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THE CHANGING VOCATION OF RELIGIOUS WOMEN IN FRANCE AND NEW FRANCE
CASE STUDIES, 1600-1700

by

Elizabeth Rapley

Thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of the
University of Ottawa in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History.

Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, 1987



Elizabeth Rapley, Ottawa, Canada, 1987.

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THE EDUCATION OF THE VIRGIN

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ABSTRACT

When it drew up its plans for rechristianizing the Catholic world, the Council of Trent had no idea of including the service of nuns. Indeed, its only prescription for religious women was a return to the strict observance of clausura, and therefore, of total separation from the world. Even as the laws were being made, however, women were experimenting with new types of community life.

The reaction of the hierarchy, and of Catholic society, was mixed. In France it was generally negative. In the early 1600s, when small groups of women began to perform good works and to teach catechism, they were at first discouraged and then, in the face of their obvious success, forced to accept clausura. However, the taste which society had acquired for their services created a small window in that clausura; from now on they were permitted to teach, not only their own pensionnaires, but girls from outside; and they were allowed to receive and encourage women in the practice of their faith.

By the 1640s, urban France was crowded with convents. But now new groups began to appear: secular women, whose purpose was to perform good works in the parishes. From a strictly juridical viewpoint they were suspect; but Catholic society wasted little time worrying about their legality, as long as they were

useful. The filles séculières provided the muscle for the innumerable hospitals, orphanages, asylums, and poorhouses which were being built across the country. Their work in establishing free schools was simply a logical extension of their charitable mandate.

Gradually, some of them began to specialize in teaching. From the 1660s onwards, communities of maitresses charitables were founded, and elementary schooling for girls came to be considered socially desirable. Religious women had broken the barriers and entered a profession which they would exercise, almost unchallenged, for two centuries.

The rapid expansion of their field of activity brought changes not only in their organization but in their spiritual rationale. Their active, outgoing religious life, once severely frowned upon, was developed and institutionalized. Their profession was carefully cultivated. Thus the working nun, who in later centuries became one of the most familiar figures in the Catholic world, made her appearance on the scene.

INTRODUCTION

The monastic life was already ten centuries old when the Council of Trent sought to revive it by restoring its discipline. It was essentially still the life that Benedict had instituted, the life of retreat, in which the unchanging round of prayer and labour, lived out within a community of brothers or sisters, was its own end, and separation from the world was both an ideal and a practical possibility.

Five years before the Council was convened, in 1540, Pope Paul III confirmed the status of the Society of Jesus. This company, which claimed monastic status while living and working in the world, was the prototype of the new "active congregations" upon which the Church of the Counter Reformation, and indeed of the modern world, was to be built.

Thirty years ago, Gabriel Le Bras signalled the importance of the appearance of the active congregations. "What a fascinating subject, this slow development of a powerful and diverse group within the Church."¹ They represented a break with the past, and for this reason they caused considerable controversy. For the masculine congregations, the turbulence abated within

¹Preface, in Robert Lemoine, O.S.B., Le droit des religieux du Concile de Trente aux instituts particuliers (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1956), p. 12. This book by Robert Lemoine, together with a later work, Le Monde des religieux: l'époque moderne (Vol. II of Histoire du Droit et des Institutions de l'Eglise en Occident ed. Gabriel Le Bras and Jean Gaudemet [Paris: Editions Cujas, 1976]) form the basis of my understanding of the changings in the legal status of the secular institutes within the Church.

sixty or seventy years. For the feminine congregations, acceptance was much slower in coming, much more painfully won.

The process by which the feminine active congregations achieved acceptance is the subject of my thesis. The central problem can best be demonstrated by juxtaposing two situations, one from the beginning and one from the end of the century.

1) The Council of Trent, and the reforming popes in the years immediately after it, plainly stated that the only life permissible to religious women was the cloistered monastic life. In France this position had the support of the elites, and of society in general. In spite of, or because of, the showing which women had made in the Protestant Reformation, Catholic France wanted nothing to do with apostolic women.

There seemed no reason why this position would be changed. The Gallican Church, and the French State as it evolved in the seventeenth century, were highly authoritarian institutions, with the moral power to enforce their will. Nor was seventeenth-century society favourable to women. In general, the trend was against them, not for them.

2) By 1700 religious women had become major participants in the life of the Church. They were the basic component in the vast structure of charity -- hospitals, refuges, asylums -- which had become central to the Church's activity, and they were teaching in schools in every city and major town, and in many villages as well. The Church, in the words of one historian,

had been "feminized".²

There is a problem here, a rupture of logic, which needs explanation. The first situation does not seem to lead naturally to the second. The conditions described in it do not seem to offer the slightest possibility of such a development. There are two ways of solving the problem. One is to downgrade the importance of the development; to suggest that the activities which the women took up when they entered religion were so servile, or so inconsequential, that they represented no break at all in the general trend.³ But ~~this is~~ a minority view; most historians who remark on the subject at all, conclude that the movement of women into the work of the Church does, indeed, represent for them a true "promotion".⁴

But who did the promoting? — The Church? If so, the Church experienced a significant change of heart, which itself would require explanation. The same is true of society as a whole. Almost every institution in Catholic France in the year 1600

²P. Chaunu, L'Eglise, culture et société: Essais sur réforme et contre-réforme. (Paris: S.E.D.E.S., 1984), p.401.

³This is the position taken by Maïte Albistur and Daniel Armogathe: "La religion peuple les couvents de pauvres servantes de Dieu, prolétaires de la foi qui n'ont une valeur, au point de vue de l'action féminine, que dans la mesure où elles ont librement choisi leur vocation charitable." (Histoire du féminisme français du Moyen-âge à nos jours [Paris: Editions des femmes, 1978], vol. I, p.136)

⁴E.g. R. Tavehneaux, Le Catholicisme dans la France classique (Paris: S.E.D.E.S., 1980), vol. I, p.82; J. Perrel, "Les écoles de filles dans la France d'Ancien Régime", in The Making of Frenchmen 1679-1979 ed. Donald Baker and Patrick Harrigan (Waterloo: Historical Reflections Press, 1980), p.83.

was adamantly set against the innovations that the new congregations proposed.

Yet by 1700 they were taken for granted. Something had happened. How did it happen? What were the factors favourable to its happening? Were they present -- albeit invisible -- from the very start? Or did the process create itself as it went along, through the clashing and the convergence of other factors?

The literature, which depends largely on the work of the historians of religious congregations, does not concern itself with dynamics. The Church "called forth" the women, so of course they came. A founder/foundress drew up the blueprint for a new community and almost at once, miraculously, it was filled with women. Modern historians, acknowledging the act of creation, attribute it not to Providence but to the conjoncture. Society needed nurses and teachers, so nurses and teachers appeared. One thing is taken for granted: the women themselves had only a passive role in the process.

I intend to contradict this assumption, and to show that the women of the congregations were the agents, as well as the products, of change. This I will do by a chronological approach: by overlaying, so to speak, the history of the times with the history of the new communities. What emerges is an interesting sequence. The religious energy of the women came first; the need to channel that energy -- while, at the same time, securing the means of subsistence -- came next. Acceptance by society

and by the authorities, secular and ecclesiastical, came last.

The "rush" of women into religious life during the early years of the century⁵ was a phenomenon in itself, which preceded the existence of convents in which to live, or even suitable jobs to perform. It was they who persuaded the public, and the Church, that their work was valuable, not vice versa. Only later, when they were established and hard at work, did society's huge effort of endowment and building begin. At mid-century, another "rush" of women into new charitable organizations surprised, sometimes alarmed, the authorities.⁶ Again, however, the women's fervour carried the day, and broke down opposition; and a massive structure of charitable institutions began to rise, depending on their support and service.⁷

The women did not act in a vacuum, however. They were affected, as were many others, by powerful religious and social forces. They were shaped by their environment, even as they helped to shape it. In a religious sense the early seventeenth century was an exceptionally dynamic time, "le siècle des saints"⁸. In social terms, an increasingly informed and aware

⁵The phrase comes from F. Furet and J. Ozouf, Lire et écrire (Paris: Editions de minuit, 1977), vol. I, p.82.

⁶See below, Chap. IV, fn. 66.

⁷See chaps. IV and V.

⁸Charles de Condren, second superior of the Oratory, quoted in C. Berthelot du Chesnay, "La spiritualité des laïcs", XVII^e siècle 62-62 (1964) p.45.

elite confronted an increasingly desperate situation, and its efforts to solve the problem led to an extraordinary "moment"⁹ of social activism. Then, as absolutism was established, came the great push to convert and discipline the masses. "After the mystical invasion, the systematic conquest of souls."¹⁰

Religious women were active in all these developments, and indeed their life and vocation were altered by them. The conquête mystique of the early 1600s was profoundly influenced by women.¹¹ The charitable offensive which followed was largely their work.¹² The edifice of charitable institutions which was created in the second half of the century depended upon their service.¹³ Finally, their teaching activity, undertaken in the face of considerable opposition, created a new acceptance of feminine education.

⁹The term is from P. Deyon, "A propos du paupérisme au milieu du XVII^e siècle: peinture et charité chrétienne", A.E.S.C. 22 (jan-juin, 1967), p.137. He is referring specifically to the "vast effort of assistance" mounted between 1620 and 1660, which later passed under government control.

¹⁰F. Lebrun (under the direction of), Histoire des Catholiques en France du XV^e siècle à nos jours. (Toulouse: Edouard Privat, 1980), p. 147. My translation.

¹¹H. Brémond, Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France, depuis la fin des guerres de religion jusqu'à nos jours. (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1916-1933), vol. II, p.36.

¹²See R. Mandrou, Introduction à la France moderne, 1500-1640 (Paris: Albin Michel, 1974): "Une bonne part du mouvement de rénovation des années 1600-1640 est l'oeuvre de laïcs, et surtout de femmes dévotes."

¹³J.-P. Gutton, La société et les pauvres: l'exemple de la généralité de Lyon, 1534-1789 (Paris: P.U.F., 1974), p. 149.

The appropriation by women of the teaching function, in the sense of religious instruction, was the high-water mark of their "promotion" in the seventeenth century. Therefore I shall concentrate my attention on the teaching communities. The field of charitable works and of nursing was, by custom, the portion of women. Teaching was left almost entirely to men. It was certainly considered inappropriate for nuns. The instruction of young girls by nuns was admissible only if the girls remained within the cloister, quarantined from the influence of "the world". The teaching of externes within the monastery was sanctioned by the Holy See for the first time in 1607, on the condition that the nuns remain cloistered and the contact be kept to a minimum. But the Church of the Counter Reformation closed the door on a feminine teaching apostolate. "C'était un abus que des filles enseignassent le monde."¹⁴ By the later years of the century, however, religious women were teaching in public, and as catechists. I will argue that the Trojan horse by means of which they entered the citadel was Charity; that the function of the maîtresse charitable evolved through that of the fille de la paroisse.

My main hypotheses are, first, that the changes in their religious life represented a real promotion for seventeenth-century women; and second, that they themselves contributed

¹⁴Quoted in M.-C. Gueudré, Histoire de l'Ordre des Ursulines en France (Paris: Editions St-Paul, 1957), vol. I, pp.41-42. Also see below, chap. VI.

to this promotion. To prove this I have used, during the first six chapters, a chronological approach. Using mostly secondary works (the histories of individual communities written by modern religious historians), I have constructed a sort of prosopography of congregations, always against the background in which they operated. A strikingly consistent picture emerges, in which space matters very little (whether it be Nancy, or Dijon, or Bordeaux, or even Montreal) and time matters a lot. The world of the dévots, I have discovered, was a close-knit little place, around which new ideas moved quickly. Because it took place almost entirely within urban centres, the evolution of the active congregations was remarkably uniform.

In the final analysis, the teaching congregations must be judged by their works. They were responsible for two creations: a pedagogy designed for girls, and a new kind of community life in which old monastic tradition was adapted to new secular needs. In the last two chapters I examine these two creations, using mostly original materials (school rules and manuals, community records and règlements, devotional practices, and contemporary memoirs and correspondence) or studies on these materials. Regrettably, this must of course remain "history from the top"; almost no evidence remains about how the rules were put into action, how successful the schoolmistresses were in their daily work, or how faithfully communities observed their rules. Aspirations are only an incomplete clue to performance. But what is more important to this thesis is that these aspirations

changed over time, revealing changes in the way that the women defined themselves and their work. If only because it shows the care with which they approached their profession, my analysis challenges the hostile verdict that is usually brought down against feminine education in the Ancien Régime.¹⁵ Similarly, I argue that the development of new forms of community life was an achievement in itself. It prepared religious women for the role which they were to take up, in increasing numbers, in the years to come.

Only three congregations in early seventeenth-century France were devoted solely to feminine education. All three are studied here. However, among the filles séculières there is a wide choice, and the subjects chosen were picked largely on the basis of availability of records. The disadvantage of this decision is that it favoured the select group of congregations that were successful, in that they weathered the storms of three centuries and endured into modern times. One of the biggest surprises of this thesis has been the realization that many communities were born in the Catholic Reformation, to live for a while and die at some later date. A roll call of the surviving congregations does not, by itself, do full justice to the feminine activism

¹⁵E.g., the conclusion of Michel Devèze, in the colloquium Niveaux de culture et groupes sociaux: "Quant à la culture féminine, elle est plutôt clairsemée au XVII^e siècle. Il n'y a qu'à la fin du siècle que des gens comme Mme de Maintenon ou Fénelon s'intéresseront vraiment à la culture féminine en tant que telle." (Actes de colloque réuni du 7 au 9 mai 1966 à l'Ecole normale supérieure [Paris: Mouton et Co., 1967], p.140).

of the seventeenth century.

No justification is necessary for including one colonial congregation in my choices: The schoolmistresses of Montreal lived in the same spiritual world as the schoolmistresses of France. They turned to the mother country for help, advice and example. Considering the separation of distance and of environment, their experiences and those of parallel communities in France were remarkably similar.

Recently, a massive work has appeared on the feminine congregations of the nineteenth century. In his conclusion, the author writes:

Between the cloistered religious and the militant laywoman we find the "fille séculière" who aspires to the religious life; between the woman of traditional society and the woman of the modern world ... should we not also situate the congréganiste, pursuing an essentially secular life in a essentially regular way? Without a doubt the feminine congregations have their place in Church history. They belong, also, to our wider history.¹⁶

In exactly the same sense, the congréganistes of the seventeenth century belong to history.

¹⁶Claude Langlois, Le Catholicisme au féminin: les congrégations françaises à supérieure générale au XIX^e siècle (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1984), p.648. My translation.

CHAPTER I

THE STARTING POSITION (1600-1631)

In 1563, in its last session, the Council of Trent turned its attention to the re-establishment of monastic discipline. In this area its work was restorative, rather than innovative. The great religious Rules of the Middle Ages were reinstated without compromise to their original principles.¹ Of these, one of the most fundamental was the principle of stability. A monk belonged to his monastery; within its confines he lived out his life of work, prayer, and study -- a life complete in itself, and separate from the world. A nun pursued the same life but with the added obligation of clausura. The walls and the grille of her monastery represented in concrete form the ideal of total withdrawal from the world.

These principles were later restated in two papal constitutions, Circa pastoralis (1566), and Lubricum vitae genus (1568). Furthermore, the complete separateness of the religious state was reaffirmed. The solemn vows of poverty, chastity and obedience which monks and nuns made at profession, in front of witnesses and to an ecclesiastical superior, conferred upon them a new legal state, that of civil death. The Church decreed that no

¹ There was to be "no relaxation in those things that pertain to the substance of the regular life. For if those things that constitute the basis and foundation of all regular discipline are not strictly observed, the whole edifice must necessarily fall down." Council of Trent, Session XXV, chap. I, quoted in H. J. Schroeder, Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent (St. Louis, 1941), p.218.

other religious state could be tolerated. The various semi-religious groups which had sprung up throughout the Church were ordered to accept the full monastic commitment, or be dispersed.² Thus the Counter Reformation at its outset formally rejected the possibility of an intermediate state between the wholly secular and the wholly religious.³

In practice, however, the same movement towards reform that inspired the Council also gave rise to new types of religious associations that eluded the medieval monastic definition but responded perfectly to the needs of the Counter-Reformation Church. Foremost among these was the Society of Jesus, which was specifically exempted from solemn vows and other monastic obligations by the Bull Ascendente Domino (1584). Other masculine congregations followed. By 1630 the existence of masculine communities living under a semi-religious rule, taking simple vows and pursuing an active vocation in the world, was generally recognized.

For women, however, reform continued to mean return to the rules. These rules bound them to solemn vows and clausura. "Qui dit religieuse, dit une cloîtrée."⁴ Clausura was an external sign, understood by Catholic society. It protected the honour of

² Charles Molette, Guide des sources de l'histoire des congrégations féminines françaises de vie active. (Paris, 1974), p.30.

³ Robert Lemoine, Le droit des religieux (op.cit.), p.40.

⁴ Vincent de Paul, Correspondance, Entretiens, Documents. Edition publiée et annotée par Pierre Coste (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1923), vol. X, p.658.

religious women; it saved them from exposure to the influence of the world. It also gave them as much protection as possible from the violence of the age.⁵ However, it also rendered them ineffective for all practical purposes. Cloistered nuns were assigned one useful function, the function of prayer. This left them almost entirely outside the active life of the Church.

It was not immediately certain that the Church would follow in practice what it had laid down in law. Some women followed the example of the new masculine congregations, and established communities which took only simple vows, did not submit to clausura, and, in modern terminology, devoted themselves to social work. The best known of these was the Company of Saint Ursula, approved by Paul III in 1544. The initial reaction of the authorities was favourable. However, in the early years of the seventeenth century some of these communities aroused anger and alarm within the Church. By entering the field of catechetics they took matters a step further, arrogating to themselves a role reserved for men. After a period of indecision the Papacy moved against them. In an important and far-reaching action taken in 1629-31, it condemned one congregation, the "English Ladies", and ordered all similar organizations suppressed. The ruling did not achieve the end to such groups, but it did ensure that the "active" congregations which developed during the seventeenth

⁵ The Council decreed that female monasteries, surrounded by their own walls, should be sheltered within cities (which of course had their own walls) so as to have double protection from outside interference. (Council of Trent, Session XXV, chap. 5, quoted in H.J. Schroeder, op.cit., pp. 220-21).

century had to do so by circumventing the legislation of Trent and the express wishes of the reforming popes. It was to be the late nineteenth century before women taking simple vows were recognized as true religious by Rome.⁶

France did not enter the mainstream of tridentine reform until the early seventeenth century.⁷ When it finally did so, French Catholicism proved itself to be more rigid and less supple than Rome itself.⁸ French canonists put the narrowest interpretation upon the legislation of Trent. As a result, the experimental female communities which took shape in Italy and in countries around the periphery found that they could not enter the kingdom of France without submitting, sooner or later, to full monastic rule. This was the situation which the early Visitation, a community of simple vows and modified clausura, faced in 1615 when it moved from Savoy to Lyon. It was forced to adopt solemn vows, complete clausura and the Rule of Saint Augustine.

The case revealed another factor which the new congregations had to take into account. The interests of the upper classes dictated the preservation of the status quo. Families with estates to consider needed assurances that their daughters, once entered into the "legal death" that the religious state represented, would not be resurrected to complicate the

⁶ Robert Lemoine, Le Monde des religieux (op.cit.), p.11.

⁷ The tridentine discipline was not formally accepted by the French clergy until July 7, 1615.

⁸ R. Lemoine, Le droit des religieux, p.178.

inheritance. The upper classes, like the Church, but for different reasons, were hostile in principle to the idea of an intermediate state in religious life. Thus juridical, social, and security reasons combined with the advice of the theologians to reinforce the principle of clausura.

The Counter Reformation began in France with an agenda which precluded the active service of women. Neither Church nor society as a whole saw any need for them sufficiently strong to overturn the order of things. The experiences of two congregations, the English Ladies and the Visitation, will serve to emphasize how solidly this position was entrenched.

1) The English Ladies.

In 1609 a young recusant Catholic woman from Yorkshire, Mary Ward, and her six companions established a small community in Saint-Omer, to teach young girls "to read, -write and sew for the honour of God."⁹ They were more than simple schoolmistresses, however. Their ultimate intention was to return to England and to proselytize -- with all necessary discretion -- in defiance of the laws of that country. In 1614 they put this plan into action: they opened a house in London, a base from which they went out to teach in private homes, and to care for the sick and the poor.¹⁰

⁹ Jean Hendrico, quoted in Mother M. Salome, Mary Ward: a Foundress of the 17th century (London: Burns and Oates, 1901), p:70.

¹⁰ Ibid., p,124.

This was dangerous work, beyond the reach of any normal Catholic conventions of the time. The England of James I allowed no clausura or solemn vows, and certainly no catechizing in the Popish faith. The women concealed their purpose by dressing, and living, as became their rank in society. In all this they took their cue from the masters of underground evangelization, the Jesuits.

The identification of the "English Ladies" with the Jesuits went far beyond their missionary tactics. From the beginning, the women saw themselves as counterparts, for their own sex, of the Society of Jesus. They openly, and confidently, used it as their model. Mary Ward herself, when pondering the form that the Institute should take, heard a voice urging her to "take the same ~~of~~ the Society".¹¹ Her plan for a new foundation, submitted to the Pope in 1616, provided for a Jesuit-style structure, complete with a Superior General who would be responsible to the Pontiff alone, "and that no religious Order whatsoever, or any person whatsoever ... should ... exercise over us authority, power, or jurisdiction."¹² To the minutest details, the practice and spirit of the new institute were to be modelled upon the Jesuits.¹³ Like

¹¹ Ibid., p.77. The voice also added, however, that the Society would oppose her.

¹² Memorial presented to Paul V, 1616, quoted in ibid., pp.90-91.

¹³ "La ressemblance avec la Compagnie s'étendait même aux mots et aux détails les plus infimes de la règle de Saint Ignace." (J. Grisar S.J., "Der erste Verbot der Ordensgründung Maria Wards", quoted in translation in Robert Lemoine, Le monde des religieux (op.cit.), p.352, fn.3. Because the Institute took root in Germany, many of the works concerning it are in German; only

the Jesuits, the English Ladies would take simple vows rather than solemn vows, and would be dispensed from the obligations of Divine Office and religious habit. More audacious yet, they would be mobile as the Jesuits were mobile. Since they were women, this meant that clausura, the great protection of virginal purity, would have to be waived.

This programme, which like Mary Ward herself, was "too much in advance of its times",¹⁴ was nevertheless well received in the early days. In 1616 it was provisionally approved by the pope, Paul V. Two prominent theologians, Suarez and Lessius, both found the proposed rule to be "holy, lawful and good". Indeed, the only point at issue was whether such a foundation -- since it did not claim the status of a religious order as such -- required papal confirmation, or whether the confirmation of the Ordinary was sufficient.¹⁵ Bishop Blaise of Saint-Omer preferred the second opinion, and sanctioned the rule himself. Within a short time new communities, including a college and a noviciate, were established in Liège, Trèves, and Cologne.

However, opposition was already growing. In 1616 Bishop Blaise was forced to issue a pastoral letter, defending the women recently has it received attention in France.)

¹⁴ Ibid., p.351.

¹⁵ Suarez' argument was as follows: "The Institute was expressly ordained and directed towards the salvation of souls; and it was a subject of serious consideration whether such a purpose could be approved of in the case of women; it seemed to be both against the Scripture and the Canon Law, and should by no means be consented to without consultation with the Holy See" (M. Salome, op.cit., Introduction, p.xiii).

against charges that they diverted others from entering established monasteries, that they pretended to be true religious, and that they undertook apostolic missions in England.¹⁶ In this last charge there appeared, for the first time, an anti-feminine edge. In claiming to act as apostles, the women were invading the masculine preserve. The seriousness of this accusation can be seen in the fact that it stayed with them until the end, fifteen years later.

Mary Ward did not retreat before her critics. She was a frank and forceful woman, who taught her followers "to appear as one is, to be what one appears".¹⁷ She did not hesitate to confess her high ambitions:

There is no such difference between men and women that women may not do great things And I hope to God that it will be seen that women in time to come will do much I confess wives are to be subject to their husbands, men are head of the Church, women are not to administer Sacraments, nor preach in public places; but in all other things, wherein are we so inferior to other creatures that they should term us 'but women'?

I would to God that all men understood this truth, that women if they will be perfect, and if they would not make us believe that we can do nothing and that we are but women, might do great matters....

I must and will ever stand for this truth, that women may be perfect, and that fervour must not necessarily decay because we are

¹⁶ Ibid., pp.93-94.

¹⁷ R. Pillorget, "Mary Ward ou la ténacité (1585-1645)" (op.cit.), p.13. I am here translating from French what was originally said in English. I have not seen the original quotation.

women.¹⁸

The Institute, as she conceived it, was "expressly ordained and directed towards the salvation of souls; and it was a subject of serious consideration whether such a purpose could be approved of in the case of women."¹⁹ Mary was warned that she was aiming too high; that she should stick to schoolteaching and leave the apostolate to men.²⁰ She was advised to accept clausura, "on which condition," wrote her companion, Winifrid Wigmore, "she should have freedom to set up as many houses all over the world as she would."

But to this fair offer our dearest Mother gave for answer that to obtain the foresaid grace of propagating [the faith], she would not admit of two stakes put in cross in form of enclosure.²¹

Mary refused to compromise, and opposition continued to grow. By 1621, with her protector, Paul V, dead, and still no definitive papal confirmation of her institute, she went to Rome to present her case to Gregory XV. By now the feelings against her were running high. The English Ladies were accused of vainglory and of high living; they were nicknamed "galloping

¹⁸ Letter to her community, quoted in M. Salome, op.cit., pp. 105-08.

¹⁹ See above, fn. 7.

²⁰ "Los Padres [the Jesuits] advise her to lay downe her imaginary pretended mission, and to apply her ayme only to a confirmation of her Institute to bring up feminine youth...." (W.E. to the Bishop of Chalcedon, quoted in ibid., p.233).

²¹ Winifrid Wigmore, quoted in ibid., p.166.

girls" and "Jesuitesses". The criticisms came mainly from the representatives of the English clergy in Rome, and arose from the ongoing rivalry between the seculars and the Jesuits.²² The Jesuits, on the other hand, after warmly supporting the women for several years, had been ordered by the new General, Vitelleschi, to distance themselves for fear of compromising their own position.²³ Mary was unable to defend herself against the accusations which were now made against her. These were, specifically: 1) "It was never heard in the Church that women should discharge the Apostolic Office"; 2) the Institute, contravened the decrees of the Council of Trent; 3) "The members arrogate to themselves the power to speak of spiritual things before grave men and priests, and to hold exhortations in assemblies of Catholics and usurp ecclesiastical offices"; 4) it was feared that they would run into errors of various kinds.²⁴ On the basis of these charges, but also out of disapproval for the audacity of a company that had been called "the sacred beginning

²² Ibid., p.139.

²³ "Le général des Jesuites, le Père Vitelleschi, se montre méfiant à l'égard de ces filles qui ont adopté les constitutions de la Compagnie sans la consulter ni demander à être placée dans sa dépendance, et peut-être pense-t-il que le prestige de celle-ci se trouverait atteint par un éventuel échec de ces filles auxquelles on donne si volontiers son nom." (R. Pillorget, op.cit., p.10).

²⁴ Document of censure, presented in 1621 by the agent for the English clergy, Bennet. (M. Salome, op.cit., pp.138-39).

Society of Jesus for women", a council of cardinals (objecting to the expression),²⁵ ordered the Institute suppressed.²⁶

Mary gained a reprieve from the Pope. She and her companions were allowed to open a charity school in Rome, to demonstrate the value of their work. In the following years schools were established in other Italian cities. But in 1625 the schools were ordered closed, to the joy of her critics.²⁷ Mary returned across the Alps to Bavaria, where she began again to found communities. In 1628, the Institute numbered ten houses, and between two and three hundred members.²⁸ It was at this stage that Pope Urban VIII ordered it suppressed.

Mary, unaware of the order, was already on her way to Rome to petition once more for authorization. She was an effective pleader, with her own influence in high places. The Pope

²⁵ Bequest of Andrew White, S.J., to "the illustrious virgin and most Reverend Mother Mary Warde, chief Superior of the sacred beginning Society of Jesus for women", who "do not content themselves to live in monasteries for themselves alone, ... but according to their measure of grace ... leave their rest and retreat as our Blessed Saviour did His Father's bosom to quench the fire of sin and heresy" (Quoted in ibid., p.125)

²⁶ "Les juristes s'effrayèrent de la hardiesse des conceptions de Mary Ward dont l'oeuvre originale se prêtait à toutes les attaques: comment les femmes pouvaient-elles émettre des vœux publics, sans clôture, sans office choral, sans costume religieux? Comment pouvaient-elles être directement régies par leur seule supérieure générale?" (J. Grisar, art.cit., quoted in R. Lemoine, op.cit., p.353, fn. 11).

²⁷ "Their schooles is tooke away, they shall stay in Rome if they will, but their habbit shall be tooke away. Their houses at Perugia and Naples shall be undone." Rant to M.W., quoted in M. Salome, op.cit., p.170.

²⁸ R. Pillorget, op.cit., p.11.

appointed a committee of four cardinals to hear her case. But if she had friends, she also had enemies; and these carried more weight.²⁹ One of the committee, Cardinal Borgia, pleaded to be released from the duty, out of his feeling for the Company: "that he held it to be of God, and that he neither could nor durst be against it; nor was his power enough to assist it, so powerful were her enemies."³⁰ Having presented her case, Mary left Rome, only to be arrested in Munich in 1630 as a heretic and a schismatic.³¹ When she was released a year later, her institute had been formally condemned, its members ordered to disperse.

The Bull of Suppression, dated January 13, 1631, declared that the English Ladies were "noxious weeds", "to be rooted out and extirpated". "We suppress and abolish them absolutely and altogether we submit them to perpetual abolition, we remove them, cut them off, and banish them entirely from the Holy Church of Christ." ³² The Bull gave two reasons for the condemnation.

²⁹ It was at exactly this time (1628) that the newly-created Congregation De Propaganda Fide ordered all communities of "Jesuitesses" suppressed. A group known as the filles de Saint-Agnes, working in the Spanish Netherlands, were defended by their patrons in these terms: "il est notoire qu'elles n'ont jamais fait, ni pretendent de faire aucunes missions, ce que ladite Congrégation a voulu principalement défendre aux femmes." (Alain Lottin, "Réforme catholique et instruction des filles pauvres dans les pays-bas méridionaux", Les religieuses enseignantes, p.26). It may be inferred that the animus of the Congregation was primarily directed at the English Ladies.

³⁰ Quoted in M. Salome, op.cit., p.200.

³¹ R. Lemoine, op.cit., p.356.

³² Analecta Juris Pontificii (1885) col. 2023 (my translation from the French of what was originally in Latin). It should be mentioned that the Holy See's bark was worse than its bite; Pope

First, the Institute had been established, and had continued to function, without papal approval.³³ Second, the women had arrogated to themselves functions reserved to men:

They went freely everywhere, without submitting to the laws of clausura, under the pretext of working for the salvation of souls; they undertook and exercised many other works unsuitable to their sex and their capacity, their feminine modesty and, above all, their virginal shame; works which men distinguished by their knowledge of the scriptures, their experience and the innocence of their lives, undertake only with reluctance and extreme circumspection.³⁴

This was the true charge against the English Ladies: they had threatened the order of things, in an age when any such threat was considered heresy. For this, as one of their sympathizers had warned them, they were rejected, "like as the little crows left by the old ones, because not feathered like themselves."³⁵

The suppression of Mary Ward's institute had far-reaching consequences. A number of communities of filles dévotes were ordered closed across Europe.³⁶ Even more serious, the Holy See had served notice that it was committed to upholding the position

Urban privately assured Mary that she was not a heretic, and gave her a pension. (M. Salome, op.cit., p.224, 244). He later wrote secretly to the elector Maximilian of Bavaria, authorizing him to keep the community in Munich open, as an asylum for the dispersed nuns. (R. Lemoine, op.cit., p.356).

³³ Analecta..., cols.2022-23.

³⁴ Ibid., col.2023.

³⁵ Fra Domenico de Gesù, quoted in M. Salome, op.cit., p.186.

³⁶ See A. Lottin, op.cit., pp.25-29. The Congrégation de Notre-Dame of Lorraine, which also was seeking papal approbation during this period, was severely threatened by Rome's dislike of "Jesuitesses". See chap. III.

of Trent regarding female religious -- a position which envisaged nothing but a return to the strict monasticism of the Middle Ages.³⁷ Henceforth throughout the century, no new initiatives would come out of Rome, and the advances that were made in fact received no sanction in canon law.³⁸

2) The Visitation: early years, 1610-1616.

One of the most successful of seventeenth-century women's congregations was the Visitation, founded in Annecy by François de Sales³⁹ and Jeanne-Françoise de Chantal.⁴⁰ By the end of the century the Filles de Sainte-Marie, as they were also called, numbered six and a half thousand, in a hundred and forty-nine monasteries spread all across the country.⁴¹ Their pensionnats

³⁷ R. Taveneaux, Le catholicisme dans la France classique (op.cit.), vol.I, p. 69.

³⁸ Religious women who took simple vows were not recognized by the Papacy as true religious until the end of the nineteenth century. (R. Lemoine, op.cit., p.2). Feminine religious congregations organized under a superior general were not recognized until the early 1900s. (Ibid., pp.358-59). By this time, most religious women were in fact in congregations of this type. (C. Langlois, Le catholicisme au féminin [Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1984], p.309).

³⁹ François de Sales (1567-1622). Educated at Paris and Geneva. Bishop of Geneva 1602. Author of Introduction à la vie dévote and Traité de l'amour de Dieu. Canonized by Alexander VII in 1665.

⁴⁰ Jeanne-Françoise Fremyot de Chantal (1572-1641). Daughter of a président à mortier at Dijon. Widowed at the age of 28, she became the foundress and first member of the congregation of the Visitation in 1610.

⁴¹ Biographie Universelle (Paris, 1847). See Jeanne-Françoise de Chantal. For a map of the Visitation's foundations, see R. Devos, L'origine sociale des Visitandines d'Annecy aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles. (Annecy: Academie Salésienne, 1973), opposite p.89.

offered a prestigious schooling to children of the lesser nobility and the haute bourgeoisie; their communities were filled with women of good family.⁴²

--The interest of the Visitation for this study lies not in its schooling, which was closer to traditional monastic schooling than to the new education of the teaching congregations, but in the manner of its foundation. The Visitation in its original form was an experiment in a different type of feminine religious life, attuned to the new spirituality which its founder, more than any other single person, had promoted. François de Sales envisaged a community of prayer without solemn vows and clausura, and without the extreme rigours of reformed monastic life. His creation aroused a clamour of criticism. When a second house was founded, this time within French territory, a crisis ensued, which lasted from 1616 to 1618, and was marked by a celebrated correspondence between the Bishop of Geneva and the Archbishop of Lyon. The result was a victory for what one historian of canon law has called "the narrowness of some Frenchmen in questions of canon law".⁴³

The Council of Trent had defined reform, for religious women, as a return to strict monastic discipline. In the early years of the century, the abbeys and priories of France began to wrestle with this return, with an end to relaxed behaviour and luxurious

⁴² Choir nuns in the Visitation brought in dowries ranging from 3000 livres to 25,000 livres (ibid.) This was considerably higher than the average dowry in most congregations.

⁴³ Robert Lemoine, Le monde des religieux, p.306.

lifestyle. The appearance in 1604 of the first Carmelites from Spain gave a powerful impulse to the reform movement. In all these cases, reform was characterized by strict austerity and personal mortification. It required high motivation, but it also required great strength and stamina.

François de Sales saw the need for a community for women who were unfit for so strenuous a life, and yet had spiritual potential.⁴⁴ He developed the idea after meeting the Baronne de Chantal. Widowed and the mother of four young children, she had already taken a vow of chastity when the Bishop of Geneva met her in 1604, and was occupied in searching for a life of "perfection".⁴⁵ However, her obligations to her family and the state of her health made entry into a monastery impossible. The community of the Visitation, established in Annecy in 1610, was inspired by her and designed for her.⁴⁶

According to François de Sales, the principal virtue to be cultivated in the new community was "littleness":

Laissant les grans Ordres des-ja établis
dans l'Eglise honorer Nostre Seigneur par
d'excellens exercices et des vertus esclat-
tantes, je veux que mes filles n'ayent autre
protection que de le glorifier par leur

⁴⁴ "Combien de filles desiroyent la retraite du monde, qui ne la pouvoient treuver es Religions ja establies ..." F. de Sales to P. Nicolas Polliens, 24/v/1610. Oeuvres complètes (Annecy, 1892-1908), vol. XIV, p.305.

⁴⁵ The term "vie parfaite" signified, in the seventeenth century, a life completely removed from the pomps and snares of the world and the flesh -- i.e., a life of contemplation and prayer.

⁴⁶ H. Brémond, Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France (op.cit), vol.II, pp. 565-66.

abaissement.⁴⁷

The four women who made up the community at its outset were not meant to be religious, but simply devout women in the fullest sense of the word. They took only simple vows.⁴⁸ Physical mortification, as practised in the monasteries, was reduced to a minimum. The sisters observed no fasting beyond that enjoined on all Catholics; they slept through the night and rose at 5:30; their food was sufficient and their clothing comfortable. Their mortification was to be interior.

Je desirois [wrote de Sales] que les filles de nostre Congregation eussent les pieds bien chaussés, mais le coeur deschaussé et bien nud des affections terrestres; qu'elles eussent la teste bien couverte et l'esprit bien decouvert, par une parfaite simplicité et despouillement de la propre volonté.⁴⁹

The life of prayer and contemplation and work within the house was to be enriched by visits to the sick and poor:

C'est à leur service que ces bénites âmes veulent en partie se consacrer, en suivant l'usage d'après lequel, en ces pays ultramontaines, ce ministère se

⁴⁷ François de Sales to Archbishop de Marquemont, June, 1615. Oeuvres, vol. XVII, p.17.

⁴⁸ Even this, according to Dom Robert Lemoine, is uncertain. Certainly they took a vow of chastity, but it is possible that for the rest they simply made promises. This would explain the title that de Sales originally gave them, of Oblates de la Sainte-Vierge: a term which offended French susceptibilities and which he later withdrew. See R. Lemoine, Le monde des religieux, pp.302-03.

⁴⁹ François de Sales to Baronne de Chantal, Dec. 1609. Op.cit., vol. XIV, p. 232.

pratique ordinairement parmi les femmes.⁵⁰

However, the ultimate purpose of these charitable works was not the service itself, but the value that they brought to the prayer life of the community. The founders of the Visitation were acting in the belief that the most perfect life was one in which prayer was combined with good works. This dimension of charitable action was fundamental to the primitive concept of the Visitation. De Sales proposed for their model the strong woman of the Bible.

Elle a mis la main a choses fortes et ses doigtz ont manié le fuseau. Medites, esleves vostre esprit, portes-le en Dieu ...: voyla les 'choses fortes'. Mais avec tout cela, n'oublies pas vostre quenouille et vostre fuseau: files le fil des petites vertus, abaisses vous aux exercices de charité.⁵¹

The mixed life of the primitive Visitation entailed a "mitigated clausura". In other words, men might not enter the house except under the conditions prevailing in women's monasteries. Women might enter with authorisation. Indeed, one of the good works of the house would be the retreats which it would offer to laywomen. The sisters, when they went out to work with the sick, were to receive permission from their superiors. Only those sisters who were sufficiently mature were allowed to leave the house.⁵² More novel was the freedom, granted under

⁵⁰ François de Sales to M. Jean-François Ranzo, 6/v/1610. Ibid. vol. XIV, pp.299-300.

⁵¹ François de Sales to the Baronne de Chantal, s.d. Ibid. vol. XIV, p.110.

⁵² François de Sales to M. Philippe de Quoex. 20/vii/1610. Ibid. vol. XIV, p. 330.

special circumstances, for women to leave the house temporarily, to see to their family affairs.

In allowing this breadth of action to a religious community the Bishop of Geneva was drawing upon Italian experience. In particular he used, and frequently cited, the example of the community of the Torre di Specchi in Rome, which combined simple vows and community life with service to the poor.⁵³ Since the foundress of this congregation, Frances of Rome, had recently been canonized, he might well feel that any community following the same pattern would be in an unimpeachable position. Here, however, he was mistaken. As soon as it spread from Savoy into France, the congregation was forced to surrender its larger vocation and accept the strict Gallican interpretation of the rules of monasticism as defined by Trent.

In 1615, a second community of the Visitation was founded, at the request of the Archbishop of Lyon.⁵⁴ However, less than a year later, the Archbishop had become convinced in conscience that, much as he admired the Visitation and respected its founder, he could not accept it in its present form. He wrote a memoir to the Bishop of Geneva, demanding that it be transformed into a

⁵³ Loc. cit. and his letter of 29/ix/1608 to the Baronne de Chantal, vol. XIV, p.69.

⁵⁴ Denis-Simon de Marquemont (1585-1626), consecrated Archbishop of Lyon in 1612, a reformer with influence at both the French and the pontifical courts.

recognized religious order, pontifically approved, with solemn vows and strict clausura.⁵⁵

The response came back almost immediately, written in François de Sales' own hand: a statement "pour l'instruction des ames devotes sur la dignité, antiquité, utilité et variété des congregations ou colleges de femmes dediees a Dieu".⁵⁶

The work contained three main themes. The first was an argument, based on examples drawn from the Bible and from the Fathers, for the dignity and value of women before God.

La femme ..., non moins que l'homme, a la faveur d'avoir esté faite a l'image de Dieu; honneur pareil en l'un et en l'autre des sexes; leurs vertus sont egales; a l'un et a l'autre est propose une recompense pareille, et s'ilz pechent, une damnation semblable. Je ne voudrois pas que la femme die: Je suis infirme et d'imbecille condition. Cette infirmité est de la chair, mais la vertu ferme et puissante a establi son siege en l'ame.⁵⁷

Then, beginning with Christ himself and continuing through the Apostles to the early Christian centuries, de Sales showed how the Church had always encouraged the feminine apostolate:

... les tressaintz Pasteurs de l'Eglise ancienne ont eu un soin tres particulier de l'avancement de ce sexe en la profession et perfection de la vie chrestienne.

In the early Church, "plusieurs assemblees de vefves et filles"

⁵⁵ R. Lemoine, op.cit., p.304.

⁵⁶ François de Sales, op.cit. vol. XXV, pp.291-321.

⁵⁷ Ibid. pp.291-92. François de Sales was here quoting from St. Basil.

dedicated themselves to prayer and the service of their neighbour.⁵⁸

The second argument was based on the structure of the contemporary Church. Within the life of perfection there were various degrees, beginning with the bishops and running through a whole range of different "states" down to the simple dévot lifestyle practiced by individuals under some form of vow or oblation. Among these degrees there was, of course, the monastic lifestyle for women, but this might have more or less clausura according to custom. Strict clausura, in fact, was a relatively new state in the Church:

Certes, la clausura absolue, perpetuelle, rigoureuse et si estroite, que plusieurs estiment estre la seul vraye clausure, ne fut jamais guere en usage parmy les anciens, desquelz la bienheureuse simplicité ne requeroit pas une si exacte rigueur; ains ilz se contentoyent d'une clausure moderee, qui avoit pour bornes la bienséance de la vocation religieuse.⁵⁹

"Moderated" clausura was appropriate to simple congregations, which had purposes other than pure contemplation. To insist that only the strictest monastic observance was permissible was to deny the possibility of a religious vocation to many people:

Et a la verité, tout ainsy qu'il faut exalter la clausure rigoureuse comme clausure plus parfaite, aussi est ce une tentation extreme de n'en vouloir aucune autre en l'Eglise; car si bien il semble que par cette rigueur on favorise fort la retraite des servantes de Dieu, toutesfois en effect on la diminue

⁵⁸ Ibid. p.294.

⁵⁹ Ibid. XXV, p.311.

extremement, en leur ostant la commodité des retraits modérées et faciles que l'antiquité et l'expérience a tesmoigné estre fort utiles au salut et perfection de plusieurs ames.⁶⁰

De Sales concluded with the argument so central to his spirituality: that the life of perfection was an interior, not an exterior, state:

Si l'esprit de devotion regne dans les Congregations, une mediocre clausure suffira pour y faire des bonnes servantes de Dieu; s'il n'y regne pas, la plus estroite clausure ne suffira pas.⁶¹

Marquemont gave his response early in 1616. Where de Sales had dealt in ideas, he was severely practical:

Les filles et veufves qui entreront en la Congregation ne seront jamais proprement ny vraiment Religieuses.⁶²

They could not enjoy the name, the merit, the perfection or the indulgences that would be their right as true religious. Of more concern -- judging from the attention he gave to it -- was the problem of their legal "state". Without solemn vows, these nuns might, by reason of temptation or seduction come to contract marriage, which would, regrettably, be valid. "Quelles semences de proces et de mauvais mesnages dans les familles!"⁶³ Furthermore, since they were not in a state of legal death, they might still

⁶⁰ Ibid. pp.316-17.

⁶¹ Ibid., p.319.

⁶² Op.cit. p.332. De Sales' comment on this was "c'est son mot, que le fruit de cette Congrégation est admirable, mais que la racine ne vaut rien; combien que Nostre Seigneur die qu'un mauvais arbre ne sçauroit produire bon fruit." (Ibid. vol. XVII, p.139)

⁶³ Ibid. XXV, p.323.

claim succession rights. "Et cet incertitude est aussi longue que la vie de la fille."

Marquemont then indicated that he was not speaking for himself alone, but for the families of Lyon:

Or, ce n'est point une speculation des plus sçavans, mais une plainte fort ordinaire et qui s'entend tous les jours en cete ville, an laquelle les parens ne sont pas fort portés a consacrer leurs filles au service de Dieu, hors du monde; et quand ils s'y laissent aller, il y a bien souvent beaucoup de considerations temporelles.⁶⁴

This uncertainty could only be rectified by converting the Visitation into a formal religious order under an approved rule. The Rule of Saint Augustine was the obvious choice, since it was less demanding than the life that the sisters were already leading, and therefore could be adapted without disrupting their present usages.

Marquemont was prepared to tolerate the practice of accepting older women and women of delicate health, and of allowing women of the world into the monastery for short-term retreats. But the other custom, of allowing widows within the Congregation to go out occasionally to deal with their affairs, he adamantly rejected. The passage in which he explained his reasons affords an excellent insight into the tensions of Counter-Reformation society:

⁶⁴ Ibid. p.324. The Bishop of Geneva recognized the financial motive behind this insistence on formal vows. "Je voy aussi que, par ce moyen on contentera une quantité de censeurs, et les peres et parens des filles qui ne les veulent pas donner a Dieu que pour gagner les portions qu'elles emporteroyent silz les donnoyent a quelque chetif mari." (Ibid., vol. XVII, p.139)

Tant il y a, que voyant une Religieuse par le monde et dans les affayres, il s'an scandalisera; tant y a, que les Monasteres lesquels en execution du Concile on veult remettre en Closture, auront fort de dire et dequoy se plaindre; tant y a, que les protestans et les libertins auront dequoy censurer les clostures de nos Monasteres, puisque par le moien des Congregations nous sçavons bien nous an passer, et prouver qu'elles n'estoyent point an la primitive Eglise; tant y a, que ces sorties seront occasion de grandes distraction aux Soeurs.⁶⁵

By the same token, the visiting of the poor and sick must stop. The women must accept the full implications of monastic life, without modification. "L'intention des Conciles a esté d'empêcher les nouveutes et diversités an l'Eglise."⁶⁶

François de Sales responded by asserting the legitimacy of the Visitation's existing practice:

Telles Congregations sont en usage en l'Eglise de Dieu entre les Pasteurs les plus reformés et dignes d'imitation ...⁶⁷

He defended the original practices of the Visitation, including the visiting of the sick.

Cet exercice fut aymé non seulement parce que de soymesme il est pieux et grandement agréable a-Dieu, mays parce que celles qui la pratti- quoyent n'alloyent jamais pour le faire sans revenir meilleures et plus consolées.⁶⁸

However, he now acquiesced "de tout son cœur, sans un seul brin

⁶⁵ Ibid. p.327.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p.330.

⁶⁷ Ibid. p.334.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p.338.

de repugnance" in the imposition of formal monastic rule and perpetual clausura.⁶⁹

This was not an about-face. It was a recognition of the facts. Marquemont, as Ordinary, had the full right to dispose of "his" community (the community of Lyon) as he saw fit. He had warned:

Si l'on ne peult pas demeurer d'accord,
Monseigneur de Geneve disposera des siennes
comme il luy playra, et l'Archevesque de
Lyon disposera de siennes comme il jugera
a propos.⁷⁰

By coming to terms with him, the founder of the Visitation was able to keep his little congregation intact. There were other reasons for the acquiescence. Several dioceses were already requesting colonies from the Visitation. The Archbishop of Lyon had enormous influence in France. "Il est le premier des Evesques de France, et moy le dernier de Savoy."⁷¹ On his opinion of the Visitation would depend its reception throughout the country. It seems, also, in the light of the experience of other feminine congregations in France, that it was Marquemont, not de Sales, who understood the spirit of the times, and knew what was necessary to make the new congregation successful.

The two Visitation convents were erected into monasteries under the Rule of Saint Augustine. Henceforth the filles de Sainte-Marie took solemn vows and observed perpetual clausura.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p.339.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p.332.

⁷¹ Ibid., vol. XVII, p.89.

The visiting of the sick, and the practice of allowing sisters to attend to their affairs, were now forbidden. On the other hand, the principal purpose of the institute -- the reception of widows and women of delicate health to a regimen of prayer without undue mortification, and the admission into the monasteries of laywomen for limited retreats -- was secured. The nuns were dispensed, at least for the time being, from the onerous duty of singing Divine Office, and were allowed to sing the Little Office of Our Lady instead. The title of the Visitation, with all that it symbolized, was retained. Under these constitutions, presented jointly by the two bishops, and approved by Pius V, the Institute enjoyed immediate success.

François de Sales accepted the outcome as a defeat. "Je n'avais dessein que d'établir une seule maison à Annecy," he later told his friend Bishop Camus,

... de filles, et de veuves, sans voeux et sans clôture, dont l'exercice fut de vaquer à la visite et au soulagement des pauvres malades abandonnés et destitués de secours Et maintenant c'est un Ordre formé, vivant sous la Règle de Saint-Augustin, avec voeux et clôture; chose incompatible avec le premier dessein dans lequel elles ont vécu quelques années
Ainsi je serai plutôt leur Parrain que leur Instituteur, puisque mon institution a été destituée.⁷²

⁷² J.-P. Camus, L'Esprit du B. François de Sales (Paris, 1664), VI^e p., chap. V, pp.196-97, quoted in R. Lemoine, Le droit des religieux, pp.185-86, fn. This quotation from Camus has been questioned by historians, notably Brémond, who suspected him of exaggerating in order to support his own anti-monastic bias. Brémond himself saw the translation of the Visitation into a contemplative order as a perfecting of the original design, in line with François de Sales' own wishes (op.cit., vol. II,

The debate over the Visitation brings to light the powerful social forces that stood in the way of change, especially where women were concerned. The Archbishop was more than a spokesman for the Gallican Church; he was a spokesman for the society to which he belonged, the elites who were as concerned with "state" and inheritance as they were with monastic discipline. The opposition which the new women's congregations encountered when they tried to dispense with clausura arose as much from legal as from spiritual concerns. Not only the Church, but society itself, had reasons to preserve the status quo.

3) Conclusion.

The Council of Trent had taken a firm, uncompromising position with regard to religious women. It remained to be seen how faithfully the post-tridentine Church would honour that position. A period of uncertainty followed, during which a number of uncloistered feminine communities were founded with approval from their bishops, and even from the Pope. However, by the early

p.19). However, there is other evidence to suggest that François de Sales was disappointed by the transformation. The primitive rule of the Visitation was given to another community of women, the Filles de la Croix whose foundress, Madame de Villeneuve, was his personal friend. The directoire of the same community, published in 1660, runs as follows: "S'il vivait, avait dit François de Sales à Madame de Villeneuve, il ferait quelque chose qu'il voyait manquer à l'Eglise de Dieu pour le service du prochain. C'était, après avoir cloîtré les Filles de la Visitation contre son premier dessein, d'établir une autre communauté sans clôture" (Quoted in C. Molette, "Conclusion", Les religieuses enseignantes, Actes de la quatrième rencontre d'Histoire religieuse de Fontevraud [Angers, Les Presses de l'Université d'Angers, 1981], pp.154-55). The Filles de la Croix were the first filles séculières to live in community under simple vows.

years of the seventeenth century attitudes in Rome were hardening against the uncloistered women, and with the death of Paul V the Holy See's tolerance came to an end. The court of Urban VIII, confronted by a woman who made no secret of her aspirations, showed itself antagonistic to "jesuitesses". The Bull suppressing Mary Ward's institute in 1631 was the Papacy's last word on the subject for many years.

But Rome's word did not automatically become law in the countries of Catholic Europe. Implementation depended on the local hierarchies. In Italy itself, and also in various parts of the Holy Roman Empire, the uncloistered communities survived because they had the protection of their bishops.⁷³ The Gallican Church, however, proved more than willing to enforce the law in all its rigour. It had behind it the full weight of public opinion, or at least of the elite public opinion that really mattered. "Aut maritus, aut murus": these were the only two states for women that French Catholic society recognized in the early seventeenth century. The following chapter will show the motives underlying this position, which made it highly unlikely that society should change its mind.

⁷³ Thus the Archbishop of Cambrai and the Archduchess Isabelle successfully defended the Filles de Sainte-Agnès in the Spanish Netherlands (A. Lottin, op.cit., pp.26-27) and the Archbishop of Besançon protected the uncloistered Ursulines of Franche-Comté (J. Morey, Anne de Xainctonge (op.cit.), pp. 364-66).

CHAPTER II

WOMEN AND THE COUNTER REFORMATION IN FRANCE

1) The background: from the religious wars to the triumph of absolutism.

Historians of religious life in early seventeenth-century France have often commented upon its two contrasting faces. It was a "confusion of light and shadows": the light of this age of saints made all the more brilliant by the surrounding obscurantism and decadence.¹ It was a time of mystical greatness; yet it was also a time of trauma and menace and pervasive fear.² The growing sophistication of knowledge went hand in hand with an obsessive concern with the supernatural.³ It was a great time for witch-burning.⁴ "The age of humanism was the golden age of demonography"⁵; far from banning Satan, the early modern mentalité seemed to welcome him in. The faithful were conscious of living

¹ P.Broutin, S.J. Le Réforme pastorale en France au XVII^e siècle. (Paris: Desclée et Cie., 1956), I, p.14.

² This climate of fear is most exhaustively described in Jean Delumeau's work, La peur en Occident (Paris: Fayard, 1980). According to Delumeau, European society during the years 1348-1660 experienced a climax of fear, in which age-old terrors coalesced with modern anxieties to form an almost unbearable state of panic. See, in particular, Chapters I - III.

³ L. Febvre, "Aspects méconnus d'un renouveau religieux en France entre 1590 et 1620", A.E.S.C. XIII (Oct.- Dec., 1958):645.

⁴ It is estimated that 50,000 witches were burnt in Europe in the first three decades of the seventeenth century. P. Chaunu, L'Eglise, culture et société (op.cit.), p.457.

⁵ J. Dagens, Bérulle et les origines de la Restauration catholique (1575-1611). (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1952), p.159.

within a barricade, outside which the Evil One was forever on the prowl.⁶

Behind the Counter Reformation was the Reformation. The crisis of the early seventeenth century can only be understood in the light of this extraordinary event. It was this great rupture, with its accompanying upheavals, that brought the collective fear and anxiety to fever pitch. Yet modern historiography, setting aside a three-hundred-year old interpretation, now sees Reform and Counter-Reform as two thrusts of the same movement:

Pas donc d'histoire de protestantisme face aux histoires de l'Eglise, mais une histoire une des églises déchirées...⁷

in which the very violence of their confrontations was an indicator of a certain underlying unity.

It follows from this interpretation that, since the two reforms had a common root, they had many characteristics in common. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it has been pointed out, both camps experienced the same spiritual movements: of humanism, of mysticism, and of the "agony of salvation" which accompanies the interiorization of religious faith.⁸

⁶ J. Le Brun, in Nouvelle Histoire de l'Eglise, ed. L. J. Rogier, R. Aubert, and M. D. Knowles (Paris: Seuil, 1963), Vol. III, p.246. Also see J. Delumeau, op.cit., Chapter VII, "Satan", pp. 304-31.

⁷ P. Chaunu, "Le XVII^e siècle religieux. Réflexions préalables", A.E.S.C. March-April 1967, pp.280-81. See also J. Delumeau, Le catholicisme entre Luther et Voltaire. (Paris: P.U.F.. 1979), p.161.

⁸ Ibid., p.286.

Thus Catholic reform paralleled Protestant reform for many years.⁹ However, there can be no doubt that Luther and Calvin moved ahead of their opponents in several important areas. The Counter Reformation, properly speaking, began with the Council of Trent (1545-1563). Many of the questions which the Fathers of Trent were called upon to address were already faits accomplis in Protestant jurisdictions. They had therefore the choice either to imitate them or to anathematize them. For the most part, they chose to do the latter. The Counter Reformation, in its conscious decisions, was highly reactive. To most Protestant challenges it responded by a hardening of its positions: a greater respect for the sacrament of the Eucharist, an enhanced devotion to the Virgin and the saints, a more hierarchical and clerical ecclesiology, and a renewed emphasis on the superiority of the clerical over the married state. On the other hand, wittingly or unwittingly, the Catholic Church absorbed many of the attitudes of its antagonist. When François de Sales wrote that "it is heresy to wish to exclude the devout life from the company of soldiers, the artisans' shop, the court of princes, the household of married people", he was drawing from his personal experience of Calvinism,¹⁰ and he himself was called heretical;¹¹ but his

⁹ F. Lebrun (under the direction of), Histoire des catholiques en France du XVe siècle à nos jours. (Toulouse: Edouard Privat, 1980), pp. 75-84.

¹⁰ R. Taveneaux, Le catholicisme dans la France classique (op.cit.) Vol. II, p.404. The quotation is from François de Sales Introduction à la vie dévote (my translation).

¹¹ F. Lebrun, op.cit., p.84.

promotion of the laity became, in time, an accepted fact.

Similarly, Luther's principle, that all Christians, in order to be saved, must be capable of a conscious, and informed, assent to the call of faith, was adopted without reservation by the seventeenth-century Church.¹²

Underlying unity but deep antipathy, mutual rejection but selective imitation -- these contradictory movements were enough in themselves to cause deep trauma in the European mind.¹³ To these psychological upheavals must be added the experience of decades of fratricidal war, and the consequent breakdown of normal life. In France, between 1562 and 1598, eight wars in succession devastated the countryside and destabilized the population. They also raised religious partisanship to unprecedented levels. This was to have its consequences even after the wars were over. The ligueurs of one decade became the dévots of another, and impressed a deeply fervent character on the revival of post-war France.¹⁴

"There was at the same time anguish and dynamism Fear created its own antidotes."¹⁵ The seventeenth century was,

¹² This adoption of the Protestant position stemmed both from genuine conviction and from good strategic sense. "Pour répondre au défi protestant, elle doit accepter le terrain de l'adversaire, combattre la Réforme avec les armes de la Réforme." F. Furet and J. Ozouf, Lire et écrire op.cit.), vol.I, p. 72.

¹³ Jacques Le Brun suggests that the trauma was all the more severe where the religious boundaries were unclear. Where did heresy end and orthodoxy begin? He argues that the situation was only clarified around 1630-1640, after years of controversy. Op.cit., pp.244-45.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp.430-33.

¹⁵ J. Delumeau, La peur en Occident, p.260.

indeed, an anxious and a dynamic period, and the antidote which it offered for the collective fears of the people was absolutism, both civil and religious. "La seule chose qui soit sans danger est la soumission à l'autorité."¹⁶ The road to an ordered society was being prepared long before Louis XIV; it received much of its direction from the Council of Trent. Obedience to authority was the cornerstone of tridentine Catholicism, the supreme virtue, the Church's response to the disorders and deviations of the sixteenth century. Since it served the purpose of the centralizing monarchy, it became the supreme civic virtue. Since it answered well to the needs of society, it was readily accepted and internalized. Thus absolutism was more than a system imposed from above; it was the answer to a craving by respectable people for the law and order that they had lacked so long.¹⁷

Much consideration has been given by historians to the process by which the structures of obedience were installed among the many different layers of society for whom they were intended. One of the most interesting of the groupings is that of women, because their destiny of obedience stemmed not from birth nor from

¹⁶ This was the admonition made to Luther at the Diet of Worms. See H. Strohl, Luther, sa vie et sa pensée, (Strasbourg, 1954), quoted in ibid., p.517.

¹⁷ "Du haut en bas de l'échelle, on ressent profondément un besoin d'autorité pour faire face aux grands bouleversements récents et contemporains, et à leur cortège de guerres et de désordres de toute nature." J. Portemer, "Réflexion sur les pouvoirs de la femme selon le droit français au XVII^e siècle", XVII^e Siècle 144 (July-September, 1984), p.191.

economic status, but from the perceived inherent inferiority of their sex.

2) Women: the sex "born to obey".

It has been suggested that, from a legal point of view, the seventeenth century was part of a longue durée of feminine subordination, which lasted from the end of the middle ages to the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁸ Before the law, women were in the process of being devalued. The concessions which medieval jurisprudence had made to them were being negated; their condition, especially in marriage, was being reduced to something very close to perpetual minority.¹⁹ From a political point of view, the Salic Law, which barred women from succession to the throne of France, remained firmly entrenched, despite the two feminine regencies.²⁰ "Le peuple de Dieu," wrote Bossuet, "n'admettrait pas à la succession le sexe qui est né pour obéir."²¹ Power was patriarchal, and it allowed for no division.

As in the sphere of politics and the law, so in the sphere of family relationships. One of the most widely-read family manuals of the seventeenth century gave this advice:

¹⁸ Ibid., pp.189-90.

¹⁹ Thus the wife was held to be in manu mariti. She could be "corrected", even imprisoned, at her husband's will. See G. Fagniez, La Femme et la société française dans la première moitié du XVII^e siècle (Paris: J.Gambler, 1929), p.154.

²⁰ P. Ronzeaud, "La femme au pouvoir ou le monde à l'envers", XVII^e siècle 108 (1975), p.9.

²¹ Quoted in C. Dulong, La vie quotidienne des femmes au grand siècle (Paris: Hachette, 1984), p.19.

Il faut que tout dépende d'un principe, d'autant que, comme le monde ne peut souffrir deux soleils, de même la famille ne peut avoir deux maîtres. Si la puissance souveraine était partagée, la division y ferait naître la jalousie qui est la ruine de tous les gouvernements.²²

Indeed, the small society of the family prefigured all other societies. According to Bossuet:

En effet la première fois qu'il y a eu subordination et ordre de gouvernement parmi les hommes, c'est lorsqu'il y a eu mari et femme, parents et enfants.²³

Throughout the seventeenth century, this model of marriage prevailed. "Pour nous," Madame de Maintenon told her young ladies in 1700, "nous sommes pour obéir toute la vie."²⁴

How closely did reality conform to theory? In a country of many different regions,²⁵ and a society of many different strata,

²² Jean Cordier S.J., La famille sainte, où il est traité de toutes les personnes qui composent une famille. First edition 1644; new edition 1885, p.169.

²³ Quoted in P. Ronzeaud, op.cit., p.15. It should be emphasized, however, that patriarchy was not peculiar to societies under absolute regimes. The same family structure has been observed in seventeenth-century England, especially under the Commonwealth. See L. Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977). The married relationship was summed up by Milton, in his description of Adam and Eve in Paradise Lost:

"Not equal, as their sex not equal seemed;
For contemplation he and valour formed,
For softness she and sweet attractive grace,
He for God only, she for God in him."

²⁴ E. Faguet, Madame de Maintenon, Institutrice (Paris, 1887). Françoise d'Aubigné, Marquise de Maintenon (1635-1719), was the second wife of Louis XIV, and foundress of Saint-Cyr.

²⁵ Martine Segalen, in her work Mari et femme dans la société paysanne (Paris: Flammarion, 1980) argues that the status of women varied with region. In general the north of the country

there were innumerable variations. But one generalization can be made: the important unit was the family, and individuals fitted into its strategies according to need.²⁶ Among peasants, necessity tended to make for a certain equality: men and women were partners in the business of survival.²⁷ Among artisans, women were associates in the family enterprises: they worked alongside their men, minding the business, keeping the accounts, sometimes even earning independently.²⁸ The same thing applied to the lesser bourgeoisie. Marie Guyart, the future Ursuline of Québec, worked as an intendante in her brother-in-law's shipping business.²⁹ Jean Maillefer, bourgeois of Reims, recalled his mother's early career:

Elle fut tirée des escolles à l'aage de quatorze ans pour estre mariée et entrer dans une boutique extrêmement subjecte, et ses premiers employs furent... à y

favoured more freedom and more social participation, while the Mediterranean regions were more oppressive. The Basque country favoured the "femme forte" (op.cit., pp.181-83). Her study focuses on the nineteenth century, but she argues that peasant society was based upon systems of production, and therefore changed only when they did; therefore the patterns set up in the sixteenth century persisted until the twentieth.

²⁶ J. Portemer, op.cit., pp. 190-92.

²⁷ M. Segalen, op.cit., chap. III.

²⁸ A. Babeau, Les artisans et les domestiques d'autrefois. (Paris, 1886), pp.166-67. Also see N. Z. Davis, "City Women and Religious Change in Seventeenth-Century France", in Society and culture in Early Modern France (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), pp. 70-71.

²⁹ R. Garapon, "Marie de l'Incarnation, Ursuline de Québec, d'après sa correspondance", in Onze Etudes sur l'image de la femme dans la littérature française du XVII^e siècle. (Paris: J.M. Place, 1979) p.42.

enfiler des escritoirs et dans la vente
et destail des menues merceries ...³⁰

Women of the less prosperous classes worked in a number of different employments, and though their status (and their pay) was generally lower than that of men, they nevertheless enjoyed a certain independence, at least of movement and of association.³¹

The situation was different for women of quality. They had suffered during the wars of religion. The normal restraints had been destroyed, and they had become vulnerable to rough treatment at the hands of men.³² Well into the seventeenth century, the kidnapping of young girls was a serious social problem,³³ and the fortunes of upper-class families were threatened by clandestine marriages. With the restoration of law and order, their protection, and circumscription, became a matter of central

³⁰ C. Loriquet, Mémoires de Jean Maillefer bourgeois de Reims: 1649-1668 (Reims, 1875) pp.122-23.

³¹ This, at any rate, is the argument of Claude Dulong: "C'était tout de même un grand avantage que de pouvoir travailler; on acquerrait par là, outre sa subsistance et parfois un peu d'instruction (à tout le moins savoir compter), une certaine liberté et une certaine autorité" (op.cit., pp.10-11). Nevertheless, in the lower classes as in the upper, women were considered unequal to men. The traditions of charivari reveal that in popular custom women were supposed to be subject to their husbands (M. Segalen, op.cit., pp.48-50, 60).

³² L. Febvre, op.cit., pp.643-44.

³³ "En 1625, en plein Paris et en plein carême, sous le gouvernement plutôt rude de Richelieu, des gens de qualité se divertissent à enlever des jeunes filles dans leurs carrosses." (Fagniez, op.cit., p. 57). As late as 1648, the young widow and heiress Marie Bonneau de Miramion was abducted by armed men on behalf of a suitor whom she did not know. Only her firm resolution prevented a forced marriage. See Madame de Miramion, by the Cte. de Bonneau-Avenant (Paris, 1875), pp.39-52.

concern. Gradually, the authorities moved to subject all marriages to the will of the parents.

The subordination of individual to family interests was not an inspiration of the Counter Reformation. Indeed, the Church strongly upheld the right of young people to dispose of themselves.³⁴ It was a strategy of the ruling classes of France, implemented progressively through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.³⁵ Through the combined efforts of Crown and Parlement, marriage was changed from an act of mutual consent between partners into a family pact. "Les mariages," wrote a prominent parliamentarian in 1643,

s'exécutent non pour la considération de la personne qui contracte, mais pour l'honneur et l'avantage des familles; on passe contrat non comme un accord particulier, mais commun à tous les parents.³⁶

Both bride and groom were at their families' disposal. But whereas he had a life outside the home, she was bound entirely to the family. Barred from any exterior profession, her only function was the production and supervision of children, and the

³⁴ J. Portemer, op.cit., p.192.

³⁵ Church law had always held marriage to be a consensual act. This conflicted with the French aristocracy's desire to transform it into a form of family alliance. In spite of the arguments of the French bishops, the Council of Trent upheld the validity of unions concluded without parental consent. French legislation gradually undermined this definition, to the point that parlements were annulling such marriages. See J. Gaudemet, "Législation canonique et attitudes séculières à l'égard du lien matrimonial au XVII^e siècle", XVII^e Siècle 102-03 (1974): 15-30.

³⁶ M^{athieu} Molé, premier président au Parlement de Paris, quoted in G.Snyders, La pédagogie en France aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles. (Paris: P.U.F.) 1965, p.232.

upkeep of the household, and the care and support of her husband. This social arrangement received full support from the Church. François de Sales wrote:

Saint Paul laisse en partage aux femmes le soin de la maison, c'est pourquoi plusieurs ont cette véritable opinion, que leur dévotion est plus fructueuse à la famille que celle des maris qui, séjournant ordinairement moins parmi les familles, ne peuvent pas par conséquent les diriger si aisément vers la vertu.³⁷

An aristocratic girl married much younger than her counterpart in the lower classes: sometimes at the age of twelve, more often at sixteen to eighteen, when -- according to some learned opinion, she was most likely to produce strong (and male) children. By twenty-two she was considered an old maid.³⁸ The daughter who did not marry remained under her father's roof, and was in time bequeathed to the heir along with the property. She could do nothing to advance her own marriage prospects, since these depended heavily on the provision of a dowry,³⁹ and on the interests of the family.

Marriages contracted in this fashion might not be unhappy, but they were likely to be cold. In fact, passion was not recommended in the ideal marriage. Almost universally the popular

³⁷ François de Sales, Les femmes mariées. (Paris: Ed. du Cerf, 1967). As always, the great saint's views were coloured by the aristocratic culture to which he belonged.

³⁸ Fagniez, op.cit., pp.60-61.

³⁹ Poor girls frequently worked to provide their own dowries. See Fagniez, op.cit., p.134.

literature of the day presents marriage as a sorry state.⁴⁰ "Qui a femme, est marri"⁴¹: the accepted wisdom may be found in collections of proverbs, in the Bibliothèque bleue, in the books read by the upper classes, in drama, and in clerical writings and sermons. Most often, the sympathy went to the husbands, but in fact, their position was easy compared to that of their wives. Madame de Maintenon, at the end of the century, presented the case against these gentlemen:

Ils viennent et reviennent plus d'une fois dans la journée, en faisant toujours sentir qu'ils sont les maîtres; ils entrent en faisant un bruit désespéré, souvent avec je ne sais combien d'autres hommes; ils vous amènent des chiens, qui gâtent tout; il faut que la pauvre femme le souffre; elle n'est pas la maîtresse de fermer une fenêtre; si son mari revient tard, il faut qu'elle l'attende pour se coucher; il la fait dîner quand il lui plaît; en un mot, elle n'est comptée pour rien.⁴²

Obviously, not all upper-class wives were prepared to renounce frivolity and live within their homes, or to be totally subject to their husbands. The very vehemence of the clerical literature⁴³ against wifely independence, extravagance, waste of time, neglect of the home, gossip, and the sinful use of low-cut

⁴⁰ For a discussion of the qualities of a "good" marriage, see Arlette Farge's introduction to her collection of texts, Le Miroir des femmes. (Paris:Montalba,1982), p.71.

⁴¹ Proverb from the Livre des proverbes français (Paris: 1859), I, p.229, quoted in J. Delumeau, La peur ..., p.441.

⁴² Madame de Maintenon, "Du mariage". Quoted in Faguet, op.cit., p.111.

⁴³ Cordier deals with all these points. See his chapter on "les vertus propres à la femme", in La famille sainte, pp. 158-71.

dress and make-up, is witness to this. The collapse of family fortunes was regularly attributed to their improvidence and mismanagement.⁴⁴ However, all the evidence suggests that the seventeenth century saw a clear trend away from the relaxed social mores of the reign of Henri IV, and the development of a distinctly housewifely ethic.

What, then, was expected of the upper-class wife? First, that she live with her husband (a legal obligation) and that she be faithful to him (a moral duty, not necessarily reciprocated).⁴⁵ Second, that she give him heirs, and supervise their upbringing -- in the case of boys, until the age of seven or eight; in the case of girls, until they left home.⁴⁶ Third, that she manage his domestic affairs -- no small matter, whether the household numbered many servants or few. Fourth, that she assist her husband in his efforts to ascend in society. Clearly, the fulfilment of all these expectations required skill and capability. Yet, in law, she remained a "demi-incapable".⁴⁷

Did women see any anomalies in this situation? Some historians contend that they did. They base their argument on the

⁴⁴ One of the motives in the founding of Saint-Cyr was to train young women of quality so as to restore the ruined fortunes of the provincial nobility. According to Madame de Maintenon, "Les femmes font et défont les maisons." Faguet, op.cit., p.162.

⁴⁵ Fagniez, op.cit., p.163.

⁴⁶ The mother also shared in the planning of the children's futures. Her consent was required for marriage or for entry into religion. However, in cases of disagreement between the parents, the father's will prevailed.

⁴⁷ G. Fagniez, op.cit., p.203.

evidence of the Reformation years, when aristocratic women joined the Protestant Churches in remarkable numbers. They hypothesize that such women, already partially emancipated from old conventions, adhered to the religion of the Bible, because it represented for them an escape from a male-dominated world.⁴⁸

3) The attraction of religion.

If this was so, it would not have been without precedent. It has been frequently observed that throughout Christian history women have been attracted to "deviant" religious movements. "From the Montanist movement onwards," writes R. A. Knox, "the history of enthusiasm is largely a history of female emancipation."⁴⁹ Women had figured largely in the medieval heretical movements,⁵⁰ in English Lollardy,⁵¹ and, more recently, in the Protestant Reformation. "In the diffusion of Reform," writes Febvre, "the capital role was held by women; they threw themselves body and soul into Reform, they served it with all their heart, with all their instinct."⁵² Yet, where Protestantism became the

⁴⁸ See L. Febvre, op.cit., also Nancy Roelker, "The Appeal of Calvinism to French Nobleswomen of the Sixteenth Century", The Journal of Interdisciplinary History, 4 (Spring, 1972): 391-413.

⁴⁹ R.A.Knox, Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1950), p.20.

⁵⁰ See Pietro Boglioni, "La perception de l'hérétique au moyen âge", in l'Altérité: vivre ensemble différents, ed. M. Gourgues et G.-D. Mailhiot (Montreal, Ed. Bellarmin, 1986), p.337.

⁵¹ For feminine participation in Lollardy, see Claire Cross, "Great Reasoners in Scripture", in Medieval Women, ed. D. Baker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), pp.359-71.

⁵² L.Febvre, op. cit., 643. My translation.

established religion, as in England, and its structures became more authoritarian, women again moved on, to become prominent in the sectarian movements.⁵³ The more egalitarian the sect, the higher the proportion of women.

At the same time, women also became the backbone of the Catholic recusant minority in England. It has been suggested that without their resistance, the English Catholic community would not have survived.⁵⁴ Catholicism under persecution needed them, as much as did Quakerism or Anabaptism. It would seem that it was not doctrine that attracted women to minority religions, but structures: structures that, being by necessity more relaxed and more inclusive, offered them a certain promotion.

Some historians have maintained that what attracted women to the reformed religion was the possibility of improvement which it offered in husband-wife relationships. Marriage, so the argument goes, was elevated as celibacy was devalued. Protestantism, at least in its early stages, seemed to offer a more equal partnership and a more genuine companionship.⁵⁵ In either case,

⁵³ See Keith Thomas, "Women and the Civil War Sects" Past and Present XIII (1958): 42-57.

⁵⁴ R. Pillorget, "Mary Ward, ou la Tenacité" in Les Religieuses enseignantes. Actes de la quatrième rencontre d'Histoire Religieuse de Fontevraud. (Angers: Presses de l'Université d'Angers, 1981) p.16.

⁵⁵ A review of this argument may be found in N.Z. Davis, op.cit. She concludes that in fact the promotion was illusory. "The Reformed model of the marriage relation subjected the wife as surely as did the Catholic one." pp.68, 91.

many women, when given an opportunity, voted with their feet against the patriarchal society.

Women of the Counter-Reformation seem to have sought in their religion not a improvement of marriage but a relief -- temporary or permanent -- from it. The case was put by a newly-widowed lady of high rank:

Pardonnez, s'il vous plaist, à ma franchise,
si ie vous dis que pour le mariage i'ay
obeï une fois, en obeïssant ie me suis
engagée à aimer plus le monde que le Ciel,
la vanité plus que la piété ... Je demeureray
... dans la liberté que ma condition donne:
la Fortune s'est ioüée de moy, il est temps
que ie me ioüe d'elle.⁵⁶

Her opinion of marriage was not unique. Many pious women vowed their widowhood to God, even before the death of their husbands. Marriage was a "tracas", a "sujetion"; with François de Sales, they exclaimed: "O mon Dieu, c'est une chose douce a une vefve de n'avoir qu'un coeur a contenter!"⁵⁷ Religion gave them an outlet. With each year the number of services in which they could participate increased.⁵⁸ Under the influence of Madame Acarie,

⁵⁶ Marguerite de Magnelay speaking to the Cardinal de Gondi. Quoted in S. de Turin, "L'emprise de l'idéal monastique sur la spiritualité des laïcs au XVII^e siècle", Revue des sciences religieuses 40 (1966), p.223.

⁵⁷ Letter to la Présidente Brulart, Feb., 1609. In François de Sales, Oeuvres (op.cit.), XIV, p.134.

⁵⁸ N.Z. Davis makes the point that in the sixteenth century lay religious activity was organized around the confraternities, and did not allow for much female participation. (Davis, op.cit., p.75). The Catholic reformation changed this. By the end of the Ancien Régime, women outnumbered men in pious organizations. See E. Le Roy Ladurie, in G. Duby and A. Wallon (eds.), Histoire de la France rurale (Paris: Seuil, 1975), vol. II, p.509.

the ancient custom of hospital visiting was again made respectable.⁵⁹ The devout life gave them an outlet for their energies as well as for their piety.

However, this rush of feminine devotion created some awkwardness. Complaints were heard against "certaines bizarres de dévotes".⁶⁰ Their behaviour was mocked openly.⁶¹ Madame Acarie herself was reproved from the pulpit for neglecting her duties as a wife and mother.

This unforeseen feminine devotion necessitated a new approach by the Church. Until recently preachers had been castigating women for their failures of piety. Now they had to warn them against over-zealousness.⁶² Furthermore, they had to make some

⁵⁹ H. Brémond, op.cit., vol. II, p.225. Barbe Avrillot (1566-1618), married to a prominent Parisian and former liqueur, Pierre Acarie. Brémond says of her that she was the most influential person in Catholic France of the early seventeenth century (Histoire littéraire, op.cit., vol. II, p.193). The great religious figures of the day met in her home. With Bérulle, her cousin, she brought the first colony of Carmelites to France; with Madame de Sainte-Beuve, another cousin, she founded the first Ursuline house in Paris.

⁶⁰ S. de Turin, op.cit., pp.366-67.

⁶¹ "Il faut doncques, en premier lieu/ apprendre à bien parler de Dieu .../ Si faut-il faire la dévote,/ porter le cordon Saint-François/ Communion chaque mois .../ Aller aux vêpres a l'Oratoire,/ Savoir où sont les Stations,/ Ce qui est la méditation;/ Visiter l'Ordre Sainte-Ursule,/ Connaitre le Père Bérulle,/ Lui parler de dévotion .../ Avoir des tantes et des cousines/ Dans le couvent des Ursulines..." , Cited by Orcibal, Jean Duvergier de Hauranne, p.30, in J. Lestocquoy, La vie religieuse en France (op.cit.), p.168.

⁶² "En tout ceci," wrote François de Sales, "prenez garde soigneusement que monsieur vostre mari, vos domestiques et messieurs vos parents ne soyent point offensés par des trop longs sejours aux eglises, des trop grans retiremens et abandonnement." (Oeuvres vol.XII, pp. 270, 351).

definitions on the subject of marriage. The Church had always been distrustful of the married state. Now, in reaction to the position taken by the Protestant reformers, and consequent to its own elevation of the state of celibacy, its distrust was stronger than it had ever been:

La Virginité (est) le Soleil, la chasteté
l'Aurore, et le mariage la nuit; le mariage
la mer, la chastité le port, et la virginité
la patrie.⁶³

However, it was necessary to formulate a moral argument to support the married condition against the counter-attraction of the devout life. This argument was shaped out of the main thesis of François de Sales' book, Introduction à la vie dévote. Every state possessed its own particular virtues, the practice of which could lead to holiness. For a layman to act like a religious was as sinful as for a religious to act like a layman.

According to the moralists, the particular virtues of the married woman were "la pudeur, le silence, la garde de la maison et l'obéissance." Her obedience to her husband had to be absolute in all things, even in her prayer life:

Il faut que la femme ajuste ses volontés
à celles de son mari, qu'elle seconde tous
ses desseins, qu'elle unisse ses forces avec
les siennes, et qu'en tout où Dieu ne sera
point offensé, elle reçoive les ordres de
son mari comme des arrêts du Ciel ... je fais
plus d'état d'une communion laissée par obéissance
que d'une autre qui se ferait par opiniâtreté.⁶⁴

⁶³ Philippe d'Angoumois, quoted in S. de Turin, op.cit., p.372.

⁶⁴ J. Cordier, op.cit., pp.169-70.

This obedience was enjoined even in cases where the husband was wrong, or where he was less intelligent than his wife:

Soyez soumises à vos maris comme à Dieu, parce qu'ils sont à votre égard les images de sa puissance Ne soyez pas de ces prétendues savantes dont les discours étaient insupportables à Saint Paul Et quand la nature vous aurait rendues capables d'instruire vos maris, elle ne vous donne pas la liberté d'usurper une autorité sur eux.⁶⁵

This counsel, which endowed the wifely virtue of obedience with evangelical proportions, lasted throughout the century. But an endorsement of marriage which likened it unceasingly to a cross that must be accepted was, indeed, a case of damning with faint praise. While ostensibly upholding the married state, the clerical authorities were in fact putting a highly negative interpretation on it:

Loyauté et fidélité, lien indissoluble, intention procreative ... Voilà donc votre profession, et les trois choses, esquelles vous demeurez obligée, qui sont, comme disent les Docteurs, les raisons qui excusent et rendent le mariage honneste.⁶⁶

The corollary of this was that, in the case of the husband's death, the wife was advised not to marry again. "Selon le conseil de l'Apôtre," wrote François de Sales,⁶⁷ "la plus grande perfection est de demeurer dans la viduité." This was a release

⁶⁵ P. Jean Adam, quoted in M.C. Gueudré, "La femme et la vie spirituelle" (op.cit.), p.58.

⁶⁶ S. de Turin, op.cit., p.379.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Roger Dechêne, "La veuve au XVII^e siècle", in Onze Etudes, p.166.

for which, apparently, many wives prayed. Père Nicolas Caussin, in his Instructions pour les veuves, wrote:

O combien de fois vous disiez dans ce lien de mariage que si Dieu retirait une fois votre mari, vous seriez tout à lui; ce devoir conjugal et ce tracas du monde étaient votre barrière et votre obstacle. Maintenant que Dieu l'a levé, fondez votre coeur dans le sien.⁶⁸

Best of all, she should not marry at all. Virginity continued throughout the century to be promoted as both the holiest and the happiest of all conditions. "Vous voyez," wrote Fénelon, "la chasteté n'est pas un joug dur et pesant ...; au contraire, une liberté, une paix, une douce exemption des soucis qui affligent les hommes dans le mariage."⁶⁹

This meant only one thing. The woman who did not marry had no respectable option but to embrace the religious life. "Maritus aut murus": these were her only choices. By custom and by law she was considered too weak to live otherwise:

Le mot commun qui avertit le père et la mère de donner à leur fille ou un mari ou un mur semble être fondé sur une loi secrète qui dicte à la femme qu'elle est née pour être toute sa vie sous la sujétion et la conduite d'autrui.⁷⁰

It is therefore reasonable to suppose that many of the women who became nuns in the seventeenth century did so as an alternative to marrying. This, at least, was the conjecture of one contemporary:

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 165.

⁶⁹ Quoted in H. Brémond, op.cit. vol. IX, p.320.

⁷⁰ Claude Joly, Avis chrétiens, quoted in J.-C. Dhôtel, Les origines du catéchisme moderne (Paris: Aubier, 1967), p.420.

Entre les vierges consacrées à Dieu, combien y en a-t-il qui n'ont commencé à se porter à embrasser pour toute leur vie l'état de la virginité que par la considération des mariages malheureux? ... Ainsi, par une espèce de prodige, les mariages servent en quelque sort à la virginité, et plus ils sont laids, plus ils servent à produire la beauté des vierges. Si tous les mariages étaient heureux, des millions de saintes filles, qui servent Dieu purement dans les cloîtres, n'y seraient peut-être jamais entrées.⁷¹

Promotion of the religious life, devaluation of marriage: this was a message delivered in persuasive tones by the preachers of the Church. Nor did the law, literature and social conventions of the day life do anything to soften the message. For women of quality, the monastic attraction, exercised through sermons and through a rapidly burgeoning literature of devotion,⁷² was a powerful force, made more powerful by the negative character given to marriage. Only by an understanding of this religious dimension, built out of social and economic conditions but not entirely commensurate with them, can the extraordinary developments of the Counter Reformation be understood.

⁷¹ Le vrai dévot considéré à l'égard du mariage et des peines qui s'y rencontrent (1679), quoted in H. Brémond op.cit., vol. IX, p.317.

⁷² The rapid rise in the production of religious literature has been noted by Brémond: "De 1570 à 1615 ont été publiés et republiés chez nous, soit en latin soit en français, presque tous les classiques de la haute vie spirituelle, pour ne rien dire d'une foule d'autres ouvrages du même ordre mais moins importants." op.cit., vol. II, p.6.

4) The "conventual invasion" of the early 1600s.

In the first half of the seventeenth century the cities and towns of France experienced what has been called "a fantastic conventual invasion".⁷³ In the space of some fifty or sixty years, the urban religious population, which had remained reasonably static for generations, soared.⁷⁴ "Depuis vingt ou trente ans," complained an official of the Parlement of Rouen, "se sont en ceste ville introduits tant et si divers ordres de religieux, ... que le nombre excède tout ce qui avait été mille ans auparavant."⁷⁵ This was an almost universal experience. Many municipalities found themselves in circumstances similar to those of Reims, which, by mid-century, saw the larger part of its urban property in the hands of religious orders.⁷⁶ The drain of property into the hands of religious orders became so serious that most cities looked for ways to prevent or limit the establishment of further communities.⁷⁷

⁷³ J.-P. Bardet, Rouen aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles: Les mutations d'un espace sociale (Paris: S.E.D.E.S., 1983) vol.I, p.90.

⁷⁴ In Rouen, for instance, with its population of 80,000, thirty new convents were built (Bardet, loc. cit.). Arras, with a population of 15,000, acquired eighteen, and Douai, sixteen. See J. Lestocquoy, op.cit. p.198.

⁷⁵ Bardet, loc.cit.

⁷⁶ G. Laurent, Reims et la région rémoise à la veille de la Révolution (Reims: Imprimerie Matot-Braine, 1930), p.xx.

⁷⁷ Paris, for one, appealed for relief to the States General of 1614: "Qu'il ne sera cy-après receu ny estably aulcun nouvel Ordre de relligieux ou relligieuses, sociétés ou communautéz ecclésiastiques ... attendu le grand nombre qu'il y en a estably depuis quelques années et qui s'accroist iournellement." Quoted in M.-A. Jégou, Les ursulines du faubourg St-Jacques (op.cit.)

The "conventual invasion" was occasioned partly by the revitalization of old religious houses, but even more by the establishment of the new congregations. The attraction of these new religious groups was seemingly irresistible. As Pierre de l'Estoile wrote in 1606: "Il n'était nouvelle à Paris et partout que de fils et filles de bonne maison, hommes et femmes de qualité qui s'allaient rendre à ces religions."⁷⁸

The increase of feminine religious was even more striking than that of men, because traditionally there were far fewer women than men in religious life.⁷⁹ An observer wrote in 1659:

On peut dire que ce siècle est un siècle de nouveaux établissements de religieuses. On voit partout de leurs monastères et il n'y a pas de si petite ville qui n'en ait ou deux.⁸⁰

In Troyes, the one female abbey that had sufficed for centuries was joined by such a variety of convents that in 1695 there were 320 nuns in the city.⁸¹ In Blois, where the ancient monastery of

⁷⁸ M. Marion, Dictionnaire des Institutions de la France aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles (Paris: A. and J. Picard, 1968), art. clergé.

⁷⁹ There were approximately 400 Benedictine women's monasteries in France, as compared to 1000 men's monasteries. See Y. Chaussy, Les Bénédictines et la réforme en France au XVII^e siècle (Paris: Editions de la Source, 1975) p.11. There were 53 Dominican houses for women, and 39 monasteries of Clarisses. See R. Lemoine, op.cit., pp. 244, 251. These were the major groupings of monasteries.

⁸⁰ An anonymous chronicler of Chalons-sur-Marne, quoted in A. Babeau, La Ville sous l'Ancien Regime, (Paris, 1880), p.462.

⁸¹ T. Boutiot, Histoire de l'instruction publique et populaire à Troyes (Troyes, 1865), p.71.

the Véroniques with its handful of nuns had accounted for the entire female religious population, three new convents raised the number to 236 by 1670.⁸² In Reims, which had a total population of 10,000 within the walls, the number of cloistered nuns rose from 60 in 1619 to between three and four hundred in 1658.⁸³ In Saint-Denis, on the outskirts of Paris, three separate convents were built between 1625 and 1629; one of them, the Ursuline community, came to number 74 religious in the 1670s. This approached the entire population of religious women in the diocese of Paris in the year 1600.⁸⁴

In increasing numbers, from the start of the century until its middle years, women crowded into the monasteries and convents. The massive influx was occasioned partly by parental pressure,⁸⁵ partly, also, by anxiety, and the desire for flight

⁸² M.-T. Notter, "Les Ordres religieux féminins blésois: leurs rapports avec la société, 1580-1670." Doctorat de troisième siècle, Université de Tours, 1982. p.147.

⁸³ Y. Poutet, Le dix-septième siècle et les origines lasalliennes (op.cit.), vol. I, p.46.

⁸⁴ J. Ferté, La vie religieuse dans les campagnes parisiennes (1622-1695) (Paris: Vrin, 1962), pp.118-19. At the end of the religious wars there were seven women's abbeys in the diocese of Paris, most with a population averaging between 12 and 16.

⁸⁵ "La famille profondément religieuse", with its readiness to place its children in the Church, is seen by Mgr. Lestocquoy as one of the two chief features of the religious revival of the seventeenth century (op. cit., p.203). Conversely, it is to the fading of this family support in the eighteenth century, that Jean de Viguerie attributes the drop in religious vocations. See "La vocation religieuse et sacerdotale en France aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles." La Vocation religieuse et sacerdotale en France, XVII^e-XVIII^e siècles. 2^e Rencontre Hist. rel., Fontevraud 1978, 1979. p.37. For further consideration of this question, see below, chap. VII,

from the world. But the motive power that must not be discounted is enthusiasm and a sense of mission. The post-tridentine Church envisaged nothing less than a total rechristianization of society. The new congregations were, in the large majority, specifically designed to be instruments in this rechristianization. As so much of the religious art and literature of the age shows, they saw themselves as fighters in a spiritual war. Their members were being invited to participate in this war. The records of the feminine congregations show that they considered themselves included in this invitation.

For women, the experience was absolutely new. For them, the monastic ideal had traditionally been an inward-turning life, complete unto itself, its isolation from the world made concrete by the enclosing walls and grilles. Now, quite suddenly, this life began to turn outwards. Even as some women re-established monastic life in all its austerity,⁸⁶ others began to look for a means to participate in the work of the Church. "To do all the good that is possible"⁸⁷ -- this intention, as enthusiastic as it

⁸⁶ These were the years when, with more or less resistance from their communities, the great abbeys of France were reformed. But the event of greatest significance for the religious revival in France was the arrival of a community of Spanish Carmelites, in 1604. The influence which these contemplative nuns exercised over the high society of Paris was extraordinary. See H. Brémond, *op.cit.*, vol.II, pp.326-29. By 1644, fifty-five Carmelite monasteries had been established in France.

⁸⁷ This was the original idea of Alix Le Clerc: "une nouvelle maisons de filles, pour y pratiquer tout le bien que l'on pourroit." quoted in A. de Besancet, Le bienheureux Pierre Fourier (Paris, 1864), pp.44-45.

was imprecise, was typical of the spirit in which women of the early seventeenth century offered their services to the Church. As opportunities to do this good opened up, the number of women entering religion burgeoned so rapidly that within a few years it equalled, then surpassed, that of men.⁸⁸

It would be a mistake to see this as an integral part of the tridentine reform. This burst of feminine energy was unforeseen and unplanned. The congregations of the seventeenth century grew out of a sort of anarchy of religious activism. To a significant degree, the act of their creation was performed by the women themselves. Groups of women all over the country joined together in impromptu communities to live, work and pray, sometimes for years, before developing a rule of their own or placing themselves in an authorized congregation.⁸⁹

⁸⁸"C'est au milieu du XVII^e siècle, entre 1630 et 1650, que le nombre des religieuses égale, puis dépasse le nombre des religieux." (P. Chaunu, Eglise, Culture et Société [op.cit.], p.401).

⁸⁹ Examples of this appear everywhere in the literature, e.g.: Saint-Claude, 1609: "quelques jeunes filles, très devotes et très desiruses d'entrer en Religion" began a movement to build a monastery. Their efforts finally succeeded in 1620. See François de Sales, Oeuvres complètes vol. XV, p.249.

Poitiers, 1613-18: several young women lived together in community in the house of Mlle. de Tusseau, widow of Jacques Desfrans, seigneur de la Bretonnyère. Their bishop then took their case to Cardinal de Sourdis of Bordeaux, who sent them a colony of filles de Notre-Dame to establish regular life. See P. Calendini, Le couvent des Filles de Notre-Dame à La Flèche (La Flèche, Imprimerie Eugène Besnier, 1905) pp.33-34.

Pontoise: a community of filles seculières had been established to teach school. "Ces filles étant fort neuves en ce qui regardait la vie de leur communauté, plusieurs gens de bien craignaient que leur congrégation ne s'en allât en fumée." Mme. Acarie went their rescue, "de sorte que cette petite communauté a donné naissance à deux florissants couvents de

These women do not fit the stereotype of the adolescent nun, safe behind her convent walls, who was so much a feature of later seventeenth-century society. In fact, the congrégées of the earliest years were more likely to enter in their twenties than in their teens.⁹⁰ Though many of them had entered with strong family backing, others defied their families to follow their own vocations.⁹¹ The communities to which they bound themselves were

carmélites et d'ursulines." (Duval, La vie admirable de Mlle. Acarie, quoted in H. Brémond, op.cit. vol.II, pp. 249-50).a

St.Malo: three young women lived together in community for nine years before accepting monastic life. See M. de C. Gueudré Histoire de l'Ordre des Ursulines (op.cit.) vol.I, p.49.

Perigueux: six young women tried to live in common under the direction of the Jesuits. They asked their bishop to invite Jeanne de Lestonnac to establish their community. This was done, several years later, in 1618. See L. Entraygues Une nièce de Montaigne (Perigueux, chez l'auteur, 1938), pp.30-31.

St-Bonnet-le-Château: a group of filles dévotes began a little congregation in 1618. In 1622, Archbishop Marquemont promised to send them Ursulines from Lyon. See P.-R. Gaussin and M. Vallet, "L'instruction secondaire des filles" (op.cit.)

Dieppe, 1619: a secular association, founded by Marie Demarets, was disallowed by Parlement. The Ursulines of Paris were then asked to adopt the community. See C. Robillard de Beaurepaire, Recherches sur l'instruction publique dans le diocèse de Rouen avant 1789. (Evreux, 1872) pp.216-17.

Provins, (1620): a community of ten or twelve "vertueuses filles" "toutes d'un mesme coeur aspiroient a la vie Religieuse, et en pratiquoient selon leur possible les fonctions". After nine years, a colony of religious of the Congregation de Notre Dame was sent from Verdun, at the request of the bishop, to establish a house. B.M. Provins, ms. 251.

Crépy-en-Valois, 1624. After four years of common life, a group of young women accepted a colony of Ursulines. See M.-A. Jégou, op.cit., p.54.

Gournay, 1625: five or six local women living in community were constrained to give way to an Ursuline house patronized by the Duchesse de Longueville (C. Robillard de Beaurepaire, op.cit.,

⁹⁰ See See Appendix B, graphs IV and V.

⁹¹ Jean de Viguerie, "La Vocation sacerdotale et religieuse", pp. 33-34.

often extremely tenuous, and in their early years were dogged by uncertainty and lack of funds.⁹² In other words, life in most of the new congregations involved several years of risk and discomfort. And yet it was often during these years that the number of entries was highest.⁹³

From all these facts it may be argued that, however important other factors may be, the "conventual invasion" in the early years of the century must finally be related to the fervour of the entrants themselves. But how did such enthusiasm come to blossom within the rigidity of Counter-Reformation Catholicism? The Council of Trent had defined reform as the re-establishment of discipline. For women in religion, above all, reform meant simply a return to the old rules.⁹⁴ What then, caused the fervour that marked the early seventeenth century?

It has to be remembered that the Counter-Reformation came late to France. Only in 1615 did the Assembly of the clergy officially accept the discipline of the Council of Trent. The old structures of the Church had been in ruins for some years before the new structures were put into place.⁹⁵ This meant that, in the

⁹² Of the four feminine religious foundations in Blois studied by M.-T. Notter, three went through a period of extreme poverty (op.cit., p.138). This experience was common in the primitive congregations.

⁹³ See Appendix B, graph III.

⁹⁴ R. Taveneaux, op.cit. vol.I, p.69.

⁹⁵ According to Dagens, "La réforme catholique sera l'oeuvre des Saints, non celle des politiques, la part des politiques ayant été de créer les conditions matérielles de paix et d'ordre qui ont rendu la réforme possible." (op.cit., p.172).

religious life of the country, the early years of the century were years of interregnum, and, therefore, conducive to individual initiative. It was during this period, and especially after the publication of the Introduction à la vie dévote⁹⁶ that lay action "took off". Before the French Church even found its feet, a strong apostolic current was sweeping through France.

In this apostolic current many women found, or thought they found, their calling. By 1615 five new feminine congregations had been established.⁹⁷ As the French Church began to prepare for reform, and for the rechristianization of the people, the women were already there, seeing themselves, in some way not yet fully defined, as participants in the apostolate.⁹⁸

In the ensuing years their newly-found apostolate came into collision with other convictions and values, and with a

⁹⁶ In the year 1608. By 1622 it had gone to 40 editions. Pierre Chaunu considers this work the most important book of the Catholic Reformation. See Eglise, Culture et Société (op.cit.), p.417.

⁹⁷ The Carmelites, who already had seven convents in France; the Ursulines; the Filles de Notre-Dame; the Visitation; the Congrégation de Notre-Dame. This last congregation, though it had several houses in Lorraine, did not actually establish on French soil until 1618.

⁹⁸ This lack of definition combined with a sense of divine calling, are well described in the foreword to Marie de Chantal Gueudré's work, Histoire de l'Ordre des Ursulines vol.I, p.16. "Toutes ces femmes, pleines de jeunesse et d'enthousiasme, sont venues des milieux les plus divers pour travailler ensemble à une tâche qu'aucune d'elles n'est capable de définir, mais que toutes envisagent comme l'expression de la volonté divine sur leur humble activité. Les divergences de vues dans l'idéal apostolique, les différentes conceptions de la sainteté se heurtent dans un groupement perdu au milieu d'une France qui se cherche au lendemain des guerres de religion."

traditionalist and distrustful view of female nature from which even the women themselves could not escape. The following chapter deals with this collision, as experienced by the three feminine teaching congregations of early seventeenth-century France, the Filles de Notre-Dame, the Ursulines, and the Congrégation de Notre-Dame. The experience of each congregation was différent, but there is a marked overall similarity. Together they illustrate the process by which a significantly new form of life, introduced into a society that initially did not welcome it, was first accepted, then absorbed, and, finally, contained by that society.

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST GENERATION: THE CONGREGATIONS OF THE COUNTER REFORMATION (1598-1640)

1) The Filles de Notre-Dame.

In 1524, Luther had written: "We must have schools for our girls, so that women may become capable of giving their children a Christian upbringing."¹ His idea became an accepted truth, first among reformers, then among counter-reformers. It was an article of faith for all seventeenth-century educators, that the shaping which the mind received in childhood would persist through life, for better or for worse. Since women dominated the early years of their children's lives, their influence was crucial. "Leur malice ou leur piété," wrote Fourier², "importe plus qu'on ne croit, à la République chrétienne."³

Nowhere was this more keenly perceived than in the cities of the Midi, where Calvinism had sunk deep roots, especially among the elite. The toleration guaranteed for their schools by the Edict of Nantes left the Huguenots with a strong advantage. The Catholics responded with a frontal counter-attack. In one city

¹ Quoted in Marie Chalendard, La promotion de la femme à l'apostolat (Paris: Ed. Alsatia, 1950), p.70.

² Pierre Fourier (1565-1640). Founder of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame, reformer of the Clerks Regular of Saint-Sauveur.

³ P. Fourier, Lettres I, p.89, quoted in H. Derréal, Un Missionnaire de la Contre-Reforme (op.cit.), P.126.

after another, they made fierce efforts to set up congréganist⁴ colleges in direct competition with the existing institutions. "Etablir un collège des Pères ... afin d'empêcher que l'ignorance et l'erreur qui sont les principes de toutes sortes de maux ne se glissent par défaut d'instruction dans les âmes des habitants ..." ⁵: this was a central strategy of the Counter-Reformation, and one that was highly successful.

But among the people most loyal to the reformed religion was a group whom the Fathers could not easily reach: the women. And whereas their sons might be removed from their influence and put into the colleges, their daughters, as long as they remained at home, were vulnerable to the mothers' heresy. They, in turn, would pass the contagion on to their own children. There seemed no recourse but to develop feminine institutions analogous to the Jesuit colleges.

Thus the first impulse towards feminine education came in the Midi,⁶ and its motive power was anti-protestantism. The region in which the houses of the Filles de Notre-Dame were located was a theatre of war (see Map I). The early development of the institute took place against a backdrop of civil conflict, of armed bands roaming the countryside, and of violent confrontation in the

⁴ For a definition of this word, see Glossary.

⁵ Convention signed between the Jesuits and the town of Aurillac, 12/ii/1619. Quoted in M.-M. Compère, Du collège au lycée (Paris: Ed. Gallimard-Julliard, 1985) p.58.

⁶ Where both the Ursulines and the filles de Notre-Dame were concentrated in their early years.

streets. The institute was, in its own way, a protagonist in this conflict, erecting statues of the Virgin on its outside walls,⁷ staging theatrical processions in her honour, and ringing its monastery bells on the occasion of her feasts, to call back the people to the worship that they had abandoned. But the main battle was conducted in the schoolrooms, and in the parlours, where girls and their mothers were educated and argued back into the true faith.

In 1605, two Jesuit fathers, Bordes and Raymond, of the college of La Madeleine in Bordeaux,⁸ decided to look for a suitable person to establish a school for girls. The woman who accepted their proposition was Jeanne de Lestonnac, Baronne de Montferrant-Landiras.⁹ She was herself the daughter of a Calvinist mother, and in her childhood had suffered from her parents' tug-of-war for her soul. Married at seventeen and widowed at forty-one, she entered a Feuillantine monastery, but had to withdraw for reasons of health.¹⁰ After two years of "devout"

⁷ These statues were sometimes erected as part of the contract with the municipality (L. Entraygues, Une Nièce de Montaigne (op. cit.), p.89). Failure to salute them could mark the passers-by as Huguenots (ibid., p.180).

⁸ Established in 1572 as a direct challenge to the Collège de Guyenne. By 1600 it was far ahead of its distinguished competitor, both in revenues and in numbers of students.

⁹ Jeanne de Lestonnac (1556-1640), daughter of a conseiller to the Parlement of Bordeaux, niece of Michel de Montaigne. In 1563 she married Gaston de Montferrant, baron of Landiras. He died in 1597.

¹⁰ L. Entraygues, op.cit., p.45.

life lived privately, she was ready to accept the difficult work of foundress.

Together with Father Bordes, and after a pattern laid down by Ignatius Loyola, Jeanne drew up a "formula" of 30 articles, outlining the major features of the proposed institute. These were presented to the Archbishop of Bordeaux, Cardinal de Sourdis.¹¹ The Cardinal examined the proposals, made some changes, and in March, 1606, approved the new institute. Within a year he had won pontifical recognition for his protégées. The papal Bull of April 7 1607, which confirmed the existence of the Compagnie de Notre-Dame, made it the first feminine teaching congregation to achieve official status in France.

In the provisions of the Bull there was considerable novelty. First, though the community in Bordeaux was, pro forma, to be affiliated to the Benedictine order, its principal purpose was not that of the conventional monastery:

La fin des religieuses de cette Compagnie et Ordre de Nostre-Dame est de vacquer en toute diligence avec la grace de Dieu, non seulement à leur propre salut et perfection, mais aussi avec la mesme grace, à l'exemple de la très-sainte Vierge leur Mère, de procurer le salut et perfection des âmes et personnes de leur

¹¹ François d'Escoubleau de Sourdis (1575-1628). Appointed to the diocese of Bordeaux at the age of 19, while still in minor orders. Received the Cardinal's hat in 1599. He was, according to Mère de Lestonnac's biographer, an ardent fighter for the Counter-Reformation. "On le voyait passer à cheval, botté, éperonné, précédé de son porte-croix et suivi de ses gentilhommes." (Entraignes, op. cit., p. 66). In his obituary the Mercure de France wrote that his was "un esprit mal endurant ce qui se faisait au préjudice de sa juridiction". Quoted in La Compagnie de Marie-Notre-Dame (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1926) p.29. (Hereafter called Ed. Letouzey).

sexe, tout autant que leur condition le leur
permettra.¹²

The work of education was "un point fondamental" of the
Institute. ¹³ In recognition of this, the Pope himself dispensed
the community from the obligation of Divine Office.¹⁴

The monastery was to be adapted to allow for the reception of
students in such a way that they would not interfere with
clausura. The pensionnaires were to have quarters set apart,
though within the monastery walls. Similarly, externes could be
accepted, though in conditions of strict isolation:

On bâtera une cour à un côté de l'église,
dans l'enclos toute fois de ce Monastère
ou Maison, avec des salles ou chambres
autour; à laquelle lorsque les Mères,
Soeurs et Maîtresses iront pour enseigner,
après le dernier signe du cloche de
l'école, les deux portes, savoir est celle
de dehors et celle de dedans seront fermées
et chacuné des filles, qui ne seront pas
pensionnaires se retirera en sa maison.¹⁵

The Constitutions elaborated further on this compromise
between cloister and school:

Comme la fonction d'enseigner et de faire

¹² Constitutions, quoted in ibid., p.62.

¹³ Pierre Michel, "Une version modernisée des règles et
constitutions des filles de Notre-Dame". B. Soc. Amis de
Montaigne (1975) ser. 5, no.16, p.59. Some of the quotations
used are from this modernised (1722) version of the rule, while
others are from the seventeenth-century version used in the
Letouzey edition; hence the difference in wording.

¹⁴ "Sa Sainteté ... a osté, de son mouvement et sans en être
requis, toute obligation de dire le grand office ou
bréviare." Constitutions, quoted in ed. Letouzey, p.67.

¹⁵ Bull of Paul V, 7/iv/1607. Quoted in Charles Molette,
"Conclusion", Les religieuses enseignantes (op.cit.), p.152.

des classes est un point fondamental de notre Institut, pour la plus grande gloire de Dieu, pour le salut des âmes et pour le Bien public, elle doit être en une singulière recommandation à toutes celles qui y seront employées.¹⁶

In order to release the religious for this demanding work, most of the mortifications normally associated with monastic life were removed. They ate well,¹⁷ performed only the penances universally exacted by the Church, and wore a habit which was designed for the classroom.¹⁸ Their religious exercises consisted of daily mass, 1 1/2 hours of mental prayer, the little office of Our Lady, and the rosary, as well as an examination of conscience after the method prescribed by Saint Ignatius -- in other words, little more than a devout person of the world might be expected to observe.¹⁹

On the other hand, the work of school teaching was to be taken seriously. "Jamais elle ne s'obmette ains se fasse (toujours de mieux en mieux."²⁰ Novices were to be trained in

¹⁶ P. Michel, op. cit., p.59.

¹⁷ "Chaque Religieuse ou pensionnaire aura trois divers mets à chaque repas, soir et matin; savoir: un potage ou une entrée, une portion (de viande) et un dessert.... La portion ordinaire de bouilli pour les Religieuses, sera de 4 onces, ... Celle de rôti, de 5 onces" (Quoted in ibid., pp.58-59)

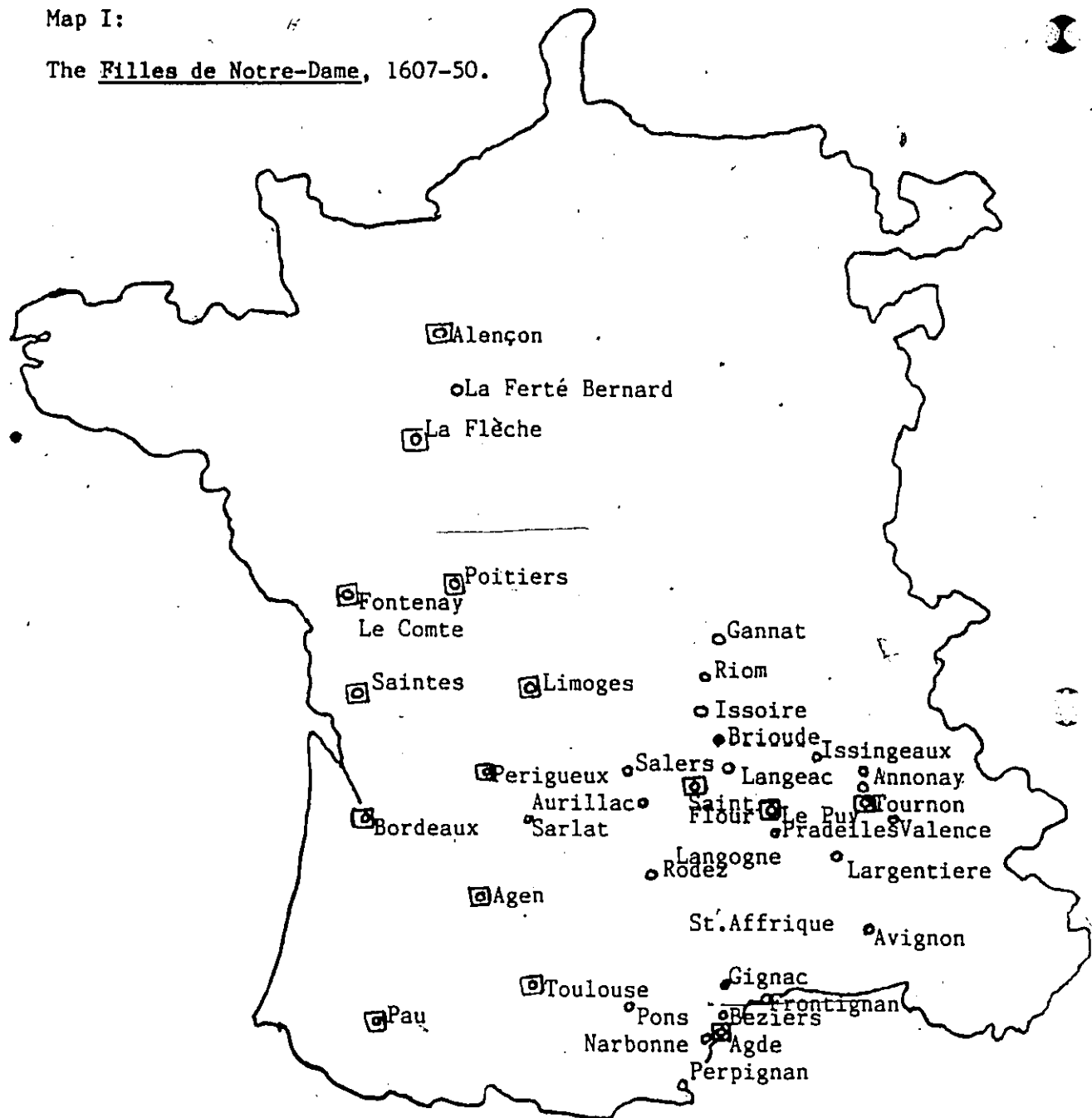
¹⁸ Entraygues describes it as "fait avec goût". Op.cit., p.85.

¹⁹ It was not uncommon for dévots to spend two or more hours per day in private prayer, as well attending Mass and reciting the little office. See C. du Chesnay, "La spiritualité des laïcs", (op. cit.) pp.(31-33. Jean Maillefer of Reims wrote in his memoirs: "Il y a 10, 15, 20, 30 ans, je me lève en esté à cinq heures, en hiver à sept. La première chose, je vay à l'église et ne manque pas non plus que maintenant d'entendre la messe." (H. Jadart, Mémoires de Jean Maillefer (op.cit.), p.114).

²⁰ Constitutions of 1640, quoted in ed. Letouzey, p.67.

Map I:

The Filles de Notre-Dame, 1607-50.



• Monasteries of the filles de Notre-Dame founded 1607-50.

◻ Monasteries in towns with major Jesuit colleges.

◻ Territories held by the Huguenots during the religious wars
(Rogier et al., Nouvelle Histoire de l'Eglise, vol. III, p.142)

catechetics. Classroom procedures, which were based on the classic Jesuit Ratio Studiorum, were rigorously observed.²¹

Along with the Jesuits, the Filles de Notre-Dame had another model: the Protestants. Mère de Lestonnac consciously copied the schools of the Protestant competition.²² The recapture of their student population was, after all, her primary purpose:

A ce que les filles soient allechées à cette institution et destournées des escoles hérétiques et gastées, on leur apprendra à lire et escrire, et travailler de l'aiguille en diverses façons, en somme toutes les honnestetés convenables à une vierge ingénue.²³

The Compagnie des Filles de Notre-Dame was a Counter-Reformation congregation. It owed much more to the Jesuits who presided over its creation than to the Order of Saint Benedict which gave it its formal existence. Its houses tended to locate in towns served by Jesuit colleges (see Map I). Its Rule so closely resembled that of the Jesuits that in many passages the only difference was the gender of the personal pronouns.²⁴ Its novices, from Mère de Lestonnac on, were trained by means of the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius.

²¹ A religious in the monastery of La Flèche who proposed new teaching methods was sent away from the house. P. Calendini Le couvent des filles de Notre-Dame de La Flèche (op.cit.) pp. 178-79.

²² L. Entraygues, op.cit., pp. 96-97.

²³ Constitutions of 1620, quoted in ed. Letouzey, p.69.

²⁴ Entraygues, op.cit., pp.116-17.

In one respect, however, the institute failed to emulate its Jesuit model. This was in the matter of organization. In the original formula presented to Cardinal de Sourdis in 1606, a generalate had been called for. In other words, Bordes and Mère de Lestonnac envisaged an elected superior-general ruling over the order, with power to appoint the local superiors.²⁵ The Cardinal eliminated this clause before the formula was sent to Rome. All that was officially asked for, and received, was the authority to found one monastery. Against her wishes, Jeanne de Lestonnac became the foundress of a single community -- that of Bordeaux -- which was subject to the Ordinary. Should this house establish others, they, too, would be autonomous and subject to the local bishops. For the Filles de Notre-Dame, as for other feminine congregations of their time, there was no escaping the strict canonical interpretation of tridentine law.²⁶

More successfully than the Ursulines, however, they managed to maintain ties between communities, and a recognition by all houses of the primacy of the Bordeaux monastery. Rome, perhaps unwittingly, assisted them: the papal brief of October 17, 1615, approving the new foundation of Béziers, ordered the new community to observe the rules and customs of the Mother House.²⁷ Later, the institute began to establish new houses without applying for new

²⁵ Ed. Letouzey, p.130.

²⁶ See Introduction.

²⁷ Ibid., pp.133-34.

papal bulls, as though theirs was an order, and not a collection of autonomous houses.

There is evidence that this action received strong support from their Jesuit advisers. "Je vous conjure," wrote Père de Lestonnac, Jeanne's brother, to the superior of the Filles de Notre-Dame at Le Puy,

de demeurer toujours unie au chef de ce même corps, quel qu'il soit. Car quoy que la personne change, l'autorité est toujours la même, autorité si nécessaire pour entretenir l'union et la conformité, que sans cela l'Ordre serait un désordre et le corps un monstre.²⁸

This effort to extend the authority of the Bordeaux house angered de Sourdis, however; he suspected Jeanne of working towards an independent congregation along Jesuit lines, subject only to the Pope. Hence a subtle war of nerves, which continued between the two throughout his lifetime.²⁹ Jeanne appears to have persisted in her hopes for a generalate. Two years before her death she appealed for new constitutions, applicable to all houses.

"L'uniformité est le soutien et la base des Ordres religieux," she wrote, and she asked that all communities regard Bordeaux "comme étant la mère de toutes les autres."³⁰ In the text of the proposed constitutions, she included a chapter entitled

²⁸ Quoted in P. Calendini, op. cit., p. 71.

²⁹ At least twice, the archbishop publicly humiliated Mère de Lestonnac in front of her community. He also seems to have supported the second superior, Blanche Hervé, who subjected the elderly nun to two years of disgrace. See Entraygues, op. cit.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 238.

"Prescriptions dans le cas d'une supérieure générale". The chapter was struck out.³¹ The centralization of the order, which had been achieved largely by the force of her personality, remained a matter of sentiment only. After her death in 1640 the institute lost some of its dynamism,³² and the various communities began to slip apart. The Filles de Notre-Dame continued without a union until modern times.

In two main areas, therefore, the creation of the Filles de Notre-Dame represented a continuation of past custom. The principle of clausura was never questioned, and the principle of a generalate, though suggested, was rejected. However, the founding of the Bordeaux house in 1607 did involve significant innovation. For the first time in France, the powers of Church and State officially sanctioned a monastic community which had as its raison d'être the education of girls. Convent education, which was to be a marked feature of seventeenth-century society, was now on its way to becoming fashionable.

2) The Ursulines.

The Compagnie de Sainte-Ursule, which became the feminine teaching congregation par excellence of seventeenth-century France, was, perhaps more than any other contemporary religious organization, the product of a process of evolution, assisted and influenced by many different men and women, but dominated by no

³¹ Ed. Letouzey, p.136.

³² Numbering thirty houses at her death in 1640, it increased to 53 by the end of the century -- some of these houses being located in Spain. Thereafter it ceased to expand.

single person. The foundress, Angela Merici, established her company in Brescia, and died there in 1540, some fifty years before the appearance of the first French community.³¹ She was at first no more than a name to the young provençal catechists who adopted the title of Ursulines.³² The life that she had envisaged for her followers in Brescia -- a life of prayer and good works based on their family homes -- was never practised in France. Where she had avoided all the marks of "religion"³³, they adopted, from the outset, a community life with simple vows, the recitation in common of the Office of Our Lady, and a distinctive dress. But if the changes undergone during these fifty years were great, those of the next fifty were greater still. By 1640 all but a handful of the Ursulines of France were cloistered.³⁴ By 1699 the Compagnie de Sainte-Ursule was, in fact, an aggregation of some three hundred and fifty autonomous monasteries, bound together only by a common origin, a common Rule (the Rule of Saint

³¹ 1 Isle-sur-Sorgues, in the Comtat Venaissin, 1592. This was in fact outside the kingdom of France, but within the orbit of the Church of France.

³² A copy of her rule came into their hands at about the time that they were setting up their community. See M. C. Gueudré, Histoire de l'Ordre des Ursulines vol. I, p.27.

³³ The word is used commonly in seventeenth-century parlance to indicate the religious, or monastic, life.

³⁴ The only exception to this rule was the Congregation of Dôle, which successfully resisted monastic transformation. Dôle, in the Franche-Comté, was then under Spanish control. Mme. Gueudré suggests that this was no coincidence: that elsewhere it was the Gallican episcopate that acted as a principal agent in the transformation of the Ursulines from congrégées into cloistered nuns. (Op cit. vol. I, p.291, fn 1)

Augustine, which Angela Merici had never observed) and a common purpose, the education of girls.

Between the Brescian Ursulines of 1540 and the French Ursulines of a century later there were profound differences. The former were altogether secular, living in their own homes, taking no vows but a private vow of chastity, distinguished by no particular form of dress,³⁵ occupied with the whole range of charitable works: visiting the poor, caring for the sick and burying the dead, as well as instructing girls and women in their faith. The latter were semi-contemplatives, choir nuns, separated from the world outside by the security of walls and grilles.³⁶ Of the multiple works of charity that their predecessors had performed, only one remained, the instruction of girls. With the translation to monastic life the Ursulines left their other callings aside and became specialists in child-education.

This was, indeed, a radical alteration, both in lifestyle and in apostolate. To modern eyes, it seems a retrogression.

³⁵ The adoption in 1545 of an emblem distinctive of their calling -- a black leather belt to signify chastity -- gave rise to some concern among the members, who considered it a departure from their primitive rule. See Dom Robert Lemoine, Le monde des religieux (op.cit.), p.292.

³⁶ An idea of the degree of security required to maintain clausura may be had from the recommendations of episcopal visitors. In the Rouen monastery, in 1641: "Dès que possible, mettre des barreaux de fer aux fenêtres du chœur, de la sacristie, de la salle de communauté et du vestibule, également aux fenêtres qui donnent du chœur en la chapelle, afin que la clôture soit en sûreté ..." In the monastery of Pont-de-Vaux: "que les grilles des parloirs et de l'église soient changées ou refaites, en sorte que les ouvertures soient plus petites et telles qu'on ne puisse passer la main au travers." (M.-C. Gueudré, op. cit., II, p.174).

Women who had been relatively free in their work, and who had enjoyed a measure of self-government, had moved into a position of juridical restriction and submission. But to many of those involved, it was, rather, a progression to a more perfect form of life, one fully in tune with the spirit of Counter-Reformation society.

Among those who held this view were the women themselves, or at least, many of them. In the spirituality of the day, the contemplative life was considered to be not only the highest, but the happiest form of human existence:

C'est en la Religion [wrote Philippe d'Angoumois]
où l'on en tient mieux la voye, où l'on n'en
confond point le passage, et où la raison se
trouble fort peu du mal des traverses de la mer.³⁷

Contemplatives were "comme les oiseaux ... en l'air de Religion, où on sauuoure souuent mille douceurs parmy un peu d'austeritez..."³⁸

This attraction to monasticism remained a powerful temptation for devout women, especially of the upper classes. By contrast, the life of good works, even when it carried pontifical approval, did not seem to be as meritorious. Once committed to a life of service and bound by private vows and promises, many women felt drawn towards the "holocaust" of themselves that full monasticism

³⁷ S.de Turin, "L'emprise de l'idéal monastique sur la spiritualité des laïcs au XVII^e siècle", p.233.

³⁸ Ibid.

represented. Mère Jeanne de Rampalle, one of the founding French Ursulines, arguing for monastic translation,³⁹ wrote:

Les vœux et la profession religieuse sont un acte des plus élevés et des plus heroïques en mérite que cette vie puisse permettre. Il semble en certaine manière avoir du rapport à l'immensité comme comprenant la hauteur des desirs, la largeur de tous les biens spirituels, la longueur de la vie et de l'éternité, la profondeur de l'anéantissement dans l'état d'une sainte servitude.⁴⁰

Of equal importance was the external pressure of society, both ecclesiastical and secular. The women who made up the new congregations belonged to this society; they were shaped by it and for the most part they shared its views. This society had a clear idea of the role which it desired religious women to play. In a series of steps, each of them a logical progression from the step before, it guided -- and if needs be forced -- the women into this role.

The Ursulines of Brescia were modelled upon the tertiaries of earlier times. They were of the same general character as the many other groups of women in Italy who aroused the envious admiration of François de Sales:

La différence qu'il y a entre la France et l'Italie, est qu'en Italie les femmes et les filles ont mille commodités ès compagnies, sociétés, et congrégations de pratiquer la dévotion de plus qu'en France.⁴¹

³⁹ I.e., the official process whereby a secular community was raised to the status of a monastery, and its members to the state of religious.

⁴⁰ M.-C. Gueudré, op.cit., vol. I, p.274.

⁴¹ François de Sales, Oeuvres (op.cit.), vol. XXV, p.341.

① Their originality lay in their ability to recruit members,⁴² and in their innovative organization. The Constitutions, which received papal approval in 1544, provided for a hierarchy of officers to direct the members, all of them together ruled by a Superior General.⁴³

② This structure, which was modelled on that of the Jesuits, went without challenge as long as the Ursulines were confined to a single diocese. However, as the success of the Compagnie led to its expansion into other dioceses, the question of control became more pressing. In 1568, twelve Ursulines went to Milan at the invitation of the Archbishop, Charles Borromeo.⁴⁴ In so doing they found themselves absorbed into a movement of religious reform the ends of which did not entirely correspond with their own. Borromeo's programme for reform was centred entirely in the diocese, whereas their society crossed diocesan boundaries. Borromeo adopted the Ursulines with enthusiasm, but rejected their principle of a generalate. Appealing to the Council of Trent, he argued that female religious were responsible to their Bishop alone⁴⁵; they must be subject to him and to no-one else. Thus from 1577 on the concept of an internal organization was set

⁴² The Company's membership grew from 28 to 150 in the first four years of its existence.

⁴³ M. Chalendar, op.cit., p.31.

⁴⁴ H. de Leymont, Madame de Sainte-Beuve et les Ursulines de Paris 1562-1630 (op.cit.), pp.117-18.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.121.

aside; each community of Ursulines became autonomous and subject to the immediate control of the Ordinary.

This was to have a profound effect upon the first feminine congregations of the Counter-Reformation period. A number of them were to seek some form of internal government, with more or less co-operation between houses.⁴⁶ Their requests were all refused. Yet at the same time the Church was advancing the principle of congregation and union of houses as the means of ensuring male monastic reform.⁴⁷ Nothing illustrates more vividly how differently the Counter-Reformation Church perceived its male and its female religious. In the tradition of Borromeo nuns were the filles de l'évêque, much cherished, but minors nonetheless.

Borromeo was responsible for another important innovation in Ursuline practice. He "congregated", or gathered into community, those of the sisters who so desired. This break with the primitive tradition according to which the members lived in their own homes was welcomed by the majority of the women. It was approved by Rome in 1582. By the time of the Archbishop's death in 1584, five communities were at work in the diocese of

⁴⁶ Prominent among these congregations were the English Ladies (see Introduction), the Filles de Notre-Dame of Jeanne de Lestonnac, and the Congrégation de Notre-Dame of Lorraine, founded by Pierre Fourier and Alix Le Clerc.

⁴⁷ This application of a double standard by the Church is noted by Hélène Derréal in her study of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame. Op.cit., p.143.

Milan: six hundred Ursulines, teaching in eighteen schools.⁴⁸

These congrégées⁴⁹ now considered themselves to be religious; they enjoyed some of the privileges of religious and they were subject to some religious discipline, including the wearing of a distinctive habit. However, the Ursulines of Milan were strictly speaking not religious, since they were not bound by solemn vows or the obligation of clausura, nor were they subject to any of the four great religious Rules.⁵⁰

It was this, the Milanese version of Ursulinism, that found its way into France.⁵¹ The beginnings of the first community followed a pattern which would be repeated time and time again in subsequent years. A group of young women in Avignon gathered together to live a semi-religious life of prayer and good works:--

Celles-ci en attirèrent plusieurs autres, de sorte que ces bonnes filles se trouvaient en peu de temps vingt-quatre, toutes dans le désir de servir Dieu et de n'avoir plus de commerce avec le monde ... Elles fréquentaient les sacrements et les exercices de la Doctrine chrétienne; elles assistaient les pauvres, visitaient les malades et s'exerçaient à toutes les autres oeuvres de piété que leur âge et leur sexe leur permettaient d'entreprendre. ⁵²

⁴⁸ H. Leymont, op.cit., p.127, and Lemoine op.cit. (1976), p.293. Note that under Borromeo the Ursulines began to concentrate on teaching as their principal apostolate.

⁴⁹ For a definition of this term, see glossary.

⁵⁰ Benedictine, Basilian, Franciscan, Augustinian.

⁵¹ M.-A. Jégou, Les Ursulines du faubourg Saint-Jacques (op.cit.), p.23.

⁵² M.Bourguignon, La Vie du Père Romillon (Marseille, 1649), quoted in H.Brémont op.cit., vol. II, p.28.

Their ambition was to form a monastic community, and they asked the Archbishop of Avignon to give them an empty monastery for their use.

Ce prélat ... répondit que les religieuses du royaume n'étaient pas assez recueillies et qu'il y avait de saintes filles dans l'Italie, qui ne faisant que des vœus simples et sans clôture, les observaient avec beaucoup plus de sainteté et d'exactitude; et que, sans perdre la solitude et la retraite intérieure, elles étaient infiniment plus utiles au salut de celles de leur sexe.⁵³

Most of the women were discouraged by this response, and they disbanded; but a few of them persisted. Under their mentor, César du Bus, founder of the Fathers of Christian Doctrine, they gravitated more and more towards catechesis, and indeed for a time adopted the title of Sisters of Christian Doctrine.

Their activity aroused the kind of controversy that was to recur over and over again. On the one hand, their supporters included the Doctrinaires de Bus and Romillon and a number of wealthy and influential Avignonese; on the other was an equally wealthy and influential group of opponents, who included, in this case, the Jesuits of the college. The leader of the group, Françoise de Bermond, received the strongest of representations from this quarter:

Le R.P. Majorius (jésuite) ... l'en ayant toujours détournée et lui représentant fort souvent que c'était une pure tentation et qu'il fallait absolument à une jeune fille, ou un mari, ou un muraille, elle n'avait osé entreprendre cet ouvrage jusqu'à ce que

⁵³ Ibid., p.28.

Dieu lui donnât le modèle et l'occasion ...⁵⁴

The opposition abated only slowly, as the group provided itself with the signs of respectability: first, a copy of the Ursuline Rule, brought back from Italy by a friendly bishop, then with a papal brief giving them "la permission d'enseigner publiquement la doctrine chrétienne aux jeunes filles",⁵⁵ and finally a house, rented for them by one of their wealthy members. By 1597 they were living in community, under the rule drawn up by Borromeo, with a superior, Françoise de Bermond, and with simple vows.

The early French congrégées were, above all, catechizers. They became full participants in the war of words that was taking place in southern France against the members of the reformed religion. The Ursuline chroniclers, Mère de Pommereu and others, describe them as heroic figures. Thus Anne de Vesvres taught catechism to men and women alike, and prepared them for the sacraments.⁵⁶ Anne de Beauvais "convertit un grand nombre de pécheurs huguenots et athées".⁵⁷ Anne de Beaumont's "fervents discours" were compared to the preaching of Saint Paul. The church

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp.29-30.

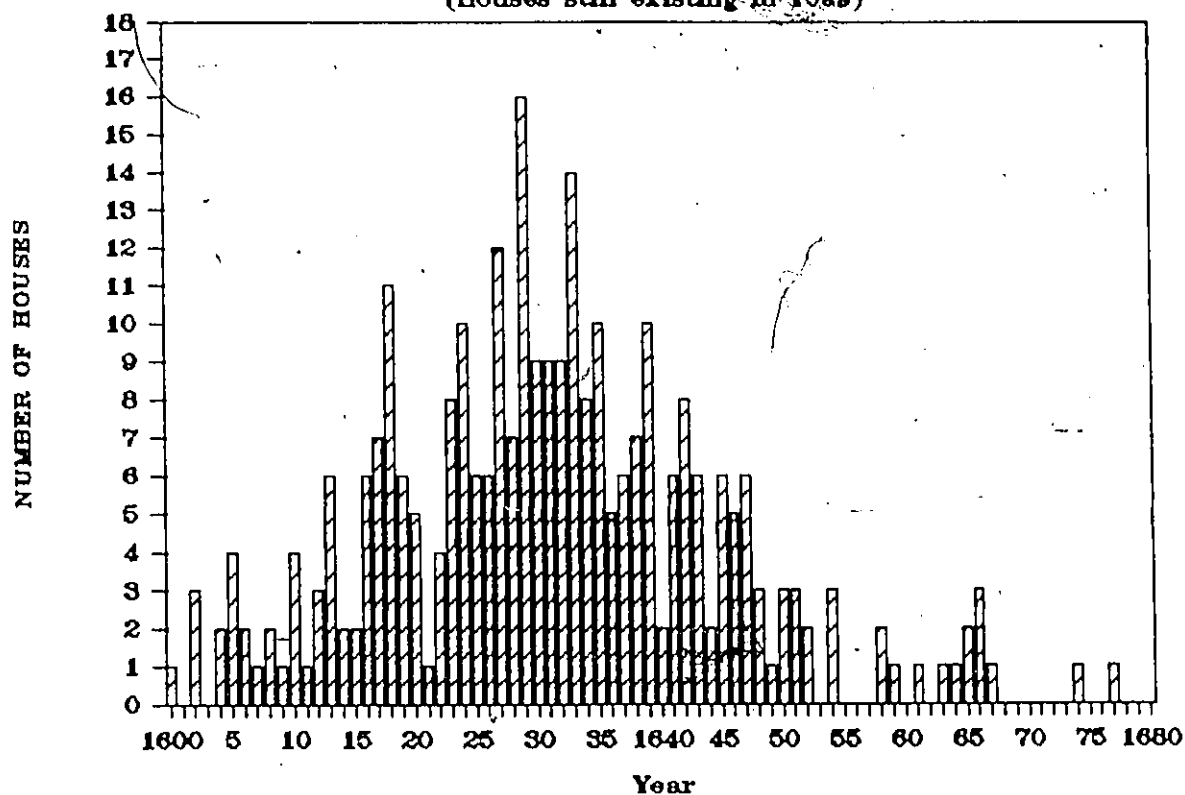
⁵⁵ Les chroniques de l'Ordre des Ursulines recueillies pour l'usage des Religieuses du Mesme Ordre par (M)ère (D)e (P)ommereu (U)rsuline (hereafter M.D.P.U.); (Paris, 1673), Part I, p.96.

⁵⁶ Ibid., Part I, p.72.

⁵⁷ Journal II, p.53, quoted in M.-C. Gueudré, op.cit., vol. I, p.158.

Graph I:

URSULINE FOUNDATIONS: 17th CENTURY (Houses still existing in 1899)



(N.B. Four houses were founded before 1600, and one after 1680).

Information collated from:

H. de Leymont, Madame de Sainte-Beuve (op.cit.), pp. 429-34.

M.-C. Gueudré, Histoire de l'Ordre des Ursulines en France (op.cit.),
vol. II, pp.326-29.

of Montelimart was too small to hold all the people who flocked to hear Paule de Cellarier talk about God.⁵⁸ Their principal work, however, was the instruction of girls. It was the demand for this that drew them so quickly into the cities of southern France.

The great period of expansion began with the new century. Between 1600 and 1610, twenty-nine houses were set up, the most important of them in the major cities. These houses, strategically located in centres of wealth, power and influence, became the colonizers of their hinterlands, sending out small groups of their sisters to form new communities in the towns that invited them in.⁵⁹ By 1630, some eighty maisons congrégées had been founded.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ M.D.P.U. III p.413.

⁵⁹ As a consequence, the Order of Saint Ursula as it existed in seventeenth-century France was in fact a collection of "congregations", each with the particular Customs of its own Mother House. Mère Pommereu of Paris, who was the Order's first historian, counted nine congregations: Paris, Bordeaux, Lyon, Dijon, Arles, Tulle, Avignon, Toulouse and Dôle. In fact Mère Gueudré, its most recent historian, suggests that the number was more like thirty. (Ibid. vol.I, p.5.)

⁶⁰ See M.-C. Gueudré op.cit., I, Appendix 1, pp. 327-29. Note that these figures do not correspond to those given in my Graph I, which are drawn from H. Leymont, op.cit., pp.429-34. Leymont's figures are for 1699, by which time some of the early houses had disappeared. Gueudré is concerned only with the maisons congrégées, those houses that were founded before the transformation of the Ursulines of France into a contemplative order.

This rapid expansion needs to be interpreted in terms of human and material resources. As François de Dainville asked with reference to the Jesuits,⁶¹ we need to ask: Who invited the Ursulines in? Who provided the accommodation, the funds, the very considerable effort involved in making all the necessary arrangements, and -- above all -- the aspirants, the young women who crowded into these communities in their early days?

First: the French hierarchy. This was a time when the Princes of the Church travelled a great deal. A series of papal elections took the French cardinals into Italy. There they were able to consider, in particular, the work of the late Archbishop of Milan. It has been said that it was Charles Borromeo who "opened the doors of France" to the Ursulines.⁶² His canonization in 1604 only enhanced his reputation; he was from now on revered as the model bishop of the Counter-Reformation. A number of French bishops adopted the Ursulines as whole-heartedly as he had done. Thus Cardinal de Sourdis invited the congrégées into Bordeaux, and defended them fiercely against all criticism:

L'Institut de ces Vierges de la Doctrine Chrétienne appelées de Sainte-Ursule n'est autre chose que l'Institut Apostolique... J'ay montré qu'il y en'avoit de ce sexe qui ensoignoient et dillatoient l'esprit, non par prédications publiques, mais par instructions particulières de la Doctrine Chrestienne, et ce principalement à celles de leur sexe. Que si jamais ville en eust

⁶¹ François de Dainville, L'Education des Jésuits XVII^e - XVIII^e siècles (Paris: Editions de minuit, 1978), p.152.

⁶² H. Leymont, op.cit., p.129. Also see R. Lemoine op.cit., (1976), p.294.

besoing, c'est cette-cy pour la dépravation
des moeurs qui est connue.... Je ne veux pas
respondre à tant de médisance, ou plustost
inepties, qu'on dit de cest Institut.⁶³

Cardinal de Joyeuse established houses in Pontoise (1611) and then
in Rouen (1615), providing them with both property and money.⁶⁴
Other bishops were equally anxious to secure establishments. Mère
de Pommereu tells us that an Ursuline foundress, passing through
Poitiers, was detained there by the Bishop until she promised that
he, too, would have a house.⁶⁵

Among the regulars, it was the new congregations that proved
most supportive to the Ursulines.⁶⁶ Although their original
support had come from the Fathers of Christian Doctrine, it was
now the Oratorians and, even more, the Jesuits, with their
considerable influence both at court and throughout the country,

⁶³ Cardinal de Sourdis, Lettre pastorale (1609). This entire
document is printed in M.-C. Gueudré op.cit. vol. I, Appendix 2,
pp. 330-342.

⁶⁴ M.-C. Gueudré, op.cit. vol. I, p. 84; C. de Beaurepaire,
op.cit. vol. II, p. 204.

⁶⁵ M.P.D.U., part I, p. 153.

⁶⁶ The Mendicants, on the other hand, frequently opposed the
Ursulines. Concerning the foundation in Tulle, an Ursuline
wrote: "Le diable se servit de certains religieux de la ville
qui, tout ouvertement, sans aucun sujet, se déclarèrent ennemis
dudit monastère, dissuadant les filles d'y entrer." Lecler,
Chroniques ecclésiastiques du Limousin II, p. 320. Quoted in
M.-C. Gueudré, vol. I, p. 42.

who did most to advertise their existence and secure new foundations.⁶⁷ The Jesuits now perceived the Ursulines as a complement to themselves in the education of children. Thus Père Marin could argue to Mme de Sainte-Beuve:

Notre père, le bienheureux Ignace, a visé à ce but, destinant notre Compagnie à la bonne éducation des petits garçons. Ce serait chose très louable et très utile, d'établir une congrégation où l'on transplantât les petites filles comme en un terroir fertile, afin qu'ayant reçu là de bonnes instructions, elles en sortissent pour porter la vertu dans les familles.⁶⁸

The Jesuits were prepared to act as animators wherever they saw a possibility. New communities often appeared in the wake of their travels.⁶⁹

Just as a new establishment needed the consent of the bishop, it also required the sanction of King and parlement. Royal approval was not difficult to obtain. In 1611 Louis XIII, "par l'avis de la Reine régente, notre très honorée Dame et Mère", authorized the foundation of the "Congrégations de filles et

⁶⁷ The Jesuits' reconsideration of their original position was not long in coming. Père Majorius, who had opposed Françoise de Bermond's vocation, was transferred to a house in the diocese of Milan, where he had the opportunity of seeing the Ursulines at work. "... il en écrivit à Mlle Françoise de Bermond et la conjura d'entreprendre ce qu'il lui avait si souvent défendu." Bourignon, La Vie du Père Romillon, quoted in H. Brémond, op.cit., vol. II, p.30.

⁶⁸ M.D.P.U. Part I, p.105.

⁶⁹ E.g. Rennes, St-Malo, and Lyon. (M.-C. Gueudré op.cit. vol.I, pp.48-51). Eu.(C. Robillard de Beaurepaire, op.cit., pp. 202-03).

femmes veuves sous le nom de la bienheureuse Sainte-Ursule, pourvaquer à l'instruction."⁷⁰ In the following year, letters-patent were issued to the communities of Paris, Lyon, Orléans, Troyes, Pontoise and Compiègne.⁷¹ It is not difficult to see the hand of the regent in the favourable treatment which the Ursulines received. Her relations with the Parisian convent were close and cordial.⁷² Louis himself, as dauphin, had been a visitor to the convent and an acquaintance of Françoise de Bermond.⁷³ This royal favour was sometimes invoked to overcome local opposition to foundations.

The parlements, though less enthusiastic, were still prepared to accept the Ursulines' existence. They anticipated the later, more reserved approach of Louis XIV, in valuing the Institute mainly as a means of suppressing co-education. "Cette religion ... est nécessaire à cause de l'instruction gratuite des enfants de leur sexe, qui ne peut se commettre aux hommes sans péril."⁷⁴ The position of the parlements is interesting, in view of the fact that it was from their milieu -- the officer class and the noblesse de la robe -- that the Ursulines, along with the other new

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.131.

⁷¹ Ibid., p.168.

⁷² "Elle y revint souvent, et y envoya fréquemment les princesses ses filles." Ursuline chronicle, quoted without identification by H. Leymont, op.cit., p. 246.

⁷³ Ibid., pp.173-74.

⁷⁴ P. Le Merre, Recueil des actes, titres, et memoires concernant les affaires du Clergé de France (Paris, 1716-50) IV, col. 1040. Quoted in ibid., p.168.

feminine congregations, would come to draw much of their support and their personnel.

To start with, however, the Ursulines moved mainly in less exalted circles. "Cette compagnie de Sainte-Ursule n'est que pour des Servantes" ⁷⁵; while this was far from the truth, since from the start a number of women "of quality" entered the congregation, the fact was that school-teaching was still considered servile.⁷⁶ The first Ursulines were the daughters of bourgeois and artisans. Though few of them were as poor as the three young girls of Clermont, who after hearing a Lenten sermon, decided to establish a community, "bien qu'elles y eussent apparemment si peu de disposition, qu'elles ne sçavoient pas seulement ny lire, ny écrire"⁷⁷, it is in fact estimated that almost half of the first French foundations were the work of very ordinary people.⁷⁸ In many cases, as in Saint-Bonnet-le-Château,⁷⁹ and in St.-Marcellin,⁸⁰ local women gathered together to start their own little communities, and only later became absorbed into the Ursuline discipline.

⁷⁵ Memoirs of Mgr Bertheaud, vicar general of Cardinal de Sourdis, quoted in M.-C. Gueudré, op.cit., p.180.

⁷⁶ When one young woman of quality entered the Ursuline convent of Paris, her grandfather-guardian protested that he considered it "à déshonneur qu'elle soit en société avec des maîtresses d'école." (Ibid., p.176).

⁷⁷ M.D.P.U. Part I, p.182.

⁷⁸ M.-C. Gueudré, op.cit., p.50.

⁷⁹ Gaussin and Vallet, op. cit., p.460.

⁸⁰ M.D.P.U., Part I, pp.278-79.

What was imperative was that these little communities should very quickly find themselves patrons, local people of substance, whose donations or legacies could provide them with a house and some income. Since the Ursulines were not allowed to beg, and since they were bound not to accept money for their teaching of externes, the support of these patrons was a sine qua non for foundation. While some houses enjoyed generous funding from the Court, the nobility ⁸¹ and the upper clergy, many others depended on smaller donors: prominent merchants, or curés, or wealthy ladies.⁸² These local donors did not necessarily reflect a general mood of benevolence in their towns; in fact they were sometimes in a small minority.⁸³ However, their support was frequently all that kept the new communities from poverty.⁸⁴

⁸¹ E.g., the Countess of Eu, who provided the Ursulines of that city with 800 livres in rentes and a chapel. The Duke of Guise gave them the right to take 5,000 firelogs a year from his forest (C. Robillard de Beaurepaire, op.cit., pp.203-204).

⁸² E.g. Mlle Chastellier de la Thébaudais, who left her house together with its furnishings, as well as jewels and silver, to the petites Ursulines of Rennes. B. Pocquet du Haut-Jussé, La vie temporelle des communautés à Rennes au XVII^e et au XVIII^e siècles (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1916), p.25. For a fuller treatment of the question of foundations, see chap. VII.

⁸³ M-T. Notter has pointed out that, in Blois, each of the four convents had its own network of supporting families. Between the different houses there could be considerable ill will. See her thesis, "Les ordres religieux féminins blésois", (op.cit.) pp. 279, 124.

⁸⁴ Instances of severe poverty were recorded in the chronicles of Mère de Pommereu: cases where the nuns survived only with the aid of small donations and, occasionally, miracles. See M.-C. Gueudré op.cit., vol. I, pp. 63-65.

Support grew more general as the Ursulines began to turn out their students. For a society unaccustomed to girls' schools, the Ursulines' teaching was an enormous advance; the opinion of society as a whole was that it should not be concentrated on the poor. As a consequence of their success, the character of the Ursulines' occupation began to change. More and more houses were persuaded to accept pensionnaires, children of the wealthier classes who were lodged within the convents and instructed separately from the externes. Although their numbers were always small compared to those of the externes,⁸⁵ these pensionnaires occupied an inordinate amount of the nuns' energy,⁸⁶ and the expectations of their parents came to dominate the communities' policies.⁸⁷

This close dependence on their social environment was a source of weakness to the Ursulines, insofar as it put their original charitable and catechetical vocation at risk. And if the wealthier classes were prepared to change the character of the institute on behalf of their schoolgirl daughters, they were

⁸⁵ While Ursuline houses differed in size and wealth and therefore in the number of externes that they taught, the average number seems to have been around 200. It is significant that this number, reached in the early days, might be maintained without increase even when the community had grown to forty or fifty nuns.

⁸⁶ At least, this is the implication of the earliest school rules, which devote most of their attention to the pensionnaires.

⁸⁷ Madame de Maintenon was to remember with some bitterness the preference which her Ursuline teachers had shown to their richer students, and she forbade such partiality at Saint-Cyr. However, it was easy to do this in a situation where the house's revenues were secure.

prepared to interfere even more when those daughters began to seek entry into the same institute as postulants.⁸⁸ The old question of the suitability of the Ursulines' type of life now became more pressing.

The absence of any formal vows left the legal state of the congrégées open to question. Without the guarantee secured by a solemn profession, there was no solid assurance that the individual might not return to the world at a later date, to the jeopardy of the family inheritance.⁸⁹ Furthermore, the precarious condition of many of the new houses put their inmates at risk. More than once, nuns and even pensionnaires were found to be living close to destitution.⁹⁰ The prospect of seeing their daughters thus reduced led many of the better-off families to look for a more solid establishment.

Finally, in the eyes of many families the uncloistered religious life style lacked propriety and dignity. The seventeenth-century biography of the Ursuline, Catherine de Veteris of Aix, tells of her meeting with her father as she walked

⁸⁸ The Ursulines, like other teaching orders, recruited a large part of their personnel from their ex-pensionnaires. In one striking case, in Clermont, twelve out of eighteen pensionnaires entered the convent at the same time. M.-C. Gueudré op.cit., vol. I, p. 154.

⁸⁹ This was a problem, not only for nuns, but for all the new congregations of simple vows. Thus in a case concerning the Fathers of Christian Doctrine Parliament pronounced in favour of solemn vows "pour le repos de familles." See de Viguerie, Une Oeuvre d'éducation sous l'Ancien Régime. (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1978) pp. 149-51.

⁹⁰ As in the case of Rennes, in October 1628. See M.-C. Gueudré, vol. I, pp. 90-91.

with her students to church, "son crêpe abattu, ses mains dans les manches, les yeux baissés en terre avec une démarche très humble". Her father, furious and embarrassed, turned away; but she was followed mockingly through the streets by the young gallants of the town. "Mademoiselle de Veteris est devenue folle!"⁹¹ Respectable society was not yet ready for these uncloistered nuns; their appearance on the streets gave rise to much scandal and derision. "Autant de fois qu'elles passoient par les rues, on les regardoient avec mepris; Les petits Enfants crioient après elles et leur jettoient de la boue."⁹²

Social and economic pressures, therefore, were instrumental in the evolution of the Ursulines from simple congrégées to cloistered nuns. The institute was embraced by respectable society, then redesigned according to its mores. This example may have been before the eyes of Vincent de Paul when, some forty years later, he warned his filles: "là où se doit observer une véritable pauvreté, les gens de condition y sont très dangereux, parce qu'elle est contraire à leur naissance." ⁹³

A more direct challenge to the new institute came from the Church itself. Much as the hierarchy valued the Ursulines, the

⁹¹ G. Augeri, Vie de Catherine de Veteris du Revest (Aix, 1672), quoted in ibid. I, p.177. Also see M.D.P.U. Part III, p.416.

⁹² M.D.P.U., part III, p.5.

⁹³ Vincent de Paul, Correspondance (op.cit.), vol. X, p. 103.

fact remained that their community life with simple vows contravened Circa pastoralis.⁹⁴ The attitude of the bishops was beginning to harden, especially as the French jurists began to come to grips with the legislation of Trent. The Jesuits took up the argument for clausura and solemn vows, asserting that it was the only way to ensure ~~the~~ permanence of the Institute.⁹⁵

The direction taken by the new Ursuline house of Faubourg Saint-Jacques, the grand Couvent, as it came to be known, was decisive. From 1607, the date of its establishment, to 1610, it had developed along the lines of a community of simple vows, under the guidance of Françoise de Bermond, who had been brought north for the purpose. But the lay foundress, Madame de Sainte-Beuve, was personally convinced by her confessor, the Jesuit Père Gontery, that the new house, to be effective, must become a monastery. After long debate, in which two other distinguished founding members, Michel de Marillac and Madame Acarie, took the opposite view, her will prevailed. In 1610 Mère de Bermond left,⁹⁶ followed by several of the Parisian congrégées, and in

⁹⁴ The Constitution of 1566, by which female religious were ordered to take solemn vows and submit to enclosure, or disperse. See chap. I, fn.5.

⁹⁵ It is significant that the Jesuits themselves were now feeling some insecurity, as French jurists discussed the validity of their simple vows. On December 19, 1611, a tract appeared which was entitled "Plaidoyé de Pierre de la Martelière, avocat en la cour, contre les Jésuites." This questioned their right to have a legal identity while not bound by solemn vows (François de Sales, op.cit., vol. XXV, p.323, fn 2).

⁹⁶ According to M.-A. Jégou, she left in order to avoid taking solemn vows and submitting to cloister. op.cit., pp.27-29.

1612 the house was erected by papal bull into a monastery. In a brilliant ceremony attended by princesses, duchesses and ladies of quality, the first twelve novices received the habit. At the end of the celebration all visitors left, and the doors were closed with a double lock and key. Then, and only then, was the community allowed to reserve the Blessed Sacrament in its chapel.⁹⁷

The enormous prestige of the Paris house and its close ties to the court made it, in a short time, the model for the other houses of France. In 1616 the Toulouse house was erected into a monastery. In 1618 Bordeaux followed suit; and in 1619 and 1620 Dijon and Lyon took the same step. Other Ursuline communities were urged to follow the Paris example. This they did in increasing numbers, through the 1620s and 1630s. The decision was sometimes made with great reluctance. The objections which many Ursulines made to monastic transformation were summarized in a petition drawn up by the community of Narbonne in about 1650. In their opinion, the particular calling of the Ursuline was to give witness to the world, to teach the children of the lower classes,

⁹⁷ H. de Leymont, op.cit., pp.206-08. This ruling by the Archbishop of Paris is indicative of his attitude towards communities with simple vows. Clearly he was not prepared to allow them any of the privileges of "religion".

and to reach out to families, as well as to train their pensionnaires to a more profound Christian life.⁹⁸ Their outside work would, they felt, be seriously curtailed by clausura Their community was transformed anyway, in 1658 -- the last of the maisons congrégées of France.⁹⁹

At the same time there was a considerable movement towards affiliation with Paris. But this was frustrated by the actual process of transformation. Each primitive group¹⁰⁰ received its own papal Bull, in which the houses, and the drawing up of their statutes, were specifically subjected to the Ordinary.¹⁰¹ As a result, the current of uniformity which was flowing out of Paris was counteracted by a host of particularities imposed by local bishops.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ The same objection was voiced by the superior of the community of Pertuis: "Il faut dire quela Mère du Revest n'y avoit pas d'inclination, et même elle s'opposa un temps, craignant que les regles religieuses ne la detournassent de ses oeuvres ordinaires de charité." (M.D.P.U., Part III, p.417. But the chronicle goes on to say that "Dieu luy fait connoistre que c'étoit son volonté qu'elle fust religieuse, et que son état en seroit, non pas changé, mais relevé et perfectionné." Mère de Pommereu, as a cloistered nun, was naturally biased towards her own state).

⁹⁹ M.-C. Gueudré, op.cit. vol.I, p.318. It should be recalled that the Ursulines of Dôle, under Anne de Xainctonge, continued to resist transformation. They remained an uncloistered community.

¹⁰⁰ In other words, each group, or congregation, of monasteries collected around its founding monastery.

¹⁰¹ R. Lemoine, op.cit., (1976), p.296.

¹⁰² Different bishops reacted differently. Some left the work of drawing up the constitutions to the communities themselves, with greater or less guidance from outside. Others called in experts, often Jesuits who knew the Ursulines; others redesigned the constitutions without reference to previous customs. M.-C. Gueudré, op.cit., vol.I, pp.299-306.

Ce qui est fâcheux [wrote Mère Marie de l'Incarnation from Québec], comme il leur est libre de faire des constitutions et des coutumiers, ils le font de telle sorte que même dans une seule Congrégation plusieurs différent en coutumes. Ajoutez à cela que chaque Congrégation a ses constitutions premières et fondamentales, et par tous les changements que font les évêques, tout cela s'altère et se bouleverse.¹⁰³

There was considerable talk of union, but this would now have depended on a decision by the Assembly of the Clergy, and this did not materialize.¹⁰⁴

The original Compagnie de Sainte Ursule was profoundly altered. Its members had moved away from their apostolate in the world. They had submitted to a system which precluded any sort of administrative unity between houses, or interchange of members.¹⁰⁵ Their collective spirituality, reinforced by their removal from the world and their intensified prayer life, drew them towards the state where they became religious first, schoolteachers second. There remained the possibility that they might also lose that right to teach publicly which Françoise de Bermond had won in 1594. The papal bulls by which they were transformed stated that

¹⁰³ Letter of 3/x/1645. Richardeau, Lettres de la Révérende Mère Marie de l'Incarnation (Paris, 1876) vol.I, p.267.

¹⁰⁴ M.-A.Jégou, op.cit., p.66.

¹⁰⁵ The monasteries themselves resisted efforts by the bishops to unite them to other houses in the same diocese. In the case of Dijon, their battle with Bishop Zamet over his project of union, was so fierce that they were threatened with excommunication. They took their case to Rome, and won. By the authority of the papal bull by which they had been transformed, each monastery was declared to be autonomous. (M.-C.Gueudré op.cit. vol.I, pp.243-45).

the permission to teach externes "... ne durera qu'autant qu'il nous plaira et au Saint-Siège apostolique."¹⁰⁶

This placed them in a dilemma. The teaching of children was their raison d'être, the function that distinguished them from other orders of nuns. But they were now religious, bound by solemn vows. "Nous sommes filles d'obéissance," wrote Marie de l'Incarnation, "et il la faut préférer à tout."¹⁰⁷ In the event that they were ordered to give up their free classrooms, the only argument they could make would be an appeal to a higher obedience. It was with this in mind that the Ursulines of Paris petitioned the Pope for permission to take a fourth vow: that of the free instruction of "petites filles séculières."¹⁰⁸ This vow, which other religious congregations were to imitate, was their means of resisting interference from outside in the important matter of their teaching vocation.

By the 1630s the Ursulines of France had for the most part accepted the role which their society pressed upon them. Their reward was immediate: a rapid expansion in the number of monasteries founded, a rapid growth in the number of religious, and an increase in the favours of court and nobility.¹⁰⁹ The

¹⁰⁶ Papal bull to the Bordeaux house, 1610. See ibid. vol.I, p.104.

¹⁰⁷ Letter of 9/viii/1659. Richardeau, op.cit. vol. II, p.141.

¹⁰⁸ M.-C.Gueudré, op.cit. vol.I, p.105; H. Leymont, op.cit., p.368.

¹⁰⁹ The experience of the monastery of Dijon was typical: "La Congrégation estant ainsi saintement établie en estat Religieux, où il y avoit plus de fermeté, plusieurs filles de qualité se presenterent pour estre receües au monastère." (M.D.P.U. part I, p.166).

majority of the approximately three hundred and twenty houses founded in France during the seventeenth century¹¹⁰ were monasteries from the start, established in the years 1629-1640.¹¹¹ The houses filled up almost as soon as they were established. Communities of seventy or eighty religious were not unknown; forty and fifty were commonplace. In some cases a second monastery had to be established in the same town to accommodate all the aspirants.¹¹² By the end of the seventeenth century, it is estimated, there were between 10,000 and 12,000 Ursulines in France.¹¹³

In return, the Ursulines accepted aristocratization. The evolution was natural. An enclosed monastery was expensive to build, since it had to be sufficient to all the needs of its perpetual inmates. The papal bull of the Bordeaux monastery listed the physical requirements:

... église ou chapelle, cloîtres, dortoirs,
réfectoires, cimetière, chœur, jardins et

110

This is the number given by Hélène de Leymont (op.cit., p 234). The estimate of the number of Ursuline houses varies from one historian to the next; an indication of how totally dispersed the houses were. Some communities failed within a few years of foundation; others were destroyed by war or bankrupted by royal taxation.

111 See Appendix B, Graph I.

112 E.g. Montbrison, in 1648.

113 M.-C.Gueudre, op. cit., vol. II, p.187. Compare this with the figures which Jean de Viguerie gives for the major male congregations. In 1749 there were 3350 Jesuits; in 1720, 656 Oratorians; in 1725, 362 Fathers of Christian Doctrine; in 1700, 200 Sulpicians. See J. de Viguerie, Une Oeuvre d'éducation, p.179.

cellules et autres appartements, bâtiments
bien clos à l'entour et complètement garnis
de meubles sacrés et profanes, et de tout ce
qui est requis et nécessaire au service divin
et à l'usage des malades qui y seront
introduits ... 114

The cost of these buildings, and all the continuing expenses
of the monastery, had to be financed by revenue which came largely
from donations and from the dowries and pensions of the nuns.¹¹⁵
The wealth of their families, therefore, became a determining
factor in the admission of aspirants.¹¹⁶ The required dowry for a
choir nun was dictated by the status of the monastery that she
desired to enter. The fees charged to pensionnaires, an important
source of income, also reflected the "quality" of the house.¹¹⁷
Since monasteries recruited their personnel so heavily from among
these pensionnaires, their social standing tended with the passage
of time to become fixed.
Overwhelmingly, and in spite of regional variations, they became
identified with the gens de bien, and in this capacity their
members were protected from the hazards of poverty and of social
derogation.

114 M.-C. Gueudré, op.cit., vol.I, p.106.

115 By a royal declaration of 1693, these were regulated: 2000
livres in the major cities and 1,200 elsewhere for dowries;
500 and 350 livres respectively for pensions. Ibid, vol. II,
p.139.

116 See below, chap. VIII, "Recruitment".

117 These fees tended to be lower than those of the Visitation, but
higher than those of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame. See
J.Perrel, "Les filles à l'école avant la Révolution" Revue
d'Auvergne 94 (1980): p.301.

Thus the original élan of the Ursulines was contained and reduced. Undoubtedly, by the sheer weight of their numbers, they did more than anybody else to introduce seventeenth-century Frenchmen to the concept of feminine schooling. In obedience to their original purpose, they maintained their externe schools, and a considerable number of girls of the popular classes received their instruction. They also formed societies of laywomen, whom they organized and instructed. But much of their energy was now confined within their monastery walls, in the care of their pensionnaires and in community duties.¹¹⁸

A contemporary observer summed up the process:

Les parents par une maxime de politique intéressée, appréhendant quelques petits désordres que pourraient arriver dans les familles, lorsque (les Ursulines) qui sortiraient, réclameraient ce qui leur pourrait être légitimement dû aux biens de l'hoirie, résolurent de demander qu'elles fussent enfermées. Par ce moyen toutes les congrégations de France furent faites insensiblement des maisons dans lesquelles, outre la clôture, les filles qui y sont enfermées, font, après l'an de probation, les trois vœux solennels sous la règle de Saint Augustin. Si c'est avantageux pour les particuliers qui y ont des filles, je crois que c'est préjudiciable à toutes les villes, qui se trouvent par ce moyen si privées de doctrines et autres exercices très utiles pour le bien public.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Thus in Dieppe at the end of the century, out of a community of fifty-five, fifteen were designated to teach the 400-500 externes. In Rouen at about the same time, out of seventy-five religious, forty taught the 400 externes. See C. Robillard de Beaurepaire, op.cit., p.224.

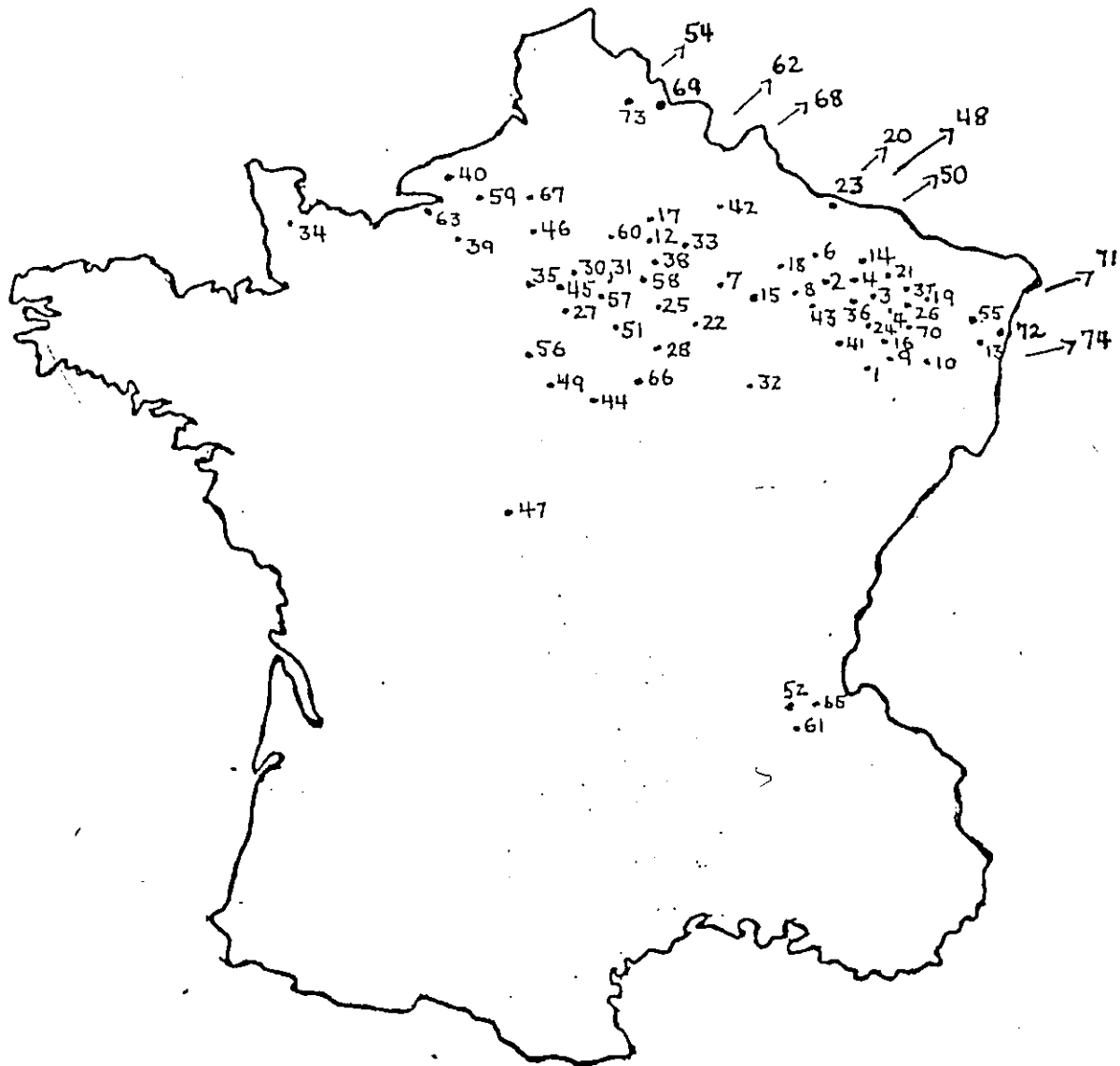
¹¹⁹ J.Pitton, Annales de l'église d'Aix (Lyon, 1668) p.261. Quoted in M.-C. Gueudré op.cit., vol. I, p.83.

Map II:

The Congrégation de Notre-Dame:

Foundations in Lorraine, France

and Northern Europe (1599-1700).



(Information taken from L. Pingaud, Saint Pierre Fourier.)

NAMES AND DATES OF FOUNDATIONS

1) Mattaincourt	1598	38) Château-Thierry	1638
2) Saint-Mihiel	1602	39) Bernay	1638
3) Nancy	1603	40) Caudebec	1639
4) Pont-à-Mousson	1604	41) Neufchâteau	1639
5) St-Nicolas-du-Port	1605	42) Rethel	1639
6) Verdun	1608	43) Ligny-en-Barrois	1639
7) Châlons-sur-Marne	1613	44) Saint-Amand	1639
8) Bar-le-Duc	1618	45) Montfort-l'Amaury	1639
9) Mirecourt	1620	46) Vernon	1639
10) Epinal	1620	47) Châtellerauld	1640
11) La Mothe	1621	48) Munster	1640
12) Soissons	1621	49) Châteauroux	1640
13) Dieuze	1621	50) Trèves	1640
14) Metz	1623	51) Nemours	1641
15) Vitry-le-François	1623	52) Aoste	1641
16) Châtel-sur-Moselle	1625	53) Marsal	1642
17) Laon	1626	54) Bruxelles	1643
18) Sainte-Menehould	1627	55) Saverne	1643
19) Blamont	1627	56) Châteaudun	1643
20) Luxembourg	1627	57) Corbeil	1643
21) Nomeny	1628	58) Coulommiers	1644
22) Troyes	1628	59) Rouen	1645
23) Longwy	1628	60) Compiègne	1645
24) Vézelize	1629	61) Pont-de-Beauvoisin	1648
25) Provins	1629	62) Essen	1650
26) Lunéville	1629	63) Honfleur	1651
27) Etampes	1630	64) Paderborn	1652
28) Joigny	1630	65) Nantua	1654
29) Bouquenom	1631	66) Donzy	1655
30) Paris-Montmartre	1634	67) Gournay	1655
31) Paris-Charonne	1634	68) Bonn	1664
32) Vic	1634	69) Valenciennes	1670
33) Reims	1634	70) Gerbeviller	1672
34) Carentan	1635	71) Mayence	1679
35) Houdan	1636	72) Strasbourg	1679
36) Toul	1638	73) Douai	1699
37) Marsal	1638	74) Heidelberg	1700

3) The Congrégation de Notre-Dame.

In 1597, virtually at the same time that the Ursuline congrégées of Avignon were establishing their first community in l'Isle-sur-Sorgues, another teaching congregation was being created in Lorraine. Five young women in the parish of Mattaincourt appeared publicly at the Christmas midnight mass in veils and black dresses, thus announcing to their neighbours that they intended to live as religious, in community. This community was to develop in time into the Congrégation de Notre-Dame, a teaching institute similar in many respects to the Compagnie de Sainte-Ursule, though much smaller.¹²⁰ Like the Ursulines, they started out with two simple objectives: to perform the corporal and spiritual acts of mercy, with particular attention to the instruction of girls, and to live a common religious life.³ Also like the Ursulines, they ended up as cloistered religious (Canonesses of Saint Augustine), distinguished from the older religious orders only by the obligations and dispensations which their fourth vow, obliging them to teach without salary, laid upon them.

Unlike the Ursulines, whose approbation by the Church came with reasonable dispatch and decorum, the Congrégation searched for legitimacy for thirty years, and was subjected to squabbling

¹²⁰ Seventy-four houses in 1700, in Lorraine, France, and northern Europe (see Map II). This congregation must not be confused with the Congrégation de Notre-Dame of Montreal. However, there was a connection. Marguerite Bourgeoys, the foundress of the Canadian community, worked as a secular schoolmistress for the convent of the Congrégation in Troyes. See below, chap. V, fn. 43-45.

and political infighting, both in Lorraine and in Rome. Before the final Bull approving the congregation was promulgated in 1628, the arguments regarding the propriety of allowing female religious to teach had all been vented in the roundest terms. So little did the women and their work seem to rate that until the very last minute, there remained a strong possibility that all the communities might be disbanded and their members sent back to their families.

Why did the Congrégation receive such rough treatment?

First, because their patrons lacked the political strength that the Ursulines' patrons enjoyed. Although the court of Lorraine favoured the new work, both it and the four bishops involved¹²¹ worked at cross-purposes to each other. In any case, in terms of influence they all paled in comparison with the court of France, which so heartily sponsored the Ursulines, not to mention the Pope himself, Urban VIII, whose personal friendship with Madame de Sainte-Beuve dated back to his days as papal nuncio in Paris. Urban was to prove as indifferent to the Congrégation as he had been favourable to the Ursulines.

¹²¹ I.e., the "three bishops" of Toul, Verdun and Metz, as well as the Primate of Lorraine whose seat was in Nancy. Later, as new houses were founded, other bishops became involved. "Plus de maisons nous aurons," wrote Fourier, "et en plus d'évêchés, plus nous aurons de difficulté à établir une forme assurée de gouvernement et de parfait union de toutes vos maisons." Quoted in L. Carrez, Histoire du premier monastère de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame en France, établi à Châlons-sur-Marne. (Châlons, 1906), p.255.

Equally important was the question of timing. The Congrégation took its case to Rome for the final time during the 1620s, just when the Holy See was becoming increasingly alarmed over the growing number of "Jesuitesses" who were making their appearance in the Church. Mary Ward and her English Ladies would finally be condemned in 1629-31,¹²² and a number of other small teaching communities ordered suppressed. There can be no doubt that the Congrégation was caught in the strong wave of disapproval of all things feminine and innovative that gripped the Holy See. On the other hand the Ursulines, like the Filles de Notre-Dame of Jeanne de Lestonnac in Bordeaux, were already safe in the shelter of their papal bulls, and were not threatened.

But perhaps the principal reason why the nuns of the Congrégation caused such offence to Rome was that they were asking for more. Their hope was that their houses be joined together under a single Mère Intendante,¹²³ with a general chapter and a Visitor. They asked, furthermore, that in view of the fact that their central vocation was the teaching of children, their obligation to clausura and to the other monastic observances should be moderated so as not to interfere with their work.

¹²² See chap. I, "The English Ladies".

¹²³ It should be recalled that Jeanne de Lestonnac had asked for a similar arrangement, but that her request had been struck out by Cardinal de Sourdis before the petition was forwarded to Rome. See above, n.24.

"L'intention première et principale était d'instruire la jeunesse, et vivre au reste le plus saintement qu'elles pourront."¹²⁴

They wished to have the maximum freedom, compatible with their state, to work with externes.¹²⁵

Unlike the Compagnie de Sainte Ursule, the Congrégation was guided by a single mind: that of Pierre Fourier, curé of Mattaincourt, a graduate of the Jesuit college of Pont-à-Mousson, a theologian and a canonist of considerable ability. He was able to give theological foundation to an organization of women, who, though extremely able and dedicated, could never have understood the niceties of Church law nor the nuances of Church politics, and could never have defended themselves against the censure of the experts. Fourier was dedicated to the proposition that religious women could work actively in the Church while still observing a modified clausura. "La clôture ne consiste pas en une forme immuable et indivisible ... elle est susceptible de plus ou du moins."¹²⁶ He also insisted that the congregation should remain

¹²⁴ p. Fourier, Lettres III, p.191-92, quoted in H. Derréal, op.cit., p.343.—

¹²⁵ The contemporary standard of clausura was so strict that even the admission of externes was considered a threat to the purity of the nuns. Pensionnaires were permitted to enter the monastery precincts, but only on condition that they stay inside, more or less permanently, until their final departure. In the case of the Congrégation, the Holy See began by drawing the line at externes, whose daily arrival and departure would present a constant contact with the outside world. This insistence is puzzling, since the Ursulines and the filles de Notre-Dame were already authorized to teach externes.

¹²⁶ Fourier, Lettres III, p. 192. Quoted in Hélène Derréal, op.cit., p.342.

united, with a single government and a single "visitor", and with the interchange of personnel, funds and ideas between houses. This concept was of itself bound to arouse the suspicion of the bishops, as he well knew,¹²⁷ since the internal strength that it envisaged was designed specifically to resist outside pressures -- theirs.

The new congregation, as Fourier proposed it, was therefore a threat to the status quo in a way that the Ursulines were not, and this, as well as his adroit persistence in promoting its cause, must go far to explain the anger that it aroused. Here were all the demands that the Papacy, the episcopate and high society as a whole found most unsettling, set out and supported by a man who was known not only as a theologian but -- embarrassingly -- as a saint.¹²⁸ If in the end he did not get the congregation he desired, it was because the difficulties were too many and too

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.186.

¹²⁸ Fourier was considered a saint even in his lifetime. Bérulle, who had met him, is recorded as saying: "si l'on voulait d'un coup d'oeil contempler toutes les vertus réunies, il fallait aller en Lorraine et regarder le Père de Mattaincourt." J. Bedel, La vie du Très R.P. Fourier, dit vulgairement le Père de Mattaincourt, réformateur et général des chanoines réguliers de la Congrégation de Nostre-Sauveur et instituteur des religieuses de la Congrégation de Nostre Dame (Paris, 1645), quoted in E. de Bazelaire, Le Bienheureux Pierre Fourier (Clermont-Ferrand, 1853), p.147. This reputation was known even to Urban VIII. "Il se félicitait vivement ... que, par la grace de Dieu, un tel homme eût été donné à l'Eglise sous son pontificat." (evidence from the procès canonique, instruit à Toul, en 1682, p.285, quoted in H. Deréal, op.cit., p.378; n.113). The deference towards holy men in the seventeenth century was not absolute; wealth, family, and so on were always considerations as well. But there can be no doubt that sanctity had its influence.

massive, and because his ideas ran ahead even of the women whose work he was promoting.

In June 1597, Fourier, a young canon regular of the abbey of Chamousey, became curé of Mattaincourt, a totally derelict parish known, because of the drain of its members towards the reformed religion, as "la petite Genève". He immediately set about the work of "rechristianizing" his parish. In the best tradition of a counter-reformation curé, he soon identified the pressing need for education of the young. "Il conclut qu'il n'y a pas d'expédient meilleur que de prendre la jeunesse dès la sortie du berceau... et qu'il n'y aurait pas de moyen plus avantageux que d'établir en l'Eglise une Religion qui aurait charge expresse de rompre le pain de vie à ces petits."¹²⁹ He collected a group of young men in his rectory, with the object of training them to be schoolmasters.

Mais la saison n'est pas encore venue. Tantôt un s'échappe, l'autre demande son congé, celui-ci se dégoûte tellement que dans trois mois tout s'évanouit ..."¹³⁰

His first attempt to create Christian schools was a failure.

It was at about this time that Alix Le Clerc approached him.

J'avais vingt ans [she wrote later] quand je pris la vocation religieuse
...Il me tombait en l'esprit qu'il faudrait créer une nouvelle maison de filles pour y faire tout le bien que l'on pourrait, et ceci me pressait avec tant de véhémence que j'allai incontinent le proposer à notre bon Père, le priant de me laisser déterminer tout cela; mais il ne le voulut pas, me montrant la difficulté qu'il y aurait à trouver des filles

¹²⁹ Bedel, quoted in Bazelaire, op.cit., p.31.

¹³⁰ Bedel, quoted in ibid., p.32.

qui eussent ce qu'il faudrait pour prendre cette nouvelle vocation ... En moins de six semaines ou deux mois, trois vinrent me trouver l'une après l'autre: Gaute André, Claude Chauvenel et Jeanne de Louvoir. Dès lors nous voulions vivre ensemble et nous mettre en commun.¹³¹

The early days of the community were uncertain. The young women were content simply to start their work. But Fourier knew that, to have legitimacy, they must receive approval from the Church. To this end he took their case to a council especially convened by the Primate of Lorraine, Mgr. de la Vallée.

The petition with which Fourier introduced the new community is revealing in its caution: no mention was made of the word "teaching". He simply affirmed their intention to accept clausura, while working for the glory of God, their own perfection, and "le soulagement tant corporel que spirituel du prochain".¹³² There was, however a provisional rule already in existence, which he had prepared for the women, devoted entirely to l'importance, profit et nécessité de leurs écoles¹³³, and the council knew of it. It was over this document that the argument raged, and Fourier had for the first time to defend the feminine teaching vocation. Against the claim that the community represented an innovation in the Church, Fourier maintained rather

¹³¹ Alix Le Clerc, Relation à la gloire de Dieu et de sa sainte Mère, et au salut de mon âme... printed in Nancy, 1666. Quoted in Besancenet, Le bienheureux Pierre Fourier (Paris, 1864), pp.44-45.

¹³² The account of this council is taken from H. Derréal, op. cit., pp.149-153.

¹³³ For the text of this document, ibid., Appendix, pp.401-403.

that they sought to "remettre au jour" the practices of the primitive Church. Quoting from Saint Paul and from the Fathers, especially from Saint John Chrysostom, he claimed for women the historic right to a share in the apostolic work, including the teaching of the faith "sinon en chaire, ès eglises", at least "en des lieux particuliers".¹³⁴

The congregation won only a conditional verbal approval from the Archbishop. It was enough for the present. A de facto community came into being. The women taught school, first in Poussay, then back in Mattaincourt, in lodgings found for them by a wealthy patroness.¹³⁵ They also set up an infirmary and a soup kitchen and went out, after school hours, to visit the sick. The initial reaction of the town was reserve, even derision;¹³⁶ this gave way to acceptance. New houses were established: in 1602 in Verdun and Saint-Mihiel; in 1603 in Nancy, in 1604 in Pont-à-Mousson, in 1605 in Saint-Nicolas du Port. Paradoxically, as with the Ursulines, their schools, though treated with suspicion in theory, enjoyed instant success in practice. Students appeared in such great numbers "que pour y

¹³⁴ Ibid., p.150.

¹³⁵ Mme d'Aspremont. It should be noted that the bulk of financial support for the Congrégation came from wealthy women.

¹³⁶ "Les uns disoient qu'elles devenoient folles, les autres qu'elles étoient trompées, et presque tous s'accordoient à dire qu'elles entreprennoient des choses pardessus leurs forces, et qu'à la fin on n'en verroit que de la confusion." La vie de la Vénérable Alix Le Clerc (Nancy: 1666), p.22. Public reaction in Mattaincourt was very similar to that in Aix, or in Dijon (see above).

satisfaire, elles y entroient dès les six heures du matin et n'ensortoyent qu'à onze"; they went back after lunch "et n'en sortoyent que le soir."¹³⁷ There was also no shortage of aspirants, including young women of quality. In fact the Congrégation, especially its house at Nancy where Alix Leclerc was superior, became the darling of the ducal court. In 1603, the Cardinal of Lorraine gave the congregation, which now had houses in three dioceses, a general approval. Without questioning the ultimate authority of the bishops, he accepted the principle of union between houses. It appeared that the Congrégation de Notre-Dame might indeed become a regular congregation, after the model of the Jesuits.¹³⁸ After that, there seemed to be nothing standing in their way. At the opening of classes in Saint-Nicolas in 1605, Fourier wrote:

Grand nombre de gentilshommes, plusieurs grandes Demoiselles, des premières de ce pays et des plus signalées de l'Eglise de Dieu, les princes et princesses et plusieurs autres écoutent, demandent et attendent de voir ce que vous faites et ferez en ce lieu ...

But he added: "Soyez sur vos gardes."¹³⁹

Success was a two-edged sword. In the obscure parish of Mattaincourt the sisters' life could go on without much stir, but

¹³⁷ An unnamed contemporary, quoted in E. Renard, La Mère Alix le Clerc (Paris: J.de Gigord, 1935), p.181.

¹³⁸ "Si hardi que fût le projet, une véritable congrégation régulière se réclamant du prototype juridique inauguré par la Compagnie de Jésus était en germe dans l'acte de 1603." H. Derréal, op.cit., p.186.

¹³⁹ Fourier - sisters of Saint-Nicolas, 22/viii/05. Correspondance vol. I, p.8.

their presence in the principal cities subjected them to scrutiny and criticism. Rome had just restated the prescriptions of Pius V. enforcing the strictest interpretation of clausura.¹⁴⁰ What was more, Lorraine was now feeling the full force of Catholic reform. It was difficult to impose monastic discipline on the ancient monasteries when these new uncloistered nuns were seen in the principal cities, moving around in the very shadow of the hierarchy.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, the upper-class families whose daughters were now entering the Congrégation were beginning to ask the classic questions about permanence and legality.¹⁴² It was an appropriate time for them to send a petition to the Cardinal of Lorraine against these pseudo-monasteries without vows, "d'où elles [the religious] pussent sortir avec liberté quand bon leur sembleroit."¹⁴³

Without doubt, the Congrégation required pontifical approval to establish it on a legal basis. The women needed this, to be sure that their "state" might not be suddenly stripped from them, and they reduced again to lay status.¹⁴⁴ But a series of deaths

¹⁴⁰ Decree of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, 22 January 1592.

¹⁴¹ So concerned was Fourier with these appearances that he warned the sisters of Pont-à-Mousson not to go to Mass during the week if it meant walking any distance through the streets.

¹⁴² See above, Introduction.

¹⁴³ Supplique inédite au cardinal de Lorraine. Quoted in H. Derréal, op.cit., p.62.

¹⁴⁴ Solemn vows were valid only if pronounced in a congregation "approuvée dans l'Eglise et dans l'Etat." See R. Pillorget, "Vocation religieuse et Etat en France aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles"

in 1607 -- of the bishop of Toul, the Cardinal and the Duke -- diverted the attention of Lorrainers to more pressing affairs, and the Congrégation was left for several years to conduct its schools and build its community life as best it could. In 1611, however, there was an abrupt change. The new primate of Lorraine, Antoine de Lenoncourt, offered to speak for the Congrégation in Rome. Fourier, anxious to gain pontifical approval for the work, hastened to provide him with a Sommaire du dessein des filles de la congrégation de la Bienheureuse Vierge Marie which represented a consensus of all the superiors. Now, it seemed, the Congrégation would receive its juridical existence.

However, Lenoncourt had ideas of his own. He was building a new monastery for the sisters in Nancy, which he hoped to make the showpiece and the motherhouse of the congregation. The bull that he obtained from Rome in 1615 was drawn up in total disregard of the wishes of the general chapter of the religious. Instead of representing the entire group of communities, Lenoncourt sought, and received, approbation for a single monastery in his city of Nancy, with no mention of union between houses or the teaching of externes.¹⁴⁵ Without any consultation with the religious or with Fourier, he erected this monastery under the rule of Saint Augustine. At his orders Alix le Clerc, superior of the Nancy house, was sent to the Ursuline convent of

¹⁴⁵ H. Derréal, op.cit., p.252.

Faubourg Saint-Jacques, to study their methods. Clearly Lenoncourt was considering a monastery along Ursuline lines, under obedience to the bishop, himself. Furthermore, if he had heard of the initiatives of de Sourdis and Zamet, archbishops of Bordeaux and of Langres, to unite all the female monasteries in their dioceses under their direction, the temptation to attempt the same himself must have been very strong. If he did not do it, someone else might. The foundation in 1615 of a new house in Châlons-sur-Marne, in France, meant that from now on the Gallican Church had its hands on a corner of the congregation. Experience already showed that where congregations spread across boundaries, the French superiors claimed jurisdiction over the rest. Lenoncourt decided to forestall such a move. One of his advisers was set to work to draw up constitutions to be applied to the entire congregation, under his authority.

However, this bid to set Nancy over its sister monasteries had disruptive effects. From now on, schismatic tendencies appeared in the congregation. Fourier had hoped, above all, for a "Congregation toute entiere bien unie".¹⁴⁶ The "interaid" that he had recommended was undermined by the general suspicion of the nuns that a new organization and a new motherhouse were being foisted upon the congregation without their consent. No longer were the ideas of a central direction appealing, if that direction came from Lenoncourt and the Jesuits of Nancy. But the

¹⁴⁶ P. Fourier, Les Vrayes Constitutions des religieuses de la Congregation de Nostre-Dame, (N.P., 1646), preface.

alternative, that each monastery apply for its own bull and become entirely autonomous, meant an end to the united organization which Fourier and the senior religious of the congregation had always envisaged. Independently of Lenoncourt, they decided to petition Rome for a single bull, which would legitimate all houses now in existence or still to be built -- in other words, a congregation of monasteries. If this general approval could not be had, they were prepared to put themselves "à la miséricorde de Dieu ... et demeurer sans bulle."¹⁴⁷ In 1627, the general chapter of the congregation sent their dossier to Rome, in the hands of two of Fourier's fellow canons regular, Guinet and Lemulier.

For almost thirty years, the congregation had contended with the legal and practical difficulties of teaching school to girls while living in religious community. They had functioned in favourable and unfavourable circumstances.¹⁴⁸ In the aftermath of the Cardinal's approbation in 1603 everything had seemed possible; after Lenoncourt's divisive move in 1615, everything was thrown into doubt. For a time, the question of "mitigated" cloister seemed open to discussion; gradually, this subject closed again, as religious thinkers, notably the Jesuits, came down against "innovation" and in favour of strict clausura. As the Ursuline communities of France, one by one, submitted to

¹⁴⁷ Fourier, Lettres, vol. III, p.100. quoted in H.Derréal, op.cit., p.340.

monastic rule and enclosure, the hopes for a wider sphere of action dimmed also in Lorraine.

Fourier was ready to adapt to every circumstance, and to persuade the superiors of the congregation to accept the less perfect in order to save the essential.¹⁴⁹ Thus the formulae which he drew up at different times, beginning with the règlement provisionnel of 1598, and running through the revised règlement of 1603, the sommaire du dessein des filles de la congrégation de la Bienheureuse Vierge Marie of 1611, to the constitutions of 1616 and 1617 and the final Grandes Constitutions of 1640, remain for us as discrete imprints of a congregation in evolution, responding as it had to do to internal and external forces of change. It is possible, therefore, to know what he still held to be essential, and what he had already surrendered, when the Congregation took its case to Rome in 1626.

On one fundamental issue he remained, as always, adamant:

L'intention première et principale était

¹⁴⁹Fourier always consulted with the superiors before taking action, and was prepared to defer to their opinion. This practice went back to the earliest days of the first community. In 1599 he received advice from the bishop of Verdun, supported by the Jesuits of Pont-à-Mousson, that the community was ill-founded and ought to be disbanded. Fourier was inclined to submit, but decided to consult the women first. "Les filles pleuroient, prioient et faisoient tout l'imaginable!" He gave them three months to reflect on the question; at the end of that time he took each woman's opinion in writing. The vote was unanimous to continue the work. He forwarded the papers, without any comment of his own. (See "Manuscrit d'Evreux" (hereafter Evr.), a collection made by Mère A. Milly, second superior of the monastery of Nancy, passim, quoted in H. Derréal, op.cit., p.171). In 1603 he institutionalized the practice of consultation, by setting up a general chapter in which all the houses were represented.

d'instruire le jeunesse, et vivre au reste
le plus saintement qu'elles pourront ...
J'ai toujours estimé qu'il était nécessaire
de dire que premièrement elles étaient
maîtresses d'école et que, pour être plus
resserrées, elles ont désiré et ... poursuivi
avec instance d'être religieuses, de peur que
l'on ne pensât qu'elles étaient premièrement
religieuses et auraient par après, demandé
des écoles.¹⁵⁰

Without this central vocation he saw no reason to have a
congregation. "Il eust mieux aymé (que ses filles) demeuraissent
dans leurs résidences sans closture qu'elles avoient faict du
passé que de cesser l'instruction gratuite des externes".¹⁵¹

His constant preoccupation was to find strategies to make clausura
and the teaching of externes compatible; but of the two, there
was no doubt which he considered the more important.

The principal purpose of the Mattaincourt community had
been set out in the règlement provisionnel of 1598. It was:

... de dresser des écoles publiques et y
enseigner gratuitement les filles à lire
et écrire, à besogner de l'aiguille et
l'instruction chrétienne ...¹⁵²

The best, most fruitful and most appropriate means of staffing
these schools was:

par des Filles congrégées, tâchantes à bien
vivre, gratuites, montrantes la piété et
quant et quant autres choses qui de soi
puissent apporter quelque profit temporel

¹⁵⁰p. Fourier, Lettres III, pp.191-92. Quoted in H. Derréal, op.cit.,
p.343.

¹⁵¹Evt., f.44. Quoted in ibid., p.252.

¹⁵²Appendix, "Extrait de quelques articles du règlement
provisionnel..." in ibid., p.401.

à celles qui les apprennent.¹⁵³

These different elements were then considered separately:

filles, because experience had shown that no man, be he married or a priest, should be allowed to teach girls; congrégées, because the schoolteachers should be "personnes libres de la servitude du mariage et déchargées de tout autre soin qui pourrait empêcher l'exercice d'enseigner"; tachantes à bien vivre, because good example would have more effect on these children "que toutes les paroles et raisons qu'on saurait leur proposer"; gratuites, because no child should be excluded by reason of poverty. "Et pour l'égard de nous qui enseignons, que Dieu seul soit notre salaire et payeur et ait plus d'occasion de bénir et faire prospérer nos labeurs."¹⁵⁴

There was no word here of a "formal religion". However, Fourier was from the very start committed to the principle of clausura. Not only had he promised it to the dignitaries assembled with Mgr de la Vallée at Liverdun; he had also promised it to the women themselves. Alix Le Clerc and her companions wanted to be "perpétuellement enfermées en une maison nouvelle"¹⁵⁵. The congregation as it developed was a compromise between their attraction to the monastic life and Fourier's urgent desire

¹⁵³Ibid., p.402.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., pp.402-03.

¹⁵⁵This was the phrase used by Fourier himself, in his Relation ... des commencemens de la congrégation de Nostre-Dame, quoted in ibid., p.164, n. 107.

for Christian schools.

However, Fourier had hopes for a "clôture modérée", adapted to their functions as schoolmistresses, just as his vows as a canon regular were adapted to his work as a curé. Movement outside the house for charitable purposes should be encouraged, and students should be admitted freely. As new foundations appeared, the congrégées were frequently sent some distance to assist or replace each other.¹⁵⁶

Under this regime the new congregation prospered, and the approbation given it in 1603 by the Cardinal of Lorraine seemed to sanction Fourier's ideas. He now extended his plan by instituting a general chapter which he, as director, summoned to discuss questions of general interest. He decided that aspirants should be sent away from their own home town, to undergo their period of probation in another house, preferably one that was not yet comfortably established. He also ruled that the dowries of novices should be applied where they were needed, and not necessarily in the house to which the novice belonged.¹⁵⁷ The nuns should be ready "comme saint Pierre et saint Matthieu pour quitter tout et soi-même au premier mot", to go wherever they were needed.¹⁵⁸

Clearly Fourier had plans for a flexible organization similar to that of the Jesuits, suitable for the broad apostolate that

¹⁵⁶Ibid., pp.210-212.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., p.214.

¹⁵⁸Fourier, Correspondance vol.I, p.157. Quoted in Ibid., p.215.

he saw waiting for it.¹⁵⁹

By 1611 the early optimism had faded. The climate of Catholic reform, both in Lorraine and elsewhere, was not compatible with the freedoms that the Congrégation had been enjoying. Increasingly concerned, as time passed, with the problem of official recognition, Fourier drew up his Sommaire du dessein des filles de la Congrégation de la Bienheureuse Vierge Marie, to be presented in Rome by Lenoncourt. By now he and the general chapter had bowed to the inevitability of full clausura. But in order to fulfil their duty of teaching the poor, and also to hold on to their young schoolmistresses, "bien entalentées" but poor, who would not be able to afford the dowries of religious, they proposed that the congregation should henceforth consist of two kinds of houses, fermées et non-fermées. The maisons fermées, or monasteries, would support and guarantee the other houses, in which filles séculières, or oblates, would observe the rule but not take vows.¹⁶⁰ This duality was the Congrégation's answer to the restriction of its field of action which monastic transformation would inevitably entail. Fourier's advisers, the Jesuits of Nancy and the Bishop of Toul, warned that the proposal would be unacceptable in Rome, and suggested that it be suppressed, at least for the time being. The version of

¹⁵⁹Derréal suggests that in drawing up these statutes of 1603 Fourier must have had the first schema of Ignatius in mind. See op.cit p.202, n. 48.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., pp.221-222.

the memoir that was finally admitted simply asked the Holy See for recognition of the work already accomplished, and a guarantee that the teaching of externes might continue, even with "une clôture restreinte", and that all the communities, "tant des monastères que des autres maisons" might be recognized under the title of the Congrégation de la Bienheureuse Vierge Marie.¹⁶¹

Thus did Fourier and his accomplices hope to bring the maisons non-fermées in through the back door!

But on this occasion the jurists' cunning was of no avail. The Bull that came back from Rome in 1615 was Lenoncourt's Bull, erecting the monastery of Nancy alone, and omitting all mention of teaching externes. After stormy scenes between himself and Fourier, with Alix caught in the middle, the primate agreed to apply again to Rome, this time for recognition of the entire congregation.¹⁶²

The new Bull authorized the nuns to teach, but made a distinction between pensionnaires, who could be taught without restriction, and externes, who could be taught only at the pleasure of the Holy See. Strict enclosure was to be preserved: the externes might not enter the monastery, but could only be admitted to an adjoining antechamber by a system of double doors. For the rest, the Bull still failed to include the other monasteries. Nancy remained the only house with juridical status.

¹⁶¹

Ibid., p.223.

¹⁶²Ibid., p.252.

Fourier now turned for help to the bishop of Toul. Required again to outline his plan, he drew up the document now known as the petites constitutions. He postulated a single congregation composed of two types of houses, fermées and non-fermées, all under the jurisdiction of an elected visitor, who would rule with the assistance of the general chapter and the advice of the bishops. No major decision was to be taken without the universal consent of the houses and the visitor. The filles séculières could move between houses, work in the monasteries if needed, and, if the occasion presented itself, could enter the noviciate. All religious must promise to maintain the teaching function, "et de ne jamais procurer, agréer ou permettre qu'elle vienne à s'abolir ou négliger."¹⁶³ The Bishop of Toul and his advisers approved the constitutions, and ordered that the remaining houses be erected into monasteries, even without papal approbation.

Meanwhile, the erection of the monastery of Nancy went ahead. In November 1617 the first clothing took place, in a magnificent ceremony. The other houses swiftly followed suit.

In the following year, the consequences of these transformations came to be felt. Invited to Nancy to make their profession together, the religious of the French houses refused, their bishops maintaining that to do so would be contrary to clausura.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³A.D. Seine-Maritime D-427, Estat Reiglement et Statut Des Religieuses et autres filles de la Congregation de La Bienheureuse Vierge Marie (1616) fol.11.

¹⁶⁴H. Derréal, op.cit., p.265.

The natural centrifugal tendencies of the monasteries, coupled with the various bishops' jealousy of their own jurisdictions, were already destroying the prospects for a single congregation. The transparent desire for control shown by the primate in Nancy made the work of reconciliation ever more difficult.¹⁶⁵ The unity of "un coeur et une âme entre toutes" which Fourier had sought in his petites constitutions was already a thing of the past.

Against these tendencies, Fourier continued to draw up plans for union and the mobility of personnel. In his règles communes he demanded that aspirants were to be asked before clothing if they were ready "à vivre en tel pais et telle maison de la congrégation qui se trouverait plus à propos pour le grand service de Dieu."¹⁶⁶ He introduced a plan for a seminary, which would be supported by all the monasteries, and which would train poor young women to teach in the petites écoles.¹⁶⁷ He developed the idea of a federation of monasteries, headed by a Mère Intendante who would be elected for a three-year term by each of the monasteries

¹⁶⁵It was Lenoncourt's plan to unify the congregation under a single supérieure -- to be elected from the house at Nancy. Furthermore, there would be a central noviciate -- at Nancy. The rejection or approval of aspirants for all the houses would thus become a matter of decision in Nancy (ibid., p.285). The other communities found this plan unacceptable.

¹⁶⁶Règles communes ms B., p.272. Quoted in H. Derreal, op.cit., p.276.

¹⁶⁷The suggestion for this seems to have come first from the religious of Chalons-sur-Marne, and to have been taken up by Fourier. (L. Carrez, op.cit., p.118 ff.)

in turn.¹⁶⁸ He continued to plan for a visitor, who he hoped would be taken from the congregation of canons regular of which he was a member. Above all, he and Alix persisted in preparing for recognition of the maisons non-fermées, which were now functioning with great success in fact, though still non-existent in law.¹⁶⁹

This was the situation in 1627 when the cause was finally taken to Rome.

The introduction of the cause in the court of Urban VIII was greeted with astonishment. By what authority had the bishops of Lorraine and France erected all these monasteries? Only the house in Nancy had pontifical approval. To Guinet, who appealed to the legislation of Trent which empowered bishops to erect monasteries, the response was that more recent legislation had in fact removed this power to the Holy See alone. He was advised that the best he could hope for was that the Pope would confirm what was already done, and validate the religious vows already taken in error.¹⁷⁰

The audience with the pope foundered as soon as Urban learned that the religious of the Congrégation taught externes.

"Est-ce que ce sont des jesuitesses? Nous n'en avons pas voulu à Rome!" The Pope then "poussait des exclamations, comme une

¹⁶⁸H. Derréal, op.cit., p.284.

¹⁶⁹Ibid., pp.328-30.

¹⁷⁰Ibid. pp. 336-37.

personne stupefaite de ce qu'elle apprend."¹⁷¹

The case was sent to the Congregation of Regulars, whose reaction was equally negative:

Ces grands messieurs [Fourier wrote later to some of his religious] qui jugent de ces affaires-là, et auxquels le Pape en a renvoyé la connaissance, disent en leur consistoire et dehors encore, à ceux qui leur en parlent, que ces filles ne sont pas religieuses; qu'elles ne sauraient garder la clôture en faisant ce que vous savez qu'elles font (les classes), et que c'est contre la constitution de Pie V; qu'ils écriront aux ordinaires des lieux où elles sont, pour savoir ce qu'elles sont et savoir s'il faut les renvoyer chacune chez leurs pères et mères ... Ce qui est plus admirable, plus odieux, plus détestable, ils les taxent d'impudicité, et croient fermement que la chasteté ne règne chez elles, parmi ce digne ouvrage-là que vous savez être le principal de leur profession. Voilà les termes de ces pays-là!¹⁷²

Guinet's protests, that a suppression of the houses would lead to scandal, elicited the unsympathetic response: "Eh bien, qu'elles se marient. Après tout, c'est leur droit. Elles peuvent en user."¹⁷³

Under these unfavourable circumstances, mere survival of the monasteries seemed doubtful. The idea that the Pope would grant a single bull to create a whole congregation together was altogether preposterous.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹P. Fourier, Lettres vol. III, p.80.

¹⁷²Fourier, quoted in E. de Bazélaire, op.cit., p.57.

¹⁷³H. Derréal, op.cit., p.339.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., p.340.

Fourier sent back arguments. The bishops' right to erect monasteries had never been rescinded in Lorraine. Custom, therefore, conserved the force of law.¹⁷⁵ As to the teaching of externes, how could this be unlawful for the congregation as a whole if it had already been approved for the religious of Nancy? He argued again, as he had done in 1598, for the legitimacy of the feminine teaching apostolate, and he again used his citations from the Fathers of the Church.

The debate went on in Rome. Guinet discovered through private research that the papal monopoly on the erection of monasteries was not as complete as he had been led to believe. He also came to the conclusion that it was the Pope's personal prejudice, rather than the law, that stood in the way of approval:

Il trouve tant de difficultés à cette instruction donnée par des femmes, et son opinion à cet égard est si fortement ancrée dans son esprit, qu'il est difficile de l'en ôter.¹⁷⁶

In March 1628, Urban relented and approved the institute, though insisting that there must be "autant de bulles qu'il y avait de monastères."¹⁷⁷ Guinet's plea, that the houses were much too poor to pay for their bulls, was rejected. "Qu'elles fassent ce qu'elles voudront. Elles peuvent prendre des bulles,

¹⁷⁵p. Fourier, Lettres vol. III, quoted in Ibid., p.342

¹⁷⁶p. Fourier, Lettres vol. III, p.306, quoted in ibid., p.348.

¹⁷⁷p. Fourier, Lettres vol. III, p.428 quoted in ibid., p.349.

elles peuvent les laisser, mais qu'elles pourvoient à leur conscience."¹⁷⁸ Then again, without explanation, the Pope reversed his decision, and granted the single Bull.

The implications of this favour alarmed the Roman officials. "La raison en était ... que jamais on n'admettrait ni créerait une congrégation de religieuses, à cause de leur absolue incapacité pour cela."¹⁷⁹ However, the Pope's decision was final; the bull that was finally promulgated, on August 8, 1628, assured for all time "l'institut de ces mères et tous leurs monastères et couvents" under the title of Chanoinesses régulières de saint Augustin, de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame.¹⁸⁰

The final Bull represented a compromise. The religious had won recognition as a congregation. They had won the right to teach -- not only pensionnaires, but externes. This right was secured by the fourth vow which, like the Ursulines of the Paris congregation, they henceforth took at profession. On the other hand, their entry into full monastic life meant a shrinking of their former apostolate. Hemmed in by severe physical and financial restrictions, they underwent a subtle "reclassing". They were forced to discriminate in favour of the wealthy, in total opposition to the founding members' wishes. The dowries of their entrants were raised, their pensionnats became more

¹⁷⁸Ibid., p. 431, quoted in ibid., p. 349.

¹⁷⁹Ibid. pp.459-60, quoted in ibid., p.353.

¹⁸⁰E. de Bazelaire, op.cit., pp.58-59.

I exclusive; the solidity of their status brought in more aspirants, more support from the moneyed classes. The maisons non-fermées were gone.¹⁸¹ The externats were all that was left of their mission among the poor.¹⁸² The unity of the congregation, for which Fourier sought to lay the foundations by securing the single Bull, was in fact frittered away, as some monasteries accepted the regular visitors and others continued in close subjection to their bishops.

Yet for all the deflection from its original purpose, the congregation performed a great service to its society. It gave that society a taste for feminine schooling. It is no coincidence that the female literacy rate remained high in Lorraine throughout the Ancien Régime.¹⁸³ More, perhaps, to the purpose of its founders, it assisted in the christianization of a country that was grievously affected by war and the attendant social disruption. Fourier, in praise of his religious, wrote:

Dans les lieux où elles résident, on remarque et l'on admire une réformation merveilleuse dans la

¹⁸¹The principle was revived in another form. The monastery of Châlons established a congregation of filles séculières: old pupils of the school, who continued to meet under the direction of the nuns, and to practice good works. This organization was imitated by other houses. Marguerite Bourgeoys was a fille séculière of the monastery of Troyes.

¹⁸²In some fashion, however, the Congrégation's commitment to the training of secular schoolmistresses was kept alive. Marguerite Bourgeoys' career in Troyes is testimonial to that fact.

¹⁸³The monastery in Nancy, for example, ran a school for approximately 400 externes until it was closed by the Revolution. See M.E. Aubry, "La Congrégation de Notre-Dame à Nancy et l'éducation des filles aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles", Annales de l'Est 1974, pp.88-89.

petite jeunesse qui passe par leurs mains; ...
la modestie, l'obéissance et la dévotion des
femmes qui ont fréquenté leurs écoles pendant
qu'elles étaient petites filles. On voit de plus
le profit que plusieurs ont fait à apprendre en
peu de temps, sans qu'il leur coûte rien, les
ouvrages manuels avec la piété, particulièrement
les pauvres qui, auparavant, ne savaient que
faire pour gagner leur vie.¹⁸⁴

4) The outcome: a compromise.

The situation in 1640 represented a compromise. The Gallican Church, and the parlements of France, had preserved the principles of clausura and the formal religious state. On the other hand, clausura had been significantly modified. Female monasticism had been opened up to include service to the neighbour -- service to women in retreats and instruction, service to young girls in the form of schooling.

The practical results of clausura were considerable. In all cases, monastic erection meant a static community, with relatively high costs which left it more dependent than before

¹⁸⁴p. Fourier, quoted in P.L. Péchenard Congrégation de Notre-Dame de Reims (Reims, 1886) vol.I, p.35.

on its sources of income.¹⁸⁵ The founders had hoped to escape the tyranny of finances: to be able to board children at cost, and to choose their postulants according to suitability and vocation.¹⁸⁶ But the expense of building and maintaining a monastery was high, and the revenues for it were raised largely from the fees and dowries of pensionnaires and postulants.¹⁸⁷ Consequently, a cycle of exclusiveness developed. Both the nuns and the children whom they boarded tended more and more to belong to the wealthier bourgeoisie or to the nobility.

The personnel required to staff the monasteries was relatively

¹⁸⁵Jeanne de Lestonnac, an expert in the subject, listed the essential monastery buildings: "l'Eglise avec un choeur de plein Pied pour les Religieuses, et une autre en haut ... pour les pensionnaires; une sacristie au-dedans, et une autre au dehors...; une chapelle domestique pour les malades...; un clocher; un cloître; un dortoir; une salle commune pour y faire les recreations ...; une petite bibliothèque; l'infirmerie; les lieux communs; une couturerie; une lingerie; le grand degré; un jardin; une basse-cour; l'endroit à mettre le tour; des parloirs; un puits; le lave-main; le réfectoire; la cuisine; la crédence; une dépense; un bûcher; un four; une boulangerie; une buanderie; pouillailier; un toit à cochons; une chambre grillée pour servir de prison...; les classes et leurs basse-cours; un petit clocher pour mettre la cloche domestique et celle des classes ..."
P.Michel, op.cit., pp.54-55.

¹⁸⁶Mère de Chantal, in founding a second Visitation house in Annecy in 1633, expressed the hope that in future young women with small dowries or no dowries at all would be accepted according to merit (R. Devos, op.cit., p.60); Mme. de Sainte-Beuve expressed the same hope for her monastery of Faubourg Saint-Jacques, and indeed left a fund to provide dowries for twelve deserving aspirants. (M.-A. Jégou, op.cit., p.103)

¹⁸⁷Quite a number of houses either went bankrupt or had to be saved by benefactors. The Ursuline monastery of Faubourg Saint-Jacques, for all its prudent management, suffered financial difficulties at the end of the century. The Ursuline community in Rouen suffered total financial collapse at the same time.

large. Where the congrégées had taught their schools with the help of a couple of girls, or, perhaps, an older woman,¹⁸⁸ the cloistered religious now diverted half, or more, of their personnel to the internal service of the community.

The opening of new houses was approached with more and more caution. In the early years of the century the congrégées had simply appeared in a town with a minimum of advance planning, and had survived until local benefactors came to their assistance.¹⁸⁹

"Il ne faut que trois filles ou femmes courageuses pour commencer," wrote François de Sales, "Dieu donnera l'accroissement."¹⁹⁰

By 1640 this casual attitude was out of date. Profiting from the experience of many difficult foundations, the Constitutions of the Ursulines of Paris insisted that, prior to sending out a colony of religious, "on s'informerá ... s'il y a des rentes et fonds pour l'entretien et nourriture de quelque nombre de religieuses et pourvoir aux choses communes et nécessaires."¹⁹¹

On the other hand the teaching communities continued to

¹⁸⁸Such as "tante Méline", a pious widow who lived with and assisted the congregation of Nancy in its early days (H. Derréal, op.cit., p.227) or "tante Marie" who worked in the kitchen at Pont-à-Mousson (P. Fourier, Correspondance, p.36).

¹⁸⁹The Filles de Notre-Dame, who had always been cloistered nuns, were the exception. In their case, suitable buildings and funding were demanded in advance. In Périgueux, where Mère de Lestonnac found these to be lacking, she simply took her nuns and went home. (L. Entraygues, op.cit., p.48)

¹⁹⁰François de Sales, Oeuvres vol. XV, p.302. This was his comment on a new Ursuline community at Chambéry.

¹⁹¹M.-C. Gueudré, op.cit. vol.II, p.129.

live up to their promise to conduct free schools for girls.¹⁹² It was the success of these free schools that established their credit with the municipalities, just as the success of their pensionnats endeared them to the upper classes. During these years, French urban society developed a taste for female education, thanks to the efforts of the teaching nuns.

In 1640 both Pierre Fourier and Jeanne de Lestonnac died, followed in 1641 by Jeanne Françoise de Chantal, the foundress of the Visitation. They had lived long enough to see their institutes accepted, but contained. At about the same time, the dynamism that had marked the first years of the congregations began to fade. The number of new foundations declined; and the established communities became content simply to replace their existing numbers with novices.¹⁹³ Society was saturated with monasteries. In most cities and towns of France the comfortable classes had at least one convent in which to place their daughters.

At this very time, new social classes began to become involved and the scope of activity broadened. In 1641 and 1642, the first female communities with simple vows came into being.

¹⁹²Though it should be noted that these schools did not grow with the communities. Where in the early days a handful of congréganistes had instructed a couple of hundred children, the later monasteries of fifty or sixty nuns tended to instruct the same number.

¹⁹³See Appendix B, graphs II and III for illustrations of this pattern of declining numbers.

CHAPTER IV

THE SECOND GENERATION: THE FILLES SECULIERES (1630-1660)

1) The milieu: dévots and dévotes.

Modern historians of the Counter-Reformation in France agree to divide that event into two phases: the Counter-Reformation properly speaking, strongly influenced by the Mediterranean Catholicism that triumphed at Trent,¹ characterized by a highly adversarial approach to the questions that had been thrown up by the Reformation; and what is known as the Catholic Reformation, a period of genuine religious regeneration, during which the Church recognized, and moved to redress, the immense problems within itself.² The turning point between these two phases is generally placed around the beginning of the seventeenth century.³

This "turning point", like most others, requires qualification. The atmosphere of violence and anxiety which fostered the Counter-Reformation spirit did not die with the conversion of Henri IV. The Protestant presence continued to cause severe,

¹P. Chaunu, "Le XVII^e siècle religieux" (op.cit.), p.291.

²See J. Delumeau, Le Catholicisme entre Luther et Voltaire (op.cit., chap. IV, "Christianisation"; R. Taveneaux, Le Catholicisme dans la France classique (op.cit.), vol.I, p.27.

³See, for instance, J.-C. Dhôtel, Les origines du catéchisme moderne (op.cit.), p.13.

and sometimes brutal, reaction.⁴ Even when non-violent, the defence of the faith was conducted largely through campaigns of apologetics, mounted by the great preaching congregations.

On the other hand, the "Catholic Reformation", in the sense in which that term is usually employed, was not fully realized until later in the century. The central drive of the Catholic Reformation was for the reform of the clergy, on which was predicated the christianization of the laity.⁵ This strategy, designed by the Council of Trent, was not implemented in France until a full century later, when seminaries were set up throughout the country in the 1670s.⁶ In the meantime, much of France remained poorly served by its clergy. The grand siècle, writes one Church historian, was not the magnificent "moment" that has sometimes been depicted, but a period of severe and continuing crisis.⁷

Thus the first decades of the century were a period during

⁴As, for instance, in Rouen, where a half-century of harassment by the students of the Jesuit college culminated in the sacking of the Protestant temple and the disinterment of a minister's corpse (C. Robillard de Beaurepaire, Recherches (op.cit.), pp.120-21).

⁵P. Broutin, La Réforme pastorale (op.cit.), vol. I, p. 20.

⁶Jacques Le Brun points out that spiritual progress was often impeded by financial difficulties. The Catholic Church emerged from the reformation period in straitened circumstances, and could not immediately undertake the rebuilding of churches, the adequate salarizing of priests, and the construction of seminaries that were necessary to put its house in order. (See his chapter in L. J. Rogier et al., Nouvelle Histoire de l'Eglise (op.cit.), p.417).

⁷Ibid., p.434.

which the country's religious reformers gathered their forces and laid their foundations. This period had its own particular characteristics. It was the time of the "mystical invasion".⁸

It was also the time of an extraordinarily high level of lay participation in religious affairs. An important part of the Church's work passed into the hands of the laity, at a time when there was a shortage of qualified priests.⁹

La plupart des prêtres demeurent les bras
croisés et il faut que Dieu suscite des laïques,
des couteliers et des merciers pour faire
l'ouvrage des prêtres fainéants.¹⁰

So wrote a great clerical reformer, Adrien Bourdoise.¹¹ The laymen of whom he spoke were less likely to be cutlers and mercers than men of substance; but the point of his argument was correct. What is remarkable is that there existed a body of laymen and laywomen capable of taking up this work. These were the dévots.

⁸Mgr. J. Lestocquoy sees three phases in this "mystical current": "D'abord une naissance, ou mieux une floraison soudaine Depuis les années marquant la fin du siècle jusqu'à la mort de saint François de Sales, les mystiques sont partout. De 1621 à 1661, il y a progrès constant, diffusion: l'âge d'or du sentiment religieux. Et puis un déclin rapide, de 1661 à la mort de Louis XIV." He points out that the chronology of the christianization of France follows a similar curve, but at a later date. (La vie religieuse en France (op.cit.), p.151).

⁹See R. Mandrou, Introduction à la France moderne (op.cit.), p.273. "Une bonne part du mouvement de rénovation des années 1600-1640 est l'oeuvre de laïcs, et surtout de femmes dévotes."

¹⁰Quoted in R. Allier, La Compagnie du Très Saint-Sacrement de l'Autel: La "Cabale des Dévots, 1627-1666. (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1902) p.260.

¹¹Adrien Bourdoise (d. 1655), founder of the seminary of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet. See below, chap. V.

The dévots defined themselves, and were defined, in several ways. To begin with, they were a religious party with a strong political purpose, under the leadership of Pierre (later Cardinal) Bérulle and Michel de Marillac. Spiritual descendants of the League (indeed, many of them had been liqueurs), they represented the pure "Catholic" interest, and were therefore frequently at odds with the more pragmatic policies of Henri IV and Cardinal Richelieu. In particular they favoured alliances with Catholic powers -- Spain and Austria -- and were appalled at the government's rapprochement with Protestant princes. Their political influence came to an end in 1630, with the Day of Dupes. Thereafter, as state policy became ever more independent of religious considerations, they separated themselves from the "world", which they now saw as intrinsically evil.¹² Dévots took on the role of critics of society and guardians of its morality. Hence their battle against Protestants, libertines, atheists, actors, and every other type of deviant.¹³ Hence their conspicuously

¹²This negative view of the world can be found throughout the works of Vincent de Paul. "Le monde, comme il a été dit, a des maximes toutes contraires à celles de Dieu; et vivre selon le monde, c'est vivre comme un ennemi de Dieu." Vincent de Paul, Correspondance (op.cit.), vol. IX, p.438.e

¹³The records of the Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement, dévots par excellence, show gypsy women locked away, a deist put into jail, a hermaphrodite banished from Paris, prostitutes prosecuted, butchers jailed for selling meat on Fridays -- as well as continuing action against Protestants. See R. d'Argenson, Annales de la Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement, publiées et annotées par le R.P. Dom H. Beauchet-Fillieu (Marseilles, 1900), passim.

sober clothes, their theatrical services of reparation during carnival and other seasons of excess, and their unremitting battle against duelling, dancing, gaming and the theatre.¹⁴

For all their status and influence, dévots were only a small segment of French society, and they were cordially disliked by many for what was seen as their excessive, and foreign, religiosity.¹⁵

But first and foremost, dévots were characterized by their interior religious fervour. "No Christian epoch," writes one historian, "has been more penetrated by the supernatural than the beginning of the seventeenth century ... Never did Christian souls ponder more anxiously the ways of divine grace."¹⁶ The dévots practised spiritual discipline at a level hitherto unknown in laymen. They confessed frequently (a practice which had begun only with Trent),¹⁷ mortified their bodies, and read and meditated upon the many religious works that were now coming

¹⁴The most famous of all dévots is, of course, a fictional one: Tartuffe. The Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement did everything in its power to have Molière's work suppressed; this savage satire was his reprisal.

¹⁵Many Frenchmen, stout Catholics, considered the religion of the dévots almost as foreign to their traditional religion as was protestantism. Their point of view was expressed by Pierre Lestolle, who hoped to see "... arracher de l'Eglise ces deux plantes bastardes: Papistes et huguenots, et rendre la catholique bien réformée et la réformée bien catholique." (J. Dagens, Berulle (op.cit.), p.244.)

¹⁶Ibid., pp.129-30. My translation.

¹⁷A practice which did not always find favour with traditional Catholics. See O. Coquault, op.cit. vol. I, pp. 191-92.

into print.¹⁸ Above all, following the advice of François de Sales given in the Introduction à la vie dévote, they found themselves spiritual directors, and developed the practice of methodical prayer. "This practice," writes Lucien Febvre, "which during the Middle Ages belonged to the convents ... passed into the 'world'." He argues that to it, more than anything else, can be attributed the intense religious fervour of the time.¹⁹

The dévot aspired to an other-worldly life within the world. "Ceux qui sont simplement gens de bien cheminent en la voye de Dieu," wrote François de Sales, "mays les devotz courent, et quand ils sont bien devotz, ils volent."²⁰

Part of the activity proper to the devout layman was good works. Indeed, it was this vocation that distinguished him from the other orders in society. In the seventeenth-century mind, charitable works were not the responsibility of the priest,

¹⁸Dagens calls attention to the enormous influx of printed devotional literature in the last years of the sixteenth century. For the first time, many works were translated into the vernacular (op.cit., pp.103-109).

¹⁹L. Febvre, "Aspects meconnus" (op.cit.), p.641. Charles Berthelot du Chesnay points out that this habit of spiritual direction did not pertain only to "quelque pieuse Philothée"; that soldiers, artisans, and other men of the world also adopted the practice. See his article "La spiritualité des laïcs" (op. cit.); p.39.

²⁰François de Sales - Mme. Présidente Brulart, 13/10/1604, in F. de Sales, Oeuvres (op.cit.), vol. XII, p.347.

still less of the religious.²¹ They fell to the layman and laywoman as their apportioned lot, the means of their salvation:

Si vous aimez les pauvres [wrote François de Sales to his Philothée], mettez-vous souvent parmi eux, prenez plaisir à les voir chez vous, à les visiter chez eux Rendez-vous leur servante, allez les servir dans leurs lits quand ils sont malades, je dis de vos propres mains, soyez leurs cuisinière et à vos propres dépens, soyez leur lingère et leur blanchisseuse.²²

Many dévots undertook good works as part of their spiritual exercises.²³ For those who found personal contact with the poor distasteful, there was alternative social action: organization, animation, fund-raising. It was in this field that the Compagnie

²¹See, for instance, the statement of principle by the Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement, dating from 1660: "Que tous les corps ont un moyen qui leur est particulier pour tendre et arriver à leur fin commune; les uns, comme les religieux, par la retraite ...; les autres, comme les ecclésiastiques, par les exhortations, les prédications, l'administration des sacrements ...; et d'autres, comme la Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement, celles des paroisses, et toutes assemblées de piété, par le soin des pauvres honteux, des malades, des prisonniers, et de toutes les bonnes oeuvres." (Cte. René d'Argenson, Annales de la Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement, publiées et annotées par le R. P. Dom H. Beauchet-Fillieau [Marseille, 1900], p. 194).

²²F. de Sales, Introduction, Part 3, Chap. 15. This was clearly a counsel of perfection, seldom followed literally; but among those who did follow it were the first sisters of the Visitation, in the period before they were cloistered.

²³C. du Chesnay, op.cit., pp.36-38; 43-45.

du Saint-Sacrement ²⁴ and its branches in the provinces were most effective.

From the 1630s on, dévot spirituality was, so to speak, bonded to good works. For the next thirty or forty years, the care of the poor, in all its diverse forms, bore the stamp of a particular mentalité that was other-worldly and yet highly practical. This mentalité, which saw poverty as an evil and the poor as social problems, was a far cry from the cheerful and indiscriminating charitable outlook of the middle ages.²⁵

The social relationships of the seventeenth century were tinged with the pessimistic theology of the French school. "For the disciples of Bérulle," writes one historian, "nature, soiled by original sin, was fundamentally evil."²⁶ The poor required assistance, training, and -- above all -- salvation. Their future was not in this world, but the next; true charity consisted

²⁴The Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement was founded in 1630 by the duc de Ventadour, as a secret association of laymen and priests whose purpose was "d'embrasser avec zèle toutes sortes de biens et de procurer la gloire de Dieu par toutes sortes de voies." Because of the exalted position of most of its members, and also because of the efficiency of its methods, it became very powerful, both in Paris and in other major cities such as Rouen and Marseille. However, its voie excitative, the secretive way in which it exercised its influence, earned it enemies, some of them in high places. It was suppressed in 1664.

²⁵J.-P. Gutton, La société et les pauvres (op.cit.), pp.93-94.

²⁶p. Deyon, "A propos du pauperisme au milieu du XVII^e siècle" (op.cit.), p.151 (my translation).

not in pampering their bodies, but in salvaging their souls.²⁷

The new attitudes towards the poor did not spring from theology alone. It has been pointed out that the same general policies were developed in Protestant societies working from a different theological base.²⁸ The harsher social approach came to prevail because it had the conjoncture on its side. Economic and social conditions, the triumph of mercantilism and the passion for order in all things combined to change the attitude of the respectable classes towards their weaker brethren.

However, a powerful and influential section of the dévot movement continued to draw, at least partly, on the traditional idea of the poor as alter Christus. At the risk of over-generalizing, it may be argued that this section represented the feminine point of view, while the other represented the masculine.

In French Catholic tradition, charity towards the poor had always been the prerogative of women. " En ces pays

²⁷"Ainsi s'expriment quelques traits caractéristiques de la réforme catholique française. Animée par une élite intellectuelle et sociale, elle veut provoquer plus ou moins autoritairement le progrès des chrétiens. A tous, elle propose de ne plus considérer cette vie terrestre que par rapport au salut, et de rechercher, delà des apparences et des péripéties quotidiennes, le sens chrétien des choses." Ibid., p.141.

²⁸J.-P. Gutton, op.cit., p.111. Also see J. Delumeau, Naissance et Affirmation de la Réforme (Paris: P.U.F., 1968), especially his chapter "Oecuménisme d'autrefois", in which he examines the many resemblances between Catholic and Protestant outlooks. In its war on mendicancy, France was much closer to Protestant England than to Catholic Spain, where all efforts to enclose and correct beggars were resisted, well into the eighteenth century.

ultramontains ce ministère se pratique ordinairement par les femmes," wrote François de Sales.²⁹ Women were entitled by law and custom to give alms on behalf of their husbands.³⁰ They monopolized the field; indeed, it was the only field outside the home that they were allowed to monopolize.³¹ As events in the seventeenth century were to show, they continued to dominate "their" segment of charitable works, which was the care of the sick and the obviously helpless.³²

It was under the auspices of these dévotés that the first charitable company of women -- the Filles de la Charité -- was born. These were, essentially, unmarried women or widows who wished to live together under one roof, and dedicate themselves to good works. Their original purpose was to assist lay action, and they usually worked closely with other pious, but less committed, laywomen. The evolution and the expansion of the business of charity, however, laid a demand on them far beyond expectations. To meet this demand, they underwent organization and training,

²⁹François de Sales - Jean-François Ranzo, 6/v/1610. Oeuvres vol. XIV, p.300.

³⁰The custom was sometimes confirmed at marriage. See the example of a marriage vow dating from 1615: "Moi Pierre Grantit je te prends Toussainte Chavanon pour femme, avec cet anneau ... et je te confie toutes mes aumônes." (G.Fagniez, La Femme et la société française (op.cit.), p.85).

³¹C.Dulong, La Vie quotidienne des femmes (op.cit.), p.266.

³²Male-operated charity was principally concerned with social control. Most masculine organizations concentrated on the able-bodied, on the training and management of young people, and on the preservation of the deserving poor from further fall.

and finally became an officially recognized company.

2) The problem: "Le peuple meurt de faim et il se damne": Poverty, ignorance and disruption in French society.

Changing perceptions of poverty came, first, from changes in poverty itself. The seventeenth century was indeed, as Pierre Goubert has called it, a "tragic century". At the end of the religious wars there was a short breathing space; then came what has been called a "climax of misery"³³: bad harvests in 1629-30, followed by bubonic plague; war in Lorraine, then in Picardie and Champagne. The years 1647-1648 and 1651-52, also bad harvest years, were aggravated by the upheavals of the Fronde. These blows fell heavily upon the rural poor. Unable to survive the disorganization of their habitat, great numbers of people simply took to the road, migrating to cities that had no real means of absorbing them.³⁴ Poverty became highly visible:

On voyait des troupes errants de mendiants, sans religion et sans discipline, demander avec plus d'obstination que d'humilité, voler souvent ~~ce~~ ce qu'ils ne pouvaient obtenir, attirer les yeux du public par des infirmités contrefaites, et venir jusqu'au pied des autels troubler la dévotion des fidèles par le recit indiscret et importun de leurs besoins ou de leurs souffrances.³⁵

These vagabond poor were despised by respectable people. They

³³P. Deyon, op.cit., p.261.

³⁴J.-P. Gutton, op.cit., p.39.

³⁵Fléchier, Oraison funèbre pour la duchesse d'Aiguillon. Quoted in A. de Bonneau-Avenant, Madame de Miramion (op.cit.), pp.187-88.

were considered:

... l'exxrement des villes, la peste des Républiques, des matières à ornements de gibets, d'où se tire les voleurs, les meurtriers et toutes sortes de racailles et gens qui ne vallent rien.³⁶

They were feared, probably with cause, as being ripe for sedition:

Les Pauvres qui sont dans l'enceinte de nos murailles, meditent à tous momens une sédition épouvantable, et le désespoir qui commence à s'emparer de leurs coeurs leur persuade que le dernier remède à leurs maux est de n'en plus chercher.³⁷

Behind these problem poor, whose wandering ways were equated in the seventeenth century with heresy, disease and vice,³⁸ stood another class of poor who, though less visible, caused equal concern. These were the pauvres honteux, or respectable poor. By contemporary definition, the pauvre honteux was "celui qui vit chrétiennement, qui ne peut gagner sa vie et qui a la honte sur le front pour ne l'oser point demander."³⁹ For the majority of the poor who remained integrated into their towns and villages the danger of destitution was only too real. "La plupart n'ont pas pour vivre pendant deux jours de maladies sans l'aide de

³⁶Memoires de Jean Maillefer (op.cit), p.120.

³⁷Les justes complaints des Bourgeois de Paris adressées a Messieurs de Parlement. Paris, 1649. Quoted in M.-A. Jégou, Les ursulines du faubourg Saint-Jacques (op.cit), p.101.

³⁸J.-P. Gutton, op.cit., pp:11-13.

³⁹Ordre à tenir pour la visite des pauvres honteux, page following the Reglements de la Charité de Saint-Germain de l'Auxerrois. Quoted in R. Allier, op.cit., p,95.

l'Hôtel-Dieu," wrote one civic official of the poor in his city.⁴⁰

The saturation of the labour market by incomers and the rising price of grain kept their numbers high. In 1651, in one Parisian parish alone (Saint-Sulpice), 856 families, for a total of 2496 mouths, were identified as pauvres honteux.⁴¹

A number of institutions already existed to handle the poor, but they were inadequate for present needs. The small country hospitals were mostly abandoned by the seventeenth century.⁴²

The municipal hôtels-dieu were run down and poorly maintained.

Bureaux des pauvres had been established during the previous century in many cities, but they usually existed in name only, without funds or buildings. Operations that continued to function did so only in a desultory way. The Couche of Paris, for instance, the institution for abandoned children, was maintained by a tax on the high justices of the city under the aegis of the Chapter of Notre-Dame; but the children were neglected nonetheless,

⁴⁰René Bourgeois, quoted in P. Desportes, Histoire de Reims (Toulouse: Privat, 1983), p.200.

⁴¹R. Allier, op.cit., p.99.

⁴²"Des hôpitaux existaient, dus le plus souvent sinon toujours à l'initiative privée, mais la plupart étaient bien décadents: la ferveur première s'était éteinte, peu à peu les fondations, les fonds étaient tombés entre les mains des autorités municipales ou, cas beaucoup plus grave, entre celles des ecclésiastiques ou de laïques plus soucieux de percevoir le revenu de ces fondations que d'accueillir et de soigner les malades pauvres." (R. P. Chalumeau, "L'assistance aux malades pauvres au XVII^e siècle", XVII^e Siècle 90-91 [1971], p.76).

or sold to any comer.⁴³ Everywhere, at the end of the troubles of the League, facilities had broken down, and the will to rebuild them was lacking.

3) The beginnings of social action.

The credit for changing this situation lies largely with one man. In typical seventeenth-century fashion, his own revelation of the misery of the countryside came first on the spiritual, rather than the material, level. In 1616 Vincent de Paul,⁴⁴ then almoner to the Gondi family, was travelling with Madame de Gondi on her domain when he was asked to hear the confession of a sick peasant. A few days later the peasant declared to Madame de Gondi that this confession had saved his soul, that without it he would most certainly have been damned. Madame de Gondi turned in astonishment to her almoner: "'Ah! Monsieur, qu'est ce que cela? ... Il en est sans doute ainsi de la plupart de ces pauvres gens Ah! Monsieur Vincent, que d'âmes se

⁴³See Vincent de Paul's own account, op.cit., vol. XIII, p.798. "On les vendait huit sols piece à des gueux, qui leur rompaient bras et jambes pour exciter le monde à ... leur donner l'aumône, et les laissaient mourir de faim."

⁴⁴Vincent de Paul (1581-1660), born of peasant parents in a small village close to Dax, in Landes. Once a swineherd, he lived to become one of the most influential ecclesiastics of his time, when he was appointed to the king's conseil de conscience. He was the founder of the congregation of the Mission and of the filles de la Charité, as well as the lay confraternities known as the parish charités.

perdent! Quel remède à cela?"⁴⁵

At his patron's behest Monsieur Vincent organized a mission in the local parish of Folleville, to exhort the inhabitants to make a general confession. The response was so overwhelming that he could not handle the confessions alone, and had to call upon the Jesuits of Amiens for assistance.⁴⁶ This was the first of his missions. In 1625, armed with a legacy of 16,000 livres from Madame de Condi, he founded a congregation of priests whose sole purpose was to convert the countryside. The method that they continued to use was the mission: an organized descent by a group of preachers upon a community, a period of intensive exhortation and instruction which ended only when everybody had received the sacrament of penance.

This method, "corresponding to the needs of the country people", bore great fruit. But its unforeseen product was the effect it had upon the missionaries themselves. "Je n'ai appris de personne l'état de ces pauvres," wrote one priest, an Oratorian who had assisted at one of the early missions,

... je l'ai reconnu moi-même Les autres confesseurs et moi trouvions des vieillards âgés de soixante ans et plus, qui nous disaient librement qu'ils ne s'étaient jamais confessés; et lorsqu'on leur parlait de Dieu, de la très-sainte Trinité, de la Nativité, Passion et Mort de Jésus-Christ, et autres mystères, c'était un langage qu'ils

⁴⁵L. Abelly, Vie de Saint-Vincent de Paul (Paris, 1843). vol. I, p.28.

⁴⁶Ibid., p.31.

n'entendaient point.⁴⁷

On discovering this alien world so close to its own doorstep dévot society experienced a profound sense of shock. Monsieur Vincent and his Mission priests consciously induced and exploited this uncomfortable awareness. Information from the countryside was relayed to the city, and disseminated by word of mouth and by pamphlet.⁴⁸ This information, combining with the tender dévot conscience, produced powerful results. In the minds of seventeenth-century theologians, ignorance of the faith meant damnation:

Sans la foi distincte des vérités fondamentales de notre sainte Eglise, il est impossible de plaire à Dieu et d'être sauvé, quelques cérémonies extérieures que l'on observe.⁴⁹

These neglected people were in danger both of material destitution and spiritual death. And the danger extended back onto those who were guilty of the neglect. "Si non pavisti, occidisti" -- if you have not fed them, you have killed them -- this hard doctrine was repeated frequently by Vincent de Paul.⁵⁰

⁴⁷Ibid., p.55.

⁴⁸In the 1650s reports from the Mission priests describing the horrors of the war in Picardie and Champagne were being published in pamphlet form in Paris. This pamphlet, entitled Relations, was part of a vast fund-raising drive conducted by the Dames de la Charité. See Pierre Coste, Le grand saint du grand siècle: Vincent de Paul (Paris: Desclée et Brouwer et Cie., 1931) vol.I, pp.624-32.

⁴⁹Boudon, La Science sacrée du catéchisme., quoted in E. Germain, Langages de la foi à travers l'histoire: mentalités et catéchèse (Paris: I.S.P.C., 1972), p.86.

⁵⁰L. Abelly, op.cit., vol. I, p.238.

Que répondrions à Dieu s'il arrivait que par notre faute quelqu'une de ces pauvres âmes vint à mourir et se perdre? ... Ne devions-nous pas craindre qu'il ne nous en demandât compte à l'heure de notre mort?⁵¹

It was a disturbing thought, but a powerful one. Beneath the good works of the seventeenth century lay, not a comfortable philanthropy, but a deep sense of anxiety and guilt.⁵²

However, this pious laity also looked forward also to the temporal reordering of society, and therefore found good works attractive for highly practical reasons. Even Monsieur Vincent was ready to include the socialization of the poor among the blessings of charity:

Les riches s'acquièrent un million de bénédictions en ce monde et la vie éternelle en l'autre ..., les pauvres sont instruits à la crainte de Dieu, enseignés à gagner leur vie et assistés en leur nécessités, et ... finalement leurs villes seront délivrés de plusieurs fainéants, tous vicieux, et améliorés par le commerce des ouvrages des pauvres.⁵³

⁵¹Ibid., p.237.

⁵²Monsieur Vincent knew very well how to speak to this guilt. In 1649 he addressed a meeting of the dames de la Charité of Paris. They were at this stage extremely discouraged by the financial burden of their undertakings, in particular that of the Enfants trouvés. A few voices spoke in favour of abandoning this project. Monsieur Vincent's answer ran, in part: "Si vous les abandonnez, que dira Dieu, qui vous a appelées à cela? ... Que diront ces petites créatures? Hélas! nos chères mères, vous nous abandonnez! ... Enfin, que direz-vous à l'heure de la mort, quand Dieu vous demandera pourquoi vous avez abandonné ces petites créatures?" Needless to say, the ladies capitulated. P.Coste, St. Vincent de Paul et les dames de la Charité (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1918), p.155.

⁵³Vincent de Paul, op.cit., vol. XIII, p.510.

The two motivations -- the spiritual and the practical -- existed side by side, so closely entwined that nobody, then or now, could distinguish one from the other. Under their impulsion a great variety of institutions and projects were launched: orphanages, hospitals, refuges, workshops, asylums, prison-visiting programmes, legal aid for galley convicts, training schools for servants, seminaries for teachers, furniture depots for the destitute, seed-grain for the peasants -- all maintained by voluntary effort until, with the establishment of the hospitaux généraux (workhouses) at mid-century, the direction began to pass to the government, and the spirit changed.

To sum up: the manpower behind the good works of the period 1620-1650 was primarily secular, voluntary, deeply religious in conviction, but also dedicated to the concept of an orderly and productive society.

It had one further characteristic: it was largely feminine. Of the different organizations developed to assist the poor, the majority were female. Since the work was all voluntary, this was something over which nobody had any control. Some found the fact worrying, others found it providential.

The beginnings, and growth, of the greatest female charitable organization of the times certainly did have a fortuitous character. In 1617 Vincent de Paul, having escaped temporarily from Madame de Gondî's devoted grasp, was working as a curé in Châtillon-les-Dombes, in the archdiocese of Lyon. One Sunday, just before Mass, he learned of a family that was sick, some

distance from the village. He announced the news from the pulpit, then, after Mass, prepared to go out to visit the family, taking with him "un honnête homme, bourgeois de la ville."

Nous rencontrâmes sur le chemin des femmes qui nous devançaient et, un peu plus avant, d'autres qui revenaient. Et comme c'était en été et durant les grands chaleurs, ces bonnes femmes s'asseyaient le long des chemins pour se reposer et se rafraichir ... Il y en avait tant que vous auriez dit des processions.⁵⁴

The difficulty was that they had overwhelmed the sick family with their generosity. Monsieur Vincent realized that much of the food they had brought would spoil, and then the family would be in need once more. He decided to co-ordinate the ladies' good will:

Dieu me donna cette pensée: 'ne pourrait-on point réunir ces bonnes dames et les exhorter à se donner à Dieu pour servir les pauvres malades?' En suite de cela, je leur montrai que l'on pourrait secourir ces grandes nécessités avec grande facilité. Aussitôt elles s'y résolurent.⁵⁵

This was the first parish charité. It was so successful that Vincent de Paul undertook to establish a charité wherever he preached a mission, and later instructed his Mission priests to do the same. Charités were legally erected as confraternities, with a superior and a treasurer elected by the members. Their funds, which were kept in a coffer with two keys, were raised by donations, by organized begging by the members, and also

⁵⁴Vincent de Paul, op.cit. vol.XIV, p.125.

⁵⁵Ibid. Vol. IX, p.209.

from any properties that the confraternity might acquire. Many of the village charités owned sheep and cattle.

The most successful charités were those in which women of different social levels were included, because in this case the wealthier women tended to provide the money while the women of modest means did the work.⁵⁶ But the several règlements which have survived show that, initially, all members were expected to take their turn preparing the food and visiting the sick.⁵⁷ The diet was to include meat, eggs or fish twice a day, as well as wine and bread and -- for the very sick -- broth and more eggs. The sick poor were expected to confess and communicate, and to accept the spiritual exhortations of their benefactors. Those who died while under the care of the charité were to be buried, if necessary, at the charité's expense, and the members were to try to attend their funeral, "tenant en cela place de mères qui accompagnent leurs enfants au tombeau."

As bigger towns became involved the organization became more elaborate. In Mâcon in 1621, a formal meeting was held at the city hall, attended by municipal and royal officials. The confraternity, once established, was given the responsibility of enumerating the poor and of suggesting how to raise the money

⁵⁶Mlle. Le Gras, Lettres de Louise de Marillac, (privately published, 1890), vol. I, p.12.

⁵⁷This and the following rules are taken from the Règlement de la Charité de Châtillon-les-Dombes (1617), in Vincent de Paul, op.cit., vol. XIII, pp.423-38.

to assist them.⁶⁰ The city fathers' scepticism dissolved into delight as the project began to be effective:

On ne se vit plus obsédé, soit à l'église,
soit dans les rues, par ces mendiants valides,
qui ne sont occupés le jour entier qu'à
chercher leur vie, sans respect pour les
églises, sans regard pour ceux qui en méritent,
sans ménagement pour ceux qui ne veulent pas
céder à leurs importunités.⁶¹

Vincent de Paul did not conceive of this work as exclusively feminine. As early as 1620 he set up a male charité; in 1621, he attempted to make men and women work together. While the women were to continue their work with the sick, the men were to oversee those who were healthy but unable to take care of themselves.⁶² The women's work was more in the charitable tradition, while the men's work contained a corrective element. Monsieur Vincent warned the men to respect the women's work: "Notre Seigneur ne tire pas moins de gloire du ministère des femmes que celui des hommes."⁶³ However, the men's charités did not thrive and the mixed charités did not work.⁶⁴ He later wrote:

Les hommes et les femmes ensemble ne s'accordent
point en matière d'administration; ceux-là se la
veulent arroger entièrement et celles-ci ne le

⁶⁰The size of the Mâcon operation was impressive. Fourteen years later, the charité was still distributing 1200 lbs of bread and 30-35 fr. per week, as well as paying for medicines, a doctor, and two nurses to watch over the sick (Ibid., p.496).

⁶¹p. Desmoulins, oratorian, quoted in ibid., p.495.

⁶²Règlement de la charité mixte de Joigny, in ibid., p.447.

⁶³Ibid., p.455.

⁶⁴p. Coste, op.cit. vol. I, p.311.

peuvent supporter On chargea les hommes du soin des pauvres valides et les femmes des invalides, mais, parce qu'il y avait communauté de bourse, on fut contraint d'ôter les hommes. Et je puis porter ce témoignage en faveur des femmes qu'il y a rien à redire en leur administration, tant elles ont de soin et de fidélité.⁶⁵

Male membership gradually dwindled and finally collapsed, while female membership continued to grow. The enthusiasm of women for the new confraternities brought them out in numbers that were sometimes alarming. From Beauvais, the royal lieutenant wrote:

que depuis quinze jours environ, serait arrivé en cette ville un certain prêtre nommé Vincent, lequel ... fait assembler un grand nombre de femmes, auxquelles il aurait persuadé de se mettre de la confrérie, à la quelle il donne le nom spéciaux (sic) de Charité et laquelle il désire ériger pour subvenir et fournir de vivres et autres nécessités aux pauvres malades ... ce qui aurait été, depuis, exécuté par le dit Vincent et icelle confrérie érigée, en laquelle il aurait reçu 300 femmes ou environ, lesquelles, pour faire leurs exercices et fonctions ci-dessus, s'assemblent souvent; ce qui ne doit être toléré.⁶⁶

But official sensibilities aside, the success of the charités was guaranteed, because the need they served was so pressing.

The first confraternity in the archdiocese of Paris was erected in 1629.⁶⁷ Vincent de Paul was initially unenthusiastic about the city charités. The institution had been designed specifically for country conditions, for a certain integration

⁶⁵Vincent de Paul, op.cit., vol.IV, p.11.

⁶⁶p.Coste, op.cit., vol. I, p.248.

⁶⁷By 1660, the year of Monsieur Vincent's death, they were active in fifteen city parishes, and throughout the banlieue.

of society in which members from different walks of life would still be able to work together at what were, after all, menial tasks. How could the upper-class women of Paris be expected to do the same? His fears proved justified: the highborn ladies were unable to perform the duties that the rule required.⁶⁸

While they were ready to provide and prepare the food, they preferred to send their servants to carry it to the sick. In some cases these servants abused or neglected their charges. The sick poor were "badly served", remarked Monsieur Vincent.⁶⁹

4) The Filles de la Charité.

At about this time (1629) Vincent de Paul, while on mission in Villepreux, met a young woman, Marguerite Naseau.⁷⁰ She had heard of the charités in Paris, and offered herself as a servant to do the work that the ladies could not stomach. He invited her to come, which she did, to serve with great fidelity until her death of the plague in 1633. Marguerite brought in several other young women, who were given a two days' retreat and then placed in the parish charités. This caused difficulties, however: village girls, no matter how well-intentioned, were ill-prepared for city life. It was decided that they should

⁶⁸"Quelques dames eurent ce même désir d'assister les pauvres de leur paroisse; mais quand on en vint à l'exécution, elles furent bien empêchées de leur rendre les services bas et pénibles." Vincent de Paul, op.cit., vol. IX, p.209.

⁶⁹Ibid., vol. IX, p.244.

⁷⁰"Une pauvre vachère sans instruction". Ibid., vol. IX, p.77.

undergo a period of training in the house of one of the ladies of the charité of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, Mlle. Le Gras.⁷¹

Thus began the unplanned evolution of the company of Filles de la Charité.⁷² From 1633, when the first few young women entered Mlle Le Gras' house, until 1658 when the company, now numbering 800, received its letters of registration from Parlement, the picture is the same: the founders were always forced ahead by the pace of events, struggling to control and solidify their immensely successful institute. In this continuous process of foundation, it was Mlle Le Gras who perceived the problems, envisaged the solutions, and begged for decisions. Monsieur Vincent, preoccupied with his other concerns, and also instinctively slow to move, preferred to wait to be sure "que le bon Dieu

⁷¹Louise de Marillac (1591-1660), niece of the chancellor and leader of the dévot party Michel de Marillac; married in 1613 to Antoine Le Gras, secrétaire des commandements to Queen Marie de Medicis. While her husband was occupied at court she adopted the lifestyle of a dévote, and in particular dedicated herself to visiting the sick. Her husband's death in 1625 left her free to pursue the life she had long desired. She found the perfect focus for her energy when Vincent de Paul began employing her to visit the out-of-town charités, to reorganize them and to reanimate them if necessary. She continued in this work for some years, then set up the charité in Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet; and finally accepted the work of forming the community of servantes. From her letters and her recorded conversations with Vincent de Paul it is clear that she took a large part in the formation and organization of the company of Filles de la Charité.

⁷²Even their title was an accident. Originally christened the servantes des pauvres malades, in keeping with their function, they became known to the public as the filles de la charité -- the women who worked for the charité. Vincent de Paul later gave the commonplace name its transcendent meaning.

le veut".⁷³ Another force played a part in the creation of the company: the rich and powerful benefactors, from Anne of Austria down, who pressed the filles into their own preferred projects, and thus deeply modified the nature of their work.⁷⁴

Initially the community was completely secular in character. The women wore the gray dress and white toquois, or turban, that was standard among peasant women of the Paris basin. They rose at a comfortable hour for working women -- 5:30 -- and observed no rule of silence.⁷⁵ They were allowed to go home on family visits. They took no vows and observed no exceptional religious practices. They were, in Monsieur Vincent's words, "personnes de paroisses sous la conduite de MM. les cures où elles sont établies."⁷⁶

Soon, however, the characteristics of a religious community began to appear. In 1634 the women (now twelve in number) received their first "petit règlement".⁷⁷ Their rising time was now 4 o'clock. Their daily devotions were defined, the great silence (from evening prayers until morning prayers) was imposed. The obligation of obedience became absolute. In the Mother House,

⁷³L. Abelly, op.cit., vol.II, p.27.

⁷⁴See P. Coste, Le grand saint vol.I, p.443. "C'était toujours pour répondre aux désirs d'une Dame de la Charité ou d'un haut personnage que saint Vincent envoyait ses filles en quelque localité."

⁷⁵Ibid., p.394.

⁷⁶L. Abelly, op.cit. vol. II, p.38.

⁷⁷Vincent de Paul, op.cit. vol. IX, pp.1-13.

Mlle Le Gras was to be superior. In other communities, even those of only two sisters, a superior was to be appointed. "Il est nécessaire," they were told, "que, parmi vous autres, il y ait toujours une qui tienne lieu de supérieure." Each sister was to attend a retreat annually.⁷⁸ In time, other conventual customs were added. Weekly conferences were to be given, either by Monsieur Vincent or by one of his priests. The rule was to be learned and relearned during the period of "testing"; thereafter it was to be read aloud weekly in community, a regular practice in convents. "Qu'elles aient la volonté d'observer exactement toutes les règles et particulièrement l'obéissance sans réplique," wrote Mlle Le Gras.⁷⁹ From both her writings and Vincent de Paul's, it is plain that they privately considered the life of the filles to be a religious life, as perfect as any found in a monastery. "Votre vocation," Monsieur Vincent told them in 1643, "est des plus grandes que je sache en l'Eglise."⁸⁰ This theme was repeated, with increasing emphasis, throughout the rest of his life. In 1659 he was prepared to say: "Vous n'êtes pas religieuses de nom, mais vous le devez être en effet, et vous êtes plus obligées à vous perfectionner qu'elles."⁸¹

⁷⁸Ibid., p.221.

⁷⁹Mlle. Le Gras, Lettres de Louise de Marillac (Privately published, 1890), p.899.

⁸⁰Conference of 7/xii/1643. Vincent de Paul, op.cit. vol. IX, p.141.

⁸¹Ibid. vol. X, p.658.

From 1640 onwards, the Filles de la Charité took vows. On the subject of these vows Vincent de Paul was highly circumspect, for fear of altering the legal status of the sisters. Living in community was one thing; living in community with vows was another: it suggested religious life, and religious life, where women were concerned, meant clausura. "Qui dit religieuse dit une cloîtrée et les Filles de la Charité doivent aller partout."⁸² His solution was to make the vows private, without witnesses. "Ils ne sont point autres qu'un dévot ou une dévote peut faire dans le monde," wrote Mlle Le Gras, "et encore ne sont ils pas tels, puisque d'ordinaire ceux du monde les font étant entendus de leur Confesseur."⁸³ By avoiding public vows Vincent de Paul, an expert canonist himself, turned the difficulty of canon law and put his filles beyond the reach of the cloisterers.⁸⁴

The company still lacked formal status. Mlle Le Gras, who was more concerned with organizational problems than was her director, kept pressing him on this issue; he kept delaying "until he could see more clearly". In 1645, he found the formula he wanted: the company could be erected as a simple confraternity, like the other charités which the filles had been recruited to serve. This would put its secular character beyond question.

⁸²Ibid. p.143.

⁸³Mlle Le Gras - Abbé de Vaux, 29/vi/56. Op.cit., p.782.

⁸⁴R. Lemoine, Le Monde des religieux (op.cit.), p.309.

To the filles, who wanted a more exalted title,⁸⁵ he later explained:

On a jugé à propos que le nom de société ou confrérie vous demeurat ... de peur que, si le nom de Congrégation vous était donné, il s'en trouvât qui voulussent à l'avenir changer la maison en cloître et se faire religieuse, comme ont fait les filles de Sainte-Marie.⁸⁶

This was the heart of the problem. Vincent de Paul, who had been a friend of François de Sales and Mère de Chantal, and who had been canonical superior of the Visitation on the rue Saint-Antoine since 1622, understood well the trap of ecclesiastical obedience in which the Filles de Sainte-Marie had been caught.⁸⁷ Once his own filles began leaving Paris for other dioceses they, too, could find themselves exchanging their life of service for confinement in a cloister. He gave them instructions on how to speak to strange bishops:

S'il vous demande qui vous êtes, si vous êtes religieuses, vous lui direz que non, par la grâce de Dieu, que ce n'est pas que vous n'estimiez beaucoup les religieuses mais que, si vous l'étiez, il faudrait que vous fussiez enfermées et que, par conséquent, il faudrait dire 'Adieu le service des pauvres.' Dites-lui que vous êtes de pauvres Filles de la Charité, que vous êtes données à Dieu pour le service des pauvres, et qu'il est permis de vous retirer et aussi que l'on vous peut renvoyer.⁸⁸

⁸⁵Mlle Le Gras, op.cit., p.726.

⁸⁶Conference to the sisters, 8/viii/1655. Vincent de Paul, op.cit., vol. X, p.102.

⁸⁷For a discussion of the case of the Visitation, see chap. I.

⁸⁸Advice to the sisters leaving for Nantes, 22/x/1650. Ibid., vol. IX, pp.533-34.

In this last sentence lay the bargaining strength of the Company. From early days the filles had proved their usefulness. The letters of Mlle Le Gras show that the demand for their services far exceeded the supply of sisters. "Vous n'êtes là que par emprunt," she told them.⁸⁹ By retaining their freedom to leave a situation that had become unsuitable, they were able to avoid interference in their way of life.

The final difficulty for the company was the matter of jurisdiction. Since the time of Borromeo, all female religious communities had been subject to the bishop in whose diocese they were established. As the previous chapter has shown, this rule was a deterrent to any project of a central direction, or of unity between houses. "Plus de maisons nous aurons," Fourier had written, "et en plus d'évêchés, plus nous aurons de difficulté à établir une forme assurée de gouvernement et de parfaite union de toutes vos maisons."⁹⁰ His solution had been to appoint a visitor to oversee the observance of the rule throughout the congregation, while still deferring to the local bishops' authority. His plan had had only small success; the majority of houses of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame had passed into the jurisdiction of the ordinaries. The other new congregations had remained altogether under diocesan control, and the result, once the first generation of nuns disappeared, had been

⁸⁹Mlle Le Gras, op.cit., p.396.

⁹⁰L. Carrez, Histoire du premier monastère de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame établi à Châlons-sur-Marne, p.255

fragmentation.

At the time of its erection as a confraternity in 1645, the new company of servantes des pauvres malades had been placed by the archbishop under the customary obedience: "la confrérie sera et demeurera à perpétuité sous l'autorité et la dépendance de mondit seigneur l'archevêque et de ses successeurs."⁹¹ It followed from this that, if the company moved into other dioceses, the communities involved would be subject to other ordinaries. Furthermore, its close ties with the Congregation of the Mission were to last only for Monsieur Vincent's lifetime. It appears that the founder himself was ready to accept this arrangement; but Mlle Le Gras was made of sterner stuff. It is believed that it was at her request that the Queen Mother petitioned the Pope, asking that the Confraternity be placed under the perpetual direction of the superior general of the Mission:

Or, d'autant que ce bon oeuvre s'est répandu en plusieurs évêchés de ce royaume ... et que les autres prélats ne voudront le recevoir sous cette condition, et que ce bon oeuvre a été commencé et cultivé depuis près de quatorze ans par le général de ladite congrégation de la Mission ... la reine fait supplier Sa Sainteté de nommer pour directeurs perpétuels de ladite confrérie ou société ... ledit supérieur général de ladite congrégation de la Mission et ses successeurs en la même charge."⁹²

When Rome agreed to this in 1655, this simple confraternity obtained a centralization that no feminine religious congregation

⁹¹Vincent de Paul, op.cit., vol. XIII, p.558.

⁹²Ibid., p.567.

had hitherto achieved in France: unity of direction and a partial exemption from local episcopal control.⁹³

The path that the Filles de la Charité took was difficult and almost without precedent.⁹⁴ Interiorly their lives resembled those of religious in all but the strictly monastic aspects of clausura and divine office. Vincent de Paul, called upon to explain how they differed from religious, could only say that "la plupart des religieuses n'ont pour fin que leur propre perfection, au lieu que ces filles sont appliquées ... au soulagement du prochain."⁹⁵ Exteriorly, however, they were "filles qui vont et viennent comme des séculières." All external signs that might identify them as religious were carefully avoided. Thus they were forbidden to wear veils,⁹⁶ or to ring bells in their houses, or erect grilles in their parlours.⁹⁷ While their

⁹³For a canonist's perspective on the institution of this company, see R. Lemoine, Le monde des religieux pp.309-13.

⁹⁴Although filles séculières were active in other countries, they were as yet barely known in France. In 1650, when Mlle Le Gras approached the Procureur General on the Company's business, he asked her "si nous prétendions être régulières ou séculières; je lui fis entendre que nous prétendions que le dernier; il me fit cela être sans exemple" (Mlle.Le Gras, op.cit., p.473). She herself could cite only one other congregation, the Filles de la Croix, who had begun to take simple vows a year before her filles.

⁹⁵L. Abelly, op.cit., vol.II, pp.38-39. This definition scarcely did justice to the cloistered Ursulines, or to the Augustines of the Hôtel-Dieu.

⁹⁶Mlle Le Gras, op.cit., p.240.

⁹⁷"Il est à craindre ..., et particulièrement s'il était grillé, que, par succession de temps, ceci ne tournât en une religion." (Vincent de Paul, op.cit. vol. XIII, p.602).

inner language was that of religious (the conferences used words like "company", "rule", and "habit") their outer language had to be secular, and the words invariably used were "confrérie", "règlement", and "dress". Like François de Sales before him, but for slightly different reasons,⁹⁸ Monsieur Vincent impressed upon his filles the principle of interiority:

Votre monastère est la maison des malades ...
votre cellule est votre chambre de louage
Pour cloître, les rues de la ville, où vous
devez aller pour le service de vos malades.
Pour clôture, l'obéissance, parce que
l'obéissance doit être votre clôture, n'outre-
passant point ce qui vous est ordonné, vous
tenant enfermées là dedans. Pour grille, la
crainte de Dieu. Pour voile, la sainte
modestie.⁹⁹

His strategy was defensive. In the minds of their contemporaries, the slightest suggestion that religious women were free to roam the streets was the subject of scandal. Hence the care to maintain a secular appearance; hence the repeated admonitions to go out only when permitted, and to behave modestly while outdoors.¹⁰⁰ In spite of all this, scandals did occur,

⁹⁸Vincent de Paul's motives were strategic. He was determined to give the company a religious character without allowing any practice which might be used as a pretext to turn it into a "religion". The Bishop of Geneva, when he set up the Visitation, had no suspicion that it would become a "religion".

⁹⁹Ibid. vol.X, p.662.

¹⁰⁰Ibid. vol. XIII, p.555.

1 and the sisters were sometimes harassed in the streets;¹⁰¹ but in general, they were well received by the public.

Just as the Company's community life evolved, so did its work. Originally, the women were exactly what their title suggested, "servantes des pauvres malades". They made two rounds each day with the medicines prescribed by the doctors,¹⁰² and a third round -- at noon -- with the pot of food, or marmite, that had been prepared by the ladies of the local charity.¹⁰³ Soon their duties were extended to include bandaging, bleeding and the making of medicines.¹⁰⁴ Along with this physical care, they were to give simple spiritual counselling: an exhortation to receive the sacraments and to accept the malady in a spirit of faith.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹See, for instance, the request for a water supply for the Mother House: "Supplient humblement les Filles de la Charité ... disant ... que leur pauvreté leur a ôté le moyen d'acheter de l'eau et les oblige à l'aller quérir elles-mêmes à ladite fontaine (la fontaine publique) où elles entendent les discours sales et vilains qui se tiennent entre les porteurs d'eau, lesquels leur disent souvent des injures et les maltraitent." A.N. Q1 1200, quoted in P.Coste, op.cit. vol. I, p.452.

¹⁰²Vincent de Paul, op.cit. vol.IX, p.116.

¹⁰³Ibid., p.241..

¹⁰⁴"Je vous prie, ma soeur," Mlle Le Gras wrote to one of the sisters in the villages, "d'apprendre à saigner à notre soeur ... Enseignez bien les dangers des artères, nerfs et autres, et souvenez-vous que s'il arrivait que vous crussiez avoir ouvert un artère, d'en tirer une grande quantité de sang et mettre un denier dans la compresse pour faire la ligature." (op.cit., p.589)

¹⁰⁵Conference of 16/iii/1642. Vincent de Paul, op.cit., vol.IX, pp. 60-66.

Although their principal duty was to visit the sick poor, the filles, from earliest times, also taught school to little girls.¹⁰⁶ There were two reasons for this. The parish charités had always concerned themselves with catechizing,¹⁰⁷ and, by extension, with school classes. As one historian puts it, "they regarded schooling in the same category as soup for the sick, or clothes for babies, or hospital visiting."¹⁰⁸ The filles inherited this work, along with the other undertakings of the charités. The ultimate purpose, whatever the good work, was salvific. "Prenez plaisir," Mlle Le Gras wrote, "d'instruire, le mieux que vous pouvez, ces petites créatures rachetées du sang du Fils de Dieu, afin qu'elles le louent et glorifient éternellement."¹⁰⁹ In Monsieur Vincent's mind the little girls themselves were not the ultimate target; instruction given to them would be passed on to their parents:

¹⁰⁶P. Coste, op.cit. vol.I, p.464. The sisters did not teach boys because this was forbidden, both by the Church and by the Crown. In a meeting of the Company's council, 30/X/1647, the question of allowing little boys into their schools was discussed. In favour were the following arguments: that it was beneficial for the little boys; there was often a lack of schoolmasters; the parents desired it; the sisters were already teaching little boys at the Enfants Trouvés. Mlle Le Gras added that in many cases the girls could not come to school unless they brought their little brothers. Monsieur Vincent, however, decided against the practice, largely as a matter of obedience to the law (Vincent de Paul, op.cit. vol.XIII, pp.646-49).

¹⁰⁷See, for instance, the règlement for the charité of Folleville, 1620. Ibid. vol. XIII, p.484.

¹⁰⁸M. Fosseyeux, Les écoles de charité à Paris sous l'ancien régime (Paris, 1912), p.27. My translation.

¹⁰⁹Mlle Le Gras, op.cit., p.614.

Vous, mes chères soeurs, qui faites profession d'instruire les petites filles, vous instruisez par ce moyen leurs pères et mères, comme cela se voit dans les missions, parce que les enfants rapportent ce qu'ils ont appris; ils l'enseignent à ceux qui le leur devraient avoir enseigné.¹¹⁰

There was a second, more practical, reason for teaching school. The intended milieu for the filles was the small bourg or village, where a charité of approximately twenty women supervised the care of the sick poor. For an operation of this size, a single servant was adequate. But the lifestyle of the filles depended on a community of at least two. Therefore the second sister needed another occupation, and the instruction of children provided it. In her spare time, she could assist in visiting the sick,¹¹¹ or do handwork (usually spinning) to help support the house.¹¹²

There thus developed a tendency towards specialization. Those women who could read and write became schoolmistresses, while others, whose work was in nursing or visiting, remained illiterate. Gradually, schoolteaching absorbed more of the sisters, especially after their first charity schools were opened in Paris in 1641.¹¹³ However, although they occasionally sought

¹¹⁰Vincent de Paul, op.cit. vol. X, p.567.

¹¹¹Mlle Le Gras, op.cit., p.853.

¹¹²Vincent de Paul, op.cit. vol. IX, p.51. Any surplus cash was sent home to the Mother House at the end of the year.

¹¹³For Mlle Le Gras' petition to the cantor of Notre-Dame, for permission to open petites écoles, see Mlle Le Gras, op.cit., p.63.

advice on teaching methods from the Ursulines or from the Filles de la Croix, the sisters did not at this time become specialists in teaching. Mlle Le Gras retained her reserve in the question of the schooling of poor children. "La crainte et amour de Dieu": these were the subjects to be taught, not the facility "en beaucoup parler".¹¹⁴

Another more fundamental change which began to develop in the 1640s was one that the founders had not foreseen and did not entirely welcome. This was the diversion of the sisters into institutions. The hospital at Angers was the first: badly administered and inadequately staffed, it requested Filles de la Charité to take over the nursing. Monsieur Vincent's friend, Madame Goussault, pleaded with him from her deathbed to grant the request. He acquiesced reluctantly, and in 1640 nine sisters were officially installed as hospital nurses.¹¹⁵ From this time on, more and more of the Company's personnel were placed in the service of institutions. In Paris, by the year of both founders' death, 1660, the sisters were in charge of three major institutions (the Enfants Trouvés, the Nom-de-Jésus, a workhouse

¹¹⁴Ibid., p.854. An interesting difference of opinion appears in the founders' correspondence. Regarding the question of teaching catechism, Mlle Le Gras wrote in 1648, "Il serait très dangereux pour notre Compagnie que nous voulussions entreprendre de parler doctement, non seulement pour notre intérêt particulier qui est si enclin à la vanité, mais encore pour la crainte de dire des erreurs." But Vincent de Paul's reaction, when he heard about this, was that if the sisters were to teach catechism, they should know it as well as the curés knew it. (Ibid., pp.357-58).

¹¹⁵P.Coste, op.cit. vol.I, pp. 465-71.

for the aged poor, and the Petites Maisons, a lunatic asylum), and heavily involved in two more, the Hôtel-Dieu and the prison for galley-convicts. As well, they had been committed to more than a score of institutions in the provinces -- hospitals both civil and military, orphanages and asylums.

Their success in these institutions was an irresistible argument for continuing the work. "Vous ne sauriez croire combien Dieu bénit partout ces bonnes filles et en combien de lieux elles sont désirées," Monsieur Vincent told his priests:

... un évêque en demande pour trois hôpitaux,
un autre pour deux; un troisième en demande
aussi, dont on me parla encore il n'y a que
trois jours, et on me pressa de lui en
envoyer.¹¹⁶

Nevertheless, the work of the hospitals was a deviation from the company's original purpose. "Vous voilà tantôt donc dans l'emploi de véritables hospitalières," wrote Mlle Le Gras to some of the sisters, "pourvu que cela n'interrompe point l'exercice de la Compagnie de la Charité."¹¹⁷ As she and Vincent de Paul saw it, home care had been developed expressly to save poor families from the pain and separation caused by hospitalization:

Si dans une pauvre famille quelqu'un tombait
malade, il fallait separer le mari de sa
femme, la femme de ses enfants, le père de
sa famille. Jusqu'à présent, mon Dieu, vous
n'aviez point mis ordre à les secourir, et il
semblait que votre Providence adorable, qui

¹¹⁶L. Abelly, op.cit. vol.II, p.36. These remarks must have been made late in Monsieur Vincent's life, since he also referred to the hospital in Calais, where the sisters began to work only in 1658. (P. Coste, op.cit. vol.II, p.662).

¹¹⁷Mlle Le Gras, op.cit., p.808.

I
ne manque à personne, n'eût point de regard
pour elles.¹¹⁸

The growing movement to build and expand hospitals contradicted the work of the parish charités, and insofar as it drew from the same pockets, it threatened to weaken them.

Que deviendra l'exercice des dames de la Charité [wrote Mlle Le Gras] si on contraint leurs malades de se ranger à l'hôpital? Vous verrez que les pauvres honteux seront délaissés du secours que leur apporte la nourriture apprêtée et les remèdes, et le peu d'argent que l'on leur donne, ne sera point employé à leurs nécessités.¹¹⁹

However, the company could do little to resist the new trend. The servantes des pauvres malades were, from their inception, bound to the ladies of the charités and to the social levels from which these ladies came. Vincent de Paul reminded them continually of their dependence on these ladies:

Ce sont elles qui vous donnent le moyen de rendre à Dieu le service que vous rendez aux malades. Que pourriez-vous sans elles, ô mes filles?¹²⁰

Their close association with the ladies, and especially with the most aristocratic confraternity of all, the Dames de la Charité de l'Hôtel-Dieu, was the source of the company's strength, of its ability to expand almost without regard to expense. But it also meant that the paths along which the company was to move were largely chosen by the ladies, often with regard

¹¹⁸Vincent de Paul, op.cit. vol. IX, p.246.

¹¹⁹Mlle Le Gras, op.cit., p.805.

¹²⁰Vincent de Paul, op.cit. vol. IX, p.118.

to their own territorial concerns. Thus the move to Angers was inspired by Mme Goussault, that to Richelieu by the Duchess d'Aiguillon, that to Vaux by Mme Fouquet, and so on.¹²¹ The patronage of two queens, Marie-Louise Gonzague and Anne of Austria, took the sisters to Poland and to a string of military hospitals along the frontiers of France. The ladies had power to dictate not only the sisters' location, but the nature of their work. "Elles sont comme le chef d'un corps, et vous n'en êtes que les pieds," Monsieur Vincent told the sisters, "... il vous faut agir ainsi à l'égard des dames; sinon, elles s'en lasseraient."¹²²

Thus the free-moving and flexible parish charités were largely overtaken by the prevailing trend towards institutionalization. In one outstanding case, however, Vincent de Paul refused to give way. This was in the matter of the Hôpital-Général of Paris, the great social experiment of the 1650s.

Renfermement, by which is meant "the involuntary incarceration of groups considered marginal or potentially dangerous",¹²³ had been in the public mind for some time. A move in 1611 to lock up the beggars of Paris had had the effect of clearing

¹²¹P. Coste, op.cit. vol.I, Chap. XIX, 461-528 passim.

¹²²Conference of March, 1647. Vincent de Paul, op.cit., pp.306-07.

¹²³E. Chill, "Religion and Mendicity in Seventeenth-Century France", International Review of Social History VII (1962), part 3, p.403.

I the streets, as those beggars mostly preferred to leave town. As the official effort flagged, however, they came flooding back in. A permanent solution would require a more co-ordinated effort, like that which established the Hôpital-Général in Lyon in 1622.

The principal promoter of the project of a Hôpital-Général for Paris was the Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement. As early as 1631 the subject was under discussion at its meetings.¹²⁴ But it was the years after the Fronde -- "the high point of popular suffering" -- which saw 40,000 mendicants in the streets of Paris,¹²⁵ that brought the matter to a head. In 1656 mendicity was banned by royal edict. The beggars of Paris were ordered enclosed in one or other of a group of institutions.¹²⁶ "Foreign" beggars were expelled. In 1657 the grand renfermement began, assisted by bodies of chasse-coquins especially enlisted for the purpose, and by a parliamentary decree forbidding the private distribution of alms. In the first year alone 6000 poor were incarcerated.¹²⁷

Renfermement had its apologists. It saved the poor from idleness, considered in the seventeenth century to be the mother of all vices; and it taught them a trade. It had a pedagogical

¹²⁴R.Allier, op.cit., p.63.

¹²⁵E.Chill, op.cit., p.413.

¹²⁶La Pitié, la Salpêtrière, Bicêtre, le Refuge, Scipion, la Savonnerie.

¹²⁷E. Chill, op.cit., p.415.

value:

Le plus grand fruit de renfermement des pauvres [wrote the Jansenist Arnauld] est la bonne éducation des enfants, le plus grand secret pour cela est de les veiller sans cesse et de les retrancher par cette vue continuelle que l'on a sur eux de mal faire. 128

Above all, it fitted in with the mercantilist spirit which now, at mid-century, was coming into vogue. One of the greatest champions of renfermement was Minister Colbert, for reasons different from those of Arnauld, as his instructions to the municipality of Auxerre show:

D'autant que l'abondance procède toujours de travail, et la misère de l'oisiveté, votre principale application doit estre de trouver les moyens d'enfermer les pauvres et de leur donner de l'occupation pour gagner leur vie, sur quoy vous ne scauriez trop tost prendre de bons résolutions. 129

It did not, however, impress Vincent de Paul. He was a member of the Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement. Like other men of his time, as the règlements of the charités show, he saw no harm in mixing assistance with discipline. He himself had established a workhouse -- the Nom-de-Jésus -- which combined a hard working day with lengthy religious devotions. However, he objected in principle to coercion. Nom-de-Jésus had only voluntary inmates, and its success is attested by the fact that

128A. Arnauld - P. de Cort, 6/iv/57. Quoted in R. Taveneaux, Le Catholicisme dans la France Classique, vol. I, p.220.

129 Quoted in J.-P. Gutton, op.cit., p.134.

it had a waiting list.¹³⁰ Why not start the Hôpital-Général, also, on a voluntary basis?

Selon son sentiment il estimait qu'il ne fallait faire d'abord qu'un essai, et prendre cent ou deux cents pauvres, et encore seulement ceux qui viendraient de leur bon gré, sans en contraindre aucun; que ceux-là étant bien traités et bien contents, donneraient l'attrait aux autres; et ainsi l'on augmenterait le nombre à proportion que la Providence enverrait des fonds ... et qu'au contraire la précipitation et la crainte dont on userait, pourraient être un empêchement au dessein de Dieu ... ¹³¹

When his point of view did not prevail, and the Hôpital-Général became an institution of confinement,¹³² Vincent de Paul distanced himself from the project. On learning that the government had assigned the spiritual direction of the institution to his mission priests, he declined the offer, "pour ne pas assez connaître si le bon Dieu le veut."¹³³ Asked to send sisters to the women's institution at the Salpêtrière, he sent two, but only for a short time.¹³⁴

¹³⁰p.Coste, op.cit. vol.II, p.495.

¹³¹L. Abelly, op.cit. vol.I, p.194.

¹³²The règlement of the institution expresses its punitive intent. "On les fera travailler le plus longtemps et aux ouvrages les plus rudes que leurs forces et les lieux où ils seront le pourront permettre." (J.-P. Gutton, op.cit., p.135). The educative dimension, which was stressed in the early days, came to be neglected in the eighteenth century.

¹³³Quoted in ibid., p.144.

¹³⁴p.Coste vol.II, p.506.

5) Result: A new role for women.

Two approaches to the question of public assistance existed side by side in seventeenth-century France. The one, which found its clearest expression in the policies of the Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement and in the building of the hospitaux-généraux, treated poverty as a punishment and a danger. "Social disorder was man's concupiscence writ large."¹³⁵ The other, represented by Vincent de Paul and the parish charités, was more compassionate. "Les pauvres sont nos maîtres," Vincent de Paul told his filles, "Ce sont nos rois; il leur faut obéir, et ce n'est pas une exagération de les appeler ainsi, parce que Notre Seigneur est dans les pauvres."¹³⁶

It is not too simplistic to say that the first, and more modern, approach pertained to men, and the second, more traditionalist, approach, to women. "Si l'oeuvre est regardé comme politique," wrote Mlle Le Gras, "il semble que les hommes la doivent entreprendre, si elle est regardée comme oeuvre de charité, les femmes la peuvent entreprendre ..."¹³⁷ The exercise of charity sprang naturally from women's position in the family

¹³⁵E. Chill, op.cit., p.424.

¹³⁶Vincent de Paul, op.cit. vol.XIII, p.430.

¹³⁷Pensées de Louise de Marillac, p.186, quoted in P. Coste, op.cit. vol.II, p,497. The comment was made with regard to the question of who should manage the Hôpital-Général, the dames de la Charité or a group of eminent men drawn largely from the Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement. As has been seen, the honour went to the latter.

and in society.¹³⁸ The nature of the work of the dames de la charité, and, by extension, of the Filles de la Charité, was traditional -- after all, it was the women of Chatillon-les-Dombès, not the men, whom Vincent de Paul had met on the road after he had made his appeal for help. This kind¹ of action was perfectly familiar and unthreatening to the seventeenth-century world.

But the scale of the effort changed, and with it, the effect that the women had on their social environment. By 1660 charity was becoming an important part of the Church's business. As Louis XIV's reign progressed and the secular powers became more concerned with the management of the country, this highly practical aspect of the Church's work fell more and more under government control. In so far as women made themselves indispensable to this work, they established a new role for themselves, not only in the Church, but in lay society.¹³⁹ However, the intervention of the government in the management of the poor paralleled, if it did not actually contribute to, the exhaustion of the spiritual movement that had fed the charités.¹⁴⁰ At the moment

¹³⁸G. Fagniez, op.cit., p.362 : "La charité féminine achève la figure que la situation de la femme dans la famille, dans la société, a déjà dessinée."

¹³⁹The hôtels-dieu became the cornerstone of most poor-relief in the country, at the same time as they passed under royal control. "Cette évolution," writes Gutton, "est liée à la multiplication des ordres hospitaliers féminins qui, de plus en plus, assurent la gestion quotidienne des hôtels-dieu." (op.cit., p.149.

¹⁴⁰p. Deyon, op.cit., p.152.

that society acquired an appetite for schools, hospitals and orphanages, the voluntary support systems established by the laity began to fall away. The filles séculières found themselves alone in the field, stripped of the cover that the dévot environment had once provided them, much closer now to a professional lifestyle than they had been in 1630.

In 1633, a handful of village girls, armed only with their own good intentions, had worked under the direction of parish charités at tasks too menial for their patrons to perform.

In 1660 an officially recognized company of some 800 women,¹⁴¹ with strong central direction and an equally strong esprit de corps, was spread out across the country. The women obeyed a rule, took simple vows, and wore a distinctive dress, yet remained secular. They were religious, as their founder told them, in all but name.

This was a revolution, though a hidden one. The Council of Tréنت had forbidden religious women to mix with the world. The first Frenchwomen who had attempted to lead a life combining religion with service to society -- the Ursulines, the Filles de Sainte-Marie and the Congrégation de Notre-Dame -- had been firmly put back into the cloister. Yet here were other women, only a few years later, and less than a half-century after the

¹⁴¹This does not begin to represent the number of women who had joined the company during its first thirty years. The death rate among the filles de la Charité was very high in the early days.

legislation of Trent had been accepted by the French Church,¹⁴² doing exactly what the Council had forbidden.

The principal reason for their success was one of approach. The congregations of the Counter Reformation had attempted a modification of the religious life, and this was seen as threatening, both by the reforming hierarchy and by Catholic society at large. The filles séculières approached their goal from a different direction. They practised a modification of the secular life, adapting it to be more devout, more ordered. "Il semble que ce siècle veut vivre en Regle, et que par une sainte émulation les personnes du monde sans le quitter que par esprit, se proposent d'y vivre, comme hors du monde."¹⁴³ From the private dévot life to community life was a small step, and for single women an eminently sensible one. Who could quarrel with that, as long as they remained secular? The practice was beyond reproach. Finally, the new communities performed a useful service at a moderate cost. This was the conclusive argument in their favour. Within a very few years they were part of the structure of public assistance, and from that time on their position was secure.

¹⁴²The tridentine discipline was formally accepted by the French clergy in 1615.

¹⁴³"Sentiment de M. Loisel Docteur de la Maison et Société de Sorbonne, Chancelier de l'Eglise et Université de Paris, Curé de St-Jean", in the preface to the Reglement et pratique chrestiennes, en forme de constitutions des Filles et vefves Seculières, du Seminaire nommé de l'Union Chrestienne, establies dans plusieurs Dioceses. (Paris, 1673).

CHAPTER V

THE FILLES SECULIERES IN TRANSITION, 1636-1700.

TWO CASE STUDIES

1) Choosing the secular life: The Filles de Sainte-Geneviève (1636-1696).

Vincent de Paul described the Filles de la Charité as "filles qui vont et viennent comme des séculières ... personnes de paroisses sous la conduite de MM. les curés où elles sont établies."¹

Although they were the largest, and among the earliest, of such groups, they were by no means unique. The Filles de la Croix, a group of secular schoolmistresses from Roye, had been functioning as a community with simple vows from 1641.²

Apart from these organizations, which because of their later development are well known to history, small foundations were, from 1630 on, springing up in towns across France: orphanages,

¹L. Abelly, Vie de Saint Vincent de Paul (op.cit.), vol.II, p.38.

²Further north, in the low countries, where the tradition of uncloistered nuns and of béguines was strong, filles séculières had been teaching school since the mid-sixteenth century. See Lottin, "Les Filles de Sainte-Agnès et leur mise en cause à Rome dans l'affaire des "Jésuitesses" (1569-1645)", in Les religieuses enseignantes (op.cit.), p. 22. The French Church does not seem to have been aware of these precedents: certainly Vincent de Paul thought his company's composition and vocation were original.

refuges, schools, and workshops.³ As often as not, they were entrusted to "veuves ou filles âgées"; usually their scale was very small, the community numbering as low as two members. Frequently, the founders gave them reglements to ensure the discipline and religious direction of their daily lives. "Il semble," said a Doctor of the Sorbonne some years later, "que ce siècle veut vivre en Regle."⁴ To a greater or lesser degree,

³Examples of such foundations:

1630: Marie Lumaque de Pollalion established a community of women to instruct and raise delinquent girls (P. Coste, St. Vincent et les Dames de la Charité [op.cit.], pp.60-61).

1631: Claire Rouillé, wife of Jean Tronson, made a donation of 200 l. in rentes to assist the sick of the parish of Saint-Eustache, and to educate twenty-two girls to the age of 12 (Fosseyeux, Les Ecoles de charité [op.cit.], p.29).

1634: Barbe Martin, widow of Nicolas Colbert, seigneur de Magneaux-les-Fismes, founded a community of women, the Filles de Sainte-Marthe, in Reims, to train poor girls destined for service (G. Fagniez, La femme et la société française [op.cit.], p.9)

1636: The Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement reported a foundation supporting a schoolmistress at Montmartre. A position for a second mistress was founded to assist her with her eighty students. There was another establishment of filles dévotes at Montmorency (R. D'Argenson, La Compagnie [op.cit.], p.69).

1637: Gabrielle de Stainville, dame d'Aulnoy, founded a community of "quatre filles dévotes, non mariées" to instruct poor children, at Gerbéviller, close to Lunéville. (A. de Rohan-Chabot, "Les écoles de campagne en Lorraine", unpublished thesis, 1969).

1638: Marie Delpech de Lestang founded an orphanage in Bordeaux, and later brought it to Paris. Within a year it had 84 boarders. (G. Fagniez, op.cit., pp.358-59)

1647: A small community was founded at Marle, near Laon, to teach little girls (L. Aroz, Nicolas Roland, Jean-Baptiste de La Salle et les soeurs du Saint-Enfant-Jésus (Rome: Maison St-Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1972), p.54.

Some communities were more fleeting, as for instance the tiny community of filles dévotes footnoted in J. Ferté, La vie religieuse (op.cit.), pp.149-51; or the community of three women established in Troyes in the 1640s which soon failed, leaving one of its members, Marguerite Bourgeois, unsure what to do next.

⁴See above, chap. IV, fn.142.

these small communities placed themselves on the verges of religious life, while retaining secular status.⁵

One such group was the community of Filles de Sainte-Geneviève, of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet in Paris. It was founded in 1636 when a pious woman, Mlle Blosset, was forced by ill health to abandon her vocation to the religious life in the Abbey of Montmartre, and came to settle in the parish. She took as her director the extraordinary and dynamic clerical reformer, Adrien Bourdoise. Bourdoise was, above all, dedicated to the work of reviving parish life. To this end he had set up a model seminary in Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, from which he and his followers studied and practised the various parish services: the proper administration of the sacraments, an improved and extended liturgy,⁶ and the work of instruction, by way of catechetics both in the church and in the parish school.⁷ The reverse side of his fervour for the parish was a thorough and

⁵The filles de Sainte-Marthe of Reims (mentioned above, fn.3) were one such group. The City Council immediately suspected "religion", and sent to inquire "à quelles fins elles ont établies un espèce de couvent de filles en leur maison et qui leur a baillé le pouvoir." See P. Gosset, Les Magneuses: Fondation de Mme Colbert de Magneux (1635-1799) (Reims: Mance et Cie., 1924)), p.11.

⁶Bourdoise did much to spread the practice of the devotion of the Forty Hours, which was practised by dévots as an act of reparation, especially during Carnival. See B. Dompnier, "Un aspect de la dévotion eucharistique dans la France du XVII^e siècle", R.H.E.F. 67 (1981), p.23.

⁷The parish school of Saint Nicolas was considered a model in its time, and the book L'Escole paroissiale, (pub. 1654) which described its methods, was widely read by educators interested in the charity schools (See below, chap VII).

persistent dislike of the religious orders which, in his opinion, were drawing away the support of the wealthy classes that was essential to the material maintenance of the parish.⁸ It is not altogether surprising, then, that Mlle Blosset was soon hearing a heavenly voice telling her "that it was not necessary to be a religious to go to heaven; that she could gain her salvation and that of many others by instructing young girls, and by taking care of the poor and the sick."⁹ In 1636 she founded a community on the corner of the rue des Boulangers and Saint-Victor, not far from the parish church, and took up the work of caring for the church and teaching little girls. Within a short time there were 300 students in the school, and a number of young schoolmistresses, learning their trade in exactly the same way that the Nicolaïte seminarians learned theirs in l'école paroissiale.

When Mlle Blosset died in 1642, a community of only three or four women remained. They continued their work, however, and in 1650 asked Bourdoise to give them a rule.¹⁰ Eight years

⁸There is a story about Bourdoise's meeting, somewhere outside Paris, with a wealthy and pious woman, whose practice it was to attend mass in a private chapel. He took her to her parish church, showed her its decay and dereliction, and so overwhelmed her with remorse that she swept and cleaned it with her own hands, and saw to its maintenance thereafter. See J. Darche, Le saint abbé Bourdoise (Paris, 1884), vol.I, pp.78-79.

⁹Ibid., vol.I, p.465 (my translation).

¹⁰Ibid., p.466.

later, the community was officially erected; in 1661 it received letters patent.¹¹ By this time, the community numbered about ten; but its financial condition was precarious and its future uncertain.

It was now under the direction of the parish priest, Hippolyte Feret, who was also superior of another small female community working close by at the same kind of employment. This community, known as the Sainte Famille, had an advantage that the Filles de Sainte-Geneviève lacked: a wealthy and influential foundress, Marie Bonneau, Madame de Miramion. Like Mlle Le Gras, Madame de Miramion had led a dévot life since the death of her husband in 1645. At the time of the establishment of the Sainte Famille in 1661 she had several other small foundations to her credit: an orphanage for twenty little girls, a sheltered workshop for young women, a refuge for delinquent girls, a retreat house, and a special segregated ward in the Hôtel-Dieu for sick priests.¹² Now she was preparing to take her devotion a step further, and to live in community with her five or six companions.

Feret suggested a union of the two communities, to save one and consolidate the other. Mme de Miramion agreed, and so a new community was created, using the title and the official

¹¹p. Schoenher, Le séminaire de Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, p.231.

¹²p. Coste, Saint Vincent de Paul et les Dames de la Charité (op.cit.), pp.88-89.

status of the Filles de Sainte-Geneviève,¹³ but supported by her money.. In 1670 the community moved to a house on the Quai de la Tournelle, close to the parish church and large enough for the conduct of retreats which was one of its functions. Here it continued until it was dispersed in 1790.

Because it failed to survive the Revolution, the secular community of Filles de Sainte-Geneviève has made little mark on history. There have been two biographies of Madame de Miramion, both by relatives.¹⁴ As for the community itself, the Count of Bonneau-Avenant, writing in 1867, recalled that "plusieurs de nos contemporains ont entendu de vieilles grand'mères, en parlant de leur jeunesse, dire avec joie, 'C'était du temps que j'étais aux Miramionnes.'"¹⁵ But little remains in the way of official record. In its time, however, the community

¹³Another wholly independent community of Filles de Sainte-Geneviève was established at almost the same time in the parish of Saint-Etienne-du-Mont, close by. In 1660 the parish priest, P. Beurrier, combining a legacy of 4000 l. with parish donations of 3000 l., founded a community of "filles ou veuves" to teach school. "Mr le Curé dressa une règle à laquelle sa petite Communauté seroit astraite." The community survived into the eighteenth century, with a membership ranging between three and five women. See Bibl. Ste-Geneviève, Ms. 703, fol.36: Etablissement d'Ecoles des filles.

¹⁴These are the Vie de Madame de Miramion by the Abbé de Choisy (1707) which is reprinted in the work by G.J.A.J. Jauffret, Des services que les femmes peuvent rendre à la religion (Paris, 1801); and Madame de Miramion et ses oeuvres charitables by the Count de Bonneau-Avenant, published in 1875. The constitutions, which have survived, along with a work entitled "L'esprit des Filles de Sainte-Geneviève", provide the rest of the information on the community.

¹⁵Op.cit., p.200.

was highly respected and widely imitated. In the later years of the century, when a number of small secular communities experienced deep demoralization and the danger of financial collapse, Madame de Miramion took up the work of reanimation. She is known to have salvaged communities in Amiens, La Ferté and Senlis, and to have been invited to La Flèche to restore order in a religious house there. She also established at least a hundred schools. "En moins de dix ans," writes Bonneau-Avenant, "sa communauté était devenue l'un des établissements religieux et charitables les plus importants et les plus avantageusement connus de Paris et de la province."¹⁶ The particular interpretation which it gave to the secular-religious life may therefore be considered as having influence far beyond the borders of the one small community.

According to Bonneau-Avenant and to Pierre Coste, the règlements of the community were drawn up under the eyes of Vincent de Paul.¹⁷ If this is true, Monsieur Vincent's contribution cannot have been much more than a general approval, since he died in 1660, shortly before the Sainte Famille started its community life. A reading of the Constitutions as they stood in 1679-80 would suggest that the guiding mind was that of Adrien Bourdoise: in other words, that the rule which he had drawn up for Mlle Blosset's filles survived the amalgamation of the two communities. The

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 199-200.

¹⁷Ibid., p.172; P. Coste, Le grand saint, p.364.

chief originality of this rule lies in its emphasis on the parochial orientation of the community:

Les Soeurs de cette Communauté font ...
profession d'estre bonnes et fidelles
Paroissiennes. Elles reçoivent en leurs
paroisses les Sacremens Saines et Malades
y assistant aux Instructions et divins
Offices, et généralement rendent tant a
la paroisse qu'a leur pasteur tous les
devoirs paroissiales.¹⁸

Although they said daily prayers in common, including the
Little Office, the sisters sought no identity at all beyond
that of "véritables Paroissiennes":

Elles se sont proposées preferablement a
toutes choses de s'acquitter avec fidelité,
exactitude, et par le motif de cette vertu
divine, des obligations du christianisme
contractées par le Baptisme, En Observant
les Maximes de l'Evangile conformes a leur
estat, et les Regles de l'Eglise Communes
a tous les fidelles, d'Assister par le
Mesme Principe aux actes publics de Religion
qui se pratiquent dans La Paroisse ...¹⁹

The parish was their priority. They had their own side chapel
in the church; they performed their Easter duties there, and
they were buried in the parish cemetery. One of their duties
was "la decoration de la Maison de Dieu selon leur pouvoir,
en blanchissant les linges d'autel, racommodant les ornemens
procurant la propreté des Eglises et tout ce qui sert au culte

¹⁸De l'Esprit de la Communauté des filles de Sainte-Genevieve,
(Archives of the Providence, Rouen), Chap. 3.

¹⁹A.N. Série LL 1679, 1681. Filles de Sainte-Geneviève,
Constitutions, introduction.

divin dans les paroisses ou elles feront leur demeure."²⁰ Their clinic was intended to assist the poor of the parish; the workshop which they set up was called "la chambre de travail de la paroisse",²¹ the children in their schools were to be trained to be "bonnes et fidelles Paroissiennes."²² Although, like the seminary of Saint-Nicholas, the community hoped to disseminate its ideas throughout the countryside, it still did so within a parochial context. Country schoolmistresses, brought into the house for advice and training, were expected to return to their own parish schools. In this respect the Filles de Sainte-Geneviève remained close to the philosophy of Adrien Bourdoise. The "Miramionnes", as they became known, were the feminine arm of the parish of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, the completion of that circle of spiritual and temporal services that Bourdoise had envisaged long ago. This was a much stronger identification with parish interests than Vincent de Paul had ever suggested. The Filles de la Charité were servants of the poor and servants of the ladies of the parish charités, and they were expected to be subject to the curés; but their first obedience was to their Company, and in cases of conflict they were obliged to obey their superiors in Paris first. "Vous n'êtes

²⁰"Esprit", fol. 6.

²¹A. de Bonneau-Avenant, op.cit., pp.240-41.

²²Constitutions, 1679, p.36.

là que par emprunt," Mlle Le Gras told them.²³ By contrast, the Filles de Sainte-Geneviève lived for their parish, and so far as they hoped to expand, planned to set up similar parish-based communities in other towns.²⁴

The other characteristic of the Miramionnes was their determination to maintain secular status, in spirit as well as in the letter of the law. The community held to the dévot ideal: the vie parfaite lived within the world: "Elle ne veut Jamais sortir de cet Estat et il luy suffira en rendant au prochain les charitables secours."²⁵ There was to be no inner aspiration to the religious life: "Vous ne vous distinguez du commun des chrestiens que par une exacte profession des maximes de l'Evangile."²⁶

The sisters were not expected to renounce their property;²⁷ nor was their commitment to the community binding under pain

²³Mlle Le Gras, Lettres (op.cit.), p.396. In fact, Vincent de Paul warned against contact with priests, whom he considered to be a source of temptation to the sisters, and he therefore discouraged the care of altar linens, as entailing too much contact with the priests. (Vincent de Paul, Correspondance (op.cit.) vol. XIII, p.758).

²⁴A handwritten rule survives for a community of filles de Saint-Joseph et de Sainte-Geneviève at Senlis -- apparently one of the houses that Mme de Miramion reformed. Its wording, though not identical to that of the constitutions of the Paris community, is obviously drawn from it. (Bibl Ste-Geneviève, Ms 1718)

²⁵Esprit, p.3.

²⁶Regles et statuts des filles de Saint Joseph et de Sainte Genevieve à Senlis, p.4.

²⁷Esprit, p.2.

of mortal sin.²⁸ They were not to be ~~cloistered~~, and they were to wear secular dress "sans se vouloir Jamais attacher a aucune forme ou sorte d'habit qui les puisse distinguer de celles qui vivent dans le monde dans une grande piété".²⁹ They were not to acquire a chapel for their own use (a privilege which suggested conventual life), "... mais seulement en faveur des malades Et infirmes, et des personnes de dehors qui viennent en retraite."³⁰ Everything that might tempt them away from their parish duties was to be scrupulously avoided:

Cette Communauté Estime et respecte La vie et Profession Religieuse, neantmoins ayant été Conseillées par plusieurs prelates, et autres Personnes de grande doctrine, pieté et experience, de se Consacrer en L'Estat et habit seculier ... Elle prefere cet estat à tout autre ... Et les Superieurs et Superieures doivent tousjours rejeter comme des tentations, Les propositions qui pouroient estre faittes, d'oster ou retrancher Ces fonctions Exterieurs, La Closture R^{se}, des voeux solempnels, et toute autre Chose qui pouroit porter au Changement de L'institut.³¹

At the time of Madame de Miramion's death in 1696 the community was functioning well according to its rules.³² In her will

²⁸Constitutions, 1680, p.89.

²⁹Esprit, p.2.

³⁰Constitutions, 1680, p.33.

³¹Constitutions 1679 I,9. See below, chap. VIII.

³²The clinic was treating between a hundred and two hundred persons per day, the retreat house was open and active, the workshop was employing eighty girls, and a school for three hundred children was operating on the Quai de la Tournelle. Two of the classrooms were free, the third received paying students. See A. de Bonneau-Avenant, op.cit., p.196.

the foundress begged the sisters to continue without change.³³ It appears that they succeeded in doing so. At the time of the Revolution the community was still wholly secular.³⁴

The fille de la paroisse was very much a creature of her time. She belonged to the dévot world of the mid-seventeenth century. What she practised was a modification not of the religious life (as the early congrégées, the Ursulines and Congrégation, had attempted), but of the secular life that was, in fact, being practised all around her by pious laymen and laywomen. "Il semble que ce siècle veut vivre en Regle, et que par une sainte emulation les personnes du monde sans le quitter que par esprit, se proposent d'y vivre, comme hors du monde."³⁵ By entering into community, she took the process a stage further, but still retained the protective colouring of the secular status. She eschewed the apartness that religious life implied. She also eschewed the apartness created by professionalization. Unlike the hospitalière and the teaching sister, she remained unspecialized. She remained the practitioner of good works in general, without claiming any distinguishing expertise.

Thus her service to the Church remained consistent with

³³Ibid., pp.415-417. She had already done her best to enforce the continuing secular status of her community, by endowing it with 70,000 francs for the maintenance of twelve sisters, which, she specified, was to pass to the Hôpital-Général of Paris if the community became cloistered (T. de Choisy, op.cit., p.140).

³⁴In 1727, the community on the Quai de la Tournelle numbered 37 sisters. See J. Ferté, op.cit., p.259-60.

³⁵See above, fn.4.

the old tradition of feminine charity. When Madame de Miramion died, a contemporary, Mme de Sévigné, wrote regretting the loss to the public of "this mother of the Church".³⁶ The mothering function, practised to an extreme degree by the great lady herself, characterised her community and others like it; and it belonged to a special "moment" in the life of the French Church, a time of widespread religious sentiment and deep social concern.³⁷ As the moment passed, the filles dévotes, or filles de la paroisse, lost their grounding in society, and were in danger of becoming anachronistic. In the later seventeenth century the trend was towards professionalization in occupation, and also towards a lifestyle which was religious in all but name. "Si vous avez l'esprit obéissant, vous serez mieux cloîtrées que les religieuses qui sont enfermées Si vous avez ces vertus, vous êtes professes."³⁸ Of the great mass of filles seculières born out of the Catholic Reformation, those who, in one way or another, adopted this formula turned out to be the most successful.

³⁶Letter of 29/iii/1696, quoted in A. de Bonneau-Avenant, op.cit., p.353. "Et pour Mme de Miramion, cette mère de l'Eglise, ce sera une perte publique."

³⁷The word is Pierre Deyon's. See "A propos du paupérisme au milieu du XVII^e siècle: peinture et charité chrétienne" A.E.S.C. 22 (1967):137.

³⁸Vincent de Paul, op.cit. vol.X, p.664.

2) From filles de la paroisse to schoolmistresses, a successful transition: the Congrégation de Notre-Dame of Ville Marie.

(1653-1700)

Unique in its circumstances, the first secular institute to be established in New France nevertheless experienced, in microcosm, the evolution that was taking place among filles séculières in the mother country. Its foundress, Marguerite Bourgeoys, left France in 1653 with a clear idea of her vocation already formed under the influence of the great pioneers of the Catholic Reformation.³⁹ Alone at first, then with only four companions, she practised a type of apostolate closely resembling that of the Filles de Sainte-Geneviève and other similar groups: a generalized service, given wherever service was needed. As Madame de Miramion was "mother of the Church" -- the great Church of the metropole -- this simple "fille sans

³⁹The rule under which she and her community lived in early days was that laid down by her spiritual director in Troyes, Antoine Gendret. Gendret, as a member of the diocesan clergy of Troyes, must have been influenced by both Bourdoise and de Paul, who helped to initiate reform in the diocese. Marguerite's pedagogical training, received from the nuns of the Congrégation in Troyes, was in the tradition of Pierre Fourier. Her spirituality, and specifically her devotion to the mystery of the Visitation, was drawn from the thought of the period, expressed in the writings and sermons of François de Sales, Cardinal Bérulle, and M. Olier, the founder of the seminary of Saint-Sulpice. For a full treatment of this spiritual background, see Lucienne Plante, C.N.D., Marguerite Bourgeoys, fille de France (Montreal: C.N.D., s.d.), and Lorraine Caza, C.N.D., La vie voyageuse, conversante avec le prochain: Marguerite Bourgeoys (Montreal: Les Editions Bellarmin, 1982).

naissance et sans bien"⁴⁰ was the mother of her Church in the tiny colony of Montréal. But by the time the congregation really "took off", in the 1680s, new ideas and new needs were making themselves felt. Under pressure from the hierarchy and the habitants, and in keeping with the changing self-image of its members, the community underwent a subtle transformation. In the last years of her life, Marguerite the fille de la paroisse became Soeur Marguerite du Saint-Sacrement, member of a semi-religious congregation⁴¹ dedicated specifically to the education of the daughters of the colonists.⁴²

Marguerite came to Montreal through the agency of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame of Troyes. Her first biographer, Charles de Glandelet, described the connection:

Il y a dans la ville de Troyes une maison

⁴⁰The description comes from her friend, Marie Morin, Hospitalière de Saint Joseph in Montreal from 1662 to her death in 1730. See her Histoire simple et véritable, ed. Ghislaine Legendre (Montreal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1979), p.75.

⁴¹In the sense that its members lived in community, with their own chapel, taking simple vows and wearing a uniform habit. The Court took note of this change in 1710. The Minister wrote that: "Sa Majesté a esté surpris de ce que ces filles ont apporté du changement à la permission qu'Elle a accordée lorsqu'elles ont été établies, les vues de leur établissement a esté de former une Communauté de filles pour vivre en séculières et pour servir à l'instruction et à l'éducation de leurs filles, mais elles ne doivent faire aucun voeux." Le Ministre à Monsieur l'Evêque de Québec, 16/v/1710, quoted in Marguerite Jean, Evolution des communautés religieuses de femmes au Canada de 1639 à nos jours (Montreal: Fides, 1977), p.34.

⁴²Not native children. By the late 1690s, the sisters gave up their missions to the Indians. See Dom Albert Jamet, O.S.B., Marguerite Bourgeoys, 1620-1700 (Montreal: la Presse Catholique Panaméricaine, 1942), vol.II, pp.767-68.

considerable de religieuses de la Congrégation de l'institution du saint homme le Père Fourier, curé de Matincourt, lesquelles sont cloitrées et chez qui vont un grand nombre de filles séculières, qui sont comme des Congréganistes externes, qui font profession de piété, et qui font l'école et l'instruction en divers endroits, par manière de mission, se mettant deux ensemble en chaque lieu où elles vont. La Soeur Bourgeoys fréquentait fort cette maison et se joignant à ces filles externes, elle allait faire des instructions comme elles.⁴³

The monastery, like the monastery of Châlons-sur-Marne from which it had been founded in 1626, had adopted the practice so dear to Fourier's heart,⁴⁴ of maintaining an association of congréganistes externes to work among the poor.⁴⁵ Marguerite was in fact prefect of this group for many years, under the supervision of Mère Louise de Chomedey, sister of Paul de Chomedey, Sieur de Maisonneuve, governor of the colony of Montreal. At the same time, in search of her own vocation, and after being turned down by two contemplative orders, she placed herself under the direction of her confessor, Antoine Gendret, as one

⁴³Le Vray Esprit de l'Institut des Soeurs Séculières de la Congrégation de Notre Dame établi à Ville-Marie en l'Isle de Montreal en Canada: notes rédigées par l'abbé Charles de Glandelet 1700 -1701 (Montreal: C.N.D., 1976), pp.18-19.

⁴⁴See above, Chapter III.

⁴⁵According to a seventeenth-century history of the congregation, this association in Troyes grew from thirty women to four hundred, "...la plupart de bons sujets pour la vertu la plus solide et la plus haute piété." Conduite de la Providence dans l'établissement de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame, qui a pour son instituteur Pierre Fourier, dit vulgairement de Matincourt, supérieur général et réformateur des chanoines réguliers de la Congregation de Notre Sauveur, quoted in A. Jamet, op.cit., vol.I, p.33.

of three members of a new secular community. The community soon failed, but the guiding ideas with which Gendret inspired it remained as his legacy to the congregation later to be founded in Montreal.

M. Jendret [wrote Mère Bourgeoys in 1695] me dit un jour que Notre-Seigneur avait laissé trois états de filles pour suivre et servir l'Eglise; que celui de sainte Madeleine était rempli par les Carmélites et autres recluses et celui de sainte Marthe par les Religieuses cloîtrées qui servent le prochain; mais que celui de la vie voyageuse de la Sainte Vierge, qu'il fallait honorer, ne l'était et que, sans voile ni guimpe, l'on serait vraiment religieuse.⁴⁶

She added: "Ce qui m'était bien agréable, car j'avais pitié des filles qui, faute de biens, ne pouvaient s'établir au service de Dieu."⁴⁷

The two principles which Gendret laid down, sometime in the early 1640s,⁴⁸ were as daring and as innovative as anything currently in the minds of Vincent de Paul and Adrien Bourdoise. First, that active, outgoing service to the Church was not only permitted to women but was positively enjoined, by the example of the holiest woman of all. To live in imitation of her vie voyageuse was to live the holiest life possible to a woman.

⁴⁶Marguerite Bourgeoys - Louis Tronson, Sept. 1695. Ecrits de Mère Bourgeoys (Montreal: C.N.D., 1964), p.204.

⁴⁷Loc. cit.

⁴⁸The community had collapsed by 1645-1647, when Marguerite returned home to nurse her father in his last illness. (See Jamet, op.cit. vol.I, p.40). Gendret's rule, which he drew up in collaboration with the theologal of Troyes, must have been in existence some time earlier.

Second, that the trappings of religious life -- the veil and wimple and the dowry that inevitably went with them -- were not as important as interior disposition, and that therefore poor women were as eligible as rich to enter the service of God. Marguerite, in the words of Dom Jamet, kept these principles faithfully in her heart.⁴⁹ For the meantime, she continued her work as a secular congréganiste.

The nuns of the Troyes monastery, like other dévots throughout the country, had been profoundly stirred by the Jesuit accounts of New France. Their contact, through Mère de Chomedey, with Montreal had given them the hope that in due course they would be able to found a house in the new colony.⁵⁰ In 1652, when Maisonneuve visited Troyes, they pressed him to allow them to do so. But Maisonneuve, in view of the precarious state of the colony, agreed to take one person only for the meantime. The person proposed was Marguerite.⁵¹ Thus the woman who was to found a new congregation of filles séculières in Montreal went in the first place as an advance guard, so to speak, for the cloistered religious who hoped to follow before long.

Marguerite arrived with the recrue of 1653, the hundred

⁴⁹Loc.cit. The community in Montreal lived under Gendret's rule for many years, until it received a new rule in 1698.

⁵⁰In 1641, when Maisonneuve left France to found the colony, his sister had given him an image inscribed with the words "Sainte Mère de Dieu, pure Vierge au coeur royale, gardez-nous une place en votre Montreal." Ecrits de Mère Bourgeoys, p.38.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 203-08.

fighting men picked to save the faltering colony of Ville Marie. These men became the first objects of her particular mothering style.⁵² Once in Montreal, she soon took up the role of spiritual animator, leading a work party to re-establish the cross that Maisonneuve had originally erected on the mountain.

Quand je fus arrivée, Monsieur de Maisonneuve détacha trente hommes pour s'acquitter de la promesse qu'il m'avait faite de me mener sur la montagne; mais les sauvages avaient ôté la croix. On a excité le monde à y en rebâtir une nouvelle. Je fus destinée pour cela.... Nous y fûmes trois jours de suite. La croix y fut plantée et il y avait des pieux pour la clore ...⁵³

Some years later she undertook to build a chapel in honour of the Virgin. "J'excite le peu de personnes à ramasser des pierres et Monsieur de Maisonneuve fit couper du bois pour la charpente."⁵⁴ This time she seems to have taken her talent for leadership too far. The new Sulpician superior of Montréal, M. de Queylus,

⁵²Marguerite acted as their nurse: "Y ayant eu quantité de malades elles les a tous servis en qualité d'infirmière avec un soin indicible, non seulement sur la mer mais encore à Québec." (F. Dollier de Casson, "Histoire de Montréal, 1640-1672" Mémoires de la Société historique de Montréal Quatrième Livraison (Montreal:1868), p.101). Once in Quebec, she was charged with overseeing their rations (Ecrits, p.45). She also gave them religious instruction. "Peu de temps après leur arrivée dans ce lieu, ces cent hommes étaient changés comme le linge qu'on a mis à la lessive," she wrote in her memoirs. (Ibid., p.42). Mère Juchereau, writing some sixty years later, remarked that "elle instruisit tous les matelots, leur faisant exactement le catechisme." See her Annales de l'Hôtel-Dieu de Québec (Quebec: Hôtel-Dieu, 1939), p.110.

⁵³Ibid., p.38.

⁵⁴Ibid., p.56. Marguerite secured labour for the chapel by barter -- doing sewing in return.

ordered her to stop work until further notice.⁵⁵

Marguerite spent her first five years in Montreal taking care of Maisonneuve's household. "Il ne la considerèt pas comme sa servante," wrote her friend, the hospitalière Marie Morin, "mais comme une personne que Notre Seigneur luy avoit donnee pour luy aider a ce sauver et pour qui il avoit un profond respect."⁵⁶ During these years, for lack of young children in the colony,⁵⁷ she was unable to practise the work for which she had been recruited. She lived, instead, the simple life of good works:

She visited and served the sick, consoled the afflicted, instructed the ignorant, washed the poor soldiers' laundry and mended their clothes, all without recompense. She buried the death, and deprived herself even of necessities, on behalf of the needy.⁵⁸

In 1658, however, she was granted a stone stable on the edge

⁵⁵The project was abandoned for years and the building materials lost. Even historians who otherwise have nothing but praise for M. de Queylus find his behaviour on this occasion hard to explain. Marie Morin simply remarks that "Monsieur l'abbé de Quelus, qui arivèt de France, ne trouva pas qu'elle passat outre pour des reisons qui nous sont cachee..." (op.cit., p.73).

⁵⁶Ibid. p.73.

⁵⁷"On a été environ huit ans que l'on ne pouvait point élever d'enfants...." Ibid., p.43.

⁵⁸Michel Faillon, Vie de la Soeur Bourgeoys (Tours, 1853), Vol.I, p.219. My translation.

of the common, and here she set up her first school.⁵⁹ Now, as children came of school age, she decided to go back to France to recruit more teachers. The women whom she brought back in 1659 were, in fact, engaged by civil contract, though they agreed to live in obedience and chastity for the duration of their service. Marguerite was still anticipating the day when the nuns from Troyes would arrive to take over the work.⁶⁰

However, the events of the next few years altered all expectations. In 1665 Maisonneuve was forced to return to France to defend himself against allegations of mismanagement of funds.

He never returned. For his circle of associates, this meant an end to the assured protection of an influential patron. The monastery of Notre-Dame in Troyes now gave up its plans to establish in Montreal. As a result, Marguerite found herself in full charge of the colony's schools for girls.⁶¹

Fortunately for her and her sisters, Maisonneuve's patronage was replaced by another, yet more powerful: that of the royal regime. In 1667 the new intendant, Talon, visited Montreal.

⁵⁹This should not be perceived as a charitable donation. Most colonists received land grants, to further the establishment of the colony. The stable was specifically intended to "servir à l'instruction des filles de Montréal." See S.S. Damase de Rome, L'Intendante de Notre-Dame (Montreal: C.N.D., 1942), pp.37-38.

⁶⁰Albert Jamet, op.cit., vol.II, p.432.

⁶¹During the early years, the schoolmistresses taught boys as well as girls -- though this was against the strictest instructions of the Crown and the Gallican Church. See L.-P. Audet, "L'éducation au temps de Mgr de Laval." S.C.H.E.C. (1957-58), p.65. It appears that a temporary concession was made for the colony.

Within a short time, at his instigation, the colonists of Montreal petitioned the Crown for official approbation of its two female communities -- the Hôtel-Dieu and the Congrégation.⁶² In 1668 Soeur Bourgeoys was constructing a larger house of stone, capable of holding both a community and up to a hundred scholars.⁶³ She obtained official permission from Bishop Laval to teach school throughout the region (1669); then, in 1670, armed with letters of recommendation from both civil and religious authorities, she left for France to find herself a group of filles séculières, to help her with the teaching. When she returned in 1672, she brought not only six companions, but Letters Patent from the King, approving the establishment of the Soeurs de la Congrégation de Montréal.⁶⁴ Four years later came Bishop Laval's official authorization of the community "sans qu'elles puissent néanmoins à l'avenir prétendre à passer à la vie religieuse"⁶⁵ -- a true community of filles séculières.

By the 1680s, the Congrégation, now numbering some twenty

⁶²A. Jamet, op.cit., vol. I, p.335.

⁶³Robert Lahaise, Les édifices conventuels du Vieux Montréal (Quebec: Ed. Hurtubise HMH, Ltd., 1980), pp.110-11.

⁶⁴For the text of the Letters Patent see Soeur Sainte-Henriette, Histoire de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame de Montréal (Montreal: C.N.D., 1910) Vol.I, pp.113-115.

⁶⁵Soeur Sainte-Henriette, op.cit. Vol. I, pp.135-36.

sisters,⁶⁶ was appearing regularly in reports by church and royal officials. It was operating, not only its school and pensionnat and a workshop -- La Providence -- for poor girls, but missions in Lachine, Pointe-aux-Trembles, Champlain, Sainte-Famille, and (to the delight of the Court) Montagne, the Indian colony set up by the Sulpicians.

Les soeurs de la Congrégation [wrote Mgr. de Saint-Vallier in 1685] ont, dans la mission de la Montagne, une école d'environ quarante filles sauvages, qu'on habille et qu'on élève à la française. On leur apprend en même temps les mystères de la foi, le travail et les prières de l'Eglise, non seulement en leur langue, mais encore dans le nôtre, pour les faire peu à peu à notre air et à nos manières.⁶⁷

The Congrégation was still, in the 1680s, very much the image of its foundress, and the beneficiary of her extraordinary reputation. "Elle était universellement regardée en ce pays comme une sainte," wrote the governor, M. Perrot.⁶⁸ However, Marguerite's style was not that of all the sisters. From early days, her readiness to perform any task demanded of her had disconcerted her companions. Her chaperonage of the filles du roi is a case in point. Around 1663 (in her own words):

⁶⁶In the census of 1681, the Congrégation numbered nineteen sisters, seven pensionnaires, thirteen domestics, 150 arpents of cultivated land, five horses, 22 cattle, and 20 sheep (A. Jamet, op.cit., vol.II, p.585).

⁶⁷Quoted in ibid., p.270. The francisization of the Indians was one of the few colonial endeavours in the field of education which the government was prepared to subsidize. The Montagne mission received 4000 livres from Paris for this purpose. See Soeur. St-Damase-de-Rome, op.cit., p.52.

⁶⁸S.S. Henriette, op.cit., p.109.

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... il arriva environ dix-sept filles du roi que j'allai quérir au bord de l'eau, croyant qu'il fallait ouvrir la porte de la maison de la Sainte Vierge à toutes les filles.... Je demeurai avec elles, et j'étais obligée d'y demeurer à cause que c'était pour faire des familles. Je crois que je ne faisais pas plaisir à nos Soeurs et que je manquais à leur donner les instructions nécessaires.⁶⁹

As long as she was superior of her community, her sisters continued to perform a wide variety of social services. In addition to their established missions, they operated missions ambulantes, preparing the outlying parishes for episcopal visits or for first communion.⁷⁰ They managed the workshop known as La Providence in Montreal, and later, at Bishop Saint-Vallier's request, opened a similar Providence in Quebec.⁷¹ In 1689, also in obedience to Saint-Vallier, and in spite of their lack of preparation for the work, they accepted responsibility for the newly-established Hôpital-Général in Quebec.⁷² It is significant that in the years immediately following Mère Bourgeoys' resignation (1693) these peripheral activities, and the Indian mission, were closed down. The Congregation's decision in 1694 to withdraw from the work of the Providence of Montreal drew an angry response from Saint-Vallier: he accused them of trying to "faire les

⁶⁹Ecrits, p.257.

⁷⁰S.Ste-Henriette, op.cit. vol.I, pp. 213, 257.

⁷¹Ibid., pp.329-30.

⁷²Ibid., p.333.

dames".⁷³ It may be inferred that specialization involved social ascension; that in concentrating their efforts on their schools the sisters were preparing to relinquish the maids-of-all-work role implied in the title filles de la paroisse.⁷⁴

Marguerite's style conflicted with that of her sisters in another area. On the subject of poverty she held strong (and, to some people, exaggerated) ideas. During her 1658 journey to France she had refused the offer of a foundation, for fear it would change the character of her institute.⁷⁵ To the parent of one of her recruits, who asked how they would live, she outlined her simple plan: "Je lui promis que nous aurions du pain et du potage et que nous travaillerions pour gagner notre vie."⁷⁶ This, indeed, they did. Their principal occupation, the instruction of children, was performed free, since in the view of the times any charge for such work would constitute simony. They earned money where they could, as for instance in the upkeep of the

⁷³A. Jamet, op.cit., vol.II, p.744.

⁷⁴Marguerite, now old and infirm, seems to have offered to salvage the financially-troubled institutions in Quebec; "Cela ne m'a pas été accordé, non plus la Providence que l'on quittait," she wrote in 1698 (Ecrits, p.278).

⁷⁵"Il faut que je dise encore un mot de cette bonne fille ... c'est qu'un homme riche et vertueux de la compagnie lui voulant donner en ce voyage du bien pour l'établir ici, elle ne voulut l'accepter, appréhendant que cela ne fit tort à cet esprit de pauvreté qu'elle conserve si religieusement ..." (F. Dollier de Casson, op.cit., p.136-37).

⁷⁶Ecrits, p.61.

churches and the laundering of the altar linens.⁷⁷ On occasion, also, they provided room and board in return for donations, in kind or in land.⁷⁸ But the chief source of their income was sewing. "La soeur Bourgeoys et les autres travallois aussy, la plus grande partie des nuits, afin de n'estre a charge a personne et gagner leur vie."⁷⁹ By their own work they were able to acquire considerable property. "Ce que j'admire le plus," wrote Dollier de Casson,

c'est que ces filles, étant sans biens, et voulant instruire gratuitement les enfants, aient néanmoins acquis, par la bénédiction que Dieu verse sur le travail de leurs mains, et sans avoir été à charge à personne, plusieurs maisons et plusieurs terres dans l'île de Montréal.⁸⁰

Once acquired, however, some of the sisters saw no reason why they should not take at least moderate enjoyment from their

⁷⁷"11 août 1694, furent présents devant Adhémar, notaire royal, Claude Cecire, ler marguillier de la paroisse des Saints-Anges de Lachine ... (et) Soeur Perrette Laurent, de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame. Lequel Cecire a représenté que la Fabrique doit à Soeur Laurent 60 livres, pour deux années de blanchissage du linge de l'église" (S. Ste-Henriette, op.cit., vol.II, p.164).

⁷⁸See, for instance, the 1673 contract between Zacharie Dupuy and his wife and the Sisters, by which the former donated all their property to the latter, in return for a commitment to "Nourir et Entretenir Lesdits donateurs Sains et Malades, pendant leur Vie." (Quoted in Emilia Chicoine, C.N.D., La métairie de Marguerite Bourgeoys (Montreal: Fides, 1986), p.112).

⁷⁹Marie Morin, op.cit., p.75. Because of the shortage of women in the colony, there was no lack of work. The sisters sewed for the residents of the fort, the soldiers and all the other bachelors of Montreal. But their principal clients were the Messieurs du Séminaire. (S.St-Damase-de-Rome, op.cit., pp.69-70).

⁸⁰Dollier de Casson, quoted in Faillon, op.cit., Vol. I, p.202.

property.⁸¹ To Marguerite, however, this was totally incompatible with the spirit of the institute. She had always feared "relâchement".⁸² In her old age, she rose up like a prophet to warn the community against infidelity.⁸³

Marguerite taxed her sisters with three major failings. First, a loss of the simple community lifestyle which she characterized as "la petite vie". Once, all the sisters had been equal. Now, "une partie des Soeurs regardent les autres comme des servantes de la maison. Cela est bien contraire à l'humilité."⁸⁴ Second, a weakening in their spirit of poverty. "Dans les commencements," she wrote, "l'on devait imiter les apôtres et travailler pour n'être à charge à personne; et cela réussissait. Présentement, il faudra des matelas, des draps et beaucoup d'ustensiles, et vivre d'une autre manière que les simples gens et avoir toutes les commodités que n'ont pas les habitants."⁸⁵ Third, laxity in the observances of their rule. "La vie 'étroite', qui est si nécessaire au service de Dieu,

⁸¹S. Ste-Henriette, op.cit., pp.243-44.

⁸²It had only been at the urging of her sisters, and against her better judgment, that she started the building of a larger house in 1668-69. (S.Ste-Damase, op.cit., p.42-43). When the house burnt down in 1683, she accepted the disaster as a punishment from heaven for the community's infidelity.

⁸³"Il me semblait qu'on me faisait connaître qu'il fallait être le Jonas de cette Communauté, au risque d'être jetée dans la mer, pour avertir cette maison de ses manquements." (Ecrits, p.242). This was in the year 1697.

⁸⁴Ibid., p.248.

⁸⁵Ibid., p.256.

n'est point goûtée en cette Communauté."⁸⁶

In the Montreal of the late 1690s, hers was a voice from the past. The Congrégation, like the colony itself, had survived, and now looked forward to easier times. By 1693 it owned 700 acres, partially cultivated, and five separate habitations.⁸⁷

The house which had been completely destroyed by fire in 1683,⁸⁸ had been completely rebuilt, "grande, spacieuse et des mieux batie de la ville," according to Mère Morin.⁸⁹ The community itself numbered some fifty sisters.⁹⁰ The Congrégation de Notre-Dame had earned its position as an important institution in the colony. No-one else accused it of backsliding. As Dom Jamet writes, "Mère Bourgeoys belonged to her times, and she felt that things were going too far, too fast; and finally, that too much was being conceded to nature."⁹¹ And Marguerite's "times" were in France, during the great days of the Catholic Reformation, while most of the young sisters

⁸⁶Ibid., p.248.

⁸⁷S.S. Damase-de-Rome, op.cit., p.34.

⁸⁸Governor Brisay de Denonville to the Minister, 13/xi/1684: "Les soeurs de la Congrégation, qui font de grands biens à toute la colonie sous la conduite de la soeur Bourgeoys, furent incendiées l'an passé, où elles perdirent tout" (Faillon, op.cit. I, pp.351-52).

⁸⁹Marie Morin, op.cit., p.75.

⁹⁰Fifty-four at the time of the foundress's death. Glandelet - M. Henri Boudon, archdiacre d'Evreux, 5/10/1700. Quoted in A. Jamet, op.cit., vol.II, p.788.

⁹¹Ibid., vol.II, p.713.

of the 1690s were born in Canada, in a much more practical age.⁹²

The Congrégation, that entered the eighteenth century responded to the needs of its time and place.

3) Analysis of the agents of change.

Like other congregations of filles séculières in the mother country, the Montreal congregation was shaped partly by forces outside itself. But this general truth requires closer analysis. The principle laid down by Furet and Ozouf should be reiterated:

Before the school could exist, and in order for it to exist, there had to be some part of the social body which desired it: the Church or the State, or both, above; society itself below; in other words, certain of its communities.⁹³

What was true for the school was true for any other voluntary association. Marguerite Bourgeoys' institute could not have succeeded without outside assistance of some kind, in the form of either political connections, or wealthy patrons, or social demand. What exactly were the components of its success?

From early days, it had received full support from the population. The habitants of Montreal, and of the côtes, required,

⁹²The particular circumstances surrounding the foundation of the Congrégation had made Marguerite, from the very beginning, much older than most of her companions. This contrast in age was increased when the fire of 1683 killed the two French sisters (both recruits of 1658) who had been considered most likely to succeed her. When the first election was finally held, in 1693, the four women elected to office were all Canadians, between the ages of 27 and 33. See L. Caza, op.cit., p.44.

⁹³Lire et Ecrire (op.cit.), vol.I, p.70.

not religious, but schoolmistresses, women who had the freedom to go travel considerable distances, and live in ordinary houses, and who, like the traditional schoolmasters of France, could assist in the work of the parishes.⁹⁴ The sisters filled this role to the general satisfaction:

Vous ne sauriez croire [wrote de Meulles to Seignelay in 1683] combien les Filles de la Congrégation font de bien au Canada Elles sont d'une sagesse exemplaire et sont en état d'aller partout et, par ce moyen, d'instruire toutes les filles qui auraient demeuré toute leur vie dans une grande ignorance.⁹⁵

Donations from the colonists themselves were usually modest, and often made in kind or in land, and it may be argued that it was by their enthusiastic acceptance of the sisters -- and especially their petition of 1667 -- that they contributed most to the institute's success. Some of the principal families of Montreal, however, became considerable patrons of the Congrégation. Their support entitled them to assist in the definition of its purpose and lifestyle. An example of this influence at work may be seen in the building of the chapel (1693-1695). The sisters had always performed their religious duties in the

⁹⁴E.g., the petition of the habitants of Lachine, 1680: "les habitants espèrent avoir pour leurs filles une école qui ne saurait jamais être mieux faite que par les soeurs de la Congrégation, tant pour la bonne éducation qu'elles donnent avec bénédiction partout où elles sont établies, que pour les autres secours spirituels qu'elles rendent, particulièrement pour les ornements des autels et la décoration des églises." (M.Rémy, p.s.s., quoted in S.S.Henriette, op.cit., p.279).

⁹⁵Meulles - Seignelay, 4/xi/1683. Quoted in A. Jamet, op.cit., vol.II, p.552.

parish church where, like the Filles de Sainte-Geneviève in Paris, they had their own side chapel.⁹⁶ In 1692, they were offered a donation of 4000 livres by Jeanne Le Ber, the daughter of one of the foremost merchants of Montreal. Like many private donations, it came with a condition: that it be used to build a community chapel, onto which was to be joined a cell, in which Mlle Le Ber would spend the rest of her life as a recluse.⁹⁷ The chapel was an attribute of a more conventual lifestyle, as the "Esprit des Filles de Sainte-Geneviève", cited above,⁹⁸ makes plain. The histories all insist that the chapel fulfilled the sisters' dreams; but it is significant that the one chapel that Marguerite herself had built, years before, was a chapel for the use of the public, which she made over to the parish.⁹⁹

In less striking ways, the principal families of Montreal were able to affect the character of the developing community. The Congrégation educated their children, as often as not in its pensionnat which it had set up at their request. It received their daughters. Like people of quality in the mother country, they felt a certain reserve towards religious women who were not bound by solemn vows. It was the character of Canada, wrote

⁹⁶Ibid., pp.513-14.

⁹⁷A. Jamet, op.cit., vol II, p.721.

⁹⁸See fn. 30.

⁹⁹I.e., Notre-Dame de Bon-secours (A. Jamet, op.cit., pp.428-431).

Marie Morin, "qui n'a point d'estime pour des voeux dont on pouvait se relever."¹⁰⁰ While the sisters remained determined not to accept the monastic life -- which was inconsistent with the purpose for which their institute had been created --¹⁰¹ they must have found it difficult to resist the social ascension which association with this class entailed.¹⁰² The result was a compromise. The Congrégation remained relatively democratic in its recruitment,¹⁰³ but it accepted its position of social eminence in the community. And it continued to bear, for many years, the responsibility of educating all the girls of Montreal

¹⁰⁰She also remarked that the fact of being in simple vows, "et nullement religieux", "...empêcherait les filles de parents distingués de se donner à leur maison." Relation de 1667, chap.I, quoted in Jamet, op.cit., p.323. Mère Morin was speaking for her own community of hospitalières, who took solemn vows only in 1671.

¹⁰¹"Ce serait non seulement changer leur institut, qui était érigé en nature de filles séculières ... mais encore détruire les premières intentions qu'elles avaient eues de procurer à de pauvres filles les moyens de se consacrer au service de Dieu, en retirant en quelque communauté sans donner de dot." (C. de Glandelet, quoted in A. Jamet, op.cit., pp.691-92).

¹⁰²Soeur Bourgeoys disapproved of marks of social respect. In 1692, in Quebec, she found that the sisters were being given pain bénit at the masses, and she complained: "N'étant que de pauvres filles, nous ne devons pas recevoir des honneurs populaires dans l'église." (Ecrits, p.272).

¹⁰³Their recruitment throughout the years of the French regime remained much more popular than that of the Ursulines. Sixty percent of their sisters originated among the people, as against forty-one percent of the Ursulines. See Pierre Hurtubise, "Origine sociale des vocations canadiennes de Nouvelle-France", S.C.H.E.C. 45 (1978): 47.

and its environs -- even the wealthiest.¹⁰⁴

The Crown consistently favoured the Congrégation.¹⁰⁵ In 1671 Colbert wrote to Talon:

Quant à l'établissement de la Congrégation des femmes et filles qui se forme à Montreal pour enseigner aux personnes de mesme sexe à lire, escrire et quelques ouvrages de main, le Roy trouve bon que vous vous appliquiez à le fortifier, ces oeuvres de piété pouvant contribuer beaucoup à l'augmentation du culte de notre religion.¹⁰⁶

There were two reasons for this approval. First, the sisters' flexible organization made them more suitable than cloistered nuns for the mission work of the côtes and the Indian settlements. Second, in the words of the Letters Patent: "la dite exposante ni ses associées ne sont aucunement à charge au pays ..."¹⁰⁷

Montreal was a poor colony, which depended for its religious

¹⁰⁴The Congrégation remained for many years the only feminine teaching congregation in Montreal. Its sisters continued to be the only country schoolmistresses in Canada until the second half of the nineteenth century. (Jamet, op.cit., vol. II, p.790).

¹⁰⁵Moral support did not, however, translate into financial support. The only money that the sisters received from the Crown was a subvention for the Indian mission of La Montagne. See S. St-Damase-de-Rome, op.cit., p.52.

¹⁰⁶Colbert - Talon, 11/ii/ 71. "Correspondance échangée entre le Cour de France et l'Intendant Talon pendant ses deux administrations de la Nouvelle-France", R.A.P.Q. XI (1930-31): 147.

¹⁰⁷S.Ste-Henriette, op.cit. I, p.114.

services on the private generosity of its priests, the Sulpicians.¹⁰⁸ Requiring neither foundation nor charity, yet teaching free of charge, the Congrégation was an irresistible bargain to the civil authorities.

As for private patrons, there were strikingly few -- certainly none to correspond to the Duchesse de Guise, patroness of the Dames de Saint-Maur, or the phalanx of noble ladies who supported the Filles de la Charité. Maisonneuve's support had been more moral than financial.¹⁰⁹ Some financial assistance was forthcoming from France, as for instance the 1200 livres from the Princesse de Conti, donated to the Indian mission.¹¹⁰ But the patrons that mattered most to Mère Bourgeoys were the Sulpicians, in their quality of seigneurs of Montreal, and -- more importantly -- as a powerful influence in ecclesiastical circles. For it was from the hierarchy of New France that the filles séculières faced their most serious challenge.

From the 1670s at least, the sisters had earned the Sulpicians' favour:

¹⁰⁸According to Mgr. Olivier Maurault, p.s.s., Saint-Sulpice, from the time it was "granted" the Seigneurie, sent only individuals of private means to Montreal, with the understanding that they would spend their own funds in its service. By 1763, the company had spent over seven million livres on the colony. See his article, "Nos Messieurs", quoted in S.S. Damase-de-Rome, op.cit., p.56, and another article quoted in ibid., n.116, p.87.

¹⁰⁹He left the Congrégation 2000 livres in his will. See Gustave Lanctot, Montréal sous Maisonneuve (Montreal: Beauchemin Ltd., 1966), p.229.

¹¹⁰See "Mémoire de Talon sur le Canada au Ministre Colbert" (10/xi/1670), R.A.P.Q. XI, p.127.

MM de Saint-Sulpice [wrote Mère Marie de l'Incarnation in 1670] qui en ont la conduite, n'y veulent que des filles séculières, qui aient la liberté de sortir pour aller ça et là, afin de solliciter et d'aider le prochain.¹¹¹

The correspondence of the Montreal seminary with Paris brought the new superior of Saint-Sulpice, Louis Tronson, onto Soeur Bourgeois' side. "Je serai ravi de vous temoigner," he wrote to her in 1682, "l'estime que je fais de votre communauté, et combien je vous suis entièrement acquis."¹¹² This esteem was invaluable to the community; it is hard to see how it could have survived without it.

The prelates of New France -- Bishop Laval and his successor Saint-Vallier, and Gabriel de Queylus, grand vicaire from 1657 -- all shared the same reserve with regard to the Soeurs de Notre-Dame. While respecting their work, they considered them temporary stand-ins, until such time as genuine cloistered nuns could be brought in. "Nous avons envoyé à Trois-Rivières des maîtresses pour prendre soin des petites filles," wrote Laval in 1661, "en attendant que le temps et l'occasion favorable se présentent pour établir dans ce lieu des religieuses de Sainte-Ursule."¹¹³ Though in 1669 he authorized the filles séculières to teach throughout Canada, it is possible that his

¹¹¹Letter to the Ursulines of Tours, 25/ix/1670, quoted in M. Faillon, op.cit., p.210.

¹¹²S.S.Henriette, op.cit., pp.186-87.

¹¹³Ibid., vol.I, p.288.

hand was forced by the action of the intendant and the petition of the habitants of Montreal in 1667.¹¹⁴ He obviously still continued to hope for change at a later date. In 1670 Mère Marie de l'Incarnation wrote: "M. l'abbé de Queylus, qui est supérieur spirituel et temporel à Montréal, pour MM de Saint-Sulpice, nous promet sa protection lorsque les choses seront en état Mgr notre prélat, qui ne fait rien qu'avec prudence, est aussi de ce sentiment."¹¹⁵ In 1676 he gave Soeur Bourgeoys and her companions further hope of permanence, by canonically erecting their community as the Filles séculières de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame, "sans qu'elles puissent néanmoins à l'avenir prétendre de passer à la vie religieuse, c'est-à-dire cloîtrée."¹¹⁶

It seems, however, that he still entertained hopes of incorporating the sisters into the Ursulines.¹¹⁷ Soeur Bourgeoys' effort, in 1679-80, to establish her community on a more solid footing met with his firm resistance.

In 1679, she took her last journey to France. "C'étaient plus mes peines d'esprit qui me faisaient entreprendre ce voyage, que le prétexte de nos Règles et de Monseigneur de Laval qui

¹¹⁴See above, fn. 64.

¹¹⁵Letter of 1670, quoted in M. Faillon, op.cit., vol.I, p.207. Though the Ursulines argued that their presence would not affect the work of the Congrégation, everyone else agreed that there would be room for only one female teaching community in Montreal.

¹¹⁶S.S.Henriette, op.cit., p.136.

¹¹⁷This is Faillon's conclusion in consideration of his treatment of Soeur Bourgeoys in Paris in 1679. Op.cit., p.259.

était pour lors à Paris, dont je me servais."¹¹⁸ The sisters
 had been without a written rule for too long, and she already
 felt the danger of "relâchement" in the community. In France,
 she resolved to seek advice from the communities of filles séculières
 who, she knew, were operating with official sanction. "Je fus
 logée aux Filles de la Croix, rue Saint-Antoine Je vas
 trouver Madame de Miramion Elle en demande permission à
 Monsieur de Rodes, son Supérieur, et ensuite à Monsieur de Laval,
 pour retrancher et ajouter à nos Règles ce qu'elle trouverait
 à propos" ¹¹⁹ But Laval had set his face against her
 project: "qui dit que j'avais mal fait de faire le voyage pour
 nos Règles, qu'il ne trouvait pas à propos que je ramenasse
 des filles."¹²⁰

The situation was still unresolved in 1684-85 when Mgr.
 de Laval resigned, and Jean-Baptiste de Saint-Vallier took his
 place. Saint-Vallier also favoured a fusion of the community
 with a monastic order. On the occasion of Soeur Bourgeoys'
 retirement and the election of a new superior, in 1693, the
 new bishop's attention was drawn to the question. The following
 spring, he presented the sisters with new rules, to which he
 demanded their immediate assent.¹²¹ The sisters discovered,

¹¹⁸Ecrits, p.69.

¹¹⁹Ibid., pp.70-72.

¹²⁰Loc.cit.

¹²¹For an account of this confrontation between the Bishop and the
 sisters, see S.S.Henriette, op.cit., pp.46-48.

to their shock, that he proposed, in effect, to turn them into Ursulines.¹²² They refused to agree immediately to the new rules, and asked for time to consider them. Now it was Saint-Vallier's turn to be shocked. He answered that "il n'avait que faire de leur consentement et acceptation, et qu'il voulait qu'elles observassent ce qu'il leur prescrivait."¹²³ However, he ended by softening his stance, and left the sisters to comment on the new rules while he went to France.

The sisters, or rather their superiors at the seminary, now had the opportunity to appeal to M. Tronson in Paris. He was informed of their dilemma: that in spite of their status as filles séculières, established by Letters Patent and by the previous bishop, "on leur ordonnait de vivre selon une règle qui n'était que pour les religieuses."¹²⁴ He also received letters from Soeur Bourgeoys, in which she recounted again, for his benefit, the inspiration which she had received from Gendret, half a century earlier.¹²⁵ Tronson undertook to mediate with the bishop, who was an ex-seminarian of Saint-Sulpice. He later wrote to Dollier de Casson: "Mgr. de Québec m'a fait

¹²²See the sisters' own account of the crisis, in their memoir to Tronson, paraphrased in ibid., pp. 57-69. "Monseigneur nous veut donner des règles et constitutions qui tendent, pour la plupart, à nous rendre religieuses" (p.58).

¹²³The same memoir as above, quoted by A. Jamet, op.cit., vol.II, p.746.

¹²⁴Tronson - Leschassier, 6/iii/1695, quoted in A.Jamet, op.cit., vol.II, p.748.

¹²⁵Ecrits pp.203-08; 221-23.

voir les règles des filles de la Congrégation. Je ne crois pas qu'il insiste ni sur les vœux, ni sur quelques autres articles, que M. Valens m'a mandé qui leur faisaient peine."¹²⁶ In 1697, finally, the modifications were achieved. "Je vous envoie les règlements que Mgr de Québec avoit fait pour les filles de la Congrégation, et que vous trouverez bien adoucis."¹²⁷ The bishop had renounced all ideas of turning the filles séculières into cloistered religious. They were to be bound by simple vows only, and there was no further mention of a special vow of obedience to the bishop.

For their part, the sisters were asked to make concessions. Foremost among these was that henceforth they had to accept dowries: a practice which they had opposed most vigorously. Neither Saint-Vallier nor Tronson had appreciated Marguerite's earnest insistence that "qu'à proportion qu'on sera avide pour les biens, on sera aussi autant plus pauvre."¹²⁸ They were also required to add to their three simple vows -- poverty, chastity and obedience -- a fourth vow, like that of the Ursulines, to teach young girls. After consultation, the community accepted the new rule. It was not what they had argued for, but it was better than they feared: it preserved certain parts of their

¹²⁶Letter of 12/v/1695. Correspondance de Louis Tronson, troisième supérieur de la Compagnie de Saint-Sulpice; lettres choisies, annotées et publiées par L. Bertrand. (Paris: V. Lecoffre, 1904), vol.II, p.351.

¹²⁷Tronson - Dollier de Casson, 21/iv/1697. Ibid., p.360.

¹²⁸Ecrits, p.286.

traditional practice while it suppressed others. At least, as a modern member of the Congregation puts it, "The vie voyagere was not irreparably compromised."¹²⁹

On June 25, 1698, in the presence of the Bishop, the sisters of the Mother House took their simple vows. Fourth in the formal procession was Soeur Marguerite du Saint-Sacrement, now seventy-eight years old.

In its first half-century, the Congrégation de Notre-Dame was formed by a variety of forces. The concept which had taken shape in Troyes in the high noon of the Catholic Reformation, and had been put into practice with great success in the hardships and dangers of early Montreal, was now smoothed by success and adapted to more prosperous times. The gradual acquisition of property and the improved living quarters, the respect in which the sisters were held in the parishes, the complexities of organization in the large community with its several missions, the rising expectations of the habitants for their daughters, both as students and as nuns -- all these circumstances affected the "petite vie" that Marguerite Bourgeoys had instituted for her community. The formality of Saint-Vallier's rule only served to complete the process. Like the Ursuline congrégées of the early 1600s, the sisters of Montreal found that the price of acceptance by society was a certain containment of their primitive apostolate. At the end of the seventeenth century, having made

¹²⁹L. Caza, op.cit., p.46.

their compromise, the Filles séculières de Notre-Dame found a secure niche in Canadian society. "To them above all," writes Dom Jamet, "we owe the Christian and French education of the grandmothers who made our country what it is."¹³⁰

¹³⁰A. Jamet, op.cit., vol. II, p.790.

CHAPTER VI

THE TEACHING CONGREGATIONS (1660-1700)

Enseigner ou faire enseigner les pauvres, les pécheurs, les enfans, pour les choses du salut est assurément quelque chose de plus excellent que de vêtir ou nourrir leur corps.¹

L'aumône d'une bonne éducation serait plus profitable aux pauvres enfans, et plus durable que toutes les autres qu'on leur pourrait faire; parce que celle-ci n'est pas seulement le soutien du corps, mais aussi la nourriture et la perfection de l'âme ... La bonne éducation est un avantage dont ils tirent des fruits tout le temps de leur vie.²

The years of Louis XIV's personal rule saw the focus of charitable action shifting to elementary schooling, as the only truly efficient means of rescuing the poor from their misery.³ The same years saw the appearance of most of the teaching congregations of filles séculières to be created under the Ancien Régime.⁴ Both of these developments involved significant change in social attitudes.

¹N.Barré, Lettres spirituelles (Toulouse, 1876), p.319.

²Charles Démià, Remontrances a Messieurs les Marchands, Echevins et principaux habitants de la Ville de Lyon touchant la necessite des ecoles pour instruire des enfans pauvres, 1666, quoted in Henri de Grèzes, Vie du R.P.Barré, religieux minime, fondateur de l'Institut des Ecoles charitables du Saint-Enfant-Jésus de Saint-Maur (Bar-le-Duc, 1892) p.139.

³J.-P.Gutton, La Société et les pauvres (op.cit.), p.152.

⁴See J.de Viguerie, L'Institution des enfans (op.cit.), pp. 62-63. "Entre la fin du XVI^e siècle et la Révolution, 33 congrégations féminines sont fondées qui inscrivent la tenue des écoles parmi leurs tâches principales 17 des 33 instituts sont nés entre 1660 et 1715 sous le gouvernement personnel de Louis XIV." He adds that only four such congregations appeared after 1715.

1) Review of the background: the "promotion of women", 1600-1660.

During the years 1600-1660 there had been a considerable enlargement in the role of women in the Catholic Church of France. By 1660 few, if any, of the principal towns and cities were without their convent school, staffed by women, and now generally viewed as a social necessity. "Les Urselines s'acquittoient, autant bien qu'on pouvoit le désirer, de l'instruction des jeunes filles".⁵ This expression of satisfaction, from a city council that had once vehemently opposed the entry of the Ursulines into Rouen, is typical of the changing attitude of notables, both secular and ecclesiastical. Their growing taste for schools, hospitals and other institutions had overcome their previous hesitations about these new "espèces de couvent".⁶

The old dictum, "aut maritus aut murus" was losing its vigour. A new concept had taken root: that of the fille dévote, the woman who practised religious virtues without withdrawing from the world. At the start of the century, such a lifestyle

⁵Quoted in C. Robillard de Beaurepaire, Recherches (op.cit.), vol.II, p.210.

⁶This was the term used by the city council of Reims to describe the new female community which appeared in 1635. See Pol Gosset, Les Magneuses (op.cit.), p.11.

was considered wholly unacceptable.⁷ But by mid-century more and more these filles dévotes, or filles séculières, were gathering into communities, emphasizing their separation from the mass of pious dames, veuves, tantes and filles âgées from whom they had been drawn, yet refusing the formal state of "religion". The "intermediate state" of religious life of which Gabriel Le Bras writes ⁸ was-being created in fact, if not in canon law.

However, the situation in 1660, though much more liberal than that of 1600, still represented a containment of the women's widest ambitions. The Filles de La Charité had achieved their first priority, the freedom to live and work outside the cloister. But they had succeeded partly because the novelty of their lifestyle was compensated for by the conservatism of their vocation. The mothering, nurturing work which they performed, in caring for the sick and small children, and in visiting the poor and the prisoners, was altogether consonant with the traditional role of women in their households and in their neighbourhoods.⁹ If the appearance of the filles on the street caused some uneasiness,

⁷When Françoise de Bermond, one of the first Ursulines, had expressed her wish to take a vow of virginity while remaining "in the world", she had been told that "c'était une pure tentation et qu'il fallait absolument à une jeune fille ou un mari, ou une muraille..." (Bourguignon, La vie du Père Romillon, quoted in H. Brémond, Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux [op.cit.], vol.II, p.28. Also see above, chap.III).

⁸See above, Introduction, fn. 1.

⁹G. Fagniez, La Femme et la société française (op.cit.), p.362.

at least their occupations offended no-one.¹⁰ Even their move into the field of teaching was unthreatening, since it was treated from the start as a function of public assistance. The pursuits of the filles séculières, at least prior to 1660, remained essentially conservative and suitably humble.

The congrégées of the early seventeenth century had been much more ambitious. They, too, had moved about on the streets, in spite of the scandal that their action caused.¹¹ They had visited hospitals and prisons, until they had been advised, by François de Sales among others, to withdraw into their houses.¹² But even more audacious was their work as catechists. They had taught in public places, even in churches, and they had instructed

¹⁰The perception that this kind of work was suitable for women comes through in the official approbation of the confraternity of Filles de la Charité specifically "comme étant une oeuvre agréable à Dieu et un bon moyen par lequel nous pourvoirons aux besoins des pauvres, donnerons moyen aux bonnes dames de la Charité et à ces pauvres veuves et filles ... de faire un oeuvre qui est à la gloire de Dieu et à l'édification du peuple." (Vincent de Paul, Correspondance (op.cit.), Vol. XIII, p.571).

¹¹There are many stories about the scandal caused by the appearance of the congrégées in public. In one case an elderly nun, who took the arm of a priest to cross over a slippery section of the street, became the subject of gossip (M.-C. Gueudré, Histoire de l'Ordre des Ursulines [op.cit.] vol. I, p.174). On another occasion, two priests accompanying a group of Ursulines to Toulouse were arrested: "... dieu permit pour leur espreuve qu'on les soubsonnat de mauvaise vie et qu'on les mit en prison pour savoir ou ils menoist ses jeunes filles..." "Memoires du commencement et progres de lordre de ste. ursule", quoted in J. de Viguerie, Une oeuvre d'éducation (op.cit.), pp.69-70.

¹²M. C. Gueudré, op.cit., vol. I, pp.154-55.

men as well as women.¹³ This public function had been removed from them when the papal bulls transformed their communities into monasteries,¹⁴ while at the same time their teaching activity had been compressed into a more traditionally feminine form.¹⁵ Finally, the very fact of clausura had the effect of reducing their horizons.¹⁶ Where once they had modelled themselves on the heroic women of the scriptures and the early Church, the nuns now accepted more modest ideals: "une très grande ponctualité dans l'observance des règles; une docilité marquée de simplicité, d'esprit d'enfance ..."¹⁷ They were still called upon to practise "vertus guerrières", but their field of action was the "tracas

¹³Thus Mère de Pommereu tells us that the people "portoient leurs parens et voisins à se faire catechiser par la Soeur de la Vesvre.... Elle fut contrainte de les recevoir les Fêtes et Dimanches dans les Classes, et là elle leur parloit des mystères de la Foy, la plupart de ses Auditeurs, tant hommes que femmes, fondant en larmes de devotion.... Une fois ils sonnerent la grosse cloche de la Paroisse, pour assembler le peuple Elle s'assit donc à terre, et leur fit un petit discours selon que le S. Esprit luy dicta." (M.D.P.U., op.cit., part I, pp.78-79). Also see Chapter III for examples of other Ursuline catechists.

¹⁴M.-C. Gueudré, op.cit., vol.II, p.224.

¹⁵Thus Gueudré suggests that intellectual stimulation was "written out" in the Bulls, while traditional jobs, such as sewing, were specified (op.cit., vol.I, p.108). Certainly the early practice of teaching Latin to the novices was soon discontinued (ibid., vol. II, p.235).

¹⁶The modern historians of the Ursulines, the Congrégation and the Visitation all allude to this effect of diminishment. See M.-C, Gueudré, op.cit. vol.II, p.220; R.Devos, Les visitandines d'Annecy p.55; M-A.Jégou, Les ursulines du faubourg Saint-Jacques, p.164; H.Derréal, Un missionnaire de la Contre-Réforme, p.388.

¹⁷Règlements of the Ursulines of Saint-Brieuc, quoted in M.-C. Gueudré, op.cit. vol.II, p.166.

des classes",¹⁸ and their own engagement under a rule that became ever more detailed and pervading.

This bowing of the head, it may be suggested, was the price that, in their different ways, both cloistered nuns and filles séculières paid for the gains that they made. In return for a wider share in the Church's apostolate and (in the case of the filles séculières) a greater freedom of action, the women accepted their limitations, acknowledged the fragility of their sex, and trod lightly -- for the time being -- in areas of greatest sensitivity.

What were these sensitive areas? Who felt threatened by the development of the active congregations? And for what reasons?

First, the municipalities. The multiplication of religious orders made them increasingly uneasy. What they feared was the absorption of their limited urban space. And with reason: new religious houses, once established, had a way of extending their holdings throughout whole neighbourhoods. As a contemporary observer commented, "l'on sait que les communautés se contentent d'un pouce de terre en arrivant et qu'elles s'étendent insensiblement dans la suite."¹⁹ City officials tended to oppose the establishment of all new congregations; and by the time the women's communities, latecomers in the "conventual invasion", arrived, their frustration was frequently boiling over. Few of them reacted as fiercely

¹⁸Mère de Pommereu, in her dedicatory letter at the beginning of her Annales, quoted in M.-A. Jégou, op.cit., p.138.

¹⁹Quoted in A. Babeau, La Ville sous l'Ancien Regime, p.465.

as the citizens of Troyes, who in 1631 dragged a "coachload of Visitandine nuns backwards away from the city gates."²⁰ But in many cases they used all possible legal means to prevent communities establishing, and, failing this, constrained the religious, in advance, to limit the size of their house, and to promise never to become a charge on the city.²¹

The second area of sensitivity was in the congregations' relations with the upper classes, from whom they largely drew their personnel. The case of the latter against the uncloistered congregations was based on family considerations. Their daughters must not enter a religious community "d'où elles puissent sortir avec liberté quand bon leur sembleroit",²² to become a charge on their families and a threat to inheritances. Archbishop Denis de Marquemont of Lyon was speaking for the respectable people of his city when he argued against François de Sales

²⁰One of the nuns later commented: "nous ne nous pûmes empêcher de sourire, ne pouvant comprendre, comme il s'imaginait, que six filles pussent faire violence à une grande ville comme Troyes." La vie à Troyes sous Louis XIII (Troyes: Centre de Recherche et d'Etudes Pierre et Nicolas Pithou, 1984), pp.224-25.

²¹See, for instance, the conditions laid down by the citizens of Pontarlier before the Ursulines were allowed to establish. They were not to acquire land within the city; all entrants were to renounce their right of inheritance; they were to receive a certain number of local women without dowry; they were not to send either money or furnishings to other houses; they were to conform to all the city's edicts; they were never to beg "même en temps de malheur, guerre ou peste". The same conditions were laid down in neighbouring towns. See J. Morey, Anne de Xainctonge (op.cit.), pp.359-61.

²²Quoted in H.Derréal, op.cit., p.191. See above, Chap.III, fn.143.

and for the enclosure of the Visitation. For the peace of families, he insisted, solemn vows were necessary. Women entering religion must be bound to a state from which there was no return. Otherwise there would be no end to the legal wrangling. "Quelle honte et quel malheur a la fille, et quel regret a ses parens! Mais, quelles semences de proces et de mauvais mesnages dans les familles!"²³ Furthermore, he maintained, women of quality needed the cloister to preserve their reputation: "Il faut penser au jugement du monde, et s'imaginer que ceulx qui verront cete Soeur de la Congregation par les chams et dans les villes, ... ne scauront pas les distinctions subtiles entre Religion et Congregation." "Quand les Soeurs seront Religieuses, et qu'elles auront faict les voeux solempnels, elles seront, pour leur regard an estat plus parfaict; elles, les Monastères et les parens hors de dangers, craintes et apprehensions."²⁴ In other words, entry into religion should not entail social derogation. The humiliation that Catherine de Veteris caused her father, by walking with her students through the streets of Aix,²⁵ was unacceptable.

The women bowed to this all the more readily because they themselves shared this point of view. For the vast majority,

²³Archbishop Marquemont - François de Sales, in F. de Sales, Oeuvres (op.cit.), vol. XXV, p.323. It should also be remarked that the same objection applied to masculine congregations of simple vows.

²⁴Ibid., pp.327, 325.

²⁵See above, Chapter III, fn. 91.

religious life was coloured by the same consciousness of rank that they had known in the world. Mère de Chantal, although the soul of charity, did not wish to accept "truly poor" women into the Visitation, "d'autant qu'assez rarement les filles de cette condition se trouvent avec les talents et dispositions nécessaires pour bien prendre l'esprit de notre vocation."²⁶ The vast majority of daughters of good family entered religious houses suitable to their rank, and pursued there, often among friends and relatives, a life nuanced to their own upbringing and social attitudes. Far from being a threat to the established social structure, the new monasteries became part of it, "quasi-necessary for the preservation of the equilibrium of families."²⁷ The character of each religious community was protected, not only by its grilles and double doors, but by the background of its postulants and the size of the dowry that they were required to bring in.

On the other hand, the "outdoor" work which Ursulines, Congrégation and Visitation had all undertaken at the outset, was left to the filles séculières who were, for the most part,

²⁶Jeanne Françoise de Chantal, Oeuvres vol. VIII, p.139.

²⁷R.Devos, op.cit., p.259 (My translation). It is interesting to note that according to R. Pillorget, in his work La Tige et le Rameau: Familles anglaises et françaises 16 - 18 siècle (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1979), pp.149-50, the number of spinsters in eighteenth-century France was considerably lower than that in England (15%-26%). This must have been the case partly because of the existence of an alternative to marriage in the religious communities.

of more modest social status.²⁸ For these women, working for a living was no disgrace, while walking and travelling alone was marginally, but not totally, improper. Above all, they were less likely to be involved in the problems of inheritance, that so exercised the minds of the upper classes, and therefore the question of the permanence of their vocation was not so burning. The simple vows that for social reasons were denied to the earlier congrégées were allowed to them.

The upper classes accepted the principle of an active religious life for women, on the understanding that its own daughters would not be affected. The more aristocratic the women, the less likely they were to be employed in service to an outside group. Although there are many instances of individuals who broke ranks to join less elevated communities, it can be said that, in general, parents placed their daughters in "good" convents just as they placed their other daughters in "good" marriages. The burgeoning of the non-monastic communities was possible only because a new social level was coming into action. The

²⁸There is little data to prove this. It can be inferred, however, from contemporary writings. The secular institutes attracted some women "of quality", especially in their early days, but they were essentially bourgeois and, in some cases, working-class. See chap. VIII.

majority of women of quality remained remote from the activity of the filles séculières.²⁹

The third, and possibly most difficult, area of sensitivity was within the Church itself. When women left the traditional occupations of charity and entered into teaching -- or, more -- specifically, catechizing -- a new question was raised: the question of their status in the Church.

The rule according to which women might not instruct men, or teach in the Church, went back to Saint Paul.

Women are to keep quiet at meetings since they have no permission to speak; they must keep in the background as the Law itself lays down.³⁰

During instruction, a woman should be quiet and respectful. I am not giving permission for a woman to teach or to tell a man what to do. A woman ought not to speak, because Adam was formed first and Eve afterward, and it was not Adam who was led astray, but the woman.³¹

The Catholic Church of the Reformation years held this proscription to be all the more complete because heretics, on the contrary, were permitting women to study Scriptures, dispute, and even

²⁹It is interesting to note that Vincent de Paul was as class-conscious as Jeanne-Françoise de Chantal -- in the reverse direction. He warned his filles to avoid accepting wealthy women into the company: "La où se doit observer une véritable pauvreté, les gens de condition y sont très dangereux, parce qu'elle est contraire à leur naissance." Correspondance (op.cit.), vol.X, p.103.

³⁰I Corinthians 14:34 (Jerusalem Bible).

³¹I Timothy 2: 11-14.

0 teach.³² Furthermore, catechizing by women was contrary to the spirit of Catholic pastoral reform. According to the Council of Trent and succeeding councils in France, the instruction of the people in the faith was the prerogative of the parish clergy.³³ Where priests were unavailable, clerks in minor orders could act as substitutes.³⁴ Laymen were admitted to catechize only where necessary, and in many places they were banned from teaching inside the church,³⁵ though this was where most of the formal instruction took place.

It was this teaching function that was forbidden to women. Obviously, mothers were expected to instruct their children, and mistresses their domestics, in their prayers and in their

32A widely-read tract of the day accused heretic women of dabbling in theology when they would have been better employed at their distaffs. "Nunc Translationibus istis in linguam vernaculam factum esse cernimus, ut quas lanam texere sub id tempus magis expediat, eae sibi docendi quoque potestatem iam arrogaverint." (S.Hosias, De expresso dei verbo (1561), quoted in Keith Thomas, "Women and the Civil War Sects" (op.cit.), p.60, n.70). English Protestant writers seized gleefully upon this text, as proof of the way in which "the Jesuits" barred women "from all conference touching the word of God." (Loc.cit.)

33"C'est d'eux immédiatement que le peuple qui leur est commis doit entendre et apprendre ce qui est de son salut." (Instruction pour bien faire le catechisme, Epître au dévot lecteur, 1626; quoted in J.-C.Dhôtel, Les origines du catéchisme moderne, p.123).

34According to the book of instructions put out in 1657 by the priest of Saint Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, "le catéchiste doit au moins être lecteur." (Dhôtel, op.cit., p.162).

35Regarding the instruction of the poor by the charitable confraternities, Vincent de Paul ruled that "les frères ne doivent pas enseigner dans l'église." (Quoted in E. Germain, Langages de la foi à travers l'Histoire [Paris: I.S.P.C., 1972], p.74).

duties as Christians. But women were not to teach the faith publicly and formally; above all they were not to teach the faith within the precincts of a church. Catechizing, however, was by custom associated with the interior of the church. The priest stood, or sat, before the assembly; not in the pulpit, but, more informally, at the front of the church. In large parishes the duty might be delegated: the congregation was broken up into small groups, which went with their catechists to the side chapels. But in every side chapel there was an altar; therefore the catechist who stood in front of the altar to teach was acting in place of a priest. For a woman to perform this physical act, with all that it symbolized, was seen as a heresy. The condemnation of Mary Ward by Pope Urban VIII was based partly on a report that she had preached standing up, in front of an altar.³⁶ "It was never heard in the Church," ran the act of accusation, "that women should discharge the apostolic office."³⁷

The opposition to women catechists as usurpers of the priestly function had its roots in an understanding of that activity as being physically located within the church, but it extended beyond the Sunday catechisms to the everyday teaching of the faith in unconsecrated surroundings. It remained an obstacle to any undue feminine apostolic ambitions. "L'Apôtre ne veut

³⁶R. Pillorget, "Mary Ward", in Les religieuses enseignantes, p.10.

³⁷M. Salmome, Mary Ward (op.cit.), p.138. See above, chap. I, fn. 24.

point que les femmes fassent aucune fonction ecclésiastique."³⁸ Since catechizing was a priestly function, it was heresy for women to undertake it. The teaching sisters of the 1660s, like the Ursuline congrégées of the 1610s, faced priests who insisted that "c'était un abus que des filles enseignassent le monde."³⁹

The antidote for this hostility was always the same. The women were instructed to demonstrate their humility and their deference, and to emphasize that their vocation remained within that fine boundary which divided the maternal teaching function from the teaching of the faith.⁴⁰ They were to insist that their work was only with persons of their own sex. They were to avoid every appearance of preaching. Since standing up and talking about the faith was suspect, they were sometimes ordered to hold an open book, or a paper, in their hands:

³⁸Fr. Anselme, speaking to the ladies of the Bourse clericale, on the subject of the good that they were doing by raising money to endow poor priests. He went on to say: "Vous seules avez trouvé le moyen de relever la gloire de votre sexe, qui semble avoir reçu quelque flétrissure par cette exclusion. Vous catéchisez, vous prêchez, vous offrez Jésus-Christ à son Père. Vous le faites sans violer le précepte de l'Apôtre, sans sortir de la sujétion que vous devez aux hommes, sans faire la moindre violence à votre pudeur, qui sont les causes pour lesquelles les Saint Pères nous assurent que votre sexe a été exclu de la Cléricature." (J.Darche, Le saint abbé Bourdoise (op.cit.), vol. II, p.115) For Fr. Anselme, catechizing was in the same category as preaching and offering the sacrifice of the Mass.

³⁹M.-C. Gueudré, op.cit., vol.I, pp.41-42.

⁴⁰Over and over again, in the school rules of the teaching congregations, we find the sisters being instructed to act towards their children "comme vraies mères". This identification of their work with the mothering function may have been part of their defence against criticism.

Elles devaient soigneusement éviter toute interprétation personnelle de la foi; elles ne parlaient qu'en ayant en main le papier de Monseigneur pour marquer qu'elles ne disent rien d'elles-mêmes.⁴¹

But if the tact of the teaching women soothed offended feelings, their ultimate argument was the demonstration that by their work they enhanced the docility of the sex that was born to obey. It was soon realized that girls who had received formal instruction performed their religious duties better. "Elles en ont retiré le plus grand profit pour leurs études, mais principalement pour leur piété," wrote the Cardinal of Lorraine in 1603.⁴² "Les confesseurs les discernoient dans les confessionaux comme mieux formées et instruites," Dom Eustache remarked in 1617.⁴³ The Archbishop of Reims, writing in 1675, found the young girls of his diocese "incomparablement plus modestes et mieux instruites" after four years of instruction by the sisters.⁴⁴ The christianizing effect of the teaching sisters upon the girls of their day was the key to their own

⁴¹The regentes of Alet, founded by Nicolas Pavillon. See R.Taveneaux, La vie quotidienne des Jansenistes aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles. (Paris: Hachette, 1973), p.78. The dames de la Charité who worked in the Hôtel-Dieu of Paris, exhorting sick women to repent and prepare for confession, were also instructed to keep an open book in their hands, so as to avoid scandal. See P.Coste, St.Vincent de Paul et les dames de la Charité (op.cit.), pp.9-10.

⁴²E. Renard, La Mère Alix Le Clerc. (op.cit.) p.182.

⁴³H. de Leymont, Madame de Sainte-Beuve (op.cit.), p.267.

⁴⁴L. de M. Aroz, Nicolas Roland, Jean-Baptiste de La Salle et les Soeurs du Saint-Enfant-Jesus de Reims. (Rome: Maison St-Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1972), p.123.

acceptance by the Church.

In the final accession of the teaching sisters to a state of full respectability we see the triumph of one set of tridentine values over another. The immediate aim of the Counter Reformation had been a return to discipline and regularity. As Archbishop de Marquemont pointed out in 1616, "L'Intention des Conciles a esté d'empêcher les nouveautés et diversités an l'Eglise."⁴⁵

For women, above all, this meant return to the strict observance of the rules, nothing more.⁴⁶ On the other hand, the reforming councils had also stressed the obligation of instructing the faithful. In the critical conditions of the seventeenth century, and with the Protestant example acting as a perpetual goad, it was this obligation that became the ruling passion.

"The Church is a School, of which Jesus Christ is the Master"⁴⁷: this is the substance of what has been called "an ideology of the school"⁴⁸, developed by the French Church of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Catholic reformers, like their Protestant rivals, came to believe that knowledge of the faith was necessary to salvation. No longer did the foi du charbonnier, the blind assent to the religion of the community, suffice:

⁴⁵François de Sales, op.cit., vol.XXV, p.330.

⁴⁶See R.Taveneaux, Le Catholicisme dans la France Classique (op.cit.), vol.I, p.69.

⁴⁷F. Furet and J. Ozouf, Lire et écrire (op.cit), vol.I, p.72.

⁴⁸Loc.cit.

Le premier soin des curés sera de procurer par tous les moyens possibles que tous les paroissiens, hommes, femmes et enfants depuis l'âge de discrétion, soient bien instruits aux points de la foi Feront savoir et répéteront souvent à leurs paroissiens que sans la croyance des dits points, ils ne peuvent recevoir les sacrements à salut ni être tenus pour vrais chrétiens."⁴⁹

This placed a heavy obligation on the parish clergy, and one which, it soon became clear, they were unable to shoulder alone. A more systematic instruction came to be seen as desirable, especially for children. "C'est par le moyen des écoles chrétiennes qu'on prépare des âmes à recevoir la parole de Dieu," wrote Bourdoise.⁵⁰ The schools, he insisted, were the only means by which vices could be destroyed and virtue established.⁵¹

That Catholic society agreed with him can be seen from the extraordinary outpouring of donations and legacies which took place in favour of the charity schools.⁵² For the faithful

⁴⁹François de Rochefoucauld, Bishop of Senlis, Avertissements aux curés (c.1614), quoted in P. Broutin, La Réforme pastorale (op.cit.) vol.I, p.49.

⁵⁰J.-C.Dhôtel, op.cit.,p.266.

⁵¹Bourdoise to Olier, 1649. "Parce que les écoles des paroisses sont pauvres, et tenues par des pauvres, on s' imagine que ce n'est rien. Cependant, c'est l'unique moyen de détruire les vices et d'établir la vertu et je défie tous les hommes ensemble d'en trouver un meilleur." Quoted in R. Chartier, M.-M. Compère and D. Julia, L'Éducation en France (op.cit.), pp. 67-68.

⁵²Roger Duchêne attests to this outpouring in his commentary on the talk by B. Chedozeau, "Les petites écoles de Pierre Nicole", in Le XVII^e siècle et l'éducation, Marseille no.88 (1972), p.19. "J'ai trouvé peu de testaments qui ne mentionnent pas avec un nombre de messes proportionné à la fortune de celui qui est en train de mourir, une dotation financière pour les écoles."

of the seventeenth century, instruction and the endowment of instruction became a service to God.⁵³ But whereas Bourdoise thought mainly about boys' schools, society as a whole showed at least equal, and possibly more, concern for girls.⁵⁴ As long as the purpose of instruction was the saving of souls, then the second sex -- "la moitié du genre humain racheté du sang de Jésus-Christ et destiné à la vie éternelle"⁵⁵ -- was equally eligible. Not only did women have their own souls to save, but they were responsible for others:

Les mesmes ... estant quelque iour plus avancées en aage, devenues Maistresses et Mères-de-famille ... par leur bon exemple, et sages remonstrances instruiront tous leurs domestiques, et garçons, et filles, et serviteurs, et servantes, et les dresseront a la pieté et craincte de Dieu; ... Et sera par ce moyen establie dans les familles la cognoissance de Dieu, la devotion, l'obeissance, la paix et le repos, la patience, et la praticque des oeuvres de misericorde envers le prochain.⁵⁶

But if girls must be instructed, women must instruct.

This was inevitable, since both Church and Crown forbade the

⁵³F. Furet and J. Ozouf, op.cit., vol.I, p.77.

⁵⁴This "more" has been the subject of discussion. "Nobles et bourgeois se preoccupaient plus tôt et plus constamment de pourvoir à l'éducation des filles qu'à celle des garçons..." (Y. Poutet, "L'enseignement des pauvres [op.cit.], p.88). The author surmises that the need for trained maidservants provided the motive for this preoccupation.

⁵⁵These were Fénelon's words (Education de filles, p.8); but they were not new. Mlle Le Gras had used the same idea before, as doubtless had many others.

⁵⁶Pierre Fourier, Primitif et legitime esprit, pp.8-10.

reception of girls into mixed classes.⁵⁷ The widespread appearance, especially in the second half of the century, of charitably funded schools for girls involved, as a necessary corollary, the widespread employment of women as teachers. In all of these establishments the objective was some variant of the following:

... non pas d'enseigner seulement aux
Enfants à lire et à écrire; mais de les
instruire des choses nécessaires à Salut
et leur donner une éducation chrétienne.⁵⁸

In other words, during the second half of the century women became catechists, and their involvement in this sacred employment ceased to shock.

Hélène Derréal sees the difficulties which the teaching congregations experienced during this period as result of the crossing of two currents, one of apostolic movement, the other of monastic reform.⁵⁹ One might add a third current, that of increasing clericalism, as the tridentine Church moved more and more to bar the laity from what it saw as the preserve of the priesthood.⁶⁰ Much of the opposition to the first attempts

⁵⁷R. Chartier, M.-M. Compère and D. Julia, op.cit., p.244. However, it has been noted, both by them and by others, that this rule was honoured in the breach as well as in the observance, since royal and episcopal denunciations of the practice of co-education continued in many schools throughout the Ancien Régime.

⁵⁸Arch. Soeurs de l'Enfant-Jésus de Reims, ms. 17, Usage des exercices, Ch. 57, p.115.

⁵⁹H. Derréal, op.cit., p.194, n.74.

⁶⁰F. Lebrun (ed.), Histoire des Catholiques (op.cit.), p.84.

at female instruction came from reforming prelates, anxious not to compromise the return to discipline.⁶¹

This crossing of currents caused turbulence for many years. But by 1660 the turbulence was abating. The Catholic Church was more secure and less defensive, as the Counter Reformation turned into the Catholic Reformation. The extraordinary variety and experimentation of the age of dévots was about to give way to a massive drive towards organization and uniformity, led by the bishops and made possible by the opening of the seminaries.⁶²

Women had shown that they could assist in the new order of things:

Dans les lieux où elles résident, on remarque
et l'on admire une réformation merveilleuse

⁶¹One of these prelates was Pope Urban VIII himself. In a letter to Pierre Fourier, Père Guinet, the representative of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame in Rome, wrote, "Il est certain que si le Souverain Pontife approuvait ces écoles de filles, l'affaire sera déjà faite Mais il trouve tant de difficultés à cette instruction donnée par des femmes, et son opinion à cet égard est si fortement ancré dans son esprit, qu'il est difficile de l'en ôter." (Quoted in H. Déréal, op.cit., pp.347-48. Also see above, Chapter III, fn. 170).

⁶²The early 1660s are frequently viewed as a turning point. Mgr. Lestocquoy signals 1661 as the end of the mystical movement, and, at the same time, the beginning of the real christianization of France. "C'est au moment du déclin des mystiques que la France est convertie." (La vie religieuse (op.cit.), p.152). Dhôtel sees 1660 as the end of the period of experimentation in the field of catechesis. "1620-1660, c'est le temps des expériences, la croissance de la catéchèse. Celle-ci, parvenue à l'âge adulte, proliférera d'une manière plus monotone. A l'âge des prototypes succédera, et pour plusieurs siècles, celui de la fabrication en série." (Op. cit., p.278). In the area of charity, the 1660s marked the decline of voluntarism and the beginnings of the takeover of "good works" by the public authorities.

↙ dans la petite jeunesse; ... la modestie,
l'obéissance et la dévotion des femmes qui
ont fréquenté leurs écoles pendant qu'elles
étaient petites filles.⁶³

From now on, their assistance would be actively sought where it had once been regarded with deep reserve. The majority of teaching congregations of filles séculières were founded after 1660, usually under the aegis of the bishops.⁶⁴ Their creation, and their admission into one diocese after another, represents the final acceptance of women as participants in the work of catechizing the masses.

2) Three case studies.

Three congregations of schoolmistresses have been chosen for closer study: the Providence of Rouen,^u the Dames de Saint-Maur of Paris, and the Soeurs du Saint-Enfant-Jésus of Reims. All three fit the characteristics of the post-1660 congregations: they were secular, they were apostolic, and they were designed to educate the children of the lower social classes. They were the beneficiaries, but also the agents, of a significant change in social attitudes towards their work, from reserve and outright disapproval to acceptance. As a result of their work, and that of other women like them, elementary schooling for girls became commonplace and respectable.

⁶³Pierre Fourier, quoted in P.L.Péchenard, Congrégation de Notre-Dame de Reims (op.cit.), vol.I, p.35.

⁶⁴R. Chartier, M.-M.Compère and D. Julia, op.cit., p.237.

i) The Providence of Rouen.

Sometime around 1652-54, during the great drive for renfermement, the Assembly General of Rouen ordered that

... les pauvres enfans, garçons et filles, ,
à partir de l'âge de huit ans, seroient
renfermés dans les maisons de la Maréquerie
pour y être instruits à la piété et religion
catholique, à lire et escrire et mesmes
employés aux ouvrages et mestiers auxquels
ils seroient instruits.⁶⁵

This was the beginning of the reconstitution of an old and moribund charity school system in the mould of the seventeenth century, with emphasis on incarceration, war on idleness, and social control. The first schools were opened within the Hôpital Général, with schoolmasters and schoolmistresses fed, lodged and paid by the hospital administration.⁶⁶ The children, from the age of eight, were subjected to a highly structured discipline, in which manual work and religious exercises played a much greater part than lessons.⁶⁷ From there the hospital's pedagogy spread out into the parishes. By 1670 boys' schools were operating

⁶⁵Y. Poutet, Le XVII^e siècle et les origines lasalliennes (Rennes: Imprimeurs réunis, 1970) vol.1, p.494. (Hereafter Origines).

⁶⁶Ibid., vol.I, p.499.

⁶⁷Ibid., p.530. The day, which lasted from 5 o'clock in the morning until 8:30 p.m., stipulated one hour of reading and writing, and approximately six of catechism and religious exercises.

in the four quarters of the city and in the faubourg of Darnétal.⁶⁸

Between 1670 and 1675 five "quarter" schools were established for girls, under the conduct of the Soeurs Grises, a community founded by Marie de Houdemaire, the daughter of a local merchant, and based on the Hôpital Général.⁶⁹

The very existence of the "quarter" schools represented a new phase in charity schooling, one in which renfermement and instruction were separated. Gradually, the external schools acquired more weight in the Hôpital-Général's system. By 1684-85, nine of the thirteen "brothers" in its employment were working in the "quarter" schools for boys; thirteen soeurs grises were working in the schools for girls.

However, the schooling of the Hôpital-Général was intended only for the indigent. Charity scholars had been distinguished in the previous century by badges sewn onto their clothes, bearing the words "Pauvre de la Ville de Rouen".⁷⁰ While they were no longer required to be so distinctive, the principle remained. All children attending charity schools were expected to produce

⁶⁸C. Robillard de Beaurepaire, op.cit., p.303.

⁶⁹It is interesting to note the predominance of laymen in all these enterprises. The moving force behind the boys' schools was Adrien Nyel, a secular schoolmaster. Under his direction the boys' schools were taught primarily by laymen, though after his death they gave way to ecclesiastics. The Soeurs grises were administered by a committee of notables, even to the nomination of their superior. Later this power was turned over to the Archbishop. (Ibid., pp.236-40).

⁷⁰C. Robillard de Beaurepaire, op.cit., p.314.

certificates from their curés, attesting their poverty. Any malingerers, so to speak, from more comfortable families were to be constrained to attend the private paying schools.⁷¹ The corporation of master-scribes maintained a vigilant watch over their monopoly, and did not hesitate to prosecute trespassers.⁷² Charity schools were, by definition, for paupers, and they taught subjects suitable to paupers. The following report, made in 1698 on a girls' school in the parish of Saint-Maclou, describes a situation that was not unusual:

Nous sommes allez ... aux écoles de charite des filles qui sont sur le cimetière de lad. paroisse, où nous avons veu deux classes, l'une d'environ quatre-vingts filles qui travaillent à faire des bas, l'autre d'environ quarante qui font de la dentelle ... Les maitresses ... enseignent à lire, à écrire, à travailler ... les filles travaillent pour les marchands de la ville dont elles sont payées fort ponctuellement ce qui aide à soulager leurs familles de leur pauvreté ...⁷³

The community of Soeurs du Saint-Enfant Jésus, which was christened the "Providence" by the people, took feminine education a step beyond the limitations of the quarter schools. They were unusual in two respects: they aimed to teach the children

⁷¹Loc cit.

⁷²The master scribes flourished during the seventeenth century. In 1618 they numbered 32; in 1662 they were 70. (Ibid., p.283). By 1725 they were down to 36 again -- victims of what they considered the unfair competition offered by the Christian Brothers.

⁷³A.S.M., G.1177. Visite paroissiale de Joseph de Seraucourt, 1698, quoted in J. P. Bardet, Rouen aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles, vol. I, p. 248.

of the working poor, rather than paupers; and they saw themselves, not simply as the teachers of little girls, but as auxiliaries to the clergy in the general work of christianization.⁷⁴ In addition to their work in the schools, they were trained to give public catechism classes, and also to proselytize the unconverted.⁷⁵

Their beginnings were unprepossessing and unplanned. In 1662, the Minime Nicolas Barré set off to preach a mission in the town of Sotteville, in the banlieue of Rouen. He took a small group of women with him as auxiliaries, to assist other women in preparing to receive the sacraments, and to catechize the children. These women were not religious. They were simply "femmes libres de leur temps" ⁷⁶; most likely members of the comfortable classes. The directrice, Françoise Duval, was the daughter of a rich merchant of Honfleur.⁷⁷ For the rest, all that is known is that at least two of them, Marguerite and Catherine

⁷⁴y. Poutet, Origines, vol.I, p.533. From the very start, their duties included the instruction of women and older girls and their preparation for confession and communion, and Sunday catechisms.

⁷⁵"De chercher dans les lieux où elles sont, les filles un peu avancées en âge, qui courent quelque risque, ou celles qui ont déjà fait naufrage, afin de prévenir la chute des unes, et d'aider les autres par leurs adresses zélées et charitables, à se retirer du péché & de toutes les occasions d'y retomber." (N. Barré, "Memoire Instructif", appended to the typed copy of Statuts et reglements des escoles chrestiennes et charitables (Paris, 1685), Archives of the Soeurs de l'Enfant-Jésus, Paris.

⁷⁶y. Poutet, Origines, vol.I, p.497.

⁷⁷F. Leon de Marie Aroz, Nicolas Roland (op.cit.) p.72, fn 1.

Lestocq, were members of a confraternity of prayer, the Famille du Saint-Enfant Jésus, whose purpose was "d'appartenir au Verbe incarné en qualité de ses domestiques."⁷⁸ In this opportunity to assist in the mission they saw, not a permanent employment, but a "good work" of limited duration. The classes which they set up, the écoles de Jésus humilié, offered two sessions a day, to instruct women and children for confession and communion.⁷⁹ Strictly speaking, their work was to be confined to "their own sex"; though there was an openly expressed hope that the lessons taught to the women would reach the men of their families.

"Il s'est fait," wrote Marguerite Lestocq, years later,

de très grandes et admirables conversions, tant d'hommes que de femmes, et grandes filles, avec quantité de confessions générales. Les petites écoles y ont tenu environ un an avec applaudissement. Je peux assurer que presque tout le village a été converti.⁸⁰

⁷⁸Quoted in Y. Poutet, "L'influence du Père Barré dans la fondation des Soeurs du Saint-Enfant Jésus de Reims", R.H.E.F., 46 (1960), p.23. Other members of the confraternity would also appear later in connection with the Saint-Enfant Jésus of Rouen: Marie Deschamps and Anne Corneille, future schoolmistresses, Marguerite Le Coeur, sister of one of the first schoolmistresses, and Madeleine de Buc, first temporal superior of the new congregation. Also members were Madeleine Legendre, wife of Laurent de Bimorel, administrator of the Hôpital-Général and principal benefactor of Adrien Nyel, and Françoise Beuvelet, wife of Roland, councillor to the presidial of Reims who was an uncle of Canon Nicolas Roland. See Y. Poutet, Origines (op.cit.), vol.I, p.489.

⁷⁹Ibid., vol.I p.505.

⁸⁰Marguerite Lestocq, Mémoire, quoted in H.de Grèzes, Vie du Père Barré, religieux minime, fondateur de l'Institut des Ecoles charitables du Saint-Enfant-Jésus de Saint-Maur (Bar-le-Duc, 1892), pp.157-58.

The classes in Sotteville were originally only a part of a general programme of conversion, attached to a specific period and intended to end with that period. But Barré came away from the mission impressed both by the problems in the field and by the effectiveness of the women in dealing with them. Though as a Minime his experience had been in preaching and spiritual direction, he now showed himself to be a convinced exponent of the "ideology of the school" so characteristic of seventeenth-century thinking. The instruction of souls, in his opinion, was more pleasing to God than the building and decoration of churches, "car c'est préparer à sa Majesté des demeures spirituelles et des temples vivants."⁸¹ Among the souls to be instructed, children had a special place, since they were particularly favoured by God:

Bien que Dieu soit souverainement grand, il prend néanmoins plaisir à s'abaisser vers les petits. C'est pourquoy en predestinant son Fils, non seulement il a voulu qu'il fust homme mais aussi qu'il fust petit ENFANT, et Jesus-Christ fait ENFANT ... au premier voyage qu'il a fait a esté chercher un ENFANT qui étoit encore dans le sein de sa Mère, pour l'éclairir, le justifier, et le sanctifier. Il a voulu que les premieres gouttes de son sang fussent appliquées aux ENFANS Il a donné à un ENFANT le milieu, c'est-à-dire, la plus honorable place entre les Apostres: il leur a défendu d'empêcher les ENFANS de l'approcher

Comme il a dit que ce que l'on fait à un des plus petits, des plus pauvres et plus méprisables on le fait à luy même, il sensuit que quiconque reçoit un ENFANT pauvre et délaissé, reçoit

⁸¹N. Barré, Lettres spirituelles (Toulouse, 1876), p.345.

doublément Jésus-Christ en sa propre personne.⁸²

He saw the schooling of children as the way to salvage the world from its present sinful condition.

Quelques personnes de piété [he wrote later, in a memoir describing the purpose of his institute] touchées d'un mal que l'on ne peut assez deplorer, ont cru que le moyen le plus efficace, pour en arrêter le cours, était de former plusieurs filles, en qualité de Maîtresses charitables, qui puissent repandre cette piété si nécessaire aux chrétiens, dans tous les endroits où il plairait à la divine Providence de les appeler ...; ainsi, elles ont pour fin d'établir le règne de Jésus-Christ dans tous les coeurs, sur les ruines du péché et de la tyrannie du démon.⁸³

But why girls' schools? His answer was:

...gagner les parents par ces petites créatures, s'insinuer dans l'esprit des mères par les filles, des maîtresses par les servantes, et pour convertir même les hommes par les femmes.⁸⁴

This was not an original idea. It went back to Fourier and the Ursulines, at the start of the century. Vincent de Paul had made it the rationale of his teaching sisters:

Et vous, mes chères soeurs, qui faites profession d'instruire les petites filles, vous instruisez par ce moyen leurs pères et mères, comme cela se voit dans les missions, parce que les enfants rapportent ce qu'ils ont appris; ils l'enseignent à ceux qui le leur devraient avoir enseigné.⁸⁵

The rest of the Church having failed, God was going to

⁸²N. Barré, Statuts et Reglemens, pp. 1-2.

⁸³N. Barré, Mémoire instructif (1681 or 1682), typewritten copy in the Archives of the Soeurs du Saint Enfant Jésus, Paris, p.1.

⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 1-2.

⁸⁵Vincent de Paul, Correspondance (op.cit.), vol.X, p.567. (See above, Chap.IV, fn. 111.

turn to little children to serve His purpose; not only little children, but little girls, the very least of His creatures. Nicolas Roland, who patterned his own work on the Rouen experiment, was soon to express the same thought:

Parce que le peuple et les grandes personnes profitent peu des meilleurs sermons, je suis résolu de travailler à établir des écoles gratuites pour l'instruction des petites filles.⁸⁶

Was it really as straightforward as this? or was there something of faute de mieux in the resolution of these founders? The initial focus of most reformers was on schools for boys, not schools for girls. In this spirit Barré attempted first to set up boys' schools in Rouen.⁸⁷ But practical experience showed that no matter how desirable charity education for boys might be, it was limited by the shortage of schoolmasters ready to do the work. On the other hand, women were available, and in abundance. His concentration on girls' schools was less a matter of choice than an acceptance of the practical possibilities.⁸⁸

⁸⁶Nicolas Roland to Guillaume Rogier, quoted in Gaetan Bernonville, Un précurseur de Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle: Nicolas Roland, fondateur de la Congrégation de Saint-Enfant Jésus de Reims (Paris, Ed. Alsatia, 1950) p.99.

⁸⁷No documentary evidence exists for these schools, but according to Blain, the biographer of Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, they were "le premier Institut du Père Barré". See Canon Farcy, L'institut des soeurs du Saint Enfant Jésus dites de la Providence de Rouen (Rouen: Imprimerie commerciale du Journal de Rouen, 1938), p.46.

⁸⁸ After he left Rouen and went to Paris, he again attempted to establish a teaching institute of men. This was initially successful, but failed after a few years.

At the end of the mission it was arranged that the women should continue their work in Rouen, in the parish of Saint-Amand. Marguerite Lestocq later recalled their success:

Nous fesions les petites escoles depuis .
8 heures jusques à 11. Ensuite, on menoit
les enfants à la sainte messe, au nombre de
130 ou plus. Depuis midi jusqu'à 2 heures,
on avait les grandes filles ...

Après, nous allions par les maisons pour
instruire les bons gens, leur apprenant les
principaux mystères Nous fesions catéchisme
les dimanches et les festes; il s'y trouvoit une
si grande affluence de monde que l'on fut contraint
d'abattre des chambres et de briser des murailles
pour avoir des places..... 89

Up to this point, there was no thought of a community life. The young women lived at home. The work was voluntary and largely experimental, under the guidance of Barré and Antoine de la Haye, cure of Saint-Amand.⁹⁰

Nous étions quatre ou cinq Soeurs dans un abandon
total à la divine Providence, sans estre en
communauté, mais dispersées. Deux Soeurs faisoient
les escoles proche les Carmelites, et trois chez Mme
de Grainville. Le R.P. Barré y venait de temps en
temps faire des conférences et nous donnoit un
régime de vie.⁹¹

⁸⁹Marguerite Lestocq, Mémoire, in H. de Grèzes, op.cit., p.159.

⁹⁰This priest seems to have played a leading role in the creation of the schools; indeed, the evidence suggests that the idea was initially his, and that Barré took it up from him. De la Haye appears to have been attempting to set up a seminary along the lines of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet, with young priests learning their trade, including the teaching of young children. (Chanoine Farcy, op.cit., p.40, fn.1). This would explain why Nicolas Roland, after visiting the Paris seminary, came to live with him for a time.

⁹¹Ibid., p.158.

Only later, in 1671 at the earliest, after two of their sisters had left to work in Reims, did they resolve to live in community. It was Barré who made the suggestion:

"Voulez-vous vivre en communauté, à la charge et condition que vous ne serez pas assurées; vous n'aurez que le nécessaire bien petitement, et, si vous êtes malades, on vous enverra à l'Hôtel-Dieu? Il faut se résoudre à mourir au coin d'une haye, abandonnée de tout le monde, et de demeurer ainsi toute la vie ..."

Nous répondîmes de très grand coeur, "Ouy, nous voulons."⁹²

Soeur Lestocq added:

il n'y a eu aucune difficulté entre les Soeurs: aussi la communauté a toujours augmenté de plus en plus, et les écoles ont toujours multiplié, et la grâce de Dieu en abondance. Cependant, il y a bien eu de grandes difficultés après plusieurs années (je n'ai pu les exprimer), tant de la part de MM. les curés, MM. les ecclésiastiques, les religieux et les personnes du monde, dont notre Très Reverend Père a bien souffert ...⁹³

Apart from this cryptic recollection of Soeur Lestocq, there is little specific reference to the difficulties that Barré experienced. But it seems that, as elsewhere, the women were resented when they began to intrude into what was considered a male preserve -- the catechizing of the people:

Il se trouva que messieurs les curés et ecclésiastiques ont voulu faire des difficultés sur nos catéchismes des dimanches, disant que nous faisions ce qu'ils devoient faire et que cela leur faisoit grande confusion; mais nous leur avons répondu si sagement, avec tant de

⁹²Ibid., p.160.

⁹³Ibid., p.161.

déférence, respect et soumission, comme ils le méritent, que, des lors, ils ont approuvé notre instruction...⁹⁴

While some of the clergy came to accept them, it would have been most unusual if approval was general; too many of the priests of the day believed, with the Parisian preacher Frère Anselme, that "l'Apôtre ne veut point que les femmes fassent aucune fonction ecclésiastique."⁹⁵ Barré's identification of his charitable schoolmistresses with the deaconesses of the early Church⁹⁶ was enough to make even some of his brother Minimes uneasy; it certainly was too audacious for many of the ordinary curés of Rouen.

As for the "personnes du monde", it is probable that the purpose of the new community -- the instruction of children of the working poor -- was not to everyone's liking. The Hôpital Général, which was already costing the city a great deal of money, had been constructed to enclose and instruct the "lazy" poor. The diversion of alms to schools for children who might otherwise be working productively was dangerous and wasteful. We shall see this idea clearly expressed later, by members of the City Council of Reims.⁹⁷ Also, of course, there were persons

⁹⁴Ibid., p.159.

⁹⁵ See above, fn.38.

⁹⁶H. de Grèzes, op.cit., p.230.

⁹⁷See below, fn. 188, 189.

whose interests ran counter to the charity schools: the master scribes, whose corporation was both powerful and vocal.

Furthermore, the community does not seem to have pleased the Archbishop of Rouen. Like Vincent de Paul, Barré was determined not to commit his sisters to the total control of the local clergy. He insisted that they must remain free to be dismissed, or to retire, from unsuitable situations:

Il est à la liberté des personnes qui
demandront les Soeurs, de les renvoyer quand
elles voudront, vu que, ne les fondant pas,
cela laisse les parties libres, et sans aucun
engagement d'une part ni d'autre.⁹⁸

To ensure this continuing freedom, he forbade all canonical and legal status for the new community. "Si les hommes y mettent la main, Dieu retirera la sienne," he argued.⁹⁹ Only after his departure from Rouen was the institute given the status that he had opposed.¹⁰⁰

This meant that although the Charitable Mistresses of the Saint-Enfant Jésus were subject to the Archbishop's authority, they were not a diocesan organization. They were administered by a small group of Barré's friends -- all notables in the city

⁹⁸N. Barré, "Mémoire instructif", p.3.

⁹⁹Montigny de Servien, Abregé de l'Histoire de l'Institution des Ecoles charitables par le P.Barré (1686), in N.Barré, Lettres spirituelles, p.371.

¹⁰⁰6/x/1674: contract signed by Grainville, Lespinay, Fauvel and Servien de Montigny, endowing the institute with a capital of 45,000 l., constituting an annual rente of 2250 l. Barré's judgment on this appeared in his Lettres spirituels: "Voyez, Paris est bien plus visiblement beni que Rouen; parce que Rouen a son avenir temporel assuré." (H. de Grèzes, op.cit., p.264)

of Rouen¹⁰¹ -- through the Hôpital Général, and their director was a Minime. Their independence had the effect of cooling Archbishop Colbert's feelings towards them, and he decided to place his support elsewhere. In 1699, he adopted as his own protégées a small hospital / teaching community in Ernemont, which he later expanded into other parts of the diocese:

Les filles de Providence [ran a memoir drawn up in 1727], ayant pris naissance en cette ville par le zèle du P. Barré, Minime, elles se sont toujours maintenues dans une entière indépendance de l'ordinaire... C'est ce qui fit désirer Mgr. de Colbert d'avoir des filles qui fussent toutes à lui et pour son diocèse.¹⁰²

Whatever success the Soeurs Barré had in Rouen was due to the dévot circles from which Barré's friends were drawn, rather than the Archbishop's palace.

The Institute grew with striking speed. In 1669, three years after foundation, the six or seven had grown to more than thirty.¹⁰³ Ten years later, they numbered two hundred. From

¹⁰¹Servien de Montigny, secrétaire des commandements to the late Queen Mother, before he resigned to become a priest; the sieur de Grainville, councillor in the Parlement of Rouen, whose mother lent space in her house for the first charity classes held in the city; Pierre Fauvel, seigneur de Touvens; the abbé de l'Epiney. These men took over full supervision of the Rouen house after Barré's death.

¹⁰²Mémoire of the administrators of Ernemont to the Archbishop, quoted in C. Robillard de Beaurepaire, op.cit., p.253.

¹⁰³The signatures of the community appeared at the bottom of a document which seems to have been designed to release the Institute from either financial obligation or long-term commitment to its members. Several of the sisters came from prominent rouennais families: Corneille, Tiberge, de la Pommeraye, de Bras de Fer (Chanoine Farcy, op.cit., pp. 38-40).

the seminary in Rouen they spread out through the diocese, then into neighbouring dioceses: Bayeux, Evreux, Sées, Lisieux, Coutances. Sisters from Normandy were sent to start communities of schoolmistresses in Reims¹⁰⁴, Paris,¹⁰⁵ Dijon, Avignon, and Marseille.¹⁰⁶ They also went on mission to various parts of the country, to prepare people for the sacraments.¹⁰⁷

Once they left the main centres, Barré's schoolmistresses lived and worked in tiny communities of two or three. The foundation in Bayeux is typical of many others:

L'an 1676, Hélène Cauvin, Marie Forfait, entrèrent à Bayeux.... Là, elles s'occupèrent ... à instruire les filles, qui sont divisées en deux classes. Dans la première, on apprend aux plus jeunes à lire; on les instruit des éléments de la Foi, et on les élève dans la piété. La deuxième est destinée pour y recevoir celles qui sont dans un âge plus avancé, auxquelles on apprend à travailler à la dentelle, et à vivre dans la vertu.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴See below, part iii.

¹⁰⁵See below, part ii.

¹⁰⁶Farcy, op.cit., p. 82.

¹⁰⁷A letter survives from a curé in Poitou, thanking the administration of the Providence for the service of the sisters. "Tout ce qui manque dans les lieux où elles vont, est le temps; il serait à propos qu'elles y séjournassent du moins trois mois en chaque lieu, pour défricher entièrement les consciences..." (Quoted in ibid., p.66). At about the same time this practice was gaining acceptance elsewhere. In Père Beurrier's missions in the Paris region, a group of "dames dévotes missionnaires" were sent ahead, to prepare for the arrival of the missionaries, and to instruct the women and children. See Bibl. Ste-Geneviève 1886, Autobiographie et oeuvres du P. Paul Beurrier, fol.453.

¹⁰⁸Ms. of 1696, Bayeux. Printed in ibid., p.65.

Occasionally, local volunteers were enlisted to help in the schools.¹⁰⁹ The arrangement was flexible -- and cheap. The Providence, as it came to be known, offered an education that poorer people, and smaller parishes, could afford:

Cet Etablissement [a] donné moyen aux
Artisans et à la Populace de faire instruire
leurs filles, et occasion à plusieurs
paroisses de campagne, où les Curés ou
Vicaires tiennent écoles pour les deux
sexes, de demander de ces Filles pour
éviter les désordres qui peuvent arriver ...¹¹⁰

Unfortunately, living as they did in an extremely fluid situation, and seldom using the service of notaries, the early Soeurs Barré, like other filles séculières, have left little trace behind them. One piece of circumstantial evidence, however, suggests that their schools contributed significantly to the education of their sex. In the city of Rouen, in the period 1670 - 1720, female literacy rose by fifteen percent, though male literacy in the same period rose only by seven percent.¹¹¹ These were exactly the years when the new schools began to take

¹⁰⁹A critic of the Marseille house alleged that sixty-two of these volunteers had come and gone, making the community "un chaos". .. (Ibid., p.86).

¹¹⁰Request by the administrators for Letters Patent, 26/ii/1679. Quoted in ibid., pp.67-68.

¹¹¹J. P. Bardet, op.cit., vol. II, Table 103.

hold. In the late seventeenth century, girls from modest families were going to school in numbers unheard-of before.

ii) The Dames de Saint-Maur.

In 1674 Barré was sent to Paris to teach at the Minime convent in the Place Royale. He began at once to look for ways of establishing charity schools along the lines of those he had started in Rouen. He found a powerful supporter in Marie de Lorraine, Duchesse de Guise. In 1676 she financed his first school in Paris, in the parish of Saint-Jean-en-Grève.¹¹² In the following year she decided to establish similar schools in her domains. Barré called in a young sister from Rouen, Marie Hayer, the daughter of a doctor in Bernay. By 1678 Soeur Hayer had opened four schools in Guise.¹¹³

At this time Barré recalled Soeur Hayer to Paris, and put her in charge of the house in Saint-Jean-en-Grève. There were now thirty schoolmistresses teaching in the vicinity, including twelve rouennaises. In the next few years, five more parish schools were opened,¹¹⁴ and the community, with its noviciate, was installed in a rented house on the rue Saint-Maur, from which the sisters were henceforth to take their name. Now they proceeded to expand on the left bank: eight schools in the parish

¹¹²H. de Grèzes, op.cit., p.180.

¹¹³In the villages of Aubenton, Hirson, Boué, and Nouvion. By the time the princess died in 1688, she had as many as 22 sisters working in her domains. (Ibid., p.200).

¹¹⁴Saint-Eustache, Saint-Roch, Saint-Louis-en-l'Isle, Saint-Laurent, Saint-Gervais.

of Saint-Sulpice alone, an orphanage on the rue Saint-Dominique, other schools on the rue de Seine, the rue Saint-Placide, and in Saint-Etienne-du-Mont.¹¹⁵

Within a few years the sisters were in demand in various dioceses throughout the country.¹¹⁶ But the crowning success of the community came in 1685, when Louis XIV decided to use them in the Midi for the re-education of newly-converted Protestants. Eight sisters were sent to Languedoc, to open schools in Montpellier and Montauban. By 1686, the king's secretary was writing to ask for more: —

M. de Baille, intendant de Languedoc, a mandé que les huit maîtresses d'école que le Roi a envoyées en Languedoc font beaucoup de fruit dans les lieux où elles ont été mises, et qu'il serait avantageux qu'il put en avoir douze autres ...¹¹⁷

In the general redistribution that followed, sisters were placed in Bordeaux, Nîmes, Gensac, Castres, Uzès, Toulouse and Toulon. The speed of their expansion, the numbers recruited, were such that the Mother House in Paris was soon in danger of losing control of them.

¹¹⁵In the first half of the eighteenth century, according to de Grèzes, there were schools run by the Dames de Saint-Maur in every parish in Paris. (op.cit., p.188)

¹¹⁶See Abregé de l'Histoire, p.372: "plusieurs de nos Seigneurs les Evêques ont aussi demandé et établis de ces Maitresses charitables dans leurs Diocèzes, non seulement dans les Villages et les Bourgs, mais aussi dans les plus grandes Villes."

¹¹⁷Chateaufort - Montigny, 30/iv/1686. Quoted in H. de Grèzes, op.cit., p.220.

At the same time, Madame de Maintenon¹¹⁸ had other designs for the Dames de Saint-Maur. She and the King, planning the new academy of Saint-Cyr for the education of young noblewomen, and determined, at this stage, not to turn it into a monastery, invited Barré to provide schoolmistresses:

...douze des meilleures Filles de son Institut pour prêter leur concours aux Dames de Saint-Louis; les former à leur méthode d'enseignement; et les instruire, elles et les élèves de Saint-Cyr, suivant les constitutions et règlements de la maison.¹¹⁹

The Soeurs Barré stayed and worked at Saint-Cyr until 1694.

However, high society began to show its bias toward the monastic life, and Madame de Maintenon was subjected to heavy pressure to change her schoolmistresses into real nuns. She wrote:

Toute la dévotion se révoltera contre moi, si je ne leur donne pas, un office à dire, une oraison à faire, des coupes, un-chapitre, des retraites, et en un mot tout ce qui se pratique dans toutes les communautés.¹²⁰

The Dames de Saint-Louis were transformed from a secular to a monastic community. Though invited to remain and take vows, the sisters now used the prerogative on which Barré had always insisted, and withdrew. They received, as reward for

¹¹⁸Françoise d'Aubigné, Marquise de Maintenon (1635-1719), secretly married to Louis XIV after the death of the Queen in 1683. During her life at court she retained a passionate interest in the education of children, and in 1686, with the King's co-operation, opened the Maison Saint-Cyr.

¹¹⁹Arch. de Saint-Maur: Printed in H. de Grèzes, op. cit., p.215.

¹²⁰M. Langlois, Correspondance de Madame de Maintenon, vol.III, p.121. Quoted in R. Lemoine, Le monde des religieux, p.339.

their work, an annual rente for the house in Paris of 500 livres, and the lifelong support of Madame de Maintenon.¹²¹

Though the lifestyle of the soeurs Barré was considered inappropriate for ladies of quality, the Institute remained the object of much admiration for its work among the lesser people. Hermant, in his Histoire des ordres religieux, wrote that "un grand homme l'appelle avec justice le dernier effort de la grace de ce siècle".¹²² Contemporaries remarked particularly on the sisters' flexibility, their readiness to go long distances and to work wherever they were called, and their indifference to questions of financial support. They owed this to the breadth of their founder's vision. Barré, like Vincent de Paul, was determined to keep his institute free of legal and canonical entanglements.¹²³ His plan of organization was simple in the extreme. The schoolmistresses were to be maintained financially by the parish, or town, which invited them in. Their upkeep (usually between 150 livres and 180 livres each per year, plus

¹²¹H. de Grèzes, op.cit., pp.338-39.

¹²²J. Hermant, Histoire des ordres religieux et des congrégations régulières et séculières de l'Eglise. (Rouen: 1710), p.454.

¹²³"La conception des Dames de Saint-Maur reprenait pour l'enseignement primaire l'idée extrêmement large que M.Vincent avait eue pour les oeuvres de miséricorde en général. Canoniste, Saint Vincent de Paul voulut des séculières; par humilité, le P.Barré, ne voulant pas être fondateur ni demander de Lettres Patentes, fit en fait des séculières." (R. Lemoine, op.cit.; p.326).

house and furnishings) could be discontinued.¹²⁴ But in this case, the sisters were free to leave.

This freedom from permanent obligation extended to the sisters' relationship with the community:

Ils vivront en Communauté, sans faire de Voeux, ny garder de Closture, sous la Conduite du Superieur ou de la Superieure, ausquels ils seront obligez d'obeir dans la veue de pur et saint amour.¹²⁵

The ultimate penalty for non-observance of discipline was dismissal from the congregation. But on the other hand, any sister was free to leave whenever she saw fit.¹²⁶

Entry into the community was equally uncomplicated. Barré relied on the Institute's manifest poverty to ensure the entrants

¹²⁴See "Mémoire instructif", p.2: "Ceux qui prennent soin de les faire subsister dans tous les endroits de la France où on les envoie, ne s'obligent point de continuer à fournir leurs entretiens...."

¹²⁵N.Barré, Statuts et Reglemens Art.V. The masculine pronoun is used because these règlements were designed also for the male community which he had established in Paris.

¹²⁶See Chanoine Farcy, op.cit., p.37-38 for a document dating from 1669 and bearing the signatures of thirty rouennais sisters, which reads, in part: "Comme elles sont libres de sortir de l'Institut quand il leur plaira, de même aussi les Supérieurs seront en plein droit de les renvoyer après plusieurs années de service, et sans récompense, quand ils ne les trouveront pas dignes et capables de l'emploi."

disinterest.¹²⁷ He initially discounted the importance of a training period:

Le Pere Barré disoit que les filles mises d'abord en employ, avançaient beaucoup plus, que si on les instruit long-tems auparavant que de les mettre dans l'exercice des classes et des Instructions. La nécessité d'agir, disoit-il, ouvre l'esprit, et luy fait faire des efforts avantageux, qui façonne promptement une Maîtresse.¹²⁸

Many of the mistresses who joined the Institute during its period of rapid expansion went straight into the schools without initial training, either in teaching or in religious life. The results were not always satisfactory. In a complaint some years later, it was explained that "n'étant point filles de communauté, elles tombent dans des fautes pour lesquelles les Evêques entreprennent de les conduire."¹²⁹ A year of noviciate was made obligatory.

The appearances of "religion" were kept to a minimum. The sisters preserved their secular status and their rights of inheritance (though during their lifetime the Institute received the usufruct). They wore secular dress: "tant à la Ville qu'à

¹²⁷"Dès qu'il y auroit quelque établissement et des assurances, on verroit venir les filles destituées de bien pour vivre, cherchant à entrer dans cet Institut, afin d'avoir de quoy subsister, et par le motif de se retirer de la nécessité. Les intentions des Maîtressees cessant d'être épurées, la ferveur au travail et aux emplois perirait bien-tôt, et l'on ne verroit plus cette abondance de graces celestes qui a fait jusqu'à present fleurir les Ecoles charitables du saint Enfant Jesus." Abregé, pp.374-75.

¹²⁸"Maximes de conduite chrétienne" in N. Barré, Lettres spirituelles, p.356.

¹²⁹Chanoine Farcy, op.cit., p.77.

la Campagne des habits noirs, mais qui soient dans une modestie et simplicité Chrétienne sans prétendre passer ny paroistre des Demoiselles."¹³⁰ However, as in the case of the Filles de la Charité, this secular exterior covered an inner life that was essentially religious:

Bien que les Soeurs Maîtresses ne fassent de vœux d'obéissance, de pauvreté et de chasteté et n'en doivent jamais faire, afin que ce qui est ordonné pour le bien public ne dégénère pas en bien particulier, en se renfermant dans un cloître ou monastère, comme il n'est arrivé que trop souvent dans l'Eglise, néanmoins il faudra garder autant d'exactitude, de rigueur de châtimement, et d'exclusion effective de la Communauté que si, effectivement, elles avaient prononcé solennellement ces trois vœux ...¹³¹

Their community life included the recitation of the Little Office, monthly retreats, regular meditation; and the frequent reading aloud of the rules and constitutions -- a practice observed by most of the new religious orders.¹³²

However, their principal occupation was not prayer, but schoolteaching. Like Vincent de Paul, Père Barré believed that it was possible "to leave God for the sake of God". The sisters would find their self-sanctification in the service of others. "Les Soeurs de l'Institut par leur emploi assurent leur salut"; the work that they did for others would compensate for their

¹³⁰N. Barré, Statuts et reglemens, Chap.IX, art.9.

¹³¹Quoted in Chanoine Farcy, op.cit., p.57.

¹³²Y.Poutet, "L'influence du Père Barré dans la fondation des Soeurs du Saint-Enfant-Jésus de Reims" R.H.E.F. 46 (1960), pp.34-47.

neglect of their own perfection.¹³³ Barré went further: the duty of the sisters was instruction, and instruction only:

Les Soeurs ne pourront ... se distraire de
l'exercice des Ecoles, ny de tous les Reglemens
susdits, sous pretexte d'aider le Prochain en
des actions de Charité ¹³⁴

Their workload was heavy. In addition to their teaching, either in elementary schools or in sheltered workshops, the sisters were obliged by their rule to hold Sunday catechism classes, and to instruct any women who came to them in their house.

The hierarchy of the Institute, as Barré devised it, was simple in the extreme. Temporal administrators, together with a Dame Associée, supervised the running of the house, "afin que la Supérieure et les Maîtresses n'aient aucune occasion de se relâcher de leur ferveur et leurs exercices."¹³⁵ These administrators were empowered to choose the supérieure, to admit and dismiss the sisters, and to send them out to their places of employment. The Institute was modelled more on the communities of the hospitaux-généraux than on the nationwide organization that it was fast becoming. Inevitably, the simplicity of Barré's plan was soon left behind. But its flexibility was preserved, to make it a wonder among women's congregations.

¹³³Maximes particulières pour les Ecoles charitables, IX and X, in Lettres spirituelles, pp.344-45.

¹³⁴N. Barré, Statuts et reglemens, chap. VIII, art. 11.

¹³⁵Quoted in Chanoine Farcy, op.cit., p.56.

While the Rouen community's ascent was less rapid than that of the Paris community,¹³⁶ it nevertheless experienced steady growth. During Barré's lifetime the institutes of Rouen and Paris were connected, though loosely, under his direction. After his death in 1686 they were divided for administrative purposes. An attempt in 1692 to reunite them remained a dead letter. The two separate institutes both lasted through the Revolution into modern times.

Not everything that Barre turned his hand to resulted in similar success. While in Rouen he had tried to set up a boys' school comparable to his girls' schools. This lasted only a short time.¹³⁷ In Paris, he established a seminary for schoolmasters, who were known as the Frères du Saint-Enfant Jésus. The statutes which he drew up in 1685 were intended for this community as well as for the teaching sisters. However, after a promising beginning the boys' schools began to fail:

Elles n'ont pas continué [wrote Barré's successor, Servien de Montigny] faute de sujets propres à entrer dans l'esprit de l'Institut qui est le dévouement total et l'abandon à la Divine Providence; les jeunes hommes cherchant ordinairement à s'avancer dans le monde.¹³⁸

After Servien's death they failed altogether. There was still

¹³⁶By the end of the century, not counting the establishments in Paris, the Institut de Saint-Maur had opened 40 houses, which served a considerably larger number of schools. Ibid., pp. 383-84.

¹³⁷See above, fn. 87.

¹³⁸Abregé, in N. Barré, Lettres spirituelles, p.372.

little enthusiasm for the role of teaching brothers in France.¹³⁹

The success of the Soeurs Barré must be attributed to the fact that in several important ways they fitted the spirit of the society of their time. They enjoyed a widely-respected founder, wealthy benefactors and the favour of the Crown, as well as students in great numbers to justify their existence. But more than that: they attracted entrants. The Institute's appeal to young women was the foundation of its success. Once in action, the new schools were their own best argument, as the experience of the Minime, P. Giry, Barré's immediate successor as director of the community, shows:

Il est à propos de remarquer que ce grand homme n'a pas toujours approuvé, surtout dans les commencements, l'entreprise du Pere Barré.

Il ne pouvait croire que des filles pussent devenir capables d'aller, comme d'autres apôtres, parcourir les provinces, et être continuellement dans les voyages et dans les campagnes, pour y exercer un zèle qui ne paraissait pas convenir à leur sexe et à leur délicatesse naturelle. Mais ayant été obligé d'entrer dans des charges qui l'engagèrent ... de parcourir plusieurs fois diverses provinces de la France, et ayant reconnu, après de très exactes recherches, que l'ouvrage surpassait ce qu'on pouvait humainement concevoir, et que les fruits en étaient très admirables ... il approuva le stratagème ... et résolut d'être un des plus zélés défenseurs de cette haute entreprise.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹Y. Poutet, Origines, vol. I, pp. 520-25; H. de Grèzes, op.cit., pp. 194-95.

¹⁴⁰P. Raffron, Vie du R.P. François Giry (Paris, 1691), quoted in H. de Grèzes, op.cit., p. 343.

iii) The Soeurs du Saint-Enfant-Jésus of Reims.

Reims, like other seventeenth-century cities, suffered from severe social and financial problems. Its several hospitals, and the Hôpital-Général which it had built in the wake of the fighting which had overtaken it in 1650, laid a heavy burden on the city's already-strained finances. By 1660, one-half of the revenue from the city's only direct tax was being spent on its institutions.¹⁴¹ Yet the problem of poverty remained unsolved. This may explain a growing exasperation felt by the citizens of good standing towards the people who were causing that problem. One rémois, Oudart Coquault, wrote that:

La gueusaille murmure toujours non-obstant notre hôpital général Après cinq hôpitaux établis par nous (en plus de l'Hôtel-Dieu) nous avons autant de ces canailles mendiants que auparavant ... ces sortes de gens sont entretenus et acoquinés par des aumônes.¹⁴²

"C'est la lie du peuple," wrote Jean Maillefer of the beggars and vagabonds in the city,

l'exxrement des villes, la peste des Républiques, des matières à ornements de gibets, d'où se tire les voleurs, les meurtriers et toutes sortes de racailles et gens qui ne vallent rien.¹⁴³

The overloaded municipal structures had also to cope with the Church's physical presence, always very powerful in Reims. In

¹⁴¹P. Desportes, Histoire de Reims (Toulouse: Privat, 1983) pp. 182-83.

¹⁴²Mémoires d'Oudart Coquault, (op.cit.) p.475

¹⁴³Henri Jadart, Mémoires de Jean Maillefer (op.cit.), p.120.

addition to the Cathedral chapter, with its heavy endowments,¹⁴⁴ there were fourteen parishes, three hospitaller communities, and two colleges. By mid-century, there were also ten masculine communities and five convents of cloistered nuns. "Depuis 40 a 50 ans," wrote Coquault, "on a tant faict de moines nouveaux ... que cela ruine la République."¹⁴⁵ Numerous priests and religious meant heavy clerical ownership of property, and widespread exemption from taxation.¹⁴⁶ Great blocs of the city were occupied by religious houses. Given the limited sources of revenue in the Ancien Régime, every new foundation within the city meant that the rest of the citizens were further burdened, either by the repartition of taxes or by another demand for alms.¹⁴⁷ In addition to this damage to the physical fabric of the city, the new communities tended to deplete church congregations, with damaging consequences for parish life. The desertion by the faithful, especially the affluent faithful, of parish masses for the more peaceful atmosphere of convent chapels posed a serious problem to central Catholic structures.

¹⁴⁴Jean-Baptiste de La Salle's canonicate, which he inherited at the age of sixteen from an uncle, was worth 20,000 livres. (Y. Poutet, Origines, vol.I, p.46).

¹⁴⁵O. Coquault, op.cit., p.375.

¹⁴⁶"La plupart des terrains étaient aux mains des ordres religieux." (Gustave Laurent, Reims et les rémois, p.xx)

¹⁴⁷Albert Babeau, La Ville (op.cit.), p.464. "Si ceux-ci (les religieux) ont le droit de posséder, ils sont exempts de tailles et rejettent sur la reste de la population une partie égale à l'impôt dont ils sont déchargés; s'ils sont mendiants, ils doivent être entretenus et nourris par les habitants."

The serious imbalance caused in city structures by the "conventual invasion" led the municipal council to take a consistently negative attitude towards new foundations. In spite of their objections, the orders managed to move in, either by appealing to a higher authority, such as the Crown, or by agreeing to restrictive terms which, once installed, they ignored.¹⁴⁸ The city, exasperated by a situation over which it had little control, devoted itself to doing whatever it could to keep the invaders out. In this it was acting much as other municipal councils across France were acting at the same time.

The city had one monastery of teaching nuns. In 1635, after a fierce battle with the Municipal Council, won only by direct intervention by Louis XIII, a house of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame had been established in the city. Once founded, it suffered no shortage of either students or entrants. When its six schoolmistresses opened the free classes in June, 1638, they were immediately swamped by 400 little girls.¹⁴⁹ As for religious, twenty of these, all from Reims and its environs, were professed before the end of 1640.¹⁵⁰ By 1650 the community was approaching the limit of fifty that the City Council had set it -- and the list of names was beginning to represent,

¹⁴⁸The Cordeliers, for instance, whose contract limited their community to twelve, numbered forty by 1660. (Y.Poutet, Origines vol.I, p.123).

¹⁴⁹p. Péchenard, Congrégation de Notre-Dame de Reims (op.cit.), vol. I, p. 86.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., vol.II, p.374.

ever more faithfully, the reigning merchant class, the "Nous-ferons", of Reims.¹⁵¹ Indeed, the size of the dowry requirements ensured that the convent would become an exclusive reserve for the daughters of wealthy rémois.¹⁵²

Without a doubt the Congrégation, bound by its obligation of enclosure and marked with the ineradicable stamp of wealth and gentility, became more involved in its inner life, and that of the pensionnaires, than in its day students. By 1678 the community numbered almost sixty, but the day school had not increased.¹⁵³ However, female education had been introduced into the mentalité of the city; this, almost certainly, was one of the prerequisites for the establishment of girls' free schools. The great expansion came in the 1670s, with Nicolas Roland and the Soeurs du Saint-Enfant-Jésus.

The Archdiocese of Reims had come late to reform. For most of the hundred and eight years between 1532 and 1640, it had been in the hands of the Guise family, and had served as little more than a power base for their activities elsewhere.

¹⁵¹See the list, "Noms des religieuses", published at the end of Pechenard, op.cit., vol.II, pp.372-379.

¹⁵² The dowry had to include an outright gift of 2711 l. and an annual pension of 250 l., as well as a gift of 250 l. on the day of clothing. A large trousseau was also required. (Y. Poutet, Origines, vol.I, p.393). In addition, the nuns were permitted to receive gifts and personal allowances from their families.

¹⁵³Nicolas Roland - Jean Roland, 1678: "les filles de la congrégation sont pres de soixante pour faire une Ecole ..." Un précurseur méconnu, Monsieur le Chanoine Roland, (Reims: Imprimerie du Nord-Est, 1963) p.7.

Only with the consecration of Maurice Le Tellier, brother of the Minister of the Crown, Louvois, as coadjutor bishop in 1668, and as Archbishop in 1671, did the machinery of reform begin to operate.

Therefore, for lack of a local seminary, it had been the custom for gifted young men to go to Paris for their clerical education. Nicolas Roland,¹⁵⁴ the son of an ennobled wool merchant of Reims, was simply following a well-beaten path when he arrived in the capital in 1660 to study philosophy. However, the contact that he made with the community of Jean Bagot -- the Compagnie des Bons Amis -- brought him full into the circle of the Aa.¹⁵⁵ For several years he lived in P. Bagot's community on the rue

¹⁵⁴Most of the information on Roland's life comes from a collection of posthumous tributes, made in the year 1693 by the Soeurs du Saint-Enfant-Jésus of Reims. A number of these personal recollections were collected into a single manuscript, entitled "Mémoires sur la Vie de Monsieur Nicolas Roland, Prêtre, Chanoine Théologal de l'Eglise de Reims, et Fondateur de la Communauté du Saint Enfant Jésus, Décédé le 27 avril 1678, age de 35 ans et 5 mois". The author is unknown though there is some reason for believing that he was Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, who was Roland's executor. This document, and the various letters from which it draws, are reproduced in Un précurseur méconnu (preface by Mgr J. Leflon), a collection of documents on Roland published in Reims in 1963, as part of the process towards Roland's canonization. The "Mémoires" are the first biography of Roland.

¹⁵⁵The Aa was a secret society of Jesuit inspiration. P. Bagot, S.J., had been in charge of it in La Flèche, site of a large Jesuit college. Later, in Paris, he formed and directed a group of outstanding young men, which included Laval-Montigny, Pallu, Gontier, Fermorel, Boudon, Lambert de la Motte and Vincent de Meur. The Compagnie des bons Amis provided the nucleus for the Congrégation des Missions étrangères. See Y. Poutet, Origines, vol. II, for an appreciation of the influence which this community had on Roland and, through him, on his friend Jean-Baptiste de La Salle.

Saint-Dominique-d'Enfer. When he returned to Reims, to become, at the age of 23, canon of the Cathedral and theologal,¹⁵⁶ he was in every way a man of the Catholic reformation -- pious, zealous, absorbed in a life of prayer, mortification and good works.

Within a year he left Reims again, on what might be called a Grand Tour for young dévots:

...il fit un voyage à Paris, pour puiser dans les Seminaires de Saint-Nicolas du Chardonnet, de St Sulpice, de la Communauté de St Lazare, aussi bien que dans les Sociétés des personnes de piété ... pour prendre les maximes les plus pures du sacerdoce ... Mais son esprit n'étoit point encore satisfait, il rechercha encore d'autres moyens de son avancement; ce qui lui fit faire un voyage à Rouen, y étant attiré par l'odeur de sainteté d'un Curé de cette ville nommé Mr de St Amand, chez lequel il demeura six mois pour apprendre la vertu ...¹⁵⁷

This curé was Antoine de la Haye, who was collaborating with Père Barré, Françoise Duval, Marguerite Lestocq and other schoolmistresses and supporters, in the early operation of their charity schools. At this stage in his life Roland was more

¹⁵⁶The office of theologal carried with it the responsibility for preaching in the diocese.

¹⁵⁷"Mémoires", Un précurseur méconnu, p.157. This is an interesting example of the way in which religious ideas were circulated in this period of reform. Throughout the century there had been a remarkable amount of contact between the major centres, first by travel, second by the printed word. "Ainsi les livres et les voyages ont été les voies de cette invasion mystique qui a eu sur la religion des classiques une influence peut-être aussi grande que celle des déistes anglais, un siècle plus tard, sur la philosophie des 'lumières'" (J. Dagens, Bérulle et les origines de la Restauration catholique (op.cit.), p.109).

interested in the renewal of the priesthood than in schools,¹⁵⁸ but the contact that he made was important later, when his mind began to move in this direction.

Sometime in the next two years he received, and read, a copy of the Rémontrances of Charles Démià. This work, published first in 1666 and addressed to the notables of Lyon, made an effective presentation of the case for charity education as the only means of salvaging and christianizing society. The book, which was promoted by the Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement, received wide attention. A copy of it reached the theologal in Reims:

Vos Rémontrances [wrote Feret, the cure of Saint-Nicolas du Chardonnet to Démià] ont fait un tel fruit partout où on les a lues, que M. Roland, chanoine et théologal de Reims, a pris la résolution d'établir dans cette ville des écoles pour les pauvres.¹⁵⁹

At the age of 27, according to the "Mémoires", "considérant que le peuple et les grandes personnes profitent peu des meilleurs sermons, et que le défaut d'éducation et d'Instruction de la jeunesse, a toujours été et est encore la source des plus grands dérèglements", Roland decided to work for the establishment

¹⁵⁸On his return to Reims he devoted his time to establishing a community in his house along the lines of the Compagnie des bons amis in Paris. It is not clear whether this was a recognized branch of the Aa, but it was certainly influenced by it.

¹⁵⁹M. Faillon, Vie de M. Démià, (Lyon, 1829), quoted in L. Aroz, op.cit., p.63.

of free schools for girls in his city.¹⁶⁰ Now he turned back to Rouen for assistance.

He had received an invitation from the City Council of Rouen to be the official Lenten preacher in the spring of 1670. This he accepted, though, as the "Mémoires" say, "la prédication n'étoit qu'un saint prétexte". When he returned to Reims, he took with him an understanding that, at the appropriate time, two schoolmistresses would come from Rouen to help him set up his schools. On December 27, 1670, Françoise Duval and Anne Lecoeur arrived in Reims.¹⁶¹

Roland knew perfectly well that his plan to establish a charitable teaching community would not sit well with the City Council. For this reason he said nothing, as yet, about his plans. Instead, he provided the sisters with a "cover", so to speak. In a neighbouring house on the rue de Barbâtre there was a small orphanage for thirty children, established and run by a pious widow, Mme Varlet, under the somewhat reluctant authorization of the city. This orphanage was in serious financial difficulties, "...ces pauvres enfants tous nuds et comme des

¹⁶⁰"Mémoires", Un précurseur méconnu, p.163. Note that whereas Feret, at the time, spoke of schools "for the poor" (no sex specified) the "Mémoires", written after the event, singled out the instruction of little girls as though it were the prime object of Roland's interest. This would seem to be one of many cases where original intention was later interpreted by final achievement.

¹⁶¹By this time Antoine de la Haye was dead. It appears that in sending the two schoolmistresses Barré was respecting a promise which the curé had made.

squélettes, faute de nourriture: leur pauvreté étoit si grande qu'ils manquaient du pur nécessaire ..."162 On October 15, 1670, Roland approached the City Council and offered to take over the care of the orphanage "si la Compagnie le trouvait bon."163 The city, suspicious at first, ended by accepting his offer, and even allowing him to buy a larger house in which to install the sisters and the orphans. Mme Varlet disappeared, to set up another orphanage in another town.

A period of peace and quiet ensued. The sisters, who were soon joined by other young women, continued to take care of the orphans. However, preparations continued which indicated very strongly that a teaching community was in the making.

The City began to suspect that Roland was using the orphanage as a pretext to establish schools. In 1674 it decided to test his good faith. It insisted that he accept new orphans. After an initial refusal, Roland, "dans la crainte de désobeir aux ordres de la ville,"164 agreed, though reluctantly. In 1675 he was ready to act. "Comme son dessein ne se terminoit pas à la seule Charité pour le soin des Orphelins et que cela ne lui servoit que de prétexte pour l'établissement des écoles",

162 "Mémoires", Un précurseur méconnu, p.165.

163 B.M.Reims, ms. 1704, p.97: Mémoires de René Bourgeois, avocat au Parlement et échevin de la ville de Reims, sur tout ce qui s'est passé en la dite ville et au Conseil d'icelle (1640-1679). quoted in L. de M. Aroz, op.cit., p.38. These memoirs are useful, since they present the Council's point of view in its battle of wills with Roland.

164 Ms. Bourgeois 1704, quoted in ibid., p.74.

he sought ecclesiastical authorization to open classrooms in the orphanage, to teach not only the orphans but also "toutes les petites filles et même les grandes qui s'y presentoient".¹⁶⁵

The city could no longer remain in any doubt as to Roland's plans. In August of 1674 the cornerstone had been laid for a chapel in the grounds of the property on the rue de Barbâtre.¹⁶⁶ Now, in July of 1675, he invited the Archbishop to bless the chapel, and the members of the city council to attend the blessing. Quite clearly, the building of a chapel placed the entire enterprise on a different footing; quite clearly, also, the City Council understood the message. A new "espèce de couvent" was being slipped in under its nose, and without its permission. It protested to the Archbishop at this flouting of its authority.¹⁶⁷ He agreed to look into the matter, and to consult with the Council before allowing the community to proceed. However, at this step, the Council overstepped the mark; a group of members, going to the Archbishop, asked that he cancel the blessing of the chapel. René Bourgeois, who attended the audience, recorded Le Tellier's cold reply:

A peine M. Dallier eut-il achevé son
compliment que Monseigneur, d'un ton fier
et d'une mine d'autorité souveraine, lui ferma

¹⁶⁵Ibid., p. 166.

¹⁶⁶The cornerstone was laid by Françoise Beuvelet, widow of Councillor Roland and a member of the Famille du Saint Enfant-Jésus, the confraternity to which several of the schoolmistresses of Rouen belonged. See above, fn. 78.

¹⁶⁷L. Aroz, op.cit., p.80.

la bouche en lui demandant s'il n'avait le pouvoir de faire les fonctions de sa charge dans la ville, qu'il avait résolu de faire cette bénédiction, que cela ne nous regardait point et qu'il était résolu de le faire exécuter ... et que nous n'étions pas ses maîtres pour l'obliger à différer de faire ce qu'il était de sa pleine liberté, et lui prescrire des lois dans les fonctions de sa charge.¹⁶⁸

The blessing of the chapel went ahead, despite the abstention of the City Council.

It did not follow from Le Tellier's snub to the Council that he was ready to support Roland. He was not yet prepared to sanction the charity schools. According to the "Mémoires", he gave Roland "plusieurs refus sur cet Etablissement".¹⁶⁹ The Soeurs du Saint-Enfant-Jésus still lacked official approval. During the next three years, despite his declining health, Roland worked feverishly to establish and legitimate his community.

Il avoit tant d'attrait et de desir que les Soeurs s'acquittassent bien d'Ecole que lui-même l'alloit apprendre dans toutes les Villes où il passoit lorsqu'il apprenoit qu'il y en avoit d'établies par de bonnes methodes, il faisoit venir des Maîtresses expérimentées pour les dresser dans cette maison, le tout à ses frais et dépens, et dans ces occasions, sa longanimité et sa charité étoient si grandes, que quelques grossières que fussent ces filles, cela ne rebutoit pas.¹⁷⁰ Il épargna rien pour y donner de bons principes pour le Règlement de cet Etablissement et pour former les dites Filles à une perfection qui réponde à la sainteté de l'Etat que demande

¹⁶⁸René Bourgeois, Mémoires, t.3, p.782. Quoted in A. Hannesse, Vie de Nicolas Roland (Reims, 1888), pp.188-89.

¹⁶⁹"Mémoires", Un précurseur méconnu, p.176.

¹⁷⁰"Memoires", ibid., p.170.

une vie apostolique.¹⁷¹

His concentration on the enterprise earned him the reproach of his colleagues:

Le Chapitre Invite donc le Sr Théologal
à se faire justice à luy mesme, et à employer
selon l'Intention des Canons les talents que
Dieu luy a départis; asseurement Il ne peut
se partager en tant d'occupations différentes,
Orphelins, filles dévotes, Missions, sans
diminuer beaucoup du temps qu'en conscience
Il est obligé de donner à son Emploi
de Théologal.¹⁷²

Roland, unlike Barré, looked for financial security for the community. Perhaps because of the hostility of the Council and the indifference of the Archbishop, and also because of his commitment to the orphanage, he wanted Letters Patent, and these could only be acquired if the community was on a sound financial footing.¹⁷³ He endowed the community with a capital of 15,797 livres, to which other benefactors added another 25,000.¹⁷⁴ Then, in the winter of 1677, he set off for Paris, hoping to enlist the support of the Archbishop and, through him, the King.

¹⁷¹Ibid., p.167.

¹⁷²"Mémoire Touchant le reglement à faire entre Messieurs du chapitre et le Théologal de l'Eglise de Reims présenté à Monseigneur l'Archevesque Duc de Reims entre les mains duquel led. Théologal remet tous ses interests. Réponse du Chapitre de Reims." Ibid., p.18.

¹⁷³A royal edict of March 3, 1667 had ruled that henceforth no new communities could be founded without a prior commitment of funds to keep them solvent, and without the consent of the religious and secular notables in the town where they intended to establish. This ended the rush of foundations that had particularly characterized the reign of Louis XIII.

¹⁷⁴L. Aroz, Nicolas Roland, pp.107-112.

Il s'occupa tout ce temps à solliciter la consommation de son Etablissement avec plus d'ardeur que jamais, passant une grande partie du temps en attendant dans l'antichambre du dit Seigneur qui passoit et repassoit souvent devant lui sans rien dire ... 175

Finally, too sick to persist, Roland returned to Reims, where he died in April, 1678.

Far from hurting the community's cause, Roland's death actually expedited it. Le Tellier, as soon as he heard the news, moved to obtain the Letters Patent that Roland had been seeking:

Jamais Monsieur l'Archevêque de Reims ne fit mieux valoir pour le bien de son Diocèse l'autorité qu'il avoit en Cour et la faveur dont le Prince l'honoroit que dans cette occasion. Les Lettres Patentes obtenues de Louis XIV aussitôt que demandées, et ensuite enregistrées au Parlement, aux frais de Monseigneur Le Tellier, furent remises entre les mains de M. de La Salle digne successeur de M. Roland dans la Communauté.¹⁷⁶

In February 1679, the community received its legal existence from king and parlement. From now on, also, it enjoyed the protection of the Archbishop.

Monseigneur l'Archevêque fit plus encore en accordant sa protection à une oeuvre qu'il regardoit comme la sienne apres le décès de M. Roland ...¹⁷⁷

Within the bare outlines of this account there are a number of illuminating dimensions. In the first place, there is the

¹⁷⁵Ibid., p.171.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., p.177.

¹⁷⁷Loc.cit.

obvious unpopularity that Roland suffered.

Sa vie fut censurée des personnes libertines, il a été persécuté pour ses sermons ... Il étoit raillé de toutes parts, de son marcher, de son port, de son maintien, de ses discours, et de son recueillement qui condamnoit la pompe mondaine. Il ne manquoit pas de Censeurs; on le contrefaisoit chez les personnes de qualité, aussi bien que chez les personnes de la lie du peuple Les personnes mêmes qui passaient pour gens de bien s'en melloient ¹⁷⁸

He was criticized in the Cathedral Chapter, and the Grand Vicar "treated him as an illuminé and a fanatic".¹⁷⁹ The parents of the nuns whom he directed (religious of the Congrégation and of the abbeys of Reims), resented his influence over their daughters.¹⁸⁰ Even his charitable efforts were criticized. Père Valentin, his friend, recalled seeing a letter written by "une personne assez distinguée par son caractère, et autre qualité ... sa plume repandit son encre sur toute sa conduite, ses emplois, ses maîtresses d'écoles, et en prétendoit noircir tout le bien qu'il operoit."¹⁸¹

It would seem that Roland's unpopularity stemmed from the fact that he was a true dévot, and that he was trying to import into Reims the values and ideals that he had learned from Père Bagot and the Aa, and from the austere curé of Saint-Amand in Rouen. His intense religious personality was antithetical to

¹⁷⁸Ibid., p.207. --

¹⁷⁹A. Hannedou, op.cit., p.191.

¹⁸⁰"Mémoires", Un précurseur méconnu, p.199,

¹⁸¹Letter from P. Valentin; Minime, ibid., p.136.

that of the average rémois, who, with Jean Maillefer, held that "il faut apporter une moderation même dans les choses honnêtes."¹⁸²

The anger that he brought down upon himself is illustrative of a wider resentment felt by Catholics de souche towards this new kind of puritanism.

Another point to be taken is just how small the world of the dévots was. Roland, with all his travels in search of self-improvement (and, later, the improvement of his community), was not unique. It has already been noted that in the early years of the century there was considerable mobility and interaction in ecclesiastical society.¹⁸³ This activity does not appear to have abated.¹⁸⁴ The exchange of preachers for Lent and Advent, the flow of ideas through correspondence and travel, the publication and dissemination of reformist literature such as Demia's Rémontrances, all served to link the major centres of the Catholic Reformation. This movement extended even to women. Françoise Duval and Anne Le Coeur were not the only schoolmistresses to travel to Reims to enter the new community; of the original twenty sisters who took vows in 1684, five were "foreigners"

¹⁸²This essential moderation is captured in a study of Maillefer by Henri Brémond. See "La vie religieuse d'un bourgeois de Reims au XVII^e-siècle", Etudes 89 (1901): 622-38.

¹⁸³See above, chap.III, fn. 60.

¹⁸⁴"Toutes les personnes de cette époque liées à quelque oeuvre ecclésiastique importante se recontrent, se connaissent, interfèrent" (R. Lemoine, Le droit des religieux, p.103).

from Rouen, Honfleur, Amiens, Paris and Orléans.¹⁸⁵

Yet another dimension of interest is the fundamental difference between the attitude of the dévots (and by this we mean not only Roland, but the schoolmistresses and other persons who collaborated in setting up the schools) and that of the city fathers, towards the question of the charity schools. Roland's difficulties did not all arise from his personality. His decision to found a new community of women earned him a great deal of harrassment, specifically from the municipal council. For reasons given above, the council bitterly opposed any further religious foundations in the city. For good reason, it feared the sort of incrementalism that had happened before, where slowly, over time, the new house would take on larger and larger proportions. ~~It~~ also suspected that what had started as a secular community would end up with religious pretensions. It was for this reason that it reacted so sharply to the building of a chapel. The possession of a chapel, especially one in which the Blessed Sacrament was reserved, was one of the hallmarks of a religious community.¹⁸⁶ Above all, it feared, with cause,

¹⁸⁵Arch. Soeurs de l'Enfant-Jesus de Reims: Proces verbal des premiers Voeux, 8/II/1684.

¹⁸⁶The importance of outward signs such as these is revealed in another incident. Roland, either by inadvertence or on purpose, had begun to refer to the superior of the community, Francoise Duval, as "Madame" -- the title normally given to the superiors of convents. When he received a note criticizing this usage, he immediately recognized his fault: "il dit aussitôt qu'il l'eut appris, ils ont raison, qu'on aille vite dire aux Soeurs qu'elles ne s'appellent plus que du nom de ma Soeur..." ("Mémoires", Un précurseur méconnu, p.208).

that control of the new foundation, which as a simple orphanage had been in its hands, would pass to the Archbishop.

Had this been the only concern of the council, it could have been explained in terms of the city's old struggle against the immense ecclesiastical power of the Archbishop. But there was a further element in the council's opposition to Roland, one that it shared with other gens de bien. This was its disapproval of the very principle of the new charity schools:

Toute la ville se banda contre lui pour empêcher l'Etablissement des Ecoles gratuites, comme si c'eût été une crime de les entreprendre. Le Clergé, les Mandians, le Corps de ville se bandèrent ensemble pour travailler à son renversement.¹⁸⁷

This opposition was rooted in social attitudes. Like the merchants and officials in Lyon to whom Démiat addressed his Rémontrances, the ruling classes of Reims believed that schooling for the poor was useless and even harmful. The sisters, according to René Bourgeois, "nourrissent les servantes dans une fainéantise qui n'est pas propre au ménage".¹⁸⁸ The general feeling at the outset was that Roland's enterprise would upset the social balance of the city.

Once the schools were observed in action, however, the council began to modify its opinion.

Je lui demandai [wrote Bourgeois regarding a conversation with M. Dallier] s'il n'était

¹⁸⁷"Memoires", ibid., p.207.

¹⁸⁸René Bourgeois, Memoires, vol.3, p.697. Quoted in A. Hannebe, op.cit., p.184.

pas persuadé que les pauvres gens eussent besoin d'instruction au moins pour leurs enfants, puisque outre qu'ils n'avaient le temps de les entretenir de la doctrine élémentaire de notre foi, ils n'en avaient pas la capacité, que les curés et les pasteurs ne s'y appliquaient pas autant qu'il serait nécessaire ... que j'estimais l'établissement de ces écoles avantageux.

He agreed with Dallier that :

... établissant ces écoles pour les filles jusqu'à un certain âge de neuf à dix ans, le profit qui en reviendrait au public, par l'instruction qu'on donnait à ces enfants, serait grand et fructueux ... mais il faudrait exclure de ces écoles les enfants au-dessus de cet âge, pour les obliger à travailler, et convenir, avec les directeurs, de ces conditions sans s'en relâcher, ou bien on rendrait les filles et garçons au-dessus de cet âge indolents et sans travail.¹⁸⁹

People like Bourgeois and Dallier came to accept the schools, but only when they began to believe that these institutions might operate for, rather than against, social control.

Another point of equal interest is the Archbishop's relationship with the community. Though the "Mémoires" do their best to minimize the fact, or rather to interpret it as the will of Providence, there can be little doubt that Le Tellier did not treat Roland kindly. However, immediately after the theologal's death he adopted the community, and treated it as his own.

In light of what is known about Archbishop Colbert and

¹⁸⁹Bourgeois, Mémoires, vol.3, p.1078. In fact, the sisters did not confine themselves to the limitations set by the city. From the very beginning, their schools accepted girls of all ages ("Mémoires", p.166). By the 1680s, when their school rules were written down, they were teaching writing to advanced students.

the Soeurs Barré,¹⁹⁰ it seems likely that Le Tellier, also, wanted a diocesan congregation under his immediate control; the death of Roland gave him this opportunity. Certainly the Soeurs du Saint-Enfant-Jésus became, and remained, the official teaching congregation of the diocese of Reims, and the rule under which they lived was that given to them, in 1683, by Le Tellier.

By the terms of the agreement reached between Roland's executor, Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, and the City Council, on August 1, 1678, the congregation was required to remain secular.¹⁹¹ This requirement was confirmed in the Letters Patent, which also made plain that, apart from the house, which, since it had been sold to Roland by a monastic community, was already religious property, and the chapel that had been built adjacent to it, the community's property was not to be exempt from taxes. Thus the new community received official definition; it was to belong to the "intermediate state",¹⁹² religious and yet not monastic, which was now beginning to take form.

One last dimension remains, almost invisible beneath the political skirmishes which marked this difficult foundation.

¹⁹⁰See above, fn. 102.

¹⁹¹"Toutes les Filles de ladite communauté seront seculières et ne pourront estre cloistrées ny voilées (...) ny faire des voeux solennels en quelque temps et sous quelque pretexte que ce puisse estre." Arch. Ville de Reims, Carton 691, liasse 14, no.5, quoted in L. Aroz, op.cit., p.94.

¹⁹²R. Lemoine Le droit des religieux, p.40.

This is the support that the new congregation received from the people that were going to use it: the women who entered the community, and the parents who sent their children to the schools. The "Mémoires" claim that "la bonne odeur que répandoit la conduite de ces premières filles de M. Roland en attirera bientôt d'autres, le nombre s'augmenta en peu d'années, ce qui fit qu'on multipliât les Ecoles en différents quartiers de la Ville et même de la Campagne ..."193 Similar stories of success are very familiar in hagiographical writing. In this case, the facts bear it out.

In 1675, when the schools opened officially, there were ten schoolmistresses in the community. In 1678, their number had risen to thirteen.¹⁹⁴ At that time Roland, outlining his plan for the future, envisaged a community of thirty: twenty to be engaged in teaching -- "une maistresse ne pouvant bien enseigner que cinq^{nte} enfans"¹⁹⁵ -- ten more in the noviciate and working in the house. "Il en faut encore compter dans la suite de temps un bon nombre d'infirmes n'y ayant rien qui ruine tant la sante des filles qu'un semblable occupaon (sic) qui demande qu'on parle presque continuellement ..."196 In 1684, when the sisters made their first simple vows, the community

¹⁹³"Mémoires", Un précurseur méconnu, p.167.

¹⁹⁴L. Aroz, op.cit., pp. 71-72.

¹⁹⁵Nicolas Roland - Jean Roland, 1678, printed in Un précurseur méconnu, p.7.

¹⁹⁶Loc.cit.

numbered twenty; by 1690, thirty.¹⁹⁷ At the beginning of the eighteenth century, counting its foundations in the countryside, it had grown to forty-two.¹⁹⁸ Within twenty years, the growth of the congregation had exceeded Roland's expectations.

At the time of Roland's death in 1678, the sisters were still running the orphanage.¹⁹⁹ But their principal task was that of conducting school, in the traditional "four quarters": in their house on the rue de Barbâtre, and in the parishes of Saint-Rémi, Saint-Jacques, and Saint-Hilaire.²⁰⁰ The number of children in their classrooms was somewhere around 1000.²⁰¹

What kind of children went to Roland's schools? There seems to have been no attempt to limit the entry of more affluent

¹⁹⁷Arch. des Soeurs de l'Enfant-Jésus, ms.15-4 C: "Procez verbal de la reception des premières Filles de la communauté du Saint Enfant Jésus", 8/ii/1684.

¹⁹⁸BN mss. 20712, Lettres et memoires, 1704-1706, Fol. 159. Cited in L. Aroz, op.cit., p.14.

¹⁹⁹Archives des Soeurs de l'Enfant-Jésus, ms.17. "Usage des exercices de la communauté des Filles du Saint-Enfant-Jésus établie à Reims (1690-1715)", pp.208-09.

²⁰⁰The limited size of the city allowed them all to live in the Mother House, and to walk to the school each morning. This walk took less than a half-hour. See Bibl. Ville de Reims, ms. 1851, "Constitutions Pour la Comte des filles du St Enfant Jésus Etablie à Reims" given by Charles-Maurice Le Tellier, 12/xi/1683, Ch. 7, no.II: "A sept heures et demie apres que les Soeurs auront dejeunée avec du pain et de leau ... celles qui sont destinée pour les ecolles de la ville s'assembleront a la porte pour aller au lieu de leurs ecolles en silence et tant celles de la maison que celles de la ville, commenceront à huit heures ..."

²⁰¹L. Aroz, op.cit., p.123.

students. The school rules simply demanded that all children, rich or poor, should be accepted into the schools "avec même estime".²⁰² According to the historian of the Christian Brothers, "Chez Roland, au début, toutes les élèves étaient, plus ou moins, pouilleuses."²⁰³ However, they were obviously not as much so as Roland would have wished. "Il y a apparence qu'il y aura encore dans la suite un plus grand nombre de colliers," he wrote to his uncle, "la trop grande misère empêchant apnt [à présent] plus^{rs} des parens de donner à leurs enfans le temps de se faire instruire."²⁰⁴

In comparison to that of the Hopitaux-Généraux, both in Rouen and in Reims, the pedagogy of the sisters appears to have been light in training in manual work; the children were taught religion, reading, civilité and some arithmetic, with writing added for the advanced students. This, presumably, reflected the desires of the parents, and suggests a very different student population from those poor pupils in the cemetery school of Saint-Maclou in Rouen, who knitted stockings and made lace to help support their families.²⁰⁵

There were, apparently, some students who were truly poor.

²⁰²Archives des Soeurs de l'Enfant-Jésus, ms. 17, p.19.

²⁰³Y. Poutet, Origines, vol.I p. 575.

²⁰⁴Nicolas Roland - Jean Roland, 1678. Un précurseur méconnu, p.7.

²⁰⁵See above, fn.73.

Their books were provided free of charge, and kept by the school.²⁰⁶

But the free schools of the Soeurs du Saint-Enfant

Jésus appear to have found their principal clientèle in a broad range of working people, comfortable and less comfortable, in the city of Reims -- the "amidonniers, boulangers, cardeurs de laine, jardiniers, mantriers, perruquiers, savetiers, serruriers, tisseurs et tonneliers"²⁰⁷ whose daughters had, most probably, never gone to school before. The Mother House on the rue de Barbâtre was located in the part of the city most heavily populated by maîtres sergers, the artisans whose work in the production of wool fabric formed the bulk of the "manufacture" of Reims.²⁰⁸ It is likely that the children from these tiny workshops also attended the free classes of the sisters.

The healthy growth of both community and schools is evidence of the satisfaction felt by ordinary people with their new schoolmistresses. The grudging conversion of the City Council has been recorded above. The most powerful approbation came from the Archbishop, in 1683, after the schools had begun to work; when the products of their discipline and instruction started to appear upon the scene. "Nous avons connu par l'expérience

²⁰⁶Arch. des soeurs de l'Enfant-Jesus, ms. 17, f.158.

²⁰⁷Aroz has recorded this list of professions of the fathers of students at a school run by the Christian Brothers, "émule de celle des Soeurs", in the Saint-Rémi quarter; he suggests that it resembles, fairly closely, the clientèle of the sisters' schools. (L. Aroz, op.cit.; p.156).

²⁰⁸See P. Desportes, op.cit., p.209 for map.

de quelque années," wrote Le Tellier, "l'avantage que les jeunes filles en tirent, car lorsque Nous leurs avons administré, en différentes occasions, le sacrement de confirmation, nous les avons trouvées incomparablement plus modeste et mieux instruites qu'elles ne l'étoient lorsque ... nous entrâmes, en l'année 1671, en possession de notre Archevêché."²⁰⁹

Among the impressions which the new charity schools made upon their society, none was more important than that which carried Roland's executor, Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, into his life's work. In 1679 the first charity schools for boys were opened in Reims, and in 1688 the Institute of Brothers of Christian Schools took shape. At last, schoolteaching by itself, without the benefit of the priesthood, became a religious vocation for men. But it should be remembered that they followed a path which women had already trodden.²¹⁰

3) Conclusion.

Women experienced a "promotion" in the seventeenth century, by virtue of their access to new fields of activity. The reasons for this promotion have frequently been discussed, but in an unflattering vocabulary that suggests passivity on the part

²⁰⁹Bibl. Ville de Reims, ms. 1851, pp.3-4.

²¹⁰This is not mere hyperbole. Jean-Baptiste de La Salle drew heavily upon the experience of the sisters, as well as other communities, in the creation of his Christian Brothers. Two historians of the Christian Brothers acknowledge his debt to the sisters. See L. Aroz, above, fn. 207, and Y. Poutet, Origines, vol. I, part 2, "Pauvre avec les pauvres de Reims".

of the women. Forces outside themselves -- whether Divine Providence or the conjoncture, depending on the historian's persuasion -- "called them forth", admitted them to the apostolate, "peopled the convents".²¹¹ This verdict does not do justice to the role of the women themselves, as active participants in the creation of their communities and of their professions. The founding communities, from the Ursulines of the 1600s to the soeurs Barre of the 1660s, to the schoolmistresses of Montreal in the 1690s, all contributed to the definition and expansion of the active, semi-religious life. The "promotion" which they experienced was not smooth and honourable, but difficult and often humiliating. They faced a deep-rooted resistance, founded in social and religious tradition, an obstacle which could only be overcome by the repeated unassuming performance of their duties. But they also needed friends -- either in the government, or in the Church, or in society.

The Crown was usually favourable. In early years because of the personal piety of the rulers, in later years because education was seen as a valuable form of social control, the teaching congregations generally received benevolent, though never financially generous, treatment by the secular authorities. The years of Louis XIV's personal rule saw the creation of most

²¹¹"La religion peuple les couvents de pauvres servantes de Dieu, prolétaires de la foi qui n'ont une valeur, au point de vue de l'action féminine, que dans la mesure où elles ont librement choisi leur vocation charitable." M. Albistur et D. Armogathe, Histoire du féminisme français (op.cit.), vol.I, p.136.

of the congregations of secular schoolmistresses to be born under the Ancien Régime.

Although many churchmen welcomed and encouraged the new communities, resistance could be strong in the Church, particularly in the matter of catechetics, which were considered to be not only a male, but a priestly, preserve. Hard realities, however, weakened the opposition. Reform thinking insisted that knowledge of the faith was a sine qua non for salvation. But the obligation of instruction was too great for the parish clergy to carry alone; furthermore, it was becoming clear that the instruction of children demanded a different approach from that of adults. In a society where the schooling of girls by men was strictly and consistently forbidden by both Crown and Church, there could only be one conclusion. If girls must learn, then women must teach.

The public mood was changeable. The sisters were first perceived as oddities, "bigottes". On the other hand, many pious Catholics espoused the new teaching institutes, in the belief that they alone could tame the wild and ill-mannered children of the poor. Parents had their own reasons for wishing to see their daughters at school. For many young Frenchwomen, schooling became the means of social promotion.

Once the value of the sisters' work was recognized, they were accepted. Then, very quickly, they became a necessary part of the social structure, as the following episode illustrates:

In the 1740s, all the women's congregations of Troyes, under suspicion of Jansenism, were forced by the bishop to close their schools. Nothing remained open for the education of girls. Within a few years, the public found this situation unacceptable. In 1764, the Corps de Métiers of Troyes officially demanded that new schools for girls be opened.²¹² What a hundred years earlier had been a luxury of doubtful value was now a social necessity.

²¹²T. Boutiot, Histoire de l'Instruction publique et populaire à Troyes pendant les quatre derniers siècles (Troyes, 1865), p.72.

CHAPTER VII

DEVELOPMENT OF A FEMININE PEDAGOGY

1) The teachers: spirituality.

A leading historian of Catholic education under the Ancien Régime, Jean de Viguerie, has drawn attention to the fact that, although in recent years a number of works have appeared on the subject of feminine education, little has yet been done on the groups that developed and dispensed this education. In his mind, this is an unnatural separation. "Comment comprendre une pédagogie sans remonter à sa source, l'esprit de la congrégation, sa finalité propre?"¹ The question should also be turned around: can we study the congregations themselves without placing them in the context of their pedagogy? Can the teaching congregations be understood without reference to the work that they performed and the rationale that developed around it?²

The subject of this chapter is the development of education in, and by, the congregations, and its effect on the women themselves. People are, in part, what their work makes them. Cloistered or uncloistered, the schoolmistresses of the congregations

¹Avant-propos, Les religieuses enseignantes: XVI^e - XX^e siècles (op.cit.), p.7.

²Claude Langlois, in his book Le catholicisme au féminin: les congrégations françaises à supérieure générale au XIX^e siècle (op.cit.), asserts that "les congrégations se définissent d'abord par l'activité qu'elles exercent, non par le genre de vie qu'elles adoptent" (p.625). In spite of this, his study is disappointingly light in the area of the nineteenth-century congregations' works.

underwent considerable adaptation in their lives to meet the priority which they gave to teaching.

The religious thinkers of the seventeenth century understood and promoted the principle of specialization of congregations. "L'esprit d'un ordre ou d'un Institut est celui dans lequel il a été conçu, avec lequel il est né, et qui l'a conduit jusqu'à sa dernière perfection."³ They recognized that such specialization would lead to the cultivation of different qualities "les plus propres à réussir et à acquérir cette fin ce qui s'appelle l'esprit de l'institut."⁴ Teaching involved its own set of qualities, which were different from those which pertained to non-teaching orders.

For centuries, the ideal of women in religion had been self-perfection through retreat from the world; "vivre unies à Dieu et dégagées des créatures par une entière séparation d'esprit et de coeur."⁵ The new teaching congregations of the Counter Reformation aspired to self-perfection, but through service to others. All of them, in one form or another, shared

³C. de Glandelet, Le Vray Esprit (op.cit.), p.5.

⁴M. Vachon de Belmont, "Eloges de quelques personnes mortes de sainteté à Montréal, en Canada" R.A.P.Q. 10 (1929-30): 171.

⁵Anne de Xainctonge, quoted in J. Morey, La vénérable Anne de Xainctonge, fondatrice de la congrégation de Sainte-Ursule au Comté de Bourgogne (Besançon: Imprimerie Jacquin, 1901), vol. II, p.33. Mère de Xainctonge (1567-1621) was the foundress of the Ursuline congregation of Dole, which escaped the general move to the cloister (see above, chapter II, p.39, fn. 33). She and her sister Françoise, who founded the Ursuline congregation of Dijon, belonged to a prominent parliamentary family in that city.

the purpose laid down by Pierre Fourier for his nuns:

... de rendre leur vie la plus sainte, la plus fructueuse et la plus utile au public, et la plus agréable à Dieu qu'il leur sera possible: et spécialement de s'employer diligemment, et tout à fait, à l'instruction des petites filles gratuitement.⁶

This entailed a different life and a different spirituality.

Instead of retreat, the new monasticism must idealize involvement:

Ayant reçu de Dieu les forces et la vie [Anne de Xaintonge told her novices] vous ne pouvez les lui rendre ... qu'en les employant à le faire connaître, aimer et adorer. Vous devez donc vous servir de votre habilité et de vos talents naturels, comme aussi de votre instruction religieuse et de votre foi, pour amener les âmes à ce bon Maître.⁷

Such involvement, worthy though it was, nevertheless detracted from pure contemplation. From the very outset it was obvious that the demands of the schoolroom would require a dilution of the monastic ideal.⁸ To have her effect on "the world" the

⁶Les vraies constitutions des religieuses de la Congregation de Notre Dame (1646), preface. This resembles the calling of the Paris Ursulines, described in their Bull of erection: "Elles se proposeront l'instruction des petites filles pour fin et but principal, y pensant continuellement, ... s'y appliquant de toutes leurs forces et attention d'esprit, et estimant que par ce moyen elles pourront satisfaire à la vocation de Dieu." (M.-C. Gueudré, Histoire de l'ordre des Ursulines en France (op.cit.), vol. I, p.111). For the Filles de Notre-Dame, see their constitutions, in La Compagnie de Marie Notre-Dame (op.cit.) (ed. Letouzey), p.67: "Que jamais ne s'omette [cette oeuvre d'éducation] ains se faire toujours de mieux en mieux."

⁷J. Morey, op.cit., vol. II, p.33.

⁸It was this that aroused the opposition of so many prelates, not only in France, but in Rome. "On ne peut comprendre à Rome qu'il soit possible d'enseigner et garder la clôture," wrote Fourier. (Quoted in M.-E. Aubry, "La Congrégation de Notre-Dame à Nancy" (op.cit., p.79).

teaching nun must be sociable and uneccentric in demeanour;⁹ to survive the "tracas des classes" she must be in sound health, and not worn out by physical mortification. Her prayer life must remain practical. "Pour les ravissements et les extases," wrote Mère de Pommereu,

ils ne sont pas ... nécessaires aux Ursulines, au contraire, il semble que s'il leur en arrivoit fréquemment, ils seroient incompatibles avec leurs principales fonctions qui les obligent a un soin et à une application continuelle aux petites filles. Que seroit-ce de trouver une Ursuline élevée de terre et privée de sens quand il faudroit qu'elle fist le catechisme ou servist les enfants.¹⁰

Nevertheless, the women of the Counter-Reformation congregations were determined to make their communities true religious communities. "Ce n'est pas une assemblée de maîtresses d'école que je pense faire," said Anne de Xainctonge, "mais une Compagnie de vierges chrétiennes vouées à la vie religieuse pour l'instruction de la jeunesse."¹¹ The Ursulines of Bordeaux were urged to follow their profession "tenant les yeux corporels sur la petite créature, et les yeux de l'âme au Créateur pour l'amour duquel

⁹"Que tout leur extérieur soit si bien composé qu'il ne s'y trouve rien qui puisse aliéner ou dégouter, ou estranger ou par trop intimider les escholières." (Fourier, Vraies constitutions, quoted in L. Maggiolo, "L'oeuvre pédagogique de Pierre Fourier" [op.cit.], p. 212).

¹⁰M.D.P.U. op.cit., part I, pp. 8-9, quoted in M.-A. Jégou, Les ursulines du faubourg Saint-Jacques (op.cit.), p.138. It should be remembered that the Ursulines' principal competition for novices came from Carmel and the Visitation, both of which were contemplative.

¹¹J. Morey, op.cit., vol. I, pp.250-51.

elles le font."¹² Alix Le Clerc and her companions wanted to "do all the good that is possible"¹³, but they also wished to be "perpetually enclosed in a new [religious] house."¹⁴ The sense of religious calling was at the heart of their new undertakings; they would not even have started without it.

A new religious life, suitable to their purpose, had therefore to be constructed out of the old, by taking some elements from traditional monasticism and abandoning others. The monastic elements that were at odds with the profession of teaching were: clausura; Divine Office; the practice of physical mortification; and the religious habit.

Clausura, as has been indicated in Chapter III, was almost universally imposed upon the new communities. It had the effect of reducing their field of action, of containing their apostolic zeal. However, in the transactions which surrounded the process of monastic translation, a significant concession was made to the teaching nuns. In order to enable them to perform their duties, they were allowed to receive externes within the confines of the Monastery. The permission was first given in 1607:

On bâtilra une ample cour a un côté de
l'église, dans l'enclos toute fois de ce
Monastère ou Maison ... a laquelle les

¹²Quoted in J. de Viguerie, L'Institution des enfants (op.cit.), p.64.

¹³See above, chap. III.

¹⁴p. Fourier, Relation ... des commencemens de la congrégation de Nostre-Dame, quoted in H. Derréal, Un missionnaire de la Contre-Réforme (op.cit.), p.164, n. 107.

Mères, Soeurs et Maîtresses iront pour
enseigner, après le dernier signe de la
cloche de l'école ¹⁵

The formula was the same for subsequent bulls of erection for all three teaching congregations. The teaching of externes was seen as a daring and dangerous innovation. Therefore permission was only provisional, "à notre bon plaisir et du Saint-Siège apostolique"; and the externe classes were fenced around, literally, with precautions. The students were to enter their classroom by an exterior door, guarded by a servant. Once they were in, and the door locked, the teaching nuns would enter by an interior door. The same procedure would be reversed at the end of classes. There would be no other point of contact between the monastery and its day students.¹⁶ But this small opening allowed the nuns of the Counter Reformation to exercise their influence on thousands of young girls in the cities and towns of France.¹⁷

Divine Office was the central act of community worship.

¹⁵Bull of erection for the Bordeaux monastery of the filles de Notre-Dame, 7/iv/1607, quoted in C. Molette, "Conclusions", Les religieuses enseignantes, p.152.

¹⁶See also Pierre Fourier, Vraies Constitutions, Part III, articles 4, 5. One nun, the Intendante (or Maîtresse générale in the case of the Ursulines) was empowered to deal with the parents.

¹⁷The three teaching congregations (filles de Notre-Dame, Ursulines and Congrégation) had over four hundred monasteries in France by the end of the seventeenth century, and in most of these externes were received. The Visitation did not teach externes. Smaller monasteries might teach a hundred students, while large houses like the grand couvent in Nancy maintained an externe population of approximately four hundred. (M.-E. Aubry, "La Congrégation de Notre-Dame", pp. 88-89).

of the monastery. In strict observance, it was sung in choir in eight parts every twenty-four hours, and the rest of the monastery's life revolved around it. For school teachers, however, this practice was virtually impossible, not only because of the rigorous schedule that it involved, but because the singing strained their voices. Most of the communities asked for, and received, exemption from this duty.¹⁸ Instead, they recited the Little Office of the Virgin, and even here, those nuns engaged in teaching were dispensed from the obligation.¹⁹ However, their prayer life remained demanding, as the focus began to shift from public to private prayer.²⁰

Physical mortifications, of the type practised in reformed monasteries and in the Carmelite convents, were equally damaging to health. The practice of self-mortification died hard. The young women of Mattaincourt invented ingenious penances for

¹⁸"Sa Sainteté ... a osté, de son mouvement et sans en être requise, tout obligation de dire le grand office." (Filles de Notre-Dame, Constitutions, quoted in ed. Letouzey, op.cit., p.67. "Il fut arrêté de ne point introduire de Musique, ny de Plain-chant dans le Choeur, afin que les Religieuses de fussent aucunement diverties de l'éducation et instruction des jeunes Filles." M.D.P.U.op.cit., quoted in M.-A. Jégou, op.cit., p.43. Only a few monasteries - for instance, the houses of the Ursuline congregation of Toulouse -- retained the obligation (loc.cit.).

¹⁹H. Derréal, op.cit., p.374, n.75.

²⁰The new communities usually modelled themselves upon the Jesuits. Their rule included daily private prayer, reading and meditation, as well as a community examen, office, and rosary. Every rule prescribed an annual retreat, and in many cases, the nuns performed the Spīritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius.

themselves.²¹ The first novices of Faubourg Saint-Jacques, according to Mère de Pommereu, "couchaient la plupart du temps sur la dure, et usaient jour et nuit mille inventions pour crucifier leurs corps."²² In time, however, mortifications came under control of the superiors, and the nuns learned, Jesuit-style, that obedience to the rule was more virtuous than "dévotions particulières".²³ The same moderation applied to their dress. The coarse clothing and bare feet of the contemplatives were hardly appropriate to the classroom.²⁴ Even the exaggerated dress and behaviour of dévotés was to be avoided, because of the negative effect that it would have on their clientèle. Thus the Ursulines of Dole were instructed to have:

... toujours le visage découvert pour faire
veoir à tout le monde, par leur modestie

²¹H. Derréal, op.cit., pp.139-40.

²²M.D.P.U., op.cit., quoted in M.-A. Jégou, op.cit., p.44.

²³For the Filles de Notre-Dame "le châtement du corps ne doit pas être excessif ni indiscret en veilles, en jeûnes et en autres pénitences extérieurs et austérités qui nuisent souvent, et empêchent de plus grands biens; c'est pourquoi il faut que chacune découvre à son Père Spirituel et à la Mère Supérieure tout ce qu'elle fait en ce point." See P. Michel, "Une version modernisée des Règles ... des Filles de Notre-Dame", p.56. For the Ursulines of Faubourg Saint-Jacques, "poverty was not misery"; their food was simple and there was no waste. The religious were expected to accept with "indifference" -- in the Jesuit sense -- what was given to them (M.-A. Jégou, op.cit., p.142).

²⁴See L. Entraygues, Une niece de Montaigne (op.cit.), p.85, for a description of the habit of the filles de Notre-Dame, "fait avec goût". The founders of Faubourg Saint-Jacques abandoned the idea of a white habit, as unsuitable to the dusty and dirty conditions of the classroom (H. de Leymont, Madame de Sainte-Beuve, p.205).

naturelle et sans contrainte, que l'amour
aussi bien que leurs vœux les attache à Dieu
d'une manière indissoluble, sans le secours des
murs.²⁵

To sum up, the new religious life was designed to be apostolic,
to draw the neighbour towards God, through example as well as
through teaching. Every act of self-perfection was linked to
the effect it would have on others:

Le but et la fin principale des Ursulines,
estant l'instruction des petites filles
séculières en la piété Chrestienne ...
elles doivent s'estudier d'acquérir une
grande perfection et tascher d'arriver à
un haut degré d'oraison, et union avec
Dieu. Car tout ainsi que le charbon qui
n'est que chaud n'allumera point un autre
charbon, comme celui qui est embrasé: de
mesme celles qui ne sont que peu eschauffées
en l'amour de Dieu, difficilement, et
rarement eschaufferont-elles les autres en
l'amour Divin.²⁶

Differences in outward observance were indicative of a
fundamental inner distinction, between contemplative and active
religious. The proliferation of new congregations offered a
greater choice of lifestyle. Women who desired contemplation
could enter the Carmelites, the Visitation, or the reformed
monasteries. This left the more actively-inclined free to choose
the active congregations, "qui cause quelque divertissement,"
according to Mère de Pommereu, "les filles en general n'estans

²⁵P. Orset, quoted in J. Morey, op.cit., vol.II, p.384.

²⁶Ursulines, Constitutions, 1640, part I, pp.21-22. Quoted in
M.-A. Jégou, op.cit., p.139.

point capables de Méditations continuelles."²⁷ In return, the active congregations were advised to accept subjects appropriate to their task: women who were not only pious, but also energetic and healthy. Pierre Fourier described the characteristics of good schoolmistresses:

Saines de corps et d'esprit, et de bonne complexion et de bon courage, et de bonne volonté, et remplies d'un grand zèle, pour supporter la fatigue de ce Saint exercice.²⁸

While many entrants fell short of his ideal, there was nevertheless a certain process of natural selection. Women who did not want to teach, or work with children, were unlikely to enter communities which required them to take the fourth vow.²⁹

The qualities defined in the earlier years of the century -- common sense, zeal, robust health -- became more pronounced with the evolution of the filles séculières. As the maxim "quitter Dieu pour Dieu" became the cornerstone of their spirituality, the new generations of schoolmistresses began to shed the tension

²⁷M.D.P.U., op.cit., Part I, p.14.

²⁸P.Fourier, Les vraies constitutions, p.6. One of the founding members of the Congrégation, Gaute André, personified the virtues that her institute admired: "elle étoit d'une complexion robuste, d'une santé bien ferme, d'un courage à dévorer toutes les difficultés sans les masquer, et d'un sens commun si solide que les plus avisés parmi les hommes ne craignoient pas de recourir à son conseil aux affaires les plus embrouillées, et quelques-uns disoient qu'elle étoit capable de gouverner un royaume." (P. Bédel, quoted in A. de Besancet, Le bienheureux Pierre Fourier et la Lorraine (Paris, 1864), p.278).

²⁹Mère Jégou cites the case of one member of the Paris community whose reluctance to teach was such that she refused to take the fourth vow; but she also renounced all claim to a voice in the affairs of the community. Op.cit., p.146.

that had so long existed between monastic practice and the duties of the schoolroom. Their work became their means of perfection. "Les Soeurs de l'Institut par leur employ assurent leur salut," wrote Nicolas Barré.³⁰ Christ, seeing their devotion to their neighbour, would not fail to advance their own holiness.³¹ The prayer life of the sisters remained considerable (in the case of the Soeurs du Saint-Enfant-Jésus, four and a half hours per day³²), but priority was now, without question, given to their apostolate. Barré compared them to servants looking after their master's children, "toutes negligées sur elles-mêmes, et mettant tout leur soin à nettoyer, habiller, orner les enfans."³³ This elevation of what had always been considered hard and somewhat servile work into a holy apostolate, was made possible by the "ideology of the school", so central to the Catholic Reformation.³⁴ Barré was able to draw on social attitudes that had changed

³⁰"Maximes particulières pour les Ecoles charitables de l'Institut", in Lettres spirituelles (op.cit.), Maxime IX, p.344. Barré went on to say that four principles ensured their salvation: the living knowledge which they possessed of the truth; the practice of their observances; the constant exercise of charity; the surrender of their wills to obedience.

³¹Ibid., Maxime XI, p.345.

³²y. Poutet, "L'influence du Père Barré dans la fondation des Soeurs du Saint-Enfant-Jésus de Reims" R.H.E.F. 46 (1960): 34. However, the sisters were exempted from all office: "A cause de leurs Emplois, il n'est à propos de les en charger." (Arch. Soeurs de l'Enfant Jésus de Reims, ms. 17, Extraits du livre des usages, f.33).

³³N. Barré, op.cit., Maxime X, pp.344-45.

³⁴See above, Chapter VI.

profoundly since the days of the early Ursulines.³⁵ In an age when every social attitude found expression in religious terms, this promotion of the schoolmistress was sealed with the seal of divine approval. The seventeenth century saw the growth of a new popular devotion to the Education of the Virgin. This theme was immensely attractive to religious schoolmistresses, from Alix Le Clerc to Marguerite Bourgeoys,³⁶ but it also found a response in society as a whole. The tradition that set Mary, in her early years, at study first with her mother, then in the Temple, was elaborated in sermons, in catechisms, and in religious art which may still be seen today.³⁷

In statues and rétables, almost all dating from the post-tridentine period, the child Mary stands at her mother's knee, holding a book (most often, an alphabet). Her posture expresses submission, though frequently a diadem upon her head indicates her role in the salvation of mankind. Her mother, Saint Anne, radiates kindness, firmness, and austerity. Saint

³⁵However, the emphasis on the salvific nature of good works was not new; it had been characteristic of the Mendicant friars' preaching for many years (L. Febvre, Le problème de l'incroyance, p.258). Barré himself was a friar.

³⁶Vie/de la vénérable Alix Le Clerc (1666), p.269; Ecrits de Marguerite Bourgeoys, passim. Also see below, chap. VIII.

³⁷In her study of the rétables in the diocese of Le Mans, Michèle Ménard has found that over a quarter of the images (428) are of the Virgin, and of these, 63 are of the Education of the Virgin. (Une histoire des mentalités religieuses aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles: Mille rétables de l'ancien diocèse du Mans. [Paris: Ed. Beauchesne, 1980] pp. 313 ff). For an example taken from Mme Ménard's book, see frontispiece.

Anne is, in fact, the personification of education. But she is not presented as a model of motherhood. She is recognizable, by her dress and by her demeanour, as a religious.³⁸

The nun-educator was a phenomenon of the seventeenth century. Reconciliation of the two roles was not easy; indeed, it involved the melding of two functions that had hitherto been considered mutually exclusive. But by the end of the century it had been achieved. The "ideology of the school", so deeply rooted in the mentalité of the times, had made it possible.

2) The teachers: Professionalism.

Of the many thousands of girls who passed through the schools of ancien régime France, few, if any, received an education comparable to that of the collèges which their brothers attended. The literacy rate among women, as witnessed by the signatures on marriage contracts, remained far lower than that among men. "Nothing," wrote Fénelon, in the last quarter of the century, "is more neglected than the education of girls."³⁹ These three sentences sum up the judgment which historians have passed on the seventeenth century's effort at feminine education.

Responsibility for this seeming mediocrity has traditionally been assigned to the teaching congregations. It has been assumed that both subject matter and teaching method were inferior.

³⁸Ibid., p.375.

³⁹François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon, Éducation des filles (op.cit.), p.5.

The first assumption has recently become the subject of argument, as defendants of the teaching congregations seek to place their syllabus in the context of the times.⁴⁰ The second assumption also demands examination. While the intellectual content of seventeenth-century girls' schooling was limited by many circumstances, the care with which the congregations approached their work, and the training which they stipulated for their members, frequently were of a "professional" standard.

"Professionalism" is a modern word, which the seventeenth century would not have recognized, even though certain members of society were already practising it. We may define it as the relationship between a group of people and their particular calling, or profession. The profession is defined by a body of knowledge which its professionals must learn, and a set of rules, which they must observe. The professionals normally administer their profession, safeguarding its integrity, training new aspirants, developing new tools and methods. They apply themselves to their calling, and they do so with all their ability. Understood in this sense, it will be argued that the word "professional" can apply to many of the feminine teaching congregations of the seventeenth century.

Bernard Chedozeau writes: "La question de l'éducation des filles; et en particulier, celle des petites filles pauvres

⁴⁰See, for instance, the various articles of Jean Perrel, especially "Sur l'enseignement féminin avant la Révolution" in Penelope 2 (1980): 9-10.

a été posée pour la première fois au XVIIème siècle."⁴¹ For years young ladies had been raised and educated in monasteries, and girls had attended school, either in the occasional classrooms run by schoolmistresses, or, more often, in mixed classes.⁴² But the idea that girls ought to attend school was developed in the collective mind of Counter-Reformation society, and implemented gradually -- "bit by bit"⁴³ -- throughout the two remaining centuries of the Ancien Régime.

The women who initiated this education were untrained for the work; many of them were unschooled, some of them even illiterate.⁴⁴ They had no tradition of female pedagogy on which to draw. If the records of their various communities do not

⁴¹"Les petites écoles de Pierre Nicole", Marseille 88 (1971):15.

⁴²It was this, more than their failure to attend school altogether, that alarmed Pierre Fourier in his early days in Mattaincourt. (H. Derréal, op.cit., p. 124). Coeducation was officially forbidden in ancien régime France.

⁴³"En miettes" -- the phrase is used by F. Furet and J. Ozouf, in Lire et écrire (op.cit.), vol.I, p.81.

⁴⁴Thus Pierre Fourier had to teach his young schoolmistresses: "il prit la peine de les enseigner à bien lire et correctement, et de leur faire entendre les principes de l'orthographe et les règles de l'arithmétique par méthode, et leur en faisait tous les jours une petite leçon." ("Relation à la gloire de Dieu" by Alix Le Clerc, 1666, quoted in E. de Bazelaire, Le Bienheureux Pierre Fourier (op. cit.)).

exaggerate, they faced full classrooms from the very beginning.⁴⁵ They had no breathing space to develop efficient teaching methods.

However, they enjoyed two advantages: their association with the masculine teaching orders, chiefly the Jesuits; and their own commitment to community life. The former gave them a coherent model on which to base their own pedagogy, the latter gave them a permanent structure in which to maintain and develop that pedagogy.

The Jesuit connection may be found almost everywhere.⁴⁶ Two Jesuit priests, Bordes and Raymond, initiated the founding of the Filles de Notre-Dame.⁴⁷ Pierre Fourier, himself trained in the Jesuit college of Pont-à-Mousson, adapted that training to the purposes of the young schoolmistresses of Mattaincourt.⁴⁸ Madame de Sainte-Beuve was persuaded to found her congregation

⁴⁵Thus for the community of five Ursulines at Dijon, "les classes furent en peu de temps si remplies, qu'elles ne pouvoient contenir le grand nombre d'Ecolières qui s'y presentoient" (M.D.P.U., op.cit., Part I, p.161). Similarly, at Paris, "à peine y avait six mois que le monastère avait clôturé, que l'on commença à y introduire de petites filles externes.... Dès abord, elles y furent reçues à centaines ..." Ibid., quoted in A.-M. Lembrez, Institut du Saint-Enfant-Jésus à Toulouse, 1699-1959 (Mémoire de Maîtrise, Toulouse, 1985), p.108. Stories of this sort abound in the various annals, and they are probably true: after all, the schools were free.

⁴⁶There were exceptions. In Provence the Ursulines continued to depend on the Fathers of Christian Doctrine, under whom the original work had started. The Ursuline congregation of Toulouse depended on the Oratorians.

⁴⁷See above, chap.III.

⁴⁸H. Derréal, op.cit., p.172.

in Paris as a direct counterpart to the Society of Jesus.⁴⁹ Over and over again, foundresses felt impelled, like Mary Ward, to "take the same of the Society".⁵⁰

The congregations took of the Society, not its subject matter, which was considered far too sophisticated and profound for girls, but its teaching methods. These may be summed up under the headings of discipline and pedagogy.

The sisters faced classrooms filled with girls of all ages, most of them without previous schooling, and, therefore, unbroken to the orderly behaviour that a classroom demands. They had, at first, only the most rudimentary teaching aids. In addition, they taught in a common classroom, filled with scores, sometimes

⁴⁹See P. Marin's exhortation to her: "Pour renouveler le monde corrompu, il s'y faudrait prendre par la petite jeunesse. Notre père, le bienheureux Ignace, a visé à ce but, destinant notre Compagnie à la bonne éducation des petits garçons. Ce serait chose très louable et très utile, d'établir une congrégation où l'on transplantât les petites filles comme en un terroir fertile, afin qu'ayant reçu là des bonnes instructions, elles en sortissent pour porter la vertu dans les familles." (Quoted in H. de Leymont, Madame de Sainte-Beuve, pp. 154-55).

⁵⁰M. Salome, Mary Ward (op.cit.), p.77. In Mary's case, the urging came from a "voice". Other foundresses also experienced visions. Thus Alix Le Clerc told her spiritual director that "c'était le saint Père Ignace qui m'avait encouragée à l'institution des petites filles..." (L. Pingaud, Saint Pierre Fourier, p.60). The Ursuline foundress, Mère Micolon, also received encouragement from Saint Ignatius in a vision. (M.C. Gueudré, op.cit., vol.I, pp.199-200).

hundreds, of children.⁵¹ It was imperative to develop methods of managing these crowds. The first step was a division of the students into smaller groups. This division could be by subject: the Filles de Notre-Dame at first divided their children into classes, for reading, writing, sewing, and "ouvrages".⁵² However, the division which came to prevail was the division according to ability and knowledge. The Ursulines of Dole decided to divide their children into six grades.⁵³ Fourier advised three levels: "les petites Abecedaires qui commencent a cognoistre leurs lettres ... celles qui apprennent a lire es livres imprimez ... les Escholieres qui lisent es Registres, et autres papiers et lettres escriptes a la main."⁵⁴ Within the classes there were further divisions into "bancs", of ten or twenty students to a mistress.⁵⁵ Each mistress had to keep her instruction

⁵¹A contemporary description survives of the first free classrooms of the Ursulines of Dole. "C'est un spectacle qui donne du plaisir, de voir, dans une même salle, un grand nombre de filles, vieilles et jeunes, assises sur des bancs ... nos soeurs les prennent successivement, les unes après les autres, pour les choses affectées au rang où elles sont....Aucune soeur est dispensée de l'instruction, et dès lors que l'heure est venue, toutes se rendent dans cette salle où elles se partagent en différents bancs qui font différents classes." (P. Orset, quoted in J. Morey, op.cit., vol. II, p.63). The nuns were still teaching by the individual method.

⁵²Ed. Letouzey, p. 74.

⁵³J. Morey, op.cit., p.72.

⁵⁴P. Fourier, op.cit., art. 14.

⁵⁵Ibid., art. 15.

within the limits assigned to her.⁵⁶ The Intendante would review the students' work several times a year, and the girls who had mastered the knowledge pertaining to their banc were promoted to a higher level. This subdivision of the classroom according to levels of achievement, joined in time to the general use of uniform textbooks, laid the foundation for simultaneous instruction, one of the great pedagogical achievements of the century.⁵⁷

The subdivision of the classroom also allowed the possibility of extending each teacher's control over her students. The teaching congregations all adopted the Jesuit institution of the décurion.⁵⁸ Each group of ten children had its own décurionne, or dizainière, who was responsible for assisting with lessons and with discipline. The dizainières were simply students "plus sages et plus sçavantes"⁵⁹, and their duties were limited to

⁵⁶"Les maîtresses auront soin de ne pas anticiper les unes sur les autres, mais de se conformer au règlement de chaque classe, en restant dans les limites assignées" (Anne de Xainctonge, in J. Morey, op. cit., Vol. II, p.71).

⁵⁷By simultaneous instruction is meant the teaching of the entire group at the same time, instead of the old practice of addressing individuals while the rest of the class waited its turn. The teacher sat at the front, or stood at the back, of the class, while the children stayed in their places. See below.

⁵⁸The Jesuits' employment in their classroom of the device of opposing camps, each divided into décuries, reflects the warlike background from which they, and their students, were drawn. See F. de Dainville, La Naissance de l'humanisme moderne, vol. I, p.144.

⁵⁹Règlements des Ursulines (Paris, 1705), part I, p.144.

two- or three-month stints,⁶⁰ during which they co-operated with the mistress, by ensuring the study and discipline of their dizaine. The dizainière, together with the décurion, was the cornerstone of ancien régime schooling. Wherever the ratio of students to teachers was high -- as was usually the case in the charity schools -- student offices proliferated. Students led the prayers, picked up and distributed the books, drilled their juniors in their recitations, swept the floors.⁶¹

Also in imitation of the Jesuits, the students were encouraged to engage to compete with each other. "Emulation" in the Jesuit system, was used as the whetstone of the students' minds.⁶² The feminine congregations applied the principle to their own teaching. In their classrooms, students read and recited against

⁶⁰Ibid., pp.152-53.

⁶¹Their responsibility was recognized in a monthly assembly of officières, presided over by the mistress. (Arch. Soeurs de l'Enfant-Jesus de Reims, ms 17, f 113, "Reglement pour les petites Ecoles Chretiennes").

⁶²Emulation served to "aguillonner et esmouvoir grandement les escoliers, les resveillant s'ils sont endormis & les faisant galoper plus legerement..." Bref Discours, 1608, quoted in F. de Dainville, op.cit., pp.151-52. The Jesuits' emphasis on emulation was almost universally adopted by seventeenth-century educators.

each other, and corrected each other's work.⁶³ Individuals and groups competed for academic honours, which were often signified by their position on the bancs.⁶⁴ For the winners, there was a banc of honour, under a crowned statue of the Blessed Virgin. For lazy or difficult students, there was a banc of penitence.⁶⁵

The reverse side of the Jesuits' use of emulation as a spur to good scholastic behaviour was their disapproval of physical punishment or uncontrolled anger in the classroom. This, too, the women's congregations wrote into their rule.

Les maîtresses se gouverneront en sorte que tout leur maintien, leur port, leurs actions, leurs paroles, leurs mouvemens soient tellement réglés et ajustés qu'elles servent à leurs escholières de modèle Elles ne leur montreront aucun signe de cholère, ou d'impatience ou de dédain; elles ne les appelleront ny anesses, ny bestes, ny sottes, ny mauvaises filles; elles

63"Chaque maîtresse appariera ses élèves deux à deux et l'une avec l'autre, celles qui sont plus égales en science à lire pour s'écouter l'une l'autre et se reprendre et se combattre pour leurs prières, catechisme et leçons." Vraies constitutions des religieuses de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame, faictes par le Très Révérend Père Pierre Fourier (1645), quoted in M. Maggiolo, "L'oeuvre pédagogique de Pierre Fourier" Mémoires de l'Académie de Stanislaus, 1892, 5^{me} série, t. X, p.219. Also see the school rule of the Filles de Notre-Dame, quoted in ed. Letouzey, p.77: "On fera réciter debout ce qui se devra dire par coeur, la partie ou adversaire de celle qui récite se levant de l'autre côté, à l'opposite, et l'enseignant ou reprenant s'il en est besoin ..."

64^{Loc. cit.}

65^{Ibid.}, p.229. This punishment was considered so serious that only the Intendante could order it.

ne crieront pas haut à l'entour d'elles, elles se garderont surtout de les battre ou frapper.⁶⁶

Les religieuses qui sont destinées pour la conduite et instruction des écolières veilleront à réprimer les passions et mouvements qui pourroient s'élever en correction, prenant garde de ne se laisser aller à la cholère. A cette occasion que jamais ny par impatience ny autrement elles ne les frappent ni les injurient.⁶⁷

A variety of lesser punishments was developed: prayers, to be recited while kneeling, for minor offences,⁶⁸ oreilles d'âne for poor study, the langue rouge for lying.⁶⁹ Shame punishments were preferred to physical discipline, which was inflicted only in extreme cases.⁷⁰ This is in striking contrast to the punishments recommended by L'Ecole Paroissiale for boys' schools, which were graded from the cane across the fingers through heavier beatings to prison "dans laquelle on les enferme l'espace de 2,3,4,5 ou 6 heures".⁷¹

⁶⁶Ibid., p.228.

⁶⁷Constitutions et règlements des Ursulines, quoted in H. de Leymont, op.cit., pp. 372-73.

⁶⁸p. Fourier, Vrayes Constitutions, Part III, art. 54.

⁶⁹"Reglement pour les petites Ecoles Chretiennes", p.113.

⁷⁰"Que les régentes n'usent pas envers leurs filles de châtimens indiscrets; qu'elles les corrigent plus par la parole que par les coups. On ne permettra de donner le fouet que pour quelque faute notable." (Règlements des Ursulines de Bordeaux, quoted in M.-C. Gueudré, op.cit., vol. II, p.244.) "Quand il faut user de correction, l'on doit beaucoup se modérer et avoir Dieu présent." (Ecrits de Mère Bourgeoys [op.cit.], p.284).

⁷¹Quoted in B. Grosperin, op.cit., p.110.

The literature suggests that the feminine congregations did more than adopt the Jesuits' ideal of cool control. They developed their own philosophy of discipline, based on a different understanding of the children whom they were to teach. Little girls, unlike their brothers, were perceived as tender beings, to be handled with care. A key text regarding discipline, which can be found repeated in other rules, appears in the Constitutions of the Paris Ursulines, drawn up in 1623:

D'autant que les jeunes filles, les unes se corrigent par la crainte, les autres par la douceur, les unes par la verge, les autres par douce persuasion, les unes par la silence, les autres en les regardant et par le seul maintien, les maîtresses de chaque classe s'étudieront à remarquer le naturel et inclinations de leurs écolières et leur capacité, afin de les traiter avec prudence et discretion.⁷²

Feminine school rules, imitations of their masculine counterparts in so many ways, display one original characteristic: the relationship between teacher and student is to resemble that of parent and child: "On tâchera de traiter les escholieres en toutes choses avec une grande douceur et une parfaite affection de mère, sans jamais les injurier, ni les moquer, ni leur montrer un visage fâcheux et austère."⁷³ "Vrayes mères" ... the phrase

⁷²Quoted in M.-C. Gueudre, op.cit., vol. II, p. 245.

⁷³Usages des religieuses de la Congrégation de Chalons (1690), quoted in A. de Rohan-Chabot, Les écoles de campagne en Lorraine au XVIII^e siècle (op.cit.), p.170.

appears and reappears, even in the charity schools where the crowds of children must have made such a relationship difficult.⁷⁴ Feminine discipline, though originally modelled on that of the Jesuits, was adapted to serve what was perceived as a different, much more delicate student population.

As in the discipline of the new congregations, so in their pedagogy: the Jesuit background is discernible everywhere. "Faire comprendre avant de faire apprendre": the principle was central in the Ratio Studiorum.⁷⁵ In their catechesis, which was at the heart of their teaching profession, the women were required to test the memorized statements, to question and subquestion so as to assure the children's comprehension -- "qu'elles ne retiennent seulement par memoire, mais comprennent bien ce qu'elles ont retenu."⁷⁶ Like the Jesuits, they designed a course of studies which depended on the student fully completing one stage before advancing to the next. Again, like the Jesuits, the feminine congregations used theatre in their pedagogy -- sometimes

⁷⁴See the rules of the Community of Saint-Charles in Lyon, drawn up by Charles Demia in 1687: "Il faut captiver l'affection des élèves: il faut qu'elles s'attachent à leurs maîtresses comme à des mères tendres", quoted in G. Compayré, Charles Démiat et les origines de l'enseignement primaire (Paris, 1905), p.111.

⁷⁵F. de Dainville, op.cit., p.117.

⁷⁶Reglemens des ursulines (1705), pp.44-45.

theatre in its classical sense,⁷⁷ but more often theatre within the church. It was in the Ursuline convent of Faubourg Saint-Jacques that the ceremony of First Communion was first raised to the level of theatre, "les Pensionnaires qui communieront pour le première fois ... vêtues le jour de leur Communion, d'une robe de toile blanche, ... une coiffe de tafetas blanc sur la tête, et une ceinture de même."⁷⁸

This adaptation of the pedagogy of the collèges was all the more inventive because it was applied to schools of very limited academic standards. The teaching monasteries lavished their pedagogical care upon relatively elementary courses of studies. Their school rules and manuals described, in detail, even the most basic procedures. What makes their effort doubly significant is that it was through their mediation that the

⁷⁷The Filles de Notre-Dame of La Flèche used theatre and disputations in their classrooms (P. Calendini, Le couvent des Filles de Notre-Dame de la Flèche, (op.cit.) ,p.190). The Ursulines of Valenciennes also gave theatrical and musical presentations (J. Loridan, Les Ursulines de Valenciennes [Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1901], p.42).

⁷⁸M.D.P.U., op.cit. quoted in H. de Leymont, op.cit., p.249. The ceremony was so brilliant that it became the fashion for young noblewomen, including a number of princesses of the blood, to come to the house to be instructed for their first communion (Ibid., p.250).

pedagogy of the Jesuits came to pervade the petites écoles.⁷⁹

The monasteries transmitted their methods to the filles séculières.⁸⁰

In many cases the filles séculières introduced their methods to other schoolmistresses -- and masters.⁸¹

The Catholic pedagogical world was a small place. The dévot elite was a close-knit group, held together by travel and by the written word.⁸² The women's congregations were developed in an atmosphere of mutual consultation and imitation. Thus Françoise de Bermond came to Paris from Provence to instruct Madame de Sainte-Beuve's Ursulines in catechetics, and Alix Le Clerc came to the same convent from Lorraine to study its teaching methods. Thus, also, Pierre Fourier could write to various houses about the superior methods of one convent: "Je

⁷⁹See J. Perrel, "Les filles à l'école", p.314. "Par ces établissements féminins vouées à l'instruction, les méthodes des Jésuites ou des Oratoriens ont gagné l'enseignement élémentaire."

⁸⁰Many monasteries considered the training of secular teachers as part of their apostolate. Marguerite Bourgeoys learned her trade in the monastery of Troyes; the pedagogy which she brought to Montreal was that of Pierre Fourier. (See Soeur Sainte-Gertrude, C.N.D., "L'Oeuvre pédagogique de Marguerite Bourgeoys". [University of Laval, 1951, unpublished thesis], p.58 ff. Sometimes whole new communities would undergo training at neighbouring monasteries. This was the case with the Soeurs du Saint-Enfant-Jésus of Reims, who were trained by the cloistered Congrégation. Their methods, in turn, influenced those of the Christian Brothers.

⁸¹Yves Poutet has extensively documented the influence of the feminine communities on the development of the Christian Brothers. See especially his work Le XVII^e siècle et les origines lasalliennes, vol. I.

⁸²See above, chapter V.

desirais que nos soeurs des autres maisons, s'il se pouvait faire, envoyassent quelques-unes de leurs pour apprendre cette belle méthode ou que quelques-unes de Châlons allassent par toutes les maisons pour l'enseigner aux autres."⁸³ The imposition of clausura ended interaction between monasteries, but the filles séculières suffered no such restraints. The Filles de la Charité took lessons from a woman who had trained at the Ursulines;⁸⁴ the Soeurs du Saint-Enfant Jésus received training from "Maîtresses expérimentées" of other houses;⁸⁵ the Soeurs de Saint-Charles of Lyon brought in one of Barré's sisters to help them set up their seminary for schoolmistresses;⁸⁶ Marguerite Bourgeoys stayed with the Filles de la Croix to learn their methods⁸⁷

.... There is abundant evidence to suggest that the congregations drew upon each other's experience in designing and establishing their rules.

The existence of a set of rules begs the question: were these rules followed? Do the written rules reflect the actual practice in the interior of seventeenth-century classrooms?

The creation of the community, and its confirmation by

⁸³Letter to the religious of Bar-le-Duc, 30/x/1621. Pierre Fourier, Lettres vol.I, p.392.

⁸⁴p. Coste, Le grand saint du grand siècle, vol.I, p.457.

⁸⁵"Mémoires", Un précurseur méconnu, p.170.

⁸⁶y. Poutet, "Nicolas Barré, Nicolas Roland, Charles Démiat et leurs 'filles séculières'", Les religieuses enseignantes, p.40.

⁸⁷Ecrits de Mère Bourgeoys, p.70.

the Church, was a strong guarantee for the continuity of its members' work. A community had its own corporate personality, which transcended that of its members. Its rules, once formulated, soon tended to harden, so that further adaptation was difficult. Thus, after a flurry of creative activity at the beginning, literal observance of original teaching methods was very swiftly institutionalized, and the rule would be inscribed:

Les Maîtresses maintiendront exactement l'ordre ordinaire des exercices ... et n'y pourront rien changer, qu'avec la permission de la Supérieure et Maîtresse générale.⁸⁸

Innovation was considered to be divergence from the rule; any religious guilty of it could be reprimanded or removed.⁸⁹ In the larger houses, whole hierarchies of officers stood ready to ensure observance; beyond them, the priests who acted as canonical superiors were available to hear complaints. But the most ardent guardians of custom were the communities themselves. Changes, even in minute details of the rule, were noticed and

⁸⁸Reglemens des ursulines (1705), p.33. In this case, the practice under discussion was the folding of the pensionnaires linen.

⁸⁹The Reglemens des Ursulines de Paris listed among "les fautes grièves ... manquer notablement en l'instruction des Ecolières ... et renverser l'ordre de leurs exercices, sans cause legitime et sans permission." (op.cit. II, p.75). A filles de Notre-Dame at La Ferté-Bernard who wanted to try new methods was sent back to the Mother House at La Flèche. (P. Calendini, op.cit., p.179).

resented.⁹⁰ Rigidity, not laxity, was the tendency of the seventeenth-century foundations.

New members of the community were trained intensively in the practice of their rule, including their school rule. During the first stage of their noviciate, they were taught the subject matter: catechism, reading, writing, arithmetic, spelling, and handwork.⁹¹ They studied manuals on their monastery's teaching methods.⁹² In the second stage, they practised teaching in the classroom, under the supervision of another mistress.⁹³ Even after taking their vows, they might remain for years under the supervision of others. According to Mère de Pommereu, it took seven years to train an Ursuline.⁹⁴

The monasteries' weakness, for which they were taken to

⁹⁰In the Congrégation of Reims, a new canonical superior attempted to give new rules, to the intense disapproval of the community. He was replaced by the bishop (P. L. Péchenard, op.cit., vol.I, pp.201-02). Even bishops were expected to respect the existing rules. Bishop Saint-Vallier caused offence to the hospitalières of Montreal by overriding their rule (Marie Morin, Histoire simple et veritable (op.cit.), p.158).

⁹¹An interrogation to ensure their knowledge sometimes preceded their formal profession.

⁹²Many of these manuals were drawn up by the religious themselves. Thus a Fille de Notre-Dame, Marguerite Filloleau, drew up a catechism for use by her sisters (P. Calendini, op.cit., p.220). Elisabeth Desnots, Ursuline of Faubourg Saint-Jacques, drew up a memoir on the method of preparing children for first communion, which was included in the règlements of 1640. (M.-A. Jégou, op.cit., p.120).

⁹³M.-E. Aubry, "Le monastère nancéien" (op.cit.), p.128.

⁹⁴Quoted in M.-C. Gueudré, op.cit., vol.II, p.260. It should be remarked that the grand couvent in Paris was almost certainly more professional than smaller convents.

task by educational reformers at the end of the century, stemmed not from lack of preparation, but from intellectual isolation.⁹⁵ By the will of their ecclesiastical superiors, the religious houses had become autonomous when they became cloistered; the interchange of personnel and of ideas which had marked the early years dried up. Each community secured its own life behind "a rigid and cold barrier".⁹⁶ In these circumstances, it would have been difficult to update education systems, even if the nuns had felt the need. Furthermore, the severity of convent life had been increased,⁹⁷ at the very time when life in the world was become more relaxed. It is to these factors, rather than to any lack of dedication and training, that the failures of monastery education should be attributed.

The filles séculières, by the very nature of their calling, could not hope for extensive preparation. The single fille dévote in Montmartre, working alone with her eighty girls,⁹⁸ had no time to upgrade her skills. Communities of only two or three members were equally unlikely to try ambitious programmes. The three filles noires established by Père Beurrier in the parish of Saint-Etienne-du-Mont for "l'Instruction et l'Education

⁹⁵Ibid., vol.II, p.220.

⁹⁶M.-A. Jégou, op.cit., p.125.

⁹⁷Mme. Gueudré attributes this, too, to the action of the bishops. Op.cit., p.248.

⁹⁸R. d'Argenson, Annales de la Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement (op.cit.), p.69.

des pauvres filles de la paroisse", offered a modest curriculum "leur apprenant a lire et ecrire, a coudre, broder, faire de la dentelle et de la tapisserie et pour gagner leur vie, mais surtout la Piété, la Modestie, et les bonnes Moeurs."⁹⁹ Even in larger communities, like the filles de Sainte-Marthe of Reims, numbering five mistresses, the rule was only of the most basic kind, concerned largely with the running of the community.¹⁰⁰ The number of "schools", or rather, classrooms, opened under arrangements like these has not been counted, but it must be assumed that a great number of girls in seventeenth-century France received their education from schoolmistresses who had little or no formal training.

However, where larger communities, such as the Dames de Saint-Maur of Paris, the Soeurs du Saint-Enfant-Jésus of Reims, the Providence of Rouen, or the Soeurs de Saint-Charles of Lyon, developed, those in charge laid down comprehensive school rules and training procedures.¹⁰¹ "Elles doivent posséder leur matière parfaitement, afin de rien avancer qu'elles ne soient certaines

⁹⁹ Bibl. Ste-Geneviève, ms. 1886, f. 492, P. Beurrier, Oeuvres.

¹⁰⁰ Instructions et reglemens pour celles qui désirent servir Dieu en la Communauté des pauvres filles dites de Sainte Marthe, fondée par Demoiselle Barbe Martin vefve de feu sieur de Magneux. Reims, 1651.

¹⁰¹ For the two communities founded by Barré, see the Statuts et reglemens des escoles chrestiennes et charitables du S. Enfant Jesus (1685). For the Reims community, see the "Reglement pour les petites Ecoles Chretiennes", Arch. Soeurs de l'Enfant-Jésus de Reims, ms. 17. The rules for the Lyon community, of which the manuscript appears to have been lost, are summarized in G. Compayré, op.cit., pp.101-114.

et bien éclaircies."¹⁰² Their theoretical training was shorter than that of the monasteries, and their practical training began earlier.¹⁰³ Frequently, as in Rouen, the young schoolmistresses lived at first in a seminary, from which they went out each day to their schools. They worked under supervision, until they were considered capable of working alone. Their apprenticeship might take a couple of years.¹⁰⁴ Even when qualified, they were expected to continue improving themselves: the Soeurs Barré, for instance, were allowed an hour's study each day, "pour se rendre capables d'avancer dans la Doctrine Chretienne, et apprendre à mieux écrire, observer l'ortographe ... se conformant en toutes choses pour ne rien ajouter ou diminuer aux Statuts."¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, the filles séculières, like the cloistered nuns, were required to listen to the reading of their rules, including

¹⁰²Arch. Soeurs de l'Enfant-Jésus de Reims, ms. 17, f. 10. Reglement pour les petites Ecoles Chretiennes.

¹⁰³Nicolas Barré, for one, was an exponent of training on the job. "Le Père Barré disait que les filles mises d'abord en emploi avancement beaucoup plus, que si on les instruit longtemps auparavant que de les mettre dans l'exercice des classes et des Instructions. La nécessité d'agir, disait-il, ouvre l'esprit, et lui fait faire des efforts avantageux, qui façonnent promptement une Maîtresse Ajoutez, que la meilleure manière d'apprendre, c'est d'enseigner." Mémoires et Instructions. However, he did insist that the apprenticeship be performed under the direction of an experienced mistress, or in a teaching institution. (Farcy, La Providence de Rouen, p.116).

¹⁰⁴This was the method followed in Montreal. "Les filles sont à l'école jusqu'à leur profession, si cela est nécessaire, pour instruire les filles quand elles en seront capables." Ecrits de Marguerite Bourgeoys, p.109.

¹⁰⁵N. Barré, Statuts et reglemens, Chap. III, art. XV.

their school rules, once a month.¹⁰⁶ Any infractions of the rule were to be reported to the Superior.¹⁰⁷

They faced certain difficulties which the cloistered religious avoided. First, the number of students. According to Fourier's rule, each nun was in charge of a banc of sixteen to twenty scholars.¹⁰⁸ The Ursulines limited their classes to thirty or thirty-five.¹⁰⁹ For the filles séculières, however, a class of fifty was standard; and there were cases where a single mistress was expected to teach a hundred children.¹¹⁰ Second, distance from the home community, which led to lack of supervision and support. To counter this, the superior of the community was expected to visit the schools at regular intervals "pour voir

¹⁰⁶According to Y. Poutet, historian of the Christian Brothers, "la lecture fréquente des règles et constitutions est signalée par la plupart des fondateurs d'ordres comme un excellent moyen de favoriser la régularité d'une maison." Ibid, "L'influence du Père Barré dans la fondation des Soeurs du Saint-Enfant-Jésus de Reims", p.47.

¹⁰⁷Statuts et Reglemens, Chap. II, art. XX.

¹⁰⁸Vraies constitutions, art. 15.

¹⁰⁹J. Morey, op.cit., p.68.

¹¹⁰In Montpellier, in 1685, four dames de Saint-Maur ran a school for four hundred externes. (H. de Grezes, op.cit., p.216). According to Barré's rule, this was too many: "chaque Maîtresse ne sera chargée pour l'ordinaire que de 70 ou 80 Enfants" (Statuts et reglemens Chapter VIII, art.VIII).

et examiner comment tout s'y passe, et l'édification que le Peuplè en retire."¹¹¹

The interest which the larger congregations took in their pedagogy, and the efforts which they took to ensure that their members met certain standards, suggest professionalism, at least in intent. How far this professionalism was practised in the classroom cannot be precisely measured. However, a certain guarantee was built in by the structures of community life, either within the monastery or in the secular institute. Where community life was strong, its members were more likely to maintain their standards.

In the later years of the century, when the enthusiasm of the Catholic Reformation had begun to fade, many small communities broke up and collapsed. But for those that survived and flourished, there was a new source of support: the growing public respect for all things educational. In 1600, schoolmistresses were socially speaking only slightly above the servants. In 1700, they were persons of standing, an arm of the Church -- and, indeed, sometimes, of the Crown.¹¹² They were proud of their profession:

¹¹¹Every fortnight for the city schools, every three months for more schools in nearby towns; at least once a year for more distant schools.. (Ibid., chap. IX, art. VIII). The same obligation applied to the superior of the Reims community (Reglement pour les petites Ecoles Chretiennes, f.156).

¹¹²I am referring here to the service which the Damés de Saint-Maur performed for the Crown, in the years after the Revocation, as re-educators of new Catholics in the cities of southern France. See R. Chartier, M.-M. Compère and D. Julia. op.cit., p.242.

Après les Religieux et les Ecclésiastiques qui travaillent au Salut des âmes, il n'y a point de profession qui travaille par état à ce divin ministère de former et enfanter Jésus-Christ dans les âmes, que les Maîtres et Maîtresses d'Ecole.¹¹³

They felt themselves associated in its dignity:

C'est un emploi sublime et propre des Apôtres [wrote Marie Barbier of Montreal]; c'est la continuation de l'ouvrage du Sauveur; je ne m'en suis jamais acquittée qu'avec frayeur et confusion.¹¹⁴

3) The subjects.

Historians of ancien régime schooling have remarked on the complexity of its motivation... The desire to save souls through education was born with the Counter Reformation and remained, though with diminishing intensity, the principal motive. However, the perception of the school as a means of social control had its roots in the sixteenth century,¹¹⁵ and never ceased to figure in the plans of seventeenth-century educators.¹¹⁶ There was a third motive behind the movement of children into the schools. This was the desire of their

¹¹³Arch. Soeurs du Saint-Enfant-Jesus de Reims, ms. 17, f. 20.

¹¹⁴Soeur Sainte-Gertrude, "L'Oeuvre pédagogique de Marguerite Bourgeoys" (op.cit.), p.63.

¹¹⁵See R. Chartier, M.-M. Compère and D. Julia, op.cit., pp.57-58.

¹¹⁶F. Furet and J. Ozouf, op.cit., vol. I, p.73. Also see Y. Poutet, "L'enseignement des pauvres dans la France du XVII^e siècle", XVII^e siècle 90-91 (1971), p.90: "Une autre finalité, plus immédiate que le salut éternel de ces enfants, préoccupait administrateurs et bienfaiteurs: il s'agissait de préserver la 'petite jeunesse' des dangers de l'oisiveté en lui procurant une occupation en rapport de son âge; il s'agissait aussi de débarrasser les rues de Paris, de Marseille, de Lyon, de Rouen, des petits polissons qui agaçaient les bourgeois ..."

parents to secure their social promotion. For boys, the lure was obvious: a little latin and a knowledge of letters might secure them a niche in the expanding world of business and of minor offices.¹¹⁷ But for girls, the material advantage of schooling seems more problematic. Literacy did not ordinarily lead to jobs. Yet the number of parents ready to send their daughters to school suggests that some sort of advantage, social or economic, was to be gained from the effort. "What is astonishing," writes Bernard Groperrin, "is not the relative weakness of feminine literacy, but rather that so many parents insisted in spite of everything on procuring an education for their daughters. Even taking account of the pressures of the clergy, we can see here one of the clearest indicators that the school had a certain prestige among the 'people'."¹¹⁸

However, the demand for girls' schools was weaker than that for boys' schools, and slower to develop. The initial stimulus came from the "supply side": from the "rush of young

¹¹⁷One of the most striking social changes of the last century of the Ancien Régime was the growth of the bourgeoisie. See F. Braudel and E. Labrousse, Histoire économique et sociale de la France (Paris: P.U.F., 1970) vol. II, p. 607. Many of the newcomers who swelled its ranks arrived by way of the colleges and the petits offices. These last were more numerous and more complex by reason of the demands of the State. (R. Chartier, M.-M. Compère and D. Julia, op.cit., p. 294). The Church itself, with its much-expanded social role, also absorbed large numbers of young men. Finally, the demand of the better-off for trained servants opened up possibilities for the children of the charity schools.

¹¹⁸B. Groperrin, Les petits écoles sous l'Ancien Régime (Rennes: Ouest France, 1984), p. 142 (my translation).

women of quality" into the congregations.¹¹⁹ These women were, indeed, responding to a pressing need -- but it was their own need, for serious and meritorious occupation in an age when religion impregnated the atmosphere. The success of their free schools ensured their work; but it was, after all, only the public's verdict on what they had already undertaken.

For the women of the Counter Reformation, the religious motive was absolutely paramount. The profane subjects were simply added to their curriculum as "bait", to entice the parents into sending their children to school.¹²⁰

En enseignant les jeunes filles les choses propres à leur état [wrote Anne de Xaintonge] mon désir est de gagner leur confiance et, en leur enseignant les vérités de la religion, mon but est d'en faire de vraies chrétiennes. C'est uniquement à ce point de vue que je considère mon ministère comme apostolique et que je lui en ai donné le nom. Lecture, grammaire, écriture et les autres sciences seroient de peu de choses, si elles ne nous servoient à rendre nos élèves meilleures et surtout vraiment chrétiennes.¹²¹

¹¹⁹F. Furet and J. Ozouf, op.cit., vol. I, p.82. (My translation).

¹²⁰This concept of profane learning as bait is well known through a statement attributed to Jean-Baptiste de La Salle: "La nécessité, l'excellence et les avantages de la Doctrine Chrétienne touchent peu ... les Parens; ainsi pour la leur faire goûter, il falloit la revêtir et l'entourer sous l'apais d'apprendre à lire, à écrire et à calculer" (J. Blain, La vie de Mr J. B. De La Salle, p.359). However, the idea dates from an earlier time. Both Fourier and Anne de Xaintonge used the word "amorce" to describe their profane curriculum. Jacqueline de Briolay, fille de Notre-Dame, wrote that "ces sciences ne sont qu'un appât pour leur insinuer la science du salut" (P. Calendini, op.cit., p.141).

¹²¹Y. Poutet, "Spiritualité des enseignants", p.323.

It was therefore to the teaching of religion that they devoted most of their time and energy.

But what was "religion"? For all educators of the seventeenth century, the teaching of religion meant much more than a simple imparting of the truths of faith; it meant the inculcation of a way of life. For women, whose right to access to sacred learning was always a matter of dispute, this was doubly true. Doctrine as a science, with all its subtleties, was inappropriate to the female sex. The teaching nun must not forget this:

Qu'elle continuera de bien instruire à
la crainte et amour de Dieu [wrote
Mlle Le Gras] plutôt que de les apprendre
à en beaucoup parler.¹²²

The Bull of 1616, erecting the monastery of the Ursulines of Toulouse, is typical of the mandate given by the Church to all female teachers:

... à s'employer gratuitement à l'instruction des
petites filles, premièrement en leur enseignant
avec la piété et la vertu ce qui est digne d'une
vierge chrétienne, la manière d'examiner sa
conscience, de confesser ses péchés, de communier,
d'ouïr la sainte messe, de prier Dieu, de
réciter le rosaire, de méditer et de lire des
livres spirituels, de chanter des cantiques, de
fuir le vice et ses occasions, d'exercer les
oeuvres de miséricorde, de gouverner une maison,
et finalement de faire toutes les actions d'une
bonne chrétienne ...¹²³

The feminine congregations all devoted a large part of

¹²²Mlle Le Gras, Lettres vol. II, p.853.

¹²³Bull of Paul V, 1616. Quoted in B. Grosperin, op.cit., p.15.

their teaching day to what may be termed "Christian deportment". The purpose behind the education of girls was "surtout, à leur graver la crainte de Dieu dans l'Âme, et à les former aux exercices convenables à leur Sexe."¹²⁴ Thus of the ten subjects enumerated by Fourier to be taught in the Congrégation's schools, one (catechism) concerned the knowledge of doctrine, and five were directly related to the behaviour of the children as Christians and as citizens.¹²⁵

a) Catechism.

The teaching of catechism was approached with extreme diffidence. Catechism was considered a form of preaching -- "la prédication du pauvre"¹²⁶ -- and, therefore, an attribute of the priesthood. There was some initial uncertainty as to how women could teach it without overreaching themselves. Mlle Le Gras, the exponent of extreme simplicity, maintained that it could only be taught in the most rudimentary way:

Il serait très dangereux pour notre Compagnie que nous voulussions entreprendre de parler doctement, non seulement pour notre intérêt particulier qui est si enclin à la vanité, mais encore pour la crainte de dire des erreurs.¹²⁷

¹²⁴M.D.P.U., op.cit., Part I, p.12.

¹²⁵These were: 1) how to say their prayers, 2) their Christian duties, 3) hatred of sin, 4) love of virtue, 5) "civilité" and good manners. The other four subjects were reading, writing, arithmetic, and sewing and other handwork (Vrayes Constitutions, Part III, art. XIII).

¹²⁶J.-C. Dhôtel, Les origines du catéchisme moderne, p.136. Also see above, chap. VI.

¹²⁷Mlle Le Gras, op.cit., p.357.

However, Vincent de Paul overrode her. Sisters responsible for teaching catechism, he argued, should know as much as the curés, about the subject that they were dealing with.¹²⁸ The approach that was recommended most often was a combination of humility and intensive preparation. "Les Soeurs se garderont de faire des questions hautes et subtiles," wrote Barré.¹²⁹

However, he also prescribed an hour's preparation each night for the lessons of the following day.¹³⁰

At a time when new versions of the catechism abounded, the teaching congregations chose theirs carefully. The Ursulines were among the earliest catechists to use the Bellarmine catechism, which was specifically designed for children.¹³¹ However, they later drew up their own catechism, so as to avoid, as much as possible, material unsuited for their students -- i.e., the sixth commandment.¹³² Mlle Le Gras, also, wrote out a catechetical model, to reduce the difficult formulae of faith to something comprehensible to the children of the charity schools.¹³³

The teaching of catechism was a difficult exercise. "Que les tendres esprits de ces petites filles ne soient ou trop

¹²⁸Ibid., p. 358, fn. 1.

¹²⁹Statuts et reglemens, Chap. VIII, art. XIII.

¹³⁰Ibid., Chap. III, art. XV.

¹³¹J.-C. Dhôtel, op.cit., pp.98-99.

¹³²M.-C. Gueudré, op.cit., vol. II, p.231.

¹³³J.-C. Dhôtel, op.cit., pp.272-74.

chargez, ou ennuyez, ou degoutez de ces bonnes viandes," warned Pierre Fourier.¹³⁴ In spite of a host of downward revisions, the content of Christian doctrine remained intractably difficult to explain. "Les grands mystères," which must be taught to the faithful, were "l'unité et grandeur de Dieu, l'adorable Trinité, l'Incarnation du Verbe, la divine Eucharistie, les Sacrements, les Commandements de Dieu, etc...."¹³⁵ Between the extreme simplicity of the "profane" syllabus and the complicated, abstract terms and concepts of the catechism, writes one historian, there was an "abyss".¹³⁶ The obvious recourse was to teach by rote. The reiterated scoldings of educational reformers suggest to us that this remained the common practice:

J'ai quelquefois trouvé des paroisses dans lesquelles un grand nombre d'enfants répondaient à merveille [wrote Henri-Marie Boudon] avec joie pour ceux qui les écoutaient sur toutes les questions du catéchisme, et cependant ils connaissent à peine Dieu.¹³⁷

Serious catechists were urged to treat this difficulty as a sort of sacred challenge:

Il ne suffit pas qu'une maîtresse occupe son esprit à savoir en substance la doctrine chrétienne pour son propre salut; mais il faut qu'elle la possède méthodiquement et selon le texte pour l'enseigner aux enfants qui ont

¹³⁴Vraies constitutions, art. 23.

¹³⁵Archbishop de Grammont of Besançon, 1688, quoted in B. Grosperin, op.cit., p.103.

¹³⁶Ibid., p.104.

¹³⁷H.-M. Boudon, La Science Sacrée du Catéchisme [1675], quoted in J.-C. Dhôtel, op.cit., p.167.

plus de mémoire que de jugement. Il faut qu'elle prévoise ses catéchismes, qu'elle s'accoutume à son auditoire; et tout cela demande beaucoup d'application.¹³⁸

The preferred solution was to combine memorization with informal questioning. Thus the Ursuline rule of 1652 directed:

On fera répéter ce qui a été dit au dernier catéchisme, changeant quelquefois les termes des demandes pour affermir davantage les pensionnaires dans la connaissance de ce qu'on leur enseigne, et qu'elles ne retiennent pas par mémoire, mais comprennent bien ce qu'elles ont retenu.¹³⁹

At the end of the century a number of congregations, including the Soeurs du Saint-Enfant-Jesus of Reims, were still following the Jesuit model. After the common recitation of questions and answers, the schoolmistress was trained to ask "subquestions"; "on doit s'étendre sur les demandes et reponses, lorsqu'elles sont un peu trop amples et dans des termes obscures, que les Enfans et les personnes non instruites ne peuvent retenir ni entendre le sens."¹⁴⁰ The catechism lesson was to end with a summing up of one principal idea, and an edifying story to be taken home and repeated to parents.

More attention was devoted in the rules to catechism than

¹³⁸Mère de Bourges, Méditations, quoted in M.-C. Gueudré, op.cit., vol. II, p.252.

¹³⁹Reglemens des Ursulines (1705) Chap. IV, pp.44-45. According to Dhôtel, this rule was first approved in 1652 See op.cit., p.168, fn.37.

¹⁴⁰"Reglement pour les petites Ecoles Chretiennes", f.139. This catechetical method was later adopted by the Christian Brothers. (Y. Poutet, Les origines lasalliennes [op.cit.], p. 478).

to any other subject. Here, more than in any other area of their work, the schoolmistresses were made conscious that they were practising a profession. However, the exhaustive detail, and the insistence on strict adherence to the methods laid down, appears to have had the effect of stifling the teachers' creativity. The search for uniformity, which characterized the period,¹⁴¹ had the effect of fixing all teaching of catechism into a permanent and immutable form.¹⁴² The feminine congregations shared in the general experience.

b) Christian deportment.

"Je crois ... que vous avez soin ... d'instruire les petites filles non seulement de leurs créances, mais aussi des moyens de vivre en bonnes chrétiennes."¹⁴³ The pedagogy of Christian living covered the entire school day, and subsumed every subject taught. However, much time was devoted directly to behaviour training: to the "Christian duties, hatred of sin, love of virtue, and civilité and good manners" with which Pierre Fourier loaded his curriculum.¹⁴⁴

Girls who went to school in the seventeenth century were

¹⁴¹M.-A. Jégou, op.cit., p.119.

¹⁴²"En 1660 la tradition catéchistique en France est fixée jusqu'à nos jours." (J.-C. Dhôtel, op.cit., p.425).

¹⁴³Mlle Le Gras, op.cit., vol. I, p.616.

¹⁴⁴See above, fn. 125.

directed towards motherhood and home management.¹⁴⁵ In this they differed from the pensionnaires of the Benedictine monasteries and of the Visitation, whose life was directed towards the cloister. Both the Congrégation and the Ursuline congregation of Paris specifically proscribed training for the religious life. The Annales des Ursulines commented: "Ne prenant point les petites filles exprès pour les faire Religieuses, il n'étoit plus nécessaire de leur apprendre les cérémonies du choeur que les autres exercices monastiques."¹⁴⁶ "Elles ... se garderont d'y rien entremesler de ce qui est propre et particulier à la vie Religieuse," Fourier instructed his nuns.¹⁴⁷ The reasoning behind this was made clear in their mandate. Christian motherhood was generally seen as the means to convert the world. "Il faut renouveler par la jeunesse ce monde corrompu; les jeunes filles réformeront leurs familles, leurs familles réformeront leurs provinces, leurs provinces réformeront le monde."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵This ultimate purpose did not change throughout the century, though the theories regarding methods evolved. See R. Chartier, M.-M. Compère, D. Julia, op.cit., pp.231-32.

¹⁴⁶Quoted in M.-A. Jégou, op.cit., p. 56. This is not to say, however, that pensionnaires were discouraged from entering religion. Of the fifty-eight nuns living in the monastery of Faubourg Saint-Jacques in 1662, thirty-nine were ex-pensionnaires (ibid., p.107).

¹⁴⁷Vrayes Constitutions, Part III, art. 35-36.

¹⁴⁸A saying attributed to the Ursulines, cited in A. Loth, La charité catholique en France avant la Révolution (Tours, 1896), p.378.

To fulfil their mission, Christian girls had first to learn to be devout: "étant plus agréables à Notre Seigneur, et plus utiles pour elles d'être fort devotes et vertueuses, que *scavantes*."149 The youngest children were first taught their prayers, and how to make the sign of the cross, "prenant garde qu'elles le forment posément et avec attention"150. From that time on, from the moment of their entry in the morning, every school day included exercise in prayers, in examination of conscience, in attending Mass with reverence and decorum.151 Indeed, the grand processions of externes, two by two, through the streets, became a form of theatre, by which these young recruits to the dévot world showed themselves to the public.152

Modest and dignified behaviour was intimately tied to the practice of religion.

Les maîtresses dresseront leur petites gens
à se montrer modestes, non seulement ès escholes,
mais durant toute leur vie..., elles les
advertiront de ne permettre jamais que la vanité,
ny l'hauténeté, ny l'affectation ou singularité

149Reglemens des Ursulines, Chap. IV, p.62.

150N. Barré, Reglemens manuscrits pour les écoles charitables, p.2.

151"Les escholieres sortiront deux a deux pour aller a la messe sans confusion, sans bruit et en silence La maistresse veillera tres exactement a ce que les escholieres ne causent dans leglise, soient immodestes, se tiennent de mauvaise grace, ou se levent pour s'aller demander quelque chose les unes aux autres Apres le dernier Evangile, elles feront toutes la reverence et s'en retourneront chez elles modestement sans s'amuser. (Ibid., pp.5-6).

152The practice was later adopted, for this reason, by the Christian Brothers.

notable se fourre là dedans Elles les régleront sur la soigneuse et perpétuelle retenue de leurs yeux, sur le mouvement des mains, de la tête, du corps, sur leur parole, leur marche, leur maintien à l'église, en l'eschole, parmi leur maison; à table en mangeant, en marchant par la ville, en parlant aux personnes, en les interrogeant, en les répondant, en leur écrivant quelque missive.¹⁵³

Il faut que la modestie et l'humilité, jointes à une maturité religieuse, paraissent en elles en toutes leurs actions extérieures ... Qu'on ne tourne la tête avec légèreté, mais qu'on le fasse avec gravité quand il sera nécessaire de la tourner; que s'il n'est pas nécessaire, qu'on la tienne droite, mais un peu baissée sur le devant, sans la pencher plus d'un côté que de l'autre En parlant à quelque personne d'autorité, qu'on n'arrête point fixement la vûe sur son visage, mais au-dessous des yeux. Il faut éviter de faire des rides au front, beaucoup plus au nez, afin que la sérénité extérieure du visage marque la paix et la sérénité de l'âme.¹⁵⁴

Religion, the study of salvation, merged imperceptibly into civilité, the study of one's place in the world.¹⁵⁵ And the place of women was within the barriers of their own modesty and pudeur.

¹⁵³p. Fourier, Vrayes Constitutions, quoted in M. Maggiolo, op.cit., pp.222-23.

¹⁵⁴Filles de Notre-Dame, Règles particulières qui concernent la modestie et la bienséance, pp.68-69, quoted in P. Michel, op.cit., p.57. This is a copy, word for word, of the Jesuit Règles de la modestie.

¹⁵⁵This understanding of civilité, as a study of the behaviour pertaining to one's station in life, is vividly put forth in a talk on the subject given by Mme de Maintenon to the classe verte of Saint-Cyr, in July, 1716. "Puisque Dieu vous a fait naître demoiselles, prenez-en les manières aussi bien que les sentiments" (E. Faguet, Madame de Maintenon, p.104).

The accent on horror of sin, "particulièrement de ceux qui sont opposés à la pureté",¹⁵⁶ was more marked in feminine than in masculine pedagogy. Fourier, and others after him, saw the innocence of early childhood as a gift which could be preserved by careful upbringing.¹⁵⁷ The child, if shielded from bad influence, could grow up in ignorance of all sins of impurity. This principle, added to the nuns' natural reserve, made direct reference to the sins of impurity almost unthinkable. Sexual reticence was pushed to such lengths that some religious were reluctant to discuss the details of the Incarnation, or to mention the word "marriage".¹⁵⁸ It is not surprising, then, that they taught purity mostly through indirect reference. The usages of the Soeurs du Saint-Enfant-Jésus of Reims are typical:

Il suffira de dire, cela déplait à Dieu, cela est mal, il le faut éviter plus que la mort. Et quand les Enfants demandent ensuite si c'est péché mortel? il leur faut répondre qu'une bonne chrétienne qui

¹⁵⁶Ordinances of the Bishop of Chalons (1693), quoted in F. Furet and J. Ozouf, op.cit., vol.I, pp.85-86.

¹⁵⁷"Pendant que vos petites pensionnaires sont encore toutes modestes et semblent s'acheminer d'elles mêmes," he wrote, "vous tâchiez les entretenir en esprit de dévotion, sans leur donner aucune ouverture ou goût de ces menues superfluités qui courent par le monde." (Letter to the nuns of Saint-Nicolas, 9/xi/1606. P. Fourier, Lettres, vol. I, p.11)

¹⁵⁸For this "false delicacy" the religious of Saint-Cyr were roundly scolded by Madame de Maintenon. "C'est un travers qui est insoutenable dans une maison comme la vôtre, de n'oser y parler d'un état que plusieurs de vos demoiselles embrasseront, qui est approuvé par l'Eglise, et que Jésus-Christ même a honoré de sa présence." (Entretien, 1705. E.Faguet, op.cit., p.153-54).

aime Dieu de tout son coeur ne doit faire
cette question et que cette seule parole,
cela déplait à Dieu ¹⁵⁹

But if the schoolmistresses did not talk directly about
impurity, they did not hesitate to attack the occasions of sin.
Their students were instructed not to sing worldly songs, or
to dance. They were to dress modestly, "ne porter jamais la
gorge decouverte, ni les bras ainsy que font les mondaines et
prostituées",¹⁶⁰ to talk "en chrétiennes", and to avoid walks,
talks and games with boys.¹⁶¹ They were to have their own beds

¹⁵⁹Arch. MM Soeurs du Saint-Enfant Jésus, Reims, Ms. 17, Extraits
du livre des usages, f.4. It should be remarked that the
majority of students in the charity schools were under ten or
twelve, since school leaving was usually around First Communion
(see below, fn. 179). Adolescents might have been handled
differently.

¹⁶⁰N. Barré, Règlements manuscrits, p.18.

¹⁶¹Arch. Soeurs St-Enfant Jésus, Ms. 17, "Usages", f.9.

if possible; certainly they were no longer to sleep with their parents or brothers.¹⁶² In a number of ways, they learned the distrust of the body which was so much a feature of the seventeenth century.

Pudeur went far beyond physical modesty. It represented the feminine identity as it was perceived in the seventeenth century, in all its weakness and limitation. Thus Urban VIII could complain that the English "Jesuitesses" were undertaking works "peu en rapport avec la faiblesse de leur sexe et de leur esprit, avec la modestie féminine et surtout avec la pudeur virginale"¹⁶³ and Fénelon could write: "il doit y avoir pour leur sexe une pudeur sur la science, presque aussi délicate

¹⁶²The elimination of the threat posed when children slept together, or with their parents, was the object of a continuing crusade among the dévots. Thus the Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement of Lyon resolved: "On tâchera d'empêcher l'abus qui se commet dans plusieurs familles, de faire coucher les enfants de diffèrent sexe ensemble" (G. Guige, Les papiers des dévots de Lyon [Lyon, 1922] p.110). Legacies to provide single beds for poor children appear from time to time; Madame de Miramion left 1500 livres for this purpose (A. de Bonneau-Avenant, op.cit., p.412). Parents were warned not to allow the practice. Marguerite Lestocq, of the Providence of Rouen, recalled the following incident from the earliest days of the institute: "On les conseillait, mais avec douceur ... de ne point coucher les enfants avec les pères et mères, leur faisant connoître les très grands accidents qui arrivent et pourroient arriver. Chose admirable: les pauvres mères n'ayant pas la commodité, de coucher leurs enfants, elles les faisoient coucher sur la paille, ou faisoient des lits avec des chaises. Les enfants vouloient coucher sur les bancs dans nos écoles, crainte de coucher avec leurs pères et mères, frères et soeurs." (Quoted in H. De Grèzes, Vie du R. P. Barré, p.158).

¹⁶³Analectâ Juris Pontificii (1885), col. 2023. (see chap. I).

que celle qui inspire l'horreur du vice."¹⁶⁴ "Je désire fort que vous soyez timides," Madame de Maintenon told her students. "Il est de la modestie d'une fille ou d'une femme de paraître ignorer bien des choses, quand même elle les saurait."¹⁶⁵ To seek learning for its own sake was unfeminine, and dangerous. Thus Jeanne des Anges, Ursuline of Loudon, confessing to her own misguided past, could write:

Je m'appliquais à la lecture de toutes sortes de livres; ce n'était pas par désir de mon avancement spirituel, mais seulement pour me faire paraître fille d'esprit et de bon entretien et pour me rendre capable de surpasser les autres en toutes sortes de compagnies.¹⁶⁶

The women, religious and filles séculières, accepted this definition of their nature. Their own writings are full of self-deprecation, and allusions to their natural weakness. "Gardez soigneusement vos filles des dissimulations et feintises naturelles aux femmes, et qui tiennent à l'imbecilité de leur complexion."¹⁶⁷ Their pedagogy remained humble and unassuming, an acknowledgement of the limitations of their sex. It may be argued that this was the price which they were required to pay, for the very real advances which they had been allowed to make.

¹⁶⁴Education des filles, p.62.

¹⁶⁵E. Faguet, Madame de Maintenon (op.cit.), p.99.

¹⁶⁶Quoted in M.-C. Gueudré, op.cit., vol. I, p.207.

¹⁶⁷Madame de Sainte-Beuve, quoted in H. de Leymont, op.cit., p.307.

c) Reading.

In the small repertoire of profane subjects taught in girls' schools, reading was by far the most important. There was no petite école that did not claim to teach its pupils how to read. This was because its "profanity" was more apparent than real. In fact, reading was "an instrument of salvation"¹⁶⁸, since it allowed access to the word of God; therefore it was the duty of Christian educators to make it available to all.

It was the pedagogy of reading, more than anything else, that demanded a new organization of the classroom. The earliest congrégées still gave their reading instruction individually.¹⁶⁹ But the numbers of children to be taught made a more orderly system imperative. The teacher had to be able to lead all her children together -- hence the importance of the division of classes into smaller groups of equal ability. The problem of what to read came next. Credit for the invention of the blackboard is generally given to Pierre Fourier, who in his constitutions for the Congrégation de Notre-Dame prescribed for each class "une ardoise, ou planche, ou tableau, attaché en un lieu éminente de l'eschole, en sorte que toutes celles qui y apprennent le puissent aisément voir."¹⁷⁰ This blackboard, and other variations

¹⁶⁸F. Furet and J. Ozouf, op.cit. vol. I, p.90.

¹⁶⁹See above, fn. 51.

¹⁷⁰Vrayes Constitutions Part III, art. XIV, 3.

such as large printed cards, were particularly useful for the beginners:

Pour faire la leçon a celles de la troisieme classe la maistresse leur monstrera une grande feuille ou seront imprimées toutes les lettres en gros caractères et leur en nommera trois ou quatre a la fois leur en faisant la difference, par exemple qu'une m a trois jambes, qu'une n n'en que deux, que l'u est fait comme l'n excepté que l'u est ouverte par en hault et que l'n est ouverte par en bas, et ainsi les autres.¹⁷¹

The other learning tool which made simultaneous instruction possible was the cheap book. By mid-century at least, children were expected to have a standard book purchased for them by their parents or, if they were poor, provided by the school.¹⁷²

Ayans toutes un même Livre [the Ursuline Rule directed] chacune à part, et étans assises en ordre, la Maîtresse fera le signe de la Croix ... puis elle épelera cinq ou six lignes, et lira après environ une page ou deux, prononçant bien, et faisant les pauses et accens: pendant ce temps elles regarderont toutes dans leurs Livres, et suivront mot à mot à voix basse ce que la Maîtresse lira.¹⁷³

The beginners' reading was in Latin, the language of the Church. They first learned single letters, then syllables:

La maistresse leur touchera les lettres avec une longue touche et après leur ordonnera de chercher les mesmes lettres dans leur petit livre de l'A.B.C. qu'elles lui montreront, elle leur

¹⁷¹N. Barré, Reglemens manuscrits pour les écoles, p.3.

¹⁷²Thus in 1647 we see Mlle Le Gras ordering a hundred books, and printed alphabetic tables, for the Enfants Trouvés. Mlle Le Gras, op.cit., p.332. All the school rules studied here insisted on standardized books for reading.

¹⁷³Reglemens des Ursulines de Paris, Part I, pp.30-31.

apprendra les sillables de mesme façon en commun et leur faire distinguer les voyelles d'avec les consonantes, ne leur faisant prononcer les mots quelles ne soient formées dans la prononciation des sillables.¹⁷⁴

The younger children were then left in the care of the second mistress, or the dizainières, to practice their reading.

The intermediate and senior classes were taught to read in French:

Les maîtresses enseigneront les escholières à lire proprement en langue vulgaire et en latin et à bien prononcer les mots; elles dresseront celles de la 1^{re} et de la 2^e classe à s'arrêter un peu aux virgules et un peu davantage au bout des périodes.¹⁷⁵

La maistresse veillera aussi à ce que les escholieres ne prennent un accent désagréable qu'on aurait peine à leur oster quand elles y seraient habituées, et quand elles seront perfectionnées en la lecture française on tachera de leur faire adoucir les mots rudes.¹⁷⁶

In order to expand their reading skills, it was the custom to ask the older students to bring in family papers: marriage contracts, inventories, land titles, account books. "Exiger de l'élève qu'elle prononce bien et avec un bon accent ce français passé

¹⁷⁴N. Barré, Reglements manuscrits, p.3.

¹⁷⁵Pierre Fourier, Vraies Constitutions, quoted in M. Maggiolo, op.cit., p.223; also N. Barré, Statuts manuscrits, p.6.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., p.7.

de mode; ne pas souffrir que les lettres soient devinées, ni la leçon dite par habitude et par coeur."¹⁷⁷

Instructions such as these would seem to imply that for many girls, in many schools, proficiency in reading was perfectly attainable. Whether, in the future, they read the spiritual works for which they had been instructed or the harmful books which Fénelon so strongly deplored,¹⁷⁸ they nevertheless joined the growing population of readers which was one of the features of the seventeenth century. The vast majority of the students of the petites écoles, however, did not reach the higher classes. They stayed at school for two or three years at the most, leaving when they had made their first communion, somewhere between the ages of ten and twelve.¹⁷⁹ They then moved back into a world which was still largely illiterate, and where such reading skills as they had learned might be of little use.

¹⁷⁷J. Morey, Anne de Xaintonge, p.79. It was stipulated, however, that these notarial documents "ne soient point des choses vicieuses ... par exemple, quand ce sont des enquêtes et examinations de témoins, où l'on parle d'injures ou autres choses malséantes." The practice of bringing such documents into school continued in Franche-Comté, according to Morey, until after the Revolution.

¹⁷⁸"Faute d'aliment solide ... elles se passionent pour des romans, pour des comédies, pour des récits d'aventures chimériques, où l'amour profane est mêlé" (op.cit., p.11).

¹⁷⁹Children usually made their first communion at about the time that they reached puberty, and thus became adults before the law. (F. Lebrun, La vie conjugal sous l'Ancien Régime [Paris: Armand Colin, 1975], p.138). It was generally considered the appropriate time for working children to leave school. (A. Babeau, Les artisans et les domestiques d'autrefois [op.cit.], p.158).

It is difficult to judge, then, what effect the reading classes of the maîtresses charitables had upon the women of their time. Jean Meyer has pointed out that for the common people the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were a period of transition between an oral and a written culture.¹⁸⁰ The only indicators of which we have of this rising level of literacy are signatures in the marriage registers. Women's signatures, while rising steadily in numbers, always remained significantly fewer than men's. Of the many women who learned how to read, but not to write, there is no trace at all.

d) Writing.

Que notre soeur Jeanne prépare des bonnes plumes bien taillées un bon canivet, une regle à régler pour les exemples et de la bonne encre pour elle, car cela donne lustre à l'écriture.¹⁸¹

If reading was the instrument of salvation, writing was a useful skill, a saleable commodity.¹⁸² The two disciplines had not yet undergone the bonding that would one day make them two parts of the same learning process. This dissociation, according to Jean Meyer, was "an essential phase in the passage of civilization from the oral to the written culture."¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰"Essai sur l'instruction populaire en Bretagne du XVI^e au XIX^e siècle", Actes du Congrès national des sociétés savantes I (Reims, 1970): 343.

¹⁸¹Pierre Fourier to the nuns of Saint-Nicolas, 14/viii/1605. Lettres, vol. I, p.4.

¹⁸²F. Furet and J. Ozouf, op.cit., vol. I, pp.90-91.

¹⁸³Op. cit., p.333. (My translation).

What is surprising is that so many teaching institutes, even those catering to the poor, included in their statement of purposes the phrase "enseigner à lire et à écrire".¹⁸⁴ At the best, they must only have meant that writing would be made available to exceptional students. In seventeenth-century pedagogical tradition, a student could progress to writing only after mastering the skill of reading.¹⁸⁵ The abécédaires of the lowest classes were never allowed to put pen to paper.

Writing required additional tools and facilities. The students' parents were normally required to supply the tools: "un petit pupitre sans serrure, ... un canif, du papier, un encrier et de la poudre."¹⁸⁶ Sometimes writing students were expected to pay an extra fee.¹⁸⁷ The school had to supply tables, which were over and above the benches on which the students otherwise sat. The pensionnaires of Faubourg Saint-Jacques used their

¹⁸⁴E.g. All the communities under study; the Union Chretienne, the Filles de Sainte-Geneviève (filles noires) of P. Beurrier. Other communities seemed to rule out writing: e.g. the Filles de l'Instruction chretienne, established 1657 "pour enseigner gratuitement pendant trois ans les pauvres filles de la paroisse et leur apprendre un metier".

¹⁸⁵E.g. Soeurs du Saint-Enfant-Jesus, Reims, Reglement pour les petites Ecoles Chretiennes, p.111: "On ne les mettra point à l'Ecriture, qu'auparavant elles ne sachent lire dans la françois et la Civilité."

¹⁸⁶N. Barré, Reglements manuscrits, p.27.

¹⁸⁷Frequently this fee was used to defray the cost of the materials, which would then be bought for general use by "quelqu'un des plus fideles". L'Escole paroissiale ou la manière de bien instruire les enfans dans les Petites Ecoles par un prêtre d'une paroisse de Paris, p.257.

refectory tables. In the school opened by the soeurs Barré in Toulouse in 1689, the municipality was required to furnish "trois tables pour escrire dans les classes -- 15 livres --" as well as sixteen little benches and thirty large benches.¹⁸⁸

The seating of the children at these tables, and their proper posture, was considered a matter of great importance. Thus the teaching manual put out by the seminary of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, L'Escole paroissiale, ordered:

Il faut tenir le corps de celui qui écrit
de telle façon qu'il ne soit ni trop penché
sur le papier, ni trop droit mais dans une
agréable médiocrité ...

and continued with a long list of instructions, to guard against curved backs and distressed stomachs.¹⁸⁹ The handling of the materials was also a subject of detailed instruction. The students had to learn to sharpen their quill pens "à chaque exemple ou coppie qu'ils auront à faire"¹⁹⁰, to keep their paper clean and neat, to powder their new work with sand or sawdust, to keep it from smudging. The ink, which was often made by the teacher, had to be kept from drying out, in ink wells of horn or lead. As Jean Meyer has pointed out, writing as a universal

¹⁸⁸A.-M. Lembrez, "Institut du Saint-Enfant-Jésus (Saint Maur) à Toulouse, 1688-1959." (Mémoire de maîtrise rédigé sous la direction de M. Louis Trénard, 1985), p.159.

¹⁸⁹Quoted in R. Chartier, M.-M. Compère and D. Julia, op.cit., p.133.

¹⁹⁰L'Escole paroissiale., p.258.

discipline had to await the development of technology, in the form of slates, pencils and steel pens.¹⁹¹

In ideal circumstances, the teaching of writing was work for an expert. The school rule of the Paris Ursulines called for one or two writing mistresses to teach the externe school.¹⁹²

The writing mistress was required, first, to show her students how to hold their pen, then to form letters, then liaisons, then whole lines:

Et qu'elle leur apprenne à être propres, à ne point barbouiller leurs papiers d'encre, ny tacher leurs habits....
Sur tout qu'elle prenne garde de les faire tenir droites en écrivant, et fasse peu écrire de suite celles dont la taille se gâte.¹⁹³

Pierre Fourier instructed that in the schools of the Congregation, other members of the community should assist by writing onto the students' papers the examples which they would be expected to copy the next day.¹⁹⁴

In the many charity schools where ideal circumstances seldom prevailed, other arrangements had to be made. The class mistresses were often forced to leave the students to write their lines

¹⁹¹Op.cit., p.339. It should be noted that metal pen nibs were already in use in the petites écoles of Port-Royal (F. Delforge, Les petites écoles de Port-Royal, 1637-1660 [Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1985]). Their use, however, did not become general until much later.

¹⁹²Reglemens des Ursulines Chap. VIII, p.144.

¹⁹³Ibid., Chap. VI, p.75 ff.

¹⁹⁴Vrayes Constitutions, Part III, art. 40.

from examples, then correct their work afterwards.¹⁹⁵ Sometimes the more advanced students were called upon to correct the beginners.¹⁹⁶ In some schools a special period was set aside for writing instruction, in the hour after lunch before the young students returned.¹⁹⁷

The students were taught to write "en ronde qu'en italienne"¹⁹⁸. Once they had mastered the many techniques of writing, they were introduced to orthographe, or spelling, in French: a subject which, as Pierre Fourier warned them, was full of discrepancies.¹⁹⁹

Pour dicter l'orthographe, on choisira un livre de quelque bon auteur, qui dans la sienne ne soit pas trop éloigné de la forme la plus commune; elle en dictera quatre ou cinq lignes; l'une des élèves répétera chaque mot faict à faict qu'elle l'aura escrit, puis elle antera hautement et intelligiblement et posément tous les mots de sien escrit et les autres corrigeront les leurs

On leur donnera quelquefois pour orthographe des formes de quittance, de recépissé des marchandises vendues ou ouvrages faicts, ou pour argent prêté et pour des choses qui se rencontrent tous les jours et ont besoin de s'escire pour plus grande assurance.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁵N. Barré, *Reglements manuscrits*, p.4. These examples were presumably printed in their books, or on cards.

¹⁹⁶Reglement pour les petites Ecoles Chretiennes, p.108.

¹⁹⁷Loc.cit.

¹⁹⁸Filles de Notre-Dame, Constitutions, 1610; quoted in ed. Letouzey, p.75.

¹⁹⁹Vrayes Constitutions, quoted in M.Maggiolo, op.cit., p.225.

²⁰⁰Ibid., pp.225-26.

Finally, the best students should be encouraged to compose their own small works.

It is obvious, from the instructions in the school rules and from the furnishings of the classrooms, that writing was not considered a subject for universal use. The huge classes of sixty, even eighty students, crowded along their bancs, could not have been accommodated by their teachers, even if it had been considered necessary. The difficulties were simply too great; furthermore, the needs were small. Writing remained a privileged subject, available only for those who required it in their calling.

It is remarkable that it was offered at all, in the girls' schools of the day. There was a bundle of overlapping prejudices against women who could write. For the upper classes, writing, insofar as it was a trade, still carried a taint of servility. "Ecrire, c'est perdre la moitié de sa noblesse," wrote Mlle de Scudéry.²⁰¹ Among the writing professionals, the maîtres écrivains, there was no anxiety to see women invading their profession. "Cet art étoit attaché au sexe masculin."²⁰² Some moralists saw it as a dangerous skill, which would allow women

²⁰¹Quoted in C. Dulong, La vie quotidienne des femmes au grand siècle, p.12.

²⁰²C. Robillard de Beaurepaire, Instruction dans le diocèse de Rouen, vol. II, p.276.

to carry on underhand liaisons.²⁰³ But the chief argument against writing seems to have been that it undermined the existing order. The later seventeenth and the eighteenth century saw a strong resurgence of the opinion that education should be tailored to the station in life of the students. "On excluerait de l'écriture ceux que la Providence a fait naistre d'une condition à labourer la terre."²⁰⁴ What applied to the lower classes applied also to women: they should not exceed the limits of their condition. A century later, Restif de la Bretonne stated the case succinctly:

Il faudrait que l'écriture et même la lecture fussent interdites à toutes les femmes. Ce serait-le moyen de resserrer leurs idées et de les circonscrire dans les soins utiles du ménage, de leur inspirer du respect pour le premier sexe qui serait instruit de ces mêmes choses avec d'autant plus de soin que le deuxième sexe serait négligé."²⁰⁵

It has been suggested that the Church of ancien régime France later became the accomplice in "une vaste demi-alphabétisation" of women. There are cases of synodal regulations and episcopal ordinances specifically forbidding girls' schools

²⁰³This was an ancient prejudice. Pierre de Navarre had written: "A fame ne doit-on apprendre lettres ni escrire si n'est especiaument pour estre nonain; car par lire et escrire de faim sont maint mal venu. Car tiex li osera bailler ou envoier lettres ou jeter devant li qui seront de folie ou de priere, en chançon, en rimes, ou en conte, qui n'oseroit ni prier de bouche ne par message mander, et s'il n'eust été nul talent de mal faire, le diable est si entendans á faire pechier, que tost la mettroit en corage que elles lisent las lettres et li fassent respons." (Quoted in H. de Leymont, op.cit., p.140).

²⁰⁴Mémoire of 1667, quoted in F. de Dainville, op.cit., p.134.

²⁰⁵Quoted in F. Furet and J. Ozouf, op.cit., vol.I, p.356.

to teach writing.²⁰⁶ This, however, was a development for the future. Among the feminine educators of the seventeenth century, and their masculine mentors, very few showed any reluctance in principle to teaching girls to write.²⁰⁷ This may have been a result of their own confidence in their ability to christianize, through their schooling, or of their continuing belief that, far from spoiling good citizens, education actually made them. It may also have been a response to the desires of the parents. The schools were bargaining with society: in return for the religious instruction that they wanted to disseminate, they had to offer the training that the parents found useful. For a small but growing segment of the population, the schools offered the possibility of social ascension.

Confirmation of this effect is strongest when it comes from a hostile source. Therefore the remarks which René Bourgeois of Reims -- himself no friend to the charity schools -- made with reference to the Soeurs du Saint-Enfant-Jésus, are instructive: "Leur methode s'éloigne de l'action dans laquelle on doit nourrir et élever les filles, ... elles nourrissent les servantes dans

²⁰⁶Ibid., p.356-57, and p.85.

²⁰⁷Only Mlle Le Gras showed serious reserve: "Je ne pense qu'il soit expédient que les filles apprennent à écrire" (Mlle Le Gras to Vincent de Paul, 22/viii/1647. Lettres I, p.330). Her institute's mandate, more specifically than anybody else's, was to teach the poorest of the poor; economic reasons and social reasons, rather than any sex bias, may have underlain her argument.

une fainéantise qui n'est pas propre au ménage."²⁰⁸ A similar back-handed testimonial to the Congrégation of Montreal comes from L. Franquet, in his memoirs of a tour which he made in Canada in 1752-53:

Ces soeurs sont répandues le long des côtes, ... attirées pour l'éducation des jeunes filles; leur utilité semble être démontrée, mais le mal qu'en résulte est comme un poison lent qui tend à dépeupler les campagnes, d'autant qu'une fille instruite fait la demoiselle, qu'elle est maniérée, qu'elle veut prendre un établissement à la ville, qu'il lui faut un negociant et qu'elle regarde au dessous d'elle l'état dans lequel elle est née.²⁰⁹

e) Arithmetic.

Les escholieres qui apprennent l'orthographe, seront aussi enseignées à compter par la plume et par jets, on leur montrera combien de chiffres ou de figures il y a, de que chacun signifie estant seul ce qu'il vaut selon le lieu qu'il occupe ... comme il faut les écrire On enseignera aux premières les règles de division et de trois; aux deuxièmes, les règles de multiplication et de subtraction et aux moindres celles d'addition et la connoissance de la valeur des chiffres.²¹⁰

Beyond writing, there was arithmetic. Usually only the senior students, who had mastered the skills of reading in Latin and in English, were given training in this subject. Fourier's

²⁰⁸René Bourgeois, Mémoires, vol. III, p.697, quoted in A. Hanneke, op.cit., p.184.

²⁰⁹Voyages et mémoires sur le Canada (Montreal: Ed. Elysée, 1974), pp.31-32.

²¹⁰Pierre Fourier, Vraies Constitutions, chap. XIV, quoted in M. Maggiolo, op.cit., pp.226-27.

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rule set a standard which was rarely reached in other girls' schools. Along with orthographe, it was allotted a period each day.²¹¹ In most cases, its small share in the school curriculum (approximately two half-hours per week)²¹² indicates its minor importance.

Children were first taught arithmetic through the use of jettons or counters. "Le maître avertira ceux qui doivent getter d'apporter une petite bourse contenant trente six pièces ou Jettons de cuivre, ou vieux deniers qui ne puissent plus servir."²¹³ Afterwards they were taught "jetter à la plume". For this, of course, they needed their writing skills:

[La maîtresse] leur fera connoître les neuf lettres de chiffre barbare, comme aussi le chiffre romain, puis leur fera nombrer jusques à mille....²¹⁴

In the girls' schools, even in the more affluent pensionnats, the programme remained severely practical:

Elle leur fera supputer à quoy reviendroient les choses qu'elles auront achetées, par exemple, 15 aunes de passement à trente cinq sols l'aune, puis le leur en fera faire une somme totale, et la payer en diverses sortes de monnoye.²¹⁵

²¹¹Vraves Constitutions (1649) Part III, p.62.

²¹²Soeurs du Saint-Enfant Jesus, Reglement pour les petites Ecoles Chretiennes, f. 109. The original school rules of P.Barré do not seem to have allowed for arithmetic.

²¹³L'Escole paroissiale, quoted in B. Groperrin, op.cit, p.97.

²¹⁴Reglemens des Ursulines, chap. VIII, art. 84.

²¹⁵Ibid., art. 85.

Here, obviously, was training for home management. However, many young women destined, like Jean Maillefer's mother, to work in their family businesses,²¹⁶ must have profited from these classes. Training in home management was also training for the workshop.

f) Handwork.

If the rules are to be believed, there was not a girl, from the richest to the poorest, who did not learn at school to work at "quelque ouvrage conforme à son estat pour éviter l'oisiveté pernicieuse."²¹⁷ For the richer, there were "toutes sortes de travaux décents et convenables à une jeune fille bien élevée"²¹⁸; for the children of artisans and bourgeois, "un exercice d'un petit travail convenable à leur estat, et à leur condition, pour faire un saint usage du temps"²¹⁹; for the poor, "entre autres choses celles qui leur seront nécessaires, tant pour gagner leur vie que pour être utiles au public."²²⁰ Handwork

²¹⁶"Elle fut tirée des escolles à l'aage de quatorze ans pour estre mariée et entrer dans une boutique extrêmement subgete, et ses premiers employs furent ... à y enfiler des escrivoires et dans la vente et destail des menues merceries...." (H. Jadart, Mémoires de Jean Maillefer [op.cit.], pp.122-23).

²¹⁷Arch. MM Providence de Rouen, "De l'esprit de la communauté des Filles de Sainte-Geneviève", chap.2, art.1.

²¹⁸Bull of Paul V to the Ursulines of Toulouse, 1616. Quoted in B. Groperrin, op.cit., p.15.

²¹⁹Bibl. Ste. Geneviève, ms. 1718: Regles et statuts des filles de St.-Joseph et de Sainte-Geneviève à Senlis, f.2.

²²⁰Ordinance of the Bishop of Cahors, 1673, establishing a community of schoolmistresses (R.Chartier, M.-M. Compère and D. Julia, op.cit., p.238).

was part of the essence of femininity. The distaff was its symbol. "La femme forte file," wrote Fénelon, "se renferme dans son ménage, se tait, croit, et obéit"221

Handwork varied from one institute to the next, with the purpose of the school and the character of its clientèle. For the pensionnaires of Faubourg Saint-Jacques, there were "fleurs de point de brodeur, de la broderie d'or et d'argent, des passements au suseau, du point de France, d'Angleterre etc etc."222 But they were also taught "à refaire ce qui seroit décousu et déchiré sur elles, et à raccommoder leur linge."223 The students of the convent at Dôle learned embroidery (as well as drawing, and "divers travaux d'agrément"). But they also learned dressmaking.224 The students of Pierre Fourier's Congrégation were taught "à coudre, à faire de la dantelle et du lassis et à le recouvrir et du point coupé et de la nuance et quelques autres ouvrages semblables."225 Both here and in Dôle, the lowest class was exempted from sewing; the reason was given

221 Education des filles, p. 125.

222 Reglemens des Ursulines Chap. 7, pp.82-83.

223 Ibid., chap. III, pp.34-35. The pensionnaires were also required to press and fold their linen after it had been laundered. Madame de Maintenon recalled her childhood at the monastery of Niort, and her efforts to please a much-loved mistress: "Je passais les nuits entières à empeser le linge fin des pensionnaires, afin qu'elles fissent honneur à la maîtresse sans qu'elle eût la peine..." (Quoted in E. Faguet, op.cit., p.117).

224 J. Morey, op.cit., vol. II, p.82.

225 P. Fourier, Vrayes Constitutions, Part III, art. 46.

by Mère de Xainctonge: "L'expérience a montré que, quand ces petites créatures ont appliqué leur esprit aux travaux manuels avant de savoir connaître et assembler leur lettres, on a une peine indicible de leur apprendre à lire."²²⁶ In these schools, at any rate, reading was more important than handwork.

The "quality" schools were anxious not to take their students' handwork to a professional level. "On se contentera d'enseigner des ouvrages communs et tout ensemble aisez et bienseans et utiles aux pauvres et aux riches. On n'y monstrera point d'autres ouvrages rares et subtils et de gros appareil," wrote Fourier.²²⁷ "Fancy" work was inappropriate for modest young women of good family. Madame de Maintenon told her nuns:

Votre constitution vous défend les ouvrages exquis et d'un trop grand dessein, afin que vous n'entrepreniez point de faire des ornements trop magnifiques pour votre maison et pour des personnes du dehors, et que vous ne fassiez point ici tous ces ouvrages et colifichets en broderie et au petit métier qui sont si inutiles.²²⁸

Such expertise was left to working women, or to religious communities in financial need.²²⁹

Where the size of the community allowed, "ouvrages" were taught by a specialist. It was sometimes taught in conjunction

²²⁶J. Morey, op.cit., vol. II, p.74.

²²⁷Vraies Constitutions Part III, art. 48.

²²⁸E. Faguet, op.cit., p.25.

²²⁹The Magneuses of Reims, for instance, specialized in fine tapestry. Their house was established to train poor girls for service. See P. Gosset, op.cit., pp. 18-19.

with arithmetic and orthographe, which required individual attention: the girls who were not working on their books were thus able to work on their sewing. Ideally, a special room was reserved for the work. The convent of Dôle built such a classroom in the late seventeenth century:

... plus longue que large, éclairée d'un seul côté par des fenestres qui ne sont pas à hauteur d'appuy, mais plus basses, afin d'avoir plus de lumière. Les fenestres devront régner tout le long de cette chambre; afin de ne pas gêner l'éclairage, la cheminée sera au bout, et le poêle sera en face des fenestres.... Il doit dans cette chambre y avoir des enfonçures ou l'on fera les buffets pour placer les ouvrages.²³¹

For the mistresses in the petites écoles of Barré and Roland, working with their crowded bancs of little girls, handwork seems to have been reserved for spare time, when other work was done: "Celles ni n'éciront pas travailleront apres avoir leu; si neantmoins celles qui escrivent estoient assez diligentes pour avoir achevé de bonne heure, elles travailleront evitant l'oisiveté...."²³² Their work included "linge, tapisserie et chose semblable."²³³ The brevity of the rules on this subject seems to suggest that handwork was not a priority in these petites écoles: an indication, perhaps, of the somewhat higher expectations of parents. We are a long way from the cemetery school of Saint-Maclou, where the little girls made lace and stockings

²³¹Quoted in J. Morey, op.cit., vol.II, p.378.

²³²N. Barré, Reglements manuscrits, p.7.

²³³Reglement pour les petites Ecoles Chretiennes, p.9.

"à soulager leurs familles de leur pauvreté."²³³

However, the problems of the poor were very much on the educators' minds. The preoccupation of the teaching congregations, at first centred on christianization, moved gradually towards the amelioration of social conditions.²³⁴

Fourier was the first to register this objective. In his first règlement, drawn up in 1598, he identified handwork -- "à coudre et besogner" -- as a way of giving poor girls the means to earn a living "lesquelles auparavant n'avaient moyen de rien apprendre à raison de leur pauvreté et de là pouvaient tirer occasion de s'exposer à plusieurs hasards"²³⁵ Even after clausura, the Congrégation was still expected to favour the poor in this respect:

La maîtresse des ouvrages s'attachera
surtout aux pauvres, pour leur apprendre
à bien et diligemment travailler, puisque
c'est le moien par lequel Dieu veut
pourvoir à leur subsistence.²³⁶

Furthermore, girls who were unable to learn to read, but who wished to attend school to learn handwork, were to be admitted.

However, the monasteries gravitated irresistibly towards a more select type of externe, and even in the petites écoles,

²³³A.S.M., G. 1177. Visite paroissiale de Joseph de Seraucourt, 1698. See above, chap. VI, fn 73.

²³⁴F. Furet and J. Ozouf, op.cit., vol. I, pp.92-93.

²³⁵"Extrait de quelques articles du Règlement provisionnel que gardaient les filles de Notre-Dame avant qu'elles fussent religieuses [1598]", Appendix in H. Derréal, op.cit., p.403.

²³⁶Usages de Châlons, quoted in H. Derréal, op.cit., p.160, fn.61.

the social classes did not mix well on the schoolroom benches.

"Les personnes de condition n'étant pas bien aises que l'on mette leurs enfants avec les pauvres, qui sont ordinairement pleins de vermine et de saleté en leurs habits aussi bien qu'en leur parole",²³⁷ the poor were, of course, the ones to leave.

The social problem remained: young girls on the street, without training or work. "Le deffaut d'éducation et d'instruction des jeunes filles a toujours été, et est en effet la source de la plupart des déréglemens, qu'on voit avec douleur au milieu du Christianisme."²³⁸ This led a number of secular communities to undertake an initiative specifically for them: the segregated class, which taught handwork only. Among these communities were the soeurs Barré:

L'an 1676, Hélène Cauvin, Marie Forfait, entrèrent à Bayeux.... Là, elles s'occupèrent ... à instruire les filles, qui sont divisées en deux classes. Dans la première, on apprend aux plus jeunes à lire; on les instruit des éléments de la Foi, et on les élève dans la piété. La deuxième est destinée pour y recevoir celles qui sont dans un âge plus avancé, auxquelles on apprend à travailler à la dentelle, et à vivre dans la vertu.²³⁹

From single classrooms, the project developed into sheltered workshops. Unlike the workshops of the Hopital-Genéral, these

²³⁷L'Escole paroissiale, quoted in R. Chartier, M.-M. Compère and D. Julia, op.cit., p.119.

²³⁸N. Barré, Mémoire instructif, p.1 (Arch. M.M. Soeurs du Saint Enfant Jesus, Paris).

²³⁹Ms. of 1696, Bayeux. Printed in Chanoine Farcy, La Providence de Rouen (op.cit.), p.65.

were not residential: the girls entered in the morning at 7, left for lunch, and returned for the afternoon. The regimen was austere, and consisted of spiritual instructions and improving readings, with occasional group singing, "afin de délasser et récréer leur esprit." The girls were permitted to take home all the proceeds from their work: "Il ne sera jamais permis à aucune Soeur Maîtresse de faire les apprentisses travailler pour elle."²⁴⁰

Training in the manual skills was a valuable part of seventeenth-century female education. However, we are unequipped to evaluate it. In matters of "fleurs de point de brodeur", broderie d'or et d'argent", "passemens au suseau" and "point de France et d'Angleterre", we are modern-day illiterates, unable to appreciate or even identify the competence involved. Our ignorance causes a dangerous imbalance in our final judgments upon what was taught, and how well. "La science des femmes, comme celle des hommes, doit se borner à s'instruire par rapport à leurs fonctions," wrote Fénelon.²⁴¹ Sewing was a skill as writing was a skill. In terms of its application to the everyday life of women, it was far the more useful of the two, and no educator of the time would have dreamed of eliminating it. We must acknowledge, even if we can no longer visualize, the

²⁴⁰For all these details, see "Reglemens à faire dans les Ecoles Chrétiennes du travail manuel ... dressez et écrits de la main du R. Père Barré", in N. Barré, Lettres spirituelles, p.359-66.

²⁴¹Op.cit., p.94.

techniques that were transmitted from teachers to children, the pedagogical skill which such transmission involved, and the thousands of hours of applied effort which followed. Then, in the words of one historian: "Allez demander ensuite aux femmes de savoir signer!"²⁴²

4) Conclusion.

The nuns of the teaching congregations of the Catholic Reformation broke all previous conventions of religious life. The evidence available to us, largely in the form of their rules and constitutions, gives clear indication that their new calling entailed -- from the very start -- a specialized training. The fusion of this training with the monastic life created a conflict of ideals. This conflict was resolved by modifying the monastic life; eliminating or reducing traditional observances to make way for the duties of the schoolroom.

The pedagogy of the congregations was a profession, entered into with serious intent: witness the widespread custom of taking a fourth vow, to teach little girls. Each community took steps to safeguard its methods and to transmit them to new members. Indeed, extreme respect for tradition and a strong desire for uniformity tended in time to a certain stagnation. The filles séculières of the second half of the century, for all their

²⁴²J. Perrel, "Sur l'enseignement féminin avant la Révolution", Penelope 2 (1980), p.10.

overload of students, at least had access to information on new ideas.

Yet there was an underlying unity in the work of the religious and of the filles séculières, in part because they all drew from a common source, in part because they interacted with each other, in part, also, because the horizons of female education were limited by a social diktat which allowed little scope for radical innovations.

The women of the seventeenth-century teaching congregations were the product of their times. They personified the mentalité of the Catholic Reformation: its emphasis on order and obedience, its spirituality and its activism. They also contributed to social change. They assisted in the modernization, not only of the religious life, but of the attitudes which adults held towards children. The great faith which they, together with other religious elites both Catholic and Protestant, placed in the power of education to regenerate society, left a permanent mark on the modern world.²⁴³

²⁴³This is the argument of Furet and Ozouf. See their "Conclusion", in Lire and Ecrire, vol. I, in which they compare the ideology of the Counter-Reformation Church to that of the Revolution.

CHAPTER VIII
THE MAKING OF COMMUNITIES

From the very beginning of its involvement in feminine education, the reformed Catholic Church laid down two basic principles: that girls should be taught only by women,¹ and that teachers should be unmarried. "Est convenable," wrote Pierre Fourier in 1598, "que ce soient personnes libres de la servitude du mariage et déchargées de tout autre soin qui pourrait empêcher l'exercice d'enseigner."² Celibacy, whether temporary or permanent, was a universal condition for teaching in the schools of the dévots.

This raised the question of how these celibate women should live. In some cases they continued to live at home, as the first Ursulines did in Brescia.³ But the preferred solution was a community. "On ne peut enseigner bien commodément avec suffisance, ordre et notable avancement des écolières, s'il n'y a plusieurs maîtresses ensemble, à raison qu'une seule ne peut satisfaire à toutes les écoles où se retrouve grand nombre

¹The Council of Bourges (1584) ordered that girls must be taught by schoolmistresses. This rule remained in force throughout the Ancien Régime, though it is clear, from the repeated scoldings of both Crown and Church, that it was frequently broken.

²"Reglement Provisionnel" [1598], quoted in H. Derréal, Un missionnaire de la Contre-Réforme (op.cit.), p.402.

³The soeurs Barré of Rouen, for instance, lived at home and worked together for some time, before deciding to form a community. See the memoir of Marguerite Lestocq, quoted in Chapter VI, pp. 242-43.

de filles et différentes en capacité et se mêler encore de la ménagerie."⁴ Community life was practical for reasons of security and support; it was also compatible with the religious practices to which most of the women wished to commit themselves.

The building of community life was therefore a primary concern for the religious schoolmistresses of the seventeenth century. Just as their outward service was important to secure acceptance in society, their private life was important for their own survival. It required at least a minimum of material furnishings and of financial stability; it also required a certain amount of internal regulation, to insure the mutual co-operation of members. And because this was the seventeenth century, the "siècle sacré"⁵, it had to have a religious justification. The making of a congregation, in the words of Jean de Vignerot, was "a work in itself ... a holy enterprise".⁶ This chapter will examine the various aspects of community building, both psychological and material. On the psychological side, the members had to provide themselves with a framework of rules inside which to live together; and -- equally important -- a spiritual rationale for their new existence. On the material side, they had to see to the procurement of revenues, and to

⁴H. Derréal, op.cit., p.402.

⁵R. Taveneaux, Le Catholicisme dans la France Classique (op.cit.), vol.I, p.177.

⁶J. de Vignerot, Une Oeuvre d'éducation sous l'Ancien Régime (op.cit.), p.25.

the maintenance of their houses. This was equally important for the communities of the Counter Reformation, created for the most part before 1640 and the secular institutes of the Catholic Reformation, which began to take firm shape in the 1640s, and continued to evolve throughout the century.

1) Religious justification.

In the course of three centuries after Trent, the Catholic Church succeeded in establishing a harmony between the contemplative and the active religious life. The harmony was crowned, in the twentieth century, by the adoption of Saint Thérèse, the little Carmelite of Lisieux, as patroness of the missions. By this time the active orders found it less painful to acknowledge the contemplative life as the higher, more perfect, form of religious life.

This only happened, however, after the day had been carried, in numerical terms, by the active orders. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the active congregations grew while the contemplative orders did not. By 1969, only ten percent of all religious women in France were contemplatives.⁷

In the Ancien Régime the order was reversed. The congréganistes were always in the minority.⁸ In the seventeenth century they

⁷C. Langlois, Le catholicisme au féminin (op.cit.), p.308.

⁸In 1790, there were five cloistered nuns for each congréganiste (Ibid., p.78). It should be emphasized that many cloistered nuns were engaged in active service, as teachers or as nurses. They should really be classed as "active contemplatives".

were still newcomers, in a society that was suspicious of change. As a consequence, they had to build defences, against attacks on their legitimacy,⁹ against the draining away of their best subjects into "real" religious life. The quarrel between the active and the contemplative orders was continuous and, sometimes, bitter.

Novelty was heresy. Innovation in feminine religious life was contrary to the legislation of Trent, and therefore scandalous. Long before the Papacy's official condemnation of Mary Ward's Institute (1630-31), this position had gained powerful support, both in the Church and in society. Resistance to change was particularly strong in France, where the continuing power struggle against the Protestants prolonged the siege mentality of the sixteenth century well into the seventeenth. It was therefore necessary, wherever innovation was attempted, to give it legitimacy by showing that it was, in fact, a return to old tradition. This could be done either by appealing to precedents in Church history or -- even better -- by pointing to a scriptural model. An extensive polemic had to be developed to protect the reformers against their critics.

⁹"Tout au long du siècle, la brûlante question des vœux solennels devait désespérer les fondateurs d'ordres, et mettre aux prises tous les juristes du temps" (H. Derréal, op.cit., p.194). It should be remarked that at the beginning of the century the Jesuits themselves were only just emerging from a half-century of controversy over the legitimacy of their Institute (R. Lemoine, Le monde des religieux (op.cit.) chap.VI).

The early seventeenth-century congregations aroused sharp controversy when they sought dispensation from formal vows and strict clausura. The Council of Trent had forbidden religious women to leave the grounds of their monastery without express approval from their bishop.¹⁰ The papal constitutions Circa pastoralis (1566) and Lubricum vitae genus (1568) had ordered all communities of tertiaries to take solemn vows, or be dispersed.¹¹ The Counter Reformation at its outset had formally rejected the possibility of an intermediate state between the wholly religious and the wholly secular.¹²

Fourier argued for the Congrégation, Romillon for the Ursulines, and François de Sales for the Visitation, that the law on clausura could be applied in mitigated form. "La clôture ne consiste pas en forme immuable et indivisible ... elle est susceptible de plus ou moins."¹³ However, it was not enough to show the usefulness and value of the proposed changes; they had to find authority for them in the past. François de Sales insisted that strict clausura was a recent phenomenon in the Church's life, and that many holy congregations had flourished before

¹⁰Council of Trent, 25th Session, chap. V. (H.J. Schroeder, Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent [op.cit.], pp. 220-21).

¹¹R. Lemoine, Le droit des religieux, p.40.

¹²Ibid., p.40. Also see above, Introduction.

¹³Fourier - Guinet, in Lettres, vol. III, pp.191-92; quoted in H. Derréal, op.cit., p.343.

it came into effect.¹⁴ His argument received confirmation from Cardinal Bellarmine:

Avant Boniface VIII, il y avait des religieuses et qui n'étaient pas tellement enfermées dans leurs monastères qu'elles ne sortissent quand il était nécessaire.... La solennité des vœux, ainsi la clôture n'a commencé, d'institution ecclésiastique, que sous Boniface VIII.¹⁵

The event referred to by Bellarmine -- the decree of Boniface VIII in 1298, enforcing strict clausura -- became a sort of watershed in the eyes of the protagonists of change. They appealed beyond the Church of recent history to the Church of earlier times. "Je ne songe nullement à faire des innovations," wrote Anne de Xainctonge,

... cependant, dès les premiers siècles du christianisme, nous trouvons des diaconesses chargées de quelque ministère extérieure. C'étaient elles qui s'occupaient des femmes et des jeunes filles, et se chargeaient de les instruire pour les préparer au baptême.... Ce n'est donc pas une innovation, c'est la résurrection d'un usage ayant eu sa raison d'être autrefois, et l'ayant encore aujourd'hui.¹⁶

This appeal to the example of the deaconesses, and the apostolic women of the early Church, remained one of the favourite

¹⁴F. de Sales -- D. de Marquemont, 2/ii/1616. In F. de Sales, Oeuvres complètes (op.cit.) vol. XXV, p.337.

¹⁵Cardinal Bellarmine - de Sales, 29/xii/1616. in F. de Sales, op.cit., vol. XVII, p.416.

¹⁶Quoted in Y. Poutet, "Spiritualité des enseignants" (op.cit.), p.51.

arguments of proponents of the active religious life.¹⁷ It reinforced the position they had already taken. Thus the Filles de la Croix, the first religious community of women to live under simple vows,¹⁸ in a prospectus describing the work that they did "for the poor of their sex in all their spiritual needs", added:

Elles ont esté d'autant plus confirmées dans ce bon dessein qu'elles ont appris qu'autrefois l'Eglise employoit les veufves et les filles qui se donnoient à son service et qui pour ce sujet estoient appelées Diaconesses ... comme il se void au quatriesme Concile de Carthage et en plusieurs autres.¹⁹

But the deaconesses, while they served a useful defensive purpose, did not give the new congregations much to work with. They needed models whom they might imitate, patrons to whom they might pray. For this they went to the Gospel tradition. A whole new cluster of devotions appeared in the seventeenth century, most of them developed by various religious orders.²⁰ Some of these devotions were to saints and angels, others were

¹⁷I have found reference to deaconesses, and to women serving in the apostolate of the early Church, in the works of Fourier, François de Sales, Vincent de Paul, Olier, Barré, Roland, Giry, Bishop Vialart of Châlons, and Marguerite Bourgeoys; in the rules of the Union chrétienne, the filles de la Croix, and the filles de Sainte-Geneviève.

¹⁸See above, chap. I, fn.72.

¹⁹Prospectus, Filles de la Croix, quoted in Y. Poutet, les origines lasalliennes (op.cit.), vol. I, p.574.

²⁰C. Flachaire, La dévotion à la Vierge dans la littérature catholique au commencement du XVII^e siècle (Paris: Apostolat de la Presse, 1957), passim, but especially pp. 168 ff.

to the various "states" of Christ. Thus the "mixed life" of Jesus -- his life of contemplation and preaching -- was the principal model for the Jesuits²¹; Mary Magdalen, "the humble and fervent disciple of Jesus, sitting constantly at his feet, attentive to his word"²², was the special patronness of the Carmelites; Martha became the patronness of hospitalières and of other cloistered nuns who served the poor.²³ Teachers invoked the guardian angels, whose task so perfectly prefigured their own.²⁴ But the principal patronness and model of the congregations was the Virgin. Almost every monastery and institute adopted her in a special way, sometimes electing her as abbess

²¹Fourier, himself an ex-pupil of the Jesuits, proposed this model for his new congrégées, as a more perfect form of life than the purely contemplative life of cloistered nuns. (H. Derréal, op.cit., p.147).

²²p. Bérulle, quoted in L. Caza, La vie voyageuse (op.cit.), p.101.

²³Including the primitive Visitation of Annecy, whom François de Sales first called soeurs de Sainte-Marthe, to indicate their duty to the poor (R. Lemoine, op.cit., p.302).

²⁴Thus Anne de Xainctonge compared her sisters to the guardian angels, who were as happy in their vocation as the Cherubim, whose only function was to contemplate God. "Ce bon Maître nous destinant à remplir dans nos classes les fonctions d'anges tutélaires, suivons l'exemple des Anges du ciel." (J. Morey, Anne de Xainctonge, vol. II, p.33). Barré also invoked the patronage of the guardian angels for his schoolmistresses. See his "Règles manuscrites", p.24.

or superior of the community,²⁵ always pointing to her as an example of the perfect religious.²⁶

As Charles Flachaire has demonstrated, the image of the Virgin changed in the course of the seventeenth century, from the "petite princesse", the "chère petite maîtresse" of the Jesuits, for whose honour they were ready to do battle, to the personification of virginal purity, "revêtue d'une majesté logique et sévère",²⁷ with whom religious men and women could relate. To the Jansenists she was Jansenist, to the Carmelites, Carmelite; to the Sulpicians, the model for the clergy and the Queen of the missions.²⁸ It is interesting, therefore, to see the way in which the active feminine congregations adopted her as their own, and endowed her with the special virtues that pertained to their vocation.

The devotion to the Education of the Virgin has already been mentioned.²⁹ This was part of a larger Catholic tradition which had built up around the early years of Mary: her birth

²⁵E.g., the Congrégation of Montreal elected the Virgin as their first Superior. Ecrits de Mère Bourgeoys (op.cit.), p.18.

²⁶Thus Soeur Barbier, second superior of the Congrégation, wrote to Bishop Saint-Vallier: "Je vous supplie, Monseigneur, que nous n'ayons pas d'autres Constitutions que la vie de la très Sainte Vierge." (L. Caza, op.cit., p.63).

²⁷C. Flachaire, op.cit., passim, but especially pp.34 ff. and p.121.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 140, 104, 160. The devotion of the Sulpicians to the Virgin was especially influential, since through their seminaries they were to form so many of the priests of the Ancien Régime.

²⁹See above, chap. VI, pp.271-72.

to the aged Saint Anne, her girlhood as a consecrated virgin in the Temple of Jerusalem, and the series of miraculous events which led up to her marriage to Saint Joseph. Though without foundation in scripture, the tradition was immensely popular, as paintings and statues in numberless churches attest.

The tradition was solidified in the Counter Reformation. The feast of the Presentation of the Virgin became the patronal feast of Saint-Sulpice, and by extension, of the clergy.³⁰

It was treated as doctrine in catechisms.³¹ It was incorporated into the faith and the spirituality of Catholics. No-one found it more inspiring than the new dévoté schoolmistresses, because it helped to authorize the lives that they were establishing for themselves. They concentrated on two themes: Mary's consecrated life in the temple, and the work that she did there, instructing young girls. Depending on the emphasis of their own lives,

³⁰C. Flachaire, op.cit., p.175.

³¹E.g., La vie du chrestien ou le catechisme de la mission of Jean Eudes (1668):

- D. Combien de temps la Tres-Sainte Vierge a-t-elle demeurée la maison de Son Père et de sa Mère après sa naissance?
- R. Trois ans.
- D. Au bout de trois ans où est-elle allée?
- R. Au temple de Hierusalem.
- D. Pourquoi?
- R. Pour se présenter et consacrer entièrement à Dieu, avec plusieurs autres saintes Vierges, qui demeuroident ensemble dans le Temple.
- D. Jusqu'à quel aage a-t-elle demeurée au Temple?
- R. Jusqu'à l'âge de quinze ans, ou environ.
- D. Que luy est-il arrivé à cet aage-là?
- R. Elle a été mariée avec saint Joseph.

(Quoted in M. Menard, Une histoire de mentalités religieuses [op.cit.], p. 371).

they stressed either the first or the second theme. Thus Alix Le Clerc, whose natural bent was towards the cloister, wrote:

La sainte Vierge au Temple travailloit comme les autres filles, faisoit comme elles les actions communes; mais à certaines heures elle se retiroit pour vaguer plus en particulier à l'oraison, et à la contemplation des choses divines, image des exercices des Religieuses de la Congrégation. Elles sont obligées par leur Regle d'employer la principale partie du temps à prier, à méditer, à chanter les louanges divines; mais en se receuillant ainsi en la présence de Dieu, c'est pour y recevoir la rosée et la manne celeste qu'elles doivent en suite distribuer aux âmes de leurs petites Ecolieres.

C'est ce que faisoit la sainte Vierge aux petites filles du Temple, qu'elle instruisoit et entretenoit dans la dévotion ... ³²

On the other hand Marguerite Bourgeoys, the filles de la paroisse for whom the Virgin was the model for an active, uncloistered life, drew a different picture:

Tout le temps qu'elle a été au temple, qui était l'école des filles, elle était l'édification de toutes les autres, et par ses instructions, et par ses actions, faisant l'office de servante, rendait à ses compagnes tous les services dont elle était capable et leur apprenait plusieurs sortes d'ouvrages honnêtes.³³

The two women, both schoolmistresses, used the same devotion to justify their different interpretations of the active life.

The mystery par excellence of the active congregations was the mystery of the Visitation. "Mary set out ... and went

³²Vie de la V.M. Alix Le Clerc (1666) (op.cit.), p.269.

³³Ecrits, p.91.

as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah."³⁴
This event in the Gospel account, which had attracted little devotion in the past, came into its own in the seventeenth century.³⁵
François de Sales introduced it as the perfect model for his new community, in which he hoped to combine the corporal acts of mercy with the contemplative life:

En ce mistere la tres glorieuse Vierge fit
cet acte solennel de sa charité envers le
prochain ... et composa néanmoins le cantique
du Magnificat, le plus doux, le plus relevé,
plus spirituel et plus contemplatif qui soit
escrit.³⁶

It is significant that Archbishop Marquemont, in his design to cloister the congregation, pressed for a new title, that of the Presentation of the Virgin.³⁷ The implications of the Visitation were clear, both for the proponents and the opponents of the active life.

The former won their case by degrees. It was difficult to dissociate women from the action of the greatest woman of all. Vincent de Paul readily invoked the Visitation for his

³⁴Luke I:39.

³⁵"Un mystère caché, et qu'il n'était pas célébré en l'Eglise comme les autres." Mère de Chaugy, Mémoires, in R. Devos, L'origine sociale des Visitandines (op.cit.), p.21.

³⁶Visitation, Constitutions, 1613. In Oeuvres vol. XXV, p. 214.

³⁷"On remarque que l'invocation de la Visitation ayant esté prinse sur le dessein que les Soeurs serviroient les malades, et ce dessein ne se devant plus effectuer, il sembleroit a propos de changer cete invocation et prendre celle de la Presentation de Nostre Dame, a laquelle l'oblation des Soeurs peult avoir plus de rapport." (Denis de Marquemont, Mémoire, in François de Sales, Oeuvres vol: XXV, p.328).

women's charités: "Elles honoreront la visite de la sainte Vierge allant visiter sa cousine allégrement et promptement, s'occupant de quelque bonne pensée."³⁸ But the implications of the new devotion were even deeper. Throughout the Catholic community, the Visitation became a symbol of the missionary mandate of the Church. The "state" of the vie voyageuse, first attributed to Christ himself,³⁹ was assigned also to the Virgin:

Dès qu'elle l'a conçu et formé dans son sein, elle est la première qui part aussitôt pour l'annoncer, et qui fait ce que les Apôtres firent ensuite à son exemple.⁴⁰

If the Virgin was a missionary, why could other women not be missionaries too? Where François de Sales had seen Mary's action as being in the service of her contemplation, and Vincent de Paul had used the same model to sanctify purely charitable activity, others invoked the Visitation as a sanction for a feminine apostolate:

Monsieur Jendret ... me dit un jour
[wrote Marguerite Bourgeoys] que Notre
Seigneur avait laissé trois états de
filles pour suivre et servir l'Eglise:

³⁸Vincent de Paul, Correspondance (op.cit.), vol. XIII, p.419.

³⁹Thus the Oratorians had houses dedicated to the different "states" of Christ: "à l'Incarnation, à la Résidence et au Repos de Jesus en Marie, à la Naissance, à l'Enfance, à la Vie Voyageuse, à la Vie Souffrante de Jesus, ou à quelque autre." (Bourgoing, quoted in J. Dagens, Bérulle et les origines de la Restauration catholique (op.cit.), p.319).

⁴⁰"C'est dans la mystère de La Visitation que les hommes apostoliques et les missionnaires doivent puiser les grâces de leur sublime vocation." (M. Olier, Vie intérieure de la Très Sainte Vierge, quoted in L. Caza, op.cit., p.86).

que celui de sainte Madeleine était rempli par les Carmelites et autres recluses, et celui de Sainte Marthe par les religieuses cloîtrées qui servent le prochain; mais que celui de la vie voyageuse de la sainte Vierge, qu'il fallait honorer, ne l'était et que, sans voile ni guimpe, l'on serait vraiment religieuse.⁴¹

The idea that women might participate in the apostolate, which was so thoroughly condemned within the Church on the authority of Saint Paul, was made respectable on the authority of the Blessed Virgin.

The feminine apostolate received further consecration from the model of Mary, Queen of Apostles. According to scripture, Mary was present in the upper room in the days before Pentecost.⁴² In the growing marian devotion which marked the seventeenth century, this presence became central: Mary ruled the apostles, and gave them their orders to preach the gospel. "Il est vrai qu'à l'extérieur Saint Pierre avait puissance sur elle étant l'image de Jésus-Christ: mais à l'intérieur il était soumis à la Très Sainte Vierge," wrote Olier.⁴³ The primacy of Mary

⁴¹Ecrits de Mère Bourgeoys, p.204. It should be remembered that Gendret's ideas had been developed in the 1640s (See above, Chap. V, fn. 48).

⁴²Acts of the Apostles I:14.

⁴³Op.cit. quoted in L. Caza, op.cit., p.90. Jean-Jacques Olier (1618-1659), cousin of Pierre Segulier, the garde des sceaux, was a member of the Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement and founder of Saint-Sulpice. In 1640 he became the co-founder, with Jerome Royer de la Dauversière, of the Société de Notre-Dame pour la conversion des Sauvages de la Nouvelle-France. He ardently supported the work of the teaching filles séculières.

in the early Church became an article of faith, expressed through the medium of devotional art.⁴⁴

Mary's participation in the work of the early Church was usually linked to the work of lesser women who, according to tradition, had assisted the apostles:

... [les] filles et Dames devotes, et saintes
et ferventes qui vivoient de leur temps,
et les aid~~oient~~ a la conquete des ames, par
leurs prieres, et bon exemple, par leurs
austeritez, et par leurs grands travaux.⁴⁵

Whereas her example on its own might arguably have been beyond the power of mere women to imitate, the holy women provided a link between the supernatural and the natural. They were not simply subjects for meditation; they were exhortations to action. Imitation was the necessary corollary to contemplation. Thus, the logic of seventeenth-century piety allowed women gradually to claim new areas of activity. "Nous faisons les missions pour contribuer à l'éducation des enfants, parce que la Sainte Vierge, en visitant Elisabeth, a contribué à la sanctification de saint Jean-Baptiste," wrote Marguerite Bourgeoys in the 1690s.⁴⁶

⁴⁴The painting behind the high altar of the seminary of Saint-Sulpice shows the scene of Pentecost, with Mary at the centre and above all the apostles: a clear depiction of the "plenitude" of her gift compared to theirs (see Illustration I). It is worth noting that this painting was already in place when Marguerite Bourgeoys visited the chapel with Jeanne Mance in 1658 (Ecrits, p.50.). It is a perfect illustration for her writings on the subject.

⁴⁵p. Fourier, Le primitif et legitime esprit (op.cit.) (Pont-à-Mousson, 1650).

⁴⁶Ecrits, p.78.

ILLUSTRATION I : PAINTING BEHIND THE HIGH
ALTAR IN THE SEMINARY OF SAINT - SULPICE,
PARIS, COMMISSIONED BY OLIER AND EXECUTED
BY LE BRUN.



By this time, her claim to a missionary role was no longer beyond the realm of reason. The feminine active religious life was no longer looked upon as something outside divine law.⁴⁷

However, it was still seen as an inferior state, less perfect than the contemplative life. "On nous demande pourquoi nous aimons mieux être vagabondes que d'être cloîtrées," Mère Bourgeoys wrote, "... pourquoi nous ne faisons pas des vœux solennels qui portent à une grande perfection et portent les filles à embrasser la religion? Et cela est plus honorable."⁴⁸ The filles séculières were constantly forced to defend themselves against this imputation of inferiority. "L'état religieux est bien saint," Monsieur Vincent protested, "mais il ne s'ensuit pas qu'il n'y ait que ceux qui l'embrassent qui se sanctifient."⁴⁹ However, custom ruled otherwise. The formal religious state carried with it not only respect, but spiritual advantage, in the form of indulgences.⁵⁰ The merit of the secular institutes remained hidden and unrecognized.

⁴⁷Although in strict terms it was still outside Church law. The Papacy did not formally recognize congregations with simple vows until 1749 (C. Molette, Guide des sources [op.cit], p.60).

⁴⁸Ecrits, p.81.

⁴⁹Quoted in R. Lemoine, Le droit des religieux, p.202.

⁵⁰Archbishop Marquemont had argued out that as uncloistered nuns, the sisters of the Visitation would enjoy "ny le nom, ny le merite, ny la perfection ny les Indulgences" pertaining to religious life. (François de Sales, op. cit., vol. XXV, p.322). Mlle Le Gras later found that her filles de la Charité were affected by the lack of spiritual reward for their work, and sought to address this problem by petitioning the Pope to grant an indulgence to all who persevered in the company until death.

That the filles séculières found this hard to accept may be deduced, both from the defensiveness of the literature, and from the problems that the Institûtes had in keeping their members from entering formal religious life, in search of greater perfection. Vincent de Paul actually discouraged his filles from talking to religious:

Laissez-là la grandeur des religieuses; estimez-les beaucoup et n'en cherchez pas la frequentation, non pas qu'elle ne soit bonne et très excellente, mais la communication de leur esprit particulier ne vous est pas propre.⁵¹

Barré was even more emphatic:

Lors qu'une Maîtresse des Ecoles charitables est tentée de se retirer de son employ, pour entrer dans une maison Religieuse, qu'elle prene garde à ce qu'elle a à faire. Elle abandonne un état plus Evangelique, plus pénible, plus pauvre, plus meprisé dans le monde, pour un autre plus commode, plus honorable, mais qui n'est utile que pour elle seule....

En voulant s'enfermer dans un Monastère, elle ressemble à un soldat lâche, qui veut toujours être en garnison, et jamais marcher en campagne: elle abandonne la guerre spirituelle, à laquelle elle s'étoit engagée pour Dieu et Jésus, afin de se reposer et vivre à son aise dans un lieu assuré, sans se mettre en peine des intérêts et de la gloire de son Roy.⁵²

By means of new devotions, and active preaching, an ideology was gradually developed, to give spiritual respectability to the active life. "Little by little these groups, born in response

⁵¹Conference of 27ii/1653, in op.cit., vol. IX, p.584.

⁵²"Maximes pour les Ecoles charitables", in Lettres spirituelles (op.cit.), pp.341-42.

to pressing needs, broke the ancient bond between clausura and the feminine religious life."⁵³ That this was a long and painful process, can be seen from the fact that the fight, which was commenced with the early 1600s, was still being joined in the latter part of the century. Madame de Miramion, reflecting in 1678 on her own continuing temptation to the religious life, concluded:

Il reste encore à faire le sacrifice de tout ton temps, pour être employé comme Il le veut et non comme tu le veux

Celui qui est appelé à la retraite, qu'il y demeure; celui qui est appelé à l'action, qu'il agisse. Les saints ont l'éternité pour contempler, et cette vie est donnée pour travailler à ceux qui y sont appelés.⁵⁴

2) Vows.

The status of a community was reflected in the vows which its members took upon entrance. Vows, in themselves, were of universal application; any adult could take them, and for any number of purposes. Vows of this sort were simple, private vows. Entrance into a recognized religious order, however, was conditional upon the taking of solemn vows. The aspirant made a public commitment, in front of witnesses and to an ecclesiastical superior, by which he or she officially "died to the world", and entered the religious state. These vows

⁵³R. Lemoine, Le monde des religieux, p.2.

⁵⁴A. Bonneau-Avenant, Madame de Miramion (op.cit.), p.243.

sprang from a medieval view of Church, a view in which the person taking the vows was regarded less as an individual than as a member of society.⁵⁵ They were not so much a private affair of conscience as a social commitment made to, and received by, the Catholic community. The act was final, and absolutely binding. It was, in the words of a monastic historian, "an external obligation, a 'chose d'Eglise', of distinctly social significance, participating in the visibility of the Church."⁵⁶

The founders of the new congregations recognized that solemn vows would lead directly to clausura. On the other hand, the absence of vows of any sort would strip their communities of all semblance of stability. They decided to follow the example of the new masculine orders, notably the Jesuits, and take simple vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. These vows were perfectly binding. "Devant Dieu," wrote Cardinal Bellarmine to François de Sales, "les voeux simples n'obligent pas moins que les voeux solennels et ne sont pas de moindre mérite."⁵⁷ However, they did not entail the formal change of state, and the "civil death" so precious in the eyes of the seventeenth century. This made

⁵⁵According to R. Taveneaux, "la conscience claire de la notion de vocation est une grande nouveauté du XVII^e siècle." In the Middle Ages, "tout se règle selon les besoins d'une diocèse, non en vue de la destinée spirituelle d'une personne: les nécessités de l'Eglise constituent la loi essentielle." (Op.cit., vol. I, p.158).

⁵⁶R. Lemoine, Le droit des religieux, p.17.

⁵⁷Robert Bellarmine - François de Sales, 29/xii/1616. François de Sales, op.cit., vol. XVII, p.416.

them unacceptable to the jurists of the Gallican Church. In the face of opposition, and fearful of suppression, the early congregations gave up their innovations, and submitted to solemn vows with all their implications.

La novice, donc, estant à genoux au milieu du chœur, a trois pas de la grille, ayant à ses costés la supérieure et l'assistante, dira en voix intelligible:

Je N.... demande, pour l'amour de Dieu Nostre Sauveur d'estre recue à la sainte Profession en la Congregation ... pour m'exercer toute ma vie en icelle au service divin, par obeissance, chasteté et pauvreté.⁵⁸

Having received her black veil, she rose and sang the verse, "Haec requies mea in saeculum saeculi" -- Here is my rest for all time. Then, prostrate before the grille, she was covered with a funeral pall while the office of the dead was recited.⁵⁹ Her commitment to her monastery was complete, and permanent.

The first filles séculières, the Filles de la Croix and the Filles de la Charité, took simple vows. But the juxtaposition of vows and community life soon raised questions as to what their actual status was.⁶⁰ Vincent de Paul, who as superior of the Visitation convent of rue Saint-Antoine was well acquainted

⁵⁸Constitutions of the Visitation, quoted in E. Catta, La Visitation Sainte-Marie de Nantes (Paris: Vrin, 1954), p.246.

⁵⁹Ibid., p.248.

⁶⁰Thus Mlle Le Gras, after an interview in 1651 with a royal official, wrote: "Il me demanda si nous prétendions être régulières ou séculières; je lui fis entendre que nous ne prétendions que le dernier; il me dit que cela être sans exemple; je lui alléguai les filles de Mme de Villeneuve et lui prouvai qu'elles allaient partout." (Lettres [op.cit]., p.473).

with the history of that congregation, was determined that his filles would not be tempted, or coerced, into religion.

L'on ne peut dire que les filles de la Charité soient religieuses parce que, pour être religieuses, il faut être cloîtrées. Les filles de la Charité ne pourront jamais être religieuses et malheur à qui parle de les faire religieuses.⁶¹

His purpose was to keep all the appearances of secularity, while giving his company the substance of religious life. He circumvented canon law, by ordering that individual sisters, on the private advice of their confessors, could take simple vows -- the vows that any lay person was entitled to take -- not before their superiors (and therefore in a stance that recalled solemn profession), but in the hearing of their superiors.⁶²

There was no question in Monsieur Vincent's mind that his sisters were to be religious in all but name. There were other like-minded communities, in which the simple vows of poverty, chastity and obedience were taken with considerable ceremony; sometimes a fourth vow of stability was added, to give the other vows permanence.⁶³ But this marked "religious" dimension is not found in all communities of filles séculières. Indeed, the basic arrangement, practised by many small communities, was simply a notarized agreement between the entrant and the

⁶¹Vincent de Paul, op.cit., vol. IX, pp.661-62.

⁶²R. Lemoine, La vie des religieux, p.309.

⁶³E.g. the Soeurs du Saint-Enfant-Jésus of Reims. (Arch. Soeurs de l'Enfant-Jésus de Reims, Carton 16-3: Constitutions, Chap. I, art.8.)

superiors, the former promising to observe the rules of the house, the latter promising to feed and maintain her.⁶⁴ Between the one extreme and the other there was a wide variety of practices. In some cases there was no vow of poverty;⁶⁵ in others, no vow of obedience.⁶⁶ Many communities made only promises. Among these were the soeurs Barré:

Elles vivront en communauté, sans faire de voeux, ni garder de clôture, sous la conduite de leur supérieure, à laquelle elles sont obligées d'obéir dans la vérité du pur et saint amour.⁶⁷

This term, "pur amour" became the codeword for a new relationship between the communities and their members. Although the filles séculières varied in the degree of their secularity, all shared one characteristic: they rejected the principle of perpetual commitment which the religious "state" implied. The member who failed to fit into the Institute, even though she

⁶⁴E.g. A.N. S 7046-47, Constitution of the filles de l'Instruction Chrestienne (1657), f. 11; formula for the contract signed upon admission: "Ladicte soeur demeurera a la reste de ses Jours en ladicte Maison pour y servir a l'Instruction des petites filles soubz la conduite et deppendance des dtes dames et de La Soeur Aînée Et pareillement lesdites Dames et soeur aisnee audict nom ont promis de la nourrir et entretenir saine et Malade, autant quelle persevera au service de ladicte Maison." This was the type of agreement that the schoolmistresses who came to Montreal in 1658 made with Marguerite Bourgeoys. (Ecrits, pp.60-62).

⁶⁵E.g. the Filles de Sainte-Geneviève. See "De l'esprit de la Communauté ...", art. 5.

⁶⁶"Reglement pour les filles Regentes de la ville de Saint Geniez de Rive d'olt" (1697), cited in C. Molette, op.cit., pp.416-18.

⁶⁷N. Barré, Statuts et règlements, chap. I, art. 5.

had been formally admitted, would not be forced to stay. "On la mettra de hors": this was the community's ultimate punishment.⁶⁸ It was not forced to maintain an unwilling subject. "Nous ne voulons point de prison chez nous, ni d'autres chaines que celles du pur amour," the sisters of Montreal told their Bishop.⁶⁹

As with individuals, so with institutes: the "monastic temptation" was always very real. Communities could be upgraded, so to speak, and accepted into recognized religious orders. The founders were only too aware of this. Precautions were frequently written into their constitutions, to guard against such an eventuality.

Bien qu'il soit tres Juste que cette communauté estant seculiere se tienne tousjours dans l'humilité et considere avec une Espece de veneration les ordres et les congregations Religieuses, les soeurs sont aussi obligées pour leur bien particulier a estimer beaucoup et preferer a tout autre cet Institut qu'elles ont choisy ... Et n'escouter jamais aucune tentation de le changer sous quelque pretexte que ce soit ... et dans cette veue les Superieurs et Superieures doivent tousjours Esloigner les propositions qui pouroient estre faites, d'oster ou retrancher les fonctions penibles ou exterieures de la Communauté ⁷⁰

⁶⁸Ibid., Chap. VI, art.4.

⁶⁹Soeur Sainte-Henriette, Histoire de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame (op.cit.), vol. II, p.73.

⁷⁰"De l'esprit de la Communauté des filles de Ste-Geneviève," (op.cit.,) chap. I, art. 9.

Frequently, acts of foundation stipulated that if the community came to be cloistered, all moneys should pass to another institute.⁷¹ The frequency of defensive strategies such as these provide more evidence of the precarious state of the filles séculières vis à vis the cloister, and the attraction which devout women of the seventeenth century continued to feel for the contemplative life.

However, the active communities never lacked for supporters. Not all women longed for "flight from the world". Many, active by nature, found their vocation in action. "Dieu seul m'a fait connaître que je ne devais point me rendre invisible pour le glorifier et que je pouvais être à lui sans m'ensevelir derrière les grilles d'un cloître," Anne de Xainctonge had written.⁷²

The Marquise de Portes, a friend of Olier, also received an inward sign that she was not meant for the cloister; "...elle éprouve un désir intérieur qui la porte à servir le prochain."⁷³

Many women were sincerely happy in the active life, for all

⁷¹E.g., Madame de Miramion's foundation of 17,000 francs was to pass to the Hôpital-Général if the community's constitutions were changed (A. de Bonneau-Avenant, op. cit., p.177). Similarly, Nicolas Roland's donation of 14,000 livres to the Soeurs du Saint-Enfant Jésus was to become null and void "en cas qu'après l'établissement de ladite maison et communauté, il arrive que les constitutions ... soient altérées ou changées et particulièrement sy on obligeoit les personnes qui composent et composeront cy après ladite communauté a une closture perpetuelle, a faire des voeux solennels...." (cited in L. Aroz, Nicolas Roland [op.cit.], p.183).

⁷²J. Morey, op.cit., vol. I, p.248.

⁷³J.-J.Olier, Lettres II, p.453. Quoted in M. Faillon, M.Olier, vol.I, p.632.

its hardship and social inferiority; indeed, they even managed to feel guilty about their happiness. When some schoolmistresses admitted that they often found an inspiration in their classrooms that they did not find in prayer, Barré calmed their scruples: "C'est ici qu'Il les visite et qu'Il les enrichit de ses faveurs, afin de leur faire entendre que c'est dans là où Il les veut."⁷⁴

Perhaps the most touching testimonial of the satisfaction that could be felt in active service came in the confession of a fille de la Charité on her deathbed:

J'avais trop de satisfaction quand j'allais dans les villages voir ces bonnes gens; je volais tant j'avais de joie à les servir.⁷⁵

⁷⁴Lettres spirituelles, p.353.

⁷⁵Vincent de Paul, op.cit., vol. IX, pp. 683-84.

3) The operation of the community.⁷⁶

Once they had adopted the status and rule of established "religion" in the early years of the seventeenth century, the new congregations at once adopted the monastic structures that went with it. All female monasteries were considered as minors, "en état de curatelle",⁷⁷ subject to the control of a canonical superior. In most cases this was the Bishop, or his delegate.⁷⁸ The superior had final responsibility for the community's spiritual and temporal well-being. A visitor, chosen from either the secular or the regular clergy, made periodic inspections to verify the regularity of the monastery.⁷⁹ Regular confessors

⁷⁶The material for the section concerned with the monasteries is taken mainly from the following works: M.-E. Aubry, "Le monastère nancéien de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame à Nancy aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles"; H. Derréal, op.cit.; P. Michel, "Une version modernisée des règles et constitutions des Filles de Notre-Dame"; M.-C. Gueudré, Histoire de l'Ordre des Ursulines en France; M.-A. Jégou, Les ursulines du faubourg Saint-Jacques à Paris 1607-1662. All these works have been cited in previous chapters.

⁷⁷B. Pocquet de Haut-Jussé, La vie temporelle des communautés de femmes à Rennes au XVII^e et au XVIII^e siècles (Paris: Librairie Ancien Honoré Champion, 1916), p.66.

⁷⁸The principal exception to this rule were the Carmelites, who depended on a masculine religious order: in some cases the Oratory, in others the reformed Carmelite friars. Sometimes they had to defend themselves against the bishops' efforts to impose control, as for instance in Rennes, where the Carmelites protested the canonical visits of the Bishop, which they argued contravened their exemption. (Ibid, p.68).

⁷⁹In some cases, the community had the right to nominate its visitor (M.-A. Jégou, op.cit., p.114).

were also appointed to the community, though the nuns' right to confess, at intervals, to another priest were respected.⁸⁰

The day-to-day government of the monastery was the responsibility of the Superieure, or prioress, elected by the community for a three-year term. She had extensive powers over every aspect of the monastery's life. She was assisted by a group of officières, some of whom she nominated, others of whom were elected. These officières met in council to oversee the finances and to decide matters of policy. The council's function was advisory rather than deliberative: the supérieure's decisions were almost always ratified. The community as a whole expressed itself only through the election of the supérieure and the officières.⁸¹ Religious communities, like the rest of society, acted with a strict sense of hierarchy.⁸²

For a short time at the beginning, this hierarchy was less rigid. The first nuns took a part in the original work of creating their community life. Newly-written règlements were frequently subjected to a trial period, during which the community was able to give advice and make suggestions. Thus the Chanoinesses

⁸⁰This was in accordance with the ruling of the Council of Trent, and it made it more difficult for individual confessors to control the religious. (M.-A. Aubry, op.cit., p.112) This became a matter of serious importance during the Jansenist controversy.

⁸¹Only part of the community participated in elections. Three, four, or sometimes more, years after profession, a nun would become a vocale: that is, she would be permitted a voice in the community. The novices, the young professes and the converses were without a voice.

⁸²M.-A. Jégou, op.cit., p.118.

de Saint-Augustin of Dieppe, in 1627, submitted various points of the rule to discussion by the novices, to know "ce qu'elles aimaient mieux, ou pour mieux dire ce qu'elles trouvaient qui serait le plus parfait."⁸³ The same process took place at Faubourg Saint-Jacques.⁸⁴ A great many of the customs which later had the force of law came first from suggestions from the nuns themselves.

However, within a few years of foundation, when the Constitutions had been definitively drawn up and approved, no major redirection of the community's life was possible, either by the nuns themselves, their superiors, or even by the Bishops.⁸⁵ The Rule, as constituted, fixed the life of the community, down to the smallest actions of everyday life.

The Rule was the community's charter. Every monastic community lived under one of the four approved rules -- Benedictine, Basilian, Augustinian, Franciscan. Most of the seventeenth-century feminine congregations adopted the Rule of Saint Augustine, because it was the most adaptable.⁸⁶ Its general statements on poverty,

⁸³Mère Juchereau, Annales (op.cit.), introduction, p.xxiv.

⁸⁴For an account of the process of drawing up the final rule, see M.-A. Jégou, op.cit., pp.118-22.

⁸⁵Thus when in 1615 Bérulle, in his capacity as visitor to the Carmelites at Châlons, attempted to impose a new vow, and new devotional practices, on them, he raised a furor among the nuns which only subsided when the innovation was suppressed (R. Lemoine, Le monde des religieux, pp. 281-82).

⁸⁶The exception was the company of Filles de Notre-Dame, who adopted the Benedictine Rule. See above, chap. III.

prayer, chastity, humility, obedience and fraternal correction formed a framework on which their more elaborate and up-to-date règlements could be built. Every event in the community's life was subject to regulation, from the admission of novices to the burial of the dead. Every nun was expected to learn her rule by heart, and to hear it read at regular intervals. Thus even the minutest details were the subject of general knowledge.

The Rule protected the community by providing an authoritative answer to all challenges, either from without or from within. Nuns could appeal to their Rule, if need arose, even against the Ordinary.⁸⁷ However, the disadvantage of so permanent an authority was that it encouraged scrupulosity. "L'idéal de la perfection est trop souvent confondu avec un fidelité littérale à la Règle et aux Constitutions."⁸⁸ Once fixed in writing, the life of the monastery ceased to change and grow.⁸⁹

The imposition of monasticism entailed the imposition of a monastic economy. The house had henceforth to be complete in itself. A whole gamut of minor offices was necessary, to assist the community's physical and spiritual functions.

⁸⁷Thus the Ursulines of Nantes could challenge the Bishop's right to impose a supérieure on them, without election: "Nous voulons vivre et mourir dans l'obéissance à nos règles, bulle et constitutions apostoliques." They won their argument. (M.-C. Gueudré, op.cit., vol. II, p.208).

⁸⁸R. Devos, Les Visitandines d'Annecy (op.cit.), p.55.

⁸⁹The Rule of the Ursulines of Paris, after going a forty-year period of trial and adaptation, was fixed in its final form in 1640. It then remained unchanged until the Revolution. (M.-A. Jégou, op.cit., p.119).

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"Supérieure, assistante, maîtresse des novices, intendante, prefecte, maîtresse des externes et des pensionnaires, Procureuse, maitresse de chœur, Sacristine, tourrières, portières, servantes de table, boulangière, maîtresse de l'ouvrier, Vestiaire, Lingière, Infirmière, apoticaire, lectrice des tables, celle qui corrige les fautes qui se commettent en la Lecture de Table, Greneriere, Jardinier, Bibliothecaire, auditrice de parloir, excitatrice, ..."; these offices, and others, many of which required assistants, absorbed much of the personnel of the monastery. "On soignera que la Monastère ait toutes les Officières dont il a besoin, car d'elles dépendent le bon gouvernement."⁹⁰ In addition to the choir nuns, each community admitted a number of converses, or lay sisters, to do the heavy work,⁹¹ and one or two tourières to perform the outside errands. About half the members of an average monastery had occupations other than teaching.⁹²

This considerable population was dependent on the monastery for its support. From the moment of profession, a religious

⁹⁰Constitutions de Nancy, 1647, quoted in M.-E. Aubry, op.cit., p.103.

⁹¹The number of converses was relatively low: approximately one to every seven or eight choir nuns.

⁹²E.g. the Ursulines of Rouen (1690) numbered seventy-five professed religious, of whom forty were active teachers (A.D. Seine-Maritime Ser.D. 404). The Congrégation de Notre-Dame of Reims (1668-70) had thirty-one choir nuns, of whom sixteen were teachers (Y. Poutet, Les origines lasalliennes, vol.I, p.394). In Dieppe, at the end of the century, fifteen nuns out of an Ursuline community of fifty-five were involved in teaching the 400-500 externes. (C. Robillard de Beaurepaire, Recherches (op.cit.), p.224)

and her community were committed to each other for life. Monasteries had; therefore, to anticipate periods of support for members who were no longer productive. It was essential for a well-run house to secure its sources of income. These fell under three headings: gifts and endowments; earnings; dowries.

At the inception of every religious community there was a founder (or in the case of a feminine community, more often a foundress). This person presided over a very difficult birthing process: finding and fetching religious to form the community, buying property, building or remodelling the house, finding at least the basic furniture, securing all the necessary legal authorizations.⁹³ The reward for this effort, on which the early success of the house depended, was the title of founder, and the privileges that went with it.⁹⁴

⁹³E.g., Madame Boullay, foundress of the Ursuline monastery in Rouen, obtained for it a papal bull, letters patent, episcopal approbation, municipal approbation and an arrêt from the parlement of Normandie. She then went to Paris for three religious to begin the establishment. For this, and a donation of 8000 livres in capital and 200 livres in rentes, she received the title of foundress in 1619. (Ursulines of Rouen, Declaration de lestat du temporel, A.D. Seine-Maritime, D.404.)

⁹⁴These privileges were sometimes expensive to the community, either financially, or because of continuing obligations which ran counter to the good government of the house. Particularly difficult was the founder's right, sometimes hereditary, to nominate clients or relatives to the community. In 1627, the Ursulines of Le Havre received a donation of 6000 livres from Denis Barbey, "à condition que sa fille Marguerite sera considérée comme fondatrice, reçue et entretenue, sa vie durant, si elle veut faire profession." Marguerite went on to become supérieure of the house. (A.D. Seine Inferieure Sér. D. 394) Also see B. Pocquet du Haut-Jussé, op.cit., pp.25 ff, p.87 for further examples.

two ways: by handwork of various kinds, which they sold to the public,⁹⁸ and by taking in pensionnaires.

Pensionnaires could be older women, retired to the monastery to end their days, or involuntary guests, incarcerated for religious, political or moral reasons.⁹⁹ However for the most part they were young girls between the ages of five and eighteen, for whom the monastery was a school. Their pension varied with the social quality of the monastery. Thus the Ursulines in the little convent of Maringues charged 100 livres per year,¹⁰⁰ the Ursulines of Besançon 150 - 200 francs,¹⁰¹ the Ursulines of Paris, 240 livres.¹⁰² The number of pensionnaires was seldom higher than thirty or forty, and often as few as three or four.

⁹⁸Handwork consisted mainly of needlework, lace, and weaving. Mme. Gueudré mentions one consignment sent from an Ursuline convent to a local merchant which brought in 15,000 livres. (op.cit., vol. II, pp.151-52). The Ursulines of Besançon specialized in banners, scapulars and other embroideries for the Cathedral. (J. Morey, op.cit., vol. II, pp. 373-74). The nuns also made sweets and preserves. In Bordeaux, the Filles de Notre-Dame were advised by the Bishop "à filer la laine, à faire des dentelles et des passements qui se pourront vendre et apporter un grand soulagement à leur pauvreté." (L. Entraygues, op.cit., p.251).

⁹⁹Madame de Maintenon, who as a child was a Huguenot, was boarded in Ursuline convents in Niort and in Paris. She was treated with great tact, and even allowed to dispute religion with a priest. (See H. de Leymont, Madame de Sainte-Beuve [op.cit.], pp.338-41.)

¹⁰⁰J. Perrel, "Les filles à l'école avant la Révolution (op.cit.), p.300.

¹⁰¹J. Morey, op.cit., vol.II, p.372. The franc d'argent was worth approximately as much as the livre.

¹⁰²M.-A. Jegou, op.cit., p. 102. During the same period the Visitation of Riom was charging a pension of 360 livres. (J. Perrel, loc.cit.).

Foundations were usually exhausted fairly rapidly. Further gifts, from the same or other donors, were quickly ploughed back into the temporal, in the form of new buildings or acquisitions of land, or embellishments to the chapel.⁹⁵ The day-to-day running of the house, therefore, was dependent on other resources. By the terms of their contracts with the municipalities, the teaching congregations were forbidden to beg. They were also required to provide free schooling, an obligation to which they were usually firmly held by the municipalities. "Les religieuses n'ont été instituées que dans les vues du bien public de la Cité," ran a declaration in Montbrison at the time of the Revolution, "c'est-à-dire pour instruire et enseigner gratuitement les filles pauvres."⁹⁶ There was little, or more often no, opportunity for revenue from that direction.⁹⁷ The nuns earned money in

⁹⁵In 1660, a legacy to the Ursulines of Faubourg Saint-Jacques from the duchesse de Ventendour was directed towards a new tabernacle. There was a subtle competition between communities in the decoration of their chapels, and the Ursulines felt that they were falling behind: "... Cela peut donner suiet aux séculiers de penser que nous n'avons grand soing du service de Dieu; et puis il n'y a que nous qui faisons ces retardements comme il se voit aux monastères establis depuis le nostre, qui ne font difficulté aucune de bastir." (Registre des Actes du chapitre, 1641, quoted in M.-A. Jégou, op.cit., p.98).

⁹⁶A.D.L. série L, quoted in P.-R. Gaussin and M. Vallet, "L'instruction secondaire des filles en Forez au XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles" (op.cit.), p.461.

⁹⁷Most communities began their free teaching as soon as they were established; e.g., the Filles de Notre-Dame of La Flèche, who arrived in the city on October 5, 1622, and opened their free classes on October 10. (P. Calendini, op.cit., pp.74, 90).

Thus while they certainly constituted an important source of revenue, it was not enough in itself to support the monastery.

The principal source of income on which the religious communities depended was the dowries of their members. These, like the price of the pensions, varied with the social quality of the monastery. In 1662, the average dowry required by the monastery of Faubourg Saint-Jacques was 10,000 livres.¹⁰³ This was 2000 livres less than was asked at the Visitation of the rue Saint-Antoine,¹⁰⁴ but a great deal more than the average for Ursulines across the country, which ranged between 1200 and 2500 livres.¹⁰⁵

The normal practice, if there was no immediate use for the dowry, was to invest it, either in property within the city, or in land, or -- as was most often the case -- in constitutions de rente. These last were, in actual fact, disguised loans: the buyer advanced a lump sum to the purchaser, in return for which he received regular interest.¹⁰⁶ Thus many monasteries became bankers for their neighbourhood, and some -- depending on the success of their dealings -- became rich.¹⁰⁷ However, a decision

¹⁰³Ibid., p.103.

¹⁰⁴R. Devos, op.cit., p.170.

¹⁰⁵G. Fagniez, La Femme et la société française (op.cit.), p.32.

¹⁰⁶A good discussion of constitutions de rente, and their importance in the monastic economy, may be found in B. Pocquet du Haut-Jussé, op.cit., pp. 101 ff.

¹⁰⁷The Visitation of Saint-Etienne was one of these successful houses. (P. Gaussin and M. Vallet, op.cit., p.469).

to build onto the cloister, or to buy another property, could quickly turn the lender into a borrower. Communities moved regularly between one and the other activity.

The dependence of the new communities on the money market rather than on land led them into straitened circumstances as the century progressed. By mid-century inflation was beginning to affect their income. In the monastery of Faubourg Saint-Jacques, the building of a new dormitory wing, long anticipated, had to be delayed "acauze de la cherté de blé extraordinaire, qui a este."¹⁰⁸ After 1689, the dépositaire was forced to borrow from time to time on the latest dowries, in order to pay the food bills.¹⁰⁹ Other houses, less well endowed or less prudently managed, went into debt, while some closed altogether.¹¹⁰ The monasteries' difficulties were aggravated by the government's search for revenues: first, by the reduction in the rentes paid by the Treasury,¹¹¹ then by its inclusion of the teaching congregations in the payment of aides, then by its demands for back payment for the rights of amortissement, which religious houses had usually taken for granted. In 1691, the back payment owed by the monastery of Faubourg Saint-Jacques was assessed at 26,000 livres, while that of smaller houses was assessed

¹⁰⁸Conclusion des Assemblies du Conseil, 8/iv/1661, quoted in M.-A. Jégou, op.cit., p.99.

¹⁰⁹M.-C. Gueudré, op.cit., vol.II, p.141.

¹¹⁰Ibid., vol. II, p.144, p.136.

¹¹¹Ibid., vol. II, p.132.

accordingly.¹¹² The instability of money, and the raids of the government on what they had long believed to be their exemptions, threw many communities into permanent financial embarrassment.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, there were 2000 feminine monasteries in France. Around five hundred of these were miserably poor.¹¹³ Various reasons have been cited for their distress: the incompetence of superiors, the carelessness of bishops, the exigencies of royal fiscal policy. However, it may also be suggested that the economic structures of monasteries did not accord well with new realities. They had been founded and furnished during a period of indulgence, mostly during the regency of Marie de Medicis, the reign of Louis XIII, and the regency of Anne of Austria. From the 1660s on they found themselves under growing pressure from the royal government and the parlements, which saw them as burdens on the economy. At the same time, private charity began to dry up. The elites began to turn away

¹¹²E.g., Montluçon, 23,000 livres; Montbrison, 12,000 livres; Rennes, 10,666 livres. (*Ibid.*, vol. II, p.138; B. Pocquet du Haut-Jussé, *op.cit.*, p.127).

¹¹³"Au début du XVIII^e siècle, il y avait en France deux mille monastères féminins. Environ cinq cents, soit le quart, étaient réduits à la misère." (R. Lemoine, Le monde des religieux, p.369). The Law collapse would administer the coup de grâce to many of these struggling communities (*Ibid.*, p.370).

from the foundations that they had so enthusiastically espoused.¹¹⁴ Unlike the older monasteries, the new houses had not, for the most part, sufficient land holdings to act as a cushion against hard times. The maintenance and improvement of their buildings depended on donations which were now much less generous than before. However, their costs were permanently built in; their nuns and pensionnaires had to be fed, their buildings maintained. From the time that the dépositaire began to borrow on the latest dowry to pay the butcher, they were in danger.

Perceptions were changing. The age of mysticism had passed, the age of moralism had begun.¹¹⁵ For a public increasingly concerned with social welfare, and decreasingly impressed by the utility of la vie parfaite, monasteries did not offer good value. "Les filles de la congregation sont pres de soixante pour faire une Ecole; on ne demande pas un si grand nombre en faire quatre," wrote Roland, comparing the work of his sisters in Reims to that of the local monastery.¹¹⁶ Vincent de Paul had made the same observation regarding the cloistered hospitalières of Paris: the Filles de Place Royale numbered forty religious

¹¹⁴According to Jean de Viguerie, families were less enthusiastic about the religious life after 1660. ("La Vocation sacerdotale et religieuse", [op.cit.], p.34). Where families no longer gave their sons and daughters, they no longer gave their money. Professor Dubé has pointed out an added disadvantage suffered by women's monasteries: as a rule, their share of charitable donations was smaller than that of their male counterparts.

¹¹⁵J. Le Brun, in L. J. Rogier et al., Nouvelle histoire de l'Eglise (op.cit.), vol. III, p. 424.

¹¹⁶Un précurseur méconnu (op.cit.), p.7.

to twenty-five sickbeds, the other hospitalières twenty-six to sixteen -- whereas a handful of Filles de la Charité working in a parish were caring for up to sixty patients at a time.¹¹⁷

The monasteries' hard times paralleled the rise of the filles séculières. The basic difference in the nature of their community, and the terms of their recruitment, made the latter more congenial to the mentalité of the times of Louis XIV, and therefore more attractive to charitable donors.

-- The filles séculières were organized in a number of different ways.¹¹⁸ In some cases their institute was "founded", which meant that their house and their income were assured to them, in return for the performance of certain recognized duties. In others, they remained clear of permanent commitment, reserving their right to enter and leave employment as the conditions warranted. The most famous exercise of this right took place in 1694, when the group of Dames de Saint-Maur who were invited to establish the school at Saint-Cyr withdrew to avoid submitting to clausura.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷Vincent de Paul, entretien of 29/ix/ 1655, in op.cit., vol. X, p.114.

¹¹⁸The examples used here come mainly from the Filles de la Charité, the soeurs Barré (i.e., the Providence of Rouen and the Dames de Saint-Maur of Paris); the Soeurs du Saint-Enfant-Jésus of Reims, the Filles de Sainte-Geneviève of Paris, and the Congrégation of Montreal. It should be emphasized, however, that these were only a few among many secular institutes small and large which existed in the seventeenth century; and that there were significant variations in structure which cannot be enumerated here.

¹¹⁹See above, chap. VI, fn. 146.

As a community grew, it became necessary to maintain at least a mother house, where young sisters could be trained and old sisters retire. But the bulk of their work was done elsewhere -- either within the neighbourhood or across the country. Therefore the communities remained simple in their structures. A supérieure who was sometimes elected,¹²⁰ sometimes appointed by the trustees,¹²¹ governed the community with the same moral authority as did the prioresses of the monasteries. No seventeenth-century community could have conceived of a life without obedience to authority. "Une Communauté n'est qu'une Babilonne si l'obéissance n'y règle et ordonne toutes choses."¹²² Even in the two-member communities of the Filles de la Charité, one sister was named as superior over the other.¹²³ However, a new stress was laid on the equality of the sisters: "en sorte que la Supérieure, après sa démission, puisse être employée à tous les offices de la maison selon sa capacité."¹²⁴ A swift rotation was sometimes recommended; "par

¹²⁰As in the case of the Reims community: See Soeurs du Saint-Enfant-Jésus, Constitutions, Chap.V, art.3.

¹²¹As in the case of the soeurs Barré. See N.Barré, Statuts et règlements, Chap. IX, art.3.

¹²²Union Chrestienne, Constitutions (1673), p.20.

¹²³Vincent de Paul, entretien of 30/iv/1643, in op.cit., vol. IX, pp. 122-23.

¹²⁴Ecrits de Mère Bourgeoys, p.221-22.

ce moyen les Supérieures devenant inférieures, pourront espérer de devenir Supérieures en vertus et partant en vérité."¹²⁵

The number of officières was kept to a minimum. Two assistants, a sacristan, a portress, a "dispensière ou cuisinière"¹²⁶ were as much as was necessary for these small working houses; and indeed, many communities had to do with less.¹²⁷ All the sisters, including the supérieure, were expected to help with the chores.¹²⁸ The stately order of the monastery was exchanged for mundane efficiency, because the women knew that their main work was elsewhere.

Some of the houses were provided from the outset with the revenues to support their work. These funds could be administered, in the tradition of the hôpitaux généraux from which many communities took their start, by a board of trustees. This was the case with the Magneuses of Reims,¹²⁹ and with the soeurs grises of

¹²⁵N. Barré, op.cit., chap. IX, art.2. An annual rotation was also recommended by Mlle Le Gras for the filles de la Charité (Mlle Le Gras, Lettres, vol. II, p.657).

¹²⁶N. Barré, op.cit., chaps. X - XIII.

¹²⁷Thus the soeurs Barré were advised to have an économe in communities of four sisters. Where there were fewer than four, the supérieure kept the accounts herself. (Chanoine Farcy, op.cit., p.111).

¹²⁸Ibid., chap. X, arts. 18,19.

¹²⁹A small community in Reims, founded by Barbe Martin, Mme de Magneux, to train young women as servants. The administration of the house remained in the Martin family. See P. Gosset, op.cit., p.13.

Rouen.¹³⁰ It was also the case with the Providence of Rouen.¹³¹ They could also be administered by the sisters themselves, as in the case of the Soeurs du Saint Enfant-Jésus of Reims,¹³² and the Congrégation of Montreal.¹³³ It should be remarked that the passage of time, and the proliferation of communities, had succeeded in allaying early fears about feminine incompetence in money matters. By the latter part of the century, both cloistered nuns and filles séculières could be found managing their own communities' affairs.

Many other filles séculières were salaried workers. . Each fille de la Charité or maîtresse charitable was sent out to work for an agreed payment, to be made to the Institute by the local hospital, parish, or municipality that had requested her. The arrangement varied from case to case. Sometimes it was provided through an individual foundation,¹³⁴ sometimes by a

¹³⁰C. Robillard de Beaurepaire, op.cit., vol. II, pp. 234-40. .

¹³¹Chanoine Farcy, op.cit., pp. 56-57.

¹³²See the Propositions présentées par MM Jean-Baptiste de la Salle et Nicolas Rogier (1678) concerning the establishment of the community: "... Que les Filles de ladite communauté administreront leurs biens par elles mesmes et en recevront le revenu comme font celles des communautés régulières ... sans qu'elles puissent estre obligées d'en rendre aucun compte qu'a monseigneur l'archevesque ... " (L. de M. Aroz, op.cit., p.38).

¹³³See above, chap. V.

¹³⁴This foundation could be very small. In Saint-Saturnin près d'Aumâle, for instance, a foundation of 50 livres' rente for one sister was set up in 1698. Since the sisters normally came in pairs, at least, this left the rest of the money to be raised in some other way. (A.D. Seine-Maritime D. 436)

direct payment. The city of Toulouse paid its dames de Saint-Maur "cent quatre-vingts livres à chacune et cent livres pour leur servante."¹³⁵ The usual salary was 150 livres, plus board and lodging.¹³⁶ This was a bargain, as many charitable donors must have seen. A schoolmistress was paid considerably less than a schoolmaster.¹³⁷ The Filles de la Charité went into the hospitals on contract, or, if they worked in the parishes, were paid by the local ladies' confréries, first for the care of the sick and, second, for the opening of a classroom for poor girls. They were never well paid. In their spare time, they did handwork and spinning, to raise money for the institute.¹³⁸

¹³⁵Ordinance of February 22, 1689, quoted in A.-M. Lembrez, op.cit., p.162.

¹³⁶The three Dames de Saint-Maur who were established in Bonnetable, in 1690, were provided with a vegetable garden, bread, meat and wood, in addition to their pay. For this they taught 200 children on a regular basis (300 during Lent and before First Communion), and visited the sick. (A.N.S. 7051: Etat de la maison de Bonnetable, quoted in H. de Grèzes, op.cit., p. 364).

¹³⁷See the testament of the Duchesse de Guise, 1686: "J'ordonne que tous les maistres et maistresses d'écoles qui se trouveront par moy establis dans mes terres, au jour de mon décès, y soient entretenus à perpétuité à raison de 200 livres pour chaque maistre d'écolles, et de 50 écus pour chacune des maistresses." (Quoted in ibid., p.609).

¹³⁸Vincent de Paul, op.cit., vol. IX, pp.51-52. This was certainly the practice among the sisters of the Congrégation of Montreal. See above, chap. V.

4) Recruitment.

The original goal of the founders of the congregations had been to choose their membership without reference to money. "Ni l'or, ni l'argent, ne font les bons monastères," Anne de Vesvres had written, "mais les vertus que les sujets apportent et qu'ils y exercent."¹³⁹ "Vous aurez toujours des filles assez qui se présenteront en vos monastères," Pierre Fourier had cautioned his religious, "Ne vous mettez jamais en hasard pour l'argent."¹⁴⁰ Mère de Chantal had written: "Il faudra ... regarder plus aux esprits qui seront propres que non pas aux richesses."¹⁴¹ François de Sales had looked forward to a day when monastic revenues could be limited, "affin qu'en cela mesme la mediocrité soit suivie, et qu'il n'ayt nulle superfluité de biens en la Congrégation."¹⁴² Jacqueline de Chesnel, first superior of the Filles de Notre-Dame at La Flèche, desired the same thing for the same reason:

Elle disoit que si la maison estoit rentée suffisamment pour la nourriture et l'entretien des religieuses, elle ne prendroit point de dot pour les filles qui entreroient dans la Religion, mais seulement des pensions, d'autant que les grands biens temporels ruinent les maisons

¹³⁹Quoted in M.-C. Gueudré, op.cit., vol. II, p.217.

¹⁴⁰Lettres vol. II, p.158, quoted in M.Chalendard, La promotion de la femme (op.cit.), p.84.

¹⁴¹Quoted in F. de Sales, op.cit., vol.XVII, p.378, fn.4.

¹⁴²Ibid., vol. XXV, p.61.

religieuses, et il est autant à craindre de les voir trop riches que trop pauvres.¹⁴³ ✓

However, the financial equilibrium which the founders anticipated did not materialize, and considerations of dowry came more and more to dominate the choice of novices. The reception of a new postulant was preceded by a bargaining session between her family and the économe of the monastery,¹⁴⁴ in which the latter's hand was strengthened as vacancies in the community filled up and the waiting list of aspirants grew. Some women of modest means were still accepted as choir nuns, but these became ever more the exception.¹⁴⁵ In fact, dowries tended to increase in size as time passed, in spite of the Crown's orders that they be strictly limited.¹⁴⁶ They were too important to the monastic economy to be foregone.

¹⁴³Quoted in P. Calendini, op.cit., p.94.

¹⁴⁴See B. Pocquet du Haut-Jussé, op.cit., p.78.

¹⁴⁵In fact, women of good family and no fortune often entered as converses, like the novice in the Visitation for whom "une nombreuse famille ne permit à Mr. son père de lui donner une Dotte, pour être d'un autre rang que celui des Soeurs Domestiques" (R. Devos, op.cit., p.250).

¹⁴⁶There was a growing feeling, from the 1630s onwards, that the religious orders were devouring too many private fortunes. An infamous case involving a sixteen-year-old heiress, Marie de Castelnau, whose dowry was set at 30,000 livres by the Ursulines of Faubourg Saint-Jacques, turned public opinion against the religious, and inspired the Parlement of Paris to order the elimination of all dowries in favour of life pensions. (M.-A. Jégou, op.cit., pp. 89-90). However, dowries continued to be negotiated. In 1693, a royal proclamation ordered congregations to limit themselves to life pensions of 350-500 livres, plus initial payments of 1200-2000 livres. The congregations evaded the law, by no longer passing formal contracts. (B. Pocquet du Haut-Jussé, op.cit., pp.85-86).

Dowries served a social, as well as a financial, purpose. They provided the means by which aspirants could be sorted out according to rank and income. In seventeenth-century France, the women's monasteries were an integral part of the social fabric, "quasi-necessary for the preservation of the equilibrium of families."¹⁴⁷ Depending on their location, the monasteries became the preserve of whatever families constituted the dominant society: noble and bourgeois-merchant in cities like Rouen, "nobles et nobles hommes" in Blois,¹⁴⁸ while in parliamentary cities like Rennes, "it was the parliamentary families above all that populated the cloisters."¹⁴⁹ The monasteries offered an honourable "state" for their daughters. In return, the families formed an extensive support system, on which the monasteries could draw for all their needs.¹⁵⁰

The close relationship between the monastery and the pious family provides a key to the rise and decline of monastic vocations. Throughout most of the seventeenth century, after the initial phase of foundation was over, the majority of entrants into the feminine religious life were young girls. They were frequently fresh out of school -- as often as not, the pensionnats of the

¹⁴⁷R. Devos, op.cit., p.259. (My translation). Also see above, chap. VI.

¹⁴⁸M.-T. Notter, "Les ordres religieux blésois" (op.cit.), p.189.

¹⁴⁹B. du Haut-Jussé, op.cit., p.70.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., p.72.

very monasteries which they were now entering.¹⁵¹ This was perfectly legal if they had reached sixteen; according to canon and civil law, they were then capable of making their profession.¹⁵² But the monasteries interpreted the law liberally, and many girls were professed before the canonical age.

Ces pauvres enfans sont fourrez dans ces prisons perpetuelles [wrote Oudart Coquault]. On les y introduit dès 10, 11, et 12 ans, - vesture à 13 ou 14, et profession à 15 au plus tard. Plus de quatre ans après elles ne savent ce qu'elles ont fait; c'est à vingt-deux, vingt-trois, vingt-quatre et vingt-cinq ans qu'elles commencent à reconnaître de quel sexe elles sont.¹⁵³

Even sixteen seemed to many contemporaries an early age for so final a decision. Only too clearly, the interests of the girls themselves were confounded with the piety, or the self-interest, or both, of their families. This is not to say that they were forced into religious life. The Council of Trent had condemned forced vocations, and the Church guarded against

¹⁵¹Thus a study of 403 Visitandine nuns in the century 1667-1767 shows that two-thirds of them were former pupils of Visitandine convents. (R. Chartier, M.-M. Compère, D. Julia, L'Éducation en France (op.cit.), p.235) Similarly, in Faubourg Saint-Jacques in 1662, only nineteen out of fifty-eight religious had not attended the convent prior to entry (M.-A. Jégou, op.cit., p.107).

¹⁵²R. Pillorget, "Vocation religieuse et état en France aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles" (op.cit.), p.9.

¹⁵³Oudart Coquault, op.cit., vol.I, pp.379-80. Coquault, although extreme in his dislike of monks and nuns, was not alone: many writers, including prominent churchmen, wrote against forced, or at least managed, vocations. The pedagogical literature of the eighteenth century was full of "incessant complaints" on the subject. See J. de Viguerie, "La vocation sacerdotale et religieuse", p.31.

them by ruling that the novice must be questioned by a representative of the Bishop before profession. But they were frequently "conditioned" from early childhood.¹⁵⁴ According to Vincent de Paul, this made for insipid, unmotivated religious. "Elles n'ont pas une vraie vocation, ayant été mises là par leurs parents et y étant demeurées par des respects humains."¹⁵⁵

Family pressure must help to explain the huge burgeoning of feminine vocations in the first four decades of the seventeenth century, and the falling-away which occurred thereafter. This pattern is revealed in the monastic books of profession. A study of entrances into religion of some 850 nuns during the period 1610-1695 shows the number peaking in the 1620s and 1630s.¹⁵⁶ During these same years, the average age of entrants dropped, from twenty-four in the earliest years to under eighteen.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, from the mid 1620s to the early 1670s, more than half the entrants were aged seventeen or less; approximately one-quarter were fifteen or under.¹⁵⁸ These were for the most part pensionnaires, moving straight into religious life within the

¹⁵⁴Jean de Viguerie examines this conditioning in his study, "La Vocation sacerdotale et religieuse", pp. 32-33. It frequently began at birth, when a child might be vowed to God.

¹⁵⁵Op.cit., vol. V, pp.563-64.

¹⁵⁶See Appendix B, Graph III.

¹⁵⁷See Appendix B, Graph IV. This graph is based on 678 cases.

¹⁵⁸See Appendix B, Graph V.

walls of the only home that they had known for most of their lives.¹⁵⁹

The same study shows that by the end of the 1660s the number of entrants into religion was in decline. This supports the thesis of Jean de Viguerie, that the phase of positive promotion of religious vocations by families ended in the 1660s; that from now on, families were more likely to oppose than encourage religious vocations.¹⁶⁰ At the same time, the average age of entrants was rising.¹⁶¹ Families of quality turned against schoolgirl vocations; and with that the rush into the monasteries ended.

The secular institutes recruited, for the most part, from a different population.¹⁶² "La plupart sont des filles de laboureurs ou d'artisans," said Vincent de Paul of the Filles de la Charité,

¹⁵⁹One of the strict rules of the monastic pensionnats was that the children were seldom, if ever, allowed to go home. Thus from the age of five, six or seven to seventeen, pensionnaires might never see their parents (J. Perrel, "Les filles à l'école" (op.cit.), p.305).

¹⁶⁰"C'est seulement à partir de 1660, que l'opposition de la famille à l'entrée en religion devient une chose ordinaire." "La vocation religieuse" (op.cit.), p.34.

¹⁶¹See Appendix B, Graph IV.

¹⁶²No study of the origins of the filles séculières is possible, because they did not mark their entrance into religion by a formal profession. Where records of community members do exist, as in the document signed by some thirty schoolmistresses in Rouen in 1669 (Chanoine Farcy, op.cit., pp.37-38), or in the proces verbal of vows taken by the soeurs du Saint-Enfant-Jésus of Reims (Arch. Soeurs de l'Enfant-Jésus, carton 5), "good" names do appear. But the proportion of upper-class, or bourgeois, women to working women remains a matter of conjecture.

"et s'il y a quelque noblesse, cela est rare."¹⁶³ In fact, the filles séculières seem to have included women from all walks of life. Even though they often accepted a dowry,¹⁶⁴ the institutes did not depend on it for their choice of subjects. The humble working life of the filles séculières was a source of strength to their Institutes, because it freed them from the tyranny of heavy expenses. Superiors were able, if they wished, to dispense with dowry requirements. "Quand les filles sont bien appelées et propres pour la Communauté, elles portent leur dot et attirent les grâces de Dieu dans la maison," wrote Marguerite Bourgeoys.¹⁶⁵

Because the women worked for their living, they did not require preliminary funding. "Il faut qu'elles apportent de quoi s'habiller pour la première fois avec leur linge et leur petites hardes, ensemble quelque argent pour s'en retourner, en cas qu'elles ne se puissent accomoder à la manière de vie de cette petite Compagnie," Vincent de Paul wrote for the benefit

¹⁶³Conference of 9/VI/1658. Op.cit., vol. X, p.509.

¹⁶⁴Roland made the point that a woman with means would be defrauding the community, if she failed to bring any money in with her: "je n'estimerai pas qu'une fille eût une bonne vocation pour y être admise, si elle voulait enrichir sa famille en lui laissant son bien pour charger la Communauté de sa personne." (Un précurseur méconnu, p.29).

¹⁶⁵Ecrits, p.286. Neither Bishop Saint-Vallier nor Tronson were impressed by this argument. The rule drawn up in 1697 for the Congrégation de Notre-Dame of Montreal stipulated dowries.

of new postulants.¹⁶⁶ Criteria as modest as this imprinted an essentially humble character upon the communities that set them. Indeed, the problem that the secular institutes faced was one of preventing women from entering their communities simply as an escape from poverty. Hard work and austere living conditions were seen as the best cure for that.¹⁶⁷ The filles séculières, for all the rigours of their lives, were often no worse off than they would have been in "the world".¹⁶⁸

5) Mobility.

The filles séculières differed from cloistered nuns in another important respect: they were mobile -- a sure sign of the modest social standing of their profession. They were free to go "out of doors" in the performance of their work. In spite of the proven usefulness of this freedom, it remained a sensitive subject throughout the century. Society questioned the regularity, and even the moral character, of religious women who were not enclosed. "On nous demande pourquoi nous aimons mieux être vagabondes que d'être cloîtrées, le cloître étant la conservation

¹⁶⁶Letter to Guillaume Deluile, Arras, 18/II/1657, op.cit., vol. VI, p. 189. Indeed, Mlle Le Gras' chief problem was to weed out "celles qui pensent venir à Paris...." out of curiosity rather than real vocation. Mlle Le Gras, op.cit. p.537.

¹⁶⁷See above, chap. VI.

¹⁶⁸This was a point which Mlle Le Gras often made in her letters. "combien de pareilles à vous sont demeurées dans le monde qui souffrent beaucoup, ou sont engagées à ne travailler que pour la vie corporelle." (op.cit., vol.I, p. 615).

de notre sexe?" wrote Marguerite Bourgeoys.¹⁶⁹ The secular institutes took defensive action, by circumscribing the women's outdoor activity with every possible precaution. The sisters were never to go out without the Supérieure's permission. They were not to visit, nor eat with, family and friends. Wherever possible, they were to travel in twos.

Allant par la rue, elles marcheront modestement et la vue basse, ne s'arrêteront point pour parler à personne, particulièrement de divers sexe, s'il n'y a grande nécessité; encore faudra-t-il qu'elles coupent court et expédient promptement.¹⁷⁰

Because their life "exposed them to many occasions of sin", postulants were not usually accepted under the age of eighteen.¹⁷¹ As Vincent de Paul pointed out, "quand une religieuse voudrait faire mal, la grille est fermée"; for the filles, however, their only grille was the fear of God, their only cloister, the city streets.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹op.cit., p.81. Her answer was simple: "La Saint Vierge n'a jamais été cloîtrée." (Ibid., p.82).

¹⁷⁰Rule of the confrérie of the Filles de la Charité. Vincent de Paul, op.cit., vol. XIII, p.555.

¹⁷¹Filles de Sainte-Geneviève, Constitutions (1679), fols. 78, 2.

¹⁷²This famous passage runs as follows: "A raison qu'elles sont plus exposées aux occasions de peche que les religieuses obligées à la clôture, n'ayant pour monastère que la maison des malades et celle où réside la superieure, pour cellule une chambre de louage, pour chapelle l'église paroissiale, pour cloître les rues de la ville, pour clôture l'obeissance, ne devant aller que chez les malades où aux lieux nécessaires pour leur service, pour grille la crainte de Dieu, pour voile la sainte modestie ... elles doivent avoir autant et plus de vertu que si elles étaient professes dans un Ordre religieux." Vincent de Paul, op.cit. vol.X, p.661.

Some of the filles séculières took their mobility further, and travelled to postings across the country. "Elles ont aussi une dépendance si entière de leur Supérieur, qu'elles sont prêtes au moindre ordre de changer de lieux sans resistance, d'aller indifféremment par tout," wrote Barré.¹⁷³ In seventeenth-century minds, this "indifference" was heroic. The rule of stability which bound religious to their monasteries, and which seems to the modern mind so inhibiting, was, in fact, a comfort that many women were loath to abandon.¹⁷⁴ Monastic communities were close-knit, intensely loyal, and unused to the idea of separation;¹⁷⁵ and even where the nuns themselves were prepared to move, as for instance for the purpose of founding a new house, their families often resisted the idea strenuously.

The communities of filles séculières which expanded beyond a single house still tended to remain within narrow regional bounds. The foundations of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth

¹⁷³Arch. Dames de Saint-Maur (Paris), "Memoire instructif", p.2.

¹⁷⁴Fourier had attempted to make his sisters mobile, and ready to go wherever they were needed. However, his design was frustrated, not only by the bishops, but by the nuns themselves, who had no desire to break up their communities. See above, Chapter III.

¹⁷⁵Thus the Ursulines annals describe the distress of the Paris community when Mère Saint-Dominique was sent to head the new convent of Rouen: "Les Religieuses qu'elle avoit presque toutes conduittes dans la Novitiate fondaient en larmes; les pensionnaires dont elle estoit Maistresse generale iettoient les haut cris, les unes et les autres la regrettant, de mesme que si en sa personne elles eussent perdu leur propre Mere." (Ursulines of Québec, archives: Annales manuscrites du premier couvent de Paris pendant les 50 premières années de son existence, 1612-1662, fol. 92).

centuries, in fact, were often diocesan, with the bishops taking a leading part in the work of creation. "Cet exemple du Père Barré a été fécond," wrote Canon Blain in 1733, "Car aujourd'hui les plus grands prélats travaillent à établir dans leurs diocèses des Communautés pareilles, destinées à la même fin."¹⁷⁶ However, the few secular institutes that developed a wider base were able to achieve the autonomy and unity that had been denied to all women's congregations at the beginning of the century. The originality of Barrés Maîtresses charitables, and of the Filles de la Charité, was that they transcended diocesan boundaries. The members were directed from the centre, and were finally responsible to the centre. "Quand l'on voudra en quelque lieu des Soeurs, il est en liberté des personnes qui les demandent de les renvoyer quand elles voudront, veu que ne les fondant pas, et elles voulant n'être pas fondées, cela laisse les parties libres et sans aucun engagement de part ni d'autre," wrote Barré.¹⁷⁷ "Vous n'êtes là que par emprunt," Mlle Le Gras reminded her sisters.¹⁷⁸ These larger institutes, few in number, were the forerunners of the congrégations à supérieure générale which became so successful in the nineteenth century.

¹⁷⁶Quoted in Positio sur la cause de béatification du serviteur de Dieu P. Nicolas Barré (Rome: Typis polyglottis vaticanes, 1970), p.53.

¹⁷⁷"Mémoire instructif", p.3.

¹⁷⁸Op.cit., vol. II, p.396.

ILLUSTRATION II : RELIGIOUS HABIT



Ursuline de la congrégation de Paris

(Hélyot, *Dictionnaire des ordres monastiques*, t. IV, p. 165, grav. 38)
BN, Cabinet des Estampes, 74 n 64726

6) Dress.

At a time when sumptuary laws were still in vigour, it is not surprising that the dress worn by different communities helped to define their social and religious status. The monastic communities had, from the outset, given up the extremes of religious dress, as unsuitable for their work with secular persons.¹⁷⁹ However, their dress, though modified, remained very much the religious habit, complete with veil and wimple, worn over the cropped hair that symbolized their death to the world.¹⁸⁰

The filles séculières followed three basic rules: they dressed modestly, avoiding all extremes¹⁸¹; they dressed to suit their station in life; and they avoided the marks of "religion", notably the veil.¹⁸²

At the lower end of the social scale were the Filles de la Charité, designed by their founders to remain humble, both in their recruitment and in their work. "Il a plu à la bonté de Dieu d'appeler principalement et premièrement des filles de village pour composer votre Compagnie," Vincent de Paul told

¹⁷⁹See above, chap. VII.

¹⁸⁰See Illustration II.

¹⁸¹Their rules almost always stressed moderation. "Elles garderont un juste tempérament qui ne fasse pas rire les fous et qui ne contriste pas les sages, qui ne les fasse remarquer par la légèreté de la mode, ni par le ridicule d'un usage passé...." Règlement of the Institut de l'enfance, cited in R. Taveneaux, La vie quotidienne des jansenistes (op.cit.) p.80.

¹⁸²See Illustrations III and IV.

ILLUSTRATION III

The filles séculières

(peasant dress)

1) A Soeur de la Providence of Rouen.

2) A Fille de la Charité (1640).

3) A Fille de la Charité (after 1685)



them.¹⁸³ To those who were not villagers by birth, he recommended that they become so by imitation.¹⁸⁴ Therefore they dressed as did country women of the Paris basin, in coarse grey serge, with a white linen turban. The costume, and especially the headwear, caused embarrassment to some of the sisters,¹⁸⁵ but Monsieur Vincent remained adamant. The humble dress was symbolic of their vocation of service. "Dites que vous voulez avoir la couronne que Dieu avait préparée aux filles de Sainte-Marie."¹⁸⁶ Only later, in 1685, did the Filles de la Charité adopt the cornet by which they became known to the world.

Grey, or brown, was the colour commonly worn by lower-class women. It was also the colour associated with women who worked for the hospitaux-généraux. The first soeurs Barré of Rouen, though drawn largely from the middle classes,¹⁸⁷ have left a portrait of one of their sisters in working women's dress.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³Entretien of June, 1642. Op.cit., p.80.

¹⁸⁴Ibid., pp.81-82.

¹⁸⁵For correspondence on this issue, see Vincent de Paul, op.cit., vol. XIV (index), under Coiffure.

¹⁸⁶Ibid. vol. X, p.103. This was a reference to the cloistering of the Visitation, which ended their visits to the sick and poor.

¹⁸⁷A document drawn up in 1666 and bearing the signatures of the community includes names of some of the best families of Rouen, such as Corneille, Tiberge, l'Espinay, de la Pommeraye, le Bras de Fer. For the complete list, see Chanoine Farcy, op.cit., pp.39-40.

¹⁸⁸See Illustration III.

This was consistent with the rigour of the vocation which Barré proposed to them:

Vous n'aurez que le nécessaire bien petitement, et, si vous êtes malades, on vous enverra à l'Hôtel-Dieu. Il faut se résoudre à mourir au coin d'une haye, abandonné de tout le monde, et demeurer ainsi toute la vie.¹⁸⁹

In general, however, schoolmistresses were dressed as bourgeoises and as widows: in black, with a coiffe enclosing their hair,¹⁹⁰ and tying under the chin, and a large black kerchief, also knotted under the chin, covering head and neck.¹⁹¹ Only common materials were allowed, in dresses, stocking, gloves and shoes, so that the modesty of their station in life should be emphasized.¹⁹² Even the colour of their underskirts conveyed a message: "L'on

¹⁸⁹H. de Grèzes, op.cit., p.160. Or, it is possible, this individual was of humble background.

¹⁹⁰Which usually remained uncut. There were some exceptions to this rule, e.g., the Soeurs du Saint-Enfant-Jésus, whose hair was cut at time of profession. This community was more "religious" than most others.

¹⁹¹The style appears to have been copied from one institute to another. The Filles de la Croix and the Filles de Sainte-Genevieve wore almost identical dress; the Dames de Saint-Maur were ordered by their superior to copy them. See the letter of Montigny-Servien, "sur la simplicité des habits", in H. de Grèzes, op.cit., pp.393-94. The dress seen in portraits of Mme de Miramion closely resembles that worn by Marguerite Bourgeoys. According to Soeur Sainte-Henriette of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame, "nous avons un article de notre habillement d'hiver qui se nomme Miramion" (op.cit., vol. I, p.156). Other filles séculières -- and many other respectable women of the later seventeenth century -- followed the same fashion. See Illustration IV.

¹⁹²An exception was made for the Dames de Saint-Maur who taught at Saint-Cyr. Their costume was ennobled by Mme de Miramion personally, to suit their new position. (See Illustration IV).

ILLUSTRATION IV

The filles séculières (bourgeois dress)



- 1) Madame de Miramion
- 2) A Fille de la Croix
- 3) Marguerite Bourgeoy
- 4) A Dame de Saint-Maur

2.



Fille de la Croix



414a

Marguerite Bourgeoy

1620-1700



5) A Dame de Saint-Maur at Saint-Cyr,
in the dress designed for her by
Madame de Maintenon.



sent plus la Maîtresse d'école du Saint-Enfant Jésus avec une bonne jupe grise sous son habit, que non pas une jupe noir qui donne toujours un air plus haut."¹⁹³

Everything about their dress was designed to testify clearly to the social station of the filles séculières. It was also meant to convey the spirit of modest and sensible piety which they held to be characteristic of their institutes. But, like the life itself, it lacked grandeur.

"La contemplative est comme Rachel, agreable, mais sterile," wrote Barré. "Lia qui étoit laide, mais feconde, est le vray symbole de la vie active."¹⁹⁴ In this defence of his schoolmistresses, the dilemma of the filles séculières in seventeenth-century society is revealed. They had won the blessing of their society, especially of the governing elites, because of their usefulness. But their institutes were essentially unaristocratic. The vow of poverty which was universally taken in the monasteries had not eliminated class differences.¹⁹⁵ The contemplative life was "austère", "dans les déserts"¹⁹⁶;

¹⁹³Montigny-Servien, "sur la simplicité des habits", in H. de Grèzes, op.cit., p.394.

¹⁹⁴"Maximes particulieres pour les Ecoles charitables", in Lettres spirituelles, p.353.

¹⁹⁵Mère Juchereau of the Hôtel-Dieu of Quebec wrote in 1687 of the religious of France "qui sont plus ennyvrées de leur qualité que les plus mondaines seculières" (op.cit., p.229).

¹⁹⁶This is a clear allusion to the image of Mary Magdalen in her later years, living as a hermit, contemplating death. Mary Magdalen was the personification of the Carmelites.

it was also, by social consensus, the portion of the rich. The "petite vie" of hard work and simplicity was "proportionnée à [la] condition de pauvre fille."¹⁹⁷ Women of quality were capable of submitting to the rigours of contemplative rule, but they could not go out alone.¹⁹⁸ They could not do servile work.¹⁹⁹ Though some women of high birth accepted social derogation and joined the secular institutes, they did so in defiance of the natural order of things. "Là où se doit observer une véritable pauvreté," warned Vincent de Paul, "les gens de condition y sont très dangereux, parce qu'elle est contraire à leur naissance."²⁰⁰ The filles séculières recruited their members, for the most part, from more modest levels of society; and they continued to battle against their own, and others', sense that they were inferior.

7) Summation.

The making of communities was a gradual process, involving the ideas and efforts, and trials and errors, of a number of

¹⁹⁷"...une vie non austère, ni dans les déserts, mais une petite vie, simple et proportionnée à ma condition de pauvre fille." Écrits de Mère Bourgeoys, p.72.

¹⁹⁸See Madame de Maintenon's advice to her young ladies, in E. Faguet, op.cit., p.161.

¹⁹⁹Vincent de Paul, praising God's wisdom in establishing the community of Filles de la Charité remarked: "Premièrement, il a pris de pauvres filles. S'il en eût pris de riches, eussent-elles fait ce que faisaient celles-ci? Eussent-elles servi les malades dans les plus bas et pénibles services?" (Op.cit., vol.IX, pp. 312-13).

²⁰⁰Ibid., vol. X, p.103.

people. At the forefront were the founders, men like Fourier, Vincent de Paul, and Nicolas Barré. They contributed leadership, ideas, spiritual motivation and tactical skill. But the inspired founder, with his perfect blueprint for a new congregation, exists only in hagiography. There is ample evidence of the input of ordinary members, especially at the beginning. Who made your community? Vincent de Paul once asked his filles; "Ce n'est pas Mademoiselle Le Gras; elle n'y avait point pensé. Pour moi, hélas! je n'y songeais point."²⁰¹ He attributed the creation, after God, to Marguerite Naseau, the "pauvre vachère sans instruction" who became the first fille de la Charité. In fact, this congregation, and the others, were built through the joint efforts of the founders and the members. Even while it was in progress, however, their work was immediately subject to the wishes of the local hierarchy, to whom they owed obedience. It was also under the influence of the benefactors, who because they paid the piper, were also able to call the tune. Arching over everything else was the influence of "the world", according to whose wishes and prejudices communities ultimately stood or fell.

The growth of the congregations could not have taken place without the changes which placed religious life at the service of the public. Society's growing demand for services -- with schooling in the forefront -- and the Church's determination

²⁰¹Conference of December, 1648. Op.cit., vol.IX, pp.455-56.

to provide those services as a part of its mandate, gave women their chance to become an indispensable part of the system. The congregations of the seventeenth century were shaped to the purposes of a particular society, and they reflected that society faithfully.

But society's contribution was supportive, not creative. The physical capability to take over such a role, and the psychological motivation to do it well, came from the women themselves. The institution which endowed them with this capability and this motivation was the religious community.

CONCLUSION

In 1631, a Bull of Suppression condemned, abolished and cut off the English Ladies, giving as reason that "they went freely everywhere, without submitting to the laws of clausura, under the pretext of working for the salvation of souls."¹ By 1700, in France and in New France, as well as in other parts of the Catholic world, women doing exactly this had become part of the Church's structure. The tridentine reform had rejected the "intermediate state" between religious and secular.² Now it was here, in fact if not yet in canon law. A new form of religious life had been created.

That this was a radical change in the Church's structure is self-evident. An enormous expansion of the Church's activity took place, into fields of charity and hospital care and education, because there were now personnel to implement it. The importance of this charitable mandate to the French Church of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries can be understood best by seeing how hard, in the early days of the Revolution, it fought to hold onto it.

Furthermore, the new "active life" congregations were only the leading edge of a wider change. The Gallican Church had been prised open, to admit women to its professional ranks

¹Analecta Juris Pontificii (1885) col. 2022-23. Also see Chapter I, "The English Ladies, 1609-1631".

²R. Lemoine, Le Monde des religieux, p.9.

in numbers never known before. Not only in the active life, but in the contemplative life, women now outnumbered men. The Church had been "feminized". This fact, long ignored, has now been proclaimed by one historian as perhaps the finest attainment of the Catholic Reformation.³

Quantitative change gives only the outline of inner psychological change. Throughout the seventeenth century, religious women influenced the tone of reformed Catholicism. A number of the most famous new devotions -- to Saint Joseph, to the Holy Child, to the Sacred Heart -- were promoted by nuns. To advance the active life to which they now laid claim, they endowed the Virgin with a new identity: she became a "vagabond", hurrying across the hills of Judaea to serve her neighbour. "Virtue", in its old sense of courageous goodness, was no longer a male preserve. The literature is full of tributes by amazed churchmen to the achievements of these new women. "They will be our judges," Vincent de Paul told his priests, "if we are not ready like them to risk our lives for God."⁴

There is another dimension to the change in the structure of the seventeenth-century Church. This is the democratization of its personnel. More and more, the new secular institutes drew upon lower strata of society. For the first time, women

³P. Chaunu, L'Eglise, culture et société (op.cit.), p.401.

⁴L. Abelly, op.cit., vol. II, p.36.

"sans voile ni guimpe"⁵ -- in other words, poor women -- were able to enter religious congregations. They were, from the very beginning, the basic component into the new structure of charity and education.

How did these religious women, cloistered and uncloistered, contribute to the wider French society? That is a subject for another thesis. This thesis has confined itself to the seventeenth century, and thus to the "beginnings" of the congregations. It would be necessary to move into the eighteenth century to measure the full effect of their work. Some trends, however, were immediately evident. In their invasion of the business of girls' education they carried all else before them. Their monopoly of this activity would become so complete that with their dispersion at the Revolution female schooling collapsed. Napoleon lost no time in inviting them back in, and they continued their hegemony throughout the nineteenth century.

Virtually all feminine education of the Ancien Régime was the work of nuns. How good a job did they do? I have addressed the traditional negative verdict which, I have argued, is ill-founded. That there was a gradual upwards curve in the literacy rate of women cannot be denied; it is equally undeniable that female literacy continued to lag behind male literacy. But here we have a problem of evidence. Literacy can only be measured by signatures on marriage contracts and other documents

⁵Ecrits de Mère Bourgeoys (op.cit.), p.204.

in other words, by writing skills. But how much did writing skills count for, in a culture that was still largely oral? Should the schoolmistresses be judged by this minor part of their curriculum?

For the educators of the seventeenth century, the refinement of teaching methods was as important as the improvement of subject matter. With children flooding into their classrooms, they worked to substitute orderly discipline for the old disorderly confusion. The religious schoolmistresses assisted in the move towards the control of the classroom which was so lacking at the beginning of the century. They applied the techniques which the Jesuits used in their collèges to the classrooms of the petites écoles. In due course, they passed their experience on to the Christian Brothers. Thus they mediated between the most influential educators of the Counter Reformation and of the eighteenth century.

The women made their own contribution to qualitative change. Their approach to their students helped to make the schoolroom more benign, less violent. After all, their student population was considered to be exceptionally delicate and weak, and therefore in need of special care. "Leur enseignement est marqué au coin de l'exactitude et de la douceur; elles peuvent être comprises par les plus petites comme par les aînées."⁶ It may be argued that the sisters brought their own insights to the growing

⁶R. Thuillier, Diarium Patrum (op.cit.), p.64.

understanding of and interest in "the child" which was a characteristic of the century.

There is evidence of one achievement of which the congregations would have been proud. A close correlation has been identified between areas of female scholarization and areas of practising reformed Catholicism.⁷ If this is correct, then their primary purpose was served.

The first argument of my thesis is that in the seventeenth century a promotion took place in the status of women within the Church. My second argument concerns the process by which that promotion was effected. My contention has been that the principal agents of change were the women themselves, and that they started from a position of disadvantages.

Here and there, in the 1980s, nuns have begun again to act as outsiders, challenging governments and, sometimes, even the Church. But before Vatican II, as far back as memory could reach, nuns were the epitome of respectability within the Catholic community. For Catholics it would have been as difficult in 1950 as in 1850, or 1750, to recall that at one time nuns were outside the system, and that many of them, like the Ursuline Françoise de Xainctonge, suffered for their nonconformity:

Les petits enfans mesme luy jettoient de
l'ordure et des pierres aussi qu'à ses
Compagnes, quand elles passoient par les
rues, leur chantoient injures, se
moquoient de leur habit, et de leur

⁷J. Perrel, "Sur l'enseignement féminin avant la Révolution" (op.cit.), p.8.

manière de vie.⁸

Yet this, I must insist, was the starting point of their promotion. Religious women entered new fields of activity in small stages, and with great difficulty. Their first attempt to "do all the good that is possible", and more especially, to catechize in the Catholic faith, was ended when they were ordered back into the cloister. However, they won the recognition that the instruction of girls was a worthy religious vocation; and this recognition was entrenched in their fourth vow. From within their monastery classrooms, double-locked so as not to violate clausura, they showed the clergy, and the public, that the instruction of girls was desirable.

Still, as long as religious women were subject to clausura, a vast part of the population remained beyond their reach. Starting in the late 1630s, new approaches were explored, new ways in which women could work among the poor. These approaches were made under the rubric of charity, and they were made by women who were secular. Under this cover, which the authorities found less threatening, some women adopted elements of the religious life that they were denied; and among their charitable works they included teaching. Then, as the voluntary charitable good works of the 1650s gave way to the institutions of the 1660s, charity schools for the poor were not only tolerated, but positively encouraged; and female teachers found themselves with a profession.

⁸M.D.P.U. (op.cit.), part I, p.74.

Throughout the later years of the century, communities of teaching filles séculières appeared in growing numbers, and their teaching reached beyond the classrooms, to religious instruction en mission. Nun-educators became part of the Church's active personnel, pursuing a career which the Crown, and society as a whole, now considered desirable.

It is misleading to say that the Church "called forth" these religious women. The Church of the Ancien Regime did not in general welcome change, and regarded this particular change with considerable suspicion. Where, then, did the impulse come from? From below? But the Catholic Church was not then, any more than it is now, a democracy. No institutional channels existed by which the faithful could assist in its decision making. Furthermore, the structure of authority was never stronger than in the seventeenth century, when obedience was perceived as the supreme, the all-encompassing virtue.⁹

Yet women, who as a group were heir to a subordinate status and a long tradition of obedience, nevertheless managed to break out of the state to which scripture and tradition had assigned them, and to establish a new identity for themselves. They had allies, and they had able leaders, many of whom were men. But the troops in this particular campaign were women. In the final analysis, they won acceptance by offering their society services of exceptional quality, at bargain prices.

⁹See chap. II, fn. 16, 17.

Little by little these groups, born in response to pressing needs, broke the old bond between clausura and the feminine religious life. These 'pious women', known also as filles dévotes, since they were not bound by solemn vows did not receive the name of religious, which at that time was reserved exclusively for cloistered nuns. But they existed, they endured, and they made themselves known. They received their 'consecration' through the good that they did.¹⁰

¹⁰R. Lemoine, Le monde des religieux, p.2.

APPENDIX A
HISTORIOGRAPHY

Le nom d'une religieuse doit être aussi
inconnu et solitaire que sa personne;
elle doit plus travailler à faire
écrire son nom au livre de Vie que sur
un thèse de théologie.¹

The feminine congregations of early modern France were almost buried from modern view, under the disruption of the Revolution which put an end to many of them, the contempt of nineteenth-century republican historians (fuelled in no small part by the continuing hold which the congregations exercised on female education), the condescension of major male religious historians who, at least until recently, respected nuns more for their virtue than for their social value,² and outright dismissal by many modern historians who are misled by the women's

¹The Marquise de Saint-Martin, Ursuline prioress of Metz. Quoted in M.-C. Gueudré, "La femme et la vie spirituelle", XVII^e siècle 62-63 (1964): 47-48.

²A striking example of this attitude, though slightly out of time, comes from G. de Bertier de Sauvigny's work, La Restauration (Paris: Flammarion, 1955). In his forty-page chapter on religious life under the Restoration, he devotes two paragraphs to the "cohortes de saintes filles, aux cornettes de toutes formes et de toutes couleurs, dont le mauvais goût très sûr permet généralement de dater l'origine" (p.424). A similar condescension is expressed, though less mockingly, by Mgr. J. Lestocquoy in his survey, La vie religieuse en France du VII^e au XX^e siècle (Paris: Albin Michel, 1964) p.190. Even Abbe Brémond, whose work, Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France, depuis la fin des guerres de religion jusqu'à nos jours (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1916-33), pays full homage to the spiritual contribution of seventeenth-century women, is careful to insist that the contribution was purely spiritual: "Inspirer ... n'est pas gouverner" (vol. II, p.37)

own habits of self-effacement.³ Only lately have historians begun to investigate the possibility that these thousands of women may have had a real effect both upon their times and upon their own condition.

The changing attitude was signalled by a book published in 1974: Charles Molette's Guide des sources de l'histoire des congrégations féminines françaises de vie active. Molette's work had been inspired by a different concern. The shrinking numbers of many communities had raised the possibility that whole congregations might disappear, and that their records might be irretrievably lost. Therefore a campaign was mounted to persuade them to set up archives. The campaign has had a dual benefit: nuns have learned how to be archivists, and interest in this sub-branch of women's history has grown, encouraged by the co-operation which many religious congregations now offer to researchers.

1) Original sources.

Nuns as a group are better documented than most seventeenth-century women. In the first place, many of them were covered by official records. Every cloistered nun made a solemn profession of vows, which was entered in a register. In most cases, her age, place of origin, and parents' names

³E.g., M. Albistur and D. Armogathe, Histoire du féminisme français du moyen-âge à nos jours. (Paris: Editions des femmes, 1978), vol. I.

were entered. Less frequently, her death was also recorded, sometimes with a brief eulogy which allows some insight into her character, or at least what her sisters thought was most important about her. Furthermore, since entry into a cloistered monastery entailed the payment of a dowry, agreements were drawn up, notarized, and preserved. Many of these records may still be found. In recent years, historians have begun to use them to analyse the population of congregations, both male and female. The study by Roger Devos, L'origine sociale des Visitandines d'Annecy. (1973) was an early model for such works.⁴ Unfortunately, the filles séculières, nuns who did not take solemn vows, and therefore were not covered by legal records, have left no such consistent trace of themselves; their numbers and social composition may only be deduced from random contemporary references.

Every religious community, monastic or secular, had its code of behaviour. Monastic communities began with one of the four recognized Rules. But it was only a beginning; around the Rule there developed a host of règlements and coûtures which translated its general prescriptions into everyday practices. The institutes of filles séculières did not follow monastic rules, but they developed their own règlements, dealing mainly with the work, discipline and prayer life of the community. Many of these documents, printed or hand-written, still exist,

⁴I should like to acknowledge the kindness of Mme M.-T. Notter. I found her study on the social origins of the feminine orders of Blois to be very valuable, and I am grateful to her for allowing me use of her unpublished data.

to provide insight into the schedules and demands of daily life.

Of course, rules are only rules; there is no way of knowing how closely they were followed. It was recognized at the time that some communities were less "regular" than others. However, what the succession of rules, taken together, shows is the way that religious idealism evolved over time. Each community expressed its own particular bias, or esprit, through its rules. As one community after another was created, new ideas and values were gradually introduced into the tradition of religious communities. The rules show that the filles séculières of 1700 saw life very differently from the cloistered nuns of 1630.

Another contemporary source of information about the congregations was a sort of prospectus which described a community, its particular characteristics and purpose. It was usually entitled "L'Esprit de",⁵ and was written by a churchman acquainted with the community. It may be assumed that these documents were circulated for purposes of recruitment.⁶ Needless

⁵See, in my bibliography, Pierre Fourier's work, Le primitif et legitime esprit de l'institut des filles de la Congregation de Notre-Dame (1650); Charles de Glandelet, Le Vray Esprit de l'institut des Soeurs séculières de la Congregation de Notre-Dame établi à Ville-Marie (1700-1701); Nicolas Barré's "Memoire Instructif pour faire connaître l'utilité des écoles charitables" in Statuts et Reglemens, 1685; A.S.P.R., "De l'Esprit de la Communauté des Filles de Sainte-Geneviève", n.d..

⁶If so, it explains why women often travelled considerable distances to join communities outside their home towns. E.g., of the original twenty women who joined the community of Soeurs du Saint-Enfant Jésus in Reims, five came from considerable distances: Rouen, Amiens, Paris, Honfleur and Orléans. (Arch. Soeurs de l'Enfant-Jésus de Reims, Carton 15-4. Procez verbal de la reception des premières Filles, 8 novembre 1684).

to say, they are public relations documents and therefore have nothing bad to say about their subjects. But, again, they show the way that ideals and objectives altered over time.

In recent years, the history of the mentalité of ordinary people has been probed through the study of their proverbs, stories, songs, and superstitions. In the same way, much can be learned about the mentalité of religious communities from their prayers, or "devotions". Counter-reformation spirituality put new demands upon pious Catholics. The saints, most of all the Blessed Virgin, were no longer perceived simply as protectors of the faithful; they were now their role models, exhorting them to imitation.⁷ However, devotion, like art, was really an improvement on life. The character with which religious men and women invested their patron saints was their own ideal character -- contemplative or active, ascetic or charitable, remote from the world or deeply involved in it. Devotions created in the seventeenth century -- many of which are still observed in the congregations today -- serve as a valuable insight into the mind of their times.⁸

To the evidence of their rules, their prayers, and their books of professions may be added the records which communities

⁷M.H. Froeschlé-Chopard, "Univers sacré et iconographie au XVII^e siècle: églises et chapelles des diocèses de Vençe et de Grasse", A.E.S.C. 31 (1976), pp.506-07. This is also the thesis of Michèle Ménard in her work, Une histoire des mentalités religieuses aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles: Mille retables de l'ancien diocèse du Mans (Paris: Editions Beauchesne), p.163, p. 393.

⁸For a fuller treatment of this idea, see chapter VIII.

kept with the conscious purpose of perpetuating their tradition. Almost every major religious community observed a deep respect for its founder / foundress. Sermons, spiritual conferences, maxims, and correspondence were preserved, firstly out of pure filial piety, secondly with an eye towards possible canonization proceedings. The principal religious personalities of the day are as well documented as any political "great". For the purpose of social commentary, the value of the literature varies. Sermons were a genre designed to inspire listeners, not to inform historians; their oratorical exaggerations were not meant to be taken literally. Spiritual conferences and maxims, also, were more a comment on the ideal than the real. Most of our insight into the practical experiences of the founders and their associates comes from their correspondence. In one case -- that of Vincent de Paul -- conferences with the sisters, which included question-and-answer sessions, were recorded viva voce, and offer a fascinating insight into the way the community functioned. Similarly, extensive minutes were taken of the meetings of the council of the Filles de la Charité.⁹ Behind the discussions and disagreements of Monsieur Vincent and Mlle Le Gras and the sister-councillors, we can see the whole company at work, in its tentative and controversial beginnings. Records like this provide the truest insight into the foundation period. Unfortunately they are

⁹Vincent de Paul, Correspondance, Entretiens, Documents. Edition publiée et annotée par Pierre Coste (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1923); vol. XIII, pp. 589 ff.

few and far between.

Finally, references to religious houses often appear, in every level of official record, both ecclesiastical and secular. The communities were subject to inspection by the bishops, to scrutiny by the parlements, the intendants, the municipalities; they were involved in lawsuits and in every sort of notarized transaction. The value of this evidence is that it presents other points of view, less biased in their favour. It also provides material history which is otherwise lacking: details of their holdings, their investments, their interaction with their neighbours.

Communities often developed their own histories. In many cases, annals were kept. One distinguished annaliste, Mère de Pommereu of the Ursuline house of Faubourg Saint-Jacques, asked for information from other Ursuline monasteries before drawing up her chronicles.¹⁰ Works such as these mixed two styles. In dealing with present events they were practical and, it may be believed, reliable. But when they turned to the past they became frankly hagiographical. Their purpose was not to record historical fact, but to provide examples of sanctity and heroism for the community to follow. The founding generation was furnished with halos, and an air of serenity which did not accord well with the anxieties and uncertainties that their

¹⁰Les Chroniques de l'Ordre des Ursulines recueillies pour l'usage des Religieuses du mesme Ordre, par M (ère) D (e) P (ommereu) U(rsuline), Paris, 1673. (M.D.P.U.)

actual correspondence reveals. What the annals did contribute, however, was a broader view of community life: all sorts of sisters, whose virtues or experiences were considered worth sharing with their successors, appear in their pages.¹¹

2) Secondary works: congregations.

Histories of congregations continued to be written in succeeding centuries, and the hagiographical motive continued to underly these histories. Late in the nineteenth century, it became, if anything, more pronounced. During the fierce Church - State confrontations of the Third Republic, from about 1880 onwards, a number of books appeared, dedicated to specific communities, and highly defensive in tone. At that time the teaching congregations were under political attack, and in serious danger of being suppressed. Then, suddenly, the tone changed: in the aftermath of the Law of Separation of 1905, most religious congregations were exiled and their houses closed; and the literature

¹¹Many of these anecdotes about the early sisters are used in my thesis. See Chapter III.

became a eulogy, full of regret for the good old days.¹² Even after the crisis was over, histories of congregations continued to be written, mostly characterized by strong partisanship and a loyalty that tolerated no imputation of fault or weakness.

-- This hagiographical tradition is obviously a highly impure source for historical research. Yet it is indispensable. The authors, usually good friends of the communities which they eulogized, had access to information which does not appear elsewhere -- which, indeed, may since have been lost. What the modern reader must do is ignore the polemics and concentrate on the "passive testimony" -- "the commonplace and virtually incidental observations" which lie about unnoticed.¹³ In a style which seems to belong to the nineteenth century, whole documents, as well as all sorts of pieces of unrelated information, were incorporated in the text. These can be picked up and used for purposes that were never intended. What we must regret, and

¹²Examples of this period in historiography are: Chanoine P. L. Péchenard, Congrégation de Notre-Dame de Reims (Reims, 1886); H. de Leymont, Madame de Sainte-Beuve et les Ursulines de Paris (Lyon, 1890); H. de Grèzes, O.F.M., Vie du R.P. Barré, religieux minime, fondateur de l'Institut des Ecoles charitables du Saint-Enfant-Jésus de Saint-Maur (Bar-le-Duc, 1892); Chanoine J. Morey, La vénérable Anne de Xaintonge, fondatrice de la congrégation de Sainte-Ursule au Comte de Bourgogne (Besançon, 1901); Abbé L. Carrez, Histoire du premier Monastère de la Congrégation établi à Chalons-sur-Marne (1906); P. Calendini, Le couvent des Filles de Notre-Dame de la Flèche (La Flèche: Imprimerie Besnier, 1905); Abbé Reneault, Les ursulines de Rouen (1619-1906) (Fecamp: Imprimeries réunies L. Durand et fils, 1919).

¹³For this principle I am indebted to Louis Chevalier, Laboring Classes and Dangerous Classes, trans. Frank Jellinek (New York: Howard Fertig, 1973), pp. 135, 120.

continue to search for, is evidence that was suppressed because it seemed, at the time, uncomfortable or irrelevant.¹⁴ This evidence often relates to the difficulties which the communities experienced from within the Church.

Two principles were always observed in older Catholic historiography. First: everything turned out in the end as Providence intended. This philosophy can be found, for instance, in every work which dealt with the imposition of clausura upon the female congregations -- a process which lasted from early- to mid-seventeenth century, and caused considerable distress" at the time.¹⁵ A twentieth-century author, writing for the Ursulines at a time when they were still cloistered, was able to conclude that "clausura did not change the primitive tradition. It can be regarded as a perfection of the work, not as a cause of diminished activity and loss of influence."¹⁶ Second: the hierarchy was never wrong, or at fault. Thus Canon Péchenard, writing for the cloistered Congrégation in Reims, was able to praise the wisdom of Pierre Fourier in continuing the practice

¹⁴Thus Soeur Sainte-Henriette's Histoire de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame de Montréal (Montreal: C.N.D., 1910) uses paraphrases as though they were quotations, and passes over awkward or uncomfortable questions. Again, we must remember that the purpose of her work was the edification of her community; and we have to acknowledge her unique advantage, since she recalls documents which were destroyed by fire and would otherwise be forgotten.

¹⁵See above, chap. III.

¹⁶L. Cristiani, La merveilleuse histoire des premières Ursulines françaises. (1935), quoted in M.-C. Gueudré, op.cit., vol I, p.14.

of clausura, and the wisdom of the papal court in its handling of the nuns' petitions, even though this meant not giving them what they asked for.¹⁷

These attitudes of unswerving loyalty were later called into question by two religious historians, members of the two congregations involved. Marie de Chantal Gueudré, in her fine history of the Ursulines in France, published in 1957, took previous historians to task for neglecting the history of the Ursulines in the days before clausura was imposed, and for remaining silent on the subject of their suffering.¹⁸ While she admired the tradition of spirituality that was developed in the monasteries, and their pedagogical achievements, she saw in their isolation and dependence a potential for weakness and stagnation. Later, in 1965, Hélène Derréal, in her biography of Pierre Fourier, depicted the papal court, and Pope Urban himself, in all their weakness and self-serving, and described Fourier's bitter distress at the decisions which led to the Congrégation's loss of its original spirit.¹⁹ Both religious invited a new, more critical, look at the history of their congregations.

Pope John XXIII's symbolic opening of a window, to allow air into the Church, also opened an age of unprecedented self-

¹⁷L. Péchenard, op.cit., vol. I, p.28, p.30.

¹⁸Histoire de l'Ordre des Ursulines en France (Paris: Editions St-Paul, 1957), 2 vols, vol. I, p.16.

¹⁹Un missionnaire de la Contre-Reforme (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1965), pp.385-88.

examination in the religious orders. One of the benefits of this has been the appearance of a number of scholarly studies of congregations, male and female, usually conducted by members of the same congregation. An outstanding example of this new historiography is the work by Marie-Andrée Jégou, Les Ursulines du Faubourg Saint-Jacques à Paris, 1607-1662 (1981).²⁰ On the whole, however, these historians do not move outside the limits of their own congregations.²¹ The result has been that islands of erudition have been created in a sea which still remains dark. No serious synthesis has yet been attempted of the multiple religious-educational endeavours of seventeenth-century France. The experiences of the different congregations remain discrete; no-one has attempted to relate them to each other and to the general situation. Furthermore, our historiography has concentrated almost exclusively upon the congregations that still exist.

²⁰Examples of unpublished works are: M.-E. Aubry, "Le monastère nancéien de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles", Mémoire de maîtrise présenté à la Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines de Nancy, 1970; J.-M. Legois, "Etude du vocabulaire de l'enseignement dans les statuts et règlements des écoles chrétiennes et charitables fondées par Nicolas Barre et Jean-Baptiste de la Salle", Mémoire de maîtrise des Lettres modernes, Lille, 1980; A.-M. Lembrez, "Institut du Saint-Enfant-Jésus (Saint Maur) à Toulouse, 1688-1959", Mémoire de maîtrise rédigé sous la direction de M. Louis Trénard, 1985. It should also be mentioned that the Congrégation de Notre-Dame of Canada has been through the years been the subject of numerous scholarly studies by its members.

²¹The exception to this is Yves Poutet, historian of the Christian Brothers, who in his book, Le XVII^e siècle et les origines lasalliennes (Rennes: Imprimeurs réunis, 1970) and a number of articles, has traced the lines which connected one congregation to another.

No-one has yet attempted a head-count of the little communities of women, created by the dozen during the Catholic Reformation, which served their neighbourhoods for years before dying a natural death or being obliterated by the Revolution.²² And yet no-one can really take the measure of female education in seventeenth-century France until this is done.

3) Secondary works: education.

No study of feminine education in seventeenth-century France would be complete without reference to the famous work of Fénelon, Education des filles, first published in 1687, and the letters of Madame de Maintenon.²³ In these works, conventional female education, which was convent education, received a bad press. Until recently, the criticisms of these two educators formed the bulk of all that was known about girls' schools in the seventeenth century. However, it must be pointed out that both Fénelon and Madame de Maintenon were concerned with the education of upper-class girls. Thus while their ideas were interesting, and sometimes ground-breaking, they concerned only a small elite group. The same is true of the petites écoles of Port-Royal.

²²One such community, the Filles de Sainte-Geneviève, has been studied in this thesis. Its memory has been preserved because of the reputation of its foundress, Madame de Miramion, whose life was the subject of two biographers, both relatives. See chapter V. Also see the same chapter, fn.3, for a sampling of other small defunct communities.

²³Published by M. Emile Faguet, in 1887. under the title, Madame de Maintenon Institutrice: Extraits de ses lettres, avis, entretiens, conversations et proverbes sur l'éducation.

They no more represented the mass of French schools than the Utopian communities of the nineteenth century represented employer-worker relationships as a whole. A serious investigation of schools and school teachers must quickly move beyond them.

There has always been a certain interest in the history of education. Large numbers of works on the subject appeared in the later days of the nineteenth century, motivated, no doubt, by the same concerns that have been mentioned above. One of these is particularly worthy of mention: "L'Oeuvre pédagogique de Pierre Fourier" by M. Maggiolo, which rediscovered the great educationist of the seventeenth century.²⁴ In recent times, especially in the 1970s, interest in the history of education has grown, and new studies have appeared. In 1970 and in 1971, two conferences, at Reims and at Marseille, devoted their attention to seventeenth-century education. In 1976, the most comprehensive book yet written on the subject, L'Education en France du XVI^e au XVIII^e siècle by Roger Chartier, Marie-Madeleine Compère and Dominique Julia, was published.²⁵ In the following year, an equally important work appeared: Lire et écrire, a study of literacy in France, by F. Furet and J. Ozouf.²⁶ In 1978, Jean de Viguerie brought out yet another work, L'institution

²⁴Mémoires de l'Académie de Stanislaus 1892. CXLIII^e Année, 5^e série, T. X. (Nancy: Imprimerie Berger-Levrault et Cie).

²⁵Paris, S.E.D.E.S., 1976.

²⁶Lire et écrire: l'alphabétisation des français de Calvin à Jules Ferry (Paris: Editions de minuit, 1977), 2 vols.

des Enfants.²⁷ Throughout these years, numerous articles on ancien régime schooling appeared in the journals.

Here and there, in all these works, mention is made of feminine education, but it is of secondary importance, reflecting, no doubt, the true position of this education in the Ancien Régime. In the work mentioned above, by Chartier, Compère and Julia, out of three hundred pages only fifteen deal directly with girls' education. However, the brevity of the chapter results more from paucity of source material than from lack of will; the authors regret the lack of studies from which to compose their synthesis. This lack is gradually being made good: a number of monographs have appeared on feminine education, often distinguished by region.²⁸ Then, in 1981, the Presses de l'Université d'Angers published the acts of the fourth meeting of religious historians at Fontevraud, dedicated entirely to Les religieuses enseignantes. The teaching sisters have been recognized, and doubtless many more works about them will appear.

²⁷L'institution des enfants. L'éducation en France 16^e - 18^e siècle (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1978).

²⁸See, especially, the works Pierre-Roger Gaussin and Madeleine Vallet, "L'instruction secondaire des filles en Forez aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles", in Mélanges offerts à André Latreille (Lyon: Audin, 1972); of Elfrieda Dubois, "The education of women in seventeenth-century France", French Studies 32, no. 1 (1978): 1-19; J. Perrel, "Les écoles de filles dans la France d'ancien régime", in The Making of Frenchmen 1679-1979, ed. Donald Baker and Patrick Harrington (Waterloo: Historical Reflections Press, 1980), and "Les filles à l'école avant la Révolution", Revue d'Auvergne 94 (1980): 291-316; M. Perrel, "L'Enseignement féminin sous l'Ancien Régime: les écoles populaires en Auvergne, Bourbonnais et Velay", Cahiers historiques 23, no. 2 (1978): 193-210.

For the purposes of this thesis, many of the works listed -- whether on the congregations or on education as a whole -- have two serious drawbacks. First, they treat the Ancien Régime as a whole. They classify a period of almost two hundred years as a single unit, and thus, by their methodology, create a supposition of immobility without even having to argue for it. Then, drawn by an understandable attraction to the part of that period which is richest in data, they come to rest in the eighteenth century.²⁹

My thesis argues not for immobility but for movement. Leaving the eighteenth century aside, with its cooling religious fervour and its "great glaciation of social mobility",³⁰ we can discern within the seventeenth century great changes of spirit, great movements of ideas. The foundation period of the first religious congregations -- sometimes so brief that it almost escapes attention -- was characterized by intense idealism. The idealism could not perpetuate itself, and mysticism

²⁹An example of this methodology may be found in a work not used in my thesis because it deals exclusively with boys' schools: Harvey Chisick's article "French Charity Schools in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, with Special Reference to the Case of Amiens", Histoire sociale - Social History XVI, no.32 (Nov., 1983):241-77. In spite of the title, the article deals almost exclusively with Amiens in the second half of the eighteenth century, and then concludes that "charity schools of the Old Regime ... were intended for and in practice served a narrower social spectrum than would be expected on the assumption that charity was to be directed to the most needy" (p.275). My thesis argues that between the distance between intention and realization was great, and filled all sorts of extraneous factors.

³⁰E. Le Roy Ladurie, in G. Duby and A. Wallon, Histoire de la France rurale (Paris: Seuil, 1975), vol. II, p.526. (My translation).

subsidied into moralism.³¹ The second wave of foundations answered to a new-found concern for charitable action, and allowed religious women to explore new avenues of social service. The third wave of foundations gave official recognition to these women, and made them an integral part of the system. It was these changing conditions that enabled the change in the women's status to take place.

Second, the literature, especially the older histories of the congregations, is institutional in character. Each work endows its own congregation, from the beginning, with a special character and purpose. Its "apartness" -- an important component of its identity, according to Claude Langlois³², is emphasized. Modern historians have accepted this approach, and have gone on to calculate feminine achievement in the seventeenth century by adding up the number of congregations known to have existed. But in fact, the congréganistes were born in the secular world, out of the intense involvement of women of all kinds with the new reformed Catholicism. They worked alongside a great crowd of dames, tantes, veuves, and filles âgées, in parish charités, schools and hospitals. Only later did they accept, and enhance, their own distinctiveness. To project back to the beginnings the institutional character of later years is to make a true appreciation of seventeenth-century feminine activism impossible.

³¹J. Le Brun, in L. J. Rogier, R. Aubert and M. D. Knowles, Nouvelle histoire de l'Eglise (Paris: Seuil, 1963) vol. III, p.424.

³²Op. cit., p.160.

APPENDIX B

ENTRANTS INTO MONASTERIES: 1610-1699

Sources.

Well-run monasteries kept records of their membership. Among these were two principal records: registers of clothings, and registers of professions.

The "clothing" was the ceremony of admission into the community, when the aspirant, after a short period of testing, was given the religious habit and allowed to begin her noviciate. Clothing did not indicate permanent commitment. The novice was still free to leave, and the monastery was still free to send her away. A certain proportion of novices left before profession. This means that the register of clothings does not accurately represent the permanent membership of the community.

After approximately two years, the novice made her profession: in other words, she took her solemn vows. In the Ancien Régime, this act of profession signified a permanent change of "state". The professed nun expected to remain in her community for life, leaving only to assist in the foundation of another house. The book of professions is therefore an accurate indicator of a monastery's population.

This limited study is based on the event on which I have the most data: clothings between 1610 and 1699. It does not claim to describe the permanent membership of monasteries, but it does indicate the numbers who at least attempted to follow a religious vocation. In total number there are 1060 entrants, divided among nine monasteries. This is the source for graph II.

In 678 cases out of the total, the age of the entrant was recorded. This is the base for graphs III, IV, and V.

While this work is not definitive, it reveals some interesting trends, and, I believe, suggests good potential for further work.

Method.

1) The years 1630-1700 have been divided into five-years periods: 1610-1614, 1615-1619, etc.

2) The mid points of each five-year period are shown on each graph; e.g., 1610-1614 = 1612; 1620-1624 = 1622.

3) The total number of cases for each five-year period has been calculated and graphed against the mid-point years.

4) The graphed points have been joined to indicate the trend over the period.

ENTRANTS INTO THE NOVICIATE IN NINE MONASTERIES

by five-year periods, 1610-1699.

Sources:

- 1) Visitation, Annecy (1610-99): 216 entrants.

Source: R. Devos, L'origine sociale des Visitandines d'Annecy aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles (Annecy: Académie Salésienne, 1973), p.76, Table I.

- 2) Ursulines, Paris (1612-1660): 111 entrants.

Source: Archives of the Ursulines of Quebec: Register of professions of the Ursulines of Faubourg Saint-Jacques, ff. 1-114. Printed in M.-A. Jégou, Les ursulines du Faubourg Saint-Jacques à Paris 1607-1662 (Paris: P.U.F., 1981), pp.168-174.

- 3) Congrégation de Notre-Dame, Nancy (1615-1699): 99 entrants.

Source: Liste des religieuses ayant fait leur profession de 1618 à 1789, in M.E. Aubry, Le monastère nancéien de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles. Mémoire de maîtrise présenté à la Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines de Nancy, 1970. Annexe 3, pp. 156-162.

- 4) Ursulines, Rouen (1619-1699): 144 entrants.

Source: List of professions, printed in Abbé Reneault, Les Ursulines de Rouen 1619-1906. (Fécamp: Imprimeries réunies L. Durand et fils, 1919), pp.194-311.

- 5) Filles de Notre-Dame, La Flèche (1623-1699): 91 entrants.

Source: P. Calendini, Le couvent des Filles de Notre-Dame de la Flèche (La Flèche: Imprimerie Eugène Besnier, 1905), passim.

- 6) Visitation, Blois (1625-1670): 84 entrants.

Source: M.-T. Notter, "Les ordres religieux féminins blésois: leurs rapports avec la société, 1580-1670." Doctorat de troisième cycle, Université de Tours, 1982.

- 7) Ursulines, Blois (1625-1699): 107 entrants.

Source: ibid.

- 8) Congrégation de Notre-Dame, Provins (1629-1699): 111 entrants.

Source: BM Provins, ms/ 251: actes de profession 1630-1788.

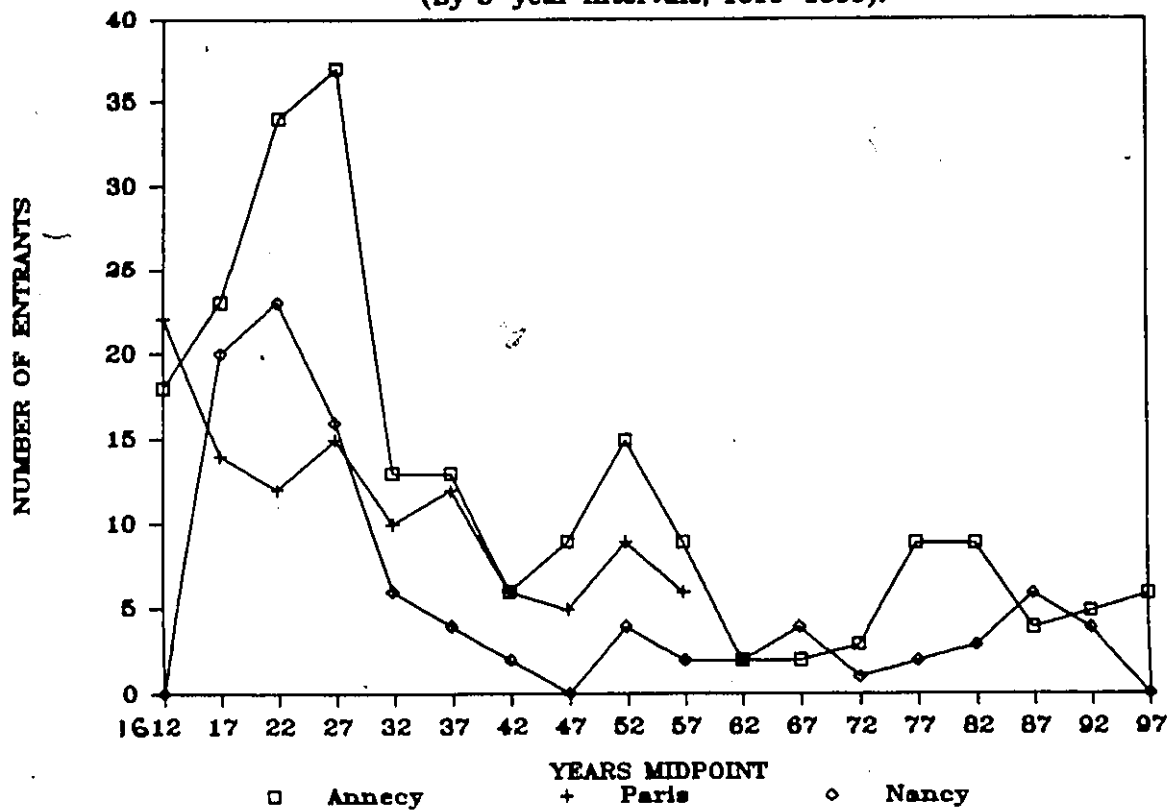
- 9) Congrégation de Notre-Dame, Reims (1636-1699): 107 entrants.

Source: P.L. Péchenard, Congrégation de Notre-Dame de Reims. (Reims, 1886), vol. II, pp.372-379: noms des religieuses.

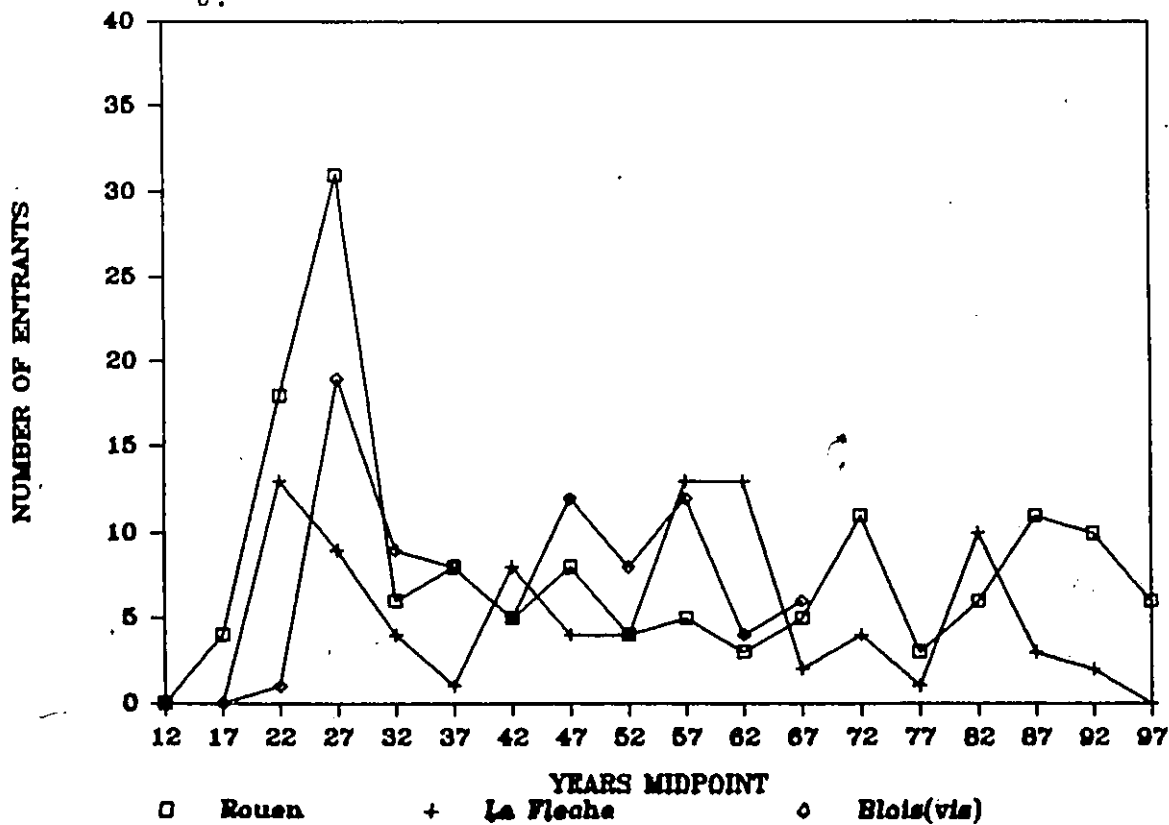
Graph II:

a. ENTRANTS IN 9 MONASTERIES

(By 5-year intervals, 1610-1699).



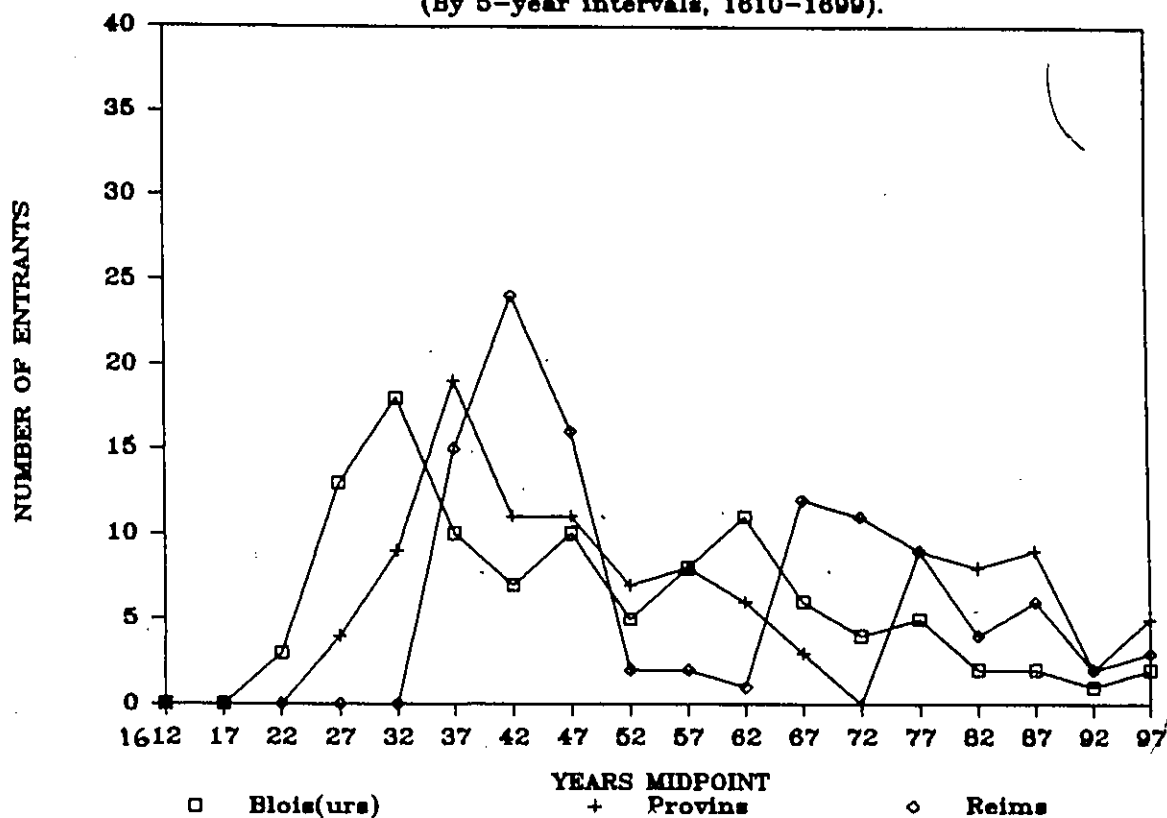
b.



Graph II:

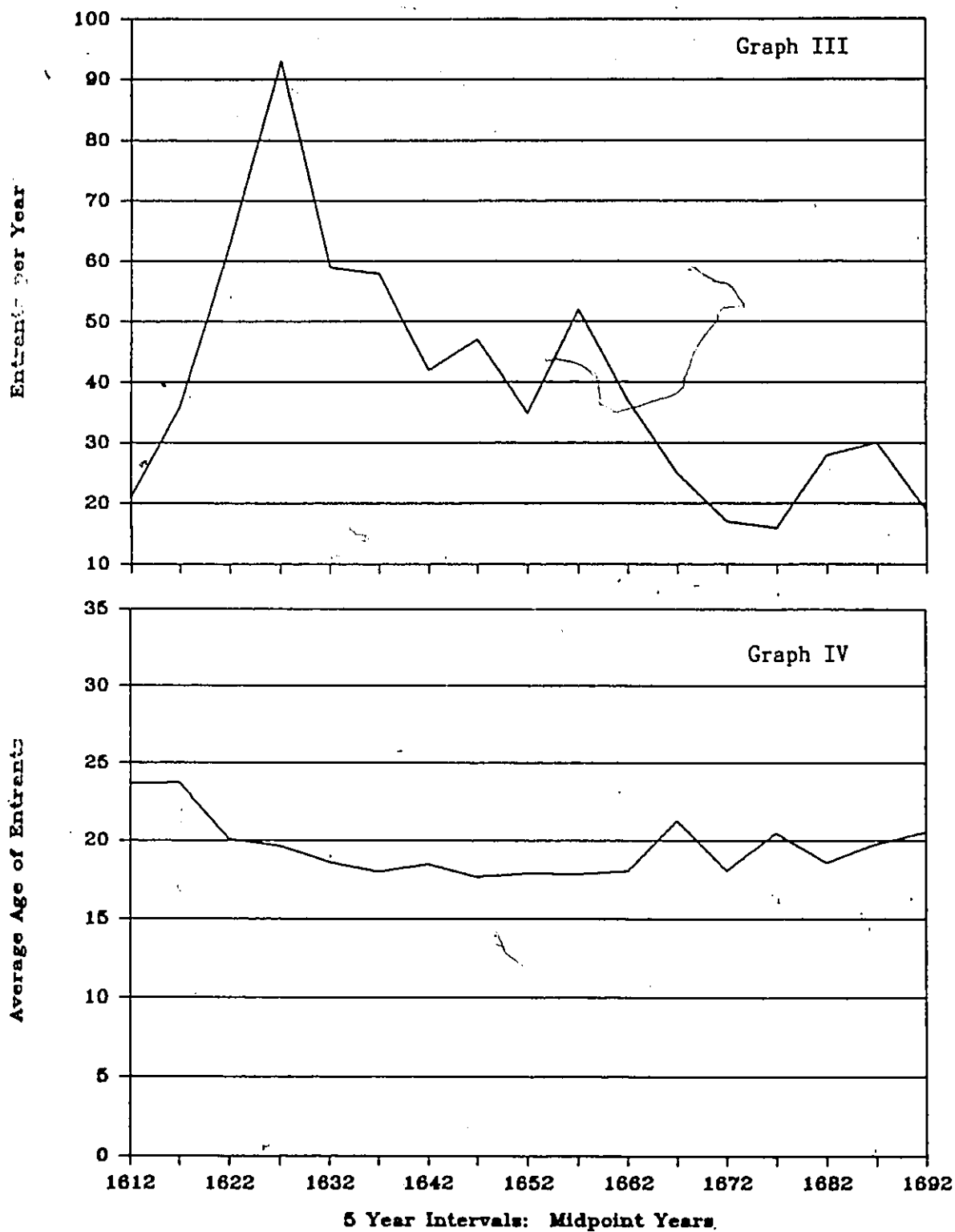
c. ENTRANTS IN 9 MONASTERIES

(By 5-year intervals, 1610-1699).



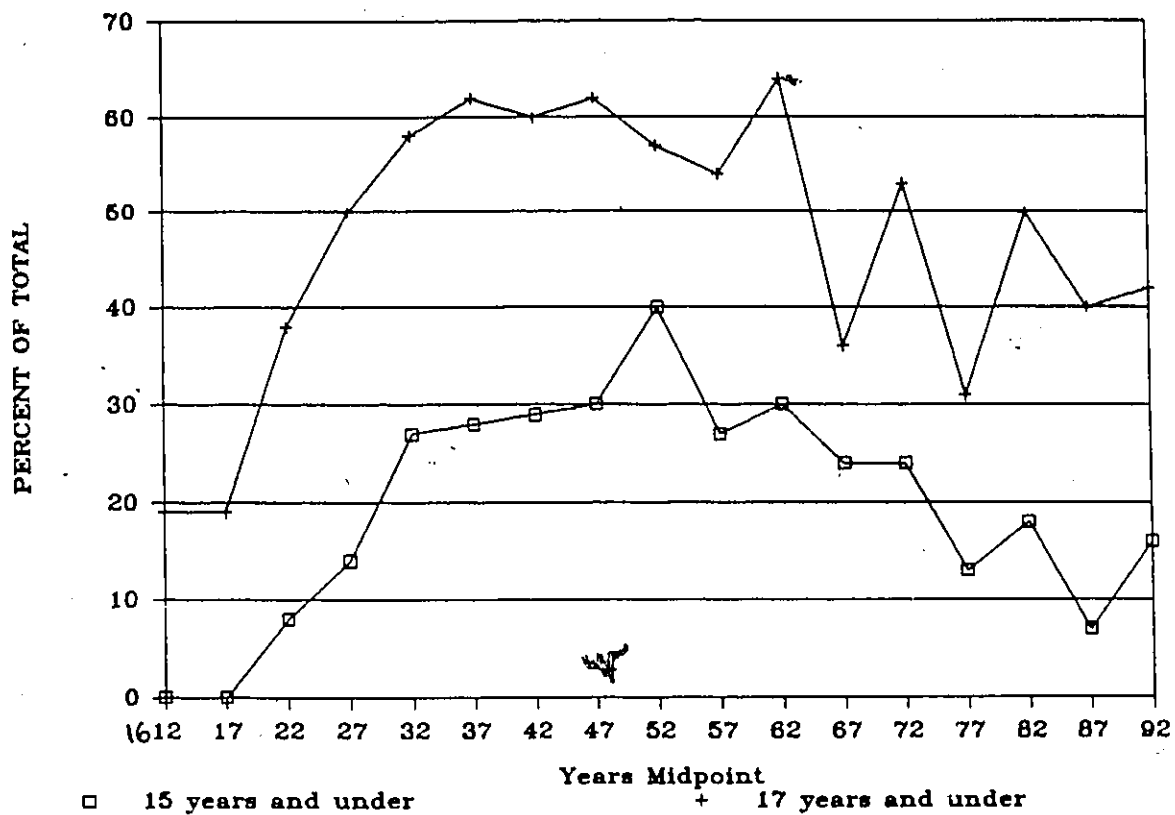
Graph III: Entrants into the teaching congregations, 1610-95 (678 cases).

Graph IV: Calculated average age at entry, 1610-95 (678 cases).



Graph V:

Percentage of young girls among entrants 1610-95 (678 cases)



GLOSSARY

(terms not explained in the text)

- Apostolate** There are two forms of Christian activity:
1) the works of charity, and 2) the spreading
of the faith, through teaching, preaching, and
the conferring of the sacraments. The second
form is called "apostolic", and pertains principally
to the priesthood. In the seventeenth century
it was considered to pertain exclusively to the
priesthood.
- Civilité** The group of conventions by which the relationship
of the individual to society are regulated; thus,
rules of conduct.
- Clausura** 1) The living space reserved for religious, which
they may not leave and others may not enter;
commonly defined by walls and grilles which
eliminate all access to and view of the outside.
2) The laws which constrain religious to live
in this space, and forbid others from entering
it.
- Congréganiste** A person belonging to a recognized congregation.
Also, an institution operated by a congregation,
e.g., a collège congréganiste.
- Congrégation** 1) A group of monasteries following the same
rule -- e.g., the Ursuline congregation of Paris.
2) A community of persons living a consecrated
life without taking solemn vows.
- Congrégée** A woman living in such a community. This term
seems to have been used only in the seventeenth
century.
- Divine Office** (from the Latin officium: duty or responsibility)
The official public prayer of the Church,
complementing the Eucharist. By the late middle
ages it was long and highly complicated, and
was reserved to monasteries and cathedrals.
Divine Office was divided into eight parts, one
of which was sung in the night and the other
seven at different hours throughout the day.
- Easter duties** The obligation of all adult Catholics to receive
the Sacraments at least once a year, in the Easter
season, in their own parish. Religious, who
no longer had a civil identity, were exempted
from the parish requirement.

Fille de
la paroisse

A devout woman, doing whatever good works are possible to her within her parish.

First
Communion

A Catholic's first reception of the Eucharist. In the Counter-Reformation period the event was invested with new pomp and ceremony. It became a rite of passage, signalling entry into adulthood, and as such became a civil event of some significance.

Founder

1) The spiritual parent of a community, who set it up and gave it its original form.
2) The first temporal benefactor, who for his/her benevolence was given a permanent, and sometimes hereditary, status of privilege in the community.

Little Office
of Our Lady

An ancient office, often used in the middle ages in addition to Divine Office. After Trent, it was adopted instead of the longer office by a number of women's congregations.

Perfection

A life totally conformed to the will of God. In the middle ages, this was understood as a life away from the world -- "in contempt of the world"

la vie
parfaite)

-- i.e. a monastic life. The Reformation challenged this concept of "flight from the world", and in the seventeenth century Catholic theologians, also, began to argue that perfection could be achieved in the world. But the identification of perfection with the monastic life remained strong.

"Philothee"

The imaginary person to whom François de Sales addressed his Introduction à la vie dévote. The name, which simply means "lover of God", was in fact a pseudonym for a real woman.

recueillies

from se recueillir, to discipline one's mind to spiritual things.

Recusant

A person who refused to submit to the authority of the established Church of England.

Religion

A recognized and approved society, whose members live under solemn vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. This use of the word is seldom found in modern times, but was common in the seventeenth century.

Religious

A member, male or female, of the above.

Tertiaries

Secular members of religious orders, obliged by their act of perfection to pursue perfection in the world. Directed by the religious order to which they belonged (usually one of the orders of friars), they wore a religious habit and passed through a period of noviciate.

Vows of religion

The vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Until the thirteenth century these were simple vows -- i.e., they did not nullify actions taken in violation. After the thirteenth century they took on a solemn character. Once professed, a religious could not possess property, succeed to an inheritance, or marry.

A note on style. Throughout the text of this thesis, quotations from ancien regime sources have been left in the original French and the spelling used is that given in the source. Quotations from modern works have been translated into English. In the footnotes, all quotations have been left in the original unless otherwise specified.

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