

Laboratoire d'Études et de Recherche sur le Monde Anglophone  
(LERMA, E.A. 853)  
Aix-Marseille Université  
29 avenue Robert Schuman  
13621 Aix-en-Provence cedex 1

**Dossier présenté en vue d'une  
HABILITATION À DIRIGER DES RECHERCHES**

*Femmes et catholicisme au dix-septième siècle :  
négociation des normes, anglicité, religion vécue*

**VOLUME 2  
RECUEIL DE PUBLICATIONS**

**Dossier présenté par Laurence LUX-STERRITT  
Tuteur : Professeur Anne DUNAN-PAGE (Aix-Marseille Université)**

**Date de soutenance : 1<sup>er</sup> avril 2016**  
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## LISTE DE PUBLICATIONS

### Monographies :

1. *Redefining Female Religious Life: French Ursulines and English Ladies in Seventeenth-Century Catholicism*, Ashgate: Aldershot, 2005. 236p.
2. *Living Spirituality. English Benedictine Nuns en Exile, 1598 – 1688* (à l'étude chez Manchester University Press)

### Direction d'ouvrages :

1. Avec Gilles Teulié (dir.), *War Sermons*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009. 285 p.
2. Avec Carmen Mangion (dir.), *Gender, Catholicism and Spirituality in Europe, 1200-1900*, Londres: Palgrave, 2010. 224 p.
3. Avec Claire Sorin (dir.), *Women, Literature and Spirituality in Twentieth-Century Writing, E-rea 8.2* (mars 2011). <http://erea.revues.org/1534>
4. Avec Claire Sorin (dir.), *Spirit, Faith and Church. Women's Experiences in the English-Speaking World, 17<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> centuries*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012. 240 p.

### Édition de sources primaires :

1. *Spirituality*, vol. 2, in Caroline Bowden (ed.), *English Convents in Exile, 1600-1800*, 6 vols. Londres: Pickering & Chatto, 2012.
2. « Introduction », in Laurence Lux-Sterritt (ed.), *English Convents in Exile, 1600-1800*, vol. 2, *Spirituality*, Londres : Pickering & Chatto, 2012, pp. xv-xxiii.

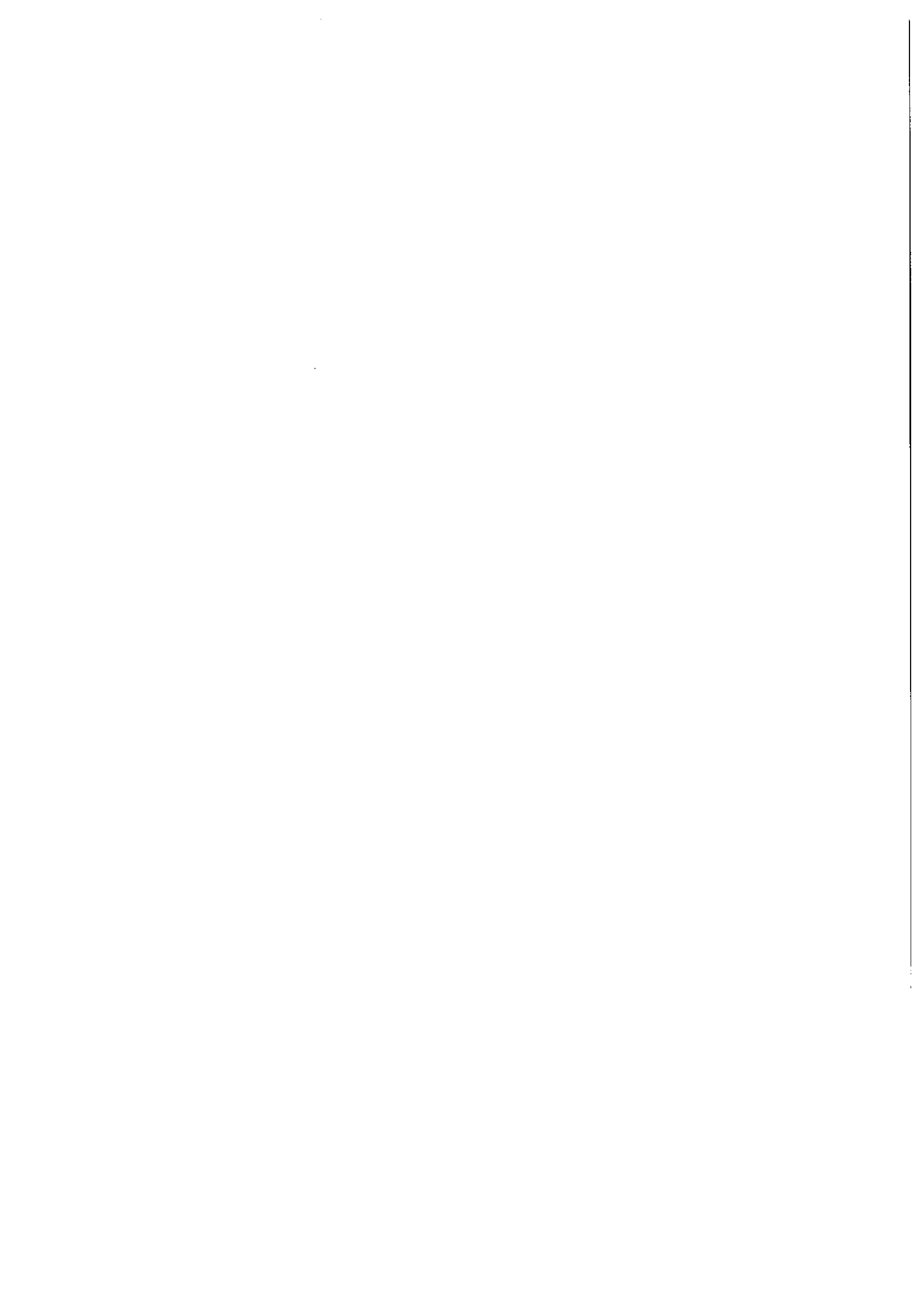
### Chapitres d'ouvrages :

1. Avec Gilles Teulié, « Introduction », in *War Sermons*, pp. vii-xviii.
2. Avec Carmen Mangion, « Gender, Catholicism, Women's Spirituality over the Longue Durée », in Lux-Sterritt, Laurence et Carmen Mangion (dir.) *Gender, Catholicism and Spirituality*, pp. 1-18.
3. « Mary Ward's English Institute and Prescribed Female Roles in the Early Modern Church », in Lux-Sterritt, Laurence et Carmen Mangion (dir.) *Gender, Catholicism and Spirituality*, pp. 83-98.
4. Avec Claire Sorin, « Introduction », in *Women, Literature and Spirituality in Twentieth-Century Writing. E-rea 8.2* (mars 2011). <http://erea.revues.org/1534>
5. Avec Claire Sorin, « Suspicious Saints: The Spiritual Paradox of the Daughters of Eve », in Lux-Sterritt, Laurence et Claire Sorin (dir.) *Spirit, Faith and Church. Women's Experiences in the English-Speaking World, 17<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> centuries*, pp. 1-27.
6. « Clerical Guidance and Lived Spirituality in Early Modern English Convents », in Lux-Sterritt, Laurence et Claire Sorin (dir.) *Spirit, Faith and Church. Women's Experiences in the English-Speaking World, 17<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> centuries*, pp. 60-91.

7. « Divine Love and the Negotiation of Emotions in Early Modern English Convents », in Bowden, Caroline and James E. Kelly (dir.), *The English Convents in Exile, 1600-1800: Communities, Culture and Identity*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2013, pp. 229-45.
8. « Qui est papiste n'est point anglais : identité et altérité dans les pamphlets anticatholiques de l'Angleterre moderne », in Martin Dumont (dir.), *Coexistences confessionnelles en Europe à l'époque moderne. Théories et pratiques, XVIe-XVIIe siècles*, Paris : Honoré Champion, 2015 (à paraître), pp. 134-52.

**Articles dans revues à comité de lecture :**

1. « An Analysis of the Controversy Caused by Mary Ward's Institute in the 1620s », *Recusant History* 25.4 (2001) 636-647.
2. « Between the Cloister and the World: The Successful Compromise of the Ursulines of Toulouse, 1604-1616 », *French History* 16.3 (2002) 247-68.
3. « Préserver l'action au sein de la clôture : le compromis des Ursulines de Toulouse, 1604 – 1616 », *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 221.2 (2004) 175-90.
4. « Les religieuses en mouvement. Ursulines et Dames anglaises à l'aube du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle », *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine* 52.4 (2005) 7-23.
5. « Mary Ward's English Institute: The Active Apostolate as an Act of Self-Affirmation? », *Recusant History* 28.2 (2006) 192-208.
6. « La séduction au service de la perfidie : représentation des missionnaires de la contre-réforme en Angleterre », *Revue de la Société d'Études Anglo-Américaines des XVII<sup>ème</sup> et XVIII<sup>ème</sup> siècles* 65 (2008) 57-75.
7. « Mary Ward et sa Compagnie de Jésus au féminin dans l'Angleterre de la contre-réforme », *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 225.3 (2008) 393-414.
8. « 'Virgo becomes Virago': Women in the Accounts of Seventeenth-Century English Catholic Missionaries », *Recusant History* 30.4 (2011) 537-53.



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« Introduction », in *Spirituality*, vol. 2, éd. Caroline Bowden, *English Convents in Exile, 1600-1800*, 6 vols. Londres : Pickering & Chatto, 2012, xv–xxiii. 299

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## Présentation :

Je joins à ce dossier un exemplaire de ma première monographie tirée de la thèse remaniée, *Redefining Female Religious Life. French Ursulines and English Ladies in Seventeenth-Century Catholicism* (Aldershot : Ashgate, 2005) ; je joins également un exemplaire de l'un des quatre ouvrages collectifs que j'ai codirigés, *Gender, Catholicism and Spirituality* (Basingstoke : Palgrave, 2011), à titre d'exemple. J'aurais aimé pouvoir joindre à ce dossier un exemplaire de mon travail d'édition de sources primaires (*Spirituality*, volume 2 de *English Convents in Exile*, en 6 volumes) ; malheureusement, la politique de Pickering & Chatto ne me permet pas de le faire. La publication de *English Convents in Exile* s'étant faite en deux parties de trois volumes chacune, les éditeurs ne souhaitent pas vendre de volumes individuels qui déferaient leurs lots. Il faut donc acheter le lot des volumes 1 à 3 pour avoir le volume 2 ; l'acquisition de six exemplaires de ce volume représente un investissement d'environ 2 400€, coût qui s'avère malheureusement prohibitif. J'ai donc reproduit ici la table des matières et l'introduction de l'ouvrage, ainsi qu'un échantillon de 23 pages qui, je l'espère, donneront au lecteur une idée de la façon dont j'ai procédé dans le travail d'édition et d'annotation.

La monographie originale, *Living Spirituality. English Benedictine Nuns in Exile, 1598 – 1688*, constitue le tome 3 de ce dossier.

Des exemplaires de tous mes ouvrages seront bien entendu disponibles lors de la soutenance.

Dans ce recueil lui-même, j'ai choisi de présenter la table des matières de tous mes ouvrages, afin de donner au lecteur un aperçu de leur contenu général. J'ai également reproduit tous les travaux que j'ai écrits ou co-écrits : articles, avant-propos, introductions et chapitres d'ouvrages, chacun accompagné d'une brève présentation.

Ce recueil regroupe donc :

- huit articles publiés dans des revues nationales ou internationales à comité de lecture
- huit chapitres d'ouvrages scientifiques
- une introduction à une édition de sources primaires et un échantillon représentatif

organisés en sections thématiques.

## **FEMMES ET VIE SPIRITUELLE**

**Avec Carmen Mangion, « Gender, Catholicism, Women's Spirituality over the Longue Durée », in Lux-Sterritt, Laurence et Carmen Mangion (eds.) *Gender, Catholicism and Spirituality*, Londres: Palgrave, 2010, pp. 1–18.**

### **Résumé:**

Cet ouvrage collectif comporte dix chapitres, chacun apportant un éclairage sur l'expérience des femmes et leur rapport à la piété et à l'Église catholique du Moyen-Âge à l'ère victorienne. L'ambition affichée de cet ouvrage est de s'inscrire délibérément dans la longue durée et de couvrir une aire géographique vaste, prenant en compte l'Angleterre, l'Espagne, la France, l'Italie et les Pays-Bas afin de permettre une croisée des regards sur leurs différents milieux culturels et religieux. Le débat sur l'interaction entre les concepts de genre et de spiritualité dans le monde catholique est bien trop complexe pour être traité en détail en un seul ouvrage, mais chacun des chapitres réunis ici contribue à mettre en lumière ces interactions dans un contexte précis. De cette diversité géographique et chronologique se détachent pourtant des thèmes récurrents. La place des femmes reste au fil des siècles très strictement délimitée par les autorités cléricales qui ne laissent guère de possibilité à des vocations originales de s'exprimer en dehors de la plus stricte orthodoxie. L'investissement féminin semble, au contraire, enclin à prendre des formes diverses, dont les dénominateurs communs sont souvent l'adaptabilité, la flexibilité et la capacité à évoluer institutionnellement. Ces mouvements religieux échappent à toute définition binaire (actif/contemplatif; séculier/religieux) et sont le lieu privilégié d'une autorité et d'une expression spirituelles au féminin.

9 399 mots

mots-clés : femmes ; Église catholique ; spiritualité ; piété ; genre

### **Présentation du texte :**

J'ai initié ce projet d'ouvrage collectif fin 2008 car je souhaitais combiner mon champ d'expertise et celui de ma collègue Carmen Mangion (Birkbeck College, University of London), elle aussi spécialiste des femmes et du catholicisme en Angleterre, mais au dix-neuvième siècle. Son travail se penche plus particulièrement sur les communautés séculières, et sur celles qui œuvrent dans le siècle à apporter soins et réconfort aux malades, aux pauvres et aux enfants. Nos deux domaines de spécialité me semblaient particulièrement bien se compléter ; ensemble, ils permettent un regard sur l'implication féminine dans l'expérience vécue du catholicisme européen sur la longue durée. C'est dans cette optique que nous avons sollicité des collègues spécialités de périodes et de pays différents afin de faire apparaître, tel un palimpseste, la rémanence de certains concepts essentiels dans l'expérience catholique féminine.

# Gender, Catholicism and Spirituality

Women and the Roman Catholic  
Church in Britain and Europe,  
1200–1900

*Edited by*

LAURENCE LUX-STERRITT

and

CARMEN M. MANGION

palgrave  
macmillan



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First published 2011 by  
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

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ISBN 978-0-230-57760-2 hardback  
ISBN 978-0-230-57761-9 paperback

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1  
20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11

Printed in China

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# Introduction: Gender, Catholicism and Women's Spirituality over the *Longue Durée*

*Laurence Lux-Sterritt and  
Carmen M. Mangion*

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Derived from St Paul's reference to 'spiritual persons' as those 'influenced by the Holy Spirit of God',<sup>1</sup> the term spirituality became linked to seventeenth-century French spiritual writers and clergy. In subsequent centuries, the general understanding of spirituality became increasingly non-denominational. Today, spirituality is broadly understood to give meaning and purpose to life and to provide a transcendental experience to those in search of the sacred. It can be attained through meditation, prayer or communion with the natural world. This transcendence can lead to a sense of connectedness with something greater than oneself, such as nature, the universe or a higher being. For some, spirituality is thoughtful and passive, while for others it is emotional or action-oriented. Notions of spirituality are not fixed, but rather culturally derived and constantly shifting, fashioned by myriad forces including gender, ethnicity and class. Since spirituality mirrors specific times, places and cultures, it can be used as an analytic tool to examine various facets of society.

Each of the ten essays gathered here focuses on specific persons or groups within the cultural milieus of England, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain between the thirteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Of course, we cannot hope to present in this volume an all-inclusive overview of how such complex concepts as gender and spirituality interact with the history of Catholicism, but each piece should be seen as a small contribution towards a greater understanding of their interactions. These essays, exploring female relationships with piety and religious vocations in their various contexts, raise similar questions. It appears that, when studying the religious endeavours of women within the Catholic Church, regardless of time and place, one is confronted with issues concerning norms and margins, be they vocational, social or institutional. Authors therefore question whether or not female agents for the Church differentiated themselves from male religious, and whether they considered



their strengths and failings as defined or influenced by their sex. In studying women's voluntary contributions to the Catholic Church, each chapter engages with the gendered preconceptions within which they operated. To what extent were female contributions to the Catholic Church limited by socially defined gendered acceptability? Such considerations, in turn, lead to the questioning of the relationship of these women's vocations with the (male) institutional orthodoxy of the Church they aimed to serve. Indeed, the success or failure of female movements was often decided by women's positions regarding canonical conformity, religious rules and clerical authority. Yet did success depend upon institutional orthodoxy?

The following chapters consider a denominational, Roman Catholic spirituality. Despite their varied geographical and chronological contexts, all are linked to a shifting theological vision. Moreover, our understanding of the gendered nature of spirituality and Catholicism is informed by our designation of gender as a category of analysis which allows the development of diverse observations of femininities and masculinities. Consequently, this collection of essays reflects the gendering of both women and men as spiritualities shift over time and place.<sup>2</sup> As can be seen in this collection, women did not confine themselves to operating within official boundaries.<sup>3</sup> Their faith legitimated actions which were often unconventional. The underlying tension between the authority women believed came from God and the (male) ecclesiastical view of this authority sprang partly from gendered discourses.

### **Gender and religious status: women in the institutional Church**

Until the thirteenth century, women enjoyed a certain amount of freedom in the ways they were allowed to express their spirituality. For instance, the Flemish Mary of Oignies (1177–1213) was one of the most famous living saints, yet she was not a nun. Though married, she and her spouse consensually vowed to live together in chastity and converted their home into a leper hospital. Free from the constraints of a religious establishment, with its rules, its strict *horarium*, its enclosure and its male authority, Mary of Oignies was able to develop a spirituality which was flexible, in direct personal interaction with the world but also with the divine. When she quickly became renowned, it was not simply as a charitable soul whose apostolate brought much-needed succour to her neighbours, but also as a mystic and a saint who enjoyed unmediated spiritual communion with God. Her a-institutional choice of life was translated into greater spiritual freedom, a mysticism which allowed her – despite her status as a laywoman – to wield great influence even over clerics such as her confessor, and later hagiographer, Bishop Jacques de Vitry (d. 1240).<sup>4</sup>

Although the Catholic Church was initially benevolent towards unorthodox avenues for female spirituality, issues of control were always present. When Clare of Assisi aligned her Poor Ladies of San Damiano (later known as the Poor Clares) with the Franciscan family recently approved by Innocent III, she was perceived to borrow from male expressions of spirituality, since she assumed the ideal of absolute poverty, a new feature of religious life spearheaded

by Francis of Assisi (1181–1226). This unorthodox choice met with clerical opposition and in 1215–16, Clare went directly to the pope to seek his help. In response, her Poor Clares were granted a rare papal favour, the unique Privilege of poverty, in which Innocent III recognized their right to remain in poverty in imitation of Christ. The Poor Clares were the only female Order to be able to secure such a thorough endorsement from the papacy, and to gain such protection. Such success reflected Clare's charisma and power. Yet, despite initially supporting Clare's ideal, the clergy – including Francis himself – became uncomfortable with what it entailed. Clare was to fight for the rest of her life for what she saw as the initial *raison d'être* of her Order, poverty and the imitation of Christ, against a clerical hierarchy for whom neither was appropriate as a defining trait of the Poor Clares. The decades of conflict which peppered Clare's experience testify to the difficulties which faced women whose vocation did not fit clerical definitions of acceptable female religious life. Later still, after the deaths of both Francis and Clare, the spirituality of the female Order was deeply transformed.<sup>5</sup> Anna Welch's chapter demonstrates that Clare's status in the Franciscan movement was muted by subsequent leaders, which reflected the lack of clarity and unity amongst the friars themselves.

Although the varied ways of life of spiritual women at times provoked the suspicion of their secular neighbours and local divines, Pope Gregory IX's 1233 bull *Glorium virginalem* offered informal religious groups a measure of papal protection, since it no longer suspected quasi-religious women of heresy. However, by the end of the century, concerns arose about the status of woman in the institutional Church. Pope Boniface VIII's 1298 decree *Periculoso* reduced the temporal power of abbesses and demanded the complete separation of religious women from the outside world.<sup>6</sup> Although the Bull was applied only loosely for a long period of time, it was a sign of things to come, as it reflected the Church's growing desire to contain the women in its midst through the imposition of walls, Rules and ecclesiastical control.<sup>7</sup> After several decades of relative disregard, this initial movement of conventualization was followed by a wave of inner reforms when Church officials, helped by zealous nuns and abbesses, attempted to impose higher standards of spirituality and purer moral values to fight the perceived slackness of certain convents. The observance of the same *horarium* and of identical Rules in daily life created a strong sense of cohesion within communities and dynamized the intensity of their spiritual lives as a group. However, as the reformed communities were placed more directly under the control of bishops and ordinaries, the powers of female governance and the convents' contacts with the outside world were subject to further erosion.<sup>8</sup>

Yet the relationship between male representatives of the Church and the women who sought to serve it was not always tense or confrontational. Many religious institutes adopted male-defined Rules and conditions willingly and viewed a cloistered life in contemplation, following episcopal guidance, as the most holy path to spiritual perfection. Many women never questioned increasing institutionalization and some welcomed it whole-heartedly. It is difficult to assess, over a period of several centuries, the level of resistance or compliance with which female groups encountered male control. The cloistered existence

of two of the most renowned religious women studied in this volume, Clare of Assisi (1194–1253) and Teresa of Ávila (1515–82, in religion Teresa de Jesús), points to the continued attraction of an institutional life supported and encouraged by the Church. For many women, and their families, this was the most viable option of lived spirituality, and they celebrated the benefits of *clausura*. Institutional religious life represented an important connection to their Church as well as a source of authority. This fed their spirituality and allowed them to become spiritual leaders within the convent.<sup>9</sup>

The Protestant Reformation heralded another period of increased episcopal control over the women who wished to be recognized officially as religious. In order to offset Protestant advances, the Catholic Church implemented a two-pronged strategy. First, it embarked upon a vigorous effort of reform from within, a Catholic Reformation meant to eradicate the abuses of the Church, to purify its practice and strengthen its spirituality. Second, an aggressive missionary movement was launched as a counter-attack against the progress of Protestantism, focused on re-conquering territory and souls. Whilst many enclosed institutions, both male and female, offered their prayers as a means of religious action to further the success of the Catholic offensive against the spread of Protestantism, Ignatius Loyola founded his Society of Jesus, the Constitutions of which were approved in 1540 by Paul III. The Jesuits' mission was to catechize and proselytize in the world, focusing in great part on the education of boys and the conversion of men. They were to be soldiers of God, regular clergy unconfined by enclosure. Their mobility and flexibility enabled them to work effectively to re-establish the spiritual authority of Rome, and their apostolate appealed greatly to both lay and religious women.

Despite this appeal, ecclesiastical authorities were unwilling to apply a similar line of action across the boundaries of gender. Rather than open female religious life to action in the world, the Church embraced Boniface VIII's *Periculoso* when, in 1563, the Council of Trent defined women religious as strictly enclosed, denying them the chance of an apostolic mission outside the cloister: 'After religious profession no nun may go out of her monastery on any pretext even for short time, except for a legitimate reason approved by the bishop [...].'<sup>10</sup> This was followed by decrees crystallizing the Church's rigidity towards what it deemed acceptable for women in the institutional Church: according to Pius V's *Circa Pastoralis* (1566) and *Lubricum Vitae Genitus* (1568), enclosure was a prerequisite for female communities claiming religious status.<sup>11</sup>

Despite their usefulness given the disputed circumstances of sixteenth-century religious strife, women who embraced vocations which differed from this model were to remain secular. Militant apostolic work, catechesis and the salvation of souls were considered better suited for men, since women were deemed physically, morally and spiritually unable to endure the difficulties awaiting them when faced with such duties.<sup>12</sup> One of the main obstacles hindering women's participation in the active work of the Catholic offensive resided in the belief that women were, by nature, flawed and therefore unsuitable for such missionary ventures.<sup>13</sup> This combination of religious tradition and vivid suspicion of female constancy made the idea of women missionaries unacceptable to Church authorities.

Men of the Church, in their capacities as chroniclers, spiritual directors or administrators, often de-emphasized the multifaceted and flexible nature of female movements. As they named them, defined them as groups, sometimes even attributed male founders for them and imposed established conventual Rules upon them, they sought to keep control of female movements. As shown in Querciolo Mazzonis's chapter on Angela Merici's Italian Ursulines, unrequited clerical control could change the initial essence of female religious endeavours. Initially, Merici's lay women were responsible for their own lives, and their Company was managed by women for women. Yet issues of authority and control created tensions between the congregations and both their secular and religious neighbours. Although Angela Merici had obtained Paul III's approval in 1544, in 1582 the Milan Archbishop Carlo Borromeo (1538–1584) reorganized the Ursulines into religious congregations where the members lived together as laywomen with an apostolic and educational focus.<sup>14</sup> As they spread to the rest of Italy, then France in the seventeenth century, they deviated from the religious type of life initially envisaged by Angela Merici.

The Englishwoman Mary Ward (1585–1645) encountered a similar struggle to persuade the Church to validate her proposed Institute modelled on the Society of Jesus. As Laurence Lux-Sterritt's chapter explains, even Mary Ward's Jesuit confessor Roger Lee was intimidated by her vocation: in the Rules he had penned for her in 1612, the English Ladies were to be a teaching and enclosed, not a militant, missionary cohort. Mary Ward's continued search for papal approval and her determination to apply the Ignatian Rules to her Institute led to her ultimate trial in 1631, when her English Ladies were ordered to disband and the foundress was labeled a heretic.

The tension between the cloister and the world has always been at the very core of monastic life; yet recent influential studies have convincingly argued that enclosure was not so hermetic as to prevent all communication between the two worlds.<sup>15</sup> Convents had a deep impact upon the societies in which they operated, and conversely were influenced by them too. Claire Walker's *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe* explores English convents in France and the Low Countries and shows that enclosed English nuns transcended the boundaries of their physical clausturation: their religious vocations stemmed from the troubled context of English Catholicism. The taking of vows became a complex act, both spiritually intimate and very public, as a political gesture. The spirit of the English mission was present at the heart of spiritual life, since these houses constantly evoked the sufferings of their coreligionists at home. The same was true of the aristocratic nuns of Naples discussed by Hills in *Invisible City*; though sometimes enclosed to suit their families' economic circumstances, these women's influence went further than the thick walls of their convents and they enjoyed a certain authority in the city.

Therefore, as noted in *Nuns: A History of Convent Life*, general debates over issues such as monastic observance or strict enclosure were influenced by the varied local circumstances of each convent.<sup>16</sup> Local conditions invariably influenced life in religious houses and softened the Tridentine spirit of uniform *clausura* with more nuanced realities, leading at times to a rather more flexible model of female monastic life. With time, papal attitudes slowly shifted to

take into account the achievements of women who, through their work outside the cloister, emerged as successful Christian missionaries. Yet this evolution was not straightforward, and did not willingly concede religious status to these pious workers. In his 1727 *Pretiosus*, Pope Benedict XIII gave his approbation to women who took simple vows and appeared outside convent walls; but if this edict allowed tertiaries to exist, it pointedly ignored the issue of religious status. Later, in *Romanus Pontifex* (1732), Benedict XIII reversed *Pretiosus* and insisted that religious status for women implied strict separation from the world.<sup>17</sup>

Despite papal hesitations, lay and clerical support for women religious living religious life outside the cloister became more encouraging by the eighteenth century. This support was based on the practical needs of a parish or a diocese, as simple-vowed women religious provided much-needed education, health care and parish assistance. Recent research on eighteenth-century French women religious asserts that their institutions, charity schools, nursing homes and hospitals, were tolerated and encouraged for pragmatic reasons: they filled a need.<sup>18</sup> Rome's acceptance of simple-vowed women religious was reflected in *Quamvis Justo* (1749), which gave women's religious congregations legitimate and juridical authority although their members were not considered 'true nuns'.<sup>19</sup> As Laurence Lux-Sterritt's essay establishes, such times offered Mary Ward's eighteenth-century successors a welcome window of opportunity: they negotiated with Rome and gained approval as an enclosed Institute, accepting traditional conventual hierarchy and ecclesiastical control. When they became devoted to the education of girls, they endorsed a role which the Church deemed better suited to women, but in so doing they created a community which diverged greatly from Mary Ward's initial ideals.<sup>20</sup>

### **Gender and forms of religious life: multifarious female organizations**

The historiography of female Catholic spiritualities illustrates that women's expressions of piety have tended, across the ages, to take less institutional forms than those of their male counterparts.<sup>21</sup> As Caroline Walker Bynum explained:

the basic characteristics of women's piety cut across the lines between lay and monastic, heterodox and orthodox, churchly and sectarian. Although women were found in all institutions – Church, monastery and sect – their mystical, charismatic piety seemed to express itself most comfortably in amorphous groups, such as beguine or tertiary communities, or in friendship networks within religious houses.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, since the Church was embodied by its male clergy, women were to some extent excluded, and even those who most wished to serve the Church would never be part of it in the same way as men. Women's piety expressed itself in modes which bypassed male institutional forms, and resisted external pressures towards institutionalization.

As shown in *Sisters in Arms*, despite the Church's attempts at controlling female religious life, the avenues chosen by Catholic women remained, through

the ages, extremely varied, nuanced and difficult to categorize neatly.<sup>23</sup> The labels which helped categorize women religious into enclosed nuns, recluses, tertiaries or lay sisters did not encompass the variety of female religious identities, and women's endeavours often blurred clerically given theoretical definitions. In keeping with this seemingly adaptable, flexible nature which centred on experience rather than structure, female organizations often seemed less preoccupied by their religious status than by a personal dedication to God and to the Church. Their outlook reintroduced the self at the core on their relationship with the divine, giving an important place to self-surrender and mysticism as privileged vectors of their experience of the sacred.

Indeed, not all religiously inclined women entered the convent: some were married, others were widows, whilst others still, remaining single, preferred to serve the Church from outside its ranks, in a secular capacity. The reasons for such choices were varied, sometimes linked to a refusal by cloistered institutions, at other times owing to more pragmatic considerations linked to property ownership. The Italian Angela Merici (c. 1470–1540) first founded her Ursulines as a community of secular women, serving the Church and the community outside the convent and without clerical control. Querciolo Mazzonis's chapter illustrates that, as spiritual laywomen, the Ursulines' 'third status' remained somewhat vague. Yet since their roles did not compete with male institutional roles, they gained papal approval in 1546. Merici's original idea of a female laity 'free to follow their personal inspiration' gave women a new space to develop their spirituality outside the traditional '*aut maritus, aut murus*', a husband or a cloister. These women were offered a degree of religious freedom more associated with a-institutional structures than with Rule-oriented religious Orders.

In the sixteenth century, the confessional crisis of the Reformation created a new environment in which female religious life rapidly acquired 'distinct configurations responding to the new circumstances'.<sup>24</sup> A specifically female type of active, uncloistered spiritual existence developed to such an extent that it became a feature of Catholic social and religious life by the seventeenth century. In the Netherlands, the religious movement of *Devotio Moderna* gave rise to the Sisters of the Common Life, who lived together bound by a private promise.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, some spiritual women chose a-institutional forms which were neither cloistered nor communal, neither nuns nor beguines, but operated on a more independent level, one that required the balancing of diverse roles. Yet these spiritual virgins did not count themselves as part of the laity, but rather as part of the Church. As both spiritual daughters and spiritual mothers, Dutch spiritual virgins had to manoeuvre delicately between obedience and authority, balancing sometimes conflicting responsibilities.

The paradox of submission which Monteiro identifies is an important feature in many of the essays in this collection. The institutional Church relegated religious women as subordinate to religious men, and reminded them of this through prescriptive literature which gendered ideals such as obedience and submission as feminine. Yet religious women used their faith to create for themselves a measure of authority and a mode of action by creating a-institutional cohorts. These forms of actions were not without gendered boundaries, but within

those boundaries women had latitude to be both spiritual and temporal leaders. Unlike women religious, they did not cling to the visible signs and symbols of institutional recognition. Their spirituality was fluid and less constrained by the requirements of the Church.

In France, the *filles séculières* (single laywomen who practised a religious lifestyle in the world) became educators, nurses and catechists, and lived in communities; yet they took only simple vows, since their unenclosed apostolate differentiated them from the solemn-vowed contemplative Orders. Apostolic, charitable vocations soon came to be construed as a typically female form of involvement in the service of the Church. By the eighteenth-century, Italian 'lay congregations' such as *Maestre Pie*, or 'Pious schoolmistresses', formed a bridge between new and old forms of religious life and were precursors to the congregations of the nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup> Many founders in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century were like Thérèse Couderc (1805–1885), whose experience of the French Revolution informed her passion for what she saw as the 'work of the Lord'. As Kate Stogdon demonstrates, Couderc and her Sisters of Our Lady of the Retreat in the Cenacle sought to 're-construct and re-invigorate Roman Catholicism' in France.<sup>27</sup>

The amorphous groups and communities that emerged gave women opportunities to practise their devotion together without entering recognized convents. Such groups sometimes gathered single women, virgins and widows only, whilst others accepted married women. These cohorts did not feel the need to answer to a precise name, to pay deference to a specific founder or figure of authority, or to observe strict rules. They existed purely to allow women of a spiritual nature to dedicate themselves to their faith through the practice of charity, and a life of apostolate action was at the core of their lived spiritual experience, whilst a corporate identity remained relatively unimportant. Yet despite these women's dedication to the Church, Rome and the ecclesiastical hierarchy remained ambivalent about them.<sup>28</sup>

The essays in this volume show that female forms of religious life escape classification and boundaries. Not only do they appear to defy Church definitions which differentiated between religious and secular, they also blurred the boundaries between action and contemplation and transcended geographical determinism. The influential *La sainteté en Occident*<sup>29</sup> proposed a typology of medieval sainthood which was defined geographically. It presented a North/South dichotomy according to which nearly all northern European saints came from an aristocratic background and extolled virtues such as austerity and separation from the world. In southern Europe sainthood took on a less elitist face; sanctity was granted to more popular, often urban figures who generally were actively involved in the apostolate and charitable works.

Although this theory was also endorsed by the authors of *Saints and Society*,<sup>30</sup> it has since been challenged by Caroline Walker Bynum, who argues that northern women did not always embrace the more reclusive forms of piety by becoming nuns, contemplatives or mystics and rejecting the world; conversely, she shows that not all southern women worked in the world and dedicated their piety to others in their active, neighbourly apostolate as tertiaries. In agreement with this interpretation, this volume argues that female

forms of religious life escape attempts to reduce them to categories or binary classifications. Bynum rehabilitates the under-studied functions of religious or quasi-religious women who combined the roles of both Martha and Mary, valuing forms of contemplation and mystical life whilst at the same time extending their apostolate and charity in the world. Therefore, the model presented by the Low Country beguines 'raise[s] doubts both about the north/south dichotomy and about the innerworldly-active/world-fleeing-contemplative dichotomy'.<sup>31</sup> In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the same region had witnessed the development of the beguinages, informal communities of women who chose to live together whilst retaining their secular freedom.<sup>32</sup>

The essays contained in this volume come to a similar conclusion with regards to the dichotomy of action and contemplation. The female movements studied here tend to support Bynum's conclusion that 'in the women's self-understanding, there is in general no contrast between action in the world and contemplation (or discipline) that flees the world'.<sup>33</sup> The case studies offered, which span both northern and southern Europe and Britain over the *longue durée*, highlight how even nuns who accepted and treasured claustration as holy nevertheless considered themselves as active through their writings, their prayers and their devotions.<sup>34</sup> Conversely, active women also cherished contemplative elements of their lives and spent much time in prayer and communion with the divine. The roles of Martha and of Mary seemed intertwined rather than mutually exclusive.

As echoed in the chapters of this collection, the active impetus which was already present from the early modern era in female Catholic spiritualities intensified with time, and although its gradual acceptance was subject to variations in different countries or regions, by the nineteenth century the 'mixed life' of active spirituality had become more commonplace. Active women in this era of the nun<sup>35</sup> were credited for the development of a distinctly Catholic spiritual ethos promulgated through their schools, orphanages, reformatories and hospitals. In France, female religious associations, both religious and lay, were among most characteristic forms of female religiosity in the first half of the nineteenth century and were in the forefront in providing welfare services.<sup>36</sup> Convent networks made 'the most profound impact on the provision of charity' in Ireland.<sup>37</sup> In Spain, the resurgence of women religious occurred in the last quarter of the century, but they also became the 'unrivalled spearhead of Catholic revival'.<sup>38</sup>

The tension between a Jesuit-like vocation and a more gendered (and clerically acceptable) educational sphere of activity was a common pattern in innovative female endeavours. It affected various groups, including the Cenacle Sisters, who in the nineteenth century incorporated the Jesuit *Spiritual Exercises* as a foundation for their own spiritual life and also employed them in retreats given to women. This was a new domain of apostolic ministry; no other female congregation had ever given the *Spiritual Exercises* in France. The death of the congregation's male co-founder put their endeavours at risk of failure. Founder Thérèse Couderc was aware that male support was necessary for this new venture to succeed, especially since such work could be construed as an infringement upon ministerial responsibilities and a possible trespass on the work of male



clergy. In 1836, she successfully defended this vocation against some of her sisters who, supported by local clergy, wished to steer away from their Ignatian undertakings and prioritize the education of girls.

Indeed, by the nineteenth century, the need to catechize, to teach and to nurse was unremitting, and this work became integrated with the spirituality of simple-vowed women religious. Religious congregations became the foot soldiers of Rome as the practical needs of the Church far outweighed some gendered limitations of femininity. In nineteenth-century Italy there was an explosion of women's groups active in the welfare and education of poor girls, linked by a 'powerful need for community and solidarity'. Many were transformed into active religious congregations such as the Servants of Charity in Brescia (1844) or the Canossian Daughters of Charity in Verona (1808), whose remit was to form 'good, Christian mothers'. Between 1800 and 1860, at least 127 new foundations were approved in Italy.<sup>39</sup>

Yet, as Carmen Mangion's chapter argues, prayer remained the core of this 'mixed life', but balancing the contemplative with the active required constant attention. There were those, from both within and without the convent, who saw the 'mixed' life as too contemplative and others who saw it as too utilitarian. Yet, action was construed as a pathway towards sanctity, and for the Church, active religious life was an important means of re-Catholicizing the masses of unchurched Catholics. Interestingly, much of the nineteenth-century historiography of female laity and religious focuses less on spirituality *per se* than on the charitable features influenced by a robust Catholic faith. This reflects the dominance of social and cultural studies but perhaps also is symptomatic of the perceived a-historicism of religion and spirituality.

However, freedom from the cloister did not necessarily lead to a more flexible understanding of spirituality. As congregations grew in size, their missions expanded and cloistered walls were replaced by an invisible cloister, a strict morality codified in Rules and constitutions. Though imposed by the Church, these strictures were endorsed by women's congregations. Carmen Mangion's chapter explains that after their founder's death the Sisters of Mercy were not content with a simple Rule and constitutions but implemented a guide which included more complex regulations to monitor religious life and encourage uniformity. The addition of Rule upon Rule increased the distance between the religious sisters themselves, and separated them also from their charges and co-workers. Prayer life was strictly defined and timed, as were all aspects of religious life; these changes met with clerical approval and were confirmed with the codification of canon law in 1917.

### **Gender and spiritual expressions: the authority of female piety and writings**

The essays in this volume show the complex realities of Catholic female spiritualities: they illustrate how women involved in important religious endeavours could be secular or religious, active or contemplative, northern or southern European. Yet more importantly, they also demonstrate that these female movements escape such classifications or binary definitions, since they

often reconciled modes of spirituality which they did not see as antithetical but rather as complementary. The outward configurations which female religious groups adopted expressed their religious spirit, one which was less preoccupied with status or propriety than with efficacy. These women sought to further the faith, and to contribute to the broad mission of their Church; as individuals, rather than institutions, they offered their services to God in a manner which was not always mediated by male clerical input. The essays in this volume all agree that female piety in many ways bypassed clerically imposed rules, structures, vows or hierarchy. In their individual religious endeavours, women often claimed to obey the revealed will of God, and referred to a mystical closeness with the divine. Indeed, a tradition of female mystics, prophets and visionaries was already well established in the thirteenth century. For instance, Mechtilde of Magdeburg (1207–82), as a beguine, had written *The Flowing Light of the Godhead* to describe how she was filled with God's presence from the age of 12. The avenue of mysticism, buttressed by the Mendicant Orders, offered opportunities for female piety increasingly to differentiate itself from men's, favouring direct rapport with the divine. Famous figures of medieval mysticism, such as the recluse Benedictine Julian of Norwich (1342–1416), voiced their intimate relationship with the divine: in her *Revelations of Divine Love, or Showings*, Julian recorded the visions she received in May 1373 and insisted upon the unmediated nature of her relationship with God. Distinct from theologians of her time, she emphasized the human nature of God. Thus comforted by her faith in a kind and loving God, she suggested that Christians must surrender their souls to God in their quest for divine presence. This philosophy of hope, love and self-surrender was shared by many of the prominent women considered in this collection.

The spiritual women studied in this volume illustrate the importance of mysticism in the female experience of the divine. Clare of Assisi, even before meeting Francis, had already acquired a reputation as a mystic, dedicating much of her time to contemplation, meditation and prayer; her deep conviction that her vocation was the will of God gave her the strength to struggle against all opposition to see her Franciscan ideal accepted. Similarly, Frenchwoman Marguerite Porete (c.1250–1310) wrote her *Mirror of Simple Annihilated Souls* in order to convey to others the lights she claimed she had received directly from God; she did not present herself as the self-willed author of the book, but rather, as Rina Lahav's chapter reveals, 'as an annihilated self which ha[d] become the vessel of God's message'. Not unlike Clare of Assisi, Porete refused to stop pursuing her religious goals, and did not hesitate to disregard ecclesiastic censorship in order to be true to what she saw as her Godly duty to proselytize.

The motif of mystical revelation is problematic, since self-surrender to the perceived will of God could become the very cornerstone of female resistance to male authority. Women who, when speaking in their own names, self-consciously acknowledged the normative feminine ideals which subordinated them to the authority of clerics, became much less pliable when invested with what they saw as a divine mission. The language of self-surrender could be used as a discursive tool to deflect criticism or perhaps exhibit agency. In Spain, Teresa de Jesús's

writings testified to her direct knowledge of God and edified not only her female followers but also her spiritual director and the clerics who surrounded her. Using what one literary scholar has called her 'pragmatic stylistics', she subtly turned the tables on the perceived spiritual weakness of women, in order to make it an asset.<sup>40</sup> Teresa claimed that, since a woman's judgement was indeed feeble, she needed God's direct guidance. Therefore, when she obeyed His commands, all opposition was bound to be futile or misdirected.

Such convictions were to be found across Europe. Mary Ward's endeavours for the recatholicization of England following the Ignatian model found their source in a series of visions culminating in 1611 with what she described as the divine commandment to 'Take the Same of the Society' (in other words to imitate the Ignatians as faithfully as possible).<sup>41</sup> It was this revelation which gave her the determination to struggle against much opposition to see her Society of Jesus for women established and recognized, since such was the will of God. Mary Ward described the feelings that compelled her, almost against her will, to leave behind the ideal of the so-called perfect life of monastic contemplation and forsake her personal inclinations in a gesture of self-offering.<sup>42</sup> Although the path indicated to her was not one which she had spontaneously chosen, she resolved to embrace it as her godly duty, and would not hear clerical injunctions to abandon her mission.

Such rhetoric of empowerment through mystical self-surrender was typically feminine and it persisted, although it became rarer, into the nineteenth century. Kate Stogdon's chapter demonstrates that in France Thérèse Couderc used the motif of self-surrender to challenge ecclesial responses to her requests when she disagreed with the nature of the response. Couderc used the language of obedience and humility but remained insistent that the work of the congregation, giving retreats, needed guidance not from diocesan priests, but from the Jesuits.<sup>43</sup>

Over the chronological span of this volume, the female spiritual voice was to be subject to increasing attempts at clerical control. Women's mysticism became the object of suspicion, especially after the confessional crisis of the sixteenth century when the developments of the Protestant Reformation:

led ecclesiastical figures to rally to the defence of their institutions, deflected the attention of many members of religious orders from promoting the cult of the 'living saint' to the doctrinal controversy, and increased caution in preaching and in publicizing visions and spiritual doctrines that would soon come to seem suspect.<sup>44</sup>

Following both the Enlightenment's dedication to reason and the Catholic Church's efforts to contain modes of spirituality which evaded its control, the status of mysticism gradually diminished. Although forms of female mysticism survived into the nineteenth and even the twentieth centuries, they did not enjoy the same kudos as in centuries past, and were neither celebrated nor publicized. The mystic visions and revelations of women such as Mary Potter (1847-1913), founder of the Little Company of Mary, were dismissed by otherwise supportive clergy as 'bouts of imagination'.<sup>45</sup>

As the essays in this collection affirm, many women upset the gendered preconceptions and role-distributions of their age when they defended their religious writings or their apostolic works. Church authorities were unsettled by the unmediated nature of their expressions of piety, which sometimes bypassed its control or usurped the perceived preserves of the clergy. Hence, women's choices in their modes of spiritual experience came under close scrutiny.

Women's religious writings and teachings were particularly subject to caution; those who did not gain clerical support were to face insurmountable difficulties, trials, and sometimes condemnation.<sup>46</sup> As Rina Lahav's chapter shows, Marguerite Porete had chosen to write her *Mirror of Simple Annihilated Souls* using the form of a sermon. As she aimed to edify her audience, she followed typical prescriptions in sermon writing, and in so doing she contravened several of the Church's conventions. Here was a woman who flouted the Pauline decree against women speaking publicly on religious subjects; moreover, what she taught was the result of her own immediate experience of God, and was not approved by Church officials. Finally, and perhaps even more importantly, she had used 'male' means of instructing. Porete therefore challenged gender norms: she not only altered traditional exegesis to fit her new theology, which in itself threatened the teachings of the Church, but did this using a typically clerical standard of expression, the formulaic sermon. Yet Porete did not seem to accept the gendered limitations imposed upon her work, and she defended her right to speak in public. When her work was condemned by the Inquisition, she refused to stop her teaching. For refusing to heed the Pauline order enjoining women to be silent, and for transgressing perceived female religious limitations, she paid the ultimate price and was executed in 1310.

In the context of the so-called Counter-Reformation, Mary Ward also believed that her divine revelations empowered her to speak and act despite the social and religious restrictions imposed upon women. Her uncompromising stance regarding the capabilities of the female self lends itself to a radical understanding of the agency of women. Ward identified women's abilities and failings and saw them as no different from men's. She wrote: 'There is no such difference between men and women, that women may not do great matters, as we have seen by the example of many Saints who have done great things, and I hope in God it will be seen that women in time to come will do much.'<sup>47</sup> Clearly, she saw no issue with women's agency, autonomy and leadership, especially in the urgent circumstances of the Catholic struggle against Protestant progress.

Ward's subordinating of gendered limitations to pragmatic efficacy in times of crisis echoed the famous words of one she would have recognized as a female exemplar, the Spanish Teresa de Jesús. Even as a recognized mystic, Teresa de Jesús required male approval for her writings, although they were directed at her female subordinates and aimed to teach and inspire other women. In the *Way to Perfection*, Teresa defended women's spiritual rights, reminding her readers that Jesus gave women as much love as he did men, and even credited them with more faith. Empowered by her direct, mystical 'knowledge of God', she used her authoritative voice to share her knowledge with religious men. She denounced men's despotism over the religious endeavours of women, which she claimed went contrary to God's will: 'I see that times are so bad that it is

not right to reject virtuous and strong spirits, even if they be women.' These words are highly reminiscent of those written by Mary Ward in the seventeenth century. Yet, as Elizabeth Rhodes's chapter demonstrates, Teresa went further than to claim the recognition of female worth in the Church: she actually critiqued male spiritual guidance, which she argued led to risks to the souls of women. She criticized their lack of confidentiality (which if gendered female would be identified as gossiping) and pointed out their need for humility in accepting God's will when they were not favoured with spiritual gifts. She actively attempted to redefine masculinity by transmitting her spiritual values to men. In leaving this book as a legacy to her sisters, she was expecting them also to play a role in the 'management of masculinity'.

Yet Teresa was ever cautious when she dealt with the religious politics of gender: aware of gendered constraints imposed upon female religious writing, she used 'a pattern of linguistic choice motivated by deliberate strategies and constrained by social roles'.<sup>48</sup> By appropriating what male authorities defined as the acceptable language of women, a low-key, humble style, she appeared both unpretentious and unthreatening. Such precaution, she knew, was essential since, to men such as the nuncio Felipe Sega, she was guilty of teaching others against the Pauline prohibition.<sup>49</sup> Yet when she spoke as a 'little woman', she deflected opposition by endorsing patriarchal preconceptions of female acceptability as a vehicle for a message which remained, nevertheless, very personal, unorthodox and powerful.

As Jenna Lay's essay also illustrates, female writings could wield considerable charismatic authority. Reading was an important form of spirituality which fed the spiritual life of contemplative sisters, and women such as Barbara Constable (1617-1684) contributed to the corpus of reading material available for nuns to study. Thus, communal spirituality was shared through 'learning, example and instruction'. Spiritual reading and **contemplative prayer** acted as an intermediary between God and the reader, and when Constable established her own 'interpretative authority', her writings came to play an important mediating role between the penitent and the divine, a role which would normally have been the preserve of the clergy. However, Lay also notes that Constable employed the modesty topos to disguise her authority. Moreover, Barbara Constable's advice 'to Preachers' and 'for missionaries' added her voice to discourses of 'contemporary religious politics and spiritual controversies'. Her work was not simply for private convent consumption; she meant it for a wider audience. Like Teresa de Jesús, she wanted to influence those outside the convent with her ideas on spiritual direction and her theories on the nature of religious authority.

As the chapters on Barbara Constable and Teresa de Jesús illustrate, women's religious writings could sometimes become effective forms of communication which breached the divide between the convent and the world. However, such female writings were rarely allowed to become authoritative, since women's use of 'male' modes of expression continued to be condemned by the Church throughout the ages. Women were therefore forced to create their own avenues of expression. In the nineteenth-century, they circumvented their exclusion from the pulpit and from formalized theological training by utilizing other forms of literary genres to develop and communicate theological ideas. Since formal

sermons and treatises were declared masculine theological discourses, women used the language of more acceptable literary devices, such as the essay or article which appeared in the periodical press, the letter, the novel or the devotional manual, to assert their theology.<sup>50</sup> Nancy Cho's essay establishes that women also communicated their faith through vernacular hymn-writing which, as an acceptable form of feminine labour, provided a versatile means of communicating complex theology in more accessible language. Cho suggests Catholic women appropriated this medium and used it not only to explain theological precepts, but also to raise awareness of social concerns and to educate Catholics, particularly children, about their faith. Female Catholic hymn-writers were both lay women and religious and their hymns served to document their Catholic spirituality. These hymns were used to advocate Catholic devotions, instruct about doctrinal ideas, commemorate the English recusant past and, controversially, to pray for the conversion of England. Cho suggests that Catholic female hymn-writers used the Virgin Mary as a frequent *topos*. Mary was the archetype of the feminine divine and provided for a more gynocentric spirituality that enabled hymn singers to reflect on the valuable female roles in the history of Catholicism. So Catholic women, barred from other avenues of expression reserved to the clergy, found in hymn-writing a means to disseminate their own approach to spirituality.

### Conclusions

Spirituality represents an important nexus through which women have been socially constituted and ideologically stimulated. The essays in this volume highlight the diversity of women's spiritualities, showing that Catholic women were not always satisfied with the normative modes of spirituality defined by the Church. Religious women throughout history expanded the boundaries of institutional and spiritual life, creating for themselves new, flexible identities. Authorities in Rome attempted to organize, to control and to standardize. Female responses to such normative control varied greatly. Some women needed to be true to their spiritual identities, or to follow their personal message from God, while others adapted their ideals to conform to Church standards. Whilst some, such as Mary Ward, claimed institutional boundaries, others such as the Dutch spiritual virgins and widows refused them. Yet, although ultimate 'success' did depend on a measure of institutional orthodoxy, the continuous pressures of testing the boundaries slowly altered the parameters of religious life.

The women discussed in this volume therefore share much in common, despite the specificities of their national contexts, and many of these distinctive features have remained evident throughout the changes which transformed female Catholic life over time. Considered together, these case studies indicate that women did not shrink from facing overwhelming odds to achieve their goals and determine their own spiritual lives. In the process, they developed an expertise in certain areas such as charity, schooling or nursing, and they found a specifically female voice through gendered modes of spiritual expression.

Yet women's tendency to disregard considerations of status or gendered role distributions, and their ability to respond to particular sets of circumstances in

a pragmatic way, may invite us to reconsider the very paradigm of gender in female Catholic life. In the same way as they transcend the binary oppositions between enclosed and non-enclosed, contemplation and action, religious and secular, these women somewhat point to a spirituality of a 'third gender', one in which the dichotomy between male and female was seen as reductive.<sup>51</sup> Women often went beyond this rigid gendered separation to undertake whatever form of religious life they believed to be suited to themselves and to their particular, local circumstances. When they bemoaned ecclesiastical control or denounced rules imposed by men, did they seek to rehabilitate the feminine, or did they indicate that they preferred an inclusive view of spirituality, free of gendered divisions?

In this introduction, we have attempted to sketch out what we see as the parameters of women's spirituality; in so doing, we were influenced by the steadily growing body of research on Catholic women's spirituality. Yet, we are also aware that there is much more research that needs to be completed. We hope this volume encourages others to question and explore the dynamic qualities of women's spiritualities.

### Notes

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« Mary Ward's English Institute and Prescribed Female Roles in the Early Modern Church », in Lux-Sterritt, Laurence et Carmen Mangion (eds.) *Gender, Catholicism and Spirituality*, Londres: Palgrave, 2010, pp. 83–98.

### Résumé :

Quand Mary Ward (1585–1645) crée son Institut de Dames anglaises, elle souhaite apporter un complément féminin à la mission masculine déjà bien ancrée en Angleterre. Mais sa vision d'une Compagnie de Jésus au féminin va à l'encontre de toutes les règles de l'Église pour la vie religieuse des femmes. Conscient des dangers d'une telle innovation, son directeur spirituel, le jésuite Roger Lee, compose avec elle en 1612 un premier plan intitulé *Schola Beatae Mariae*. L'Institut proposé par Lee dans ce document diffère fortement de celui décrit plus tard par Ward elle-même dans son propre *Institutum* de 1621. En tant que membre du clergé, Roger Lee anticipe les difficultés insurmontables posées par la vocation ignacienne de Mary Ward; dans son *Schola*, il propose donc une version très atténuée de cette vocation, de façon à rendre l'Institut plus acceptable aux autorités. Après sa mort cependant, Ward rédige seule son *Institutum* et y décrit sans compromis l'Institut missionnaire qu'elle envisage. Comme Lee l'avait anticipé, sa proposition déclenche une violente opposition, incitant le clergé séculier à rédiger un mémoire à l'encontre des « jésuitesses » et provoquant une enquête de la part de *Propaganda Fide*, pour finir par la suppression de l'Institut dans une bulle où le Urbain VIII juge la vocation des Dames anglaises « tout à fait inadaptée à leur sexe ». Quand en 1703 ce sont des règles très comparables à celles de Roger Lee, et non à celles de Mary Ward, qui permettent à une nouvelle version de l'Institut d'obtenir enfin l'approbation papale. La vision ignacienne la fondatrice ne sera honorée qu'en 2003, quand une branche de cet Institut pourra répondre au nom de Congrégation de Jésus et revendiquer son héritage spirituel.

7 947 mots

mots-clés : Mary Ward ; Roger Lee ; jésuites ; mission ; femmes

### Présentation du texte :

Ce chapitre compare la façon dont Mary Ward elle-même définit sa vocation à la façon dont son directeur spirituel, le jésuite Roger Lee, a infléchi cette expression de façon à gommer ses traits les plus novateurs et les plus ambitieux. Son *Schola Beatae Mariae* ne parle pas d'une vocation missionnaire mais d'un groupe de femmes observant une sorte de clôture ; il ne parle pas de conversion des âmes mais de simple éducation et de catéchèse des filles ; il passe sous silence le modèle institutionnel privilégié par Ward, qui est directement emprunté à la Compagnie de Jésus, avec une supérieure générale ayant autorité ultime. Lee se fait-il le porte-parole d'un ordre établi qu'il défend et représente en tant que jésuite ? Souhaite-t-il, dans ce document, remettre les choses à leur place et inculquer à Mary Ward l'humilité qui sied à une femme ? Où espère-t-il, en effaçant les traits les plus audacieux, faire accepter ce plan en premier lieu, pour ensuite obtenir des modifications ? Ward ne s'embarrasse pas de telles considérations mais son intégrité condamne son entreprise à l'opprobre. C'est finalement la version de Roger Lee qui permettra à l'Institut de renaître de ses cendres, et qui permettra, 400 ans plus tard, aux femmes de l'Institut de vivre enfin ce qui avait été la vocation de leur fondatrice.

# 5

## Mary Ward's English Institute and Prescribed Female Roles in the Early Modern Church<sup>1</sup>

*Laurence Lux-Sterritt*

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### **Introduction**

Protestantism gained much ground in late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century Europe, prompting the Catholic Church to embark upon a worldwide catechizing endeavour. The reforming Council of Trent (1545–63) sought to respond to the challenges of the rapidly changing religious picture, giving increased importance to missionary vocations amongst the clergy. However, it made no provision for **women religious** to become part of this common effort; on the contrary, in 1563, it reasserted that the only acceptable form of religious life for women was cloistered contemplation. Yet before and after Trent, many unenclosed female movements emerged which sought to complement male apostolic movements. Earlier in this volume, Querciolo Mazzonis evoked the vocation of the Italian Angela Merici (1474–1540), whose Company of Saint Ursula combined contemplation and care of one's neighbour. Marit Monteiro's essay also shows that, in the Netherlands, **spiritual virgins**, or 'beguines', found it difficult to match the usefulness of their active endeavours with the authorities' reticence towards females who escaped traditional status definitions. In France, the *Congrégation de Notre-Dame* (1597), François de Sales's *Visitation* (1610–16) or the *Filles de la Charité* (1634) all shared the same apostolic essence.<sup>2</sup> Their main vocation was not the observance of a monastic way of life but rather an evangelical brief which implied constant interaction with others. For England, the main representative of this female apostolic movement was Mary Ward.

Born at Mulwith near Ripon, in Yorkshire, Mary Ward (1585–1645) became acquainted, from an early age, with missionary activities in recusant networks. She felt called to serve God and, in 1606, she left England to become a Poor Clare in St Omer. Yet taking the veil did not bring her spiritual peace; between 1607 and 1611, she received what she later described as a series of revelations through which God called her to serve Him in a different way.

Initially, she could not envisage any religious life outside the convent; in 1607, she left her Flemish convent to found a house of Poor Clares specifically for English women. Finally, in 1611, she received what she described as the divine command to 'Take the Same of the Society' (that is, to imitate the Ignatians as faithfully as possible): this epiphany prompted her to found a congregation modelled upon the Society of Jesus 'both in matter and manner'.<sup>3</sup> Within a few years, houses were opened across the Continent, in Liège (1616), in Cologne and Trier (1620–21), in Rome (1622), in Naples and Perugia (1623), in Munich and Vienna (1627) and finally in Bratislava and Prague (1628). In parallel, small clandestine houses also operated in England.

When Mary Ward created her Institute of English Ladies<sup>4</sup>, her purpose was to provide a female counterpart to the male missionaries in England and on the Continent. Yet her dedication to the creation of an independent Society of Jesus for women, combined with the canonical transgressions this entailed, triggered a violent clerical reaction against her proposal. In 1621, the secular clergy wrote a Memorial against the English Ladies; *Propaganda Fide* began enquiries into their orthodoxy in 1624.<sup>5</sup> Finally, in 1631, Pope Urban VIII suppressed them with the bull *Pastoralis Romani Pontificis*, condemning their vocation and their way of life.<sup>6</sup> Defeated by clerical opposition, Ward returned to England, where she died in January 1645.<sup>7</sup>

Until recently, most publications on Mary Ward came either from members of her Institute or from supportive clerics. The authoritative biography written by M. C. E. Chambers is a mine of detailed information, but has a marked tendency towards hagiography. Similarly, remarkable studies such as those undertaken by Josef Grisar, SJ, Immolata Wetter, IBVM, or Henriette Peters, IBVM, were written in the cause for Mary Ward's canonization.<sup>8</sup> Because of their nature, these highly valuable sources sometimes neglect the general context which influenced Ward's fate. Yet the most recent publications indicate that this trend may be coming to an end: both Ursula Dirmeier, CJ, and Christina Kenworthy-Browne, CJ, have taken exciting steps to make the Institute's primary sources available in print, thereby ushering a phase in which Mary Ward's historiography may quickly take new directions.<sup>9</sup>

This chapter seeks to examine the difficulties which led to the suppression of Mary Ward's Institute. Rather than dealing with the Institute's merits or shortcomings *per se*, it will examine the extent to which Mary Ward's congregation diverged from clerically imposed norms by comparing her own definition of her vocation (which she gave in her 1622 Plan known as the *Institutum*<sup>10</sup>) with male-filtered expressions of what was acceptable. Indeed, plans for the approbation of the Institute were written both before and after Ward's own *Institutum*. The earliest document was drafted by her spiritual director, Roger Lee, SJ (1568–1615), and the Institute he described in his 1612 *Schola Beatae Mariae* was far removed from Ward's missionary project, offering a more traditional female religious Order.<sup>11</sup> The same can be said of the 81 Rules which were finally approved after Frances Bedingfield (1616–1704), once a follower of Mary Ward, took it upon herself to initiate a new phase in the history of the English Ladies. When she purchased houses to be used as centres for priests and elementary schools in Hammersmith (1669) and York (1686), a new Institute was born from the ashes of the old one; yet, in order to seek papal approval, it kept its heritage

from Mary Ward carefully hidden.<sup>12</sup> Its Rules – actively supported by Bishop John Leyburn, Vicar Apostolic of the London District (1685–1702) – were presented in 1699 by the then Chief Superior Mary Anne Babthorpe (d. 1711), and gained Clement XI's approbation on 13 June 1703.<sup>13</sup>

What were the elements which made both Lee's *Schola* and Babthorpe's Rules more likely to gain papal approval than Mary Ward's own *Institutum*? This chapter will show that the reasons for the Church's condemnation of Mary Ward's vocation stemmed from the missionary nature of that vocation, but also from the institutional form which Ward gave her Institute. Underpinning both, however, was the thorny issue of gender and the prescribed female roles in the early modern Church.

### Mary Ward's vocation: unenclosed and missionary

In her 1622 *Institutum*, Mary Ward emphasized her desire to assist her fellow Catholics and to support her Church. Some aspects of this apostolate remained in keeping with roles deemed acceptable for women, such as catechizing and educating girls 'in day and boarding schools'.<sup>14</sup> Although opening the doors to day pupils and catechizing adults were both relatively new briefs for women religious, such a way of life had been sanctioned by Pope Paul V for the Ursulines of Paris in 1612.<sup>15</sup> As the example of the so-called 'teaching nuns' was adopted by others, it became part of a movement which witnessed the rapid development of teaching female Orders.<sup>16</sup> This aspect of Mary Ward's vocation therefore remained within the tolerated sphere of female religious activity.

Nevertheless, the duties of the English Ladies exceeded this traditional brief; in England, they would facilitate the work of missionaries by preparing lay folk for the sacraments and providing spiritual assistance in the absence of priests. They would serve prisoners and attend to the sick; more controversially still, they would 'seek women of doubtful lives' and work for the conversion of those 'estranged from the Church', a role normally recognized as perilous for women.<sup>17</sup> Mary Ward never envisaged a typical conventual life in her 1622 *Institutum*; on the contrary, she openly presented her Institute as missionary. Inspired by the Jesuit *Formula Instituti* and using the same martial vocabulary, she presented her Ladies as crusaders:

Whoever wishes to serve *beneath the banner of the cross as a soldier of God* in our Society [...] is a member of a Society founded primarily [...] *to strive for the defence and propagation of the faith* and for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine, leading them back from heresy and evil ways to the faith.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, the Ladies' mission was to operate on a worldwide level, 'among the Turks or any other infidels, even those who live in the region called the Indies, or among any heretics whatever, or schismatics, or any of the faithful'.<sup>19</sup> Implicitly, of course, they also hoped to work in the English mission, reconquering their native land.

Such a missionary vocation violated the laws of enclosure which had been strictly enforced upon women since the Council of Trent's 1563 decree endorsing Boniface VIII's medieval bull *Periculoso*.<sup>20</sup> In seventeenth-century Europe, the

English Ladies were not the only women to denounce the limitations of such a definition of female religious life. Beguines, Ursulines and Visitandines all claimed to play an active part in the ongoing mission of Catholic recovery. The Spanish Luisa de Carvajal even claimed a missionary vocation very similar to Mary Ward's, and took an active part in the Catholic mission in England.<sup>21</sup>

Yet although Mary Ward's Institute was part of a broader female movement challenging Tridentine decrees, it was also unique. Luisa de Carvajal acted as a rogue individual, and her actions remained localized in London. The spiritual virgins and widows of the Low Countries, on the contrary, were legion, and highly visible in their local *milieus*.<sup>22</sup> But like Carvajal, they functioned outside religious status; although their endeavours served the Church, they did not claim to be officially part of it. Unlike Mary Ward, they neither founded multiple branches throughout Europe, nor sought papal recognition for an entirely novel female missionary Order. The Ursulines did gain official religious status, but this came at the price of their original active vocation, as they gradually moved away from Angela Merici's initially broad apostolic brief and accepted *clausura* as a teaching religious Order for girls. Mary Ward, on the other hand, refused all compromise, but rather hoped to change the Church's views on women's roles as active militants of the Catholic Reformation.

As mentioned earlier, the secular clergy responded to Mary Ward's *Institutum* with a Memorial addressed to the Pope, in which they denounced the Institute as 'directly contrary to the decrees of the Sacred Council of Trent'. Although the authors recognized the Ladies' teaching work as worthy of praise, they insisted that these teachers could not be considered religious if they remained unenclosed.<sup>23</sup> Later, in October 1622, the English secular priest John Colleton<sup>24</sup> (1548-1635) wrote:

If [the Institute] abode within its cells and walls, after the example of other religious communities, [it] would perhaps deserve much praise, but when it claims the duties of the apostolic office, wanders unrestrainedly about hither and thither [...] and in spite of this insists on being numbered amongst the religious communities, [it] is certainly exposed to the censures and reproaches of many pious people.<sup>25</sup>

The Ladies' geographical mobility was interpreted as symptomatic of their rebelliousness. In the same year, Fr. John Bennet (d. 1623), the agent for the English secular clergy in Rome, summarized the situation: 'Briefly closure they must embrace, and some Order already approved, or else dissolve. But of closure they will not hear.'<sup>26</sup> Pope and clergy alike perceived Mary Ward's missionary vocation as a threat to Catholic institutions, since it openly advocated an alternative to the only female religious life heretofore recognized.

### **Mediated expressions of Mary Ward's vocation: an enclosed teaching Order**

If Mary Ward's own expression of her vocation was controversial, the texts written before and after the *Institutum* under (male) clerical guidance left more room for compromise. Before the foundress wrote her own plans, her spiritual director Roger Lee, SJ, had cast a first draft in 1612, the *Schola Beatae Mariae*. Long after

Ward's death in 1645, when the 'second Institute' developed by Ward's friend and follower, Frances Bedingfield, sought approval of its Rules, it presented a profile which was closer to Lee's *Schola* than to Ward's missionary Order. Both documents downplayed the women's agency and emphasized their compliance with Tridentine decrees. They described Institutes which focused primarily upon the spiritual welfare of their own members through contemplation and prayer, and whose only active brief was the teaching and catechizing of girls and women.

As Roger Lee strove to ensure a positive reception for the Institute, he presented its vocation with the vocabulary of modesty and deference suited to all religious, and to women in particular; he described the aim of the Institute as follows: 'Firstly, that [...] we may make timely provision for our own salvation by a complete renunciation of the world: Then *in accordance with the capacity of our own sex* we may devote ourselves to the Christian education of maidens and girls whether outside or inside England.'<sup>27</sup> Lee chose to comply with conventional tradition: like other women religious, his Ladies sought the advancement of their own souls through detachment from the world and dedication to God. Gendered roles were respected also, since the Ladies' teaching brief was limited to their 'own sex', never venturing into the sphere of male activities and responsibilities. To all intents and purposes, his proposed Institute resembled the French Ursulines, who, by then, had become an enclosed Order of teaching and catechizing nuns. In fact, throughout the years of controversy in the 1620s, various clerics recommended that the Institute should adopt the Ursuline rules; yet Mary Ward refused to compromise the global missionary nature of her vocation and found such suggestions unpalatable, answering: 'If God give health, we shall find another way to serve him than of becoming Ursulines.'<sup>28</sup>

When comparing Lee's *Schola* to Ward's *Institutum*, it appears that the cleric negotiated the politics of religion more subtly than his penitent. He knew that women's place in the Church was defined by the male hierarchy which determined standards of acceptable female behaviour. Tellingly, Lee utilized the trope of female humility in a way which is reminiscent of Teresa of Ávila's rhetoric. Alison Weber showed how Teresa's recognition in the Church owed much to her 'pragmatic stylistic', which seemingly endorsed the patriarchal definition of female abilities, the better to gain the trust of clerical sceptics.<sup>29</sup> Echoing Teresa's strategy, Roger Lee's prose constantly highlighted the 'littleness' of the English Ladies; the Plan was presented as a plea in which they 'begged' to be allowed to 'render services'. Their vocation, described in an almost apologetic fashion, was shown as a mere 'pious desire' to help the Church. The opening paragraph set the tone by suggesting, in the meekest of terms, that the Catholic crisis in England and in Europe called for a reassessment of female involvement, arguing that 'it seem[ed] right that, *according to their condition*, women also should and c[ould] provide something more than ordinary in the face of this common spiritual need.'<sup>30</sup> It was not by chance that Roger Lee chose to conclude this paragraph on typically female virtues likely to meet with the clergy's approval: 'But let them specially strive to be outstanding in humility and meekness.'<sup>31</sup> In his *Schola*, not unlike Teresa of Ávila in the *Book of Her Life*, he utilized gendered clichés the better to achieve his goals; such pragmatic compromise was, however, entirely absent in Mary Ward's own *Institutum*.

In contrast to Mary Ward, Roger Lee also realized that female enclosure was not a condition which could be breached. The Continental houses of the Institute were to be cloistered, while in Protestant England, where houses could not function openly as convents, monastic enclosure would be relaxed only to avoid detection. Yet Lee worded this request carefully:

And although this Institute, of its nature, does not allow of the strict cloister in the present condition of England, still, far from having the house open to all, *we desire rather to have cloister so strictly observed that no access is to be allowed* to any extern whatsoever in the chapel and schools [...]. But necessary and serious conversations will be referred to *the grille* destined for that purpose, and no one shall go without permission of the Superior who shall be present at the conversation.<sup>32</sup>

Even as the *Schola* proposed a Catholic Order of women which would function both on the Continent and in Protestant England, it remained tentative in its attitude to enclosure or the evocation of an active apostolate.

The similarity between Roger Lee's 1612 *Schola Beatae Mariae* and the 81 Rules which obtained papal approval in 1703 is most striking. It is as though the new Institute had used Lee's *Schola* rather than Ward's *Institutum* as its model, highlighting contemplation, prayer and the spiritual salvation of its own members, while mentioning the education of girls only in second place: "The end of this Rule is to enable us to work out, with the grace of God, our own perfection and salvation, and aided by the same Divine grace, to labour for the perfection and salvation of our neighbour, by means of the education of children of our own sex."<sup>33</sup> Quite contrary to Mary Ward's explicit wish, but in keeping with Lee's proposal, the new Institute's active vocation was limited to the instruction of girls, to the exclusion of any missionary ambition. The 81 Rules also echo the *Schola* on the issue of enclosure: contacts with the outside were to be limited and supervised at the grille, all letters were checked, and correspondence should not be smuggled in or out by externs. Private conversations with day pupils were also to be punished.<sup>34</sup> The same provisions were made to observe in England a *modus vivendi* which was as close to cloistered life as possible.

Yet as the Congregation of the Council of Trent examined Mary Anne Babthorpe's petition for the approval of the new Institute, they noted that it breached strict monastic enclosure, since it undertook the education of both boarders and externs and also functioned in England, where *clausura* was impossible. Its slight adaptation of enclosure therefore denied the new Institute any official religious status. This objection was overcome only when the Ladies argued that they did not request approbation as a religious Order in the Church, but merely as a devout congregation of pious women, whose work carried papal endorsement.<sup>35</sup> Although it was a clear departure from Mary Ward's intentions, such a compromise represented a first step towards official recognition.

Moreover, Mary Anne Babthorpe recognized that women's spiritual endeavours could succeed only with clerical support, and she had gained strong clerical allies. Bishop John Leyburn, Vicar Apostolic of the London District (1685-1702) supported her appeal in a letter addressed to the Pope, in which he underlined the orthodoxy of those 'noble virgins'.<sup>36</sup> By presenting an



unassuming profile, complying with male-defined female religious roles and publicizing its acceptance of episcopal guidance, the new Institute secured the approbation of its 81 Rules in less than four years.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, the 1612 *Schola* and the 1703 Rules presented only a few differences from female religious orthodoxy and proposed an Order which was more likely to obtain papal assent than that presented by Mary Ward in her 1622 *Institutum*. Indeed, both depicted a congregation which was strikingly similar to that of the French Ursulines, who had reconciled teaching and enclosure in a teaching Order officially confirmed in Paris in 1612.<sup>38</sup> It is possible that, aware of the developments in religious and apostolic life in Europe, Lee and Babthorpe had decided to propose an Institute which, though not entirely faithful to the missionary ideal of Mary Ward, might be better attuned to the definition of female roles in the post-Tridentine Church.

Yet it was not only Mary Ward's active vocation which had been at the core of the virulent debate leading to the Institute's suppression in 1631; her proposed unenclosed mission was novel in itself, but it became all the more dangerous in the context of the dispute between Jesuits and secular clergy, and particularly in the English context where secular priests and Jesuit missionaries were in open conflict. Thus, the fact that Mary Ward chose to model her congregation on the Society of Jesus played a crucial part in the condemnation of her Institute.

### **Institutional issues: Mary Ward's female Society of Jesus**

Mary Ward claimed that her definition of the Institute was not a personal choice, but rather an act of self-surrender to God's commandment to 'Take the Same of the Society'. She therefore adopted both the vocation and the hierarchical structure used by the Society of Jesus, which gave unprecedented levels of autonomy to her English Ladies. Internally, all the branches of the Institute were coordinated by one central figure, the Mother Superior General, who fostered a unity of rule and governance between all the houses across Europe and England.<sup>39</sup> This organization in a generalate departed radically from the norm of female religious Orders and was highly controversial, especially since the Superior General's authority was second only to that of the Pope.

Indeed, the foundress requested that the Institute should bypass all clerical authority, and make a vow of direct obedience to the Pope.<sup>40</sup> In her Memorial addressed to Pope Gregory XV in December 1621, she explained why her Institute, unlike traditional female Orders, should not be subject to clerical supervision: '[religious life under episcopal control], though holy in itself and helpful to other religious communities [is] not only contrary to the Institute allotted unto us, but would moreover [...] much molest and hinder us [in] the service we are to perform towards our neighbours'.<sup>41</sup> Despite the formulaic lip-service paid to the tradition of episcopal control, Mary Ward associated submission to bishops with a hindrance, an impediment which would interfere with the Institute's functioning and violated its vocation. The English Ladies requested self-government and wished (in addition to the customary three vows) to take a fourth vow of direct obedience, recognizing the pope as their only authority outside the Institute's Mother Superior General.

Clerics were incensed by what they perceived as a woman's presumption to dispense with male jurisdiction altogether. In the controversy which escalated in the 1620s, the English Ladies were repeatedly accused of usurping male privileges; more specifically, Mary Ward was accused of founding a female Society of Jesus. In their 1621 memorial, the secular clergy referred to the Ladies as 'Jesuitesses', a term which showed that they misconstrued the Institute's imitation of the Society of Jesus as some sort of assimilation into the Ignatian fraternity.<sup>42</sup> Although they may well have objected to unenclosed female Orders, these clerics were also taking a political stand when they condemned Mary Ward's imitation of the Society of Jesus.

Mary Ward's battle for papal recognition was caught in the cross-fire of the bitter internal fight which opposed the secular clergy to the Jesuits; her handling of this issue demonstrates that she had not fully comprehended the seriousness of the dispute which was tearing the fabric of the Church asunder. Far from realizing that her vindication of the Jesuit model was probably her most hazardous argument, she saw in this spiritual affiliation a convincing model. In her correspondence with the Curia, she argued that the Society of Jesus had created a favourable precedent when it was recognized by Paul III in 1540. At a time when the Church needed every advantage it could summon, a congregation of women working to catechize the female half of the population would represent a formidable asset. Mary Ward knew that the Society was not allowed to take the direction of a female Order, but did not consider this as a difficulty since her own Society was to be fully autonomous. Her Ladies' independence was a point upon which she insisted in her 1621 memorial to Gregory XV: she described her Institute as modelled on the Constitutions of the Jesuits, yet 'altogether independent, nevertheless, of the said Fathers'.<sup>43</sup> In this memorial, Mary Ward attempted to clarify her Institute's independence from the Society of Jesus, thereby denying that it was an unlawful branch of the Society. Her Ladies would be faithfully *like* Jesuits, yet not a part of Ignatius Loyola's Society of Jesus.

Despite opposition to her project, she was unwilling to compromise on the terms of her mission; the vision she claimed to have received in 1611 had called for a female counterpart to the Society of Jesus and she had no intention of departing from this in any way.<sup>44</sup> She therefore also demanded that her Institute be named after Jesus: 'Whoever wishes to serve beneath the banner of the cross as a soldier of God in our Society, *which we desire to be designated by the name of Jesus*.'<sup>45</sup> By using the terms 'Society' and requesting the name of Jesus, Mary Ward proposed nothing less than her own Society of Jesus, adapted for women. This, of course, greatly contributed to the erroneous but nevertheless widespread amalgamation of the English Ladies with the Jesuits. In the context of the bitter dispute which opposed seculars and Jesuits, this was to throw countless difficulties in the path of the Institute.

If the English Ladies faced the opposition of the secular clergy, they also provoked reactions within the Society of Jesus itself.<sup>46</sup> From the very beginnings in 1612, the General of the Jesuits, Claudius Aquaviva (1543-1615), had received warnings from alarmed brethren concerned that their Society would be accused of protecting a female branch, in breach of their founder's recommendations. The General had ordered the Jesuits of St Omer to hand over the

direction of the Institute to the secular clergy; their only contact with the Ladies of St Omer should be in church, to hear the confessions of those who asked for a Jesuit confessor, in the same way as was customary with any other women.

In the context of the English mission, Mary Ward's enthusiastic imitation and support of the Jesuits was a source of deep embarrassment for the Society, and exacerbated the secular clergy's animosity. As a consequence, most Jesuits detached themselves publicly from the female congregation. The stigma endured and, in 1623, the Provincial Richard Blount (1565-1638) addressed his brethren thus:

[you should] not meddle with any thing belonging to the temporals of Mrs Mary Ward, or any of her company [...] and make the world know that the Society has no more to do with them than with all other penitents who resort unto them, whereby I hope in, a short time, the manifold calumniation, which for their cause and proceedings are laid upon us, will have an end.<sup>47</sup>

Above all, the Fathers should make it quite clear that their Order had no more particular link with these women than they did with other penitents. The few priests who had supported the Ladies, such as Roger Lee himself, but also John Gérard (1564-1637) or Edward Burton (d. 1624), incurred reprimands from their superiors. Slander had thus left a deep scar in the relationship between English Ladies and the Society they so admired, as Jesuits were anxious to dissociate themselves from the so-called 'galloping girls'.<sup>48</sup>

### **An institutional compromise: a Marian congregation for women**

In this context, Roger Lee's early defence of Mary Ward's unenclosed female Order had been risky. His *Schola Beatae Mariae* demonstrates his political acumen, as he attempted to distance Loyola's Society of Jesus from the Ladies' Institute while remaining steadfast in his support to Mary Ward:

Among those Orders [the English Ladies] should specially look to those which most resemble the Institute amongst which not the last is the Society of Jesus [...]. And although *from its Institute it cannot undertake the direction of women, it is, however, lawful for all the faithful to be present at their sermons, to confess to them and to profit by their excellent advice.*<sup>49</sup>

In this passage, Roger Lee openly recognized that Ignatius Loyola had excluded women from his Society, and that no female branch of the Society of Jesus could be envisaged; having acknowledged this key principle, he emphasized the informal nature of the relationship between Jesuits and Ladies. Although he evoked some links of affinity between the two congregations, he downplayed any special relationship. As a further argument in his favour, he evoked the pragmatic reality of work on the Continent, where the English Ladies found few opportunities to have contact with English-speaking priests, and would therefore naturally attend the services of English Jesuits. As he argued for a continued collaboration between the English Ladies and Jesuits, he chose

to overlook their shared Rules or ideology, and brushed aside any political connivance in order to highlight harmless practicalities.

Moreover, as Roger Lee portrayed a congregation which did not present a profile modelled on the Society of Jesus, he silenced Mary Ward's unabashed claims for female authority in the form of a generalate and her refusal of episcopal authority, which he replaced with a more traditional subjection to male authority. The Institute was to be placed under episcopal control, and its members' willing obedience was emphasized throughout: '[they] make the three Solemn Vows in the hands of the Bishop, who shall be their Ordinary, to whom they shall with a complete self-oblation bind themselves by vow to the service of God in the education of maidens and girls.'<sup>50</sup> The issue of name was also circumvented. Lee proposed a simple 'School' of virgins placed under the protection of the 'Blessed Virgin Mary', and called after her; Mary Ward's desire for a 'Society' named after 'Jesus' was not expressed, thereby avoiding any misapprehension of the English Ladies as 'Jesuitesses'.

Lee's version of female obedience and organization eventually proved more fruitful than Mary Ward's: it was echoed in the 1703 new Institute's willing submission to episcopal authority. As mentioned earlier, Mary Anne Babthorpe's petition was aided greatly by Bishop Leyburn, who in turn mentioned the support of other bishops in his address to Clement XI: 'One thing only, most Holy Father, seems in the eyes of not a few, to be wanting to the perfection of this pious work, namely that the said Institute, so lauded by several Bishops, and welcomed into their dioceses, should by your Holiness be deemed worthy of approbation and confirmation.'<sup>51</sup> Validation from local ecclesiastical authorities weighed heavily in favour of the petitioners. This proved that the new Institute was in keeping with male definitions of female religious roles; but equally importantly, it also showed that, politically, the new Institute had no suspicious affiliations with the Society of Jesus. Where Lee's *Schola* merely recognized the authority of bishops (while being championed by a Jesuit), the new Institute also boasted influential episcopal patronage; thus, it left the perilous waters of political controversy and came back to the fold of religious orthodoxy.

Although neither the 1612 *Schola Beatae Mariae* nor the 1703 Rules were true expressions of Mary Ward's vocation to 'Take the Same of the Society', there remained a point which they would uphold: both preserved her desire for unity. In 1612, as the idea of multiple foundations was raised, the office of 'Principal', acting as overseer and co-ordinator of all the houses, was evoked. In the *Schola*, this was perhaps the only element which was not typical of contemporaneous female Orders and gave the virgins an unusual degree of authority. Aware of the bold nature of this innovation, Roger Lee made no mention of a Superior General, whose title was not deemed acceptable for female Orders and remained the preserve of male congregations. In his proposal, the Mother in charge of the global overseeing of the Institute was to be called simply 'Principal', and her role was akin to that of a mother.

Dominating this rather informal, maternal authority, the Ordinary embodied official Church supervision; he was the representative of male clerical hierarchy, whose approval was to be sought before the 'Principal' could undertake her duties. Roger Lee may have realized that the office of Superior General could

only hinder the Institute's approval and therefore toned down his request; he diffused the potentially offensive novelty of the post of 'Principal' by not calling it 'Superior General' and by placing it under the supervision of an accepted male authority figure.

The very same issue arose again during the examination of the Rules of the new Institute in the eighteenth century, and it was resolved in a similar manner: the petitioners highlighted the fact that each house was under the control of the local bishop, and argued that their own 'Chief Superior' enjoyed a power which was purely maternal, since she simply acted as the Mother of her scattered religious family. Their emphasis upon male authority and their denial of any female empowerment within the hierarchy of the new Institute played a part in the successful approbation of the 1703 Rules, even if like Roger Lee's 1612 *Schola*, they represented a significant departure from the original spirit of Mary Ward's foundation.

It would be dismissive to claim that Mary Ward was unaware of the difficulties she faced when proposing a missionary Society of Jesus for women which operated as a generalate, made a direct vow of obedience to the Pope and bypassed bishops' authority; as a Catholic in early-modern England, she was aware of the female religious standards of her time, and she knew also about the controversy which opposed Jesuits to seculars. In 1617, she exhorted her sisters to show the fortitude of pioneers when she declared: 'men you know look diversely upon you as new beginners of a course never thought of before, marvelling what you intend and what will be the end of you.'<sup>52</sup> Yet she ignored these obstacles and strove to see her vocation approved as she believed God intended; it is in this refusal to compromise that the major difference between her *Institutum* and the mediated plans which were the 1612 *Schola* and the 1703 Rules is to be found.

In the seventeenth century, Mary Ward had refused to walk the tightrope of gendered acceptability. Her vindication of female worth in the Catholic mission not only came as a blow to the Church hierarchy but presented a challenge to the received traditional order. Responding to a Jesuit who, in 1617, doubted the constancy of the religious fervour of those he called 'but women', Mary Ward wrote: 'There is no such difference between men and women, that women may not do great matters, as we have seen by the example of many Saints who have done great things, and I hope in God it will be seen that women in time to come will do much.'<sup>53</sup> As the next passage demonstrates even further, Mary Ward did not share the patriarchal views of the early modern Church:

What think you of this word, 'but women'? If we were in all things inferior to some other creature, which I suppose to be men, which I care be bold to say is a lie then, with respect to the good Father, I may say: it is an error. [...] I would to God that all men would understand this verity: that women, if they will, may be perfect, and if they would not make us believe we can do nothing, and that we are but women, we might do great matters.<sup>54</sup>

By asserting that 'women, *if they will*, may be perfect,' Ward rejected her contemporaries' conceptions of gender and claimed that, when they were inspired by God and dedicated to Him entirely, women were as capable as men of serving

the Church. Mary Ward was not the only foundress to reject the patriarchal beliefs which marked women as spiritually inept; before her, Teresa of Ávila had argued that, when filled with God's grace, women were spiritually as worthy, perhaps even more so, than men. Yet there was one major difference between Mary Ward's and Teresa of Ávila's vindication of female religious worth: Teresa expressed her unorthodox ideas through the very orthodox rhetoric of female subjection and inferiority, as a 'little woman' whose ignorance allowed her the better to be filled by the holy spirit.<sup>55</sup> In doing so, she complied with a medieval exalted definition of women as 'empty vessels', elevated above themselves by God's light.<sup>56</sup> Mary Ward, on the contrary, remained assertive through her actions and her prose: where Teresa used gender prejudices subtly, she rejected them openly. To her, divisions of gender were not relevant to spiritual life and served only to hinder the efforts of the Catholic Reformation.<sup>57</sup> Her failure to see the relevance of gender boundaries was going to prevent Mary Ward from enjoying the same degree of success as Teresa of Ávila.

### Conclusions

For its opponents, Mary Ward's Order was unacceptable: it claimed religious status but chose to follow a male apostolic life, whose missionary activities flouted every Tridentine decree concerning women religious. Faced with such a novel and androgynous enterprise, clerical authorities acted to restore order and reassert their definition of female acceptability in the Church. Urban VIII's bull *Pastoralis Romani Pontificis* ordered the English Ladies to disband, since their work was 'most unsuited to the weakness of their sex' and represented a danger for the reputation, the organization and the sound doctrine of the Catholic Church. The Pope condemned this 'sect' which mimicked 'the customary religious life' despite flouting the laws of enclosure. The Ladies' work was 'by no means suiting the weakness of their sex, intellect, womanly modesty and above all virginal purity'. Finally, they were labelled 'Jesuitesses'. A canonical aberration which could not be suffered to endure, the Institute was especially abhorrent in the context of the English mission since, through its imitation of the Society of Jesus and its open irreverence towards the secular clergy, it served as a reminder that the Catholic Church was politically divided.

The Institute was condemned to 'perpetual abolition'.<sup>58</sup> Mary Ward's non-conformity with traditional female role definitions had been a crucial bone of contention between the foundress and the Church she aimed to serve, and it had led to the suppression of her work. Of course, the Institute was condemned both on religious and political grounds, yet above all it was suppressed because it was the gendered expression of a *female* free agent who chose to disregard the criteria of a male-defined orthodoxy. Despite the suppression, Ward's mission was kept alive, though her followers usually opted for a less confrontational stance. Compliance with clerically defined female roles was indeed the key to Pope Clement XI's 1703 approbation of the 81 Rules of the second Institute which, like Roger Lee's 1612 *Schola*, closely imitated traditional female religious life. Compliance with gendered norms was, in the end, the only way to gain the approbation of male Church authorities. By respecting some enclosure, accepting

episcopal authority, and limiting its activities to the teaching of boarders and externs, this community was in conformity with the clerically accepted roles for women in the Church; moreover, it showed no particular link with the Society of Jesus and therefore was no longer an element of political controversy. Thus, when the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM) was confirmed in April 1749, by Benedict XIV's Constitution *Quamvis Justo*, it bore, on paper, no relation to Mary Ward's earlier foundation.

The history of the Institute remained a complex one through subsequent centuries, and lies beyond the scope of this brief essay; yet some outcomes can be highlighted here, which show the extent to which Mary Ward's vocation to 'Take the same of the Society' had been ahead of its time. Indeed, it was only in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, after decades of efforts by members and supporters of the Institute, that it became gradually accepted as the true spirit of the IBVM: the initial breakthrough came when, in 1909, Pope Pius X rehabilitated Mary Ward as the original foundress of the IBVM and recognized the value of her militant work. Later, from 1953 onwards, Immolata Wetter and Edelburga Eibl, IBVM, worked indefatigably alongside Josef Grisar, SJ, for the cause of the canonization of Mary Ward, researching the Institute's history and gaining unprecedented access to the archives of the Inquisition. It was only in June 2003, after continued efforts from the IBVM sisters, that the Roman branch of the IBVM<sup>59</sup> was allowed to adopt Ignatian Constitutions, the text of which was feminized, omitting nothing except passages referring specifically to priestly ministries. After nearly four hundred years, members of the IBVM were finally given the right officially to be called the Congregation of Jesus (CJ) and to adapt, in a way which Mary Ward would have recognized as faithful to her original vocation, the rules of the Society of Jesus for the use of women.

### Notes

1. I would like to thank Claire Cross, Michael Questier, Carmen M. Mangion and Glyn Redworth for their insights and valuable comments on the early drafts of this essay.
2. See E. Rapley, *The Dévotes: Women and Church in Seventeenth-century France* (Kingston, Ont.: McGill, Queen's University Press 1990) and R. Liebowitz, 'Virgins in the Service of Christ: The Dispute over an Active Apostolate for Women during the Counter-Reformation', in R. Radford Ruether (ed.), *Women of Spirit* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), pp. 131-52.
3. Mary Ward described this episode retrospectively in a letter to Mgr Albergati, reproduced in 'Mary Ward to Nuncio Antonio Mgr Albergati, 1621', in U. Dirmeier, CJ (ed.), *Mary Ward und ihre Gründung: Die Quellentexte bis 1645* (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2007), Vol. 1, pp. 536-42.
4. Since during Mary Ward's lifetime her Ignatian Institute was not given an official name; she and her followers were simply known as 'the English Ladies'.
5. Founded in 1622 by Gregory XV, the purpose of *Propaganda Fide* was both to supervise missions to non-Christian regions and to check the spread of heresy. When Mary Ward's endeavours were perceived as unorthodox, possibly even heretical, *Propaganda Fide* was naturally in charge of the investigations. See M. I. Wetter, *Mary Ward: Under the Shadow of the Inquisition 1630-1637* translated by M. B. Ganne and M. P. Harriss (Oxford: Way Books, 2006), pp. 54-64.

6. L. Lux-Sterritt, 'An Analysis of the Controversy Caused by Mary Ward's Institute in the 1620s', *Recusant History*, 25:4 (2001), pp. 636-47.
7. See M. G. Kirkus, 'The Presence of the Mary Ward Institute in Yorkshire 1642-1648', *Recusant History*, 25:3 (2001), pp. 434-48.
8. The two reference works available in English about Mary Ward's life and work are M. C. E. Chambers, *The Life of Mary Ward, 1585-1645*, 2 vols (London: Burns and Oates, 1882-1885) and H. Peters, *Mary Ward: A World in Contemplation*, translated by H. Butterworth (Leominster: Gracewing Books, 1994). In German, J. Grisar, *Die Ersten Anklagen in Rom Gegen das Institut Maria Wards* (Roma: Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1959).
9. The Institute's primary sources are to be found *in extenso* for the first time in Dirmeier, *Mary Ward*; see also the work by C. Kenworthy-Browne, CJ (ed.), *Mary Ward, 1585-1645: A Briefe Relation with Autobiographical Fragments and a Selection of Letters* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008).
10. In 1616, Mary Ward had written her first Plan for the Institute, known as the *Ratio Instituti*; yet it is her subsequent 1622 *Institutum* which is recognised as encapsulating most clearly the religious vocation she had received in the 1611 revelation to 'Take the same of the Society'. For that reason, this study will focus upon that version rather than its earlier draft.
11. Peters, *Mary Ward*, pp. 129-31.
12. H. J. Coleridge (ed.), *St Mary's Convent, Micklegate Bar, York, 1686-1887* (London: Burns and Oates, 1887). The Bar Convent is the oldest operating convent to date in England.
13. A manuscript of the 1703 Rules is kept in the Bar Convent Archives (hereafter BCA), file J2: *Letters Apostolic by which Clement PP. XI, June 13<sup>th</sup>, 1703, approved and confirmed the Rules of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary*.
14. BCA: B18, *Institutum*, item 2. For this essay, I shall use the English translation, kept at the Bar Convent, of the Latin original reproduced in Dirmeier, *Mary Ward*, Vol. 1, pp. 625-30.
15. As Ursuline congregations spread in France and sought papal approval, they adopted conventual enclosure, although they were allowed to receive externs within their walls for their daily lessons. See my *Redefining Female Religious Life: French Ursulines and English Ladies in Seventeenth-Century Catholicism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).
16. Rapley, *The Dévotes*, pp. 42-73.
17. BCA: B18, *Institutum*, item 2.
18. *Ibid.*, item 1, my italics.
19. *Ibid.*, f. 22.
20. Session 25, 3-4 December 1563, in N. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols (London: Sheed and Ward, 1990), Vol. 2, p. 778.
21. See Rapley, *The Dévotes*; E. Rhodes, *This Tight Embrace: Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza (1566-1614)* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2000), and 'Luisa de Carvajal's Counter-Reformation Journey to Selfhood (1566-1614)', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 51:3 (1998), pp. 887-911; also G. Redworth, *The She-Apostle: The Extraordinary Life and Death of Luisa de Carvajal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). The difficulties of reconciling action and contemplation and to serve the Church whilst not fully complying with its precepts on female religious life continued to encumber the efforts of nineteenth-century active women religious, as Carmen M. Mangion shows later in this volume.
22. See Marit Monteiro's chapter in this collection.
23. Westminster Diocesan Archives (henceafter WDA), Vol. 16, f. 206.



24. John Colleton formed the Association of the Clergy of England, an independent body in charge of regulating the affairs of the secular clergy. He was later suspended for aggravating the schism between the seculars and the Society of Jesus. See E. Taunton, *The History of the Jesuits in England, 1580-1773* (London: Methuen, 1901), pp. 256-57.
25. BCA: C1, *Translation of Documents re. Jesuitesses*, J3.
26. *John Bennett to Edward Bennett*, in Dirmeier, *Mary Ward*, Vol. 1, p. 659.
27. BCA: B18, *Schola Beatæ Mariæ*, item 5, italics mine. For this essay, I shall use the English translation, kept in the Bar Convent, of the original Latin document reproduced in Dirmeier, *Mary Ward*, Vol. 1, pp. 171-84.
28. Mary Ward to Elizabeth Cotton and Mary Poyntz, 18 February 1631. In Dirmeier, *Mary Ward*, Vol. 3, p. 165.
29. A. Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1990) and 'Little Women: Counter-Reformation Misogyny', in D. Luebke (ed.), *The Counter-Reformation: The Essential Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 143-62.
30. BCA: B18, *Schola*, item 1.
31. *Ibid*, item 46, italics mine.
32. *Ibid*, *Schola*, item 14, my italics.
33. BCA: J2, *Letters apostolic*, f. 12, item 1.
34. BCA: J2, *Rules*, p. 28-9, items 43-7.
35. Coleridge, *St Mary's Convent*, pp. 106-7.
36. London, 16 October 1699; letter reproduced in Coleridge, *St Mary's Convent*, p. 106.
37. Mary Anne Babthorpe had begun petitioning in Rome in 1699.
38. For a more detailed comparison of Mary Ward's Institute with the Order of the Ursulines, see my *Redefining Female Religious Life*, and A. Conrad, *Zwischen Kloster und Welt: Ursulinen und Jesuitinnen in der katholischen Reformbewegung des XVI-XVII. Jahrhunderts* (Mainz: Von Zabern 1991).
39. BCA: B18, *Institutum*, item 4.
40. *Ibid*, item 7.
41. *Memorial to Gregory XV*, in Dirmeier, *Mary Ward*, Vol. 1, pp. 597-600.
42. WDA: Vol. 16, ff. 201-07.
43. *Memorial to Gregory XV*, in Dirmeier, *Mary Ward*, Vol. 1, pp. 597-600.
44. Mary Ward to Nuncio Antonio Mgr Albergati, 1621, in Dirmeier, *Mary Ward*, Vol. 1, pp. 536-42.
45. BCA: B18, *Institutum*, item 1. Italics mine.
46. Peters, *Mary Ward*, p. 123. See also comments in Wadsworth, James, *English Spanish Pilgrim* (London: Michael Sparke, 1629), p. 30: '[The Jesuits] are grown to a faction about the Jesuitrices or Wandering Nuns, some allowing them, some disliking them utterly.'
47. Provincial Richard Blount SJ to the English Province, 19 July 1623, in Dirmeier, *Mary Ward*, Vol. 2, pp. 3-4.
48. WDA: Vol. 16, f. 207.
49. BCA: B18, *Schola*, item 48-9.
50. BCA: B18, *Schola*, item 8.
51. Coleridge, *St Mary's Convent*, p. 106.
52. *Three speeches of our Reverend Mother Chief Superior made at St Omer having been long absent*, third speech, in Dirmeier, *Mary Ward*, Vol. 1, pp. 362-6.
53. *Ibid*, first speech, in Dirmeier, *Mary Ward*, Vol. 1, p. 358.
54. *Ibid*, p. 359.

55. Weber, *Teresa of Avila*, p. 37.
56. C. Atkinson, "Precious Balsam in a Fragile Glass": The Ideology of Virginity in the Later Middle Ages', *Journal of Family History*, 8:2 (1983), pp. 131-43.
57. P. Ellis, "They are but women": Mary Ward, 1585-1645', in S. M. Brown (ed.), *Women, Gender and Radical Religion in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 243-64.
58. Wetter, *Mary Ward*, pp. 213-14.
59. Since the mission of the sisters expanded worldwide, the IBVM was divided into three (Roman, Irish, and North American) branches. In 2003, the North American and Irish Branches united to form the Loretto Branch, which is currently transforming, like the Roman Branch, into a female Congregation of Jesus.

Avec Claire Sorin, « Foreword », in *Women, Literature and Spirituality in Twentieth-Century Writing*, *E-rea* 8.2 (mars 2011)

### Résumé:

Cette sélection d'articles explore l'interaction entre la conscience féminine et féministe et le concept de spiritualité à travers l'analyse des écrits de trois auteurs britanniques et deux Américaines au vingtième siècle. Dans le contexte agité des années 1960, la deuxième vague du mouvement féministe produit un glissement important dans la façon d'appréhender la spiritualité, une évolution de l'idée d'habitation vers l'idée de quête du sacré. La critique féministe tend à accuser les religions majoritaires d'opérer au sein de systèmes qui dénigrent les femmes. Tandis que de nombreuses activistes concluent à l'impossibilité de réconcilier leur foi et leur engagement féministe, d'autres parviennent à renégocier leur relation avec la spiritualité. Dans leurs écrits, Virginia Woolf, Michèle Roberts, Sara Maitland, Gail Godwin et Toni Morrison promeuvent toutes une conscience féminine que les systèmes religieux occidentaux ont jusqu'alors contribué à réduire au silence et à l'invisibilité.

1 912 mots

mots-clés : Virginia Woolf ; Michèle Roberts ; Sara Maitland ; Gail Godwin ; Toni Morrison

### Présentation du texte :

Ce dossier littéraire est issu de la sélection de cinq articles reprenant des communications présentées lors du colloque que j'ai co-organisé avec Claire Sorin en 2009 à Aix-en-Provence sur les femmes et la spiritualité. L'appel à communications ayant remporté un grand succès, le colloque avait accueilli une quarantaine de communicants. Un délicat processus de sélection nous a ensuite permis de composer un dossier de cinq articles littéraires, en sus de l'ouvrage collectif qui réunit neuf articles de civilisation. Nous avons choisi de publier ce dossier à part, plutôt que de l'intégrer à l'ouvrage collectif, pour des raisons de cohérence de contenu. Dans ce dossier, l'engagement féministe et l'autorité de la voix féminine courent tels des fils rouges et s'entremêlent aux considérations spirituelles d'auteurs en quête du divin et dont l'écriture cherche à renégocier une place genrée pour une spiritualité féminine dans la société du vingtième siècle.

# E-rea

Revue électronique d'études sur le monde anglophone

## 8.2 | 2011 Femmes et spiritualité

Sous la direction de **Laurence LUX-STERRITT** et **Claire SORIN**

**Claire SORIN et Laurence LUX-STERRITT**

Women and Spirituality in 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Writing: an Exploration into the Fiction of Virginia Woolf, Michèle Roberts, Sara Maitland, Gail Godwin and Toni Morrison [Texte intégral]

Foreword

- **Naomi TOTH**

Reincarnating Shakespeare's sister: Virginia Woolf and the "uncircumscribed spirit" of fiction [Texte intégral]

- **Arina LUNGU-CIRSTEA**

Feminism and Faith: Exploring Christian Spaces in the Writing of Sara Maitland and Michèle Roberts [Texte intégral]

- **Elaine LUX**

Holistic Spirituality in Gail Godwin's Life and Fiction: *Father Melancholy's Daughter*, *The Good Husband*, and *Evensong* [Texte intégral]

- **Claude LE FUSTEC**

"Never break them in two. Never put one over the other. Eve is Mary's mother. Mary is the daughter of Eve": Toni Morrison's Womanist Gospel of Self [Texte intégral]

Claire SORIN et Laurence LUX-STERRITT

## Women and Spirituality in 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Writing: an Exploration into the Fiction of Virginia Woolf, Michèle Roberts, Sara Maitland, Gail Godwin and Toni Morrison

### Foreword

- 1 The following essays were initially presented at the international conference on Women and Spirituality, which was organized by Laurence Lux-Sterritt and Claire Sorin (Université de Provence, LERMA) in June 2009. In the context of this event, spirituality was to be understood as a broad notion encompassing personal and/or institutionalized relations to the divine, a notion that at once included and transcended religion. The purpose of the conference was to explore the diversity and specificity of female spirituality in the English-speaking world as well as focus on some of the complex positions that women have occupied in religious institutions since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This interdisciplinary conference, which welcomed specialists in religion, history and literature as well as members of religious communities, allowed fruitful exchanges and provoked many fascinating and sometimes emotional discussions. The conclusions were that in terms of freedom and equality within the religious structures, 21<sup>st</sup>-century women still have a long way to go because of lingering and deeply rooted prejudices; at the same time, it was made clear that women's relations to spiritual and church authority had to be closely examined in each historical context in order to avoid sweeping and false generalizations. For example, the fact that women systematically occupy inferior positions in male-dominated institutions needs qualifying and the commonly-held belief that modern feminism and religion are antithetical is simply not true, as is demonstrated in the following articles. This selection of essays focuses on three British and two American 20<sup>th</sup>-century women writers whose fictional works explore the interconnections between women and spirituality from different angles, and yet with striking underlying similarities.
- 2 The questioning of an immutable, omniscient and omnipotent God, the loss of a sense of coherence, unity and meaning, which modernism and postmodernism reflect, profoundly altered the conceptions of the self, the divine and the sacred in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century. The post World War II period in particular represents a distinctive landmark in this global context of transformation. For sociologist Robert Wuthnow, who analysed the evolution of religiosity in America since the 1950s, the counterculture of the 1960s and the evolving social infrastructure of the decade entailed "a profound change in [...] spiritual practices" (3). Wuthnow contends that the 1950s were characterized by regular attendance at worship and a "traditional spirituality of inhabiting sacred spaces" (3) which reflected the period's quest for stability and which he identifies as a *spirituality of dwelling*. In contrast, there emerged in the subsequent decades a new understanding of community and of the sacred which produced what he calls a *spirituality of seeking*. Involving negotiation rather than habitation, the individual rather than the congregation, the spirituality of seeking rejects fixed and hierarchical forms of worshipping and is practiced by people who "explore new spiritual vistas," and seek "sacred moments that reinforce their conviction that the divine exists" (4). To some extent, we can say that the present collection of essays (including that on Virginia Woolf) illustrates this individual-oriented, fluid and unclassifiable way of practising or relating to religion and spirituality.
- 3 In the social and cultural turmoil of the 1960s, it could be argued that the second wave of the feminist movement forcefully contributed to the shift from a spirituality of dwelling to a spirituality of seeking. On both sides of the Atlantic, a number of women's rights advocates and religious scholars tried to figure out how feminist issues could relate to religion and spirituality. This gave rise to a powerful (although not entirely new) feminist critique of established religion

as a sexist system denigrating women. While many activists came to the conclusion that they simply could not reconcile their faith to their feminism, others managed to renegotiate their relations to religion and /or spirituality, either within or beyond the frame of Christianity. Michèle Roberts and Sara Maitland, whose fiction Arina Lungu examines in this issue, are living and complex examples of how differently individual activists managed to articulate feminism and faith. Actually, it seems that at some point and in their own ways, all the writers considered here had to confront the positioning of their own spirituality in a male-defined society.

4 While feminists criticized and rejected the historical and established form of religion, many envisioned feminism *itself* as a kind of religion and developed a feminist spirituality which was both personal and community oriented. As American scholar Gayle Graham Yates noted back in 1983:

Feminist spirituality [...] parallels the many other facets of feminism now active in America and has (1) far-reaching implications for personal awareness and behaviour of women; (2) expressions in individual and corporate actions that bear ethical significance; (3) institutional forms and effects on institutions; (4) symbolic, mythic, ritual, literary, and aesthetic meaning; and (5) cognitive import and expressions. If one believes, as I do, that feminism is a new world view, then the spiritual aspect of it has ramifications in every aspect of life. (60-61)

5 Through the work of influential scholars such as Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether or Carol P. Christ, a feminist rewriting of women's religious history took place and theological alternatives developed. Women-centred theology grounding spirituality in nature, the earth and the body, challenged a patriarchal God and culminated in neo-paganism and the Goddess movement which became widespread not only in North America but also in Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand.

6 The five authors studied here have a connexion to feminism; not all of them were actual activists but all of them definitely promote a feminist consciousness. This means that their fiction, to varying degrees, is shaped by the awareness that the western patriarchal and religious systems have consistently endeavoured to keep women silent, inferior and invisible. Thus, Virginia Woolf points to this invisibility through the spectre of Shakespeare's sister; Michèle Roberts and Sara Maitland's quests for space are reactions to male-defined religious landscapes; Gail Godwin's powerful spiritual heroine, Margaret, rehabilitates the strength of women within the Church; and Toni Morrison's revision of the Biblical script is inscribed in a feminist, or rather womanist, logic.

7 Yet, although the fictional works under study evidence a feminist consciousness, they do not systematically extol feminist, non-Christian or neo-pagan forms of spirituality. In "Reincarnating Shakespeare's sister: Virginia Woolf and the 'uncircumscribed' spirit of fiction," Naomi Toth's insightful analysis of Woolf's definition of spirit, fiction and femininity does not simply posit the female body as a privileged vector of spirituality. Woolf's ambiguous discourse on gender, it seems, ultimately seeks to transcend this category. Elaine Lux and Arina Lungu show that, in spite of different perspectives, the fiction of Gail Godwin, Michèle Roberts and Sara Maitland is primarily shaped by Christian spirituality. Finally, Claude le Fustec, in her exploration of Toni Morrison's novels (from *The Bluest Eye* to *Paradise*), notices a movement away from "the disabling function of the myth of the fall [...] to the enabling power of the Christian teaching of love [...]." The tendency to inscribe and explore women and spirituality issues within, rather than without, a Christian frame seems to confirm Heather Ingman's finding that many 20<sup>th</sup>-century women writers try to preserve a dialogue between traditional religious discourse and women's contemporary religious and spiritual experience.

8 Thus, it is with a literature of renegotiation rather than rejection that we ultimately seem to be dealing with. This renegotiation involves an imaginative rewriting of the traditional religious script, capable of accommodating and giving meaning to the female experiences of spirituality. The "restorying" process revisits and shapes myths, spaces, mystical heroines, and spiritual journeys through predominantly female characters. The quest for space is problematic in Michèle Roberts's fiction, which, in its denunciation of Christian space as enclosure, explores the ambivalent spaces of the House and the Wood without succeeding in locating an ideal

place for female spirituality. Sara Maitland chooses to enlarge the space of the church by introducing a symbolic transgression liable to expand its boundaries and accommodate all the communities of the outcasts. Maitland's challenge to the exclusionary power of church space is echoed by Toni Morrison's denunciation of the exclusionary power of myth and of the myth of the fall, in particular, which works as a symbol of the African American community's alienation. In most of the novels examined, biblical stories, such those of Adam and Eve, Ruth, Hagar, or Jonah's journey, are the objects of a subtle yet thorough revision which sometimes generates empowered female characters. For example, Elaine Lux shows that Gail Godwin's characters, Margaret and Magda, may be interpreted as types of Christ. Through what Claude le Fustec calls a "womanist gospel of self knowledge," Toni Morrison's black women characters in *Beloved*, *Jazz* and *Paradise* embark on a quest for enlightenment and wholeness which culminates in the wisdom of the mystical heroine Consolata.

9 Yet a puzzling question to settle for all the articles is how to define a specifically *female* spirituality. Elaine Lux writes that "Godwin herself is not sure that women's spirituality is different from that of men." Naomi Toth underlines Virginia Woolf's ambiguous discourse about gender and its relation to spirit and reality, noting that "at no point does Woolf attempt to determine what that authentically female relation to reality might be." More generally, in the fiction under study, the specifically female experience of motherhood does not seem to be exploited as a privileged channel to the divine or the sacred. The capacity for mothering that some, such as Carol Ochs, have deemed central in a context of female spirituality (28) is not consistently presented here as a redeeming gift. Although they may be mothers, these heroines' encounters with spirituality, such as they are presented in the following essays, rather seem to engage them as sisters, wives or daughters. Virginia Woolf does not conjure up the spectre of Shakespeare's mother and yet urges the female writer to "think back through our mothers;" Arina Lungu, in her study of Roberts's novel *Daughters of the House*, focuses on girls' experiences; Elaine Lux deals with Margaret's difficult childhood and Magda seems childless; Claude le Fustec's essay comments on infanticide. The capacity for mothering is present, however, in a metaphorical way, through creative, imaginative and visionary powers which give birth to revelations, a sense of temporal and spatial immediacy ("here" and "now") or "moments of vision." Those imaginative and visionary powers also engage, of course, the very act of writing which becomes itself a form of prayer, of spiritual journey transcending gender and reaching out to a universal dimension which at once dissolves and reveals the gendered self.

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Avec Claire Sorin, « *Suspicious Saints: The Spiritual Paradox of the Daughters of Eve* », in Lux-Sterritt, Laurence et Claire Sorin (eds.) *Spirit, Faith and Church. Women's Experiences in the English-Speaking World, 17<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> centuries*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012, pp. 1-27.

#### Résumé :

L'histoire de la religion et des femmes dans le monde anglophone est profondément marquée par une tradition judéo-chrétienne dans laquelle ces dernières sont associées aux deux stéréotypes antithétiques d'Ève et Marie, l'une pécheresse et corruptrice, l'autre pure et rédemptrice. Bien que les femmes constituent une majorité des membres pratiquants dans les religions chrétiennes occidentales, elles ont longtemps été (et pour beaucoup demeurent) exclues des sphères décisionnelles et institutionnelles de leurs Églises. La deuxième vague féministe et la naissance des études sur le genre ont noté cette exclusion dans les années 1960 et 1970, ainsi que son corollaire : l'absence des femmes des pages de l'histoire religieuse. L'intérêt des chercheurs s'était jusqu'alors porté principalement sur les grandes figures masculines, les prêtres, les pasteurs, ceux qui prêchaient et écrivaient, les hommes d'influence. Les femmes, bien que constituant la masse des paroissiennes, n'avaient pas d'histoire. C'est ce travers que les contributions de cet ouvrage collectif tentent de rectifier grâce à neuf études de cas précis de spiritualité féminine du dix-septième siècle à nos jours dans le monde anglophone. Au delà de la question institutionnelle, les articles débattent l'existence d'un lien privilégié de la nature féminine avec le divin, de la place du corps sensuel dans la vie spirituelle, et des bénéfices parfois paradoxaux dérivés d'une situation d'exclusion et d'infériorité.

8 795 mots

mots-clés : femmes ; spiritualité ; corps ; sacré ; féminisme

#### Présentation du texte :

L'ouvrage collectif pour lequel a été écrite cette introduction est le résultat d'un processus de sélection des communications entendues lors du colloque organisé avec Claire Sorin en 2009 à Aix-en-Provence sur les femmes et la spiritualité. Dans cette introduction, je souhaitais revenir sur des thèmes qui avaient été présents dans ma propre recherche sur les femmes dans le catholicisme du dix-septième siècle et les comparer à l'aune d'autres siècles et d'autres mouvements religieux. Le rapport au corps féminin a-t-il évolué dans le catholicisme au fil des siècles ? L'exemple des religieuses australiennes semble indiquer que la tendance est plutôt à la persistance de préjugés négatifs ; l'exemple des femmes prêtres de l'Église anglicane, pourtant symbole d'évolution des mœurs, fait néanmoins écho à ces préjugés ancestraux. Pourtant, il semble exister un lien paradoxal entre ce corps dénigré et un rapport privilégié des femmes au divin, au spirituel, voire au monde des esprits. Dans ce travail, je souhaitais m'engager plus franchement qu'auparavant sur le terrain d'une analyse prenant en compte les études sur le genre et les théories féministes.



Spirit, Faith and Church:  
Women's Experiences in the English-Speaking  
World, 17th-21st Centuries

Edited by

Laurence Lux-Sterritt and Claire Sorin

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P U B L I S H I N G

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**This book first published 2012**

**Cambridge Scholars Publishing**

**12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK**

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library**

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**ISBN (10): 1-4438-3465-3, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-3465-0**

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## INTRODUCTION

### SUSPICIOUS SAINTS: THE SPIRITUAL PARADOX OF THE DAUGHTERS OF EVE

LAURENCE LUX-STERRITT AND CLAIRE SORIN

The history of women and religion in the English-speaking world has been shaped by startling paradoxes which characterize both the conceptions of woman's nature and her position within religious institutions. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, women have been associated to the all-encompassing, yet antithetical archetypes of Eve and Mary. Moreover, although women have long constituted the bulk of Church membership, they have traditionally been –and still are, in some denominations– excluded from Church leadership. One might surmise that, despite evidence of vibrant female participation in the piety and pastoral life of Christian congregations, the archetypal representation of women as the daughters of Eve serves as a constant reminder of their sinful potential and, by the same token, partly explains their historical exclusion from the pulpit. Conversely, these remarks point to a major contradiction inherent to the subject of *men* and religion: if men constitute a minority of Church members, why do they represent an overwhelming majority of Church leaders? Several studies highlight this striking paradox: in 2006, the Australian National Church Life Survey revealed that men accounted for only 39% of all churchgoers.<sup>1</sup> In 2007, the Tearfund report on churchgoing trends in the United Kingdom noted that women accounted for 65% of churchgoers. It also remarked that although male attendance had been dropping sharply since the 1980s, men still occupied the great majority of positions of leadership in Catholic, Anglican, Methodist or Baptist churches.<sup>2</sup>

The complex effects of the dual biblical representation of woman's nature as well as the question of power and gender within religious institutions obviously deserve nuanced and contextualized analyses,

especially when they apply to a variety of geographical and historical backgrounds. Yet the field of gender studies which emerged in the wake of the second feminist wave undoubtedly provides a useful and unifying conceptual framework for understanding how women's history globally relates to religious history. The movement of historical revision which the feminists of the western world launched with renewed vigour in the 1960s and 1970s was initially meant as a reaction against women's absence from male-written history. It was an attempt to give a name and a face to the anonymous protagonists of history. Back in 1975, Gerda Lerner noted that the invisibility of women not only had to be remedied through "compensation" and "contribution" narratives but that it should, above all, lead to a global rewriting of traditional history using new conceptual tools. One stage of this rewriting process includes the addition of new categories (such as sexuality, role indoctrination, sexual values and myths, female consciousness) analysed through the prisms of "race, class, ethnicity, and possibly, religion [...]"<sup>3</sup> Lerner's somewhat tentative inclusion of religion seems odd, given her awareness of the tremendous impact of religion in shaping women's history and consciousness and, we must add, in shaping religious history as well. As American scholar Ann Braude points out:

[...] we cannot expect to understand the history of religion in America until we know at least as much about the women who have formed the majority of participants as we do about the male minority who have stood in the pulpit.<sup>4</sup>

Braude's emphasis on religious women as a majority echoes Lerner's claim that women constituted the majority of humankind and that "history, as written and perceived up to now, is the history of a minority, who may well turn out to be the 'sub-group'"<sup>5</sup> In her groundbreaking 1997 essay entitled "Women's History IS American Religious History", Braude actually proposed to shift the focus and re-examine three major concepts which scholars have traditionally used to characterize American religious history. The decline of religion in the colonial period, its feminization in the Victorian era and secularization in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Braude argues, are but the fictional narratives of the minority which "incorporate assumptions about women's powerlessness or invisibility derived from the value system of American Protestantism"<sup>6</sup> In fact, the gender lens reveals that

[t]he cultural transitions referred to as declension, feminization and secularization might be seen as positive developments in American Protestantism: the colonial period saw an increase in the spiritual status and role of women; the nineteenth century saw a vast increase in the

activities and influence of the female laity; and the twentieth century [...] has witnessed the rise of female clergy and a reorientation of liturgy and theology based on women's experience.<sup>7</sup>

Since the 1970s, an amazing amount of research has documented this "majority of participants" Braude considers to be the main characters of religious history. Female religious leaders, women's religious activism and spiritual experiences have been the objects of many studies which have made "women and religion" a visible category in colleges and universities. Yet, as Catherine Brekus remarks, "women's history has not yet gained full acceptance within the fields of either religion or history" and a pattern of exclusion globally continues to characterize women's religious history, both in academic and textbook publications on religion.<sup>8</sup> According to Brekus, this exclusion is first due to the persistence of androcentric prejudices which inform the minds of historians of both sexes and present man as the universal subject, relegating woman to the status of the "other".<sup>9</sup> The difficulty in decentring maleness is paralleled by a reluctance to shift the focus and purpose of religious history. Women's historians have raised issues that encompass the traditional questions of the relationship between religion, national culture and democracy, but they have asked other types of questions which challenge the neutrality of knowledge and the hierarchical classification of points of view. Inspired by and contributing to the "social history" which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s and the "cultural history" of the 1980s, they contested an elitist version of history and focused on the voices of ordinary people. This attempt at recovering women's individual and collective experiences has fragmented and complexified the traditional grand narrative but it has failed, ultimately, to provide a coherent explanation of structural transformations. For Brekus, this failure to propose a coherent whole also explains why women's history has not been yet integrated into mainstream religious history.<sup>10</sup>

Conversely, the integration of religion into women's history has been somewhat problematical. Women's history has mainly been written by feminists who viewed religion as an oppressive and conservative force. This negative reading of religion as a force of ideological and institutional constraint owes much to feminism's own debt to the Enlightenment; as reason became the guiding precept of intellectual thought, the spiritual was devalued as irrational, and dogma or religion became associated with "false consciousness", or socially-imposed and artificial values.<sup>11</sup> In 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft's ground-breaking and seminal *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* emerged from the Enlightenment debate on the concepts of freedom and equality. Wollstonecraft focused upon female physical,

intellectual and temperamental attributes but did not touch upon their spiritual aptitudes. As she turned her attention increasingly to issues relating to the body, her 1798 *Maria, or the Wrong of Woman* heralded centuries of feminist struggle towards the acceptance of women's sexuality. In such a context, issues of religion and particularly the power of religious institutions seemed antithetical with the fight for women's sexual and political equality. Thus, when the two pioneers of the women's rights movement in the United States, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, wrote a history of feminism (*The History of Woman Suffrage*, 1881–86), their anticlerical stance unsurprisingly failed to present the Church as a space where efficient feminist struggles took place.<sup>12</sup>

This bias was reproduced by the subsequent generations of historians of feminism who tended to disregard the roles that prominent religious women like Frances Willard or Helen Barrett Montgomery played in the movement.<sup>13</sup> Australian feminist Germaine Greer typically left out issues of faith and religion from her infamous 1970 *Female Eunuch*.<sup>14</sup> Although more attention was paid to religion in the early phase of the second wave after the mid-1980s, many women's historians have neglected religious issues, probably because the conservative backlash of the period increasingly associated religious values to antifeminist ones. Yet it seems that over the last decade, inspired by the research on African American women and religion, more scholars have begun seriously to consider questions of religion.<sup>15</sup> It is to be hoped that this trend will continue for, just as the neglect of women's presence and agency blurs the understanding of religious history, the failure to include religion obviously impoverishes the complex reality of women's history. Only a sustained and mutual integration of those topics will contribute to the writing of the "truly universal history" which Gerda Lerner evoked 36 years ago.<sup>16</sup>

The following essays are an attempt to shed further light on the field of women's religious history which, in spite of the abundant research that has developed over the last four decades, still needs exploration, especially in a transnational perspective. Inspired by gender and religious studies, they address the broad question of how women from the English-speaking world have related to spirit, faith and Church since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The case studies concern mainly white, English-speaking middle-class women brought up in the Christian tradition, a group which has often been pointed out as having received extensive coverage, compared to other racial, social and religious categories. In the same way feminist historians have become aware of the overrepresentation of white middle-class Protestant women, religious scholars of the English-speaking world have acknowledged the need to explore women's religious diversity beyond the white Protestant



mainstream. While we share this concern, our broad geographical and chronological scope required a set of common questions around which to centre the discussion. The essays therefore relate to women and Christianity, leaving aside otherwise fascinating religious traditions such as Judaism, Islam, Buddhism or pre-Columbian religions. Our case studies offer insight into women's embodied experiences of their faith in North America, Britain, Australia and New Zealand, from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to nowadays.

The chapters do reflect religious and spiritual plurality within the Christian tradition. Out of nine essays, four specifically focus on Protestant women while two deal with Catholic nuns in different geographical and historical contexts and another with Mormon women in the United States. Finally, two chapters escape the boundaries of denominational religion and concentrate on the larger field of spirituality. Thus, H el ene Palma's work examines freemason spirituality and Beth Robertson's is about spiritualism. Each chapter has tried to recover women's stories and voices in order to confront them with the religious or spiritual ideology in which they emerged. Ideology, as Nancy Theriot reminds us, is not simply a set of discourses and practices imposed on passive subjects:

[...] ideology (sexual or otherwise) is not the creation of a ruling class or ruling sex, but is a collective creation of individual human beings acting on the material conditions of their lives in an attempt to make their experience meaningful. This does not mean that all groups have equal input into one ideology but that there are competing ideologies with the hegemonic group influencing but not determining the beliefs and world views of the various 'out' groups by exerting power over the material conditions of these groups' existence [...] This view of sexual ideology allows us to see women as neither victims nor all-powerful actors, but as people constantly responding to and interpreting their life situations within unchosen constraints.<sup>17</sup>

To a large extent, this book explores religious women's responses and interpretations of their spirituality in a set of "unchosen constraints". The case studies were oriented by three interrelated issues: the first was to explore how women have internalized, contested or negotiated their places and their identities in a wide array of religious contexts sharing a patriarchal background, and how their presence and agency have contributed to shaping this background. The second was to get a more precise understanding of how women perceived and described the nature of their religious roles and spiritual journeys. How did gender influence their relation to, and their conception of, the divine? Thirdly, most authors

explore the complex and central issue of the female body in relation to women's spirituality and to their membership of religious institutions.

### **Gendered Spiritualities: A Female Bond to the Divine?**

Historical sources such as diaries, letters, autobiographies and memoirs allowed Michèle Lardy and Rachel Cope to delve into the language used by 17<sup>th</sup>-century English Protestant ladies and 19<sup>th</sup>-century American evangelical women. Lardy's study confirms that the parameters of female piety in England were remarkably consistent with those in colonial New England. Going to church, attending and commenting upon the sermons, praying, reading, writing and catechizing the children and servants were activities that the institution and the community expected from virtuous wives and mothers. Most women accepted their subordinate status within the Church and submitted to the authority of their husbands and ministers. This may have been because they did not question the inferior status accorded woman in the Scripture and because their lower position did not reflect in the spiritual sphere. Indeed, the Reformation defended the idea that all believers should have a direct access to the Bible and most Protestant and Puritan churchmen recognized and even valued women's potential for godliness.<sup>18</sup> Also, as Michèle Lardy shows, religion was a source of comfort but also of empowerment for women: while traditionally recognized as legitimate as teachers in the domestic sphere, women also found in the emerging Protestant ethics a new entitlement to express their views on political issues which were closely dependent on religious ones. Thus, the English Civil Wars (1642–51) and the period of the Interregnum (1649–60) provided women with new opportunities for religious and public fulfilment.<sup>19</sup>

This empowerment could embolden some women into voicing their opinions in more or less radical ways. The lives of dissenters like Anne Askew, Anne Hutchinson or Mary Dyer tell stories of open defiance resulting in death and banishment but, on a daily basis and in less dramatic ways, other women also made their voices heard through their writings.<sup>20</sup> The stories of many such women, spurred on by their own models of spirituality, remain to be discovered and studied. Marilyn Westerkamp suggests that New England Puritan women's participation in the life of their congregations has not yet been fully assessed and that shifting the focus on the "hidden ones", as Cotton Mather called the female congregants, significantly deepens the understanding of Puritan culture. She also points out that giving female authors like Anne Bradstreet (1612–

reformers imported into the domestic realm the prestige and efficiency of science to provide utopian visions of virtuous democracies where male values were despised and men's roles secondary.

### **Empowered by Powerlessness? Female Body and Female Spirit**

Still, while Victorian middle-class culture glorified the figure of the "angel in the house" and celebrated its almost supernatural piety, women were persistently portrayed as physically and intellectually inferior to men. The 19<sup>th</sup> century added science to prejudice as the new fields of phrenology, craniology and gynaecology "proved" women's natural subordinate status. In fact, the religious dominance of women, despite enlarging their sphere of influence, not only failed to bring an egalitarian vision of the sexes; it partly justified the opposite for woman's force, ultimately, lay in her power to pray and submit. This paradoxical status was already illustrated during the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Enlightenment which theoretically insisted on the same essential nature of men and women and practically perpetuated a patriarchal bias. In 18<sup>th</sup>-century American colonies, the revolutionary rhetoric inspired by the Enlightenment and expressed in the Declaration of Independence excluded women –along with poor and coloured people– from the egalitarian ideal of the young republic; and despite the concept of republican motherhood which entrusted females with the mission of bearing and rearing virtuous citizens, women remained excluded from the political sphere.

The inequality of men and women pervaded religious institutions as well as political ones. As H  l  ne Palma points out in her survey of women and freemasonry, the egalitarian ideal inspired by the Enlightenment was, in practice, hardly applied. This was due to the Christian and patriarchal roots of freemasonic spirituality and to the persistence of sexist prejudices which stressed women's intellectual weakness. It appears that even enlightened minds continued to believe with St Augustine that, if man was made in God's image, woman emphatically was not.<sup>25</sup> She was, in the terms of St Thomas Aquinas, a "misbegotten male". As a result, most lodges excluded women whom they associated with bondsmen and poor people. However, Palma, whose chapter focuses on the mixed lodges in The Hague and in France, adopts an optimistic stance, arguing that the exceptional cases of admission did support, rather than contradict, a commitment to the Enlightenment ideals.

This contradictory status, marked by power and powerlessness, endured in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and found one of its most intriguing expressions in the

spiritualist medium. Spiritualism, which emerged in the United States in the late 1840s as a new unconventional religion,<sup>26</sup> rapidly spread in Canada, Europe and Australia where thousands of men and women enthusiastically embraced its tenet that the living could communicate with the dead. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the general assumption is that the supernatural sphere tends to be disproved by science, or at least that the two spheres are unrelated. On the contrary, 19<sup>th</sup>-century spiritualism tried to conflate both realms, proving the very existence of supernatural phenomena through scientific means. Spiritualist séances meant to prove empirically that spirits did exist, that there was a tangible form of spiritual activity in the world beyond. Laurence Moore's analysis of the place of women in American séances has since been consolidated by Alex Owen's study of English spiritualism. In accordance with Moore's findings, Owen remarks that, "[English] Victorian spiritualists held that women were particularly gifted as the mediums of this communication".<sup>27</sup> In fact, women were considered fit for mediumship because of their supposedly more spiritual and more passive nature, which was believed to facilitate the spirit's possession of the female body. Victorian assumptions about the weaker nature of females paradoxically empowered some women to become privileged "empty vessels"; in this way, Victorian spiritualism replicated the medieval mind frame which assumed that women's inner hollowness allowed them to be filled entirely by the divine spirit. Female mystics were able to gain direct conversation with God: they heard him, spoke with him, bonded with him in perfect mystical union. Such direct access to the divine was paradoxically denied men, whose mental strength and rationality rendered them less receptive to such spiritual influences. In the same way as medieval and early modern mystics were the *loci* of divine manifestations, 19<sup>th</sup>-century women also became bridges between the earthly and heavenly worlds in the confined space of the séance room.

On both sides of the Atlantic, spiritualism developed in parallel with the women's rights movement and was particularly supportive of the feminist cause. Spiritualism endowed women with a special leadership and contained a potential for subversion which enabled many to test and contest the rigid 19<sup>th</sup>-century class and gender norms, despite accepting one of those norms—female passivity—paradoxically to legitimize the female medium's power. Beth Robertson's essay provides an insightful analysis of the complex identities of the woman medium as active agent and passive subject in the context of the séances organized by Dr T. G. Hamilton, a Canadian scientist who tried to photograph the spirits of the dead in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Robertson's description of those séances, which no longer occurred in a darkened room but in a male-managed

laboratory, clearly presents the female bodies of the mediums as objects probed, manipulated and controlled by the doctor as well as by the male and female spirits. Still, she shows that those bodies were also subjects whose blurred identities and gender contained a potential of aggressive, erotic and subversive power.

### **Troublesome Sex: Women in Religious Institutions**

The ambiguous status of the female body as well as its ambivalent ties with spirituality are given a particular focus in the last three chapters of the book which analyze contemporary cases of women struggling against male-defined church institutions. These essays demonstrate the astonishing endurance of patriarchal forces which, in some religious denominations, obstruct women's access to leadership, impose gender-based norms and restrict the worshipping of female divine figures. History is peppered with cases of extraordinary women who, despite being spiritually enabled, yet remained constrained by religious institutions. The history of Catholicism is rife with examples of women, religious or lay, whose active and vocal involvement in the Catholic life of their times put them on a collision path with Church authorities which deemed their endeavours unacceptable. Such women were condemned (and sometimes branded heretics or burned at the stake) despite their professing absolute devotion to a Church whose tenets they only intended to further in their own ways. For instance, during the wave of medieval mysticism which swept 14<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, *The Mirror of Simple Annihilated Souls* aimed to provide spiritual steps towards perfection; yet in writing it, Marguerite Porete was deemed to have violated the preserve of male preaching. She was burned at the stake in Paris in 1310. Three centuries later, at the height of the Catholic Reformation, when the Church launched a mission to re-Catholicize areas lost to Protestantism, Mary Ward founded a female congregation modelled on the Society of Jesus, to take part in the English mission. Her initiative was perceived by the Church as a violation of its strict definition of gendered roles: Mary Ward was condemned as a heretic in 1631.<sup>28</sup> The history of Protestantism also shows that a gender bias emphasized women's deviant potential as testify Anne Hutchinson's banishment from Massachusetts Bay and the Salem witchcraft trials that took place in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Puritan New England.

Generally-speaking, such women provoked the anger of religious institutions not because of what they *did*, but because of what they *were*: women, daring to impinge upon male spiritual preserves. Based on interviews and testimonies gathered through personal interviews and

internet blogs, the last three essays of this volume highlight the voices of women who test Church authority. Eglantine Jamet-Moreau shows that the ancestral belief in the female body's impurity and defiling power still plays a role in the non ordination or reluctant acceptance of women priests in the Anglican Church. The new vision of inner piety and maternal tenderness that emerged in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century did not completely erase the deeply-rooted fear of female bodily corruption. This fear was initially expressed through the public punishments of women of colour and lower social classes<sup>29</sup> and at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is still perceptible in the rejection of female uncleanness.

Since the 1980s, the Anglican Church has suffered great internal turmoil around the issue of the ordination of women; the subject had first been discussed by the Lambeth conference in 1948, but remained contained for many years. The year 1975 saw some significant advances when the General Synod proposed a ground-breaking motion: "that this Synod considers that there are no fundamental objections to the ordination of women to the priesthood". The vote was tight, with interesting variations between the three Houses. Whereas the House of Laity returned 117 Ayes for 74 Noes, the House of Clergy returned 110 Ayes for 96 Noes, and the House of Bishops 28 Ayes for 10 Noes.<sup>30</sup> It appears that, at this time, the laity felt readier than clerics to accept women priests. This is confirmed by the votes returned on the second motion: "that this Synod, in view of the significant division of opinion reflected in the diocesan voting, considers that it would not be right at present to remove the legal and other barriers to the ordination of women". When faced with the decision to postpone ordination, the House of Laity returned 80 Ayes for 96 Noes, voicing its desire to move forward immediately. The House of Clergy, on the other hand, expressed its relief and returned 127 Ayes for 74 Noes. The House of Bishops returned 19 Ayes for 14 Noes.<sup>31</sup> Between 1988 and 1998, the numbers of bishops attending the Lambeth conference grew from 518 to 800 over a period of ten years. As the ecclesiastical ranks of the Anglican Church became increasingly concerned with the issue of female ordination, so did their lay communities, and the subject was far from consensual.<sup>32</sup>

The very unity of the Church of England has been severely tested, and many amongst both laity and clergy defected over this issue. Eglantine Jamet-Moreau's study shows that the everyday experience of female ministers of the Church is not one of peaceful endorsement. Churchgoers often voice their outright opposition to female ministry, and amongst those who do not, there sometimes remains a latent discomfort with the fact that the sacred functions of the ministry should be incarnated in female bodies.

Modern mentalities appear to echo St Jerome's position on female sexuality; as Jamet-Moreau's interviews evoke parishioners' reactions to the real or imagined figure of a pregnant or menstruating minister, they testify that a woman's reproductive power, linked to her sexuality, represent the main obstacle to her performance of the sacred rites of the Anglican tradition.

The Roman Catholic Church, by comparison, is even more wary of the female within its ranks. When the Anglican Church was in the process of discussing the delicate issue of the ordination of women, the Catholic Church voiced its disagreement in plain terms. Pope Paul VI wrote to Archbishop Coggan in November 1975, arguing that "the exclusion of women from the priesthood is in accordance with God's plan for his Church".<sup>33</sup> Of course, tradition weighs heavily upon such considerations: to justify its stance, the Church presents it as a decision to honour Christ's own intentions when he chose only men for his apostles. Yet the continued exclusion of women from the priesthood goes beyond this avowed desire to honour tradition; its roots run deep within the collective psyche which, since the Middle Ages, has associated womanhood with change, fluctuation, irrationality, uncleanness and sin. For Jerome, only the virgins who dedicated themselves entirely to Christ were freed from their natural blemish, and became honorary men:

As long as a woman is for birth and children, she is different from man as body is from soul. But when she wishes to serve Christ more than the world, then she will cease to be a woman, and will be called a man.<sup>34</sup>

The cult of Mary paradoxically justifies an incompatible relation between priesthood and motherhood. Indeed, Mary stands "alone of all her sex", an incarnation both of physical purity and spiritual perfection never to be achieved by other women.<sup>35</sup> Even the most theoretically pure and spiritually fecund women who wish to become part of the fabric of the Church remain subject to limitations: although nuns enjoy recognition as Christ's spiritual spouses, they can never hope to become the ordained dispensers of his blood and body. Moreover, clerical expectations of the ideal nun set stringently high standards for those who take the veil, demanding that women religious should cease to be embodied women to become pure beings, untouched by sin and entirely devoted to lives of chastity, poverty, charity and obedience.

In her study of Australian and New-Zealander nuns, Megan Brock, herself a sister, reveals a surprisingly intense dissonance between nuns' self perceptions and Church expectations. While official discourses define the nun as a woman apart, whose power resides in her chastity, docility,

devotion and freedom from emotional ties, real sisters see themselves as ordinary, relational and even sexual persons who need human experiences to nurture their maturation process. This gap generates in many nuns a conflicting state of emotions and a sense of uneasiness which appears to be cross-confessional. Indeed, Sonya Sharma highlights similar feelings when discussing young Canadian women who are lay members of various Protestants denominations. In her sample study, she notices that the rapport between women's bodies and their faith is especially complex, particularly when confronted to the male-defined norm of what women are supposed to feel or how they should behave in order to be "good" Christians. Sharma asks the thorny question: "What happens when a young woman's identities as Christian and as an embodied sexual woman collide?"<sup>36</sup>

This echoes the difficulties expressed not only by Megan Brock's Catholic nuns in Australia and New Zealand, but also those encountered by Margaret Toscano's Mormon women, thereby testifying to the universality of the internalized conflict between womanhood and Church rules. Whilst women underpin the very institutions of most religious groups, their assimilation of male-defined institutional norms often is the source of painful feelings of alienation from their very gendered beings. Emotions, such as shame or guilt, may even cause women to leave such Churches in order to find solace in alternative avenues of spirituality which they can more easily reconcile with their sexuality. As Sharma puts it: "a conflict between Christian and sexual identities contributes to women leaving the church and moving towards other forms of spiritual practice [...]"<sup>37</sup>

Yet it is not only their sexuality in the narrow sense which is problematic for female believers. It seems that in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Christianity, women often continue to be stigmatized as Tertullian's "devil's gateway", the embodiment of rebelliousness, of un-Godliness, and of spiritual death. Simply by *being* women, they are instantly put in an untenable position when they belong to Churches whose spiritualities are defined in male terms, and for which concepts associated with the feminine are so dangerous. Although Mormon theology initially conceived God as an embodied male and female, in 1991, the Church of the Latter-Day Saints, desirous of gaining respectability as a mainstream Christian religion, established a ban on praying the Heavenly Mother; this ban has triggered an intense debate, especially among the Mormon feminists, with whom Margaret Toscano identifies. Her academic research about the Mother God eventually led to her excommunication in 2000, a decree that has concerned some of her counterparts since the early 1990s. The chapter proposes an



analysis of the visionary experiences of the Heavenly Mother (not necessarily reported by feminists) which present the Divine Female as a helpful figure sometimes appearing spontaneously in times of painful crisis. For Toscano, these visions are “a crucial site for understanding the way these women attempt to develop a personal and empowered spirituality while negotiating a place for themselves within the highly patriarchal structure of the LDS Church”.

Quite obviously, they also raise the question of the gendering of the divine and the relations between female embodiment and female deity, questions of particular resonance in Mormon theology. Toscano’s fight for the rehabilitation of the Heavenly Mother echoes some feminist theologians’ recovery of the Divine Feminine and confirms that feminism and religion are not necessarily antithetical and that, indeed, they have always been tightly linked.

Paralleling the secular and anti-clerical stance of some women’s rights activists, a rich and complex network of interactions has led feminism and religion to cooperate and evolve, leading many religious men and women to support women’s fight for equality and feminists to redefine women’s positions within the church, as well as woman’s place in theology.<sup>38</sup> While many feminists managed to reconcile their convictions and their traditional faith, others turned to alternative religions or spiritual movements more congenial to women such as spiritualism, Shakerism, Christian Science, theosophy or New Thought. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the atmosphere of the women’s liberation movement favoured the rebirth of pagan witchcraft and the religion of the Goddess. Spurred on in the late 1970s by the influential works of theologians like Mary Daly and Carol Christ, or self-taught thinkers like Z Budapest, a feminist spirituality movement was born in the United States and it quickly spread in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, becoming one “among the few living religions worldwide created and led by women”.<sup>39</sup> In Goddess theology, the original sin is rejected, the female body with its menstrual cycles is glorified, and the whole patriarchal script is nullified. The popularity of the movement of the Goddess testifies to women’s need for a divinity in their own image, a need that the Mormon women interviewed by Toscano also experience.

Ultimately, the book traces the various forms of female spirituality in the liminal spaces of diaries, spiritual journals, Masonic lodges, séance rooms, private interviews and internet forums. Such inquiries, beyond the institutional sphere, are necessary to get a deeper understanding of (women’s) religious history and Janet Moore Lindman’s remark on Protestant spirituality in early America could indeed apply to a variety of cultural backgrounds and religious denominations:

Looking beyond the meetinghouse expands our understanding of American religious history to more than just an institutional or theological enterprise. Consideration of women's religious experience provides a wide-angle view to include myriad spiritual expressions and enactments—embodied spirituality, religious narrative, lay activism, and gender identity—as primary components of American religious history.<sup>40</sup>

While many of the voices studied here do not radically challenge or alter the institution, they do belong to those “primary components” of history which add to the ever-changing mosaic of the gender and religious landscape. Besides, read together, the chapters offer a web of stories which gives an extraordinarily complex vision of the female body and spirit in their relation to the Church and the divine. It is not only that religious authorities have stressed purity or impurity, strength or weakness, innocence or sin differently over the years; what is striking, in the last resort, is to notice that the female body has never escaped a Manichean representation which in fact hides a third figure. The ambivalent and contradictory images that one finds in the male-shaped discourses on womanhood and in women's self perceptions, show that the scriptural models of Eve and Mary have merged into an invisible archetype of female religiosity that cannot be defined by an “or” but an “and” logic: woman, ultimately, has always been perceived as sin *and* innocence, force *and* weakness, purity *and* pollution, threat *and* redemption. Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, one has witnessed a distinct de-emphasis of woman's potential for corruption. Yet, this potential is far from having disappeared: this is particularly perceptible in the conflicting responses to motherhood which, with its capacity to inscribe and erase original sin, continues both to elevate and downgrade Christian women. This is also visible in the emphasis on chastity and the rejection of the divine female that some denominations operate. To a certain extent, most women brought up in the biblical tradition have been the daughters of this third pervasive figure blending vice and virtue and arousing suspicion and admiration. Double, dual and possibly divisive—like the fallen angel—women have also a distinct aptitude for spirituality and leadership. The enduring sense of guilt and particular feelings of empowerment that many females, within and without the church, experience in their spiritual journeys may be related, in part, to the irreconcilable yet indissociable forces which linger on as the legacy of Eve and Mary. While some have tried to write an alternative script obliterating guilt entirely, the task of scholars in religious and women's studies remains to bring to the surface the many tales and faces of the hidden ones.

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### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> NCLS Research, "Gender Profile of Church Attenders." Accessed July 4, 2011. <http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=137>.
- <sup>2</sup> Why Church. Belonging and Believing. "Why So Few Men in Church?" Accessed July 4, 2011. <http://www.whychurch.org.uk/gendergap.php>
- <sup>3</sup> Gerda Lerner, "Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges," *Feminist Studies* 3 (Fall 1975): 13.
- <sup>4</sup> Ann Braude, "Women's History IS American Religious History," in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, ed. Thomas A. Tweed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 107.
- <sup>5</sup> Lerner, "Placing Women," 13.
- <sup>6</sup> Braude, "Women's History," 97.

*Ibid.*

Catherine A. Brekus, "Introduction: Searching for Women in Narratives of American Religious History," in *The Religious History of American Women, Reimagining the Past*, ed. Catherine A. Brekus (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 3.

*Ibid.*, 13-4.

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Marilyn J. Westerkamp, "Puritan Women, Spiritual Power and the Question of Sexuality," in *The Religious History of American Women, Reimagining the Past*, ed. Catherine A. Brekus (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 52-3.

*Ibid.*, 57.

Marilyn J. Westerkamp, *Women and Religion in Early America, the Puritan and Evangelical Traditions* (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), 19.

Barbara L. Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelicalism and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University press, 1981), 53-5.

<sup>24</sup> The feminization of religion increased women's moral and social power as it enlarged their sphere of action through numerous forms of religious activism. Scholars have assessed its impact more or less positively. See Barbara Welter's pioneering article, "The Feminization of American Religion: 1800-1860," *Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women*, eds., Mary S. Hartman and Lois W. Banner (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1975), 137-57; Ann Douglas's famous book, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Avon Books, 1978), offered a rather negative analysis of the sentimentalism this phenomenon led to.

<sup>25</sup> Julian O'Faolain and Laura Martinez, eds., *Not in God's Image: Women in History from the Greeks to the Victorians*, (New York: Fontana, 1973).

<sup>26</sup> Anne Braude argues that "Spiritualism should be taken seriously as a religion making a legitimate response to 19<sup>th</sup>-century theological challenges." *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001) xv.

<sup>27</sup> Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology and American Culture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) and Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room. Women, Power and Spiritualism in Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 1.

<sup>28</sup> See Laurence Lux-Sterritt and Carmen Mangion, eds., *Gender, Catholicism and Spirituality. Women and the Roman Catholic Church in Britain and Europe, 1200-1900* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>29</sup> Katherine M. Brown, *Foul Bodies, Cleanliness in Early America* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009), 92.

<sup>30</sup> *The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood: A Second Report by the House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England* (London: General Synod of the Church of England, 1988), 3.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>32</sup> Adolphus Chinedu Amadi-Azuogu, *The Politics of Power and the Ordination of Women* (Xulon Press, 2007), 315.

<sup>33</sup> Paul VI, "Response to the Letter of His Grace the Most Reverend Dr. F. D. Coggan, Archbishop of Canterbury, Concerning the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood," November 30, 1975, in *Acta Apostolica Sedis* 68 (1976): 599.

<sup>34</sup> Comm. in Epist. ad Ephes. III.

<sup>35</sup> Marian Warner, *Alone of all her Sex. The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976).

<sup>36</sup> Sonya Sharma, "When Young Women Say 'Yes': Exploring the Sexual Selves of Young Canadian Women in Protestant Churches," in *Women and Religion in the West. Challenging Secularization*, ed. Aune, Kristin, Sonya Sharma and Giselle Vincett (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 71.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Ann Braude, "Religions and Modern Feminism," in *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America*, vol. 1, eds. Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 11-23.



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**VOCATIONS INNOVANTES ET TRADITIONS**

**CONTEMPLATION, ACTION ET NEGOCIATION DES NORMES**

**« An Analysis of the Controversy Caused by Mary Ward's Institute in the 1620s », *Recusant History* 25.4 (2001) 636–647.**

**Résumé :**

En 1611, ayant reçu ce qu'elle décrit comme le commandement divin d'imiter la Compagnie de Jésus, la jeune Mary Ward fait de cette épiphanie la raison d'être de sa nouvelle vocation. Elle avait quitté son Yorkshire natal pour entrer chez les clarisses à St Omer, mais cette forme de vie religieuse ne convient plus à l'appel qu'elle vient de recevoir. Elle prend alors une décision lourde de conséquences : elle quitte le couvent et la protection de sa règle monastique pour fonder un Institut de Dames anglaises imitant au plus près la vocation et l'organisation jésuites. Avec ses disciples, elle travaille en Europe et en Angleterre, apportant soutien matériel et spirituel aux populations catholiques et s'efforçant de convertir les indécis. Si leurs travaux de catéchèse et d'éducation sont en général bien reçus par leurs bénéficiaires et par les autorités cléricales, leur choix d'une vocation missionnaire et leur imitation de la Compagnie de Jésus fait débat. Dans les années 1620, l'Institut fait face à de très forts mouvements d'opposition de la part du clergé séculier mais aussi de ses modèles, les jésuites, qui souhaitent prendre leurs distances vis-à-vis de ces pseudo-religieuses si peu conventionnelles. Cet article explore la controverse qui occupe toute la décennie de 1620, et qui n'est résolue qu'en 1631 par la bulle papale frappant Mary Ward d'hérésie et ordonnant la suppression de son Institut de « jésuitesses ».

6 407 mots

mots-clés : catholicisme anglais ; Mary Ward ; jésuitesses ; controverse religieuse ; mission

**Présentation du texte :**

Cet article est la toute première de mes publications ; il a été rédigé pendant ma dernière année de thèse pour proposer une synthèse des difficultés liées à la vocation très spécifique de Mary Ward. En proposant une forme de vie militante, missionnaire, et calquée sur l'organisation de la Compagnie de Jésus, Mary Ward s'éloigne de presque toutes les recommandations du concile de Trente sur la vie religieuse au féminin. Elle ne tient compte ni des limitations liées au sexe (les femmes ne peuvent qu'être cloîtrées si elles se veulent religieuses) ni du contexte politique qui oppose les jésuites à de nombreux détracteurs. Cet article montre que les trois plans soumis à l'approbation des autorités ecclésiastiques proposent une image de plus en plus claire de la vocation jésuite de la fondatrice, et donc de plus en plus inacceptable pour la curie romaine. Loin de concéder certains compromis dans ses négociations, Ward fait le chemin inverse : elle s'affranchit des conseils de ceux qui avaient initialement proposé des versions édulcorées de sa mission et n'accepte rien qui puisse compromettre le commandement divin qu'il dit avoir reçu, « Take the same of the Society ». L'article est assez général, puisqu'il était envisagé comme une introduction appelant ensuite des publications plus précises (voir suite).

## AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONTROVERSY CAUSED BY MARY WARD'S INSTITUTE IN THE 1620s

*by* LAURENCE LUX-STERRITT

**D**uring the reign of Elizabeth I, English Catholicism experienced a degree of persecution that was meant to ensure the extirpation of the old faith. However, Elizabethan anti-Catholic laws had an ambiguous effect upon the recusant population of England. Although the Roman Catholic faith initially suffered greatly, yet by the end of the reign it was rising again with force.<sup>1</sup> The unique vocation of Yorkshirewoman, Mary Ward (1585-1645), can be seen as an eloquent illustration of this new English Catholic spirit and as the embodiment of an English missionary determination to further the Catholic cause.

Between 1581 and 1585, two Acts were passed in an attempt to eradicate Catholicism on English soil. Anyone who acknowledged the authority of Rome or had received ordination abroad since the Queen's accession would be considered a traitor. It also became a criminal offence to hear Mass or even to help known Catholics.<sup>2</sup> It was in this troubled context that Mary Ward<sup>3</sup> was born in 1585 at Mulwith near Ripon; the daughter of Ursula and Marmaduke Ward, she belonged to a family renowned for its dedication to the old faith.<sup>4</sup> In a pattern already characteristic of recusant child-rearing, she was brought up and educated in various Yorkshire Catholic households,<sup>5</sup> and spent six years with the Babthorpes of Osgodby.<sup>6</sup> There, she witnessed the daily management of a recusant household and evolved in a world where housewives and women in general played crucial roles in maintaining the faith. These formative years among covert Catholic families in Yorkshire played a crucial part in the maturation of her spirituality, and they are intricately linked to her subsequent religious vocation. Indeed, even as she became inwardly convinced of her religious call, Mary Ward was influenced by the recusant background where, from a child, she had seen daily proof of women's aptitude to keep English Catholicism alive.

Between 1606 and 1611, Mary Ward experienced several defining moments that would provide the basis for her unique vocation.<sup>7</sup> The real turning point, however, came in the shape of 'a vision' she experienced in 1611 when she, accompanied by seven fellow Englishwomen, was at work among the expatriate English Catholic population in St Omer.<sup>8</sup> In

her letter to the Nuncio Albergati, she described hearing the divine commandment to 'Take the Same of the Society', an epiphany that changed the course of her life forever.<sup>9</sup> She further attempted to describe both her divine revelation and the way in which she had interpreted it:

I heard distinctly, not by sound of voice, but intellectually understood, these words, "Take the Same of the Society", so understood, as that we were to take the same, both in the matter and the manner, that only excepted which God by diversity of sex hath prohibited.<sup>10</sup>

Mary Ward understood the commandment to 'Take the Same of the Society' as an exhortation to start a society of women, formed on the model of the Society of Jesus, and pursuing the same goals.<sup>11</sup> She therefore lost no time in starting an Ignatian Institute that mainly focused upon the relief of adults and the education of girls.<sup>12</sup> By 1611 in St Omer, this handful of Catholic women was casting the foundations of a religious movement whose missionary and apostolic zeal would revolutionise the seventeenth century conception of religious women.<sup>13</sup>

Despite its contribution to the advancement of the Catholic faith however, Mary Ward's project came to an abrupt end in 1631, when Pope Urban VIII issued a Bull suppressing the Institute and condemning its foundress as a heretic. Although both the Institute and Mary Ward herself have generated much research in recent years, very few works have attempted to unravel the complicated history behind this fate.<sup>14</sup> The suppression of such a valuable Institute seems to contradict the missionary spirit of the post-Tridentine Church, and the reasons for the decree still remain unclear. This essay offers an analysis of the debate that emerged about the English Ladies in the 1620s, in an attempt to uncover the complex factors that led to the suppression. In 1621, Mary Ward had presented the essence and purpose of her Institute to the Curia, in a Plan called *Institutum*. An analysis of this Plan can help not only to understand the components of her vocation, but also to comprehend the violent controversy that led Pope Urban VIII to suppress the Institute in 1631.

After her 1611 revelation to 'take the Same of the Society', Mary Ward continued to struggle for a further ten years to discover the right path. In the 1610s she drafted two proposals for her Institute. The first, known as *Schola Beatae Mariae*, was sketched in 1612 and focused primarily upon the nuns' own salvation and their separation from the world.<sup>15</sup> Although it declared that teaching girls was the Institute's vocational occupation, it nevertheless gave primacy to the nuns' spiritual life. The Institute described in this first Plan would be named the 'School of Blessed Mary' and function like a cloister, with a traditional régime of enclosure.<sup>16</sup> However, it would be misleading to equate the proposals of the *Schola* with what Mary Ward truly envisaged. Indeed, the Plan had been drafted mostly by her spiritual director, Father Lee, and it proposed but a pale picture of the foundress' vocation: its essence

was deeply traditional and in keeping with Tridentine laws on monastic life for women religious. In 1616, however, the revelation to 'take the Same of the Society' had sufficiently matured for Mary Ward to submit a revised Plan, the *Ratio Instituti*, which proposed an Institute totally detached from the traditional cloister. In quite a novel way, it advocated the mixed life, an educational apostolate and total independence from bishops' authority for the English Ladies; the influence of a Jesuit model was already strongly evident.<sup>17</sup>

Neither of these two Plans fully captured the radicalism of Mary Ward's fully-fledged vocation. By 1621 she was ready to submit her third and most complete Plan, known as the *Institutum*—a Plan that she had drafted carefully, as the exact and mature expression of what she wanted for her congregation.<sup>18</sup> It is an analysis of this third Plan that brings to light both the essence of Mary Ward's missionary project, and the elements which led to its suppression in 1631. Indeed, the *Institutum* revealed its most controversial innovations even in its opening lines, where the foundress and her followers described themselves as 'soldiers of God' wishing to serve 'beneath the banner of the cross'.<sup>19</sup> After years of hesitation, the Institute exposed both its faithful emulation of the Society of Jesus and its desire to be recognised as a female counterpart of the Society. Unequivocally, the Ladies went so far as to request the right for their Society to be 'designated by the name of Jesus'.<sup>20</sup> In fact, about 85% of Mary Ward's text derived from the Jesuit *Formula Instituti* (1550), and claimed to adopt most of its innovations concerning the nature of religious life.

The Plan mapped out the proposed works of the women in the Institute. Primarily, the Ladies aimed to instruct simple people in Christian doctrine, to prepare them for Mass and the Sacraments, and to re-Catholicise those whose apostasy put their salvation in peril. They also wished to teach the catechism and focus especially upon the education of Catholic girls. However, their apostolate was not to stop there, for the Ladies (further emulating the Jesuits) envisaged a mission on a world-wide level. In the *Institutum* they vowed to obey the Pope should he send them 'among the Turks or any other infidels, even those who live in the region called the Indies, or among any heretics whatever'.<sup>21</sup> This clause, of course, encompassed the English mission itself, in which the Ladies wanted to participate as actively as male missionaries. In addition to sharing the Society's purposes, the Institute of the English Ladies also proposed to parallel its structural form. The *Institutum* wished to appoint a Mother Superior General, whose central authority would supervise all of the Institute's houses. Thus, the Englishwomen declined the immediate jurisdiction of any male order or of the local ordinaries: like the Society of Jesus, they requested self-government, and wished to vow direct obedience to the Pope.<sup>22</sup> So far, the aims of the Institute mirrored, almost word for word, those of the Society of Jesus. Its missionary, apostolic and educational vocation shared the

same essence; its form and structural organisation were woven in the same pattern.

If the *Institutum* was so similar to the Jesuit *Formula*, then what were the reasons for the bitter opposition mounting against Mary Ward in Rome? Surely, the Society of Jesus itself had created a favourable precedent when it was recognised by Pope Paul III in 1540. At a time when the Church needed every advantage it could summon, a Congregation of women working to catechise females would represent a formidable asset. However, the Institute's imitation of the Society of Jesus, far from facilitating its progress, was to throw countless difficulties in its path. It seems clear that the controversy caused by Mary Ward's scheme was, in large part, generated by the disputatiousness of Jacobean Catholicism, and above all by the deep divide between regulars (especially the Jesuits) and secular clergy.

The drawing of the *Institutum* quickly prompted the English clergy to present a memorial against it, in 1622.<sup>23</sup> It was predictable that those who opposed the Society of Jesus would also oppose an Institute that faithfully claimed to emulate it. Indeed, such vituperation was expressed vividly in the memorial, where the members of the Institute were termed 'Jesuitesses'. Although the secular clergy accurately understood some elements of the Institute's relationship with the Society of Jesus, it was also, either deliberately or unintentionally, mistaken on other points. In particular, the seculars were correct in their claim that the Institute's members lived 'according to the rule and institute of the Jesuit Fathers'. However, it was a mistake to assume, as they did, that the English Ladies were directly 'under their government and discipline'.<sup>24</sup> The latter statement arose, clearly, from a point-blank assumption that the self-rule of autonomous female congregations under no male government was inconceivable. Furthermore, it ran contrary to the Society's rules on the matter: neither Mary Ward's followers nor the Jesuit Fathers wished to trespass against St Ignatius's prohibition of a female branch.

As if opposition from the opponents of the Society of Jesus was not enough to contend with, Mary Ward also faced antipathy from within the Society itself: some Jesuits proved sensitive to their enemies' accusations that they violated their Rule and sheltered an illicit feminine phalanx. Despite the foundress' clarity on this point in the *Institutum*, the boundaries between Jesuits and members of the Institute had become blurred. As a consequence, many Jesuit Fathers decided to detach themselves officially from the female Congregation.

Although there remained members of the Society who supported the Ladies, the official line was conveyed in 1623 by the Jesuit General's order 'not [to] meddle with any thing belonging to the temporals of Mrs Mary Ward, or any of her company'.<sup>25</sup> Above all, the Fathers should make it quite clear that their Society, in keeping with the rulings of St Ignatius, did not harbour any female branch; the English Ladies had no

more particular link with them than any other penitent. Calumny had thus already left a deep scar in the relationship between the Institute of English Ladies and the Society they so admired. The Jesuits were anxious to dissociate their Society from that of the so-called 'galloping girls'.<sup>26</sup>

Yet, despite being attributed with such nicknames, the Institute was not to be dismissed simply as a laughing stock for the sport of the clergy. Had that been the case, they would not have felt moved to press so hard for its suppression. The secular clergy were not merely amused by the Englishwomen's endeavours: they were profoundly disturbed by them. In fact, the English Ladies proposed a new form of female religious life that threatened male supremacy.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, these were women who were being unwomanly, who lacked proper feminine humility and reserve, and who showed no sense of their intrinsic limitations. The *Institutum*, the clergy complained, lacked the meekness and modesty befitting religious women. Indeed, a brief review of the lexical field used in the 1621 Plan shows that, by that date, Mary Ward had a firm and definite idea about the nature of her Institute. This final version of her Plan displayed none of the timidity or reserve which characterised its two earlier formulations, the 1612 *Schola Beatae Mariae* and the 1616 *Ratio Instituti*. For example, both the early Plans had resorted to a deferential style of prose, emphasising the Ladies' humility in recurring phrases as 'we humbly beg' or 'according to our littleness'.<sup>28</sup> However, the 1621 *Institutum* did not resort to such vocabulary: it was clear and to the point, and unveiled its missionary ambitions with unusual directness. Either Mary Ward expected no difficulties in seeing the Plan approved, or she was not prepared to compromise what she now saw clearly as her divine mission.

The radicalism of the *Institutum* partly lay in its bold transference of the styles of the male clerks regular to a new religious association of women. The Plan's proposed missionary vocation and the Institute's structure both defied the patterns of pre-defined gender roles within the Catholic Church. Indeed, the Church had been heading a prominently male campaign in England: though it sent priests over and trained boys in colleges on the Continent, it did not address women in the same determined way. The Catholic faith of English women was confined to the sphere of their homes. Recusant female circles revolved around a few centres in influential Catholic houses, and women could only take part in the English mission in their roles as recusant housewives, or as religious exiles on the continent. The Church's missionary impulse seemed directed at male Orders only, since the Council of Trent closed its last session in 1563 with a decree endorsing Boniface VIII's Bull *Periculoso* (1299) and enforced enclosure on all convents.<sup>29</sup> When Trent re-actualised this medieval perception of religious women and denied them the chance of an apostolic mission outside the cloister, the actual walls surrounding the cloisters came once more to embody the



metaphorical walls separating the spiritual from the secular. One of the main obstacles hindering women's participation in the active works of the Catholic offensive was the traditional belief that women were, by nature, flawed, and therefore unsuitable for such a missionary venture. This was an eloquent expression of the common gender prejudice of the age, according to which women were physiologically and temperamentally unfit for a strenuous apostolate in the world. It was this combination of religious tradition and vivacious distrust of female constancy that made the idea of women missionaries unacceptable to Church authorities.

Undoubtedly, one of the most acute aspects of the controversy about Mary Ward's project was centred on the relationship between religious life and gender. Without engaging in a feminist analysis of the Institute, it is clear that Mary Ward's opponents constructed their attacks along the lines of gender definitions within the Catholic Church.<sup>30</sup> With hindsight, it is possible to untangle the elements of the controversy and uncover the clergy's main argument as twofold. On the one hand, the Institute's detractors condemned the Institute as insignificant, and ridiculed what they saw as the feeble attempts of weak women. On the other hand, they also denounced the Institute's vocation as unfeminine, and condemned the lack of propriety of its members, who did not fit into pre-defined female categories. The English Ladies, they claimed, were usurping roles that were rightfully male. In short, even as they scorned the Ladies for their pre-supposed intrinsic weakness, yet they felt threatened by their ambitious endeavours.

Many of the Institute's detractors argued that it was worthless and ludicrous, simply because it was composed of women. In 1617, at a meeting in Rome, a Jesuit Father had expressed the general point of view when he doubted the English Ladies' positive input in the Catholic mission in these cutting terms: 'fervour will decay, and when all is done, they are but women.'<sup>31</sup> Women, it was universally admitted, did have a place in the Church, but their communities should submit to male jurisdiction and focus upon activities within their limited scope. Their intellects, as well as their bodies, were deemed less fit than those of men trained for missionary or evangelising purposes. Traditionally, initiatives and authority both rested with male orders, secular priests, the episcopate, and ultimately the curia and the Holy See. The Memorial's authors decried the 'vain designs of weak women' and predicted that the Englishwomen's project would 'come to nought'.<sup>32</sup> They voiced the opinion that women's lesser capability would only lead them to failure. This frame of mind was also reflected in the whole lexical field of the Memorial: the authors remarked that the Institute was 'incongruous' and 'ridiculous' and incurred much 'mockery'.<sup>33</sup>

According to them, most of the innovations suggested in the *Institutum*, such as the government of the whole Congregation by a Mother Superior General, would necessarily occasion further ridicule.

The clergy believed, quite simply, that a woman was not capable of governing in such posts.

The Memorial's opening sentence illustrates the point, protesting that 'the Catholic faith had been propagated hitherto in no other way than by apostolic men of approved virtue and constancy'.<sup>34</sup> The women of the Institute, the Memorial complained, were full of 'vain designs, supported by no ecclesiastical authority', and did not 'fear to meddle with the conversion of England', a mission which the seculars saw as a male preserve. The clergy did, it is true, describe the Ladies' work in their schools as worthy of praise: in essence, religious instruction and girls' education were fully in keeping with the spirit of the Catholic Reformation. Nevertheless, the seculars insisted that the Ladies could not be considered religious if they must continue travelling at will, living an ordinary manner of life and dressing in secular fashion. This, they concluded, was 'not only a scorn but a great scandal to many pious people' and 'unbecoming to their sex'.<sup>35</sup>

Thus faced with bitter opposition from the English secular clergy and with, at best, cool suspicion on the part of their Jesuit exemplars, the English Ladies endured a mounting volume of censure. The *coup-de-grace* came when, in 1631, Pope Urban VIII decided in favour of her opponents and issued a Bull of Suppression against the Institute.<sup>36</sup> The Bull was written in severe terms and declared the Institute 'null, invalid, and of no value or importance', condemning it to 'perpetual abolition'. In it, Pope Urban VIII endorsed all the attacks that have already been reviewed. He called the women 'Jesuitesses' and described the Institute as a 'sect'. The women had transgressed the boundaries of gender-defined roles, and the Pontiff condemned their 'arrogant contumacy' and 'great temerity'. He also chastised the nature of their work which, he complained, was 'by no means suiting the weakness of their sex, intellect, womanly modesty and above all virginal purity'. Lastly, the Institute's houses were likened to 'dangerous branches', 'plants hurtful to the Church' and to be 'pulled up by the roots and extirpated'.<sup>37</sup> The decree was pronounced as final and it was disastrous for the Institute.

How can we explain Mary Ward's failure at ensuring recognition for her Institute? It may be worth considering that she was influenced by the prominence of women in the household recusancy<sup>38</sup> that had shaped her faith as a child. As a Yorkshire recusant, she may have been predisposed, almost instinctively, to assume that female religious initiative and leadership were part of the accepted order.<sup>39</sup> Mary Ward often expressed her zeal for her vocation with her own particular brand of assertiveness: her documents provide a vivid insight into her frame of mind. To those who accused the members of the Institute of immodesty, or even of usurping roles that were rightfully male, Mary Ward answered in plain terms. During the controversy that had followed the *Institutum*, she had drawn up her own Memorial to Pope Gregory XV in 1622, in an attempt to clarify her argument even further. In the first

place, she claimed she had not wilfully designed her idea of the Institute: quite the contrary, she had received it 'by divine appointment',<sup>40</sup> She saw herself as the vessel of divine will, and God's human instrument on earth, a claim that made her position non-negotiable.<sup>41</sup> She rejected charges of pride or ambition, arguing that she had not chosen her vocation of her own free will, but rather she had been chosen by God. Her pursuit of the Institute, even after the suppression, was evidence of her dedication and obedience to the divine will. After Urban VIII suppressed her Institute in 1631 and declared her a heretic, Mary Ward wrote a declaration from her prison in Munich:

I have never undermined the authority of the Holy Church; on the contrary, for 26 years, with great respect to both His Holiness and the Holy Church, and in the most honourable way possible, I have put my frail efforts and my industry to their service, and this, I hope, by the mercy of God and His benignity, will be accounted for at the right time and place.<sup>42</sup>

She described herself as 'a true and obedient servant of the Holy Church', and hoped the charges against her Christian character would be annulled, particularly the accusations of heresy and schism.

As far as the relationship between the Institute and the Society of Jesus was concerned, Mary Ward seemingly failed to see that her diligence towards the Society could be, in itself, a damning characteristic. From her letters and papers, one can deduce that she believed the precedent embodied by the Society of Jesus would make the approbation of her own Institute a simple matter of course. In her 1622 Memorial to Gregory XV, she reminded the pontiff that her project was simply 'to take upon us the same Holy Institute and order of life already approved by divers Popes of happy memory [...] to the Religious Fathers of the Society of Jesus'.<sup>43</sup> She seemed to see no reasons why her venture should be thought presumptuous, when it merely followed rules that had already been approved for the Jesuits.

The foundress also defended her Institute by vindicating women's worth in the Church. The Jesuit Father Minister who, in 1617, had looked down upon the English ladies for being 'but women', whose initial fervour would decay brought about the occasion of Mary Ward's three speeches to her Congregation in St Omer later that year. She responded to the taunts:

It is true, that fervour does many times grow cold. But what is the cause? Is it because we are women? No; but because we are imperfect women. There is no such difference between men and women . . . and I hope in God it will be seen that women in time to come will do much.<sup>44</sup>

Mary Ward's defence of women thus showed that she did not share the patriarchal view generally endorsed by the early modern Church. Her understanding of female potency might have emerged from her familiarity with English recusancy, in which women were so prominent in the daily running of the endangered Church. The next passage demonstrates this even further:

What think you of this word, "but women"? If we were in all things inferior to some other creature, which I suppose to be men, which I care be bold to say is a lie then, with respect to the good Father, I may say: it is an error. [. . .] I would to God that all men would understand this verity: that women, if they will, may be perfect, and if they would not make us believe we can do nothing, and that we are but women, we might do great matters.<sup>45</sup>

These words speak for themselves: Mary Ward did not share her contemporaries' traditional conception of women. This was, perhaps, the most insurmountable obstacle of all, and it certainly played a crucial role in the suppression of 1631. The Institute did not recognise that gender definitions in seventeenth-century Catholicism made a mission which was praiseworthy for men, quite unacceptable for women - regardless of how beneficial it could have been for the Church. When Mary Ward failed to think inside the feminine frame of the early modern Church, communication became impossible, as if both parties spoke different languages.

Her answer in the face of adversity was in keeping with her character. After the suppression of her life's work, and for as long as she lived, she strove to accomplish the goals she had exposed in the *Institutum*, while still refusing to compromise her vocation. For her, there was no half-way house; her vision would materialise exactly as it was meant, or it would not be at all. When advised to compromise on some points of principle, and perhaps adopt a modified form of enclosure, she replied somewhat dismissively: 'If God give health, we shall find another way to serve him than of becoming Ursulines'.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, the Ursulines had started as simple Congregations of women undertaking pastoral work and educating girls without the restrictions of enclosure. However, faced with the popular and ecclesiastical suspicion that accompanied unenclosed female religious endeavours, the Ursulines had agreed to become nuns in cloisters. Although their rule of enclosure was relaxed in order to allow day pupils to come in and receive their lessons, Ward was not wrong in thinking that the original Ursuline spirit had been forced into the mould of recognised and approved female religious roles.<sup>47</sup> This was what Mary Ward was not prepared to do. She believed, even after the suppression, that the Pope might come to change his verdict, and she never stopped trying to rectify her position in Rome.

Despite Mary Ward's personal conviction that her contribution would benefit the Church, her Institute was doomed by its essence, even from its inception. Unwittingly, the foundress' ardent desire to take part in the Catholic mission in England was caught in the cross-fire between regulars and seculars, and was consequently immolated by both opposing parties. On the other hand, patriarchal Church authorities frowned upon the ambitious vocations of the English Ladies, and they deemed Mary Ward's zeal for an apostolic mission to be unfeminine and ludicrous. The Institute's suppression was pronounced, at least

partly, to censure a group of women who behaved in an unwomanly way. Nevertheless, the foundations had been cast for an Institute that is still extant around the world under the name of the IBVM. Although Mary Ward's vocation was ahead of her time it highlighted the importance of women's involvement in the Counter Reformation, and it provides us with an edifying example of female initiative in early modern Catholicism.

## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Chambers</i>	M.C.E. Chambers, <i>The Life of Mary Ward, (1585-1645)</i> . (London: Burns and Oates, 2 vols., 1882-1885).
<i>Peters</i>	Henriette Peters, <i>Mary Ward, A World in Contemplation</i> . (trans. by Helen Butterworth. Leominster: Gracewing Books, 1994).
<i>BCA</i>	Bar Convent (York) Archives
<i>Schola</i>	First Plan of the Institute, 1612. BCA, B18/1.
<i>Ratio</i>	Second Plan of the Institute, 1616. BCA, B18/2.
<i>Institutum</i>	Third Plan of the Institute, 1621. BCA, B18/3.
<i>Bull</i>	Bull of Suppression of the Institute by Urban VIII, 1631, BCA, C1, the Cramlington Papers.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> General surveys of Catholicism in England can be found in works such as: J.C.H. Aveling, *The Handle and the Axe*. (London: Blond & Briggs, 1976); John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850*. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1976); Alan Dures, *English Catholicism, 1558-1644*. (London: Longman, Seminar Studies in History, 1983); Peter Guilday, *The English Catholic Refugees on the Continent, 1558-1795*. (London: Longman, Green and Co, 1914); M.J. Havran, *The Catholics in Caroline England*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962); M. Leys, *Catholics in England, 1559-1829: A Social History*. (London: Longman, 1961); B. Magee, *The English Recusants. A Study of the Post-Reformation Catholic Survival and the Operation of the Recusancy Laws*. (London: Burns & Oates, 1938); David Mathew, *Catholicism in England, the Portrait of a Minority: its Culture and Tradition*. (London: The Catholic Book Club, 1938); A.O. Meyer, *England and the Catholic Church under Queen Elizabeth*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967); A. Morey, *The Catholic Subjects of Elizabeth I*. (London: Allen and Unwin, 1978) and W.J.R. Trimble, *The Elizabethan Catholic Laity*. (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1964). See also articles by John Bossy, 'Rome and the English Catholics: a Question of Geography', *Historical Journal* 7 (1964); 'The Character of Elizabethan Catholicism', in T. Aston (ed.), *Crisis in Europe 1560-1660*. (London, 1965); A.G. Dickens, 'The First Stages of Romanist Recusancy, 1560-1590', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 35 (1943); Christopher Haigh, 'The Continuity of Catholicism in the English Reformation', *Past and Present*, 93 (1981) and 'From Monopoly to Minority: Catholicism in Early Modern England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, fifth series, 31 (1981).

<sup>2</sup> The Act to Retain the Queen's Majesty's Subjects in their Due Obedience (1581, 23: Eliz. 1, c. 1) and the Act against Jesuits, Seminary priests and such other like Disobedient Persons (1585, 27: Eliz. 1, c.2). In G.R. Elton, *The Tudor Constitution*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965). pp.422-427.

<sup>3</sup> In this article, I have mainly used the major recognised biography of Mary Ward, by M.C.E. Chambers, *The Life of Mary Ward, 1585-1645*. (London: Burns and Oates, 2 vols., 1882-1885), in parallel with the more recent work of Henriette Peters, *Mary Ward. A World in Contemplation*. (trans. by Helen Butterworth, Gracewing Books, 1994). A number of biographical works have been published that cover Mary Ward's life and her vocation in the Institute: see Right Rev. Abbot Gasquet, *The Life of Mary Ward, Foundress of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. (London: Burns and Oates, 1909); Leo Hicks, 'Mary Ward's Great Enterprise', *The Month* 151 (1928); M. Littlehales, *Mary Ward (1585-1645). A woman for all seasons: Foundress of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1974); Margarita O'Connor, *That Incomparable Woman*. (Montreal: Palm, 1962); M. Salome, *Mary Ward: A Foundress of the Seventeenth century*. (London: Burns and Oates, 1901).

<sup>4</sup> Contemporary biographies comprise the Italian *Vita*, the English *Life* and a series of 50 paintings (now kept in Augsburg) acting as vignettes of the milestones in Mary Ward's life, called *The Painted Life*. The biography known as the English *Life* was originally entitled *A Briefe Relation of the Holy Life and Happy Death of our Dearest Mother*; it is a posthumous *Vita*, written jointly by Mary Poyntz and Winefred Wigmore, Mary Ward's closest two followers, c. 1650.

<sup>5</sup> For illicit Catholic schooling, see A.C.F. Beales, *Education Under Penalty: English Catholic Education from the Reformation to the Fall of James II, 1547-1689*, (London: Athlone Press, 1963); P. Armitage, 'Catholicism and Educational Control in North-East Lancashire in the Reign of Elizabeth I', *North-West Catholic History*, vol. 13 (1986); J.A. Hilton, *Catholic Lancashire. From Reformation to Renewal, 1559-1991*, (Chichester: Phillimore, 1994) and S. Mews and Michael Mullett, 'Catholicism and the Church of England in a Northern Library: Henry Halsted and the Burnley Grammar School Library', in *Studies in Church History*, Subsidia, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> For Mary Ward's stay at the Babthorpes, see *Chambers*, vol. 1, pp. 40-42; M. Oliver, *That Incomparable Woman*. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1960), p. 56; E. Orchard, *Till God Will* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), pp. xiv and 9 and *Peters*, pp. 44-48.

<sup>7</sup> For analyses of these revelations, see Anthony Clarke (ed.), *The Heart and Mind of Mary Ward*, (IBVM, 1985); Emmanuel Orchard (ed.), *Till God Will. Mary Ward through her writings*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985); M.P. Parker, *The Spirit of Mary Ward*, (London: Thomas More Books, 1963); and Immolata Wetter, 'Mary Ward's Apostolic Vocation', *The Way*, supplement 17 (1972).

<sup>8</sup> *Peters*, p.110. Ward's companions were her sister, Barbara Ward, Mary Poyntz, Winifrid Wigmore, Johanna Browne, Susan Rookwood, Catherine Smith and Barbara Babthorpe.

<sup>9</sup> *Peters* pp. 114-119 and *Chambers*, vol.1, pp.283-285.

<sup>10</sup> BCA, B5, letter 4 to Mgr Albergati, 1620.

<sup>11</sup> For literature on the Jesuits, see William V. Bangert, *A History of the Society of Jesus*, (Saint Louis, Mo: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1986); James Brodrick, *Origins of the Jesuits*, (London: Longmans, 1949), and *Saint Ignatius Loyola. The pilgrim years*, (London: Burns and Oates, 1956); George E. Ganss, *Saint Ignatius' Idea of a Jesuit University: a study in the History of Catholic Education*, (Marquette University Press, 1956); and A. Lynn Martin, *The Jesuit Mind: the Mentality of an Élite in Early Modern France*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> Caritas McCarthy, 'Ignatian Charism in Women's Congregations.' *The Way*, supplement 20 (1973): 15; N. McMullen, 'The education of English Gentlewomen 1540-1640', in *History of Education* 6 (1977) 2; René Pillorget, 'Mary Ward ou la Ténacité (1585-1645)' in *Les Religieuses Enseignantes, Actes de la Quatrième Rencontre d'Histoire Religieuse de Fontevraud*. (Angers: Presses de l'Université d'Angers, 1981).

<sup>13</sup> On the tensions between the cloister and the apostolate for religious women, see Marie Chalender, *La Promotion de la Femme à l'Apostolat, 1540-1650*, (Paris: Editions Alsatia, 1950); Louis Chatelier, *L'Europe des Dévôts*, (Paris: Flammarion, 1987); Elizabeth Rapley, *The Dévotes. Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France*, (Kinston, Ont.: McGill, Queen's University Press, 1987); James Cain, 'Cloister and the Apostolate of Religious Women', *Review for the Religious* 27 (1968); Ruth Liebowitz, 'Virgins in the Service of Christ: The Dispute over an Active Apostolate for Women during the Counter-Reformation', in *Women of Spirit*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979); Linda Lieheimer, 'Redefining Convent Space: Ideals of Female Community among Seventeenth Century Ursuline Nuns', *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History* 24 (1997), and James Cain, 'The Influence of the Cloister on the Apostolate of Congregations of Religious Women', PhD dissertation at the Pontifical Lateran University, Rome, 1965.

<sup>14</sup> I am grateful to the convent's archivist Sister M. Gregory Kirkus, for her insightful discussions and invaluable help during my research visits to the Bar Convent. She has clarified my understanding of the IBVM and helped me to untangle the many strands which make up the rich and complicated history of the Institute.

<sup>15</sup> *Schola*, point 5: 'Therefore, the aim of this Institute is as follows: Firstly, that reflecting on the shortness of life and on the eternity that is then to follow, we may make timely provision for our own salvation by a complete renunciation of the world. Then, in accordance with the capacity of our own sex, we may devote ourselves to the Christian education of maidens and girls whether outside or inside England' (emphasis added). The plan is analysed in *Peters*, pp. 124-132.

<sup>16</sup> *Schola*, point 14: 'far from having the house open to all, we desire rather to have cloister so strictly observed that no access is to be allowed to any extern whatsoever'.

<sup>17</sup> *Ratio*; the text is analysed in *Peters*, pp. 199-203.

<sup>18</sup> This Plan has recently been presented and its importance explained to the Congregation of the IBVM by Mother Immolata Wetter in the Fourth Letter of Instruction in November 1970

<sup>19</sup> *Institutum*, f.19.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 22.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>23</sup> Text transcribed in *Chambers*, vol. 2, pp. 183-186, and analysed pp.44-46; also *Peters*, pp. 338-346.

<sup>24</sup> *Chambers*, vol. 2, p. 183.

<sup>25</sup> PRO. SP 16 ff. 40 v; Mutius Vitelleschi's letter, dated 19 July 1623; directions for the colleges of Louvain and St Omer.

<sup>26</sup> *Chambers*, vol. 2, p. 186. Ward's followers were also mockingly called 'wandering nuns' because of their refusal to accept traditional enclosure. In her article 'Wandering Nuns': The Return of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary to the South of England, 1862-1945', *Recusant History* 24:3

(1999), pp. 384–96, Sr. M. Gregory Kirkus, IBVM explores what she calls 'the purposeful mobility' of the members of the Institute.

<sup>27</sup> Although Mary Ward herself never wished to challenge Church authorities, her vocation was, unwittingly, rocking the foundations of a patriarchal hierarchical system.

<sup>28</sup> *Ratio*, f. 3. and *Schola*, point 2.

<sup>29</sup> H.J. Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*. (Rockford, Ill: Tan Books, 1978), pp. 220–21.

<sup>30</sup> In this respect, we adopt a methodological process similar to that described by Barbara Newman in *From Virile Woman to Woman Christ*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1995), p. 2: 'All the essays [in this collection] take misogyny more or less for granted, noting its repercussions in women's lives without attempting to trace either its historical origins or its psychological roots. The complex beliefs and practices surrounding female subordination [. . .] seems to constitute one of the few melancholy universals to be observed across the immense range of human cultures.'

<sup>31</sup> *Chambers*, vol. 1, p. 408.

<sup>32</sup> *Chambers*, vol. 2, p. 183.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>34</sup> *Chambers*, vol. 2, p. 183.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>36</sup> *Bull*; also discussed in *Chambers*, vol. 2, pp. 386–87 and analysed in *Peters*, pp. 565–67.

<sup>37</sup> *Bull*, ff. 1–4.

<sup>38</sup> Northern Catholics have been the subjects of pioneering works in the field of regional studies: J.C.H. Aveling, *Northern Catholics: the Catholic Recusants of the North Riding of Yorkshire, 1558–1790*, and *The Handle and the Axe*, (Blond & Briggs, 1976), and 'Some aspects of Yorkshire Catholic Recusant History: 1558–1791' in *Studies in Church History* IV, 1967. Also J.A. Hilton, *Catholic Lancashire, From Reformation to Renewal, 1559–1991*, (Chichester: Phillimore, 1994); A.G. Dickens 'The First Stages of Romanist Recusancy, 1560–1590' in *Yorkshire Archeological Journal*, 35, (1943); J.S. Leatherbarrow 'Lancashire Elizabethan Recusants' in *Chetham Society*, 110, (1947).

<sup>39</sup> See J. Bossy's theory of a Northern Catholic matriarchy in *The English Catholic Community, 1570–1850*. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1976).

<sup>40</sup> *BCA*, B5/6, f. 17. Memorial dated January 1622.

<sup>41</sup> Jeanne Cover, *Love, the Driving Force. Mary Ward's Spirituality: Its Significance for Moral Theology*. (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1994).

<sup>42</sup> *BCA*, B5/82, f. 93a. A Declaration of Mary Ward from the Angers Prison, Munich, to the Roman Congregation, Holy Office, 27 March 1631.

<sup>43</sup> *BCA*, B5/6, f. 17.

<sup>44</sup> *BCA*, B17, certified copy of 'Three speeches of our Reverend Mother Chief Superior made at St Omer having been long absent'; originals kept in the archives of IBVM, München-Nymphenburg.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>46</sup> *BCA/BS/f.* 90. Letter to her congregation, 17 February 1631, when in prison in Angers.

<sup>47</sup> In the Archives Départementales de la Haute-Garonne, there is evidence among the Ursuline papers that the early Congregation of Toulouse accepted enclosure as a means to an end. In 221H-37, we are told that despite the Congregation's great popular success, its safety was jeopardised by its informal status. Marguerite de Vigier, then acting as Superior, resolved to ask for enclosure in order to ensure the future of her community.

**« Between the Cloister and the World: The Successful Compromise of the Ursulines of Toulouse, 1604-1616 », *French History* 16.3 (2002) 247–68.**

**Résumé :**

En 1609 les ursulines congrégées de Toulouse envoient un représentant à Rome pour demander l'élévation de leur congrégation laïque en cloître prononçant des vœux solennels. Cette décision peut sembler étrange puisque l'établissement avait été fondé pour éduquer et catéchiser la population féminine de la ville. Les congrégées, au contraire des religieuses traditionnelles, n'étaient pas sujettes aux lois de la clôture et pouvaient donc accueillir des externes de classes sociales humbles en sus des pensionnaires aisées coutumières d'une éducation conventuelle. Dans ce contexte, pourquoi ont-elles souhaité embrasser la clôture religieuse, puisqu'elle devait nécessairement entraver leur vocation de catéchèse et d'éducation populaire ? Ce choix stratégique allait en fait devenir la clé de voûte de l'immense succès des ursulines en tant qu'institution religieuse à vocation enseignante. Entre 1609 et 1616, les ursulines de Toulouse négocient leurs statuts avec le plus grand tact et obtiennent de Rome un compromis leur permettant d'adopter la protection de la clôture perpétuelle tout en ayant l'autorisation d'ouvrir quotidiennement leurs classes aux externes, inaugurant ainsi une forme de vie religieuse entre le cloître et le monde.

10 611 mots

mots-clés : France moderne ; catholicisme ; ursulines ; clôture ; religieuses enseignantes

**Présentation du texte :**

Cette deuxième publication est issue d'un travail initialement proposé lors d'un colloque de jeunes chercheurs à l'université de Lancaster en 1999. La communication (« Between Enclosure and Active Apostolate: The Successful Compromise of the Ursuline Sisters in Early-Modern Toulouse ») m'avait permis de poser les premiers jalons de mon analyse sur les motivations qui avaient poussé un groupe d'ursulines qui fonctionnait parfaitement dans son organisation laïque à demander l'élévation en cloître. Ma thèse posait le problème du conflit entre le cloître et le monde, entre l'action et la contemplation. Cet article, une fois développé, montre que ces termes sont trop souvent compris comme antinomiques alors que, dans les faits, ils peuvent parfois s'enrichir l'un l'autre. Dans le cas des ursulines françaises, c'est l'élévation en cloître qui a permis la sécurité, la bonne réputation et la pérennité des établissements, assurant ainsi l'avenir des écoles externes qui leur étaient associées.



# BETWEEN THE CLOISTER AND THE WORLD: THE SUCCESSFUL COMPROMISE OF THE URSULINES OF TOULOUSE, 1604-1616

LAURENCE LUX-STERRITT\*

**Abstract**—In 1609 the Ursuline *congrégées* of Toulouse sent a representative to Rome, requesting the elevation of their lay congregation into an enclosed convent. This decision may initially seem paradoxical, since the establishment had been founded specifically in order to educate and catechize the female population of the city across a wide social spectrum. Since *congrégées*, unlike traditional nuns, were not subject to monastic enclosure, they could teach day pupils and local women as well as wealthier boarders. So why did they wish to become enclosed nuns, when it would obviously curtail their vocational teaching? Surprisingly, monastic enclosure proved to be the key to the success of their teaching establishment. Between 1609 and 1616 the Toulousain Ursulines tactfully negotiated their status with Rome and reached a highly successful compromise when, while promising to observe perpetual enclosure, they obtained a papal brief ordering them specifically to teach pupils daily within the convent walls.

The seventeenth century signalled a new era for French Catholicism; after the troubled years of the Wars of Religion (1562–98), and the religious toleration granted to Protestants in the edict of Nantes, the Catholic devotional revival known as the *dévôt* movement quickly gathered momentum across the realm.<sup>1</sup> The *dévôt* religious outlook promoted a deeper trend of piety, a life in imitation of Christ and an apostolic message that aimed to tighten the links between the Church and its flock.<sup>2</sup> Confronting the success of Protestant schools addressing both female and male audiences, the Catholic mission gave particular emphasis to its educational impulse and multiplied its efforts to catechize the multitude and strengthen the bases of the Catholic faith among the laity.

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<sup>1</sup> See works such as H. Brémond, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France depuis la fin des guerres de religion jusqu'à nos jours* (11 vols., 1971); R. Briggs, *Communités of belief: cultural and social tensions in early modern France* (Oxford, 1989); P. Chaunu, *L'Église, culture et société: essai sur réforme et contre-réforme* (1984); G. Hanlon, *Confession and community in seventeenth-century France: Catholic and Protestant coexistence in Aquitaine* (Philadelphia, Pa, 1993); D. Potter (ed.), *The French Wars of Religion: selected documents* (1997); and M. Richard, *La vie quotidienne des protestants sous l'ancien régime* (1966). Also R. Taveneaux, *Le catholicisme dans la France classique, 1610–1717* (2 vols., 1980), i. 22–8.

<sup>2</sup> L. Châtellier, *L'Europe des dévots* (1987).

One of the distinctive features of this seventeenth-century Catholic revival was what Elizabeth Rapley called 'the feminization of the Church', a phenomenon that manifested itself both in the renewed appeal of traditional monastic life and in the multiplication of new companies of *filles séculières* and of teaching congregations.<sup>3</sup> By the middle of the seventeenth century there were more nuns than monks and friars in France and, in parallel, the proportions of women in mixed lay confraternities sometimes increased to more than 80 per cent.<sup>4</sup> Characteristically, female lay involvement in the French Catholic Reformation was even more ardent than its male counterpart.<sup>5</sup> French *dévôtes* rediscovered the practice of charity and dedicated their time to good works, following the example of the renowned Mme Acarie (1566-1618), who was linked with the first Ursuline establishment in the faubourg Saint-Jacques in Paris.<sup>6</sup> This wave of female religious exaltation naturally led to the formation of numerous lay congregations that specialized in works believed to be particularly suited to women, such as relieving the poor, attending to the sick or educating girls. The intensity of such lay activism was characteristic of the seventeenth-century Catholic Reformation.

In the movement geared towards the religious education of the masses, female congregations had found a niche that channelled their contribution to the Church's apostolate. In the city of Lyon alone, nine schools were dedicated to boys' education, but ten were dedicated to girls'.<sup>7</sup> Against the general early modern background of feminine submission, the first decades of the seventeenth century offered an oasis of possibilities where women's opportunities reached far beyond their traditional roles both within the Church and in society at large. Women's communities became involved not only in the devotional life of the Church, but also in its active life with the multiplication of apostolic vocations to re-Catholicize their country.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> L. Rapley, *The dévôtes: women and church in seventeenth-century France* (Kingston, Ont., 1990), pp. 193-6.

<sup>4</sup> J. Viguerie, *Le catholicisme des Français dans l'ancienne France* (1988), p. 166.

<sup>5</sup> On Catholicism and women in early modern Europe, see such works as: R. Bridenthal and C. Koonz (eds.), *Becoming visible: women in European history* (Boston, Mass., 1977); E. Clark and H. Richardson (eds.), *Women and religion: a feminist sourcebook of Christian thought* (San Francisco, 1977); J. Delumeau (ed.), *La religion de ma mère* (1992); S. Marshall (ed.), *Women in Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe: private and public worlds* (Bloomington, Ind., 1989); M. Miller Migliorino, *Sexuality and authority in the Catholic Church* (1995); P. Ranft, *Women and the religious life in premodern Europe* (Basingstoke, 1996); Rapley, *The dévôtes*; and M. Wiesner, *Women and gender in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1993). Also, E. Weaver's article 'Women and religion in early modern France: a bibliographical essay on the state of the question', *Cath Hist R*, 67 (1981), 50-9.

<sup>6</sup> For illustrations of this new active outlook: M. Chalendar, *La promotion de la femme à l'apostolat 1540-1650* (1950); Châtellier, *L'Europe des dévôts*; H. O. Evensett, *The spirit of the Counter-Reformation* (Cambridge, 1968); and Rapley, *The dévôtes*. See also articles such as M. C. Gueudré, 'La femme et la vie spirituelle', *Dix-Sept S*, 62 (1964), 47-77, and C. McCarthy, 'Ignatian charism in women's congregations', *The Way*, supplement 20 (1973), 10-18.

<sup>7</sup> P. Hoffman, *Church and community in the diocese of Lyon, 1500-1789* (New Haven, Conn., 1984), p. 115.

<sup>8</sup> N. Zeinon Davis, *Society and culture in early modern France, eight essays* (Stanford, Calif., 1979), particularly 'City women and religious change', pp. 65-96, and 'Women on top', pp. 124-51.

The city of Toulouse, which will be the focus of this study, mirrored this national phenomenon precisely. After the Wars of Religion, the municipality of Toulouse remained resolutely Catholic, but the influential *ville parlementaire* was a city under siege, surrounded on all sides by areas of Calvinist conviction in the Languedoc and Guyenne.<sup>9</sup> Studies of its municipal registers indicate that, hard-line commitment apart, a considerable proportion of the city's key middle class had become undecided, confused or even uninterested in religious practice.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the area's extensive Protestantization offered a wealth of opportunities for religious initiatives, whilst presenting equally numerous challenges.<sup>11</sup> Local historian Bennassar wrote: 'In the Wars of Religion, the Toulousain way became clear. The city would be the Catholic stronghold in a region of which three-quarters were held by Protestants. It would, therefore, be the theatre of the most violent Catholic reaction.'<sup>12</sup> Influenced by the post-Tridentine impulse given by Carlo Borromeo (archbishop of Milan, 1566-84), the cardinal-archbishop of Toulouse (1588-1605), François de Joyeuse, would be the architect of the city's vigorous Catholic counter-attack.<sup>13</sup>

The efforts of Cardinal-Archbishop Joyeuse were quickly rewarded by a remarkable devotional movement which involved unprecedented proportions of women.<sup>14</sup> In Toulouse, existing convents opened their doors to increasing numbers of entrants each year, while lay congregations flourished. The Congregation of Saint Catherine of Sienna, for instance, undertook apostolic relief for the poor; the Madeleines Repenties cared for 'fallen women', the

<sup>9</sup> It was in fact the *Parlement* of Toulouse, the second largest and most influential after Paris, that had formed the very first Holy League in France, on which the Parisian League was modelled in 1585: P. Wolff (ed.), *Histoire de Toulouse* (Toulouse, 1974), p. 286.

<sup>10</sup> P. Wolff, in *Toulouse, Histoire des diocèses de France* (1983), p. 98, argues that between 1558 and 1561 about 30 per cent of merchants were Protestant converts, while only 16 per cent remained steadfast Catholics. Similarly, 46 per cent of the *bourgeois* were Protestants, against 39 per cent of Catholics. For more detailed studies on Protestantism in Toulouse: J. Davies, 'Persecution and Protestantism: Toulouse, 1562-1575', *Hist J*, 22 (1979), 31-51, and 'Notes sur les sources de l'histoire du protestantisme toulousain au seizième siècle', *B S Hist Prot Français*, 127 (1981), 103-6; also M. Greengrass, 'The anatomy of a religious riot in Toulouse in May 1562', *J Eccl Hist*, 34 (1983), 367-91, and 'The *sainte union* in the provinces: the case of Toulouse', *Sixt Cent J*, 14 (1983), 469-96.

<sup>11</sup> A. Auguste, *Étude sur la réforme catholique au xvii<sup>e</sup> siècle dans l'ancien diocèse de Toulouse* (1913); A. Salvan, *Histoire générale de l'Église de Toulouse* (4 vols., Toulouse, 1861); R. Schneider, 'Urban sociability in the old regime: religion and culture in early modern Toulouse', unpub. Ph.D. diss. (University of Michigan, 1982) and *Public life in Toulouse, 1463-1789: from municipal republic to cosmopolitan city* (Ithaca, N.Y. and London, 1989); Wolff (ed.), *Histoire de Toulouse*, and idem, *Histoire du Languedoc* (Toulouse, 1967).

<sup>12</sup> B. Bennassar, 'Des années de Ligue aux jours de Fronde (vers 1560- vers 1630)', in *Histoire de Toulouse*, ed. Wolff, p. 280.

<sup>13</sup> François de Joyeuse (1562-1615) was the brother of the extremely influential Anne de Joyeuse, *amiral de France*. In the debate concerning the reception of Tridentine decrees in France, he worked as *protecteur de France à la cour de Rome*, a position that testified to his family's engagement in the Catholic cause. When he arrived in Toulouse in 1588, he led the Catholic revival of the city. In 1606 he was made legate of the Pope, before presiding over the *États-Généraux* in 1614: Michaud, *Dictionnaire de biographie universelle* (repr. Graz, 1968), xxi. 276-7.

<sup>14</sup> Châtellier, *L'Europe des dévots*; Chaunu, *L'Eglise, culture et société*; Zemon Davis, *Society and culture*; Delumeau, *La religion de ma mère*; Rapley, *The dévotes*.

Dames du Saint-Sacrement cared for the sick and the Dames de la Miséricorde specialized in visiting prisoners.<sup>15</sup>

It is universally acknowledged that the French feminine educational drive was spearheaded by the Ursulines, which Rapley has called 'the feminine teaching congregation par excellence'.<sup>16</sup> By the end of the century there were an estimated 320 communities across the realm of France, all combining a convent and a school for day pupils.<sup>17</sup> However, it has often been erroneously assumed that the congregation of Paris was the leader of the distinctive French Ursuline experiment. This accolade, in fact, belongs to the establishment of Toulouse which, in 1604, was the first house to stem from the original settlements in Provence and the Comtat-Venaissin and adopt a form that was less directly in keeping with their Italian roots.

The history of the Ursulines epitomizes a growing female desire to take an active part in the Catholic Reformation. In 1535 in Brescia, Angela Merici (1474-1540) founded a gathering of lay women, which she called the Ursulines.<sup>18</sup> They lived separately in their own homes, undertaking apostolic and educational works with girls and women. Although it was as an informal lay movement that they gained Pope Paul III's approval in 1544, the archbishop of Milan, Carlo Borromeo, soon organized them into communities under the authority of local bishops, thereby creating the first Ursuline congregations. This formula, half-way between the religious and the secular, reached Provence and the Comtat-Venaissin in the late sixteenth century and provided the model for the congregation of Avignon, led by Françoise de Bermond (1572-1628) and her director César de Bus (1544-1607), founder of the Fathers of the Christian Doctrine. Pope Clement VIII (1523-43) granted the Ursulines permission to teach the Christian doctrine to the girls and, on occasion, to the women of Avignon. Their endeavours were crowned with such success that new houses opened quickly in towns such as Chabeuil, Aix-en-Provence, Arles and Marseille.<sup>19</sup>

The year 1604 marked the first settlement of a new Ursuline congregation outside Provence and the Comtat-Venaissin; one of the *conseillers au Parlement de Toulouse*, Arnaud Bourret, became aware that the Ursulines (and their male counterparts, the Fathers of the Christian Doctrine) would be a valuable asset in the Catholic drive that was sweeping the city. He understood

<sup>15</sup> See Viguierie, *Le catholicisme des Français*, p. 166, and Schneider, *Public life in Toulouse, 1463-1789*, pp. 208-10.

<sup>16</sup> Rapley, *The dévotes*, p. 48.

<sup>17</sup> M. C. Gueudré, *Histoire de l'Ordre des Ursulines* (2 vols., 1960), ii. 148.

<sup>18</sup> The Italian origins of the movement have been explored in detail in T. Ledochowska, *Angèle Merici et la compagnie de Sainte Ursule à la lumière des documents* (Rome, 1967). See also P. Caraman, *Saint Angela: the life of Angela Merici, foundress of the Ursulines 1474-1540* (1963); D. Latz, 'Sainte Angèle Merici et les courants spirituels de la renaissance italienne', Thèse de doctorat (Université de Strasbourg 2, 1986); B. O'Reilly, *St Angela Merici and the Ursulines* (1880); and M. Reidy, *The first Ursuline: the story of St Angela Merici* (1962).

<sup>19</sup> The main work of reference concerning the early Ursulines of Provence and the Comtat-Venaissin is C. A. Sarre's *Vivre sa soumission, l'exemple des Ursulines provençales et comtatines 1592-1792* (1997).

that the Avignon formula of *congrégées*, unfettered by conventual enclosure, would be ideally suited to reach out to the broad range of the local female population. Thus, Bourret appealed personally to César de Bus, requesting two Fathers of the Congregation of the Christian Doctrine to run a school for boys and two Ursulines to manage a school for girls.<sup>20</sup> Cardinal-Archbishop François de Joyeuse, eager to further the city's mission of education and evangelization, seconded Bourret's letter with a request of his own, asking for the establishment of the two communities specifically to teach Christian doctrine.<sup>21</sup> César de Bus responded to Joyeuse's request and, on 14 October 1604, Marguerite de Vigier (1575-1639) and Françoise de Blanchet (no dates available), accompanied by two Fathers of the Congregation of the Christian Doctrine (Antoine de Vigier, Marguerite's brother, and Pierre Sisoine), arrived in Toulouse to establish new branches of their respective congregations.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the community of Toulouse was the first to branch out of the early settlements in Provence and the Comtat-Venaissin.

## I

The Ursuline archive in Toulouse provides a vivid illustration of the tactics used by the sisters to create the new, pioneering model of the teaching nun that was to have such impact on the female educational and religious landscape of seventeenth-century France.<sup>23</sup> The documents show how this practically minded congregation developed a formula that enabled it to serve the Church's active educational mission in the world without, however, breaching the conservative decrees of Trent which, in 1563, had endorsed Pope Boniface VIII's bull *Periculosus* (1299) and enforced strict enclosure upon all female religious Orders.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> His letter, dated 20 February 1604, is transcribed in A. Riboti, *Examen d'un livre qui a pour titre la vie du P. Romillon avec plusieurs éclaircissements sur la première institution des congrégations de la Doctrine Chrétienne et des Ursulines en France* (Toulouse, 1676), p. 241.

<sup>21</sup> Riboti, *Examen.*, p. 242, letter dated 8 March 1604.

<sup>22</sup> A[rchives] D[épartementales de la] H[aute-]G[aronne.] 221H-4. Since the manuscript folios kept in this bundle have been damaged by fire, the Archives départementales have not numbered them, and the reader will require special authorization to consult these documents.

<sup>23</sup> Primary documents (1604-1790) consist of forty-three bundles of manuscripts kept in series 221H in the ADHG, and three additional bundles in series 1G 25. Moreover, the Bibliothèque municipale of Toulouse keeps Parayre's *Chronique des religieuses augustines ursulines de la congrégation de Toulouse* (3 vols., Toulouse, 1681) which, despite Parayre's tendency to eulogize, have proved reliable when counter-checked against the Ursuline manuscripts; indeed, large sections of the *Chronique* used documents that had initially been written by the *congrégées* themselves, many of which are kept in ADHG 221H-37. Ursuline historian Gueudré believes this was standard practice across France where, she claimed, many Ursuline communities deposited their manuscripts into male hands for the purposes of publication: Gueudré, *Histoire de l'Ordre des Ursulines en France*, i. 8. The later years of the Ursuline convent of Toulouse have been the object of a recent study by S. Klassen, 'Greying in the cloister: the Ursuline life course in eighteenth-century France', *J Women's Hist.*, 12 (2001), 87-112.

<sup>24</sup> H. J. Schroeder (ed.) *Canons and decrees of the Council of Trent* (Rockford, Ill., 1978), p. 220.

Initially, Vigier and Blanchet benefited from the kindness of *conseiller* Bourret, who personally provided them with lodgings in his own home before eventually purchasing a house for them in the rue des Trois Rois Vieux.<sup>25</sup> There, the first *congrégées* began their works of education with the city's local girls. They immediately took on boarders from families who could afford the *pension* but, crucially, they also ran open day-classes for externs. Indeed, the motivating force behind the Toulousain Ursuline experiment was the *congrégées'* desire to take part in the drive that was transforming this once-disputed city into the leader of French provincial Catholic reform. Schooling, therefore, was vested with primary importance, since it provided the forum for the evangelization of girls. Parayre, in his *Chronique des religieuses augustines ursulines de la congrégation de Toulouse*, highlighted the fact that the Ursulines were a teaching and evangelizing congregation, as opposed to a purely contemplative order, and underlined their apostolic and educational brief as the essential core of their vocation. He wrote: '[the Ursulines] relate contemplation to the instruction of souls, which is their principal aim, in order to teach girls the mysteries of Christian religion and the practice of virtue'.<sup>26</sup> The community's book of Constitutions confirms the teaching of Christian doctrine as the primary vocation of the house founded by Marguerite de Vigier and Françoise Blanchet.<sup>27</sup> The section on the vocation opens unequivocally: 'The principal aim of this institute is to instruct girls in Christian doctrine and in good morals . . . according to the study that is proper and suitable to their sex.'<sup>28</sup>

Of course, the crux of the instruction provided by the Toulouse community was confessionalization rather than academic education *per se*. The manuscript book entitled *Constitutions of the school and monastery of the convent of Saint Ursula of Toulouse* provides an interesting insight into the way in which the house valued secular teaching compared with religious instruction. It states: '[The Ursulines of Toulouse] will teach the aforementioned girls in the Christian doctrine, in piety and in the practice of [Christian] virtues; in order to do this, they will teach them to read, write and sew to the best of their abilities.'<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> ADHG 221H-25 fo. 3, *Notarial act, registering Arnaud Bourret's gift of a house to the women of the congregation of Saint Ursula.*

<sup>26</sup> *Chronique*, pt 1, p. 21.

<sup>27</sup> ADHG 221H-28bis, 5, *Constitutions.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* fo. 3.

<sup>29</sup> There are two undated manuscript books entitled *Constitutions of the school and monastery of the convent of Saint Ursula of Toulouse* in the Ursuline archive. After careful comparison, I am satisfied that they contain the same material, with only slight textual variations; however, I will refer to the text in 221H-28bis, item 5, since this appears to be the older document. Only when passages have become illegible in 221H-28bis will I use text in 221H-41.

For Vigier's Ursulines, schooling in the elementary skills of reading and writing was necessary in order to enable their pupils to become more closely acquainted with the catechism and Catholic doctrine.<sup>30</sup> Thus, secular teaching was essential to Ursuline commitment, but mainly in so far as it provided teachers with opportunities to catechize the youth.<sup>31</sup> In his seminal work on the early communities of Provence and the Comtat-Venaissin, which were heavily influenced by their Italian exemplars, Ursuline historian C. A. Sarre found evidence that the primary mission of these houses was to catechize rather than to educate. Similarly, the manuscripts of the early congregation of Toulouse also highlight the teaching of Christian doctrine as the core of its mission.<sup>32</sup> This seems to have been the case across France in general, and has been noticed for the communities of Paris, Bordeaux and Burgundy.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, the essence of the *congrégées*' vocation was to stamp the basics of Catholic doctrine even in the minds of those who could not enter the traditional classrooms of the city's boarding establishments. Unlike traditional convents, the Ursulines of Toulouse did not primarily aim to train future novices in religion. Rather, they launched their school to secure and strengthen the faith in girls who, in time, would marry and have families of their own.<sup>34</sup> Their special participation in the Toulousain Catholic revival was their Christian training of wives and mothers for future generations. By teaching externs, the house at Toulouse aimed to address the whole spectrum of the city's female population, without restrictions of social background. Thus, in its devotion to its catechetical vocation, the small Ursuline community fitted perfectly into its local context. Its music played its part in the overall symphony of the Toulousain Catholic renaissance; even more essentially, it completed its tune by providing its own particular note: its educational and catechizing vocation for local girls. As the sisters' house experienced increasing

<sup>30</sup> For literature on the Jesuits, see W. V. Bangert, *A history of the Society of Jesus* (Saint Louis, Mo, 1986); J. Brodrick, *Origins of the Jesuits* (1949), *The progress of the Jesuits* (1946) and *Saint Ignatius Loyola: the pilgrim years* (1956); G. E. Ganss, *Saint Ignatius' idea of a Jesuit university: a study in the history of catholic education* (Milwaukee, Wis., 1956); F. Génin, *Les jésuites et l'université* (1844); and M. A. Lynn, *The Jesuit mind: the mentality of an elite in early modern France* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1988).

<sup>31</sup> The Ursulines' conception of instruction as a way to save souls was indeed very close to that of the Society of Jesus. Although the Ursulines of Toulouse did not overtly claim any privileged links with the city's Jesuits, their house on the rue des Trois Rois Vieux was geographically situated near the Jesuit college and its novitiate.

<sup>32</sup> ADHG 221H-41, *Constitutions*, fo. 27, and Sarre, *Vivre sa soumission*, p. 297.

<sup>33</sup> See, *inter alia*, Mère de Pommereu, *Les chroniques de l'Ordre des Ursulines recueillies pour l'usage des religieuses du mesme Ordre* (1676) and *Règlements des religieuses Ursulines de la congrégation de Paris, divisez en trois livres* (1751). Also Gueudré, *Histoire de l'Ordre des Ursulines*, ii. 134-5; P. Annaert, *Les collèges au féminin: les Ursulines; enseignement et vie consacrée aux dix-septième et dix-huitième siècles* (Namur, 1992), pp. 44-7; and M. A. Le Bourgeois, 'Les Ursulines d'Anne de Xainctonge (1601). Contribution à l'histoire des communautés religieuses féminines sans clôture', Thèse de doctorat sciences théologiques, institut catholique de Paris, 1995.

<sup>34</sup> This was also clear in the community of Paris: M. A. Jégou, *Les Ursulines du faubourg Saint-Jacques à Paris 1607-1662: origines d'un monastère apostolique* (1981), pp. 55-6.

success, it became known for the excellence of its school and the dedication of its teachers.

The example of one of the initial members of the community, Marie de Liberos (born 1574, in religion *soeur* de la Trinité), illustrates this point eloquently.<sup>35</sup> Significantly, she claimed to see a lighted torch (a traditional emblem of pedagogy) burning by her side as she was teaching her classes. Liberos believed this torch represented her community's educational endeavours and the excellence of its Christian aim. Her predilection for teaching was such a precious asset for the community that she was among the few select sisters who later left Toulouse in order to help newer houses in rural areas.<sup>36</sup>

Nor was Liberos an isolated case in the community. Her *consoeur* Catherine de Pins de Montbrun (1585-1664, in religion *soeur* de Saint-Bonaventure), was equally dedicated to her teaching brief.<sup>37</sup> According to Parayre, she refused to take her thirty-minute break each day, but insisted on employing it to teach and help girls individually. As with Marie de Liberos, her efficiency in the classroom was used to optimize Ursuline success in the region and she was later sent to found a new community in nearby Auch. Another *congrégée*, Jaquete de Maynie (1588-1632, in religion *soeur* de Saint-Jean l'Evangeliste), displayed the same concern for her Ursuline educational and evangelizing vocation.<sup>38</sup> A daughter of one of the most noble and powerful families in the city, she had herself been tempted by the distractions of the wealthy society in which she lived. Parayre's account described her as an idle young girl, full of social ambitions and delusions of grandeur. He wrote: '[her] Christian practices were not only dissipated by it but altogether infected and corrupt'. He recounted the episode of her conversion as a miracle, saving her from the perils of what he referred to as dangerous 'books of fashion and profane stories'. In the chronicler's words, 'these thoughts possessed her so absolutely that they were strong enough not only to distract her in her prayers and in all devotional practices, but also to make her abandon them altogether'.<sup>39</sup> Perhaps as a consequence of her own conversion, Jaquete de Maynie became one of the most active catechizers of the initial congregation. Her awareness of the Ursuline vocation as one that was essentially educational led her to play a crucial role in ensuring that the community remained devoted to this brief even after the major structural changes that were to occur as the congregation was elevated into a convent between 1614 and 1616. To her, it was crucial that, in embracing conventual life, the community did not become entirely devoted to

<sup>35</sup> *Chronique*, pt 2, pp. 338-75.

<sup>36</sup> ADHG 221H-37, *Memoirs*. She worked efficiently in the town of Brive-la-Gaillarde, before moving on to Limoges, where her school proved very popular.

<sup>37</sup> ADHG 221H-15, *Professions de foi*, fo. 225, 221H-29, register of professions, fo. 165 and *Chronique*, pt 2, pp. 26-44.

<sup>38</sup> Details on Jaquete de Maynie can be found in ADHG 221H-15, *Professions de foi*, fo. 214, 221H-29, register of professions, fo. 24; 221H-37, *Memoirs*, 1G 663 fo. 23; and *Chronique*, pt 2, pp. 45-87.

<sup>39</sup> *Chronique*, pt 2, p. 46.



the contemplative life, but continued undertaking extensive educational duties as well.

The early Ursulines in Toulouse seemed deeply attached to their dual essence, and were proud to combine the duties of Martha with the spirit of Mary. A manuscript book kept by the congregation and entitled *Memoirs of the beginning and progress of the Order of Saint Ursula* covers the years between 1604 and 1621. Its opening statements define the nature of the establishment eloquently: 'The life of Ursulines is none other than that which the Son of God, his Holy Mother and the apostles led in this world . . . Such are the exemplary models followed by their status and their profession: it is the mixed life, embracing both contemplation and action . . .'<sup>40</sup>

Indeed, for the first ten years in Toulouse, the Ursulines were not nuns but only *congrégées*.<sup>41</sup> The canonical distinction was crucial, for the members of a congregation - as opposed to those of an order - were bound only by simple, private vows and not solemn ones: thus, their legal status remained that of lay women, not nuns. The *congrégées* did not obey any monastic rule nor observe enclosure, and were relatively free from ecclesiastical control. They represented a sort of half-way house between the lay and the religious world.

## II

As they busied themselves in the evangelization of local women and girls, the Ursulines seemed to show no signs of preoccupation about their status or their designation. The house operated as a community of lay women under private vows: thus, the establishment corresponded to no recognizable category. It was more than a simple lay sorority, since the *congrégées* lived in a community with its own hierarchy and regulations; yet they were emphatically not nuns, since they took no solemn vows and did not observe strict enclosure. Between 1604 and 1609 documents show no evidence of any consideration for constitutional arrangements that would define their status and correct this anomalous position. Thus far, these technicalities remained secondary to the practical pursuit of the congregation's catechizing vocation. Indeed, at that juncture, the establishment in the rue des Trois Rois Vieux was more preoccupied with carving a niche for its educational vocation amongst local women than with the pursuit of ecclesiastical recognition. Yet, despite working assiduously for the Church, the *congrégées* were in breach of church decrees. Such contradictions would need to be resolved if the Ursulines were to secure official acceptance for the work they insisted on carrying out, and the difficulties encountered by the early Toulousain *congrégées* provide an eloquent example of the preoccupations of their contemporaries with status classification and order.

<sup>40</sup> ADHG 221H-37, *Memoirs of the beginning and of the progress of the Order of Saint Ursula*, fos. 1-2.

<sup>41</sup> ADHG 221H-25 fo. 9, *Letter sent by the Vicar General . . . to call sister Marguerite de Vigier to found the congregation of Saint Ursula in the city of Toulouse.*

In her authoritative study of the Ursuline Order in France, M. C. Gueudré stated that most municipalities showed no inclination to regularize the administrative situation of new Ursuline houses; on the contrary, the *congrégées* often experienced difficulties in gaining approbation from their local authorities.<sup>42</sup> This was the case in Toulouse, where the local *Parlement*, although an essentially Catholic body actively involved in the city's Catholic renaissance, had refused to recognize the community officially before it was approved by the king.<sup>43</sup> However, it was only in 1611, as a result of *consellier* Bourret's efforts, that the community of Toulouse finally secured royal *lettres patentes*; in them, Louis XIII gave, for the first time, his approbation to an Ursuline establishment in France, entrusting it 'to promote by all necessary means the service of God and the salvation of souls'.<sup>44</sup> Although the community was in breach of Tridentine definitions, Louis XIII praised it as an establishment of 'great profit and edification'.<sup>45</sup>

Once the congregation was eventually recognized by the king, the *Parlement* showed no trace of hesitation in receiving it wholeheartedly, although it was not as yet approved by the Pope. Thus, the community became officially registered by the *Parlement* of Toulouse in April 1612, eight years after its settlement in the city in 1604, but only a few months after securing Louis XIII's assent. The motivations behind the *Parlement's* refusal to recognize the early congregation remain unclear; was it wary of a congregation of Italian origin, therefore considering royal approval as a prerequisite for its own endorsement of the Ursulines? Or did its reservations spring from more pragmatic concerns?

The community's foundress, Marguerite de Vigier, was only too aware both of the general public's suspicion of novelty and of the fragility of the reputation of female enterprises. During her initial journey from Avignon to Toulouse in 1604, her little troupe had even been arrested on suspicion that they were 'gens de mauvaise vie'.<sup>46</sup> This anecdote illustrates vividly how seventeenth-century perceptions frowned upon geographical mobility in general, and upon that of unmarried women in particular. Early modern conceptions understood women as confined either within the sphere of their household or that of a convent. This, of course, was not specific to the Toulouse experiment: across Europe, female initiatives (whether social, economic, political or religious) faced both the underlying misogyny of the male ruling classes in church and state and the profoundly patriarchal nature of early modern society. Catholic

<sup>42</sup> Gueudré, *Histoire de l'Ordre des Ursulines en France*, i. 132.

<sup>43</sup> The Ursuline documents indicate that, particularly in the early years, the congregation's relationship with the *Parlement* was not always smooth. However, *Parlement's* papers, in ADHG series B, do not yield any information on the subject.

<sup>44</sup> ADHG 221H-4, *Royal letters of approval*.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> ADHG 221H-37, *Memoirs*, fo. 2: in October 1604, on their way to Toulouse, the four missionaries were arrested and imprisoned in Pezenas. Their arrest bears witness to early modern fears of vagrants: the women, travelling freely in the company of men, were immediately suspected of being prostitutes and thieves.

clerics and laity often received the women who were dedicated to the revival of the faith with a strong blend of suspicion and mistrust. Thus, gender-defined stereotypes exercised considerable influence even upon missionary movements that ultimately transformed the practical sphere of women from one of humble subjection to one of relative initiative. Linda Lierheimer has noted that such restrictions affected the Ursuline movement all across France since, as she puts it, 'their ambiguous status and their incursions into public spaces were disturbing' to early modern society.<sup>47</sup> It therefore comes as no surprise that the Toulouse settlement needed to prove its good credentials before it gained the support of the families of the local elite.

Parayre's *Chronique* illustrated the difficulties that brought the early community, with its unenclosed lay status and its free open school for all, into direct conflict with some of these influential families. One incident concerned Magdelaine Despanez (1594-1677), in religion *soeur de Jésus*, whose father, a *trésorier général de France*, had promised her for an advantageous marriage in 1606. However, the young girl, who was not yet twelve years old, broke all the arrangements when she escaped and found refuge with the Ursulines.<sup>48</sup> One can understand her family's discontent at the loss of potential income and status, which was in this case further aggravated by the blatant disobedience of their child. Moreover, their daughter had found a haven in a small and unapproved congregation of women which was, as yet, far from enjoying the distinction, prestige and, above all, the good reputation of some of the city's established convents. Yet the girl's parents were of a devout disposition; eventually, they complied with their daughter's choice without attacking the community as virulently as might have been expected. In this case, a well-to-do family relinquished personal interest and social alliances to oblige their daughter's desire to stay with the Ursulines and become a simple *congrégée*.

Things did not go so well, however, for the young Marie de Liberos. Like Despanez, she also fled a prearranged union by finding refuge with the Ursulines.<sup>49</sup> However, in her case, parental consent was not so easily gained as for her *consoeur*. Originally from the smaller town of Agen, she had been sent to Toulouse under her uncle's tutelage, in order to meet her future husband and finalize the settlement. When she ran away to the safety of the Ursuline house, both uncle and suitor attempted to break down the house's doors and kidnap her. An embarrassingly public battle of wills followed; when the use of force was finally abandoned, it was substituted with court action on the part of the enraged uncle, who sued the Ursulines for holding his niece illegally. The community eventually won after a long legal battle, and Marie de Liberos was

<sup>47</sup> L. Lierheimer, 'Redefining convent space: ideals of female community among seventeenth-century Ursuline nuns', *P Ann West S Fr Hist*, 24 (1997), 213.

<sup>48</sup> Details on Despanez are found in ADHG 221H-15, *Professions de foi*, fo. 212; 221H-29, register of professions, fo. 25; 221H-37, *Memoirs*; and 1G 663 fo. 23. See also *Chronique*, pt 2, pp. 240-64.

<sup>49</sup> *Chronique*, pp. 338-75.

soon sent to a new branch of the community, in the nearby town of Brive-la-Gaillarde.

The vulnerability of the community's reputation and the unconventional nature of its status can be illustrated further with one last vignette. Françoise Rabonite (d. 1654), in religion *soeur de Sainte-Claire*, was the daughter of an *avocat en la cour du Parlement*; she was destined to follow in the footsteps of her sisters, who were nuns in the city's prestigious convent of Saint Claire.<sup>50</sup> However, despite having been educated as one of its boarders, she refused to enter the novitiate there.<sup>51</sup> Instead, she preferred the poverty of the Ursuline *congrégées*, whose apostolic vocation had already won her heart, and whom she stealthily joined in 1607. On discovering her initiative, Parayre recorded, her mother was deeply upset. One of her uncles, a *procureur au Parlement*, even tried to get her out by force. Significantly, respectable neighbouring families united to support Madame Rabonite in her plight, and stood at the Ursulines' doors demanding Françoise's release and shouting abuse at the community. Indeed, although most Catholic families approved of the *congrégées'* religious cause, their institutional status implied that the house's financial stability remained uncertain. Thus, most fathers of influential households preferred safer placements for their daughters, in convents whose prestige was proven and long established. When her mother faced her with an ultimatum, Françoise Rabonite chose never to see her family again, and decided to remain with the Ursulines. The community's *Memoirs* relate the incident:<sup>52</sup>

Françoise Rabonite . . . presented herself to the community with such fervour and such generosity that she resolved, for the love of God, never to see her mother again, the latter having opposed and resisted [her daughter's] decision as much as she could, and declared that she would never see her again in her life . . .

Thus, Françoise Rabonite's choice ran against early modern conceptions when she refused the grandeur and kudos of the Saint Claire convent and favoured the small, fragile and unrecognized Ursuline community, much to her parents' distress.

These three examples illustrate how the initial years of the Ursuline settlement in Toulouse were, episodically, blighted by conflict, and this despite the intensity of the Catholic Reformation effort in the city. They did find that their initial congregational form and the novelty of their unapproved structure constituted a considerable obstacle to their success with the city's elite classes whose support was so essential to their success. Therefore, Marguerite de Vigier soon decided to take drastic measures in order to secure the future of her lifelong commitment to the Ursuline project. By 1609 the house had not

<sup>50</sup> Françoise Rabonite's story is documented in ADHG 221H-15, *Professions de foi*, fo. 226; 221H-29, register of profession, fo. 11; and 221H-37, *Memoirs*.

<sup>51</sup> *Chronique*, pp. 87-116.

<sup>52</sup> ADHG 221H-37, *Memoirs*.

yet been officially approved by the local *Parlement*, the monarch or even the Pope. Therefore, wary of potentially fatal attacks against her congregation, Vigier decided to take a course of action that was to change the face of her Ursuline community beyond recognition.

## III

By the year 1609 the Ursuline house counted twenty-seven *congrégées* and exhibited all the signs of a healthy community, the popularity of which increased steadily under the umbrella of protection provided by Cardinal-Archbishop Joyeuse and *conseiller* Bourret.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, the community's archive shows that between 1610 and 1616 it welcomed another nineteen members, while its school was, according to Parayre, becoming increasingly popular, both with boarders from wealthy backgrounds and with less privileged day pupils.<sup>54</sup> However, despite such seemingly favourable auspices, Marguerite de Vigier felt that the foundations of her work were not as stable as she wished. Therefore, in order to strengthen the position of the Ursuline house in Toulouse, Antoine de Vigier (the foundress's brother, of the Congregation of the Christian Doctrine) was sent as a representative to Rome in 1609; his brief was to present Pope Paul V with the congregation's request to become an enclosed convent.<sup>55</sup> In other words, these independent *congrégées* wished to relinquish their autonomy, submit to episcopal control, enter the state of religion and become nuns.

The community's records indicate that although conventual life seemed at odds with the catechizing and teaching brief of the Ursulines, it was not imposed upon the community by the ecclesiastical authorities but rather came as the direct result of the women's request. Their decision to opt for enclosure of their own accord seems to indicate that Vigier's followers expected to gain something out of such a transformation.<sup>56</sup> Why did the community wish to become a convent when its initial form as a lay congregation allowed it to enjoy a degree of independence and freedom of initiative that it would never have if it became a nunnery? Upon taking the habit, the Ursulines would become confined to their convent and clausturation would be sure to threaten their freedom of manoeuvre. Since the establishment's aim was to teach and

<sup>53</sup> ADHG 221H-15, *Professtons de foi*, and 221H-37, *Memoirs*.

<sup>54</sup> Unfortunately, numbers of boarders and externs for that period are not available. The earliest register of boarders for the establishment on the rue des Trois Rois Vieux starts in November 1771, when the school counted forty-seven boarders. ADHG 221H-40.

<sup>55</sup> ADHG 221H-37, *Memoirs*, and *Chronique*, pt 1, p. 123.

<sup>56</sup> Annaert, in *Les collèges au féminin*, p. 46, stated that the Ursulines of Toulouse, when they applied for enclosure, followed the example given by their *consoeurs* of Paris. The documents kept in the Toulousain archives disprove this claim and show that, though the Parisian establishment became a convent in 1612, the house in Toulouse had actually been petitioning to Rome as early as 1609. Had it not been delayed in its dealings with the Curia, the house on the rue des Trois Rois Vieux would have been the first French Ursuline congregation to be elevated into a convent.

evangelize all ranks of the Toulousain female population, how could it propose to serve its active vocation by becoming enclosed?

The community's *Memoirs of the beginning and progress of the Order of Saint Ursula* give a narrative of the foundation of the Ursuline house in Toulouse. For the year 1609, the chapter is eloquently entitled: 'How mother Vigier contacted Rome to ensure the vocation [of the community] by entering the religious Orders'.<sup>57</sup> This title implies that the community envisaged the appeal to Rome as a means to save itself from potential danger and to secure its future in the city. The chapter itself shows that Vigier feared that the budding congregation she had nurtured for five years might become the victim of potential opposition and be destroyed. Seized by the force of this sentiment, she resolved to transform her congregation into a convent, so as to secure its future. The manuscript explained:

[she] feared that, one day, one of the devil's tricks might lead this company to be dissolved. Therefore, in order to ensure its future, she and the aforementioned girls resolved to send a plea to Rome, asking for the Holy Father's intervention. They begged him to agree to the elevation of their house into a monastery of the Order of Saint Ursula.<sup>58</sup>

When Vigier perceived she had no alternative but to secure recognition and status by becoming religious or jeopardize the house's prospects, she opted for action. Thus, the decision was essentially palliative: had the Ursulines felt entirely safe in their informal congregation, they would probably not have felt the need to apply for transformation into a cloister. Finally, Parayre's explanation of this episode shows that the chronicler himself understood the transition from congregation to convent as a pragmatic move. He wrote: '[Vigier resolved] to elevate this congregation into religion, so as to secure it through this most effective of all means.'<sup>59</sup> The evidence indicates that, in Toulouse at least, the *congrégées*' decision to become nuns was, at least initially, motivated by a desire to avoid potential suppression; moreover, in 1609 it was the first French Ursuline establishment to request elevation into a convent.

Whereas the initial Ursuline congregations of Provence and the Comtat-Venaissin remained tightly linked to their Italian heritage, the Toulouse community operated in an influential *ville parlementaire* whose Catholic temperament revealed a pronounced Gallicanism. We have seen that, in 1604, the local *Parlement* had received Vigier and Blanchet with extreme caution and allowed them into the city on a provisional basis only, since their congregation had not as yet been approved by the king.<sup>60</sup> In 1609 the *congrégées*'

<sup>57</sup> ADHG 221H-37.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Chronique*, pt 1, p. 129.

<sup>60</sup> ADHG 221H-37, *Memoirs*, fo. 29.

unofficial status still constituted their main weakness and their new model of the unenclosed *religieuse* presented the city of Toulouse with an unresolved ambiguity that made even its most devout Catholic families ill at ease. Marguerite de Vigier's plea for the elevation of her community into an enclosed convent was one of the most astute decisions she was to take while she was at the head of the community, and it found a specific resonance in local politics at Toulouse. It is likely that confrontations with influential local families had dented Vigier's confidence, making her more acutely aware that her congregation was institutionally in breach of the decrees of the Council of Trent.<sup>61</sup>

Therefore, the Toulousain house resolved upon an apparently paradoxical, yet shrewd course of action: it would embrace conventualization in order to safeguard its active, educational vocation. In this respect, although there is no doubt that the Ursulines of Toulouse were profoundly respectful of traditional Catholic institutions and values, one could say the sisters were manipulative even in their open profession of subjection to patriarchal rules. Evidence indicates that the Toulousain *congrégées* purposely endorsed traditional female subjection to male authority in order to accomplish their self-appointed educational mission. In effect, they complied with the conservative decrees of Trent so as to be in a better position to transcend them. As Lierheimer explained in her study of the French Ursulines, 'enclosure provided the basis for a new ideal of community, an ideal that was in some ways more original than that of their uncloistered predecessors'.<sup>62</sup> Certainly, the history of the house on the rue des Trois Rois Vieux indicates that, far from being a constricting and repressive decision imposed unilaterally by the ecclesiastical authorities upon unwilling women, enclosure represented an affirmative and constructive development.

## IV

However, the papal understanding of a female religious house differed widely from that of the Toulousain petitioners. In 1609 the pope refused the Ursulines the privilege of becoming a religious order in their existing form, since the Council of Trent, endorsing the decrees of Lateran IV, had prohibited the founding of new orders.<sup>63</sup> Since Saint Ursula had not been a nun herself, she could not be the patron of an order, and Paul V asked the *congrégées* to submit to one of the pre-existing approved religious Rules.<sup>64</sup> The congregation deliberated and opted for the Rule of Saint Augustine, which prescribed a

<sup>61</sup> See U. Strasser "'Aut maritus, aut murus?'" Women's lives in Counter-Reformation Munich 1579-1651', unpub. Ph.D. diss. (University of Minnesota, 1997), pp. 5-7; and L. Lierheimer, 'Female eloquence and maternal ministry: the apostolate of Ursuline nuns in seventeenth-century France', unpub. Ph.D. diss. (Princeton University, 1994), p. 27.

<sup>62</sup> Lierheimer, 'Redefining convent space', p. 211.

<sup>63</sup> N. Tanner (ed.), *Decrees of the ecumenical councils* (2 vols., 1990), i. 227-73.

<sup>64</sup> ADHG 221H-37, *Memoirs*, ch. 9.

moderate type of asceticism that they deemed particularly suited to their active way of life.<sup>65</sup> In 1614 Antoine de Vigier was dispatched to Rome a second time, and finally came back to Toulouse, the bearer of a papal bull dated 9 April 1614, elevating the Toulouse congregation into a convent.<sup>66</sup>

Revealingly, the bull obtained in April 1614 was entitled *Bull of elevation of the Ursulines congrégées into religion of the Order of hermits of Saint Augustine*.<sup>67</sup> The very use of the lexicon of monasticism seemed to seal the alignment of these Ursulines to a norm of the enclosed life. The text specified:<sup>68</sup>

[The sisters shall] live *under the yoke of religion, perpetual enclosure, and regular observance*, under the jurisdiction, visitation, and obedience of the present archbishop of Toulouse and his future successors. [They shall] take the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and nevertheless attend . . . to the instruction of the aforementioned girls, on condition that, while the pupils live in the monastery, they too keep the rules of enclosure.

Despite its lengthy phraseology, this passage is remarkably clear: Paul V elevated the *congrégées* into nuns and thereby ordered them to keep their enclosure so closely as to teach boarders only, within the confines of the cloister. As a consequence, the Toulousain Ursulines would retain none of their initial particularities. Under such terms, the house's elevation into religion entailed its abandonment of all interaction with the local girls of the *externat*: it seemed that Vigier's plan had backfired and that her community's far-reaching educational mission had been unwittingly suppressed.

In 1614, although Marguerite de Vigier had succeeded in securing papal approbation, she had failed to obtain the validation she had initially envisaged, as a participant in the Catholic mission of education in the Toulouse area. The bull did not show that the Pope had understood the congregation's wish to continue their teaching activities for day pupils, albeit within the safety of the cloister. His protection came at the cost of the house's freedom to catechize all who cared to listen at their grille and to teach externs in their classrooms.

This came as something of a shock for the Ursulines of Toulouse, who quickly decided that it was contrary to the essence of the congregation's vocation. The community's records make it very clear that, despite their plea for enclosure, the *congrégées* remained wholeheartedly dedicated to their initial evangelizing vocation: though they were to become nuns, they

<sup>65</sup> In her *Histoire de l'Ordre des Ursulines en France*, i. 113, Gueudré explained that all French houses of Ursulines subsequently adopted the Rule of Saint Augustine, which they deemed perfectly suited both to their gender and to their specific religious calling.

<sup>66</sup> ADHG 221H-37, *Memoirs*, and *Chronique*, pt 1, pp. 130-4. See also Gueudré, *Histoire de l'Ordre des Ursulines en France*, i. 252-3, and Sarre, *Vivre sa soumission*, pp. 55, 83-4.

<sup>67</sup> The bull was originally written in Latin, and the ADHG hold both the Latin version and its translation into French in bundle 221H-4. Another copy of the bull is kept in 221H-25 fo. 25.

<sup>68</sup> ADGH 221H-4, emphasis mine.



continued to view themselves essentially as teachers. The manuscript book entitled *Memoirs of the beginning and progress of the Order of Saint Ursula* gives the following account:<sup>69</sup>

When the time came to implement the aforementioned bull, there were six [*congrégées*] who, moved by their zeal for the Christian doctrine (and fearing that their entry into religion would bring them to abandon it, since our Holy Father did not mention teaching externs in his bull) refused to become religious.

Significantly, six out of the twenty-six sisters refused to take the habit unless the bull specifically acknowledged their teaching duties towards externs.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, most of the early members had felt deeply drawn to the community because of its innovative profile which, unlike that of traditional convents, involved interaction with other women and the instruction of the local youth.

Documents show that Jaquete de Maynie (1588-1631, in religion *soeur de Saint-Jean l'Evangéliste*), deeply convinced that the community's main *raison d'être* was its educational vocation, became the leader of the six *congrégées* who, in 1614, protested against the papal bull of enclosure, which they deemed incompatible with the Ursulines' original vocation.<sup>71</sup> She and her fellow protesters refused to take the habit unless the bull acknowledged the community's teaching duties towards the externs; in fact, their movement was supported by the entire congregation, who delayed their entry into religion while Antoine de Vigier was again sent to plead anew with Pope Paul V. At long last, a further brief was issued which dissipated all doubt concerning the Ursulines' right to teach day pupils. This brief, dated 3 October 1616, bore a title that was as revealing as that of the preceding bull: *Papal brief to join the institute of the Christian doctrine to monastic life*. In it, Paul V now agreed to the Ursulines' request to teach externs.<sup>72</sup>

We order . . . the aforementioned nuns to instruct, free of charge, the aforementioned girls by teaching them, above all else, the piety and virtue that are worthy of Christian virgins, as well as a summary of Christian doctrine . . . However, these representatives of the world will be allowed to enter the convent only for as long as the Holy See will permit.

Thus, by 1616 the Toulousain Ursulines had obtained a supplementary papal brief unequivocally instructing them to teach not only their enclosed boarders but also local externs. These girls, often of lower social status, were expressly allowed to enter and leave the convent to receive their lessons on a daily basis.

<sup>69</sup> ADHG 221H-37, *Memoirs*.

<sup>70</sup> ADHG 221H-37, *Memoirs*, fos. 44-7, and *Chronique*, pt 1, p. 109. Brigitte Seysol, widow of nobleman Pierre Delpéch, who had joined Marguerite de Vigier in 1606 when she was already eighty years old, had died of old age in 1614. Thus, there remained only twenty-six *congrégées*.

<sup>71</sup> *Chronique*, pt 2, pp. 45-87.

<sup>72</sup> ADHG 221H-25 fo. 26.

Such an outcome was a tactical *tour de force*, through which the congregation formally accepted the patriarchalist conception of religious women - enclosed and contemplative - in order to secure the safety of its active teaching initiative. Approved by the Pope and properly enclosed, yet actually ordered by papal decree to teach and catechize externs, the Toulousain Ursulines had thus become virtually invulnerable to opposition. It was only at this point, seven years after their original appeal of 1609, that the *congrégées* of Toulouse were truly prepared to become nuns. With the exception of one anonymous sister who left, and another who died,<sup>73</sup> all remaining twenty-four *congrégées* entered the religious life, took novices' habits together and later became professed in December 1616. They had five different classrooms, with five main teachers.<sup>74</sup> In January 1617 six lay sisters also took their solemn vows: thus, in its initial months as an enclosed convent, the Toulousain house counted thirty inmates.<sup>75</sup> In the year 1617 another seven young women became professed Ursulines (six *professes* and one *converse*), and throughout its history, the convent generally housed between thirty-five and forty professed nuns at any one time.<sup>76</sup>

Thus, although the Toulouse house first petitioned for enclosure in 1609, it was transformed into a convent only in 1616. In the meantime, the passage from the state of simple lay congregation to that of approved religious establishment had already been realized by the Parisian community in the faubourg Saint-Jacques, which petitioned for, and obtained papal approval, in 1612.<sup>77</sup> However, the issue of teaching externs was to be a thorn in the side of the Parisian community; although its members took a teaching vow, its papal bull mentioned teaching in a non-specific way that did not explicitly refer to externs. Concerns were repeatedly raised by members of the community on the subject.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, the decision to become enclosed was subsequently taken by most Ursuline houses across France during the 1620s and 1630s, and the Toulouse formula was significant in defining a working role for enclosed religious in the France of the Catholic Reformation.

## V

Enclosure had been a quintessential condition for the elevation of the Toulousain congregation into a convent. Consequently, when Paul V's bull of 1614 allowed the establishment to become a cloister of the Order of Saint Augustine, the sisters officially renounced any physical involvement in the

<sup>73</sup> Madame de Causan, widow, ADHG 221H-37.

<sup>74</sup> *Chronique*, pt 1, p. 142.

<sup>75</sup> These numbers have been collated from ADHG 221H-15, 221H-29, 221H-37 and Parayre's *Chronique*.

<sup>76</sup> ADHG 221H-15, *Professions de foi*, and 221H-29, register of professions. See also Klassen, 'Greying in the cloister', p. 93.

<sup>77</sup> H. Leymont, *Madame de Sainte Beuve et les Ursulines de Paris, 1562-1630* (Lyon, 1890); Jégou, *Les Ursulines du faubourg Saint-Jacques*.

<sup>78</sup> See Gueudré, *Histoire de l'Ordre des Ursulines en France*, i. 104-6.

world. According to the Constitutions of the Toulousain house, they could vacate the premises only when in actual danger of their lives. The Constitutions de l'Ordre des Ursulines de Toulouse specified the only legitimate reasons for leaving the convent as follows: 'if [the sisters] suffer from leprosy or contagious disease, or in case of fire, flooding or war, or else in order to be employed for the foundation or the restoration of some monastery, and this only with a written licence from Monseigneur the Archbishop or his Vicar'.<sup>79</sup>

This extract is taken from the ninth chapter ('Of enclosure') of the book of Constitutions. It is significant that this is noticeably the most lengthy chapter out of a total of thirty-three; it leads to another long descriptive chapter dedicated to the *parloirs*, thereby illustrating the strict surveillance imposed upon any communication with the outside.<sup>80</sup> These *parloirs* consisted of a grilled reception foyer for occasional conversation with visiting relatives; they were fitted with a double row of spiked iron bars and they shut with tinsplate in which small holes had been drilled. The only aperture consisted of a small window that was opened to speak to relatives, and these conversations were to be conducted only with the Mother Superior's authorization, and under the surveillance of a fellow sister. The partitions segregating the convent from the secular world seemed unforgivingly hermetic, and were generally to be found in all French Ursuline establishments.<sup>81</sup>

The enclosure was therefore a literal reality, embodied in the physical presence of high walls acting as a distinct separation between the 'outside' and the 'inside'. Neither the nuns nor the boarders had any insight into the life of the city: they lived in isolation from society. Yet, despite its solemn vow of *clôture*, the congregation in the rue des Trois Rois Vieux remained faithful to its far-reaching educational vocation. Both the contemplative and the active life seemed to hold equal importance in the principles of the Toulousain establishment: '[The Ursulines] must not be content with being simply religious, but [they are] also teachers of Christian doctrine . . . and the excellence of this vocation should be impressed upon them; those who will not be inclined or disposed towards this design will not be received in any way.'<sup>82</sup>

The Ursulines had made a strategic choice in becoming enclosed, since the propriety of the cloister gave them a recognized and unambiguous civil status and an undisturbed life in good repute. Cloistered nuns were thus placed in conformity with gender expectations in respectable society, as well as in obedience with the decrees of Trent. However, the Ursulines of Toulouse did not consider themselves as traditional, contemplative religious women, as can be seen in their Constitutions, which highlighted the fact that their vocations combined religious observance with the teaching of Catholic doctrine.

<sup>79</sup> ADHG 221H-28bis, 5, fo. 20.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. fo. 20 passim and 221H-41 fos. 62-4.

<sup>81</sup> The system was the same in Bordeaux and Paris, for instance: see Gueudré, *Histoire de l'Ordre des Ursulines en France*, ii. 242, and *Règlements des religieuses Ursulines*.

<sup>82</sup> ADHG 221H-28bis, 5, *Constitutions*, fo. 44.

Nevertheless, the tension between monastic observance and teaching activities was felt acutely. If the sisters could not go out of their convent, was the scope of their teaching necessarily limited to the confines of the cloister? The Ursulines needed to find a practical compromise allowing them to teach girls without breaking their vow of perpetual enclosure: conventual life needed to be adapted in order to accommodate both aspects of their vocation. How could they house combine the respect of their new enclosure with their primary teaching vocation? Whilst guaranteeing a degree of security, did monastic life represent a restriction upon the sisters' pedagogical vocation?

Traditional conventual life was ingeniously reorganized according to a complicated structure, and a compromise was reached to suit the sisters' educational purpose. First, the nuns themselves were enclosed and bound by solemn vows. The convent was redesigned so as to accommodate them in their own quarter while, during their period of probation, the young novices occupied another part of the building.<sup>83</sup> Along with professed and prospective nuns, the Ursuline house in Toulouse also provided for students; their boarders were lay pupils, who lived in the convent and were submitted to enclosure in the same way as were the sisters.<sup>84</sup> They lived in a separate wing of the building, and did not mix with either the nuns or the novices outside the classroom. The day pupils represented the last element in the structure: they were allowed in the convent's classrooms for their daily lessons, but returned home every evening. Compared with the nuns, the novices, or even with the boarders, these day pupils were seen as the agents of the world, the only inmates to have contact with the outside.<sup>85</sup> The students gathered outside the cloister door, which was opened for them at seven o'clock. They entered the classroom by this exterior door, which was then immediately locked again behind them; when the door was secured, the teachers entered the classroom by an interior door, itself guarded on the inside by a *soeur portière*. The classrooms, therefore, could be compared to a sort of airlock between the inside and the outside, secured at either end by heavy, double-locked doors. Thus, the Toulousain Ursulines designed a daily routine to enable the externs to enter the convent whilst allowing only minimal contact with the outside world.

In terms of structure, this represented the most innovative thread in the Ursuline fabric. The day pupils, who were allowed to enter the convent's classrooms, returned home every evening; these girls did not belong to the religious establishment, they did not partake either in its enclosed life or regular practice, and their daily entrance required some amendments to traditional conventual rule. Although the sisters did not actually breach their vow of enclosure, the teaching of externs implied that the convent opened its doors and allowed an exchange between the inside and the outside. This minor

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. fo. 51.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. fo. 4.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. fo. 12.

infringement of the rule of enclosure was enough to enable the Ursulines of Toulouse to influence and catechize hundreds of girls.

This, I believe, brought a new constituency within the ambit of the convent and allowed these girls to benefit, to a degree, from the spiritual charge conferred by enclosure. Without being elements of the cloister themselves, they were able to soak up its pious atmosphere, to experience its regular routine and to learn in its classrooms. I would therefore argue that, if the externs permitted part of the world to penetrate the convent, they also enabled some of the convent's essence to seep out into the world. The conventual bubble was not hermetically sealed any longer, and the day pupils were the main beneficiaries of this change. Thus, in the rue des Trois Rois Vieux, enclosure had become active, thereby embodying the 'fluidity' that Lierheimer described as 'a continuum from the convent to the world beyond'.<sup>86</sup> To use her lexicon, the Ursuline day classes functioned as a 'bridge', or a 'no man's land' between the spheres of the public and the private, between the world outside and the conventual space inside of enclosure.<sup>87</sup> When considering the evidence presented above, one can only agree with Lierheimer when she argued that the Ursuline sisters 'expanded the convent into the world'.<sup>88</sup>

Enclosure, although it had been adapted in order to allow the teaching of externs, nevertheless implied the end of all other kinds of apostolic works that required interaction with one's neighbours.<sup>89</sup> However, the establishment in Toulouse managed to preserve some of the original Italian Ursuline spirit of apostolic works by organizing a parallel lay association composed of married or widowed ladies who, though they did not want to become nuns, wished to be linked to the Ursuline congregation. These Dames de Sainte-Ursule carried out apostolic works in the city: they visited the sick, relieved the poor and helped prisoners.<sup>90</sup> In this initiative, Marguerite de Vigier seems once more to have been a pioneer, since it was she who organized the first partnership between an Ursuline convent and its parallel lay company; this model was subsequently adopted throughout France by the communities of other cities such as Bordeaux, Dijon or Grenoble.<sup>91</sup> Thus, the evangelical brief of the convent's initial 'mixed' life was preserved through its close links with the Compagnie des Dames de Sainte-Ursule; in Toulouse, this impulse remained strong, and the Compagnie counted between forty-five and sixty members at all times.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Lierheimer, 'Redefining convent space', p. 218.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. p. 217.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. p. 212.

<sup>89</sup> Rapley, *The dévotes*, p. 57. In fact, the community in Narbonne petitioned against this shift, claiming that the Ursulines' educational vocation could not possibly be entirely fulfilled in a cloistered house. It was nevertheless transformed into an enclosed convent in 1658, thus closing the chapter on the *congrégées* in France.

<sup>90</sup> ADHG 221H-28bis, item 2; this is a slim manuscript book containing the rules of the Compagnie des Dames de Sainte-Ursule. See also *Chronique*, pt 1, pp. 128-9.

<sup>91</sup> Gueudré, *Histoire de l'Ordre des Ursulines en France*, i. 165.

<sup>92</sup> ADHG 221H-34, Rules of the compagnie des Dames de Sainte-Ursule. This manuscript book contains, at the back, a roll of entries in the company and a list of members at various dates.

Although the *congrégées* of Toulouse, and across France at large, had been obliged to abandon their unenclosed and pioneering apostolate, they had nevertheless found a compromise that allowed them to remain an active female force within the Church.<sup>93</sup>

Thus, the Toulousain Ursulines were cautious never to *break* the rules, nor expose themselves to either clerical or secular criticism; however, they learned the art of gently *bending* traditional monastic regulations, in order to serve their original educational purpose. By 1616 they had concluded their dealings with Rome and finalized both the essence of their vocation and the status under which they operated. In the process, the congregation had undergone major structural changes, but it had successfully negotiated its niche within the Catholic Reformation.

<sup>93</sup> See Lierheimer, 'Female eloquence and maternal ministry', p. 17.

**« Préserver l'action au sein de la clôture : le compromis des ursulines de Toulouse, 1604 – 1616 », *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 221.2 (2004) 175-90.**

**Résumé :**

En 1604, la congrégation ursuline de Toulouse se soustrait au modèle monastique pour catéchiser les filles de la ville. Leurs manuscrits le montrent clairement, elles se considèrent à cette époque comme enseignantes et catéchistes plus que comme religieuses au sens tridentin du terme. Or, en 1609, elles mettent en œuvre une forme de clôture et demandent à Rome leur élévation au rang des religieuses cloîtrées. Comment comprendre cette décision a priori paradoxale ? C'est que, loin de souffrir la claustration comme un fardeau, ces ursulines la célèbrent comme moyen de préservation d'une vocation apostolique féminine alors en danger. En effet, dans leur état initial de congrégation laïque, rien ne les protège puisque l'établissement n'est approuvé ni par le pape ni par le roi, et qu'en conséquence, le parlement de Toulouse refuse même de porter au registre. L'absence de statut met la congrégation en position délicate vis-à-vis des bonnes familles de la ville et des autorités municipales. Ayant obtenu en 1612 l'approbation royale, et donc la ratification du parlement local, les congrégées renouvellent leurs efforts pour obtenir de Rome un statut religieux officiel. En 1616, elles accèdent enfin à la sécurité du statut religieux, mais obtiennent également un bref papal leur permettant d'ouvrir quotidiennement leurs classes aux externes. Alliant ainsi leur vocation de catéchistes à la stabilité du couvent, les ursulines deviennent l'une des congrégations religieuses les plus illustres de la France d'Ancien Régime.

5 002 mots

mots-clés : France moderne ; ursulines ; couvents ; religieuses enseignantes ; clôture

**Présentation du texte :**

Cette troisième publication découle de la précédente et apporte quelques modifications de détail à mon analyse ultérieure du mouvement des ursulines françaises vers la clôture, que je montre ici comme une décision pragmatique destinée à sauvegarder la mission catéchétique d'une congrégation autrement menacée. Rédigé en 2003, cet article est le premier travail que j'écrivais en français depuis mon inscription en thèse à Lancaster en 1997. La raison de cette publication française est double : j'ai pris conscience à cette époque qu'écrire sur un sujet français en langue étrangère pouvait limiter le lectorat de mes travaux, puisqu'il existait sans doute des historiens, professionnels ou amateurs, qui ne pratiquaient pas suffisamment l'anglais pour lire un article rédigé dans cette langue. C'est aussi durant cette période que j'ai réalisé avec un certain effroi que je ne savais guère plus rédiger un travail universitaire dans ma langue natale ; j'ai souhaité remédier à cet état de fait et publier dans une revue française.

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## **Préserver l'action au sein de la clôture : le compromis des Ursulines de Toulouse (1604-1616)**

*En 1604, la congrégation ursuline de Toulouse se soustrait au modèle monastique pour catéchiser les filles de la ville. Or, en 1609, les congrégées décident de se cloître. Comment comprendre cette décision a priori paradoxale ? C'est que, loin de souffrir la claustration comme un fardeau, les Ursulines la célèbrent comme moyen de préservation d'une vocation apostolique féminine alors en danger. En 1616, elles gagnent et la sécurité du statut religieux et la permission papale d'ouvrir quotidiennement leurs classes aux externes. Alliant ainsi leur vocation de catéchistes à la stabilité du couvent, les Ursulines deviennent l'une des congrégations religieuses les plus illustres de la France d'Ancien Régime.*

**Preserving action within the cloister :  
The compromise of the Toulouse Ursulines, 1604-1616**

*In 1604, the Ursuline congregation of Toulouse refused the monastic model to focus upon the catechising of local girls. Yet, in 1609, the congrégées decided to become cloistered nuns. What led them to this seemingly paradoxical decision ? At a time when their female apostolic mission was at stake, the Ursulines embraced claustration as a means to preserve their vocation. By 1616, they obtained papal permission to open the convent doors and teach day classes to externs ; in this way, they allied their catechising vocation with monastic stability and became one of the most renowned religious congregations of Ancien Régime France.*

*Revue de l'histoire des religions, 221 - 2/2004, p. 175 à 190*



Après les troubles des guerres de religion (1562-1598), une ère nouvelle s'annonce au début du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, alors que le pieux mouvement visant à renouer les liens entre l'Église catholique et le peuple français gagne tout le royaume. Partout se créent des salons et des cercles dévots, souvent sur l'initiative des femmes ; partout de nouvelles écoles qui, pour contrecarrer les établissements protestants, se vouent à l'instruction religieuse des garçons mais aussi des filles, inscrivant ainsi la femme dans l'impulsion missionnaire et pédagogique du renouveau catholique français<sup>1</sup>. C'est ce qu'Elizabeth Rapley appelle « la féminisation de l'Église », phénomène marqué à la fois par l'engouement renouvelé pour le couvent et par la multiplication de compagnies féminines séculières et non cloîtrées.

L'essor de la Contre-Réforme permet aux femmes, religieuses comme laïques, de dépasser les limites des rôles qui leur sont traditionnellement attribués : outre les œuvres charitables et la vie monastique, elles peuvent désormais prendre part à l'effort général, missionnaire et apostolique, pour re-catholiciser la France. En fer de lance de la mission éducatrice de la Contre-Réforme, les Ursulines, qu'Elizabeth Rapley désigne comme « la congrégation féminine enseignante par excellence »<sup>2</sup>. Or, si maints ouvrages se penchent sur la communauté de Paris, celle de Toulouse demeure fort mal connue. Elle mérite pourtant quelque attention puisqu'elle est la première fondation ursuline française hors de la Provence et du Comtat Venaissin : elle offre toute une richesse de documentation permettant de faire plus de lumière sur la genèse du nouveau modèle de la religieuse enseignante, modèle innovateur qui transforme la place de la femme au sein de l'Église et marque du même coup les premiers pas de la pédagogie féminine du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle<sup>3</sup>.

1. Voir, entre autres, les travaux de Henri Brémond, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France depuis la fin des guerres de religion jusqu'à nos jours*, 11 vol., Paris, 1971 ; Pierre Chaunu, *L'Église, culture et société : essai sur Réforme et Contre-Réforme*, Paris, 1984, et René Taveneaux, *Le catholicisme dans la France classique, 1610-1717*, 2 vol., Paris, 1980, I, 22-28.

2. Elizabeth Rapley, *The Dévotes : Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France*, Kinston, Ont, 1990, p. 48.

3. Archives départementales de la Haute-Garonne (ADHG), 221H-4.

## ENSEIGNANTES ET CATÉCHISTES PLUS QUE RELIGIEUSES

Venues d'Avignon où, à mi-chemin entre laïcité et religion, elles enseignaient la doctrine catholique aux jeunes filles<sup>4</sup>, Marguerite de Vigier (1575-1639) et Françoise de Blanchet arrivent à Toulouse en octobre 1604, sur la requête du conseiller parlementaire Arnaud Bourret<sup>5</sup>, épaulé par le cardinal-archevêque François de Joyeuse<sup>6</sup>. À l'origine, elles sont reçues dans la demeure personnelle de leur protecteur, Arnaud Bourret, qui leur fait bientôt don d'une maison dans la rue des Trois-Rois-Vieux. Sans perdre de temps, elles y fondent un pensionnat où elles accueillent les filles de familles suffisamment aisées pour payer leur pension ; mais c'est leur externat ouvert à toutes, même les plus humbles, qui représente leur trait le plus distinctif<sup>7</sup>. Axe central de la mission de reconquête de la Contre-Réforme, la catéchisation des masses est au cœur même de la vocation des Ursulines de Toulouse. Bien qu'elles enseignent les rudiments de la lecture, de l'écriture et de l'aiguille, l'essence véritable de leur école réside, qu'on ne s'y trompe pas, dans l'enseignement de la doctrine catholique. Les *Constitutions* de l'établissement sont claires à ce sujet : « [Les Ursulines de Toulouse] enseigneront auxdites filles la doctrine chrétienne, la piété et la pratique des vertus ; à ces fins, elles leur apprendront à lire, écrire et coudre le mieux qu'il leur sera possible. »<sup>8</sup> C'est donc l'instruction religieuse plutôt que l'éducation laïque qui importe : si l'enseignement séculier fait bien partie des devoirs

4. C. A. Sarre, *Vivre sa soumission. L'exemple des Ursulines provençales et comtadines 1592-1792*, Paris, 1997.

5. In Augustin Riboti, *Examen d'un livre qui a pour titre la vie du P. Romillon avec plusieurs éclaircissements sur la première institution des congrégations de la Doctrine chrétienne et des Ursulines en France*, Toulouse, 1676, p. 241-242, lettres datées respectivement du 20 février et du 8 mars 1604.

6. ADHG, 221H-4.

7. ADHG, 221H-25, f. 3, 20 juillet 1605, *Acte de donation de la maison de Arnaud Bourret aux filles de la congrégation de sainte Ursule*.

8. ADHG, 221H-28 bis, 5, *Constitutions*, f. 3.

des Ursulines, c'est seulement parce qu'il leur permet de mieux catéchiser la jeunesse.

L'ambition de ces religieuses enseignantes est d'atteindre même les plus pauvres, dont les familles ne peuvent payer la pension des prestigieux couvents de la ville ; elles ne s'adressent pas particulièrement à celles qui souhaitent entrer en religion, mais au contraire ouvrent leurs écoles dans le but de renforcer la foi dans le cœur de jeunes femmes qui deviendront plus tard des mères de famille, responsables à leur tour de l'éducation de leurs enfants. Leur école apporte une formation catholique complète aux épouses et aux mères des générations futures : c'est ainsi qu'elles espèrent regagner le terrain perdu par l'Église lors des guerres de religion.

Il est difficile d'exagérer l'importance de l'enseignement dans la vocation des Ursulines de Toulouse. Marie de Liberos, l'une des premières congrégées de la ville, explique qu'elle est chaque jour accueillie en classe par la vision d'une torche enflammée, emblème universel de la pédagogie<sup>9</sup>. Elle en est convaincue, cette torche représente les efforts éducatifs de sa communauté et l'excellence de son but ultime. Sa prédilection pour l'enseignement devient très vite un atout majeur pour la petite congrégation florissante et son zèle en fait la candidate idéale pour fonder de nouvelles branches dans les régions rurales environnantes<sup>10</sup>.

Mais il ne faudrait pas croire que Liberos fut un cas isolé : les *Chroniques*, comme les nécrologies de la communauté, abondent en références au zèle des jeunes institutrices. Sa consœur Jaquete de Maynie (1588-1632) est elle aussi toute dévouée à sa tâche d'enseignante. Fille d'un des nobles les plus en vue de Toulouse, elle est si attachée aux vanités et aux faux-semblants de la haute société que sa biographie rapporte : « Ces pensées la possédaient si absolument qu'elles avaient assez de force non seulement pour la distraire dans ses prières et en toutes pratiques de dévotion, mais encore les lui faire quitter, et toute attention à la

9. R. P. Parayre, *Chronique des religieuses augustines ursulines de la congrégation de Toulouse*, 3 vol., Toulouse, 1681, part. 2, p. 338-375.

10. ADHG, 221H-37, *Mémoires du commencement et progrès de l'Ordre de sainte Ursule*.

parole de Dieu et aux Offices et à la sainte messe. »<sup>11</sup> Sa conversion est décrite comme un miracle qui la sauve *in extremis* des griffes du diable et des périls mondains des livres licencieux et des histoires profanes dont elle était si friande<sup>12</sup>. C'est peut-être à cause de cette métamorphose que Jaquete de Maynie devient l'une des catéchistes les plus actives de la communauté et qu'elle est plus tard si déterminée à préserver cet aspect de la vocation ursuline coûte que coûte.

Les premières congrégées de Toulouse, profondément attachées à leur double nature, combinent l'esprit de Marie et les devoirs de Marthe. Le mode de vie de la congrégation est consigné dans un petit cahier manuscrit intitulé *Mémoires du commencement et progrès de l'Ordre de sainte Ursule* dans lequel on lit : « La vie des Ursulines n'est autre que celle que le fils de Dieu a menée en ce monde, et sa sainte mère avec les apôtres après sa montée au ciel. Voilà les modèles et les exemplaires (*sic*) de leur état et profession : c'est la vie mixte mêlée de la contemplation et de l'action. »<sup>13</sup> À mi-chemin entre le monde séculier et le monde religieux, dans une situation encore peu régulée qui ne correspond à aucune catégorie ecclésiastique prédéfinie, les premières congrégées toulousaines ne sont ni tout à fait des religieuses, ni de simples dévotes laïques ; seule leur vocation semble parfaitement bien définie, et c'est l'enseignement et la catéchèse qui en sont les deux piliers<sup>14</sup>.

#### DES DIFFICULTÉS STATUTAIRES

Tout à leur travail de pédagogues, les premières consœurs de la rue des Trois-Rois-Vieux, entre 1604 et 1609 au moins, semblent peu préoccupées par le statut canonique de leur commu-

11. Parayre, *Chronique*, part. 2, p. 45-87.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

13. ADHG, 221H-37, *Mémoires*, f. 1-2.

14. ADHG, 221H-25, f. 9, *Lettre missive qui fut envoyée par M. le Vicaire général M. Nicolas Gilles pour appeler la sœur Marguerite de Vigier pour fonder la congrégation des filles de Sainte-Ursule en la présente ville de Toulouse.*

nauté. Ces considérations techniques sont moins pressantes que les préoccupations pragmatiques liées au succès de leur école. Occupées à la sauvegarde des âmes de leur prochain, les congrégées ne font rien pour remédier à leur manque de statut officiel ni pour s'assurer l'approbation du clergé. Or leur forme enfreint gravement les décrets du concile de Trente, selon lesquels il n'est de vie religieuse féminine qu'à l'intérieur du cloître. De plus, un tel manque de statut n'inspire guère confiance aux familles parlementaires aisées dont l'influence et le patronage sont si nécessaires au succès d'une nouvelle fondation.

En fait, le chaos institutionnel est total : l'établissement n'est approuvé ni par le pape, ni par le roi. Il n'est même pas enregistré par le Parlement de Toulouse, qui refuse de le recevoir officiellement sans approbation royale préalable<sup>15</sup>. Ce n'est qu'en décembre 1611 que les efforts infatigables du conseiller Bourret sont couronnés de succès : les congrégées toulousaines sont les premières à recevoir des lettres patentes de Louis XIII reconnaissant et approuvant une compagnie d'Ursulines sur le sol français et leur témoignant toute sa confiance, les mandatant de « promouvoir par tous les moyens le service de Dieu et le salut des âmes »<sup>16</sup>. Au mois d'avril 1612, l'approbation royale amène dans son sillage la ratification parlementaire ; il n'est que la bénédiction papale qui fasse désormais défaut au palmarès toulousain.

Mais le manque initial d'approbation royale ne suffit pas à expliquer les réticences locales. Quelle est la source d'une telle méfiance ? La classe parlementaire se sent-elle menacée par cette petite institution féminine naissante, aux origines obscures et au futur incertain ? Dans le contexte du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, il n'est pas peu commun que l'initiative et l'indépendance alliées à la liberté de mouvement impliquée par les activités des congrégées ursulines inspirent la suspicion, parfois même la peur. La plupart des communautés d'Ursulines doivent passer cet écueil avant de se faire

15. Les documents des Ursulines montrent que, durant ses premières années à Toulouse, la congrégation n'a pas toujours des rapports harmonieux avec le parlement local ; cependant, les documents parlementaires de la série B, ADHG, ne donnent aucune information à ce sujet.

16. ADHG, 221H-4, *Lettres Royaux en faveur des Ursulines de Toulouse*.

accepter par leur entourage, et Linda Lierheimer avance que c'est l'ambiguïté du statut des Ursulines, aggravé par leur apparente incursion dans la sphère publique, qui se trouve à la source du problème<sup>17</sup>. Les congrégées représentent une menace potentielle pour l'élite de Toulouse : nulle famille à la réputation bien établie ne souhaite voir ses filles s'associer à une communauté sans statut, sans approbation et sans finances.

Les chroniques de la congrégation illustrent bien cette crise : l'un des incidents les mieux documentés concerne la jeune Magdelaine Despanez (1594-1677), dont le mariage est arrangé en 1606<sup>18</sup>. Pour éviter cette union, la jeune fille, âgée d'à peine 12 ans, se réfugie chez les Ursulines, à la fureur de son père, trésorier général de France, qui exige le retour de la jeune rebelle pour honorer l'engagement. Au scandale de la désobéissance filiale s'ajoute une perte de face publique et, pis encore, la ruine de l'alliance promise à la famille du jeune homme. Mais le désastre familial est d'autant plus amer que Magdelaine trouve asile non dans l'un des grands couvents au prestige national, mais au sein d'une petite troupe de femmes sans réputation prouvée.

Encore cette histoire se finit-elle sans grand fracas : les Despanez, eux-mêmes fort dévots, finissent par accepter le choix de leur fille sans engager de poursuites contre les Ursulines. Mais pour la jeune Marie de Liberos, pédagogue zélée que nous avons rencontrée plus haut, les choses ne se déroulèrent pas si bien<sup>19</sup>. À l'instar de Magdelaine Despanez, elle s'enfuit chez les Ursulines pour éviter le mariage alors qu'elle est en visite à Toulouse sous la tutelle de son oncle pour y rencontrer son futur époux. Son entourage réagit violemment : outrés, son oncle et son fiancé s'unissent pour forcer un passage dans l'établissement, dont ils tentent de défoncer la porte principale pour enlever la jeune fille. S'ensuit une saga aussi scandaleuse qu'elle est publique ; la

17. Linda Lierheimer, « Redefining convent space : Ideals of female community among Seventeenth-Century Ursuline Nuns », *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History*, 24 (1997), 213.

18. Parayre, *Chronique*, part. 2, p. 240-264.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 338-375.

famille Liberos poursuit la congrégation en justice pour finalement se heurter au verdict de la Cour, qui trouve la communauté non coupable et l'autorise à garder la jeune fille en son sein.

Enfin, l'exemple de Françoise Rabonite<sup>20</sup>, fille d'un avocat à la cour du Parlement de Toulouse, souligne la vulnérabilité de la réputation de l'établissement. Destinée à suivre l'exemple de ses sœurs, nonnes au prestigieux couvent de Sainte-Claire où elle est elle-même pensionnaire, la jeune fille refuse d'y commencer le noviciat, préférant à l'opulence de Sainte-Claire la pauvreté des Ursulines dont la vocation apostolique et pédagogique la touchent<sup>21</sup>. Subrepticement, elle rejoint la communauté en 1607 et brise du même coup le cœur de sa mère. Un de ses oncles, procureur au Parlement, tente de la faire sortir par la force, et c'est bientôt toute une troupe de familles d'influence qui se trouve aux portes des Ursulines, soutenant la cause de Mme Rabonite et lançant toutes sortes d'insultes aux congrégées. Une telle solidarité se comprend : la menace est omniprésente et le malheur des Rabonite pourrait demain toucher leur propre famille. Dans ce litige, la bonne société se sent attaquée et se ligue donc contre l'ennemi commun. Ainsi Mme Rabonite en vient-elle à poser un ultimatum à sa fille : sa famille ou les Ursulines. Au grand désarroi de sa mère, la jeune Françoise choisit de ne jamais revoir les siens et de rester chez les congrégées. Les *Mémoires* de la congrégation relatent l'incident : « Elle (...) se résolut pour l'amour de Dieu de se priver de voir jamais plus sa mère qui, ayant fait toutes les oppositions et résistances qu'elle put à son dessein, lui protesta enfin qu'elle ne la verrait de sa vie. »<sup>22</sup> Le choix de Françoise Rabonite va donc à l'encontre des conceptions de l'époque, puisqu'elle refuse la grandeur et le renom du grand couvent de Sainte-Claire au profit d'une compagnie sans statut, richesse ni stabilité.

Outre leur valeur anecdotique, ces trois exemples démontrent que, lors de ses premières années à Toulouse, la communauté ursuline a maille à partir avec la bonne société qui, bien

20. ADHG, 221H-15, Professions de foi, f. 226.

21. Parayre, *Chronique*, part. 2, p. 87-116.

22. ADHG, 221H-37, *Mémoires*.

qu'elle ne conteste pas la valeur de son école, répugne néanmoins à voir ses propres filles s'engager dans un tel établissement. Il n'en faut guère plus pour que Marguerite de Vigier, la fondatrice, se rende à l'évidence : l'avenir de son entreprise est en danger si elle n'agit pas bientôt. Ainsi, en 1609, elle prend une décision si importante qu'elle change à jamais la nature institutionnelle de son établissement.

#### LES CATÉCHISTES CHOISISSENT LE CLOÎTRE

En 1609, la maison sise rue des Trois-Rois-Vieux compte 27 congrégées et ne cesse de grandir. Entre 1610 et 1616, 19 jeunes femmes viennent s'y joindre, et l'école elle-même accueille un nombre grandissant d'internes et d'externes. Cependant, malgré ces auspices favorables, Marguerite de Vigier craint que son œuvre ne soit fragilisée par le manque de statut et de reconnaissance officielle de la maison. En effet, elle n'a à cette époque pour seuls alliés haut placés que le cardinal-archevêque François de Joyeuse et le conseiller parlementaire Arnaud Bourret<sup>23</sup>. Afin d'assurer l'avenir de son établissement, elle convient avec ses consœurs de se procurer l'approbation papale. Pour ce faire, elle demande à son frère, Antoine de Vigier, de la Congrégation de la doctrine chrétienne, d'aller plaider à Rome pour obtenir du pape l'élévation de la congrégation en un Ordre religieux sous clôture perpétuelle<sup>24</sup>.

De ce fait, ces congrégées indépendantes souhaitent, volontairement, se soumettre au contrôle épiscopal et devenir religieuses cloîtrées. Bien qu'une telle décision semble rendre impossible l'enseignement des externes, les documents sont sans équivoque : loin d'être imposés par les autorités ecclésiastiques, claustration et passage en religion proviennent directement de la requête des Ursulines elles-mêmes. Mais pourquoi donc abandonner leur liberté de mouvement et leur indépendance pour se soumettre au « joug de la religion »<sup>25</sup>, perdant ainsi tout droit à l'initiative et,

23. ADHG, 221H-15, Professions de foi, et 221H-37, *Mémoires*.

24. ADHG, 221H-37, *Mémoires*, et Parayre, *Chronique*, part. 1, p. 123.

25. Parayre, *Chronique*, part. 1, p. 132.



pis encore, à l'interaction avec les externes ? Comment les Ursulines se proposent-elles de rester fidèles à leur vocation d'enseignantes et de catéchistes si elles sont enfermées dans l'isolement du couvent ?

C'est dans les *Mémoires* de la communauté que l'on trouve la clé du mystère. Le chapitre concernant l'année 1609 indique bien que Vigier envisage sa requête comme un moyen pragmatique d'assurer l'avenir de son établissement. Intitulé « Comme la mère de Vigier envoya à Rome pour assurer la vocation par la religion », il révèle les craintes de la fondatrice, soucieuse que sa congrégation, qui s'agrandit sans cesse depuis cinq ans, ne soit un jour victime de trop d'opposition et en vienne à être détruite. Réaliste, elle voit l'entrée en religion comme un recours efficace, comme l'explique le manuscrit :

[Elle] entra en appréhension que, par quelque artifice du diable, cette compagnie ne vint un jour à se dissiper ; et désirant de l'assurer pour l'avenir, elle se résolut avec lesdites filles d'envoyer à Rome pour y faire intervenir l'autorité du saint Père, lequel elles supplièrent de vouloir ériger leur maison en monastère de sainte Ursule<sup>26</sup>.

La décision d'entrer dans les Ordres semble donc palliative : trouver un statut reconnu et stable, ou risquer la dissolution. Si elles s'étaient senties en parfaite sécurité en tant que simple congrégation, les Ursulines n'auraient certainement pas opté pour la forme conventuelle. Parayre lui-même comprend cette décision comme un geste pratique quand il écrit : « Elle se sentit fortement inspirée d'ériger cette congrégation en religion, pour l'assurer par ce moyen le plus efficace de tous. »<sup>27</sup> La décision d'embrasser la vie monastique paraît, du moins initialement, motivée par le désir d'éviter la possible suppression de leur congrégation. Ainsi, en 1609, Toulouse est le premier établissement d'Ursulines françaises à demander l'entrée officielle dans les Ordres et ouvre la voie à toutes les autres branches françaises qui, au cours du siècle, seront transformées elles aussi en couvents.

26. ADHG, 221H-37.

27. Parayre, *Chronique*, part. 1, p. 129.

## LA CLÔTURE, GARANTE DE L'ACTION ENSEIGNANTE

Il n'est pas question ici d'affirmer que les congrégées toulousaines n'ont pas pour la vie contemplative du cloître le plus grand respect. Force est cependant de constater que la nature active de leur vocation ne les y prédispose pas. Or la demande d'élévation s'avérera être l'une des décisions les plus visionnaires prises par Marguerite de Vigier durant son mandat à la tête de la communauté. D'une part, elle répond parfaitement aux désirs des familles parlementaires toulousaines et permet de donner à sa maison un statut officiel. D'autre part, comme le constate Linda Leirheimer dans son étude des Ursulines de France, la clôture leur permet de fonder un nouvel idéal de la communauté religieuse, un idéal qui est, par sa subtilité et son adaptation des principes monacaux, plus original que celui des congrégations non cloîtrées<sup>28</sup>. La conventualisation représente donc un développement constructif et libérateur pour la communauté.

Néanmoins, le progrès n'est pas sans délai. En 1609, en accord avec les décrets tridentins interdisant la formation de nouveaux Ordres, Paul V refuse l'entrée en religion aux congrégées ; il leur demande, par l'intermédiaire d'Antoine de Vigier qu'il renvoie à Toulouse, de se conformer aux règles et aux statuts d'un Ordre déjà confirmé. Avec son ascétisme modéré, particulièrement adapté à la vocation enseignante, l'Ordre de saint Augustin semble un choix naturel et, en 1614, Vigier revient donc à Rome pour finaliser la procédure<sup>29</sup>. Il en revient porteur d'une bulle papale datée du 9 avril 1614 et ordonnant l'élévation de la congrégation de Sainte-Ursule en couvent de l'Ordre de saint Augustin<sup>30</sup>.

Cependant, le succès de l'initiative ursuline reste mesuré ; en effet la définition papale d'une maison des religieuses s'avère bien différente de ce que les congrégées ont en tête. L'usage du lexique monastique dans le document papal, intitulé *Bulle*

28. Linda Leirheimer, « Redefining convent space », 211.

29. ADHG, 221H-37, *Mémoires*, chap. 9.

30. ADHG, 221H-37, *Mémoires*.

*d'érection des Ursulines congrégées en religion de l'Ordre des ermites de saint Augustin*, démontre que le pape met les Ursulines au rang des religieuses cloîtrées traditionnelles. Le texte le confirme :

[Les sœurs vivront] sous le joug de la religion, sous perpétuelle clôture et observance régulière et sous la juridiction, visitation, correction et obéissance du révérendissime archevêque de Toulouse... Elles devront faire les vœux de pauvreté, de chasteté et obéissance et néanmoins vaquer à l'instruction et institution des susdites filles... à la charge que lesdites filles, durant qu'elles demeureront dans ledit monastère, gardent la clôture<sup>31</sup>.

Paul V transforme donc les congrégées en nonnes et ne mentionne leur vocation enseignante que tant qu'elle se cantonne aux pensionnaires, comme c'est la coutume dans les monastères établis. La bulle retire aux Ursulines toutes leurs particularités en leur interdisant de tenir une école pour externes : le plan qui, selon Vigier, devait assurer la sécurité des Ursulines paraît s'être retourné contre elles pour réprimer leur vocation active.

En effet, la bulle de 1614 ne garantit pas une place légitime dans la mission éducatrice de la Contre-Réforme toulousaine. La protection du pape n'y est assurée qu'au prix de la liberté de catéchiser celles qui vivent hors du couvent. Or cela va à l'encontre de l'essence même de la vocation ursuline, et c'est bientôt l'insurrection dans la petite congrégation. En effet, la plupart des congrégées avaient choisi les Ursulines pour leur mission pédagogique active qui, au contraire des couvents traditionnels, permettait l'enseignement et l'instruction religieuse des filles de toute condition sociale. Ainsi, six des 26 congrégées refusent de prendre l'habit à moins que la bulle ne soit complétée par un bref mentionnant expressément leurs devoirs de catéchistes et d'enseignantes envers la population féminine de la ville ; les *Mémoires* racontent : « Il s'en trouva six qui, mues d'un zèle pour l'institut de la doctrine chrétienne, craignant que la religion le fît quitter, d'autant que le saint Père ne parlait point en sa bulle des filles des classes, refusèrent de s'engager en la religion pour en ce cas le maintenir. »<sup>32</sup>

31. ADGH, 221H-4.

32. ADHG, 221H-37, *Mémoires*, f. 44-47, et *Chronique*, part. 1, p. 109. Brigitte Seysol, veuve du noble Pierre Delpech, et qui se joint à Marguerite

C'est Jaquete de Maynie qui, convaincue que l'enseignement est la raison d'être de la congrégation, s'investit le plus activement dans cette démarche de résistance contre la bulle qui semble nier cette vocation active ; avec les autres contestataires, elle persuade ses consœurs de ne pas prendre l'habit de religion avant que le décret ne soit modifié pour inclure les externes<sup>33</sup>. S'ensuivent de longs mois d'attente alors qu'Antoine de Vigier part de nouveau pour Rome plaider la cause des Toulousaines. Le 16 octobre 1616, un bref est accordé ; son titre, *Bref du pape pour joindre l'institut de la doctrine chrétienne à la vie monastique*, est tout aussi révélateur que celui de la bulle qu'il vient modifier. Le pape ordonne maintenant aux Ursulines, de façon explicite, d'enseigner les savoir-faire de base ainsi que la doctrine catholique aux jeunes externes qui se présentent à leurs leçons. Il déclare :

Il est ordonné que lesdites religieuses instruiront gratuitement lesdites filles en leur enseignant en premier lieu la piété et la vertu dignes d'une vierge chrétienne, comme le sommaire de la doctrine catholique... Et pour mieux attirer les jeunes filles à leur école, les religieuses leur apprendront à lire, à écrire, à travailler de l'aiguille<sup>34</sup>.

Ainsi, en 1616, les Ursulines toulousaines obtiennent enfin le bref qui les transforme en religieuses spécialement mandatées pour le catéchisme et l'alphabétisation des filles. Un tel résultat relève du tour de force, puisque la congrégation, d'abord définie par le pape comme contemplative et cloîtrée, parvient maintenant à retourner cette décision en obtenant le droit de déroger à la règle de la clôture absolue prohibant tout contact avec l'extérieur. L'obtention de ce bref, sept ans après la requête initiale de 1609, décide les Ursulines à accepter le voile de novices et à devenir religieuses. À l'exception de l'une d'entre elles, dont on ne sait rien si ce n'est qu'elle quitte ses consœurs, et d'une autre qui meurt avant la cérémonie<sup>35</sup>, toutes les congrégées font leur profession de foi en décembre 1616. La congrégation de la rue des Trois-Rois-Vieux est désormais protégée de l'opposition locale et gagne, dans les

de Vigier dès 1606, à l'âge de 80 ans, meurt de vieillesse en 1614. Il ne reste donc que 26 congrégées.

33. Parayre, *Chronique*, part. 2, p. 45-87.

34. ADHG, 221H-25, f. 26.

35. Mme de Causan, veuve, ADHG, 221H-37.

mois qui suivent, sept sœurs converses et cinq sœurs de chœur. Au cours de son histoire, le couvent comptera en général entre 35 et 40 sœurs professes<sup>36</sup>.

Alors que le processus de conventualisation commencé à Toulouse dès 1609 n'atteint sa conclusion qu'en 1616, la congrégation provinciale a été prise de vitesse par celle du faubourg Saint-Jacques de Paris, qui entre en religion en 1612 et inaugure ainsi le mouvement qui, au cours des années 1620 et 1630, transforme toutes les maisons ursulines du royaume<sup>37</sup>. Cependant, la bulle de Paris ne mentionne pas spécifiquement l'enseignement des externes, et cette omission devient vite une source constante de dissension au sein de la communauté, qui ne sait déterminer absolument si son vœu d'enseignement ne s'applique qu'aux pensionnaires ou s'il s'étend aux jeunes externes des classes<sup>38</sup>. Ainsi, quand Toulouse décide de différer son entrée en religion jusqu'à l'obtention d'un bref plus précis, elle s'épargne en fait bien des soucis à plus longue échéance.

#### LES RELIGIEUSES ENSEIGNANTES

Les Ursulines toulousaines s'adaptent facilement à leur double nature, qui combine claustration et interaction avec les externes. Dans le cahier des constitutions, le chapitre consacré à la clôture est de loin le plus long et l'isolement est une réalité physique que rappelle la présence de hautes murailles, de grilles et de parloirs séparant hermétiquement le « dedans » du « dehors », le monde religieux et le monde séculier. Ni les sœurs ni leurs pensionnaires ne sont autorisées à s'intéresser au monde et elles sont strictement

36. Estimation à partir des documents ADHG, 221H-15, Professions de foi, et 221H-29, registre des professions et la *Chronique* de Parayre. Voir aussi Sherri Klassen, « Greying in the cloister : The Ursulines, Life Course in Eighteenth-Century France », *Journal of Women's History*, 12.4 (2001), 93.

37. Hélène Leymont, *Madame de Sainte Beuve et les Ursulines de Paris, 1562-1630* (Lyon, 1890), et M.-A. Jégou, *Les Ursulines du faubourg Saint-Jacques à Paris, 1607-1662. Origines d'un monastère apostolique*, Paris, 1981.

38. M.-C. Gueudré, *Histoire de l'Ordre des Ursulines en France*, 3 vol., Paris, 1957-1963, vol. 1, 104-6.

isolées de la société. Leur claustration personnelle est respectée et les sœurs ne sont autorisées à quitter l'enceinte du couvent qu'en cas de guerre, de maladie contagieuse, d'incendie ou d'inondation. Si elles sont autorisées à aller fonder d'autres branches de la congrégation de part et d'autre, ce n'est que par licence expresse de l'archevêque<sup>39</sup>. Cependant, les constitutions rappellent aussi aux Ursulines la nature active de leur vocation :

Elles ne se doivent pas contenter d'être simples religieuses mais aussi régentes de la doctrine chrétienne pour y vaquer selon qu'elles y seront employées et on tâchera de leur faire bien reconnaître l'excellence de cette vocation, et celles qui n'auront pas inclination ou disposition à ce dessein ne seront reçues en façon quelconque<sup>40</sup>.

Pragmatiques à souhait, les Ursulines trouvent une solution aussi idéale qu'elle est simple pour combiner isolement conventuel et enseignement. Les pièces réservées aux leçons des externes vont représenter une sorte de sas de sécurité, à mi-chemin entre le monastère et le monde séculier. Aménagées dans la muraille de l'édifice, les portes laissent, chaque matin, entrer les jeunes externes dans leur classe avant d'être refermées immédiatement à clé derrière elles. Puis s'ouvre une autre porte, intérieure celle-ci, pour laisser entrer les maîtresses ; elle est également refermée à clé par une sœur portière, chargée de s'assurer de l'hermétisme de la clôture et du bon déroulement de cette procédure quotidienne. Après les cours, les maîtresses rentrent d'abord au couvent par cette même issue, puis les externes sont rendues au monde par la porte extérieure. Ainsi, la salle de classe des Ursulines est le seul lieu où les sœurs entrent en contact avec les agents du monde, et ce sans jamais effectivement briser leur vœu de clôture, puisqu'elles restent dans l'enceinte du bâtiment<sup>41</sup>. Par ce simple ajustement à la règle conventuelle, la piété du couvent peut ainsi se communiquer au monde, permettant à la classe des externes d'agir comme un pont reliant l'intérieur et l'extérieur du couvent ; Linda Lierheimer parle, chez les Ursulines, d'un « continuum entre le couvent et le monde au-delà de ses limi-

39. ADHG, 221H-28 bis, 5, f. 20.

40. ADHG, 221H-28 bis, 5, *Constitutions*, f. 51.

41. *Ibid.*, f. 12.

42. Linda Lierheimer, « Redefining convent space », 218.

tes »<sup>42</sup>. L'exemple toulousain ne fait que conforter sa théorie selon laquelle les Ursulines ont ouvert le couvent vers le monde. Bien que soucieuses de ne jamais véritablement enfreindre les règles monastiques, les Ursulines de Toulouse savent les adapter à leurs besoins de façon subtile autant que fonctionnelle.

Ainsi, les Ursulines ne se considèrent pas comme de traditionnelles religieuses et la tension entre la contemplation monastique et l'impulsion éducatrice se fait sentir partout. Dans le but précis d'instruire et de catéchiser les filles de Toulouse, même les plus humbles, elles sont déterminées à être les architectes d'un nouveau catholicisme féminin qui, s'il les inclut, dépasse néanmoins le cercle des familles privilégiées. Pour elles, la Contre-Réforme ne peut être un succès que si elle s'adresse au peuple autant qu'aux élites. C'est donc ce qu'elles font quand elles ouvrent un externat pour compléter l'internat traditionnel de leur établissement. Quand leur manque de statut menace de nuire à leur entreprise, elles se décident à embrasser la vie religieuse afin d'assurer l'avenir et la stabilité de leur mission. Premières Ursulines de France à demander l'élévation de leur congrégation en couvent, les Toulousaines refusent de s'engager au prix de leur vocation pédagogique populaire et, contrairement à leurs consœurs de Paris, elles ne deviennent religieuses qu'après l'obtention d'un bref papal leur permettant d'enseigner les externes. Grâce à cette décision, elles officialisent un mode de vie qui adapte la claustration conventuelle afin de permettre au cloître et au monde de se rencontrer dans les classes des externes. C'est alors la naissance du nouveau modèle de la religieuse enseignante qui, bien qu'elle-même cloîtrée, participe activement à la catholicisation des masses. Cette formule, qui connaîtra le succès que l'on sait, avec l'ouverture d'environ 320 communautés d'Ursulines en France dans le courant du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, est en partie due à l'opiniâtreté des congrégées de Toulouse et à leur fidélité à l'idéal pédagogique de leur institut.

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***Redefining Female Religious Life. French Ursulines and English Ladies in Seventeenth-Century Catholicism, Aldershot : Ashgate, 2005.***

**Résumé :**

**Introduction :**

Cet ouvrage se propose de mettre en lumière les motifs qui sous-tendent l'engouement féminin pour des vocations actives et apostoliques au cours du dix-septième siècle, ainsi que les difficultés que de telles vocations connaissent pour faire accepter leur utilité et leur bien-fondé au sein d'une société et d'une Église dont les valeurs patriarcales limitent l'engagement des femmes dans le sphère publique. À travers l'étude et la comparaison de deux cas, l'Institut de l'Anglaise Mary Ward et les ursulines françaises, il apparaît que de telles vocations, innovantes et en marge de l'orthodoxie de la vie religieuse définie pour les femmes par le Concile de Trente, si elles obtiennent le soutien officieux des populations et des clercs, connaissent de plus grandes difficultés pour remporter une approbation officielle des autorités. Leur but, leur organisation institutionnelle mais aussi, et surtout, leur pouvoir de négociation et de compromis, sont autant de facteurs déterminants dans l'issue des conflits qui les opposent à leurs détracteurs.

**Chapitre 1 – Naissance du nouveau phénomène des religieuses enseignantes**

Le dix-septième siècle est fortement marqué par ce qu'Elizabeth Rapley a appelé la « féminisation de l'Église »<sup>2</sup> ; c'est une période connue en France sous le nom de siècle des saints, qui voit le nombre de congrégations laïques et de salons dévots se multiplier, et l'engagement des femmes prendre des proportions sans précédent. Ce mouvement, s'il est particulièrement marqué en France, n'est pas unique à ce pays ; il se retrouve aux Pays-Bas avec l'essor des béguinages, et même dans le catholicisme anglais avec l'exemple de Mary Ward, jeune exilée qui, initialement entrée au noviciat des clarisses, quitte l'ordre pour fonder un Institut anglais. Mary Ward veut éduquer les filles et en faire, dès le plus jeune âge, de ferventes catholiques. C'est aussi la vocation des ursulines françaises qui ont en commun avec Mary Ward une vocation d'enseignantes visant à combler le manque flagrant d'éducation et de catéchèse des jeunes filles au sein de la Contre-Réforme.

**Chapitre 2 – Les inconvenantes institutions de femmes importunes**

Tandis que les Dames anglaises de Mary Ward et les premières ursulines françaises installées à Toulouse se concentrent initialement sur leur travail d'éducation et de catéchèse, le statut institutionnel de leurs organisations reste à définir. Il s'agit là de femmes qui souhaitent s'inscrire pleinement dans le courant apostolique de la Contre-Réforme mais qui réclament le statut de religieuses, sans adopter néanmoins la seule forme de vie reconnue pour les femmes par le Concile de Trente : la vie contemplative du cloître. L'Institut de Mary Ward s'attire les foudres de la quasi-totalité du clergé en proposant l'impensable : une Compagnie de Jésus au féminin, revendiquant pour ses consœurs le même nom, la même mission, et la même organisation que l'ordre d'Ignace de Loyola. De leur côté, les ursulines optent pour une vie « mixte » de congrégées qui sans être cloîtrées, vivent en communauté et présentent aux autorités séculières comme ecclésiastiques un profil moins scandaleux mais néanmoins hétérodoxe.

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<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Rapley, *The Dévotes. Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France*, Kingston, Ont. : McGill University Press, 1990, p. 193.



### Chapitre 3 – Négocier le genre dans un contexte de changement religieux

Les ursulines françaises et les Dames anglaises partagent le même souhait de participation à l'effort d'évangélisation de la Contre-réforme, et doivent par conséquent négocier leur place au sein d'une société et d'une Église qui ne permettent pas aux femmes de s'impliquer dans la vie publique au même titre que les hommes. Les injonctions de St Paul restent fortes dans l'Europe du dix-septième siècle ; ce chapitre montre comment Ward et les ursulines ont tenté de s'emparer des stéréotypes genrés de leur époque pour mieux justifier leur vocation en faisant usage, à divers degrés, d'une certaine « rhétorique de la féminité »<sup>3</sup> leur permettant de mettre en avant leur innocence, leur humilité et leur obéissance au dessin divin.

### Chapitre 4 – L'école au service de l'Église

Les classes des ursulines, dans leurs pensionnats comme dans leurs classes pour externes, rencontrent en France un immense succès. Là, les jeunes filles reçoivent une éducation bien meilleure que jamais auparavant, grâce à des méthodes leur permettant un apprentissage efficace de la lecture et de l'écriture de la langue française, et pour certaines d'autres matières comme le calcul ou le latin. La nouveauté des ursulines est leur organisation et leur véritable engagement pédagogique pour des élèves venues de toutes les classes sociales même les plus humbles. Le *curriculum* des sœurs de Mary Ward est plus ambitieux que celui des ursulines, qui reste assez traditionnel : chez les Dames anglaises, on peut aussi parfois apprendre le grec, l'hébreu ou même l'astronomie. Néanmoins, chez les unes comme chez les autres, c'est le catéchisme qui reste au cœur de l'enseignement dispensé : on apprend pour servir Dieu et l'Église.

### Chapitre 5 – Repousser les frontières de l'autorité féminine

Les écoles ouvertes par l'Institut et par les ursulines sont plébiscitées par les communautés locales qui y ont recours en grand nombre ; les classes ne désemplissent pas, malgré les difficultés liées au manque de statut officiel de ces entreprises. C'est en classe que ces femmes, au service de l'Église, commencent leur travail d'apostolat, en conformité avec leur vocation. Mais elles ne limitent pas leur action aux murs de leurs écoles : dans certaines communautés, les ursulines prêchent à la grille de leur établissement, tandis que d'autres demandent à partir pour le Nouveau Monde aux côtés de la mission jésuite. Les Dames de Mary Ward, quant à elles, œuvrent en Angleterre où elles détachent certains de leurs membres qui officient clandestinement comme le font les missionnaires. Ces femmes servent donc l'Église catholique à laquelle elles sont dévouées, tout en enfreignant ses règles de conduite pour les religieuses.

### Chapitre 6 – Au service de Marthe et de Marie : *modus vivendi*

C'est en analysant les modes opératoires privilégiés par les ursulines et par les Dames anglaises que les spécificités de ces deux mouvements apparaissent le plus clairement. Les ursulines, cherchant à pérenniser leur action, prennent rapidement conscience que leur manque de statut officiel ne peut que nuire à leur avenir. Afin de mieux inscrire leur vocation dans l'esprit de l'Église post-tridentine, elles demandent donc leur élévation au statut d'ordre religieux cloîtré, perdant ainsi de leur autonomie et de leur mobilité, mais gagnant en stabilité et soutien officiel. Grâce à d'habiles négociations, leur forme de vie est reconnue comme partie intégrante de la Contre-Réforme, servant Marthe dans les salles de classe et Marie dans le cloître. Mary Ward, elle, choisit au contraire de ne rien compromettre de sa vocation

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<sup>3</sup> Alison Weber, *Teresa of Ávila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*, Princeton, NJ : Princeton University Press, 1990.

jésuite. La conséquence de ce choix est que son Institut duplique aussi exactement que possible le mode de vie jésuite, mais reste sans approbation officielle.

#### Chapitre 7 – Modernité et tradition : l'imitation du cloître

Le mode opératoire choisi par chacune des communautés montre combien il est délicat de proposer une vie qui serve une vocation innovante tout en restant fidèle à l'esprit de l'Église. Dans les deux cas, et ce malgré les revendications tout à fait hétérodoxes de Mary Ward pour un engagement religieux et missionnaire, ursulines et Dames anglaises cherchent à imiter un modèle régulier approuvé par l'Église. Ce modèle (le cloître pour les ursulines, la Compagnie de Jésus pour Mary Ward) est pour elles l'expression du sacré, un mode de vie où chaque instant a sa fonction dans un *horarium* précis, et où toutes les actions des religieuses sont dédiées à Dieu. L'esprit de dévotion est aussi zélé chez elles que chez les religieuses d'ordres plus traditionnels, comme en témoignent les nombreux exemples d'ascèse, parfois extrême, pratiquée par des femmes qui doivent – selon leurs règles – préserver l'intégrité de leur corps pour avoir la force d'enseigner quotidiennement.

#### Chapitre 8 – Quitter Dieu pour Dieu : l'apostolat comme acte de renoncement

Les ursulines françaises et les Dames anglaises revendiquent nombre des caractéristiques de la vie monastique traditionnelle. Même si elles ne vivent pas sous une forme de clôture hermétique, elles expriment dans leurs écrits leur admiration et leur soutien à leurs consœurs d'ordres plus strictement cloîtrés ; l'idéal contemplatif reste pour elle le plus pur et le plus direct vers la vie dite « parfaite » et l'union divine. Quand elles choisissent la voie de la pédagogie, ces femmes sont conscientes de se priver de cet idéal de contemplation et de prière perpétuelle. Elles choisissent de dédier leur vie au Christ d'une autre manière, plus nouvelle et moins noble : l'apostolat devient pour elles une forme d'abnégation et de don de soi à la cause de l'Église et de la Contre-Réforme.

#### Conclusion

Les Dames anglaises et les ursulines françaises souhaitent servir l'Église dans son effort d'évangélisation et de reconquête, grâce à des formes de vies qui, bien qu'innovantes, ne peuvent selon elles manquer d'emporter l'approbation des autorités qui constatent leur succès. Ces deux communautés espèrent que leur utilité, puisqu'elle est indéniable, suffira à leur obtenir l'assentiment papal. Mais l'histoire des ursulines françaises et de l'Institut de Mary Ward montre combien cet espoir est illusoire. Ce n'est qu'en donnant à leur mode de vie un profil acceptable, en embrassant la clôture, en formulant des vœux perpétuels et en se soumettant à l'autorité des évêques que les ursulines accèdent à la reconnaissance ; pour Mary Ward, qui refuse cette voie et réclame une Compagnie de Jésus au féminin, la sentence est lourde, l'Institut est éradiqué, et déclaré nuisible à l'Église. Au dix-septième siècle, il est dangereux d'oser franchir les frontières des rôles établis pour les femmes par la société et l'Église. Pour n'avoir pas su respecter les limites imposées aux interventions féminines dans la sphère publique, Mary Ward est déclarée hérétique. Pourtant, pour elle comme pour les ursulines, l'apostolat est une forme de dévouement et d'abandon de soi à Dieu, pour des femmes qui renoncent à l'idéal de la vie contemplative pour servir la cause autrement.

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# Redefining Female Religious Life

French Ursulines and English Ladies in Seventeenth-  
Century Catholicism

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ASHGATE

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Published by  
Ashgate Publishing Limited  
Gower House  
Croft Road  
Aldershot  
Hants GU11 3HR  
England

Ashgate Publishing Company  
Suite 420  
101 Cherry Street  
Burlington, VT 05401-4405  
USA

Ashgate website: <http://www.ashgate.com>

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

Lux-Sterritt, Laurence

Redefining female religious life : French Ursulines and English Ladies in seventeenth-century Catholicism.—(Catholic Christendom, 1300–1700)

1. Ursulines—History—17th century 2. Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary—History—17th century 3. Women in the Catholic Church—History—17th century

I. Title

271.9'74

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Lux-Sterritt, Laurence.

Redefining female religious life : French Ursulines and English Ladies in seventeenth-century Catholicism / Laurence Lux-Sterritt.

p. cm.—(Catholic Christendom, 1300–1700)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-7546-3716-6 (alk. paper)

1. Ursulines—France—History—17th century. 2. Women in the Catholic Church—France—History—17th century. 3. Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary—History—17th century. 4. Women in the Catholic Church—England—History—17th century. I. Title. II. Series.

BX4543.F8L89 2006

271'.974044'09032—dc22

2005010976

ISBN-10: 0 7546 3716 6

Printed and bound in Great Britain by MPG Books Ltd, Bodmin, Cornwall

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**« Les religieuses en mouvement. Ursulines et Dames anglaises à l'aube du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle », *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine* 52.4 (2005) 7–23.**

**Résumé :**

Les premières décennies de la Contre-Réforme témoignent de l'engouement féminin pour une vocation qui, inspirée par l'imitation du Christ, se définit à la fois comme religieuse et active. Or, si des congrégations féminines se forment sur le modèle des clercs réguliers, les décrets du concile de Trente (1545-1563) déclarent clairement que la vraie religieuse ne peut être que cloîtrée. Les ursulines françaises doivent choisir entre liberté de mouvement et statut religieux, tandis que les Dames anglaises de Mary Ward connaissent les mêmes difficultés quand elles se proposent de participer à la mission de reconversion de leur pays au catholicisme. Les objections de leurs détracteurs, empreintes d'une misogynie profonde, expriment des peurs complexes. Ces femmes en mouvement qui se réclament de la religion enfreignent pourtant les décrets tridentins ; elles font fi des normes de l'orthodoxie et, en outre, usurpent parfois certains rôles conçus comme exclusivement masculins. La religieuse à vocation missionnaire au XVII<sup>ème</sup> siècle représente une sérieuse menace pour l'ordre établi, et doit faire face à de très fortes oppositions.

8 573 mots

mots-clés : ursulines françaises ; Mary Ward ; clôture ; apostolat ; couvents

**Présentation du texte :**

Rédigé fin 2003-début 2004, cet article s'inscrit dans un mouvement d'infléchissement de la direction de ma carrière de jeune chercheuse. D'une part, j'envisageais de prendre part à la campagne de recrutement des maîtres de conférences en France, et je souhaitais donc publier en langue française. D'autre part, je souhaitais mettre en regard les deux pôles d'intérêt de ma recherche (l'Institut de Mary Ward et les ursulines françaises) dans un article comparatif montrant que, si les circonstances locales et nationales des deux entreprises différaient très largement, les objections qui leur étaient faites étaient tout à fait comparables, notamment pour ce qui concerne le paramètre essentiel de la claustration religieuse. Au dix-septième siècle, la clôture apparaît comme l'étalon de la vie religieuse au féminin ; si elle peut souffrir quelques rares aménagements, comme dans le cas des ursulines, elle ne peut en aucun cas permettre la liberté de mouvement des femmes. Cette règle trahit une profonde méfiance vis-à-vis de la femme, que l'on croit naturellement encline au vice et incapable de faire le bien ou de servir l'Église sans les garde-fous d'un contrôle clérical permanent et d'une clôture empêchant un contact jugé dangereux avec les populations.

## Les religieuses en mouvement. Ursulines françaises et Dames anglaises à l'aube du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle

Laurence LUX-STERRIT

« Une religieuse hors de sa clôture est [...] comme un arbre hors de terre; [...] comme un poisson hors de l'eau [...]; comme une brebis hors de sa bergerie et en danger d'être dévorée des loups [...] et par conséquent dans un état tout à fait opposé à la vie régulière qu'elle a embrassée »<sup>1</sup>.

Ces mots, écrits en 1681 dans l'un des nombreux traités du genre qui paraissent à cette époque, trahissent un questionnement profond quant à la nature de la femme d'Église et plus particulièrement quant à sa relation avec la liberté de mouvement. Le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle marque en effet une ère nouvelle pour le catholicisme, un renouveau qui se caractérise entre autres par une certaine « féminisation » de l'Église<sup>2</sup>. Sur le sol français, l'essor est général : partout se créent des salons dévots, partout de nouvelles écoles qui, pour contrecarrer les établissements protestants, se consacrent désormais à l'instruction religieuse des filles ainsi que des garçons, inscrivant la femme au cœur même de l'impulsion de la Contre-Réforme<sup>3</sup>. Dans l'Angleterre protestante et malgré la clandestinité à laquelle il est condamné, le renouveau catholique se manifeste par le soubresaut d'énergie qui ranime alors la communauté récusante. Tandis que les prêtres missionnaires et les Jésuites en particulier entreprennent de reconquérir leur terre natale, ils sont aidés par la participation de femmes sans qui la mission n'aurait pu connaître le succès qu'on lui attribue<sup>4</sup>.

1. Jean-Baptiste THIERS, *Traité de la clôture des religieuses*, Paris, Dezallier, 1681, p. 243.

2. Elizabeth RAPLEY, *The Dévotes: Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France*, Kingston (Ont.), McGill Queen's University Press, 1990, p. 193-196.

3. Voir entre autres les travaux d'Henri BRÉMOND, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France depuis la fin des guerres de religion jusqu'à nos jours*, 11 vols, Paris, A. Colin, 1971; Pierre CHAUNU, *Église, culture et société: essai sur Réforme et Contre-Réforme*, Paris, SEDES, 1984 et René TAVENBAUX, *Le catholicisme dans la France classique, 1610-1717*, 2 vol., Paris, SEDES, 1980.

4. Certaines études se penchent sur le rôle actif joué par les femmes dans l'Angleterre récusante: John BOSSY, *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850*, Londres, Darton, Longman et Todd, 1976; Roland CONNELLY, *Women of the Catholic Resistance in England 1540-1680*, Durham, Pentland Press, 1997; Alexandra WALSHAM, *Church Papists: Catholicism, Conformity and Confessional Polemic in Early Modern England*, Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 1993 et Marie ROWLANDS, « Recusant women 1560-1640 », in Mary PRIOR (dir.), *Women in English Society 1500-1800*, Londres, Methuen, 1985.

Cet élan de reconquête nécessite bien sûr l'action et la mobilité physique. Or, si le concile de Trente (1545-1563) accorde aux hommes d'Église le droit de servir une vocation apostolique dans le siècle, il impose au contraire la clôture aux congrégations féminines : en 1566, la bulle *Circa Pastoralis* de Pie V renforce la décrétale *Periculoso* de 1299 et réaffirme du même coup les traditions médiévales qui n'offrent à la religieuse d'autre alternative que le couvent. Le décret est catégorique : « s'il se trouvait par hasard des religieuses qui, s'appuyant sur quelque coutume, même immémoriale [...] s'opposassent par opiniâtreté à cette clôture [...] les ordinaires et les supérieurs les pourront contraindre comme rebelles et incorrigibles »<sup>5</sup>. Le paradoxe est évident : dans une ère où l'effort catholique trouve en la femme une alliée toute dévouée, celle-ci, si elle se veut compter aux rangs de l'Église, se voit interdire le mouvement essentiel à toute activité missionnaire. La femme dont la vocation serait à la fois religieuse et apostolique fait donc face à un dilemme : le choix de la religion implique l'abandon de tout engagement dans le monde, tandis que le choix de l'action rend tout statut religieux impossible.

#### RELIGIEUSES ET ACTIVES : DES CONGRÉGATIONS CALQUÉES SUR LES CLERCS RÉGULIERS

À travers l'Europe du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, l'impulsion apostolique féminine se fait sentir de façon très nette : de nombreuses communautés se forment spontanément sur le modèle évangélique de la vie mixte, plus proche de la vie du Christ que celui proposé par les moniales traditionnelles. Or, malgré leur ardent désir d'être approuvées par le Saint-Siège, ces congrégations ne bénéficient alors d'aucun statut religieux officiel, puisqu'elles ne se conforment pas aux règles monastiques, mais au contraire, délaissent la sédentarité et la séparation qui vont de pair avec le couvent, pour se dévouer à un apostolat demandant une interaction quotidienne avec le peuple. Ainsi réunies dans un but pieux, ces femmes qui entendent faire partie de l'Église, en enfreignent pourtant les règles ; leur histoire est scandée par les difficultés liées à leur décision de ne pas se cloître.

Parmi ces nouvelles communautés actives à but religieux, les Ursulines sont le fer de lance de la mission pédagogique et catéchétique française. Si la recherche fait en général honneur à la congrégation de Paris, c'est pourtant bien la fondation de Toulouse, fort méconnue, qui lance en 1604 l'initiative ursuline en France hors de la Provence et du Comtat Venaissin. Simples congrégées dénuées de statut officiel, elles sont prêtes à braver l'opprobre pour se vouer à une vocation qu'elles estiment plus sainte même que la vie monastique traditionnelle. L'apostolat se trouve en effet au cœur de la démarche ursuline et les jeunes femmes notent que c'est leur mode de vie, si proche de celui du Christ, qui donne à leur action toute sa valeur :

5. Cité dans J.-B. THIERS, *Traité de la clôture...*, op. cit., p. 68.



« La vie des Ursulines n'est autre que celle que le fils de Dieu a menée en ce monde, et sa Sainte mère avec les apôtres après sa montée au ciel. Voilà les modèles et les exemplaires de leur état et profession: c'est la vie mixte mêlée de la contemplation et de l'action [...] la voie la plus assurée et la plus profitable à la gloire de Dieu, au bien de son Église et au salut des âmes »<sup>6</sup>.

L'imitation du Christ semble ratifier une vocation religieuse non cloîtrée; c'est elle qui justifie et motive à la fois l'entreprise des premières Ursulines, qui se perçoivent comme des « anges tutélaires » envoyées par Dieu afin d'assurer le salut des âmes des jeunes élèves et des femmes qu'elles instruisent. Leur sexe, loin d'être incompatible avec une telle vocation apostolique, fait au contraire partie du dessein divin, qui utilise les instruments les plus fragiles et les plus humbles pour réaliser son œuvre. Selon elles, Dieu « se sert de ces chétifs instruments pour faire la guerre à l'enfer, pour détruire le vice, établir le règne des vertus et conserver l'innocence dans les âmes ». La femme a donc sa place au sein des efforts de reconquête du peuple entrepris par les mouvements missionnaires de la Contre-Réforme; la congrégée se veut l'instrument de Dieu et l'alliée de l'Église.

La vigueur de ces vocations n'est en aucun cas limitée au continent et l'on constate qu'outre-Manche, bien des fidèles s'investissent aussi corps et âme dans la lutte contre le protestantisme établi. Si un nombre croissant de dévotes n'hésite plus à s'expatrier pour entrer dans les Ordres, la survie de la communauté récusante et le second souffle vital qu'elle trouve sous le règne de Jacques I<sup>er</sup> doivent beaucoup aux efforts de celles qui, restées en Angleterre, se résignent à demeurer laïques faute de couvents sur leur sol natal. À ces deux solutions traditionnelles – *aut maritus, aut murus*, l'enfermement domestique ou celui du cloître – l'Institut des Dames anglaises qui voit le jour à Saint-Omer en 1611 vient ajouter une alternative sans précédent. C'est la première fondation anglaise à s'éloigner de la tradition cloîtrée: à l'instar des Ursulines françaises, les disciples de la fondatrice Mary Ward se targuent d'imiter les clercs réguliers et de servir l'Église tout en demeurant dans le siècle.

En 1616, alors qu'elles tentent de gagner l'approbation pontificale, elles rédigent le *Ratio Instituti*, document qui explique la raison d'être de leur Institut:

« Puisque l'Angleterre dans son grand malheur a tant besoin de travailleurs spirituels et puisque les prêtres, apôtres de cette récolte, s'y emploient si assidûment, il semble que face à cette même nécessité spirituelle, le sexe féminin doive et puisse lui aussi, selon sa propre mesure, apporter une contribution comparable »<sup>7</sup>.

Le lien causal qui s'établit ici, entre le besoin de missionnaires en Angleterre et l'entreprise de Mary Ward, traduit avec simplicité l'esprit pragmatique

<sup>6</sup> Archives départementales de la Haute-Garonne [désormais AD31], 221H-37, f. 2, *Mémoires sur le commencement et progrès de l'ordre de sainte Ursule*, Cahier 1604-1621.

<sup>7</sup> Archives du Bar Convent, York [désormais ABC], B18, *Ratio Instituti*, f. 1. Fondé clandestinement par les Dames anglaises en 1686, le Bar Convent est encore en activité à ce jour et a l'honneur d'être le plus ancien couvent du royaume. L'Institut de la Bienheureuse Vierge Marie y conserve une partie de ses archives.

de l'Institut. Loin de refuser le cloître dans un mouvement de rébellion contre les canons de l'Église, c'est dans un esprit de service que les Dames anglaises choisissent l'action. Comme les Ursulines, elles ne voient pas d'incompatibilité entre leur sexe et leur vocation, mais plutôt une réponse fonctionnelle à un besoin concret car, selon la fondatrice, si les garçons bénéficient déjà de l'aide des prêtres missionnaires, les filles, tout aussi nombreuses, sont laissées pour compte. Les Dames anglaises se proposent donc de compléter le mouvement masculin en catéchant l'autre moitié de la population, assurant ainsi la continuation de la foi chez les futures mères de famille<sup>8</sup>. Ainsi, elles s'inscrivent au sein du mouvement de la Contre-Réforme et calquent leur formation sur le modèle de la mission jésuite alors si ardente ; elles quittent d'abord leur pays pour être formées sur le continent avant de s'appliquer à instruire les populations d'Europe et surtout d'Angleterre, où beaucoup retournent clandestinement<sup>9</sup>.

Initialement, Ursulines françaises et Dames anglaises adoptent un fonctionnement similaire. Libres de leurs mouvements, elles ouvrent des écoles où internes et externes apprennent à lire et à écrire tout en acquérant les rudiments de la doctrine catholique. Dès le début, elles se déplacent non seulement de ville en ville mais aussi (surtout dans le cas de l'Institut) de pays en pays, fondant partout de nouveaux établissements. Durant leurs premières années, ces nouvelles religieuses apostoliques présentent pour la plupart un profil qui n'a *a priori* rien de menaçant, ni pour l'Église ni pour la société patriarcale dans laquelle elles évoluent : œuvres charitables, visite des malades et des prisonniers et enseignement des filles sont en effet depuis toujours des activités féminines. Cependant, Ursulines françaises et Dames anglaises ne se limitent pas à ces tâches philanthropiques et domestiques : elles entreprennent non seulement de sauvegarder la foi là où elle est présente, mais aussi de convertir des femmes de mauvaise vie, des non-croyantes et des huguenotes voire, à l'occasion, des hommes. Cette mission n'a alors plus rien de féminin et ressemble de très près à celle des prêtres et des clercs séculiers.

Le nouveau modèle de la religieuse à vocation apostolique soulève des problèmes d'ordre déontologique autant que constitutionnel. Par son défi à la tradition, la religieuse fait preuve d'un esprit d'indépendance qui ne peut que mettre en péril l'ordre établi. C'est donc à cause de sa vocation prosélyte qu'elle se met à dos tant de détracteurs, dont les deux griefs essentiels – l'un lié aux préconceptions misogynes du siècle, l'autre centré sur des considérations

8. ABC, B18, *Brevis Declaratio*.

9. La fondation créée par Mary Ward ne recevra jamais de nom officiel et nous la désignerons ici sous le nom de l'Institut des Dames anglaises. Cette première phase de l'Institut prend officiellement fin en 1631, quand Urbain VIII ordonne sa suppression à l'issue d'années de controverse. Cependant, la fondation renaîtra de ses cendres et finira par être approuvée par Clément XI en 1702. Cette seconde phase connaîtra plus de succès que la première, puisque le nouvel Institut, nommé Institut de la Bienheureuse Vierge Marie, est aujourd'hui implanté dans le monde entier.

canoniques – se concentrent sur la liberté de mouvement et l'interaction avec le monde. En tête de la liste de doléances dressée par le clergé en réponse à la vague d'innovation qu'il s'efforce de contenir, les déplacements excessifs sont jugés nuisibles aux mœurs des femmes, qu'elles soient d'Église ou pas ; ils sont également incompatibles avec le statut religieux féminin, qui exige la soumission à la clôture. Le préjudice est donc double, condamnant les Ursulines françaises et les Dames anglaises à cause de leur sexe mais aussi de leurs aspirations religieuses, qui menacent les privilèges masculins.

L'opposition suscitée par leur manque de clôture met très vite en péril l'existence même de ces congrégations qui choisissent alors des voies opposées : afin d'éviter la suppression, les Ursulines françaises acceptent le voile, mais sous certaines conditions. La « congrégation féminine enseignante par excellence » inaugure ainsi une nouvelle formule, ouvrant pour la première fois les classes du cloître à des élèves externes, entreprise couronnée d'un tel succès qu'on compte en France un total de 320 communautés avant la fin du siècle<sup>10</sup>. Face aux mêmes difficultés les Dames anglaises, elles, refusent de compromettre leur liberté de mouvement ; malgré la controverse et la multitude de difficultés qu'une telle décision engendre, leur vocation religieuse se poursuit donc au sein de la société séculière, loin des restrictions du couvent.

#### LAÏQUES, INDÉPENDANTES ET SANS STATUT : LES FEMMES QUE L'ON MÉPRISE

Toute analyse des difficultés liées au déplacement des femmes à vocation religieuse se doit de considérer la nature duelle des arguments invoqués par les détracteurs des congrégations non cloîtrées. Avant même d'en venir aux considérations de statut religieux, l'opposition naît d'abord du fait qu'il s'agit du sexe dit faible. La femme, selon le trope bien connu de l'époque moderne, est non seulement plus fragile, plus vulnérable mais aussi plus susceptible d'être séduite, sa vertu et son intellect étant inférieurs à ceux de l'homme<sup>11</sup>. La mobilité géographique au féminin n'est pas sans évoquer une certaine inconstance morale, ni sans remettre en question honnêteté et humilité. La liberté du corps symbolise le vagabondage des mœurs, l'indocilité et la perversion. Le scandale enveloppe la voyageuse tel un manteau de murmures et d'accusations.

Cause, ou peut-être symptôme d'une absence de stabilité intérieure et d'un manque des jalons moraux essentiels pour ne point s'éloigner des sentiers

10. E. RAFFLEY, *The Dévotes...*, op. cit., p. 48 ; estimation de M. C. GUEUDRE, *Histoire de l'ordre des Ursulines*, 2 vols, Paris, St Paul, 1960, t. II, p. 148.

11. Voir entre autres Lucy DE BRUYN, *Woman and the Devil in Sixteenth Century Literature*, Iisburry, Compton Press, 1979 ; C.F. KARLSEN, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, New York, W. W. Norton, 1987 ; Jan MACLEAN, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980 ; Margaret SOMMERVILLE, *Sex and Subjection: Attitudes to Women in Early Modern Society*, Londres et New York, Arnold, 1995 et Alison WEBER, « Little Women: Counter-Reformation misogyny », in David LUEBKE (dir.), *The Counter-Reformation. The Essential Readings*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1999, p. 143-162.

battus, la pérégrination est associée au vice et à l'inconduite. Une femme sillonnant les routes ne peut que susciter la méfiance. C'est donc sans grande surprise que l'on constate que, quand deux Ursulines d'Avignon, Marguerite de Vigier et Françoise de Blanchet, partent fonder une communauté à Toulouse en 1604, elles sont appréhendées par les autorités municipales de la ville de Pézenàs et jetées en prison, soupçonnées d'être des femmes de mauvaise vie<sup>12</sup>. Cet incident n'est pas un cas isolé, l'histoire des Ursulines de France est jalonnée de tels témoignages d'hostilité. En 1606, Geneviève de Valember et Christine Péron fondent un établissement dans la ville de Grenoble et sont bientôt en proie à l'opprobre : « Un fameux prédicateur déclama contre elles en pleine chaire dans l'église de sainte Claire, et les montrant du doigt et les nommant par leur nom, dit quantité de choses qui leur étaient très désavantageuses »<sup>13</sup>. Si, dans ce cas, les attaques proviennent d'un clerc, il n'est pas rare qu'elles émanent du public, et très souvent même des enfants. À Dijon, le peuple tourne le dos à Françoise de Xainctonge, fondatrice de la nouvelle congrégation d'Ursulines. Ayant quitté sa famille, l'étiquette voudrait qu'elle prenne époux ou qu'elle se cloître, et non qu'elle aille de part et d'autre de la ville flanquée de ses compagnes<sup>14</sup>. Ce sont les enfants qui verbalisent l'anxiété et la peur des adultes, à coup d'insultes, de chansons humiliantes, voire de crachats et de jets d'immondices. Les congrégées sont exclues de la société : craintes par les uns et ridiculisées par les autres, elles symbolisent le refus des principes patriarcaux qui régulent le siècle et, de ce fait, elles menacent la stabilité du système. Conscientes des difficultés liées à leur indépendance et à leur manque de statut officiel, les Ursulines de France décident donc, dans la première moitié du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, d'abandonner leur liberté de mouvement et de prendre le voile, avec le vœu de clôture perpétuelle qu'il implique.

Face à des difficultés similaires, l'Anglaise Mary Ward, elle, rejette le cloître et refuse de soumettre son Institut à une autorité épiscopale qu'elle estime mal à propos. D'après les conceptions d'Ancien Régime, qui confinent la femme soit au domaine du foyer soit au couvent, l'entreprise de Mary Ward ne peut que paraître équivoque et les calomnies sont omniprésentes dans l'histoire de celles qu'on affuble de sobriquets tels que « nonnes errantes » (*wandering nuns*), « galopeuses » (*galloping girls*) ou « commères errantes » (*wandering gossips*), que l'on suspecte en outre de relations immorales avec les Jésuites<sup>15</sup>. La pétition adressée à Grégoire XV par le frère bénédictin Robert Sherwood (1588-1665), adversaire de la Société de Jésus, dénonce les innovations de l'Institut et abonde en sous-entendus remettant en question la chasteté de la

12. AD31, 221H-37, *Mémoires du commencement et progrès de l'ordre de sainte Ursule*, f. 29.

13. Mère de POMMEREU, ursuline [désormais MDPU], *Les chroniques de l'ordre des Ursulines recueillies pour l'usage des religieuses du mesme ordre*, Paris, Eloy Hélie, 1676, t.I, p. 84.

14. *Ibid.*, t. IV, p. 3-9.

15. Lewis OWEN, *Running Register*, Londres, Milbourne, 1626.

fondatrice et de ses consœurs – et plus particulièrement l'honnêteté de leurs rapports avec les pères jésuites qu'elles côtoient<sup>16</sup>.

Au cœur de la tourmente, Mary Alcock, ancienne sœur de l'Institut, se retourne contre lui pour dénoncer son mode de vie; son témoignage fournit aux détracteurs de l'Institut les armes nécessaires pour dénoncer le scandale qu'il représente. Dans une attaque virulente, Alcock raconte comment, sous prétexte de préserver leur anonymat et de cacher la nature religieuse de leurs activités dans le centre clandestin d'Hungerford House, à Londres, les Dames anglaises s'habillent de soie, de velours et de collerettes de couleurs vives, attirent l'attention de tous par leur train de vie luxueux et sont régulièrement prises pour des courtisanes et des prostituées<sup>17</sup>. L'une d'entre elles est même accusée d'attendre un enfant. Ainsi les Dames anglaises font-elles l'objet de la méfiance des « catholiques de bonne conscience » selon qui, au dire de Thomas Fuller « ces dames errantes dévient [...] de la modestie féminine (pour ne pas dire virgine) ». Et d'ajouter, non sans un certain sarcasme, que « si les hommes ne font que circuler, les femmes, elles, vagabondent »<sup>18</sup>.

Le monde voit dans la mobilité des Dames anglaises toutes les indications d'un tempérament inconstant. Outre la corruption de la vertu, le mouvement va de pair avec un manque d'humilité qui entache la fondatrice, ses consœurs et même leurs élèves. Celles-ci contreviennent tant à la discrétion et à la docilité qu'elles sont, dans l'esprit de leurs critiques, des femmes-hommes, usurpant jusqu'à l'identité masculine. Mary Ward est d'ailleurs accusée de vivre au sein d'un collège de Jésuites, déguisée en habit de prêtre. Chez les religieuses missionnaires, la mobilité physique semble indiquer une nature plus masculine que féminine. En 1630, alors que l'Institut fait l'objet d'une enquête ordonnée par le Saint-Siège, le secrétaire de *Propaganda Fide*, Francesco Ingoli, s'insurge contre l'obstination de la fondatrice à transgresser les rôles de son sexe. Il décrit Mary Ward comme « une vierge à l'esprit viril », faisant ainsi écho à une de ses déclarations antérieures où elle lui semble être une « jeune femme au tempérament masculin »<sup>19</sup>. Au cours de son investigation, Ingoli recueille de nombreux témoignages afin de déterminer la nature de l'Institut et d'en juger le bien-fondé. Il interroge sept Dames anglaises qui toutes restent fidèles à Mary Ward et à l'idéal missionnaire de leur communauté; mais c'est surtout la masse des dépositions outrées par l'affront moral que représente un groupe de femmes non cloîtrées qui le pousse, dans le *Compendium* qu'il soumet au pape en conclusion de son rapport, à presser le pontife de dissoudre l'Institut sans tarder<sup>20</sup>.

16. ABC, B 45; Joseph GRISAR, *The First Accusations in Rome against the Institute of Mary Ward (1622)*, p. 28. Traduit de l'allemand par M. CAMPION DAVENPORT.

17. ABC, C1, *Godfather's Information about the Jesuitesses (1623)*.

18. Thomas FULLER, *The Church History of Britain from the Birth of Jesus Christ, until the Year 1648*, Londres, J. Williams, 1655, t. VI, p. 498.

19. ABC, C18, f. 101, Francesco Ingoli, 1627.

20. ABC, C1, *Letters against the Jesuitesses*, f. 309-312. Il interroge Maria Clopey, Elizabeth Hall, Anna Morgan, Catherine Smith, Brigida Heyd, Winefrid Campion et Anna Micel.

## DES RELIGIEUSES À VOCATION APOSTOLIQUE: LA VIE MIXTE AU FÉMININ

La virulence de l'opposition qui se dresse contre l'Institut des Dames anglaises peut surprendre. Il faut se tourner vers les activités de ces congrégations pour être à même d'interpréter les réactions qu'elles suscitent: au contraire des Ursulines, dont la mobilité initiale est remplacée par la clôture au cours du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, les Dames anglaises sont décidées à imiter les Jésuites autant que possible et concrétisent leur idéal missionnaire en refusant le couvent. Leur tâche est double, puisqu'il s'agit à la fois de maintenir une présence constante chez les catholiques clandestins d'Angleterre et de convertir les protestants. La plus ancienne biographie de Mary Ward explique comment elle travaille incognito dans les rues de Londres, parmi les infortunés qu'elle rencontre chaque jour<sup>21</sup>. Quand en 1639, après de longues années d'exil, elle est de retour à Londres, elle ouvre un centre permettant à la communauté récusante de la capitale d'y venir prier, se confesser et entendre la messe dite par l'un des deux prêtres qui y résident en permanence. Malgré les dangers de la répression protestante, la fondatrice inaugure une école primaire qui se voit confier l'éducation des filles des familles catholiques les plus influentes ainsi que celle des plus humbles.

Les activités des membres de l'Institut font écho à celles de leur supérieure: le rapport écrit au début des années 1620 par une missionnaire clandestine nommée sœur Dorothea met en lumière la nature de ses activités pédagogiques et évangéliques. À la tête d'un petit centre sous la protection de Lady Timperley de Hintlesham Hall, dans le Suffolk, Dorothea voyage de famille en famille, éduque les enfants, tente de consolider la foi des parents et s'efforce d'atteindre les pauvres (*The simple and vulgar sort*)<sup>22</sup>. Dans ce journal de bord, les silences sont tout aussi éloquents que les mots: on comprend donc que, par souci de sécurité, la jeune femme ne révèle nulle part sa véritable identité civile. Mais ses priorités sont également inscrites dans le texte, et si elle reste très vague sur le contenu et les méthodes de ses activités d'institutrice, elle décrit ses travaux de prosélyte dans de plus amples détails. On constate donc à travers ce témoignage que, si essentielle que soit l'aide apportée aux catholiques, les Dames anglaises aspirent à dépasser ces activités pastorales pour amener les protestants à se convertir. La lecture du rapport de Dorothea démontre que l'interaction avec le peuple et la liberté de mouvement sont deux des piliers essentiels de la mission des Dames anglaises: elle doit être libre d'aller au-devant des sujets qu'elle désire rencontrer, et de couvrir de longues distances pour entrer en contact avec le prêtre le plus proche. Ainsi, alors même qu'elle se réjouit de la conversion de neuf personnes, la missionnaire doit parcourir

21. ABC, B12, *A Briefe Relation of the Holy Life and Happy Death of our Dearest Mother*, écrite à titre posthume par ses plus proches compagnes Mary Poyntz et Winefrid Wigmore c. 1650, f. 20.

22. M. C. E. CHAMBERS, *The Life of Mary Ward, 1585-1645*, 2 vol., Londres, Burns et Oates, 1882-1885, t. II, p. 27-39.

près de quinze kilomètres à pied pour solliciter un Jésuite<sup>23</sup>. Il lui est essentiel de pouvoir se déplacer : sans mouvement, il n'est point de mission pour les Dames anglaises.

Si le désir d'explorer de nouveaux territoires est caractéristique du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle en général et de l'engouement naissant pour le voyage, il n'inclut d'habitude que très peu de femmes. Or, Mary Ward va sillonner toute l'Europe, souvent à pied ou à dos d'âne; sa motivation première n'est certes pas la découverte de l'inconnu mais le désir de propager son Institut. Elle entretient tout au long de sa vie des liens privilégiés avec sa terre natale, dont la conversion est la raison d'être de cette Société de Jésus au féminin. Ainsi, elle traverse la Manche plus de dix fois, dans des conditions hasardeuses, pour revenir servir ses compatriotes<sup>24</sup>. Sur le sol anglais, elle réside à diverses reprises dans la capitale, visite Canterbury pour finir son périple dans son Yorkshire natal. En route, elle passe quelques mois à Newby et Ripley Castle, puis atteint la petite communauté d'Hutton Rudby en septembre 1642; en 1643, accompagnée de quelques fidèles, elle ouvre un nouveau centre récusant dans le village de Heworth, aux portes de York, avant d'y mourir deux années plus tard, en janvier 1645<sup>25</sup>.

Une telle mobilité est en elle-même remarquable pour toute femme de l'époque moderne, mais les pérégrinations de la fondatrice ne se limitent pas à l'Angleterre. Sur le continent, elle fonde de nombreuses branches de son Institut: après Saint-Omer en 1611, c'est le tour de Liège en 1616, de Cologne et de Trèves en 1620-1621, de Rome en 1622, de Naples et de Pérouse en 1623, de Munich et de Vienne en 1627 et enfin de Pressburg et de Prague en 1628. Ses voyages l'amènent donc aux quatre coins de l'Europe, poussant au Nord jusqu'à la ville de York, au Sud jusqu'à Rome (où elle se rend trois fois) et à l'Est jusqu'à Prague, aux portes occidentales de l'empire ottoman. Elle s'arrête en chemin dans de diverses villes comme Lorette, Assise, Venise, ou Spa<sup>26</sup>. Son dernier périple, au cours duquel elle manque de perdre la vie, couvre les milliers de kilomètres qui séparent Rome du Yorkshire, négocie les cols périlleux des Alpes en plein hiver et fait halte tour à tour dans des villes comme Cologne ou Paris. Un tel parcours ne peut qu'être exceptionnel pour son siècle, et n'est pas sans susciter l'hostilité au sein même de l'Église à laquelle Mary Ward se proclame si dévouée.

<sup>23</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>24</sup>. Ses premières compagnes sont Mary Pointz, Winefrid Wigmore, Johana Browne, Susanna Hookwood et Katherine Smith. Barbara Babthorpe et Barbara Ward sont supposées avoir également fait partie du voyage. Voir Henriette PETERS, *Mary Ward: a World in Contemplation*, traduit en anglais par Hélien Butterworth, Leominster, Gracewing Books, 1994, p. 110.

<sup>25</sup>. Après la mort de la fondatrice, les Dames anglaises n'opèrent plus en Angleterre, mais elles sont de retour en 1669 avec une fondation à Hammersmith, suivie d'une seconde à Hammersmith en 1678 et enfin d'une troisième à York en 1686. Le couvent de York continue d'être actif de nos jours.

<sup>26</sup>. L'extraordinaire mobilité physique de Mary Ward est l'objet d'une analyse par Joseph GRISAR, spécialiste de l'Institut, in «Mary Ward, 1585-1645», *The Month*, 12/22, 1954, p. 69-82.

L'Institut apparaît donc à ses contemporains comme défini par sa mobilité même, et en termes toujours négatifs : on reproche à celles que l'on surnomme les « nonnes errantes » leur imitation des pères jésuites et de leurs activités « de par le monde, prêchant l'évangile à celles de leur sexe en Angleterre et ailleurs »<sup>27</sup>. Cette constante comparaison avec la société d'Ignace de Loyola est revendiquée par Mary Ward elle-même : en 1621, la fondatrice cherche à obtenir l'approbation pontificale et adresse à Rome une requête dans laquelle elle décrit le fonctionnement de sa nouvelle « Société de Jésus ». Dans ce texte, connu sous le nom d'*Institutum*, elle sollicite l'envoi de ses consœurs partout dans le monde, au même titre que les jésuites. Les « Jésuitesses » y expriment le désir d'être mandatées directement par le pape pour aller travailler « parmi les Turcs ou tout autre peuple infidèle, même chez ceux qui vivent dans la région qu'on nomme les Indes, ou parmi les hérétiques de toute sorte »<sup>28</sup>. La mission des Dames anglaises méprise les frontières, et elle reste en cela une entreprise unique.

Cette mobilité d'un même groupe à l'échelle internationale n'est partagée, à notre connaissance, par aucun autre groupe d'aspirantes religieuses. Pour ce qui concerne les Ursulines françaises, un tel déploiement spontané devient impossible, dès lors que les simples congrégations laïques des débuts se transforment progressivement en cloîtres au cours du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le rayonnement géographique des Ursulines reste donc plus modeste, en général à l'échelle locale. En outre, ce n'est qu'avec licence épiscopale que les maisons peuvent envoyer certaines de leurs sœurs fonder de nouveaux établissements, qui eux aussi seront clos. Les évêques ont d'ailleurs grand soin d'exhorter ces fondatrices à la plus grande diligence et à la plus grande retenue lors du voyage nécessaire : « nous vous avons permis et permettons par ces présentes [...] de revenir au collège de Ste Ursule de cette ville [...] sans vous divertir ailleurs et avec la décence et modestie convenable à votre profession »<sup>29</sup>.

C'est de cette façon que les Ursulines de Toulouse s'établissent entre autres à Brives-la-Gaillarde en 1608, à Limoges en 1620, à Bayonne en 1621, à Auch en 1623, à Villefranche de Rouergue et à Grenade en 1626, à Béziers en 1632 et à Pamiers en 1644. En parallèle, d'autres branches comme celles de Paris ou de Bordeaux essaient à leur tour, assurant ainsi rapidement la présence ursuline sur tout le territoire. Mais si la pratique leur interdit la mobilité physique, les Ursulines ne sont pas cependant sans s'intéresser aux régions lointaines auxquelles Mary Ward aspire. Compte tenu de la sévérité des règles qui contrôlent les lectures des sœurs, tant dans leur correspondance privée que dans leurs études, il n'est pas sans intérêt de noter qu'elles conservent dans leurs archives des récits comme la *Relation de la conquête du Mogol par*

27. James WADSWORTH, *English Spanish Pilgrim*, Londres, Michael Sparke, 1629, p.30.

28. ABC, B18, *Institutum*, f. 22.

29. AD31, 221H-15, f. 78. Licence datée du 13 janvier 1651 pour le retour d'une Ursuline toulousaine dans son couvent après la fondation d'une nouvelle maison à Pamiers.



*Thamas-Koulikan, et de la façon de vivre des dames mahométanes* envoyée par un missionnaire au Bengale à la sœur Hyacinthe de Toulouse<sup>30</sup>.

L'idéal de conversion universelle est présent chez les Ursulines comme chez les Dames anglaises. Catherine Canterel, de la communauté d'Amiens, entretient des liens particuliers avec les pères jésuites et, bien qu'elle ne puisse elle-même se joindre à la mission catholique en cours au Canada, développe une relation très forte avec les pères Brebœuf, Le Jeune, Ragenau et de Caen, missionnaires chargés de cette ambitieuse entreprise<sup>31</sup>. Loin d'être exceptionnelle dans sa conception mondiale de l'engagement des Ursulines, Catherine Canterel est assez représentative de ses consœurs, comme en témoigne leur empressement pour la mission canadienne. À Lisieux, la notice mortuaire de Marie Godebit, avide lectrice de dépêches provenant du Canada, commente : « Son zèle pour le salut des âmes la portait à offrir ses prières pour la conversion du Canada, demandant instamment à Dieu qu'il donna force et efficace aux paroles des personnes qui travaillent au salut de ces pauvres peuples »<sup>32</sup>. À Évreux, Elizabeth Turgis se porte volontaire pour l'exil en Nouvelle France, mais la mission ne peut alors accueillir d'autres religieuses. Déçue, elle ne perd rien de son enthousiasme et elle prend la tête de l'externat de sa communauté, qu'elle désigne comme « son cher petit Canada ». Dans l'attente de voir un jour ce nouveau pays, elle surnomme ses externes ses « petits sauvageons »<sup>33</sup>. Bien d'autres comme elle demandent à être envoyées à leur tour sur la terre des « sauvages », si bien que le Jésuite supérieur du Québec s'étonne du nombre d'Ursulines souhaitant le rejoindre outre-Atlantique<sup>34</sup>.

L'Ordre est de nos jours célèbre pour son implantation précoce dans les régions hostiles du Canada, sous la direction de Marie Guyart (1599-1672), en religion Marie de l'Incarnation, fondatrice du mouvement des Ursulines au Québec<sup>35</sup>. À son arrivée en 1639, aidée de deux compagnes, elle se voit confier l'éducation séculière et religieuse de six jeunes natives ; fidèle aux pratiques des prosélytes de l'époque, elle utilise le dialecte local et apprend l'algonquin, le Huron et l'Iroquois pour mieux communiquer son message au peuple. Les difficiles conditions de vie font que ses activités sont très similaires à celles des pères jésuites. Les religieuses missionnaires ne peuvent observer les règles de clôture et doivent se déplacer fréquemment, ne serait-ce que pour se procurer des vivres et des matériaux combustibles. Les circonstances permettent

<sup>30</sup> *Rélation de la conquête du Mogol par Thamas-Koulikan, et de la façon de vivre des dames mahométanes*, écrite par un missionnaire français qui est dans le royaume de Bengale, à Mad. de S. Hyacinthe religieuse ursuline à Toulouse (Toulouse, 1740).

<sup>31</sup> MDPU, *Les chroniques...*, op. cit., t. III, p. 421.

<sup>32</sup> Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal, Paris [désormais BA], ms 4990-56 - Lisieux, 2 mai 1686.

<sup>33</sup> MDPU, *Les chroniques...*, op. cit., t. III, p. 288-290.

<sup>34</sup> Reuben GOLD THWAITES (dir.), *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, 73 vol., Cleveland, Ohio, Burrows, 1896-1901, vol. 6, p. 142.

<sup>35</sup> Dom Guy Marie OURY, *Marie de l'Incarnation 1599-1672*, Tours, Abbaye Saint-Pierre de Solesmes, 1973.

alors aux Ursulines d'adopter le modèle évangélique de la vie mixte d'une façon qui leur est interdite sur leur terre natale<sup>36</sup>. Cependant, une telle mobilité physique reste exceptionnelle, et la plupart des postulantes se verront refuser leurs vœux: le Québec est en effet le théâtre d'affrontements violents entre colonisateurs et indigènes et l'Église ne peut y approuver la présence de religieuses dont le manque de clôture met en péril leur vertu et jusqu'à leur vie. Ainsi, les réussites de Marie de l'Incarnation demeurent des exploits auxquels la majorité de ses consœurs ne peut qu'aspirer.

#### LES OBJECTIONS CANONIQUES: LE MOUVEMENT, SYNONYME D'USURPATION

Les exemples fournis par les Ursulines françaises et les Dames anglaises illustrent l'un des phénomènes principaux de la Réforme catholique, cet engouement féminin marqué notamment par la multiplication de compagnies séculières non cloîtrées. Cependant l'Église, même en pleine mission de reconquête du peuple, n'est pas prête à accepter la liberté de mouvement pour les congrégations féminines. Alors qu'en France comme en Angleterre, la mission jésuite connaît un succès remarquable, cette victoire demeure sans équivalent pour les femmes. L'opposition au mouvement des moniales est complexe, liée tant aux objections misogynes dévoilées plus haut qu'à l'aspiration de ces femmes à un statut religieux, qui implique la sujétion à l'autorité de l'Église et un rôle à la définition aussi étroite qu'elle est inamuable.

Or, bien que cloîtrées, les Ursulines s'efforcent d'honorer leur vocation apostolique et entretiennent des liens privilégiés avec le monde: pour nombre d'entre elles, le couvent ne doit pas être synonyme d'isolement complet. La Toulousaine Claire Durdes incarne ce désir d'action: l'archevêque Charles de Montchal l'envoie pour un temps à la maison de la Charité en qualité de supérieure. Là, elle instruit les femmes débauchées en voie de réhabilitation et en convertit huit qui deviennent religieuses. Enfin, elle est mandatée plus loin encore, pour fonder les Ursulines de Pamiers « pour le bien et le salut des âmes ». Compensant les restrictions de la clôture par la dispersion la plus large possible de son catéchisme, elle fait de la fondation de Pamiers un modèle de zèle et d'excellence. Elle doit bientôt ouvrir une deuxième classe pour les externes et les femmes de la ville se querellent pour assister à ses leçons dominicales de doctrine dont le succès est tel que les hommes viennent se joindre à l'audience. Claire Durdes fait tout pour attirer les non-catholiques à ces leçons et ses pouvoirs de persuasion doivent être remarquables, car Parayre note la conversion de quatre huguenotes, qui deviennent elles-mêmes Ursulines. Elle reçoit chaque dimanche plus de quatre-vingts personnes à la grille de l'église, et les témoignages contemporains indiquent

36. Charles SAINTE-FOI, *Vies des premières Ursulines de France tirées des chroniques de l'ordre*, Paris, Poussielgue-Russand, 1856, p. 163-222.

qu'on préfère venir l'écouter plutôt que le père de Saint-Denis, envoyé par l'évêque pour faire la doctrine<sup>37</sup>.

Claire Durdes brouille dangereusement les limites qui séparent l'enseignement privé et la prédication. Si elle prêche publiquement, n'usurpe-t-elle pas le rôle des prêtres tels que le père Saint-Denis ? Pour reconverter une région fortement influencée par le protestantisme, la jeune pédagogue s'octroie un rôle militant qui, s'il sied aux clercs réguliers, n'est pas traditionnellement du ressort des religieuses. Elle contrevient aux injonctions de saint Paul (I Tim. 2 : 12) et aux décrets tridentins qui interdisent à la femme de prêcher en public. Consciente du danger et avec une prudence toute ursuline, Durdes se hâte donc d'obtenir une licence l'autorisant à instruire les adultes dans le chœur bas de l'église, de façon à poursuivre ses activités en toute sécurité.

Après l'expiration de son mandat à Pamiers, elle rentre à Toulouse dans les années 1650 et prend la charge de mère de la Compagnie des Dames de la Miséricorde de Sainte Ursule. L'existence même de cette Compagnie témoigne du désir qu'ont les Ursulines de garder un lien avec le monde : formé alors que la congrégation de Toulouse est transformée en couvent en 1616, ce groupe constitué de vierges, de mariées et de veuves dévotes sert de bras droit au nouveau couvent, continuant au sein de la ville les travaux apostoliques que les Ursulines doivent abandonner. Depuis le parloir, cette zone intermédiaire entre les mondes de l'intérieur et de l'extérieur, Claire Durdes supervise les activités des Dames de la Congrégation : bien que physiquement isolée, elle possède une influence qui pénètre le monde séculier au quotidien et grâce à sa relation avec la compagnie, l'action ursuline se fait sentir au-delà des murs du couvent. Durdes est également employée aux classes, où elle trouve l'occasion de dépasser l'hermétisme de l'enfermement monastique : si elle ne sort plus du monastère, les externes viennent y puiser son message évangélique pour à leur tour le diffuser dans le monde.

L'exemple de Claire Durdes illustre la complexité de la relation entre clôture et liberté. En effet, si la clôture peut certes être prohibitive, elle n'en permet pas moins la propagation de l'apostolat pédagogique des Ursulines ; bien qu'elle ne travaille jamais qu'à l'intérieur de la clôture, l'Ursuline n'est donc pas entièrement recluse et sa claustration corporelle ne nuit pas à la dissémination de son catéchisme<sup>38</sup>.

Cependant, c'est le succès même de la diffusion du message des Ursulines qui, paradoxalement, peut mettre ces dernières en danger. En effet, l'une des préoccupations majeures reste l'appropriation des rôles traditionnellement masculins par des femmes missionnaires. Les hommes sont par essence habilités à être en contact avec le peuple, à prêcher en public. Mais les nouvelles

37. R. P. PARAYRE, *Chronique des religieuses augustines ursulines de la congrégation de Toulouse*, 3 vol., Toulouse, Guillaume Bosc, 1681, t. III, p. 2-21.

38. Linda LIERHEIMER, «Female eloquence and maternal ministry: the apostolate of ursuline nuns in seventeenth-century France», *Ph.D.*, Princeton University, 1994, p. 236-288.

religieuses à vocation active s'octroient et usurpent ces mêmes attributs. Il y a donc là une rivalité implicite. L'exemple de Françoise Rabonite, dite sœur de sainte Claire, illustre parfaitement l'importance du mouvement et de l'interaction avec le monde<sup>39</sup>. Née de parents honorables qui la voulaient religieuse, la jeune fille est si attirée par l'apostolat des Ursulines qu'elle rejoint la communauté de Toulouse en 1607 contre le désir de sa famille. À cette date, la congrégation est encore libre d'aller et venir, et Rabonite est employée aux classes des externes; elle s'occupe également d'activités apostoliques de par la ville, auprès des malades, des pauvres et des prisonniers. En 1616, elle devient religieuse cloîtrée comme ses camarades toulousaines, mais sa carrière continue de s'illustrer par l'action. En 1632, elle est envoyée à Béziers pour y prendre la tête d'une nouvelle branche en pays protestant; là, elle donne libre cours à son zèle missionnaire et s'efforce de dépasser les limites de sa propre claustration. Comme toute Ursuline doit le faire, elle ouvre un internat pour les pensionnaires aisées et un externat pour les filles de familles pauvres n'ayant pas les moyens de régler une pension. Néanmoins, elle choisit de ne pas se limiter à ce rôle et entreprend d'attirer de jeunes protestantes, des femmes de mauvaise vie et même des prostituées notoires pour tenter, à force d'entretiens réguliers, de les ramener au catholicisme, ce qu'elle fait avec succès<sup>40</sup>.

Or, si bénéfiques soient-elles à l'Église catholique, ses actions ne sont pas conformes au rôle traditionnel des religieuses dans sa situation. Bien sûr, Rabonite se met à dos la population protestante de la ville quand elle entreprend de convertir des huguenotes; mais elle irrite aussi les catholiques en se mêlant de l'éducation des prostituées ou des voleuses, ce qui dépasse de loin son rôle d'Ursuline et correspond bien mieux à celui d'un prêtre. De surcroît, son succès témoigne d'une éloquence qui dérange d'autant plus qu'elle est supérieure aux savoir-faire requis par la définition contemporaine de la religieuse enseignante. Ainsi, les huguenots de la ville sont vite rejoints par de nombreux catholiques dans leur dénonciation des activités de cette catéchiste zélée. Françoise Rabonite est atteinte par la calomnie « la plus noire », accusée de relations d'ordre sexuel avec son confesseur, d'illumination et de sorcellerie<sup>41</sup>. Abattue, elle quitte Béziers en 1653 et rentre à Toulouse où elle reste cloîtrée jusqu'à sa mort, quelques mois plus tard. L'opinion générale à Béziers a condamné l'Ursuline qui n'avait point su s'en tenir au mandat habituel des religieuses de son ordre.

La mission apostolique proposée par les Ursulines et les Dames anglaises transgresse de façon alarmante les décrets tridentins sur la clôture<sup>42</sup>. L'errance

39. R. P. PARAYRE, *Chronique...*, op. cit., t. II, p. 87-116.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

42. Voir entre autres E. RAPLEY, *The Dévotes...*, op. cit.; Ruth LIEBOWITZ, « Virgins in the service of Christ: the dispute over an active apostolate for women during the Counter-Reformation », in Rosemary RADFORD RUETHER (dir.), *Women of Spirit*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1979, p. 131-152.

au féminin n'est jamais bien reçue, mais celle des religieuses est un scandale : en effet, puisqu'elles se réclament de l'Église, c'est bien la liberté de mouvement qui est à la source des principales difficultés tant des Ursulines françaises que des Dames anglaises. En 1615, Francisco Suarez (1548-1617) s'insurge contre les dites « Jésuitesses », soulignant leur absence de clôture et leur non-respect des décrets du concile de Trente comme obstacles majeurs à leur réception en religion<sup>43</sup>. Il écrit : « elles vont de par-delà le pays sans rien de la bienséance du sexe féminin et causent l'ignominie de la religion catholique »<sup>44</sup>. En octobre 1622, le prêtre John Colleton<sup>45</sup> exprime lui aussi ses inquiétudes :

« si [l'Institut] se confinait à ses cellules et à ses murs selon l'exemple des autres communautés religieuses, [il] mériterait peut-être nos louanges, mais quand il réclame une charge apostolique et erre sans aucune retenue de ci de là [...] il s'expose sans doute à la censure et au reproche de bien des âmes pieuses »<sup>46</sup>.

En outre, le bénédictin Sherwood trouve inacceptable que ces prétendues religieuses enseignent l'éloquence à leurs écolières et les encouragent à parler en public, à débattre de sujets religieux ou à prêcher. Comme les Jésuites, elles mettent en scène des pièces de théâtre, activité qui témoigne d'une absence totale de réserve de la part des enseignantes<sup>47</sup>. La femme en mouvement ne connaît plus sa place dans la société, moins encore dans l'Église.

Il faut convenir que la réserve et l'effacement considérés essentiels à la femme, et *a fortiori* à la religieuse, échappent parfois à Mary Ward, tout absorbée du zèle de sa vocation. Son travail en Angleterre étant venu à la connaissance de l'archevêque de Canterbury, ce dernier ordonne un avis de recherche public, avec une description détaillée de la « Jésuitesse » et une mise en garde selon laquelle cette femme « fait à elle seule plus de mal que six Jésuites »<sup>48</sup>. M. Ward, loin de se retirer dans l'anonymat, décide de rendre visite au prélat ; elle part à pied pour Lambeth Palace, suivie de quelques compagnes, et grave son nom sur l'une des fenêtres du palais à l'attention de l'archevêque qui s'était absenté ce jour-là. Que cet épisode soit réel ou qu'il provienne de l'imagination d'un chroniqueur quelconque importe peu : il n'en reste pas moins représentatif de l'impudente hardiesse attribuée à la fondatrice par ses détracteurs comme par ses disciples.

42. Linda LIERHEIMER, « Redefining convent space: ideals of female community among seventeenth century Ursuline nuns », *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History*, n° 24, 1995, p. 211-220.

43. H. PETERS, *Mary Ward...*, *op. cit.*, p. 154-157.

44. ABC, C1, *Letters against the Jesuitesses*, f. 297.

45. Pendant le conflit entre Jésuites et prêtres séculiers de la mission anglaise, John Colleton forme l'Association du clergé d'Angleterre, corps indépendant chargé de réguler les affaires du clergé séculier. À cause de cette initiative, il est plus tard accusé d'aggraver le schisme entre séculiers et Jésuites et suspendu de ses fonctions. Voir Ethelred TAUNTON, *The History of the Jesuits in England, 1580-1773*, Londres, Methuen, 1901, p. 256-257.

46. ABC, C1, J3, *translation of documents re. Jesuitesses*.

47. ABC, B 45, J. GRISAR, *The First Accusations...*, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

48. ABC, B12, *A Briefe Relation...*, *op. cit.*, f. 21.

Ce défaut de retenue est interprété par le clergé comme un acte de rébellion, et par les historiens d'aujourd'hui comme une revendication féministe avant l'heure. En effet, à une époque où l'Église a besoin de toute l'aide qu'elle peut mobiliser pour augmenter le nombre de ses fidèles, il semble évident à Mary Ward qu'une congrégation travaillant à catéchiser la population féminine sans les restrictions de la clôture représenterait un avantage considérable. Elle ne partage aucunement les opinions androcentriques qui prévalent alors ; elle croit la femme tout à fait capable de mener cette tâche à bien et de rester constante même au cœur d'une mission hasardeuse, de ville en ville, de pays en pays. Elle déclare un jour à ses consœurs :

« Je prie Dieu que les hommes comprennent cette vérité : que les femmes, si elles le veulent, peuvent atteindre la perfection, et que s'ils cessaient de nous faire croire que nous ne pouvons rien faire, et que nous ne sommes rien que de pauvres femmes, nous pourrions réaliser bien des prouesses »<sup>49</sup>.

La force de sa conviction, alliée à son peu de diplomatie, finissent de convaincre les autorités de son obstination à nier les normes de l'époque. Tout à son dévouement envers la Contre-Réforme, Mary Ward oublie que, pour le clergé, les rôles masculins et féminins ne sont guère interchangeables : une mission hautement respectée chez les hommes peut donc constituer une entreprise inacceptable chez les femmes. Cette erreur s'avère fatale et alors que les Ursulines françaises prospèrent, les filles de Mary Ward voient le pape Urbain VIII prononcer la suppression définitive de leur Institut et condamner leur fondatrice comme rebelle et hérétique<sup>50</sup>.

L'Institut de Mary Ward, qui tente d'imiter les Jésuites le plus fidèlement possible, est brutalement supprimé en 1631. La déclaration pontificale dénonce « la prétendue congrégation des Jésuitesses » comme dangereuse et devant être éradiquée à tout prix. L'un des motifs principaux est bien sûr le manque de clôture des Dames anglaises, ce qu'Urbain VIII appelle leur liberté d'« aller et venir comme bon leur semble et, sous l'apparence de promouvoir la sauvegarde des âmes, d'entreprendre d'autres travaux mal seyants à la faiblesse de leur sexe et de leur entendement, ainsi qu'à la modestie féminine »<sup>51</sup>. Cependant, de façon paradoxale, cette suppression est comme une libération pour la mission active de l'Institut : à l'abri des objections canoniques, les Dames anglaises privées de leur statut clérical peuvent désormais donner libre cours à leur zèle sur le terrain. Bien sûr, elles sont toujours, en tant que femmes en mouvement, soupçonnées de mœurs légères et sujettes à la raillerie populaire, mais elles ne représentent plus de danger pour le clergé. Les prêtres qui les voyaient comme rivales implicites ne les considèrent plus que comme laïques réunies autour d'une mission pieuse. Grâce à ce statut inoffensif, elles

49. ABC, B17, f. 3.

50. ABC, boîte d'archives n°1, pièce 2, Bulle papale.

51. *Ibid.*

sont plus libres qu'elles ne l'étaient alors qu'elles réclamaient la reconnaissance religieuse.

Le succès des Ursulines s'explique, au contraire, par leur soumission à la clôture, grâce à laquelle elles gagnent le respect du peuple et de l'Église. L'histoire des premières années de l'ordre indique que si les congrégées avaient persisté dans leur forme initiale, indépendante et sans clôture, mais réclamant le statut de religieuses, elles auraient sans nul doute connu un sort similaire à celui de l'Institut de Mary Ward. Mais les murs du couvent les protègent. Cloîtrées, elles ne peuvent usurper les attributs masculins des missionnaires et prédicateurs de la Contre-Réforme. La formule ursuline est cependant plus subtile que la traditionnelle vie religieuse, puisque les sœurs ne renoncent pas à leur vocation active et pédagogique. Soumises à l'immobilité physique qu'implique leur statut, elles sont en contrepartie autorisées à recevoir les externes au sein du couvent et à donner des leçons de doctrine aux grilles de l'église. C'est donc le mouvement qui vient à elles sous la forme des externes et des foules auxquelles elles enseignent. Par cette simple manœuvre, les Ursulines restent fidèles à leur vocation évangélique, sans risquer d'alarmer le clergé. Cette subtile redéfinition de la clôture monastique suffit à garantir la sécurité de leur mission.

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La liberté de mouvement, si créatrice et si précieuse chez les clercs réguliers masculins, demeure une impossibilité chez leurs émules du « sexe le plus dangereux et le plus faible »<sup>52</sup>. Pour que ses activités de par le monde soient légitimes, la femme se doit de demeurer séculière. Au cœur de ce paradoxe de l'Église de la Contre-Réforme se trouve le stigmate de la femme en mouvement. La mobilité spatiale est à peine acceptable lorsqu'elle est laïque, mais semble anathème à la définition de la femme d'Église : on ne saurait avoir de religieuses errantes. Aussi, les promesses de l'aube du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle restent-elles lettre morte pour ces dernières : les déplacements demeurent un privilège masculin ordonné par les décrets du concile de Trente et confirmé par la papauté au moment même de la plus fervente vague de dévotion féminine de l'histoire moderne.

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<sup>52</sup> R. P. PARAYRE, *Chronique...*, op. cit., t I, p. 58.

« Mary Ward's English Institute: The Apostolate as an Act of Self-Affirmation? », *Recusant History* 28.2 (2006) 192–208.

### Résumé :

Mary Ward (1585-1645) est connue comme la fondatrice de l'Institut de la Bienheureuse Vierge Marie, un institut religieux qui, sous ses diverses formes, continue encore aujourd'hui à éduquer les jeunes filles dans le monde entier. Au cours de premières décennies du dix-septième siècle, sa fondation développe des branches clandestines en Angleterre et ouvre onze collèges sur le continent. Là, celles que l'on appelle les Dames anglaises se consacrent à l'éducation religieuse et séculière d'externes et de pensionnaires, selon le modèle emprunté à la Compagnie de Jésus. Mais la vocation de l'Institut ne vise pas le seul maintien de la foi catholique là où elle existe déjà ; elle a pour ambition de la propager. Pour certains historiens, Mary Ward souhaite délibérément mettre un terme aux traditions qui définissent alors la vie religieuse au féminin, pour inaugurer une ère nouvelle pour les femmes au sein de l'Église catholique. Cet article tente de démontrer que ce postulat est en partie discutable. Il montre comment la vocation des Dames anglaises s'inscrit dans la lignée de nombre d'entreprises féminines et ne cherche pas à rompre totalement avec l'héritage spirituel et la tradition contemplative des couvents orthodoxe. En se privant de la vie dite « parfaite » du cloître contemplatif, ces missionnaires optent pour un apostolat qu'elles envisagent plus comme un geste d'abnégation au service de l'Église que comme une déclaration d'autonomisation.

8 210 mots

mots-clés : Mary Ward ; Angleterre moderne ; catholicisme ; apostolat ; vie contemplative

### Présentation du texte :

Cet article vient compléter certaines des conclusions de ma monographie, *Redefining Female Religious Life*, publiée en 2005. Je souhaitais prendre le contre-pied des affirmations un peu hâtives d'historiens comme P. Collinson (et de celles, plus politiques, de quelques membres de l'Institut de la Bienheureuse Vierge Marie comme Lavinia Byrne), qui voyaient en Mary Ward une aventurière proto-féministe cherchant à faire avancer la cause des femmes en mettant à bas les traditions de l'Église catholique<sup>1</sup>. Si l'on ne peut nier que Ward refusait de considérer les femmes comme des êtres aux capacités restreintes, on ne peut limiter sa vocation à ce seul militantisme sans la priver de ses subtilités et de sa complexité. Dans son enfance récusante, Ward aspirait à la vie parfaite, contemplative et cloîtrée, qui était son modèle spirituel. Plus tard, les écrits de l'Institut continuent de témoigner du grand respect qu'elle et ses disciples portent à cette tradition conventuelle. Cet article interprète la vocation missionnaire de l'Institut comme une forme de dévouement ultime à l'Église, puisque les Dames anglaises se consacrent à Dieu en le servant dans le siècle, se privant ainsi d'un idéal spirituel monastique dans un acte d'abnégation qui n'est pas sans rappeler l'ascèse et l'abandon du soi pratiqué dans les murs.

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<sup>1</sup> Voir P. Collinson, *Elizabethan Essays*, Londres : Ambledon Press, 1994 et L. Byrne, « Mary Ward's Vision of the Apostolic Religious Life », *The Way* supplement 53 (1985) 73–84. En 2000, Lavinia Byrne quittait l'Institut de la Bienheureuse Vierge Marie après 35 ans de vie religieuse. Selon ses dires, elle aurait subi des pressions du Vatican au sujet de ses positions sur la prêtrise des femmes et sur la contraception.



## MARY WARD'S ENGLISH INSTITUTE: THE APOSTOLATE AS SELF-AFFIRMATION?

by LAURENCE LUX-STERRITT

Mary Ward (1585–1645) is known as the foundress of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, an Order of women which continues to educate thousands of girls around the world. During the first decades of the seventeenth century, her foundation was a religious venture which aimed to transform the Catholic mission of recovery into one that catered for women as well as men. It maintained clandestine satellites on English soil and opened colleges on the Continent, in towns such as St Omer (1611), Liège (1616), Cologne and Trier (1620–1), Rome (1622), Naples and Perugia (1623), Munich and Vienna (1627) and Pressburg and Prague (1628). There, it trained its own members and undertook the education of externs and boarders. The Institute's vocation was not only to maintain the faith where it was already present but also to propagate it; as such, it went far beyond the accepted sphere of the feminine apostolate and its members were often labelled as rebels who strove to shake off the shackles of post-Tridentine religious life. To some modern historians, Mary Ward was an 'unattached, roving, adventurous feminist'; to others, she was a foundress whose initiative deliberately set out to lay tradition to rest and begin a new era for the women in the Church.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, this study will contend that the English Ladies' active vocation did not imply any disdain towards long-established forms of female religious life. A timely reassessment of the Institute's spirituality indicates that, when they denied themselves the perfect life of the cloister, the raptures of contemplation and the spiritual conduit of conventual life, these missionaries embraced the apostolate, not as a gesture of self-empowerment but as one of self-abnegation in the service of the Church.

### *An Ignatian Institute for missionary women*

When, in 1621, Mary Ward wrote the Plan known as the *Institutum*, she described her English Ladies as combatants, working alongside priests for the conversion of Protestants. In this document, which she submitted to Rome in her quest for papal approval, the military metaphor was omnipresent, portraying the Ladies as soldiers in battle, perhaps, even, on a crusade which would tax their physical and spiritual resources to their limits. They followed a vocation that had a deeply missionary trend running at its very core. She warned postulants to consider their position

most carefully since, as she put it:

Whoever wishes to serve beneath the banner of the cross as a soldier of God in our Society, which we desire to be designated by the name of Jesus, is a member of a Society founded primarily for this purpose: to strive for the defence and propagation of the faith and for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine, leading them back from heresy and evil ways to the faith, to a Christian manner of life.<sup>2</sup>

In this Plan, Ward revealed her vision of an international mission shaped on the Society of Jesus, pursuing the same goals, functioning with the same structures and even bearing the same name. Borrowing her military imagery from the Jesuit lexicon, Ward praised her followers as 'soldiers of God' serving God 'beneath the banner of the cross'. She exposed both her faithful imitation of the Society and its desire to be recognised as its independent female counterpart. Unequivocally, she went so far as to request the right for her 'Society' to be 'designated by the name of Jesus'. Her military imagery was extended further when she declared: 'After they have enlisted through the inspiration of the Lord in the militia of Jesus Christ, they ought to be prompt in carrying out this obligation which is so great, being girded for battle day and night.'<sup>3</sup> All in all, the Institute's vocation covered a much wider scope of action than that usually attributed to women, even in the circumstances of the English mission; its members did not only help Catholics but also worked towards the conversion of Protestants in an assertive manner.

The Institute was unorthodox in that it claimed to give women some of the responsibilities which had, thus far, been the preserve of clerical men; such ambitions were expressed in the *Institutum*, where the Ladies vowed to take their mission beyond Northern Europe (where they were already settled) and to obey the pope should he send them 'among the Turks or any other infidels, even those who live in the region called the Indies, or among any heretics whatever'.<sup>4</sup> Crucially, this clause opened the English Ladies' vocation to a world-wide level, including them in the Counter Reformation's drive of recovery, alongside male priests. This desire to be involved in the global Catholic mission, however, was to remain purely a theoretical statement, since the pontiff never deemed it fit to dispatch female proselytisers on such an operation.

Despite claims to a universal evangelical brief, it was in their more local endeavours in the English mission that Mary Ward and her followers represented the most direct threat to the established *status quo* of post-Tridentine female religious life. There, their clandestine networks allowed them to work daily as missionaries without the decency of enclosure or the supervision of a male ordinary. Running parallel to the first organised houses in London and, later, in the North of the country, smaller pockets of work allowed the Institute to penetrate the fabric of English society in a discreet and covert way. In areas where setting up a school was not possible, some members worked as single, anonymous

individuals, often living with a family under the guise of a member of the household. The narrative of Sister Dorothea, of whom we know nothing except that she was one of the lay members working in England, showed how she not only catered for existing recusants, but also converted Protestants. She spent a large proportion of her time helping the poor, caring for them in their sickness and generally doing good works. Although she was not in a position to open schools, she honoured her educational vocation by teaching children at home. Yet, her report conveys little information regarding the contents of her curriculum or even her pedagogical methods. Significantly, she chose to focus on her missionary work of conversion and she described her activities as a proselytiser in considerable detail.

By teaching her pupils within their own homes, Dorothea established contact with important families and found opportunities to converse with them about religious matters. In those times of anti-Catholic persecution, many were not entirely ready to commit to recusancy, for fear of the consequences. She applied herself to the pastoral service of such households, thereby gradually persuading them not to attend Anglican services regularly, or at least to refrain from communion there.<sup>5</sup> She brought about the conversions of nine people, but encountered difficulties officially to receive these new converts into the Church: she often had to walk miles on foot to meet with the nearest priest, or even wait for months before she could secure one.<sup>6</sup> Her function complemented that of the clergy; though she could not dispense the sacraments herself, her work in Suffolk was of a missionary nature and, clearly, transcended early-modern conceptions of womanly religious roles.

Success as a Catholic evangeliser brought Sister Dorothea to the notice of Protestant authorities: the church court issued a sentence of excommunication and it was only her care in preserving her anonymity that saved her in the crisis. Since villagers and officials knew her simply as 'Dorothy', the absence of a family name prevented the local minister from taking further action. However, the immediacy of danger in her missionary occupations did not dampen her spirits for long and she soon resumed her activities under the very noses of her prosecutors. This anecdote shows how individual members of the Institute worked in England in a manner entirely comparable with that of missionary priests. Although Sister Dorothea could not herself reconcile people to the Church, she played a crucial role in converting and instructing them until she could procure a priest who could sanction their conversion. Her skill and her dedication to the cause returned souls to the Catholic Church and prepared the ground for the missionary priests.

Indeed, Dorothea underlined the complementary nature of her work with that of the priests. At a time when clerical ranks were divided about the 'Jesuitesses', she found that, on English soil, she could work hand in hand with missionaries and enjoy mutual support in the alliance

in the common cause of the Church. She took upon her the religious instruction of the new converts and ensured that their new-found faith was solidly anchored.

Sister Dorothea's account illustrates the kind of tasks that were to lead to the Institute's condemnation in 1631. The work of the English Ladies was not taking place within the established forum of religious enclosure; their teaching and catechising activities were the result of self-motivated and independent enterprise that functioned outside the control of an episcopate and outside the secluded, private sphere of conventual classrooms. Thus, their physical freedom worked against their ultimate success as an institution. It was because the Ladies catechised outside the traditional female arena of the enclosed classroom that their endeavours were categorised as public preaching contravening the Decrees of Trent and the Pauline injunctions for women to remain silent in matters of religion. As they outgrew the sphere of humble domestic maintainers of the faith, they became involved in works of conversion that were deemed highly unsuitable for women in seventeenth-century Europe.

One of Mary Ward's most famous declarations was her reply to a remark made by a Jesuit who doubted the constancy of those he called 'but women'. In her often-quoted retort, Ward addressed her congregation of St Omer in a manner that sounds assertive even to the modern reader:

There is no such difference between men and women, that women may not do great matters, as we have seen by the example of many Saints who have done great things, and I hope in God it will be seen that women in time to come will do much.<sup>7</sup>

Her defence of women as worthy beings thus showed that she did not share the patriarchal view generally endorsed by the early modern Church. The next passage demonstrates this even further:

What think you of this word, 'but women'? If we were in all things inferior to some other creature, which I suppose to be men, which I care be bold to say is a lie then, with respect to the good Father, I may say: it is an error. [...] I would to God that all men would understand this verity: that women, if they will, may be perfect, and if they would not make us believe we can do nothing, and that we are but women, we might do great matters.<sup>8</sup>

These words speak for themselves: Ward did not share her contemporaries' conceptions of women. Her strength of conviction, combined perhaps with her failings in the art of diplomacy, surely made it plain in her *rapport* with the authorities that she refused to comply with female role-definitions. Her defence of the value of women in the active ranks of the Church patently disregarded centuries of tradition that deemed them to be physically, morally and spiritually weaker than men.

Although there is no evidence that the Roman Curia ever heard or read these speeches directly, there can be little doubt that, in their dealings with

Mary Ward, they became familiar at least with their spirit. In the 1621 Memorial of the English clergy, John Bennet (the agent for the secular clergy in Rome) accused her of pride and immodesty, declaring that she and her Ladies 'presume[d] of their own power that it is omnipotent'.<sup>9</sup> Many supported this view and felt equally angered by Mary Ward's refusal of traditional enclosure. Fr. John Bennet, (d. 1623), wrote: 'Briefly closure they must embrace, and some Order already approved, or else dissolve. But of closure they will not hear.'<sup>10</sup> Some years later, in 1630, Francesco Ingoli, secretary of *Propaganda Fide*, wrote along the same lines. In his *Compendium of the process made by the Nuncio of Cologne against the Jesuitesses in the year 1630 and month September* he described the Institute as 'a new form of religious life without the license of the Apostolic See, [...] without enclosure, against the pontifical bulls'. After questioning the Ladies' honour by equating their geographical mobility with loose morals, he denounced their impudence since, he claimed, they preached publicly, taught theology and dared to think themselves equal to priests.<sup>11</sup>

These were women without a *custos*, who brazenly refused male supervision and the propriety of the cloister; they were given the sarcastic sobriquets of 'galloping girls' or 'wandering nuns'.<sup>12</sup> As the 1631 Bull of Suppression proved, the Institute's adopted lifestyle (missionary, unenclosed and autonomous) was simply unacceptable to the Church of the seventeenth century. Yet Mary Ward championed her ideal of a female counterpart to the Society of Jesus, which she had no intention to depart from in any way.<sup>13</sup> But did her unwillingness to compromise on the terms of her mission spring from her assertive resolution to empower women within the Church? Did she envisage her Institute as defined by gender, striving to liberate women from the perceived yoke of patriarchal dictates?

#### *The cloister within the soul*

Careful study of the Institute's documents reveals that, when Mary Ward was but a child, her initial vocation was of an introspective nature; only gradually did it evolve towards exteriorisation.<sup>14</sup> Between 1600 and 1606, at Osgodby (East Riding), the seat of the prominent Yorkshire recusants Lady Grace and Sir Ralf Babthorpe, she was introduced to the quasi-religious lifestyle observed by the family and its servants.<sup>15</sup> In a conscious attempt to imitate the regularity of conventual offices, the Babthorpes' monastic-like regularity observed a daily *horarium* that prompted their ministering priest, James Sharpe (*alias* Pollard, 1577-1630) to consider the house like a monastery.<sup>16</sup> On working days, he said two morning Masses, one for the servants at six o'clock and the other at eight o'clock for those who did not attend the first. Every afternoon, at four o'clock, he said vespers and compline for the gentry

members of the household. On Sundays and holy days, the doors were locked while the members of the household heard Mass and sermons and the children were later taught catechism. The locking of the doors before the service, although primarily a practical precaution, symbolised on a metaphorical level the mental shutting out of the world during times devoted to contemplation. Moreover, most members of the Babthorpe family meditated and prayed daily, following the *Spiritual Exercises* and retiring to bed at nine o'clock after their evening litanies; the family's spirituality was further enhanced by fortnightly confession and communion.

It is arguable that English recusants separated from the control of their Church, far from seizing the opportunity to innovate and escape the strict régime of monastic observance were, on the contrary, compelled by adverse conditions to adhere to tradition with renewed devotion. Since they had been deprived of their freedom of worship, recusant households had turned inwards, in order to cultivate traditional contemplation and imitate the monastic model of the 'perfect' life as faithfully as their daily occupations in England allowed. As a recusant girl staying with the Babthorpe family, Mary Ward had found personal ways of bringing the aura of the cloister into her secular time and space; on the one hand, she allocated a cardinal virtue to each day of the week while, on the other, she dedicated each room to a particular saint. Her desire, in those early years, was to enter a convent on the Continent, where she could take the habit and become a nun, consecrating her every waking moment to contemplation, prayer and meditation.

Her six-year stay at Osgodby deeply influenced the awakening of her vocation; she became imbued with the empirical experience of its quasi-monastic regularity and lived through events that were to become important milestones in the development of her early spirituality. For instance, it was as the women were gathered together, sewing or embroidering, that she heard the story of a nun who, after breaking her vow of chastity and giving birth to a child, had been allowed to re-enter her community.<sup>17</sup> However, the offender was to be constantly punished for her sin: she was to lie before the chapel door so that all the other nuns stepped over her on their way to the choir. On hearing the story, Mary Ward was not shocked by such treatment but, on the contrary, edified by its example; of these early days, she later remembered: 'Of all virtues to which I was drawn with greatest affection was chastity'.<sup>18</sup>

This respect for virginal purity remained a constant trait of her spirituality throughout her life. Thus, in the 1612 *Schola Beatae Mariae*, Mary Ward addressed the education of girls by endorsing the received ideal of feminine perfection. Pupils were exhorted to behave as models of proper social behaviour, to 'curb passions, restrict inordinate desires, obey parents, turn away from the levity of girls; observe virginal maturity' and show restraint at all times.<sup>19</sup> In fact, the Institute's teaching retained

elements of a traditional nature and inculcated the virtues advocated by the patriarchal consensus of the period as intrinsically feminine. The qualities of reserve and discretion should become second nature in a pupil, in order to prevail against curiosity and gossip—two faults believed to be particularly recurrent in young females. More importantly, the triumvirate of the most holy virtues in women, chastity, humility and obedience, was praised and recommended daily, as the crown on a virtuous wife's head.

This conformist outlook was consolidated when four years later, the 1616 *Ratio Instituti* specified that the members of the Institute should take a private vow of chastity, the transgression of which would incur irrevocable expulsion, regardless of circumstances. It was the only instance of a sin deemed grave enough to warrant the exclusion of a member: the English Ladies would be of irreproachable moral purity and 'altogether angelical'.<sup>20</sup>

As a young woman, Mary Ward's ideal of devout perfection endorsed all the canons of the post-Tridentine Church. In fact, when she first left England to enter religion in 1606, she had elected to become a Poor Clare, a choice which expressed a spirituality centred on inner reflection. As she later confessed, she could not, as yet, envisage a religious purpose outside the traditional cloister. She explained that, initially, she had felt drawn to monasticism and anticipated 'content in solitude and abstraction from the world'. She expanded:

I had no particular vocation to one Order more than another, only it seemed to me most perfect to take the most austere that a soul might give herself to God, not in part but altogether since I saw not how a religious woman could do good to more than herself alone. To teach children seemed then too much distraction [...] as therefore to hinder that quiet and continual communication with God which strict enclosure afforded.<sup>21</sup>

Although the Institute was deemed so objectionable that it had to be suppressed by Urban VIII in 1631, and although Mary Ward herself is sometimes seen as a feminist activist, she had begun her religious journey in a remarkably unthreatening way, holding traditional virtues as her ideals of perfection. The foundress shared this spiritual heritage with her closest followers: the necrology of Barbara Babthorpe (1591–1654) maintained that 'her spiritual gifts far surpassed her natural talents, though these were of a very high order', which suggests that she may not have felt talented or even drawn to a teaching apostolate, and may have preferred more traditional avenues of communication with the divine through contemplation and prayer. Although reputedly 'severe and hard, unmerciful even to herself', her rigid self-discipline was counter-balanced in her kindness to others and impartial government.<sup>22</sup>

Another pillar of the Institute, Winifred Wigmore (1594–1656), was known by her sisters as 'the little Saint', in honour of her fair and sweet temper. Her eulogist equally praised her high degree of piety.<sup>23</sup> Her life

was characterised by her meekness and extreme personal poverty, and by her self-effacing dedication of her time and possessions to the well-being of others. Through the example of these sisters, who shared Mary Ward's inclination towards contemplation and her respect for recognised monastic values, it becomes clear that the Institute, despite its active nature, aspired to some of the more traditionally monastic ideals. In fact, its members combined their new way of life with the observance of many traits of medieval religious practice.

One of the most telling attestations of Ward's faithfulness to the conventual model was her early affinity with claustration and the contemplative channels it offered; paradoxically—since it was her steadfast refusal of enclosure that led to the suppression of her Institute—she started her project with a semi-cloistered way of life, which she described in her 1612 *Schola Beatae Mariae*:

And although this Institute of its nature does not allow of the strict cloister in the present condition of England, still, far from having the house open to all, we desire rather to have cloister so strictly observed that no access is to be allowed to any extern whatsoever in the Chapel and [boarding] schools [. . .]. But necessary and serious conversations will be referred to the grille destined for that purpose.<sup>24</sup>

This passage plainly indicated that, in 1612, Ward expected her Institute to compensate for its lack of strict enclosure by implementing some safeguards to guarantee the integrity of the religious house and of its boarding school. Clearly, what was to become a ground-breaking vocation had in fact originated from traditional beginnings, embracing most of the received conceptions of female religious perfection.

In that sense, the Institute's archives contradict the stereotype of a rogue community of women intent on divorcing themselves from centuries of tradition. Rebellious natures do not emphasise obedience as one of their chief spiritual aims; yet, as Mary Ward took the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius, she repeatedly promised to subject her own will to that of her director. The 35 resolutions which she took around 1612–1614 revealed her love for the established notions of medieval monasticism. In resolution 10, she plainly declared: 'I will never contradict in desire, word, nor action the will of my superior'. Her determination was reiterated several times throughout the text which, at times, gained an almost ascetic tone:

I will not permit in myself the least repugnance to whatsoever obedience shall ordain, nor nourish in myself a contrary opinion. My will with obedience shall be always one and the same in every occasion, whether the thing be great or small, prosperous or adverse, easy or hard.<sup>25</sup>

In this way, Mary Ward applied herself to the pursuit of spiritual perfection through the channels of monastic values such as chastity, separation from the world and obedience. She and her English Ladies were far from rejecting the established paradigm of religious excellence;



on the contrary, they strove towards its complete assimilation and regarded it as the only sound foundation on which to base their novel foray into the female apostolate.

Moreover, although the Institute's rules exonerated its members from physical acts of penance which, by weakening the body, ran counter to the mission of 'soldiers of God', many English Ladies remained attached to such traditional practices. Since, in England, she was forced to dress according to her social status to avoid detection, Mary Ward resolved to wear a hair shirt underneath her apparel, thereby practising asceticism even in the midst of English genteel society. In the same spirit of attrition she ate but one meal a day for the first seven years of her foundation and slept exclusively on straw beds, 'as a means to obtain light'.<sup>26</sup> Her resolve to punish her senses was also apparent in the resolutions she took during the *Spiritual Exercises*, and in which she pledged: 'Seeing that my loathness to suffer has been the cause of so many evils, I propose henceforward to embrace all contrary things as due for my sins, and the part and portion which for myself I have chosen'.<sup>27</sup> In these ways, the foundress did not shrink from punishing herself for all but the smaller defects, and her spirituality was imbued with a trend of asceticism worthy of the most austere regular Orders.

Some years later, in 1618, Mary Ward wrote down a few notes during a spiritual retreat she undertook when spending some time working on English soil; her desire to punish herself for her perceived shortcomings remained as present as ever in statements such as 'I wanted a sorrow', '[I] had some desire and resolution to begin a course of mortification'.<sup>28</sup> Forms of penance were not a requirement but rather the expression of her personal asceticism: her understanding of religious perfection implied the observance of strict religious rules. Ward's ascetic *penchant* was also shared by some other members of the Institute, such as Frances Bedingfield whose necrology recorded that she had renounced all the vanities of the world by the age of fourteen and chastised her body through fasting and the regular use of chains and of the discipline.<sup>29</sup>

Such indications of a propensity towards monastic catharsis, although they are the exception rather than the norm, nevertheless appear in the Institute's documents with more regularity than might have been anticipated considering the novel, Ignatian nature of the Ladies' vocation. It is clear that the English Ladies' spirituality derived directly from that to which they had been habituated in English recusant circles. As members of one of the most pioneering female religious enterprises in early modern Europe, they nevertheless held monasticism and contemplation in high regard and did not envisage their Institute as a way of freeing themselves from the obligations of the cloister.

Mary Ward's recusant upbringing unquestionably had a considerable impact upon her ideal of perfection. Most revealingly, her spirituality, like that of so many of those working in the English mission to ensure

the survival of Catholicism, abounded not only with notions of asceticism but with the ideal of martyrdom as means to achieve perfection. In an England where Catholics regularly were victims of searches, fines, trials, imprisonment and even execution, recusancy was inextricably intertwined with martyrdom. Therefore, from a young age, Mary Ward had grown accustomed to the violence of religious persecution and viewed self-sacrifice as a necessary means for the attainment of sanctity. In her formative years, she considered dying for her faith to be one of the most perfect ways—if not *the* most perfect—to achieve sanctification in the eyes of God.

The tenth panel of Ward's pictorial biography, the *Painted Life*, offered a vivid illustration, recalling how at the age of sixteen, inspired by the lives of the holy martyrs, she had felt strongly attracted to martyrdom herself. She stands in the centre of the picture with, at her feet, traditional symbols of martyrdom such as knives, axes, spears and various instruments of torture. To her left, Catholics are put to death, their executions shown at the various stages of hanging, burning, disembowelling and quartering. As she literally embraces the gallows with both arms, she looks upon the scene with visible longing. This is highly reminiscent of the missionary outlook illustrated in the dramatic paintings of the English College at Douai. Yet, a small panel on the top right-hand corner of the picture offers a sharp contrast to the horror of the main scene: there, the young woman appears alone, facing a single majestic candle, absorbed in prayer, in an evocation of the revelation in which she understood that God required spiritual rather than bodily sacrifice.<sup>30</sup> At this juncture, her spirituality became one in which ideals of martyrdom or of extreme asceticism were replaced by a deep concern for the spiritual welfare of others. The hardship to be endured would derive from her vocation to serve her neighbour through education, catechesis and apostolic works.

#### *The apostolate as self-sacrifice*

There can be no doubt that the Institute, for all the novelties it entailed, nevertheless embraced many of the characteristics of traditional monasticism; what is more relevant is that it did not do so out of a sense of duty or obligation, but because its foundress deeply believed in the intrinsic value of the 'perfect' life. Though Mary Ward refused enclosure, she often expressed her admiration for religious claustration as a preserver of spiritual serenity and order; though she opted for the apostolate, she revered contemplation as a privileged path towards the divine and an efficient way to advance catholic progress in Europe. In this respect, our modern understanding of the relationship between action and contemplation contributes to the current sense of puzzlement over active communities' esteem for monastic values, which we sometimes see as paradoxical.

Since cloistered meditation has all but disappeared from contemporary lifestyles, physical isolation and immobility have, on the whole, come to

represent passivity and inactivity, which the twenty-first century is quick to dismiss as useless. Subconsciously shaped by today's values, equating action with empowerment and contemplation with subjection, historians have misread these determined women, who braved both public opinion and ecclesiastical censure, in order to join unrecognised teaching communities. Their resolve is understood as the indicator of ambition, combined with a strong desire to choose a different option; their choice, it is surmised, must be the manifestation of their self-will, refusing to limit themselves to the gender-defined boundaries of post-Tridentine religious life. However, the modern dichotomy between action and contemplation can be deceptive. It is arguable that these early-modern pioneers did not envisage the apostolate as a means of liberation from the Church, but as a gesture of ultimate sacrifice to it. Rather than a movement of feminist empowerment freeing women from religious subjection, could not the English Ladies' catechising mission be essentially an act of self-denial?<sup>31</sup>

When, in 1620, Mary Ward wrote to Mgr Albergati to explain her change from a preference of an austere enclosed order to that of a missionary ideal, she described a divine revelation she believed to have experienced in 1609. The vision, known as the vision of St Athanasius's day, intimated that contrary to her personal inclination, she was not destined to be an enclosed nun. In this epiphany, she recalled, joy and hope were intertwined with anxiety and foreboding:

To leave what I loved so much, [...] to expose myself to new labours, which then I saw to be very many; to incur the several censures of men, and the great oppositions which on all sides would happen [...] afflicted me exceedingly. Yet had I no power to will or wish any other than to expose myself to all these inconveniences, and put myself into God's hands with these uncertainties.<sup>32</sup>

In this passage, Mary Ward explained that God's summons had compelled her, almost against her will, to leave what she had described as perfect contentment in solitude and contemplation. However, she confessed to Mgr Albergati, she understood that her own personal inclinations had to be forsaken in order to obey God's commands.

In the aftermath of this episode, Ward became prey to many doubts; she was to leave her Poor Clare convent, but she was not sure what else she was meant to do. When reflecting upon what might be required of her, she could only envisage entering another convent, of a different Order: she debated with her confessor whether she should enter the Teresians, so convinced was she that her calling was to be monastic. As she waited for her path to become clearer, she left for England, where she spent some months working for the recusant community. It was while she was there that her mysticism manifested another vision; this, known as the Gloria vision, convinced her she was not to become a Teresian any more than a Poor Clare, and left her more confused than ever. She recorded:

[...] though in that instant of time my understanding was clearly convinced that the thing then put before me was truly good [...] and my will so possessed as left without power, then or ever after, to love or elect any contrary thing, yet to have still all denied me, and nothing proposed in particular seemed somewhat hard.<sup>33</sup>

Confronted with the realisation that she was not to become an enclosed religious, Mary Ward's despondency soon transformed into complete abandonment of herself into the hands of God; her will was resigned to embrace, not what she would personally prefer but what came to her from God, through her enlightenments. Eventually, the way in which she was to realise her divine purpose was revealed to her through the same channel of visionary experience when, in 1611, she received divine direction to 'Take the same of the Society'.<sup>34</sup> This final revelation came to her as a relief, a 'comfort and strength' which changed her entire soul. Thereafter, her design for a community of English women took a new form: after years of indecision between the contemplative and the active life, she took a decisive turn towards the apostolate. Through this ultimate revelation, she understood that she was to found a Society of Jesus for women. In this way, the Ignatian Institute came into being when its foundress surrendered her own will to obey that of God. Far from being an expression of assertive rebellion, her action was one of self-denying trust.

In order to understand the nature of Mary Ward's Institute, the mystical elements of its genesis cannot be underestimated. Indeed, this radical female Order not only pointed out the inadequacies of post-Tridentine religious life but also presumed to bridge the divide between the sexes in the Church. Such a militant challenge understandably seems revolutionary, intent on the demise of the old order and driven by the wilful ambition of a determined, charismatic leader. Yet, one must avoid the pitfalls of textual blindness and consider the creation of the Institute in context: Mary Ward never claimed to be the source of her Ignatian project. Personally, she felt drawn to the cloister and respected the Catholic tradition. When they embarked upon their mission, she and her followers were not indulging their own whim but rather sacrificing themselves to fulfil the will of God. The foundress, as a mystic, was simply obeying the divine commandment to found a Society of Jesus for women.

Therefore, Mary Ward abandoned her preferred path to begin her female Society of Jesus; she turned down the pleasures of cloistered contemplation in order to undertake labours towards which she did not feel any particular affinity. Hence, the 1616 *Ratio Instituti* presented the English Ladies' educational work as their particular gift to God, an offering that could not be made by enclosed communities:

no one is, by the Institute, obliged to observe strict enclosure, or to wear a determined religious habit, or to perform external penances and austerities; [the English Ladies] are not called to a life in which they can devote themselves only to themselves; but that, having Divine Love alone in view,

they are to prepare themselves to undertake any labour whatsoever in the education and instruction of virgins and young girls.<sup>35</sup>

The foundress was urging her followers to refrain from penitential practices that could hinder them from fulfilling their apostolic duties. Teaching was to take precedence over everything else, even the established practices of the 'perfect' life: it was their calling, it was what God commanded. Their educational vocation was an act of self-denial *per se*. In that sense, the rebellious 'Jesuitesses' in fact demonstrated abnegation by renouncing the rewards of contemplative piety and undertaking works for the Christian education of girls. They offered a new interpretation of medieval asceticism born from the very spirit of the Catholic mission of recovery. By putting the spiritual welfare of others before their own and choosing what they believed to be the more arduous path, they were able to reconcile the principles of monastic asceticism with their novel Ignatian vocation.

Indeed, some members were said to have taught despite a natural, physical inclination to the contrary; in her death notice, Mary Clifton, for instance, was praised for her constant teaching efforts 'notwithstanding her delicacy'.<sup>36</sup> Like many others, Clifton's initial intention was to enter a traditional convent; only later did she come to embrace the apostolic ideal of the Institute as a more perfect way to give herself entirely to the greater glory of God. The active teaching of the so-called 'Jesuitesses' can therefore be construed as an act of self-denial undertaken as the ultimate sacrifice to God; it was, as the *Institutum* put it, 'a pathway to God'.<sup>37</sup>

Mary Ward always anticipated considerable opposition against her Ignatian project, but welcomed these difficulties 'with a great desire to suffer much and many crosses'.<sup>38</sup> She embraced suffering in her willingness to sacrifice her whole being in the pursuit of her divine vocation:

I then offered myself to suffer with love and gladness whatsoever trouble and contrariety should happen in my doing of his will [...] presented that perchance there was some great trouble to happen about the Confirmation of our course, and with this I found a great and new love to this Institute and a near embracing or union of affection with it; I offered myself willingly to this difficulty, and besought our Lord with tears that he would give me grace to bear it.<sup>39</sup>

Hardship did little to deter her from an apostolate which she embraced as the most arduous path and a mirror image of the life of Christ himself. Thus, at the age of 33, Mary Ward was prepared to follow her imitation of Christ to its ultimate conclusion: she was ready to die, not for the salvation of her own soul only, but for that of her fellow Catholics. This desire was still present in 1621 when, on her way to Rome, to present the pope with the *Institutum*, she stopped at Loreto and 'took for her part and portion to labour and suffer for Christ, having lively represented [sic] to her the much she was to suffer'.<sup>40</sup>

The thirtieth panel of the *Painted Life* illustrates Mary Ward's complex spirituality explicitly, capturing her re-interpretation of the medieval notions of martyrdom and cloistered contemplative devotion and her understanding of the active apostolate as a better, more complete way to please God. This panel represents the moment when, in 1619, she understood that saving the souls of others would be a greater gift to God than offering Him her own soul in a convent or on the gallows.<sup>41</sup> Kneeling to the right of the scene, she is looking upon three different types of protagonists. In the top left-hand corner, martyrs, in their death agonies, are sacrificing their lives for the faith. In striking contrast to the violence of such a scene, the right-hand corner of the painting depicts a group of male and female figures from various older established Orders, all deeply absorbed in prayer in the company of illustrious saints.<sup>42</sup> However, it is the third party upon which Mary Ward is smiling, a motley gathering of pilgrims and simple people she evangelised by her teaching. The caption reads: 'In 1619, in St Omer, while Mary was fervently thanking God for the grace of her vocation, He revealed to her that to help to save souls is a far greater gift than the religious life or even than martyrdom itself.'<sup>43</sup>

Mary Ward saw the ideal of the 'perfect' life as essentially centred on the self and focused upon personal salvation. Conversely, the paradigm of martyrdom with which she grew up emphasised the sanctification of the martyrs themselves. Ward therefore hoped that, since her Ladies' vocation was a calling whose altruistic nature used the channel of catechesis in order to save souls, the workers in such a noble enterprise could not fail to be favoured by God. In this way, their educational vocation reaped a double harvest. It bore immediate and visible fruit in the mission of Catholic recovery, improving its pupils' knowledge of God and enabling them to read spiritual works. Women who had been educated by the English Ladies were fully armed to face the hardships that awaited them in life, particularly if they were to live under the repressive penal laws of England. Their training enabled them to remain steadfast in the faith, by the regular practice of the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises*, mental prayer and sound doctrinal foundations.

But there was another recompense to this educational mission, one that would benefit the members of the Institute directly: they were securing their own salvation by giving away their lives in the service of others. The sacrifice involved in their renouncing the cloister for this unforgiving struggle in the world was sure to gain them a place in heaven, near the martyrs of the faith and the missionary priests with whom they worked in recusant England. Indeed, physical and moral suffering, material and emotional deprivation, personal and public humiliation were often the bitter portion of the English Ladies. The 1620s saw a rising tide of opposition to the Institute and later, after the proclamation of the 1631 Bull of Suppression, Mary Ward's imprisonment in Munich placed her followers

in even greater turmoil. In a letter to the pope in that year, Ward described these dark times in a poignant passage that brings to life the very wretchedness of the English Ladies' lives at that time. She evoked the harshness of her own condemnation as a heretic and mentioned, as if in passing, that incarceration had brought her to the very gates of death. Yet, she was more concerned with the welfare of her followers. Her condemnation also affected her disciples most cruelly: the stain on her good character, by association, marred the reputations of her followers and her fall was shared by all:

Our Ladies have been mocked by the heretics for having abandoned their fatherland and families; they have been despised by their closest relations; their annual income has been unjustly seized so that in four of our colleges it has been necessary to ask for alms.<sup>44</sup>

Mary Ward bemoaned the injustice of popular and ecclesiastical censure, especially since she envisaged the apostolate as a pathway to the divine. And yet, the very suffering they endured in their apostolate was to be part of its redemptive nature. She believed that the difficulties hindering her Institute's progress, the recurrent attacks against the Ladies' integrity and the general suffering they endured were as nothing compared to the reward God had in store for them. She considered their teaching vocation as the manifestation of their absolute abandonment to the will of God and as a direct conduit towards the salvation of their souls. She once wrote to one of her companions, Mother C. Morgan, assuring her that her work could not fail but ensure her a 'lasting crown'.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, the Institute's Ignatian mission was doubly perfect. On the one hand, it strengthened girls' knowledge of God and enabled them to read devotional works. Thus, pupils were fully armed to face the hardships that awaited them in this life, particularly under repressive English penal laws. On the other hand, this educational mission reaped a second harvest, one that benefited the English Ladies directly: by dedicating their lives to teaching and catechising, they were working towards their own sanctification.

The English Ladies, though they contradicted the decrees of the Council of Trent, were not rebelling against the established order of their Church. On the contrary, when they abandoned the ideal of monastic life and the quietude of private devotion in order to labour in the world, they accepted their vocation as their cross. Their mixed life was their ultimate sacrifice, one in which the apostolate that spearheaded the Counter-Reformation was intertwined with elements of traditional spirituality. Hence, Mary Ward's strong-worded declarations about women's worth and ability in the Church did not equate to her rejection of a tradition she found misogynistic and restrictive. Appealing as it may be, her representation as an ambitious feminist who purposefully exploded the boundaries of female

involvement in the Church is an anachronistic misinterpretation of the genesis of the Institute, the active vocation of which found daily nourishment in traditional medieval practices. When the English Ladies abandoned the ideal of monastic life and the serenity of private devotion in order to become evangelists, they embraced the 'mixed' life as their cross. Therefore, in imitation of Christ, the teaching nuns suffered adversity gladly; the stumbling blocks in their path were so many trials of their fortitude. They had a conviction: like Christ, they were sacrificing themselves to the active life for the glory of God. Like him, they would be rewarded a thousand-fold and gain, through this new form of martyrdom, the sanctification of their souls. In this way, the Ladies undertook the active apostolate as an act of penance, in a subtle adaptation of the medieval values of self-abnegation to the new conditions of seventeenth-century apostolic labour.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Patrick Collinson, "'Not Sexual in the Ordinary Sense'" in *Elizabethan Essays* (London, 1994), p. 127.
- <sup>2</sup> Bar Convent Archives (thereafter *BCA*), B18, *Institutum*, f. 19.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibidem.*, f. 23.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibidem.*, f. 22.
- <sup>5</sup> M.C.E. Chambers, *The Life of Mary Ward, 1585-1645*, 2 vols (London, 1882-1885), vol. 2, p. 27: 'Those who in respect of the fear of persecution [...] I cannot at the first bring to resolve to be living members of the Catholic Church, I endeavour at least so to dispose them that understanding and believing the way to salvation, they seldom or unwillingly go to heretical churches'.
- <sup>6</sup> Chambers, *Life*, vol. 2, p. 28.
- <sup>7</sup> *BCA*, B17, f. 2, *Three speeches of our Reverend Mother Chief Superior made at St Omer having been long absent*.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibidem.*, f. 3.
- <sup>9</sup> Westminster Diocesan Archives (thereafter *WDA*), B25, f. 56.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibidem.*, f. 54.
- <sup>11</sup> *BCA*, C1, *Letters against the Jesuitesses*, f. 311.
- <sup>12</sup> *WDA*, vol. 16, f. 207. In her article "'Wandering Nuns": The Return of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary to the South of England, 1862-1945', *Recusant History* 24.3 (1999) 384-96, Sr. M. Gregory Kirkus, IBVM, explores what she calls 'the purposeful mobility' of the members of the Institute in more recent years.
- <sup>13</sup> *BCA*, B5, letter 4 to Mgr Albercati, 1620.
- <sup>14</sup> See Jeanne Cover, *Love, the Driving Force: Mary Ward's Spirituality and its Significance for Moral Theology* (Milwaukee, Wis., 1997); Margaret Littlehales, *Mary Ward (1585-1645). A Woman for All Seasons* (London, 1974) and *Mary Ward, Pilgrim and Mystic* (London, 1998). Note also articles such as Lavinia Byrne, 'Mary Ward's Vision of the Apostolic Religious Life', *The Way Supplement* 53 (1985) pp. 73-84; Joseph Grisar, 'Mary Ward, 1585-1645', *The Month* 12.22 (1954) pp. 69-81; and Immolata Wetter, 'Mary Ward's Apostolic Vocation', *The Way*, supplement 17 (1972) pp. 69-91.
- <sup>15</sup> Henriette Peters, *Mary Ward: A World in Contemplation*, trans. by Helen Butterworth (Leominster, 1994), pp. 44-54.
- <sup>16</sup> Adam Hamilton, *The Chronicle of the English Augustinian Canonesses of the Lateran, at St Monica's in Lauvain, 1548 to 1625* (Edinburgh, 1904), p. 180. See also Roland Connelly, *Women of the Catholic Resistance* (Durham, 1997), pp. 191-93.
- <sup>17</sup> *Painted Life*, panel 9.
- <sup>18</sup> *BCA*, B4, autobiographical notes, transcribed in Emmanuel Orchard, *Till God Will: Mary Ward through her Writings* (London, 1985), p. 10.
- <sup>19</sup> *BCA*, B18, *Schola Beatae Mariae*, item 54.
- <sup>20</sup> *BCA*, B18, *Ratio Instituti*, f. 16.
- <sup>21</sup> *BCA*, B5, letter 4 to Nuncio Albercati, 1620.
- <sup>22</sup> *BCA*, box 4, necrologies, f. 4.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibidem.*, f. 15.
- <sup>24</sup> *BCA*, B18, *Schola Beatae Mariae*, item 14.
- <sup>25</sup> *BCA*, B9, notes written during the *Spiritual Exercises*, 1612-14, resolution 27.



- <sup>26</sup> *BCA*, A12, *A Briefe Relation of the Holy Life and Happy Death of our Dearest Mother*, ff. 15–16. This is a posthumous biography, written jointly by Mary Poyntz and Winefred Wigmore, Mary Ward's closest two followers, c. 1650.
- <sup>27</sup> *BCA*, B9, notes written during the *Spiritual Exercises*, 1612–14, resolution 5.
- <sup>28</sup> *BCA*, B9, retreat notes, April 1618.
- <sup>29</sup> *BCA*, box 4, necrologies, f. 17.
- <sup>30</sup> *The Painted Life*, panel 10.
- <sup>31</sup> See, *inter alia*, R. Blumenfeld-Kosinski and T. Szell (eds.) *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY, 1991); Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia, Penn., 1995); Elizabeth Petroff, *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women Mysticism* (New York, 1994); Diane Watt, *Medieval Women in their Communities* (Cardiff, 1997).
- <sup>32</sup> *BCA*, B5, letter 4 to Mgr Albergati, 1620.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*.
- <sup>35</sup> *BCA*, B18, *Ratio Instituti*, f. 5.
- <sup>36</sup> *BCA*, box 4, necrologies, f. 15.
- <sup>37</sup> *BCA*, B18, *Institutum*, f. 20.
- <sup>38</sup> *BCA*, B9, notes written during the *Spiritual Exercises*, 1612–14, resolution 35.
- <sup>39</sup> *BCA*, B9, *Various Papers*, 'The Loneliness', f. 34.
- <sup>40</sup> *BCA*, B12, *Briefe Relation*.
- <sup>41</sup> *The Painted Life*, panel 30.
- <sup>42</sup> The Saints represented are Benedict, Pachomius, Francis of Assisi, Dominic, Clare, Bridget, Scholastica and Teresa of Ávila.
- <sup>43</sup> Peters, *Mary Ward*, pp. 256–57.
- <sup>44</sup> *BCA*, B5, letter 86, f. 93 d.
- <sup>45</sup> *BCA*, B5, letter 44, f. 71.

**PARTICULARITES DU CATHOLICISME ANGLAIS :**

**ENTRE ALIENATION ET ISOLEMENT**

**« La séduction au service de la perfidie : représentation des missionnaires de la contre-réforme en Angleterre », *Revue de la Société d'Études Anglo-Américaines des XVII<sup>ème</sup> et XVIII<sup>ème</sup> siècles* 65 (2008) 57–75.**

### **Résumé :**

L'Angleterre de l'ère moderne construit en partie son identité sur l'exclusion systématique de ses sujets catholiques. De nombreuses publications volontiers alarmistes suivent chacune des crises majeures liées à divers complots papistes, sous le règne d'Élisabeth I<sup>ère</sup> comme durant tout le dix-septième siècle. La propagande anticatholique s'attaque à la foi mais aussi et surtout à la loyauté des sujets catholiques du royaume. L'un des ressorts les plus subtils de cette campagne d'avilissement repose sur la rhétorique de la féminisation de la mission et sur le concept de séduction. Nombre d'auteurs dénoncent en effet le rôle des femmes dans le projet subversif de la mission catholique. Ils montrent comment les missionnaires (et en particulier les jésuites) s'appliquent à séduire les Anglaises, célibataires, veuves, épouses ou mères, pour mieux attenter grâce à elles à l'intégrité de la famille et de la nation toute entière. La controverse anticatholique dénonce la stratégie des missionnaires qui, tel le serpent avec Ève, s'en prennent aux femmes pour mieux atteindre ensuite leurs époux et leurs enfants, pour s'immiscer dans la sphère privée. Ces pamphlets montrent les femmes comme d'innocentes victimes. Mais une fois séduites, en ligue avec l'ennemi, elles lui prêtent main forte et leur permettent d'usurper la place du paterfamilias et, de proche en proche, de renverser les valeurs fondatrices du royaume.

7 284 mots

mots-clés : Angleterre moderne ; mission catholique ; jésuites ; anticatholicisme ; controverse

### **Présentation du texte :**

Cet article est une version remaniée et étoffée de la communication présentée lors du colloque international sur « Les formes de la séduction » organisé par Pierre Dubois pour la Société d'Études Anglo-Américaines des XVII<sup>ème</sup> et XVIII<sup>ème</sup> Siècles, en janvier 2008. L'appel à communications correspondait à ma recherche à ce moment précis, puisque je m'étais tournée vers l'analyse des imprimés anticatholiques. Ce travail montre comment la figure ambiguë de la femme, à la fois innocente victime et dangereuse séductrice, se prête parfaitement au discours anticatholique. La rhétorique de ces pamphlets tend à décrire les missionnaires comme de cruels chasseurs traquant sans merci leur proie sans défense ; mais ce discours est double puisqu'à la cruauté s'ajoute la couardise d'hommes qui n'ont pas le courage de s'en prendre à leurs égaux et ne s'attaquent qu'à de faibles créatures. En outre, en utilisant l'exemple du foyer comme métonymie de la nation tout entière, cette rhétorique fait le portrait d'une mission vouée à renverser toutes les hiérarchies et toutes les valeurs de la nation anglaise. L'exemple des femmes permet à la propagande anticatholique de diaboliser les missionnaires, à qui elle prête les caractéristiques de Satan lui-même.

**LA SÉDUCTION AU SERVICE DE LA PERFIDIE :  
REPRÉSENTATION DES MISSIONNAIRES  
DE LA CONTRE-RÉFORME EN ANGLETERRE.**

L'Angleterre de l'ère moderne construisit en partie son identité sur l'exclusion systématique de ses sujets catholiques. Dans des publications volontiers alarmistes, la propagande anti-catholique dénonçait le rôle dévolu aux femmes dans le projet subversif de la mission catholique. C'est en circonvenant les femmes, célibataires, veuves, épouses ou mères, que les papistes menaçaient l'intégrité de la nation. La controverse anti-catholique dénonce la stratégie de séduction du missionnaire catholique qui, tel le serpent avec Ève, s'en prend à la femme pour mieux détourner l'époux, et de proche en proche, renverser les valeurs du royaume.

*The construction of early modern English identity relied partly upon the systematic ostracizing of « papist » subjects, who came to embody the very opposite of Englishness. In a plethora of alarmist publications, polemicists insisted upon the importance of women in the subversive project of the Catholic mission: it was by corrupting spinsters, widows, but also housewives and mothers that papists jeopardized the integrity of the nation. The anti-Catholic controversy therefore exposed the seductive strategies of priests in order to unmask their duplicity and unveil their truly evil nature: like the serpent who tempted Eve to defy God, missionaries would seduce women as an indirect means to ensnare their husbands, influence their families, and eventually overthrow the values of the kingdom.*

Alors que l'Angleterre tente, durant toute l'époque moderne, de définir son identité religieuse et de se montrer comme une nation unie autour d'une *Anglicana Ecclesia*, séparée de Rome depuis Henri VIII,<sup>1</sup>

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1. En 1533, le souverain reniait l'autorité du pape : « [...] this realm of England is an Empire [...] governed by one supreme Head and King » (Act in Restraint of Appeals to Rome). L'année suivante, l'acte de Suprématie officialisait la naissance de l'Église d'Angleterre, sous l'autorité suprême du roi, qui devenait ainsi chef de l'Église aussi bien que de l'État : « [...] Be it enacted by authority of this present

l'existence d'une communauté catholique au sein du royaume, si minoritaire et clandestine soit-elle, ne manque pas de poser de graves difficultés. Car, depuis le règne d'Élisabeth I (1558-1603), ces sujets anglais, dont l'allégeance est partagée puisqu'ils obéissent au pape autant qu'au monarque, deviennent l'objet de peurs et de soupçons qui s'expriment dans l'abondant corpus des pamphlets anti-catholiques. On se défie d'eux et l'usage du terme méprisant de « papiste », montre la cassure grandissante entre les loyaux sujets de la couronne et ceux que l'on représente comme des traîtres potentiels, alliés aux entreprises de Rome pour détruire le royaume. Cette peur, culmine en 1688 avec la Glorieuse Révolution et l'exclusion du roi Jacques II (1685-88).

Les crises qui jalonnent la période exaspèrent la dichotomie entre protestants et catholiques ; Élisabeth I ne fut-elle pas menacée par diverses conspirations ?<sup>2</sup> Jacques I (1603-25) ne fut-il pas victime du complot des Poudres, le 5 novembre 1605 ? Et Charles II (1660-85), ayant restauré la monarchie et l'Église anglicane après la République puritaine d'Oliver Cromwell, ne fut-il pas l'objet des machinations de Titus Oates en 1678 ? Selon les polémistes, ces attentats sont la preuve de la duplicité des « papistes ». Durant des décennies, foisonnent les titres qui cherchent à alarmer le public en s'attardant sur la duplicité du catholique, qui devient par définition l'ennemi du royaume souverain d'Angleterre. Les études d'historiens comme Michael Questier, Peter Lake et Alexandra Walsham, ainsi que celles de critiques littéraires comme Frances Dolan, Arthur Marotti, Alison Shell ou Raymond Tumbleson tentent aujourd'hui de distinguer le réel de l'imaginaire dans cette polémique anticatholique.

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Parliament that the King our sovereign lord, his heirs and successors kings of this realm, shall be taken, accepted and reputed the only supreme head in earth of the Church of England called *Anglicana Ecclesia* [...] ».

2. Entre 1569 et 1586, le règne d'Élisabeth I est menacé par une succession de complots visant à l'assassiner et à la remplacer par sa cousine, la catholique Marie Stuart, reine d'Écosse. En 1569, on découvre l'insurrection des comtes de Westmoreland et de Northumberland; puis c'est le banquier florentin Roberto Ridolfi qui ourdit un complot en 1570. En 1583, le catholique Sir Francis Throckmorton, en contact fréquent avec Marie Stuart, est exécuté pour haute trahison. Enfin, en 1586, Sir Anthony Babington est à son tour condamné pour des faits similaires ; les preuves accumulées contre Marie Stuart convainquent Elisabeth de signer l'arrêt de mort de sa cousine. Le contexte international, la guerre contre l'Espagne (et notamment l'épisode de l'Armada en 1588) contribuent également à attiser les sentiments anti-catholiques.

Le propos de la présente étude est un peu différent : il ne s'agit pas ici d'estimer la véracité des accusations formulées, mais d'étudier le discours et la rhétorique mis en œuvre pour diaboliser le catholique dans l'imagination anglaise. On remarque en effet que, si l'agitateur politique fait couler beaucoup d'encre, il inquiète moins que son confrère le missionnaire qui, loin de la cour, œuvre en secret dans les familles du royaume. Ces prêtres, condamnés à la clandestinité par la sévérité des lois pénales qui les rendent passibles de la peine de mort, prennent une dimension sans précédent dans l'imaginaire collectif de l'époque moderne. Les plus grands auteurs, même s'ils restent en marge de la diatribe anticatholique, sèment leurs ouvrages de commentaires qui témoignent du climat de peur grandissant. Ainsi John Milton, dans *Areopagitica*, dénonce les « papistes » comme des imposteurs au service de l'oppression romaine, « falsest seducers and oppressors of men » (245). Jour après jour, indétectables, ils travaillent à la conversion de l'Angleterre et leur discrétion tourmente notamment les auteurs anticatholiques qui, pour servir leur propos, choisissent de mettre l'accent plus que de coutume sur le rôle des femmes.

Alexandra Walsham a démontré que la surreprésentation féminine dans la communauté récusante, dont attestent les recensements officiels, étaient souvent le résultat de pactes domestiques passés entre époux afin d'éviter les sanctions pénales. Or, ce cas de figure n'est pas mis en avant par les polémistes du temps qui dénoncent au contraire une stratégie visant à multiplier les conversions féminines. L'anticatholicisme anglais contribue donc à donner aux femmes une place centrale dans la *représentation* du danger « papiste » : peintes en victimes d'abord innocentes puis consentantes, elles sont un élément-clé du discours de propagande protestante visant à diaboliser les missionnaires, et les jésuites en particulier. C'est, nous dit-on, en séduisant les femmes que le prêtre s'imisce dans la vie privée des familles, petites et grandes, pour y multiplier ses œuvres subversives (Dolan 53). On argue que l'entreprise de séduction est aisée, car l'intellect féminin n'offre guère de résistance : ainsi manipulées par les missionnaires, riches veuves ou célibataires fortunées sont pour eux d'idéals mécènes qui, protégées par l'égard dû à leur statut social et à leur sexe, offrent la sécurité et le financement sans lesquels la Mission ne saurait remplir sa fonction. Mais les missionnaires ne séduisent pas seulement pour s'approprier des ressources. Ils cherchent à attaquer le tissu social, et prennent pour cibles les mères de famille, même les plus humbles, car elles permettent la conversion des époux et des enfants (Yates 64) ;

cette stratégie leur permet enfin d'usurper l'autorité du *paterfamilias*, de renverser les rôles domestiques, et finalement de détruire l'ordre établi, mettant en péril les valeurs fondamentales du royaume.

Dans *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures*, Samuel Harsnett présente les jésuites comme d'habiles séducteurs. Il s'agit de détourner les innocents du droit de chemin, de les convaincre par des procédés souvent malhonnêtes. Selon lui, le catholicisme, obscurantiste par nature, mêle tradition, idolâtrie et superstition ; c'est une supercherie mise au point pour duper les esprits les plus vulnérables par des procédés rhétoriques et scéniques destinés à impressionner et à influencer le public. Harsnett se penche sur certains cas de possession démoniaque et sur les exorcismes qui les accompagnent : ce sont là, écrit-il, de pures mises en scène où acteurs et actrices ont appris et répété leur rôle. Il recueille le témoignage d'une certaine Anne Smith, prétendue possédée repentie, qui reconnaît n'avoir fait que se conformer à un scénario : « she learned her cue, to come into her fits » (191). Le polémiste s'appuie plus loin sur l'examen de Sara Williams pour dénoncer l'impudeur des officiants, qui, écrit-il, ne reculent devant rien pour choquer l'auditoire et lui faire accroire les pires mensonges : en partant des pieds, les prêtres posent leurs mains sur tout le corps de la jeune femme en remontant vers la tête, pour y repousser le démon qui sera alors expulsé par la bouche, les oreilles et le nez. Grâce aux pouvoirs de reliques sacrées, ils affirment avoir un jour expulsé un démon des parties génitales de la possédée (202). Selon Harsnett, l'exorcisme n'est qu'un stratagème qui doit d'être si répandu à sa faculté d'impressionner les foules, produisant à coup sûr l'effet désiré. Dans son ouvrage, le pamphlétaire exhorte ses compatriotes à ne pas se laisser ainsi mystifier : « To the Seduced Catholics of England : Seduced and disunited brethren, there be two grand witches in the world, that seduce the souls of the simple and lead them to perdition: lying wonders and counterfeit zeal ». L'ancienne religion, écrit-il, abuse de la crédulité du peuple : « [Catholicism is] the only religion to catch fools, children and women, by reason it is naught else, save a conceit pageant of puppets » (A2 et 20).

Si les prêtres sont représentés comme autant de séducteurs visant à impressionner les esprits faibles, la polémique avance donc que les femmes, par la vulnérabilité intrinsèque à leur sexe, sont des proies toutes désignées. John Gee enquête sur les méthodes mises en œuvre par les « grands maîtres de la séduction, particulièrement les jésuites »

(*New Shreds B*) et dénonce leur attitude prédatrice : « [they] steal away the hearts of the weaker sort, and secretly [...] creep into houses, leading captive simple women loaden with sins and led away with diverse lusts » (*The Foot out of the Snare 3*). Grâce à l'analyse de plusieurs cas particuliers, il s'efforce de percer à jour les pratiques employées pour convertir les jeunes femmes. Il évoque d'abord une certaine Mary Boucher qui, en service chez une dame catholique, est convertie par trois jésuites, Fisher, Wiseman and Ireland, qui la convainquent de renoncer à la religion protestante et de devenir religieuse. L'accent est mis sur les artifices de théâtre destinés à terrifier la victime : tandis que les clercs évoquent les tourments de l'enfer auxquels son hérésie la condamne, trois éclairs aveuglants déchirent la pénombre, suivis de l'arrivée spectaculaire d'un spectre féminin tout vêtu de blanc, dont les admonitions effraient tant la jeune femme qu'elle se convertit bientôt au catholicisme. Interrogée par l'auteur, Mary Boucher se dit victime d'un stratagème mêlant mise en scène dramatique et sorcellerie, tandis que Gee s'insurge contre la couardise des prêtres qui s'en prennent au sexe faible : « with what creeping sly stealth the Master gamesters the Jesuits do drive the female partridges into the net by the help of the setting dog of sneaking visions and phantasms » (*New Shreds 23*).

Les écrits protestants restent pourtant ambigus envers celles qu'ils décrivent comme les victimes des jésuites : elles sont en effet considérées à la fois comme des proies sans défense et des manipulatrices qui, une fois converties, se révèlent aussi redoutables que leurs confesseurs, jouant des préjugés culturels envers leur sexe pour mieux dissimuler leurs actions. Les polémistes prétendent qu'après avoir été séduite et trompée, la catholique devient à son tour séductrice et trompeuse ; ils étaient leur thèse sur les récits des missionnaires eux-mêmes : il n'est pas rare en effet que, dans leurs écrits, les jésuites, rendant compte du progrès de leur mission, louent le travail de leurs associées et leur témoignent respect et gratitude. Par exemple, Henry Garnet (1555-1606), supérieur des jésuites en Angleterre, rend hommage au courage de sa partenaire en religion, Anne Vaux (1562-1637?), et de sa sœur aînée, la veuve Eleanor Brookesby (c.1560-1626), qui toutes deux accueillent les réunions annuelles de la Compagnie de Jésus dans leur demeure de Great Ashby, Leicestershire, jusqu'en 1600. Conscientes que la sécurité de la mission toute entière repose sur leurs épaules, elles savent exploiter l'opinion de leur époque qui ne voit en la femme qu'un être faible et inconstant. Lors d'une fouille en octobre



1591, Anne Vaux manipule ainsi avec tact ces préjugés. Tandis que les cinq jésuites et les deux séminaristes présents dans la maison sont conduits dans les cachettes ménagées pour eux, et qu'Eleanor se réfugie dans une autre, Anne se prépare à accueillir les poursuivants et leurs hommes de main. Mais elle demande d'abord un moment de répit, prétextant, à l'heure matinale de la perquisition, ne pas être décentement habillée pour les recevoir. Garnet applaudit au sang-froid de sa pénitente, dont l'assurance laisse aux serviteurs le temps de faire disparaître toute trace de pratique catholique. Quand enfin elle ouvre la porte, c'est en parfaite maîtresse de maison qu'elle offre des collations aux perquisiteurs, permettant encore une fois à son personnel de maison de se rendre dans les pièces de l'arrière pour y dissimuler livres ou objets de culte, tandis que les poursuivants se réjouissent du bon accueil qui leur est fait.

En effet, les jésuites l'ont bien compris, ce n'est pas malgré, mais à cause de leur sexe que ces femmes sont utiles à la Mission, car il leur permet d'utiliser la misogynie établie de leur époque pour devenir des alliées irremplaçables. Garnet, organisateur pragmatique d'une mission clandestine dont il doit assurer la sécurité, salue l'aplomb d'Anne Vaux et se félicite d'avoir une associée si compétente. Mais de tels épisodes sont interprétés très différemment par ses détracteurs protestants : si les jésuites recherchent chez les femmes une protection qu'aucun homme n'aurait pu leur garantir, c'est que ce sont des imposteurs qui ne reculent devant rien pour exploiter ensuite celles dont ils ont gagné la confiance.

Le respect mutuel et l'entraide sur lesquels insistent les récits des missionnaires sont absents des publications protestantes, qui adoptent une perspective mieux faite pour échauffer le sentiment anticatholique. On remarque par exemple que les célibataires ont d'autres attraits que la seule protection qu'elles peuvent offrir. Les registres récusants montrent que les femmes fortunées, célibataires ou veuves, figurent en première place au rang des organisatrices et des piliers de la mission catholique en Angleterre. Les traités anticatholiques s'emploient à démontrer que cette incidence n'est autre que le fruit de la stratégie des missionnaires, qui cherchent à s'approprier logements et ressources. Gee montre que les prêtres s'enrichissent aux dépens de leurs alliées et dévoile les agissements des jésuites Fisher et Wiseman qui, en 1623, convoitaient les mille livres de rentes de l'orpheline Francis Peard. Usant du même artifice employé pour convertir Mary Boucher

– le spectre féminin vêtu de blanc qu’annoncent d’éblouissants éclairs – ils persuadent Francis Peard de prendre le voile, non sans l’avoir d’abord convaincue de mettre sa bourse au service de la Compagnie. Gee utilise encore l’image du prédateur et de sa proie : « they laboured to get this fat fish into their nett » (*New Shreds* 10), mais il souligne cette fois l’avidité des jésuites : « like two cunning gray-hounds that could well serve one another’s turn for the catching the poor hare, with some other journey-men of their trade, [...] every one of them began to pluck a feather from the plume of her estate » (14).

De nombreux pamphlets, tels *The Jesuites Intrigues* de Henry Compton, dénoncent ces mêmes exactions : « [...] women, [...] being persuaded by these fathers to despise the World, are by Them, in requital made a Harvest of, being wheedled out of rich movables and other considerable matters » (7). Compton prétend reproduire les *Instructions* données par la Compagnie à ses missionnaires. Le chapitre 7, « How to keep Widows to our selves, so far as concerns the disposing of their Estates » montre que le jeu de la séduction, loin d’être une fin en soi, n’a d’autre but que de s’approprier les ressources des dames ainsi charmées :

Visit the Widows, as often as we may be welcome, entertaining them with pleasing discourses, and godly stories, and keep up the cheerfulness of their humour, and never be too severe with them in Confession, lest they take a distaste at us : unless there be no hopes left of making any advantage by them (38).

Compton, prétendant toujours à l’authenticité, montre que les jésuites ne reculent devant rien pour séduire de nobles veuves dont ils pourront dilapider la fortune ; le chapitre des *Instructions* intitulé « How to procure the friendship of rich Widows » indiquerait, selon lui, la marche à suivre :

For this purpose must be called out some of the Fathers of the liveliest, fresh complexions, and of a middle age. These must frequent Their houses. [...] we must put a Confessor to them, that shall persuade them to continue in their widowhood [...]. Set them up a little Chapel, and an Altar neatly furnished, the minding of which may put the thoughts of a Husband out of their heads (35).

Les insinuations sensuelles sont à peine déguisées, et la séduction spirituelle s’allie au charme physique et personnel des jeunes prêtres en mission.

Cette représentation, fruit d'une imagination protestante attisée par la peur et l'animosité, semble justifiée par l'interprétation faite des écrits des missionnaires. Comme son supérieur Garnet, le jésuite John Gerard (1564-1637) insiste souvent sur la dimension pragmatique de ses choix. Il avoue sans détours avoir incité sa bienfaitrice, Elizabeth Vaux (née Roper, d. 1627), à renoncer au couvent après la mort de son mari ; en demeurant en Angleterre, elle permettait en effet à la mission de bénéficier de sa protection, de son réseau social, mais aussi de ses finances et de ses domaines. Garnet lui-même prodigue ces conseils à Anne Vaux, sa compagne en religion durant plus de vingt ans. Entre son arrestation le 27 janvier et son exécution le 3 mai 1606, il lui demande de continuer à servir en Angleterre et de ne pas entrer dans l'un des couvents du Continent, dont l'austérité ne pourrait que nuire à une santé déjà fragile (Caraman, *Garnet* 423). La sollicitude et la bienveillance du clerc à l'égard de sa pénitente se doublent de considérations pratiques, et si Garnet souhaite sincèrement épargner la santé d'Anne Vaux, la polémique protestante retiendra surtout qu'il cherche à exploiter son statut social et sa féminité pour protéger les activités de ses coreligionnaires en Angleterre.

Si les riches célibataires offrent ressources et protection, épouses et mères de famille représentent elles aussi d'idéales protectrices. Les explications de ce phénomène sont aussi variées que complexes, et continuent d'alimenter les études historiques. Godfrey Anstruther plaide d'abord pour une affinité quasi hormonale entre féminité et catholicisme, la sensibilité féminine étant particulièrement attirée par le mysticisme et les rituels de l'Église de Rome. Plus tard, John Bossy décrit le catholicisme anglais de l'époque moderne comme un « matriarcat » ; il met en avant l'importance du système pénal qui, en forçant les catholiques à cacher leur foi, participa au repli de leurs pratiques religieuses sur la sphère domestique, domaine d'influence féminine par excellence. Plus récemment, Alexandra Walsham a imposé sa démonstration selon laquelle l'importance des femmes dans la communauté récusante pouvait s'expliquer, entre autres raisons, par l'inefficacité des lois anticatholiques (78-81) : les sanctions pour récusance<sup>3</sup> portent exclusivement atteinte à la richesse et à la propriété,

3. L'adjectif « papiste » est utilisé en règle générale par les protestants dénonçant tous les catholiques, qui par définition reconnaissent l'autorité papale en matière de religion. Au contraire, le terme « récusant » est un terme légal se rapportant à toute personne refusant de se présenter au service dominical anglican. Par glissement, le terme fut employé pour définir les catholiques refusant ouvertement de se conformer

or la femme mariée, en tant que *feme covert*, ne possède aucun capital en son nom propre et ne peut donc être punie par la loi. En 1610, le parlement fait face à ce problème et vote une loi spécifique, « An Act for the Administration of the Oath of Allegiance and the Reformation of Married Women recusants »; l'épouse refusant de prêter le serment d'allégeance encourt une peine de prison, tandis que son mari est condamné à payer 10 livres par mois jusqu'à sa relâche, ou, s'il ne le peut, à renoncer à un tiers de son patrimoine. C'est donc toujours le *paterfamilias* qui est sanctionné, puisque, selon la loi, c'est à lui qu'incombe la conformité religieuse de son foyer. Dans ce contexte, les épouses bénéficient d'une liberté religieuse dont leurs maris ne jouissent pas. Selon Walsham, bien des couples concluent alors un pacte domestique, l'époux s'en remettant à sa femme pour garantir la foi catholique de la famille; elle sera récusante tandis qu'il deviendra schismatique, sa conformité publique le protégeant des poursuites. L'État anglais, sans le vouloir, semble avoir contribué à donner aux femmes un rôle véritable dans l'organisation de la communauté catholique clandestine.

Mais cette explication suppose une réelle connivence entre époux; les polémistes de l'époque, eux, préfèrent souligner la malveillance des prêtres qui corrompent les liens sociaux en séduisant les mères de famille. Une fois encore, les pratiques des jésuites sont l'objet des lectures les plus sévères. John Gerard explique que c'est en raison de leur docilité naturelle que les femmes ne persistent pas dans l'hérésie de façon aussi opiniâtre que leurs époux; c'est pourquoi il préfère tenter de les convertir quand elles sont seules, comme dans le cas de Mary Mulshaw, qu'il instruit en l'absence de son mari, Sir Everard Digby. Puis, fort de son alliance avec l'épouse, et grâce à l'aide de son coreligionnaire Roger Lee, il entreprend la conversion du *paterfamilias* lui-même, qu'ils n'obtiendront qu'*in extremis* alors que celui-ci gît sur son lit de mort. Pour le jésuite, il s'agit de faire preuve de sagacité et d'utiliser tous les atouts pour s'assurer de l'heureuse issue de ce moment délicat, qui met en jeu le repos éternel de l'âme: la collusion avec Mary Mulshaw est nécessaire pour venir à bout de l'entêtement de Digby et lui assurer la bienveillance de Dieu. Il est impossible de

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ou de prêter serment d'allégeance au monarque qui, en Angleterre, était reconnu comme autorité suprême pour l'Église comme pour l'état. Les récusants se différencient des schismatiques (dits « Church papists ») qui, souvent pour échapper aux sanctions, assistent à l'office et prêtent serment publiquement, bien qu'étant catholiques en privé.

savoir si les auteurs protestants avaient pu lire les récits de mission de leurs ennemis « papistes », mais il ne fait aucun doute qu'ils en connaissaient la teneur. Or, pour eux, les mots de Gerard indiquent un calcul, avec la complicité de l'épouse, pour « capturer » Everard Digby : « [...] all three of us got together and discussed the best way of catching her husband in St Peter's net. [...] His illness gave me the opening I wanted » (Caraman, *Gerard* 165). La métaphore de la capture d'une proie, omniprésente dans les publications anticatholiques, se retrouve (avec une intention différente), sous la plume du missionnaire, et donne l'occasion à ses critiques de dépeindre les jésuites en agents du mal qui, tel le serpent qui tenta Ève pour atteindre Adam, séduisent les femmes afin de mieux corrompre les hommes : « seek they not to seduce poor simple women, that they may entice their husbands, as *Eva* did *Adam*? » (Baxter 37). Les jésuites sont représentés comme des empoisonneurs séduisant les femmes pour infecter ensuite les hommes et les enfants, car ce sont les mères qui amènent leur progéniture au catholicisme : « young imps that [...] have sucked poison from their mothers' breasts » (Baxter 178). L'influence des récusantes sur leurs enfants est en effet un fait reconnu qui amène le Parlement à étudier, entre 1605 et 1677, de nombreuses propositions de loi, visant à les soustraire à l'influence jugée néfaste de leur mère. John Gerard lui-même admet utiliser la conversion d'une mère pour amener celle de toute la famille (Caraman, *Gerard* 189).

Si les polémistes anticatholiques se concentrent sur les récusantes, c'est parce que celles-ci jouent un rôle important dans ce qu'ils voient comme une stratégie permettant aux prêtres de s'immiscer dans la société anglaise pour la corrompre à l'insu des sujets protestants. Julian Yates remarque que les missionnaires sont perçus comme des parasites, qui infestent les domaines du privé autant que du public et mettent en danger toute la structure du royaume par leur travail de sape : « [t]he 'scandal' of recusancy was thus not so much the beliefs of English Catholics so much as the manner of their existence, the fact that they inhabited the fabric of the realm and did not resist openly » (172).

C'est, entre autres, l'identité catholique anglaise, multiple, variée et déroutante, qui exacerbe cette peur de l'ennemi domestique. En effet, si les récusants, qui refusent le service anglican, sont facilement identifiables, tous les « papistes » ne le sont pas. Certains, pour éviter les sanctions, sont d'occasionnels conformistes, qui assistent à l'office

et prêtent serment d'allégeance au monarque. Ces « Church papists » sont souvent perçus comme les plus hypocrites, car ils sont difficiles à distinguer des Anglicans :

conformity with the Oath of allegiance and other outward formal satisfaction of the State, concurring with a resolution to continue in Popery, is far more pernicious to the State then open and professed Recusancy (Bernard B3).

Thomas Bell soutient que la dissimulation est inscrite dans le mode d'action des missionnaires :

I have with great watchings, painful studies, and nightly lucubrations found out the secret caves, dens and holes, to which the Romish fox that devours the innocent lambs of Christ [...] resorts usually and hides himself therein from time to time covertly » (Bell, *Romish Foxe* A4).

Plus tard, il développe encore son portrait du jésuite en utilisant cette fois l'image du caméléon : « [...] if you ask them what is a Jesuit, their answer is, every man. Implying, that they are creatures which vary their colours like the Cameleon, according to the object » (*Popish Tyrannie* 54); il qualifie enfin les prêtres de « parasites du pape » : « the Pope's parasites » (*Downfall of Poperie* 16), dont on ne connaît la présence que trop tard, alors que l'infrastructure de l'édifice est déjà affaiblie. Afin de le démasquer, Baxter suggère de placer sur la poitrine de chaque « papiste » une fenêtre à travers laquelle on pourrait entrevoir son âme et connaître ainsi, par transparence, la vraie nature de ses pensées et de ses convictions (*Toile* 110). Et l'auteur de se faire le porte-parole de l'obsession nationale envers les intentions secrètes des catholiques lorsqu'il conclut : « forbearance of household foes can be no good policy » (169). En 1614, le parlement envisage même de contraindre les catholiques à porter toques et chausses de couleur jaune, couleur symbolisant la trahison, afin de pouvoir les reconnaître d'un simple coup d'œil parmi ses voisins, ses associés, et même ses amis. Car c'est là l'un des aspects les plus dérangeants de la séduction catholique : l'ennemi, nous prévient-on, avance masqué et souvent sous les traits agréables et familiers d'un proche. Le lien marital lui-même est susceptible d'être souillé par ceux qui s'immiscent dans l'affection des femmes pour y supplanter leurs époux, corrompant ainsi un lien sacré.

Si les prêtres s'allient aux femmes pour bénéficier de leur protection et de leurs réseaux sociaux, de telles collaborations entre

les sexes se prêtent volontiers à des interprétations d'ordre moral. Les clercs sont autorisés à pénétrer les espaces féminins les plus secrets, ceux dont sont normalement exclus les hommes ; dans ce milieu caché, ils occupent les espaces les plus privés, les chapelles clandestines et les « priests' holes » dissimulés dans l'architecture même des demeures, mais aussi les boudoirs et les chambres à coucher. Comptant sur la bienséance des officiers pour ne pas fouiller la couche encore tiède d'une dame de bonne famille, ils n'hésitent pas à se réfugier dans le lit de leur bienfaitrice pour échapper aux poursuivants. À l'inverse, les récusantes passent de longues heures dans les quartiers des prêtres ou les ravitaillent dans l'espace confiné de leurs cachettes. Le débat anticatholique fait grand cas des « liaisons ambiguës » entre pénitentes et hommes d'Église, souvent présentées comme scandaleuses, et que Coleen Seguin qualifie de « cocufiage spirituel » (« spiritual cuckoldry » 161).

Dans le débat anticatholique, la pénétration d'espaces sexués paraît symptomatique d'une moralité corrompue, et l'aspect spirituel de ce cocufiage cède le pas à des anecdotes salaces qui ne manquent pas de faire sensation. L'amitié qui, pendant vingt ans, lia Garnet à Anne Vaux donne lieu à des calomnies lors du procès de ce dernier. On remarque qu'Anne l'a accompagné en tout lieu et qu'ils ont vécu, dit-on, comme mari et femme. On en apporte comme preuve une lettre d'Anne Vaux à son confesseur emprisonné, signée A. G., pour Anne Garnet. Le juge, Lord Salisbury, se saisit de cette correspondance pour démontrer l'immoralité du jésuite : « What, you are married to Mrs. Vaux : she calls herself Garnet. What! *Senex fornicarius!* » (174). Les protestations du prêtre n'y feront rien, sa relation avec sa partenaire de mission est à jamais entachée de suspicion. La séduction attribuée aux prêtres n'est donc pas exclusivement de nature morale, mais peut bel et bien prendre des dimensions physiques, voire sexuelles, que les polémistes se plaisent à dévoiler, dénonçant la prétendue chasteté des prêtres comme une simple ruse destinée à inspirer la confiance :

You abominable Whore-masters, you filthy fornicators, you stinking Sodomites, you deceitful Deflowerers of maids, you devilish defilers of men's wives, you cankered corrupters of widows, and you lecherous locusts, may lie with your whores and harlots all night, and the next day after go to Masse. (Becon 157-59)

L'activité missionnaire est associée à la débauche ; on prétend même que les jésuites donnent des dispenses aux femmes qu'ils corrompent,

si, une fois enceintes, elles se font avorter (Anonymous 16-17). William Fennor rapporte l'anecdote d'une jeune femme qui, sur le point d'être mariée, s'avère être enceinte d'un jésuite : « her belly [was] full of young bones, which [she] afterwards confessed were of the Jesuit's making ». L'auteur exhorte ses lecteurs à se défier de la familiarité de leurs épouses avec les jésuites qui auront tôt fait de les supplanter dans la chambre conjugale : « they themselves will vouchsafe to enter their closets » (Fennor 17-18).

C'est ainsi que la traditionnelle accusation anticléricale de sodomie est remplacée à cette époque en Angleterre par celle d'adultère (Dolan 89-93). Lors de son procès pour non-conformisme, Margaret Clitherow (c. 1556-86), est accusée d'avoir eu des relations sexuelles avec les prêtres qu'elle protégeait (Dillon 277). Un jeune élève de son école dit avoir été témoin de scènes qui ne laissent pas de doute à ce sujet ; le conseiller Hurleston, siégeant au procès, s'en prend à celle qui, selon lui, a souillé le lit conjugal et déshonoré son mari : « It is not for religion that thou harbourest priests, but for harlotry » (Morris 414). Cette harangue exprime le sentiment populaire envers les missionnaires, qui envahissent l'intimité des époux et violent les liens les plus sacrés du foyer. À travers le scandale sexuel, si sensationnel, c'est le renversement des valeurs familiales que l'on craint, et pas seulement chez les protestants : en effet, les relations des récusantes et de leurs prêtres sont parfois l'objet de ressentiment, même chez les catholiques. Ainsi, Mr. Fermor porte-t-il plainte contre le clerc qui demeure sous son toit. Ce dernier, un certain Fr. Ashton, avait incité Mrs Fermor à remplacer les serviteurs du foyer par des domestiques de son choix et à renvoyer trois prêtres qui lui déplaisaient, sans que Mr. Fermor fût consulté sur ces changements. Lorsqu'il en prend connaissance, éclate une violente dispute au cours de laquelle il reproche au Fr. Ashton de s'être octroyé le rôle du *paterfamilias*. C'est alors, écrit-il, qu'il comprend que le missionnaire avait séduit sa femme pour mieux dominer sa famille et soumettre enfin l'époux, de gré ou de force, à son autorité : « Mr. Ashton hath told me diverse times if I would be ruled by him, I should have so good a wife as any man had in the country where I dwelt, insinuating what he could do with her » (Archives of the Archdiocese of Westminster 326).

Le devoir d'obéissance de l'épouse catholique est un problème difficile. En tant que femme, elle doit en principe obéissance à l'autorité patriarcale représentée par son époux ; cependant, en tant



que catholique, son allégeance ultime est due au clergé. Que faire si les ordres de l'un et de l'autre sont contradictoires ? Doit-elle se soumettre à l'autorité civile ou religieuse ? Si pour les récusantes, et les catholiques en général, ce problème est parfois douloureux, les missionnaires sont très clairs. Le Concile de Trente (1545-63), en réaffirmant la primauté du clergé sur les laïcs, a libéré les femmes de leur devoir de soumission conjugale en matière de religion. Garnet écrit donc : « Your husbands over your souls have no authority and over your bodies but a limited power : but your heavenly spouse can condemn both unto everlasting fire, or reward with everlasting bliss » (Garnet 145). Pour la catholique, de telles injonctions impliquent donc un conflit inévitable entre devoirs maritaux et religieux.

Un certain antagonisme conjugal devient alors inévitable pour la récusante dont l'époux, lui, est membre de l'Église établie. Le chef de famille est en effet considéré comme responsable des infractions commises par tous les membres de son foyer. L'insubordination de sa femme a donc des conséquences souvent désastreuses sur les finances du *paterfamilias* ; en outre, elle remet en cause sa capacité à diriger sa famille et le couvre de ridicule dans son voisinage. Le cas le plus connu de rébellion récusante contre l'autorité d'un époux conformiste est sans doute celui de Margaret Clitherow, à la tête de plusieurs centres catholiques dans la ville de York. C'est avec un respect non dissimulé que son biographe raconte comment elle rendait visite à son confesseur dès que ses devoirs d'épouse et de mère lui en laissaient le loisir (Mush 390). Quand elle demande si elle peut recevoir des prêtres sans l'accord de son mari, le prêtre, comme Garnet, l'assure que l'obéissance conjugale ne peut en aucun cas avoir prééminence sur l'obéissance envers Dieu : « in this, your necessary duty to God, you are not any whit inferior to him » (392). La jeune femme continue ainsi ses activités, tandis que John Clitherow est la risée du voisinage et la supplie, si elle doit persister, d'être au moins plus discrète. Ainsi, il semble bien que le catholicisme des femmes justifie leur désobéissance domestique.

À travers de telles anecdotes se construit la représentation du missionnaire comme ennemi de l'ordre domestique, exhortant l'épouse à bafouer l'autorité légitime de son mari. Pour les protestants, ceci illustre parfaitement l'inversion catholique de l'ordre naturel. Pour Gee, les prêtres ont su jouer de la clandestinité de leur mission en Angleterre, tirant grand avantage de la proximité peu commune qu'elle leur offre

avec les pénitentes qui les abritent et les protègent. Grâce à cette situation, ils développent leur ascendant, et exercent une influence qui, en aucun cas, ne saurait être convenable pour des serviteurs : « Thus, while they pretend that they are forced to creep into private houses for fear of persecution, they carry more dominion over the Family, than any Parish-Priest does in those Countries where Popish Religion publicly prevails » (*Foot out of the Snare* 80-1). Ayant renversé le rapport d'autorité entre maîtres et serviteurs, ils s'appliquent chaque jour à affaiblir l'infrastructure des rapports sociaux. Ils encouragent la destruction de tout devoir d'obéissance, d'abord entre conjoints, mais aussi entre parents et enfants ; ils exhortent les nouveaux convertis à désavouer leur famille si celle-ci persiste dans l'hérésie. Le polémiste Thomas Morton s'insurge contre la dangereuse inversion de l'ordre domestique qu'est, selon lui, le catholicisme :

Wives are not bound to render due benevolence unto their husbands, if heretics. [...] For by the heresy of the father, the child is freed from obedience. [...] Heretics may not be termed either children or kindred; but according to the old law, Thy hand must be against them to spill their blood [...]. Shall we call this Religion, which [...] by no acknowledgement of Natural Duties of Wedlock, natural Parents, natural Children, natural Country, doth bowel up Nature, as it were, and deprive men of Humanity itself? (3-4).

Car c'est bien là la véritable peur qui nourrit le débat : le catholicisme dissout tout lien de loyauté et appelle les sujets à renverser l'autorité patriarcale.

Morton, parmi tant d'autres, concourt plus encore à la diabolisation des missionnaires en les désignant comme les ennemis naturels du bien commun : « Those snakes as do naturally sting as soon as they get warmth, may not be harboured in the bosom of the Commonwealth : but all popish priests profess rebellions as soon as they can presume of their strength » (13). Selon lui, en défiant leur époux, les insoumises comme Margaret Clitherow ne font rien moins que participer au renversement de la hiérarchie établie. Comme lui, de nombreux auteurs de l'ère moderne lient ainsi le microcosme familial aux enjeux nationaux (*Anti-Papist* 30). Parce qu'il promeut l'inversion des valeurs, le missionnaire menace le tissu social et l'intégrité politique de la nation. Bell avertit donc ses lecteurs :

Note here, gentle reader, that to depend upon the Jesuits is to depend upon the devil ; and consequently, that to follow the Jesuits and their

bloody, tragic, and traitorous designs, is nothing else indeed, but to forsake God ; to abandon his true fear and worship ; to be traitors to your prince ; to be enemies to your native country. (*Popish Tyrannie* 8).

Au cours de l'époque moderne, et de plus en plus, le catholicisme est perçu comme l'antithèse de ce qui est cher au royaume ; c'est l'Autre par excellence, une image inversée comme dans un miroir, entièrement irréconciliable avec l'anglicité. Si la doctrine éclairée de l'*Anglicana Ecclesia* est la voie du salut, la « superstition » romaine ne peut être que le chemin de la perte. Le « papiste » s'apparente ainsi au serpent miltonien qui, dans *Paradise Lost*, devine la fragilité d'Ève et se réjouit de sa nature imparfaite. Il la séduit pour la convaincre d'agir selon son gré, mais le but ultime de sa séduction n'est autre que la corruption de l'humanité et le renversement de l'ordre divin. La séduction de la gent féminine est le moyen le plus sûr de réaliser ses desseins. C'est ainsi que, tandis que l'Angleterre moderne construit son identité anglicane et nationale dans l'altérité avec l'Église de Rome, elle donne à la récusante une importance qu'elle n'avait probablement pas pour ses coreligionnaires ; car dans la construction de cet anticatholicisme manichéen, le rôle des femmes, exagéré, est nécessaire à la représentation du monde catholique comme un monde inversé. La polémique insiste donc sur le fait que c'est en envoûtant les femmes et en les détournant du droit chemin que les missionnaires parviennent à parasiter la société anglaise. C'est cette séduction spirituelle, pétrie de mensonge et de manipulation, qui permet à ces agents du mal de corrompre les liens de la famille et de la société tout entière, pour finalement atteindre leur but ultime et renverser l'ordre établi.

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### Résumé :

Insolite reflet de la querelle des femmes qui occupe les érudits, la polémique cléricale autour de l'Institut catholique fondé en 1611 par Mary Ward (1585-1645) tente de déterminer si ces femmes, qui se veulent à la fois religieuses et missionnaires, sont les émissaires de Dieu ou les agents du mal. Tandis que leurs amis louent leur vertu, leurs nombreux détracteurs contestent la probité de ces « Dames anglaises » qu'ils pensent corrompues. Leur vocation ne leur semble pas divine mais maléfique, et leur choix innovant d'une Compagnie de Jésus au féminin paraît être la preuve de leur déviance. S'ils approuvent les grands principes de la vocation de Mary Ward et reconnaissent le bien-fondé d'une action visant à catéchiser les femmes, les jésuites eux-mêmes prennent leurs distances vis-à-vis de leurs émules, puisque leur règle ne leur permet pas de branche féminine. Ils craignent en outre toute association avec le scandale causé par l'absence de clôture de celles que l'on surnomme « *galloping girls* » ou « *wandering nuns* » aussi bien que « *Jesuitesses* ». Les séculiers, quand à eux, reprennent certains éléments du discours protestant et s'efforcent de montrer les dérives que représente de l'Institut de Mary Ward comme un argument de poids dans leur campagne anti jésuite auprès de la Curie. Convaincu, Urbain VIII éradique l'Institut en 1631 et le déclare nuisible à l'Église.

7 546 mots

mots-clés : Mary Ward ; Angleterre moderne ; controverse ; mission ; jésuitesses

### Présentation du texte :

Cette publication est à considérer dans le prolongement de la précédente, puisqu'elle fait partie du même moment de réflexion sur l'anticatholicisme mais aussi, plus particulièrement, sur le mouvement anti-jésuite que l'on trouve en dehors de l'Église catholique mais aussi au sein même de celle-ci. C'est en réfléchissant aux grands axes du discours anti jésuite chez les auteurs protestants que j'ai perçu d'étonnants échos avec la rhétorique mise en œuvre par les détracteurs séculiers de l'Institut de Mary Ward. Cet article tente donc de montrer comment l'opposition du clergé séculier contre l'Institut tenait autant d'une opposition de principe à une forme de vie religieuse en brèche avec les décrets du concile de Trente que d'un positionnement plus politique contre la Compagnie de Jésus. Dans le contexte de l'affrontement entre les deux partis, l'Institut de Mary Ward fournit sans le vouloir de très forts arguments tendant à démontrer les dérives du modèle ignacien.

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## Mary Ward et sa Compagnie de Jésus au féminin dans l'Angleterre de la Contre-Réforme

*Insolite reflet de la querelle des femmes qui occupe les érudits, la polémique cléricale autour de l'Institut catholique fondé en 1611 par Mary Ward (1585-1645) tente de déterminer si ces étranges religieuses, qui se veulent missionnaires, sont les émissaires de Dieu ou les agents du mal. Tandis que leurs amis louent leur vertu, leurs nombreux ennemis contestent la probité de ces femmes qu'ils pensent corrompues. Leur vocation ne leur semble pas divine, mais maléfique, et l'innovation d'une Compagnie de Jésus au féminin, usurpant l'autorité cléricale, est la preuve de leur déviance. Convaincu, Urbain VIII éradique l'Institut en 1631 et le déclare nuisible à l'Église.*

### **A Society of Jesus for Women? The Controversy about Mary Ward's Project in Early Modern England**

*Peculiarly echoing the ongoing "querelle des femmes", the clerical polemic which developed around the catholic Institute founded in 1611 by Mary Ward (1585-1645) pondered whether these unusual missionary nuns could in fact be considered as Soldiers of God. Whereas their friends hailed them as saints and mystics of angelic virtue, their many enemies questioned the probity of these women, whom they viewed, by their very nature, as corrupted. Their novel vocation seemed evil rather than divinely inspired, and their deviance was believed to be illustrated in their Society of Jesus for women, which usurped clerical authority. In 1631, these arguments convinced Urban VIII, who eradicated the Institute, declaring it harmful to the Church.*

Revue de l'histoire des religions, 225 - 3/2008, p. 393 à 414



Le 5 novembre est jour de fête nationale en Angleterre : les feux de joie que l'on allume, et sur lesquels on brûle des effigies du catholique Guy Fawkes, sont l'occasion de commémorer le fameux complot des poudres découvert le 5 novembre 1605. Ainsi, l'histoire du pays ne peut faire l'économie d'une histoire de l'anticatholicisme profond qui le façonne. Depuis le schisme du roi Henri VIII, qui déclare l'Angleterre indépendante de l'Église de Rome en 1533 et se fait proclamer unique chef de l'Église d'Angleterre en 1534, le royaume construit son identité nationale en utilisant le catholicisme comme puissant repoussoir<sup>1</sup>. Dans l'Angleterre protestante du dix-septième siècle les catholiques, que l'on appelle aussi « récusants » quand ils refusent de se conformer à l'église établie, sont soumis à des lois très sévères. Dès 1581, le parlement d'Elisabeth I (1558-1603) déclare que c'est trahison de reconnaître l'autorité spirituelle du Pape, d'entendre la messe et d'aider les catholiques sur le sol anglais. En 1585, le Parlement concentre ses efforts sur les organisateurs de réseaux résistants et surtout sur les missionnaires formés sur le continent et qui, revenus clandestinement au pays, travaillent chaque jour à la reconversion du royaume<sup>2</sup>.

Dans ce contexte répressif se développe pourtant une tentative de survie, et même de renouveau, au sein de la minorité catholique ; inspiré par l'esprit de la Contre-réforme, un nombre croissant de familles envoie ses fils aux séminaires de Douai, de Reims ou de Rome. Au péril de leur vie, ces jeunes missionnaires reviendront ensuite sur leur sol natal pour y porter assistance à leurs coreligionnaires et tenter de convertir les autres. C'est dans cette atmosphère que Mary Ward (1585-1645) grandit dans le Yorkshire avant de partir

1. En 1533, l'acte dit « in Restraint of Appeals to Rome » déclare que le royaume d'Angleterre est un empire indépendant de l'autorité du pape, que l'on désigne désormais sous le titre de simple évêque de Rome ; en 1534, avec l'Acte de Suprématie, naît l'*Anglicana Ecclesia*, dont le seul chef suprême n'est autre que le roi.

2. 1581, 23: Elis. I, c.1, Act to Retain the Queen's Majesty's Subjects in their Due Obedience; et 1585, 27: Elis. I, c.2, Act against Jesuits, Seminary Priests and such other like Disobedient Persons.

pour Saint-Omer, où elle devient clarisse en 1606<sup>3</sup>. Or, le cloître ne lui procure pas la sérénité qu'elle espérait y trouver ; plus tard, tandis qu'elle écrit quelques bribes d'autobiographie, elle se souvient des années 1607 à 1611 comme d'une période difficile. En 1609, elle obtient la permission d'ouvrir un nouvel établissement de clarisses, pour y regrouper toutes les postulantes anglaises. Mais son mal-être demeure, et c'est seulement en 1611 qu'elle trouve enfin sa vocation. Dans sa correspondance, elle décrira plus tard avoir reçu l'ordre divin, « Take the Same of the Society » ; elle pense donc comprendre que Dieu souhaite qu'elle se consacre à un apostolat comparable à celui de la Compagnie de Jésus<sup>4</sup>. En 1612, elle quitte son Ordre pour fonder à Saint-Omer une maison de « Dames anglaises » qui, dès l'abord, se considèrent comme religieuses bien que n'étant pas reconnues par le Pape.

La formule est un succès et Mary Ward ouvre d'autres établissements à Liège (1616), à Cologne et à Trier (1620-1621), à Rome (1622), à Naples et à Pérouse (1623), à Munich et à Vienne (1627) et enfin à Presbourg et à Prague (1628). Ces maisons accomplissent des tâches diverses. Dans leurs internats, de jeunes Anglaises issues de familles aisées achèvent leur éducation catholique loin des dangers de leur terre natale. Leurs externats, eux, accueillent des élèves de condition humble, souvent issues de la population locale. Enfin, les instituts fonctionnent aussi comme des séminaires où les Dames anglaises sont formées aux devoirs de leur mission apostolique.

3. Voir la biographie de M.C.E. Chambers, *The Life of Mary Ward, 1585-1645*, 2 vols, Londres, 1882-1885 et la remarquable histoire de l'Institut écrite par Henriette Peters, *Mary Ward: A World in Contemplation*, traduit de l'allemand par Helen Butterworth, Leominster, 1994. Voir aussi Laurence Lux-Sterritt, *Redefining Female Religious Life: French Ursulines and English Ladies in Seventeenth-Century Catholicism*, Aldershot, 2005.

4. Archives du Bar Convent, York (ABC), B5, lettre 4 à Mgr Albercati, 1620. Le Bar Convent, couvent fondé à York par les consœurs de Mary Ward en 1686, est aujourd'hui encore actif ; c'est le plus ancien couvent du royaume. Il conserve dans ses archives des copies des documents concernant l'Institut durant la vie de Mary Ward, dont les originaux se trouvent au généralat de Munich. Il préserve aussi tous les originaux ayant trait à ses propres membres et aux autres centres clandestins fondés en Angleterre pendant l'ère moderne. Traduction de l'anglais par mes soins.

Pour secourir les récusants et convertir les protestants d'Angleterre, Mary Ward crée également des centres clandestins dans le royaume et développe un réseau qui s'étend bientôt de Londres jusqu'aux régions du nord du Yorkshire.

Depuis une dizaine d'années, des auteurs comme Frances Dolan, Arthur Marotti, Michael Questier et Peter Lake, Alison Shell, Raymond Tumbleson ou Alexandra Walsham ont publié d'excellentes études sur la représentation du catholique dans l'imaginaire collectif anglican<sup>5</sup>. Ces études se penchent naturellement sur les traités des défenseurs de l'anglicité, protestants convaincus qui dénoncent les « papistes » et particulièrement les jésuites, comme source de tous les maux. Or, les fils spirituels d'Ignace de Loyola sont l'objet d'une violente dispute au sein même de l'Église catholique et la voix du clergé séculier rejoint parfois étrangement celle des protestants pour formuler les mêmes reproches à l'encontre de la Compagnie de Jésus. Dans un contexte religieux si agité, la communauté de Mary Ward, calquée sur le modèle jésuite, se retrouve attaquée de toutes parts, par les polémistes anticatholiques, bien sûr, mais aussi par le clergé séculier et même par les jésuites eux-mêmes. La controverse qui fait rage dans les années 1620 se conclut en 1631 quand le pape Urbain VIII condamne l'Institut à l'abolition perpétuelle dans sa bulle *Pastoralis Romani Pontificis*<sup>6</sup>.

5. Voir Frances Dolan, *Whores of Babylon. Catholicism, Gender and Seventeenth Century Print Culture*, Ithaca, 1999 ; Peter Lake, « Anti-Popery: the Structure of a Prejudice », in Richard Cust et Ann Hughes (dir.), *Conflict in Early Stuart England*, Londres, 1989 ; Peter Lake et Michael Questier, *The Anti-christ's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England*, New Haven, Conn., 2002 ; Arthur Marotti (dir.), *Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism in Early Modern English Texts*, Basingstoke, 1999, et *Religious Ideology and Cultural Fantasy. Catholic and Anti-Catholic Discourses in Early Modern England*, Notre Dame, Ind., 2005 ; Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination, 158-1660*, Cambridge, 2006 ; Raymond Tumbleson, *Catholicism in the English Protestant Imagination. Nationalism, Religion, and Literature, 1600-1745*, Cambridge, 1998 et Alexandra Walsham, *Church Papists: Catholicism, Conformity and Confessional Polemic in Early Modern England*, Woodbridge, 1993.

6. Voir Immolata Wetter, *Mary Ward. Under the Shadow of the Inquisition*, Oxford, 2006 et Laurence Lux-Sterritt, « An Analysis of the Controversy Caused by Mary Ward's Institute in the 1620s », *Recusant History* 25.4 (2001), 636-47.

Les facteurs qui poussent Urbain VIII à prononcer la suppression de l'Institut sont trop complexes pour être envisagés ici en détail. Il suffira de nous pencher sur les principaux aspects de la vocation des Dames anglaises pour y percevoir des éléments qui, à eux seuls, auraient amené la condamnation de celles qui se voulaient être les « soldats de Dieu »<sup>7</sup>. Leur Compagnie de Jésus au féminin est officiellement rejetée comme une aberration, puisque Ignace de Loyola interdit formellement sa Compagnie aux femmes et que le Concile de Trente (1545-63) proscrit la création de nouveaux ordres. De plus une communauté de religieuses faisant fi des règles de la clôture irait à l'encontre de la loi canon et de la morale chrétienne : l'Institut envisagé par Mary Ward ne saurait donc exister, ne pouvant être à la fois régulier et apostolique. La controverse repose pourtant sur un paradoxe évident : alors même que le clergé démontre qu'il est impossible de reconnaître une Compagnie de Jésus au féminin, c'est néanmoins en tant que « jésuitesses » que les Dames anglaises subissent les pires attaques : afin d'éliminer une communauté si proche de ses rivaux réguliers, le clergé séculier n'hésite pas à emprunter aux polémistes protestants les arguments les plus éprouvés de la diatribe anti-jésuite.

### 1. LA VOCATION IGNACIENNE DE MARY WARD

Dès l'époque moderne, les recensements officiels (par exemple les *recusant rolls*) montrent une surreprésentation des femmes dans la communauté récusante, que l'historien John Bossy voit d'ailleurs comme un « matriarcat »<sup>8</sup>. Cette prépondérance féminine peut être expliquée par divers facteurs, mais dans le cas des épouses d'hommes déclarés conformistes Alexandra Walsham a démontré qu'il s'agissait souvent de pactes passés entre conjoints pour préserver le patrimoine familial en évitant les lourdes amendes ou les confiscations de biens qui sanctionnent la récusance<sup>9</sup>. La femme mariée est en effet protégée par son statut de *feme covert* : ne possédant aucun capital en son nom propre, elle n'est que marginalement atteinte par

7. ABC, B18, *Institutum*, f. 19.

8. John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850*, Londres, 1976.

9. Walsham, *Church Papists*, pp.78-81.

la loi et jouit donc d'une liberté religieuse que de nombreux foyers sauront mettre à profit. Elle sera récusante et assurera l'éducation de leurs enfants et la pratique de la foi au quotidien, tandis qu'il deviendra *Church-papist*, évitant les poursuites par sa conformité publique<sup>10</sup>. L'État anglais, sans le vouloir, semble avoir contribué à donner aux femmes une véritable importance dans l'organisation de la communauté catholique clandestine, et ce sont elles que les missionnaires citent souvent dans leurs récits pour leurs qualités d'hôtesse et de collaboratrices.

L'entreprise de Mary Ward cherche à permettre aux femmes de transcender le statut de simples « aides » de la mission, pour faire d'elles de véritables agents. Ses Dames anglaises se considèrent comme religieuses mais préfèrent à la clôture traditionnelle la liberté de mouvement nécessaire à toute entreprise missionnaire, au même titre que les jésuites. Cette vocation répond à un besoin criant en Angleterre où, faute de couvents, les femmes qui souhaitent entrer en religion se voient *de facto* condamnées à l'exil, tandis que celles qui demeurent dans le siècle ne bénéficient guère d'une mission qui s'adresse d'abord aux hommes. Les Dames anglaises pallient ce manque en adoptant le modèle typique des clercs réguliers de la Contre-Réforme pour apporter le soutien spirituel nécessaire à leurs coreligionnaires en Angleterre et ailleurs.

Après 1611, année où elle déclare avoir reçu l'ordre divin d'imiter la Compagnie de Jésus, la fondatrice tente à plusieurs reprises d'obtenir l'approbation papale. Dès 1612, aidée par le jésuite Roger Lee, son confesseur, elle ébauche un premier plan, intitulé *Schola Beatae Mariae*, dans lequel elle présente la raison d'être de son Institut<sup>11</sup>.

10. L'adjectif péjoratif « papiste » est utilisé en règle générale par les protestants dénonçant, par ce sobriquet, tous les catholiques. Au contraire, le terme « récusant » est un terme légal se rapportant à toute personne refusant de se présenter au service dominical anglican. Par glissement, le terme fut employé pour définir les catholiques refusant ouvertement de se conformer. Les « récusants » se différencient des *Church papists* qui, souvent pour échapper aux sanctions, assistent à l'office bien qu'étant catholiques en privé.

11. Les documents concernant les demandes d'approbation de l'Institut sont conservés au généralat de Munich ; des copies sont consultables aux Archives du Bar Convent (ABC) de York dans la liasse B18. Ici, voir ABC, B18, *Schola Beatae Mariae*, item 1.

Elle rappelle aux autorités romaines les circonstances particulières de son Angleterre natale, et les conditions difficiles dans lesquelles la minorité catholique tente de survivre. Elle ose suggérer que, dans les pays protestants, le modèle tridentin de la religieuse cloîtrée n'est pas le mieux adapté ; sans nier l'utilité des prières offertes par ces communautés, elle souhaite néanmoins obtenir l'autorisation d'engager des religieuses dans une vie dite « mixte », mariant contemplation et action afin de compléter l'effort des missionnaires masculins.

En 1616, la fondatrice soumet un deuxième Plan (*Ratio Instituti*), soulignant une fois encore la dimension pragmatique de son Institut :

Puisque l'Angleterre, tristement affligée [...] se trouve dans un si grand besoin de travailleurs spirituels, et puisque les prêtres [...] travaillent assidûment comme apôtres dans cette moisson, il semble que le sexe féminin lui aussi, dans la mesure de ses moyens, doive et puisse, d'une façon semblable, contribuer plus qu'à l'ordinaire face à ce besoin spirituel commun<sup>12</sup>.

Elle l'écrit sans détour : les femmes ont le devoir moral de s'impliquer dans cette crise, et elles ont les capacités physiques et spirituelles de travailler dans l'apostolat comme le font les missionnaires.

Il faut plusieurs années avant que la nature précise de sa vocation ignacienne ne soit formulée clairement avec un troisième et dernier Plan, la *Ratio Instituti* de 1621. Très largement inspiré des *Formula Instituti* de la Compagnie de Jésus, ce document adapte les constitutions jésuites pour l'usage des Dames anglaises, et Mary Ward demande au pape Grégoire XV d'approuver ce qu'elle nomme sans détour sa Compagnie de Jésus au féminin :

Quiconque désire servir sous la bannière de la croix comme soldat de Dieu dans *notre Compagnie, que nous voulons désigner sous le nom de Jésus*, [...] est membre d'une Compagnie fondée avant tout pour la défense et la propagation de la foi et pour aider les âmes à progresser dans un mode de vie chrétien et à mieux connaître la doctrine, pour les détourner de l'hérésie et du mal<sup>13</sup>.

12. ABC, B18, *Ratio Instituti*, f. 1.

13. ABC, B18, *Institutum*, f. 18-9 (mes italiques).

Elle accompagne ce Plan d'une brève déclaration (*Brevis Declaratio*) dans laquelle elle justifie sa vocation et son imitation des jésuites :

Nous ne pouvons que constater et regretter que ce qui est approuvé pour l'éducation prodiguée aux garçons par la Compagnie de Jésus n'existe pas pour les filles ; il en résulte que la moitié de la race humaine [...] semble, sinon tout à fait laissée à elle-même, du moins ne pas recevoir grande assistance<sup>14</sup>.

Si la fin de l'Institut se veut en tous points similaire à celle des jésuites, il en va de même pour sa structure, chaque branche régionale étant administrée par une supérieure, elle-même soumise à l'autorité unique d'une supérieure générale, Mary Ward elle-même. Tout comme la Compagnie de Jésus, l'Institut se soustrait à l'autorité traditionnelle des évêques et se veut entièrement autonome : c'est la générale qui décide des actions à mener et des moyens à mettre en œuvre, et il n'est d'autorité supérieure à la sienne que celle du Saint-Père lui-même. Ainsi, dans l'*Institutum*, les Dames anglaises demandent l'autorisation de prononcer, comme le font les jésuites, un vœu d'obéissance directe au pape<sup>15</sup>.

L'initiative novatrice de la récusante Mary Ward se veut donc à la fois religieuse et apostolique, et elle adapte fidèlement les règles de la Compagnie d'Ignace de Loyola, ses constitutions et jusqu'à son organisation hiérarchique. Or, si le clergé reconnaît volontiers que la mission anglaise manque cruellement d'entreprises apostoliques et enseignantes adressées aux femmes, c'est la forme choisie par la fondatrice qui semble constituer un obstacle infranchissable. Dans le contexte de l'Europe post-tridentine, les Dames anglaises enfreignent la loi canon et compromettent les valeurs de l'Église de la Contre-Réforme : elles se heurtent donc sans tarder à de grandes difficultés, puisque leur Compagnie de Jésus pour femmes apparaît à la grande majorité du clergé comme une monstruosité.

14. ABC, B 18, *Brevis Declaratio*.

15. ABC, B18, *Institutum*, f. 22.

## 2. UNE COMPAGNIE DE JÉSUS AU FÉMININ : UNE ABERRATION CANONIQUE ET MORALE

Une aberration, en effet, car les femmes sont exclues de la Compagnie de Jésus par son fondateur, Ignace de Loyola (1491-1556) ; les Dames anglaises ne peuvent donc en aucun cas être considérées comme faisant partie des jésuites, ni comme leur étant affiliées. En outre, la création d'une communauté de religieuses imitant le *modus vivendi* des missionnaires n'est pas envisageable, puisque le Concile de Trente a non seulement interdit la création de nouveaux Ordres, réitérant les décrets du quatrième concile œcuménique de Latran (1215), mais aussi ordonné la plus stricte clôture pour les Ordres religieux féminins, renforçant à cette occasion la décrétale *Periculoso* (1298) de Boniface VIII<sup>16</sup>. Un Ordre de religieuses doit par conséquent être cloîtré et adopter l'une des règles monastiques déjà existantes. Ces principes de la Réforme catholique sont défendus avec d'autant plus de véhémence qu'ils sont souvent mis en péril au dix-septième siècle, ère où fleurissent de nouvelles congrégations à vocation apostolique. La dialectique de l'action et de la contemplation est l'un des sujets les plus brûlants de l'époque, et le Français Jean-Baptiste Thiers, dans son *Traité de la clôture des religieuses*, déclare qu'il n'y a chez les religieuses « rien qui soit plus contraire à l'esprit de la Religion que le violement de la clôture » ; il se fait le porte-parole du clergé quand il écrit que « les religieuses qui sortent de leurs monastères sont dans un état scandaleux et injurieux à Dieu et à la religion »<sup>17</sup>.

La mobilité géographique de l'Institut de Mary Ward devient très vite une pierre d'achoppement majeure ; l'idée d'une communauté missionnaire féminine est tournée en dérision, tant il est impensable que des religieuses s'éloignent du modèle conventuel. Les Dames anglaises qui travaillent incognito en Angleterre se voient alors affublées de sobriquets comme les « commères errantes », les « nonnes

16. Norman Tanner (dir.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Londres, 1990, vol. 1, p. 227-73.

17. Jean-Baptiste Thiers, *Traité de la clôture de religieuses*, Paris, 1681, p. 254.



errantes », ou les « galopeuses »<sup>18</sup>. Il est vrai qu'elles changent fréquemment de lieu de résidence, usent de pseudonymes et jouent beaucoup du déguisement pour échapper aux sanctions du gouvernement : vêtues tantôt comme de nobles dames, tantôt comme de pauvres femmes, elles changent d'identité selon la circonstance pour passer inaperçues<sup>19</sup>. En 1621, dix représentants du clergé séculier rédigent un virulent mémoire contre l'*Institutum* présenté au pape par la fondatrice. Sous la direction de l'archiprêtre William Harrison (†1621), ils signent l'*Informatio* pour protester contre un Institut qui leur semble « en contradiction directe avec les décrets du Concile sacré de Trente »<sup>20</sup>.

Même s'il reconnaît le travail de catéchistes et d'enseignantes des Dames anglaises comme digne de respect, le clergé séculier s'entend pour condamner le *modus operandi* choisi par Mary Ward. En octobre 1622, le prêtre John Colleton (1548-1635) souligne à nouveau l'infraction à la clôture des dites « jésuitesses » :

Si [l'Institut] se cantonnait à ses cellules et à ses murs, suivant l'exemple d'autres communautés religieuses, [il] serait peut-être louable ; mais quand il s'arrogue les devoirs de l'office apostolique, erre sans restriction ici et là, [...] entreprend la direction spirituelle des familles et bien d'autres choses encore sous prétexte de charité chrétienne, et qu'en dépit de tout cela [il] insiste pour être compté parmi les rangs des communautés religieuses, [il] s'expose certainement à la censure et aux reproches de bien des gens de piété<sup>21</sup>.

Cette condamnation de la mobilité géographique des Dames anglaises est d'ailleurs l'un des rares sujets de consensus entre le

18. Lewis Owen, *Running Register*, Londres, 1626.

19. La première biographie de Mary Ward, *A Briefe Relation of the Holy Life and Happy Death of our Dearest Mother*, est écrite par ses consœurs Mary Poyntz et Winifred Wigmore autour de 1650. Le Bar Convent de York en conserve des photographies (liasse A11) et une transcription (liasse A12). Ici, voir A12, f. 20.

20. Archives du diocèse de Westminster (ADW), vol. 16 (1617-22), ff. 201-07, *Copia Informatio de Jesuitissis*.

21. ABC, C1, J3, *translation of documents re. Jesuitesses*. John Colleton (1548-1635), fondateur de l'Association du clergé d'Angleterre chargée des affaires du clergé séculier, sera suspendu pour avoir envenimé la dispute entre séculiers et jésuites. Voir Ethelred Taunton, *The History of the Jesuits in England*, Londres, 1901, pp. 256-57.

clergé séculier et le clergé régulier à cette époque. La polémique qui, dès le début du dix-septième siècle, oppose en Europe les jésuites aux séculiers, est exacerbée dans le contexte de la mission anglaise, où les enjeux de pouvoir sont importants. Cependant, malgré le schisme grandissant entre les jésuites et les prêtres séculiers<sup>22</sup>, les deux partis s'accordent à condamner ensemble l'initiative de Mary Ward. Le jésuite canoniste Francisco Suarez (1548-1617) ajoute ainsi sa voix à celle de ses rivaux quand il s'oppose au mode de vie non cloîtré des Dames anglaises qui, écrit-t-il, « vont et viennent dans tout le pays au mépris de l'étiquette convenant au sexe féminin et au grand déshonneur de la religion catholique »<sup>23</sup>.

Mais le manque de clôture n'est pas la seule difficulté posée par la vocation novatrice des « jésuitesses ». Dans les mois qui suivent, de vives accusations se joignent à l'*Informatio*, pour demander la suppression de l'Institut. Une plainte est d'abord adressée au pape en mai 1622 par le Frère Robert Sherwood, bénédictin. Puis c'est Matthew Kellison, président du séminaire anglais de Douai, qui inclut dans son rapport sur le statut des séminaires en Flandres un procès-verbal contre l'Institut de Mary Ward<sup>24</sup>. Tandis que le clergé se défie de l'engagement croissant des femmes dans la Contre-Réforme, les critiques de l'Institut soulignent ce qu'ils décrivent comme une incompatibilité essentielle entre féminité et mission : la femme, écrit-on, n'a ni la force physique, ni la rectitude morale, ni les capacités spirituelles nécessaires à une telle vocation. Selon

22. Voir entre autres le très célèbre plaidoyer de Christopher Bagshaw, *A true relation of a faction begun at Wisbich by Fa. Edmonds, alias Weston, a Jesuite, 1595 and continued since by Fa. Walley, alias Garnet, the Provinciall of the Jesuits in England, and by Fa. Parsons in Rome, with their adherents : Against us the Secular Priests their brethren and fellow Prisoners, that disliked of novelties, and thought it dishonourable to the ancient Ecclesiastical Discipline of the Catholicke Church, that Secular Priests should be governed by Jesuits* (presse anonyme, 1601).

23. ABC, C1, *Letters against the Jesuitesses*, f. 297.

24. Pour une analyse détaillée des documents écrits par Harrison, Sherwood et Kellison, voir Joseph Grisar, *Die ersten Anklagen in Rom gegen das Institut Maria Wards 1622*, Rome, 1959 et *Ein schwieriger Rechtsfall zwischen den Englischen Fräulein und den englischen Jesuiten in Lutich 1616-1630*, Rome, 1960.

saint Paul, d'ailleurs, elle ne doit ni prêcher ni se mêler de discours religieux. Pour l'archiprêtre William Harrison, la propagation de la foi est l'affaire d'hommes alliant les enseignements du séminaire à une vertu inébranlable. Les Dames anglaises, au contraire, risquent d'enseigner dans leur catéchisme une doctrine erronée, ou d'être contaminées à tout moment par l'hérésie qui les entoure. Le contemporain de Mary Ward doute qu'une femme ait en elle la force de servir Dieu sans fléchir, et se plaît à rappeler le risque encouru par l'Église qui laisserait libre cours aux intentions apostoliques de filles qui, par stupidité si ce n'est par malice, finiraient par la desservir. Tous les détracteurs de l'Institut semblent d'accord sur ce point : une mission ne peut pas se concevoir pour les femmes, qui en sont physiquement, intellectuellement et moralement incapables.

Dans le contexte déjà tendu de l'époque, tout amalgame avec ces « nonnes errantes » prend donc une dimension particulièrement importante pour la Compagnie de Jésus, qui comprend que les accusations contre les Dames anglaises peuvent être utilisées également pour la discréditer. Les rapports initialement cordiaux entre Mary Ward et certains missionnaires se dégradent très vite, et un libelle anticatholique brocarde d'ailleurs le dilemme imposé aux jésuites par leurs plus ferventes adeptes :

[Les jésuites] sont en désaccord total vis-à-vis des jésuitesses, ou nonnes errantes ; certains les tolèrent, d'autres les ont en horreur. [Les Dames anglaises] portent l'habit ignacien et s'exposent à la vue de tous, accoutrées comme les jésuites ; elles diffèrent des autres nonnes en cela qu'elles vont et viennent dans le siècle et prêchent l'Évangile aux femmes en Angleterre et ailleurs<sup>25</sup>.

La Compagnie de Jésus est très embarrassée quand les Dames anglaises optent pour le port d'une robe noire évoquant leur habit ; elle prend alors ses distances avec l'Institut, auquel elle refuse d'être assimilée. Afin de combattre toute association erronée, les missionnaires reçoivent pour consigne de se dissocier publiquement de tout commerce avec les disciples de Mary Ward. La ligne de conduite officielle est énoncée par le général Muzio Vitelleschi (1563-1645) en 1623, ordonnant à ses confrères de « ne se mêler d'aucune des

25. James Wadsworth, *English Spanish Pilgrim*, Londres, 1629, p. 30.

affaires de Mary Ward ou des femmes de sa compagnie »<sup>26</sup>. Les jésuites anglais qui ont par le passé soutenu la fondatrice, comme Roger Lee (1568-1615), John Gerard (1564-1637) ou Edward Burton (†1624) sont sévèrement réprimandés : il faut faire savoir à tous que la Compagnie de Jésus ne tolérera aucune branche féminine de son Ordre et que ses membres n'entretiennent aucune relation avec lesdites « galopeuses »<sup>27</sup>. En 1623, le rapport de mission de l'une des consœurs en mission en Angleterre évoque la dégradation des relations entre l'Institut et les jésuites sur le terrain<sup>28</sup>. Consciente de la mauvaise réputation dont pâtissent les Dames anglaises, sœur Dorothee cache sa véritable identité et son appartenance à l'Institut de Mary Ward à toutes ses connaissances, et même à ceux qu'elle convertit. À l'exception de Lady Timperley, qui la soutient, personne ne connaît son secret. Alors qu'elle œuvre au sein de la communauté récusante, elle témoigne des conversations de laïcs mais aussi des propos d'un jésuite et d'un jeune homme se préparant à le devenir, reprenant à leur compte les accusations faites contre Mary Ward par les opposants de l'Institut.

En reniant l'Institut de Mary Ward, les jésuites cherchent à échapper à la calomnie qui prend ces femmes pour cibles ; mais plus essentiellement, en accord avec le clergé séculier, ils dénoncent le concept même de « jésuitesses ». La religieuse qui se veut apostolique outrepassa le rôle de la femme dans l'Église du dix-septième siècle, où la vie dite « mixte » reste la chasse gardée de l'homme. En 1617, un jésuite met en doute la constance des Dames anglaises confrontées aux rigueurs de la mission, arguant qu'elles ne sont après tout « que des femmes ». Face à la misogynie de son Église, Mary Ward s'insurge et déclare, lors d'un discours prononcé devant ses consœurs à Saint-Omer :

Rien n'est plus faux que d'affirmer que les femmes, à la différence des hommes, ne sauraient réaliser de grandes choses [...] Que pensez-vous

26. Lettre de Muzio Vitelleschi, le 19 juillet 1623 ; copie conservée aux ABC, C1, J3.

27. ADW, vol. 16, f. 207.

28. Le texte est transcrit dans M. C. E. Chambers, *The Life of Mary Ward*, pp. 226-32.

de ce mot, « que des femmes » ? [...] les femmes, si elles s'y emploient, peuvent être parfaites, et si les hommes cessaient de nous assurer que nous ne pouvons rien accomplir et que nous ne sommes que des femmes, nous pourrions faire beaucoup<sup>29</sup>.

La fondatrice ne partage pas les idées communes à l'anthropologie de son temps, et sa revendication de la valeur féminine ne fait qu'exaspérer la hiérarchie ecclésiastique. Ainsi, pour Francesco Ingoli, secrétaire de la *Propaganda Fide* chargé de l'examen de l'Institut dans les années qui mèneront à sa suppression, la jeune femme cherche à effacer les différences entre les deux sexes, en se distançant de toutes les qualités de la féminité, mais aussi en usurpant celles de la masculinité. Ward est, selon lui, « une vierge à l'esprit viril »<sup>30</sup>, une « jeune femme à l'esprit masculin »<sup>31</sup>. C'est cette rupture de communication avec les autorités romaines qui constitue l'un des obstacles les plus infranchissables pour l'Anglaise. Sa force de conviction, qui semble renier la différence essentielle entre l'homme et la femme, est perçue par le Saint-Siège comme un désir obstiné de transgresser les normes établies.

### 3. L'INSTITUT CIBLE DE LA POLÉMIQUE ANTI-JÉSUITE

Pragmatique, Mary Ward ne comprend pas que le pape n'accepte pas pour son Institut ce qu'il approuve pour la Compagnie de Jésus. Or, loin de faciliter la ratification de l'Institut, l'imitation du modèle jésuite s'avère en fait être rédhibitoire. Les jésuites sont en effet les missionnaires les plus honnis d'Angleterre, ce sont eux qui, dans les libelles protestants, incarnent la perfidie romaine et le renversement des valeurs anglicanes ; ils sont considérés comme plus dangereux encore que les autres catholiques. Dans *Anatomie of Popish Tyrannie*, c'est donc le jésuite plus qu'aucun autre « papiste » qui représente le mal absolu :

29. ABC, B17, f. 2, *Three Speeches of our Reverend Mother Chief Superior Made at St Omer Having Been Long Absent*.

30. ABC, C1, *Letters against the Jesuitesses*, f. 312.

31. ABC, C18, f. 101.

Notez bien, cher lecteur, que dépendre des jésuites c'est dépendre du diable; par conséquent, soutenir les jésuites, leurs desseins sanguinaires et leurs tragiques complots, n'est rien moins que renier Dieu, renoncer à le craindre et à le vénérer; c'est trahir votre prince; c'est être l'ennemi de votre terre natale<sup>32</sup>.

Dans *The Jesuits Downfall*, Thomas James, polémiste anti-catholique, s'en prend lui aussi aux jésuites comme étant les plus pernicieux de tous les missionnaires :

J'admets que nous devons craindre les prêtres aussi bien que les jésuites car ce sont là, à des degrés différents, de dangereux ennemis de sa Majesté et de l'État : mais les pires sont les jésuites, car ils réduisent leurs disciples à une servitude, voire à un esclavage tel que tout ce qu'ils disent a force de loi<sup>33</sup>...

En Angleterre, l'anti-papisme qui règne depuis l'excommunication de la reine Elisabeth par le pape Pie V en 1570 atteint son paradoxe au début du dix-septième siècle, et particulièrement après le complot des poudres visant à détruire le Parlement du royaume le 5 novembre 1605. La dimension politique de la diatribe se cristallise autour de la figure du jésuite, agent du pape et ennemi naturel du royaume d'Angleterre et de son Église<sup>34</sup>. Cependant, dans le contexte agité du dix-septième siècle, l'anti-jésuitisme est loin d'être l'apanage des protestants, et on le retrouve au sein même des communautés catholiques : ainsi voit-on se développer en France, depuis la publication des textes monarchomaques du jésuite Juan de Mariana, une controverse dont les motifs sont en tous points similaires. Un mouvement hostile à la Compagnie de Jésus se développe donc à cette époque dans l'Église catholique elle-même, surtout sous le pontificat d'Urbain VIII (1623-44), pape sensible

32. Thomas Bell, *The Anatomie of Popish Tyrannie*, Londres, 1603, p. 8.

33. James Thomas, *The Jesuits Downefall, Threatened against them by the Secular Priests, for their Wicked Lives, Accursed Manners, Hereticall Doctrine, and more then Machiavellian Policie*, Oxford, 1612, avant-propos.

34. Parmi les publications mentionnées plus haut (note 5), voir par exemple Peter Lake, « Anti-Popery : the Structure of a Prejudice », in Richard Cust et Ann Hughes (dir.), *Conflict in Early Stuart England*; Peter Lake et Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat*; Arthur Marotti (dir.), *Religious Ideology and Cultural Fantasy* et Raymond Tumbleson, *Catholicism in the English Protestant Imagination*.

aux plaintes des prêtres en lutte contre les ignaciens pour obtenir la direction des familles catholiques de la minorité récusante en Angleterre.

Ainsi, les polémistes protestants trouvent-ils un soutien inespéré quand le clergé séculier produit lui aussi des libelles anti-jésuites. Mary Ward se trouve prise sous les feux croisés de ce conflit. Si les prêtres rejettent une Compagnie de Jésus au féminin comme une absurdité, c'est pourtant bien en tant que « jésuitesses » qu'ils attaquent les Dames anglaises. Dans leur combat contre les jésuites et leurs imitatrices, les séculiers reprennent ainsi à leur compte les arguments typiques et codifiés des libellistes protestants. La diatribe aime se nourrir de détails qui font sensation, se plaisant à accuser les jésuites de graves débordements sexuels. John Baxter, anti-jésuite de renom, tonne contre les missionnaires : « ne font-ils pas tout pour séduire les pauvres femmes<sup>35</sup> ? ». Un autre pamphlet rapporte l'anecdote d'une jeune femme dont on découvre la grossesse quelques jours avant le mariage ; elle finira par avouer que le père de l'enfant est un jésuite<sup>36</sup>. On va jusqu'à prétendre que les jésuites distribuent généreusement des dispenses à celles qui, enceintes, consentent à subir un avortement<sup>37</sup>.

Le clergé séculier attaque donc l'Ordre de Mary Ward par le même biais du scandale sexuel, s'appropriant ainsi l'une des armes de prédilection des polémistes protestants qui associent l'activité missionnaire à la débauche et dénoncent les jésuites comme les plus perfides des séducteurs, corrompant à l'envi les femmes qu'ils côtoient. C'est ainsi que dans les années 1620, les Dames anglaises sont accusées de relations charnelles avec leurs confesseurs jésuites ; l'une d'entre elles est même soupçonnée d'en attendre un enfant. On accuse Mary Ward d'inciter ses consœurs à user de leurs charmes

35. John Baxter, *A Toile for Two-Legged Foxes*, Londres, 1600, p.37.

36. William Fennor, *Pluto his Travailles, or the Devils Pilgrimage to the Colledge of Jesuits*, Londres, 1612, pp. 17-18 : « her belly [was] full of young bones, which [she] afterwards confessed were of the Jesuit's making ».

37. Anonyme, *The Black Box of Roome Opened. From Whence are Revealed the Damnable Bloody Plots, practices and Behaviour of Iesuites, Priests, Papists, and Other Recusants in Generall*, Londres, 1641, pp.16-17.

pour parvenir à leurs fins, et d'avoir un jour déclaré que « [les Dames anglaises] feraient bien plaisir à Sa Sainteté et aux autres Cardinaux si elles s'exhibaient, la poitrine découverte, à la mode des courtisanes »<sup>38</sup>. Dans son *Informatio*, l'archiprêtre William Harrison note que plusieurs de ces femmes sont réputées frivoles, et que leur mode de vie représente à lui seul un scandale pour l'Église. Le pamphlet du bénédictin Robert Sherwood accuse également les Dames anglaises de petite vertu et d'immoralité.

À ces accusations formulées par des clercs extérieurs à l'Institut, vient enfin s'ajouter un libelle anonyme paru en mars 1623 et connu sous l'intitulé *Godfather's Information*. Une section de ce pamphlet contient les dix-neuf déclarations de l'une des premières consœurs de Mary Ward, Mary Alcock, qui avait quitté l'Institut quelques années plus tôt et qui s'attache à le discréditer en attaquant personnellement sa fondatrice. Ce document outrancier et souvent invraisemblable n'offre guère de crédibilité. Néanmoins, par ses excès, il témoigne du climat particulier à cette période, tant il semble moins préoccupé de véracité que de sensationnel. Selon Mary Alcock, la population locale prendrait les établissements clandestins des Dames anglaises en mission à Londres pour des maisons closes<sup>39</sup>, et serait confortée dans cette idée par la conduite dissolue des Dames anglaises, qu'elle croirait être des prostituées. Ce témoignage suggère les mœurs des salons libertins plus que celles du couvent, évoquant des gorges découvertes et des robes aussi splendides qu'extravagantes, rehaussées de collerettes jaune vif pour lesquelles la fondatrice semble avoir une prédilection toute particulière. Et le rapport de s'insurger :

Une fois, [Mary Ward] habilla sa propre sœur Barbara Ward, d'une robe de taffetas de couleur vive taillée selon la dernière mode; ainsi affublée d'une collerette d'un jaune profond, la poitrine dénudée jusqu'au corset, elle l'envoya avec une seule compagne habillée de la

38. ABC, C1, Francesco Ingoli, *Compendium of the Process made by the Nuncio of Cologne against the Jesuitesses*, f.312.

39. ADW, vol. 17 (1623-24), ff.59-62, *Godfather's Information about the Jesuitesses*. Voir f.60, item 12 : « elles passaient pour des courtisanes et on les suspectait d'être des prostituées. »



même façon, passer la nuit dans une auberge pour y convertir des âmes (selon ses dires) ; mais on n'a jamais entendu parler jusqu'ici de conversion des âmes par de tels moyens<sup>40</sup>.

Ornements évocateurs des mœurs sulfureuses de celles qui les portent, ces collerettes de couleur jaune avaient été lancées dans les milieux précieux de la société londonienne par une certaine Mrs Turner, criminelle, alchimiste et magicienne notoire, dont les filtres, onguents et autres potions réputées diaboliques lui vaudront la pendaison<sup>41</sup>. Mary Alcock souligne là les implications latentes de toute association, ne serait-ce que par le vêtement et la couleur, à Satan. La symbolique compare les Dames anglaises à des débauchées, séduites d'abord par la malice de la fondatrice elle-même et s'appropriant à corrompre leurs victimes à leur tour.

Bien entendu, la luxure n'est pas le seul vice reproché aux Dames anglaises, que l'on accuse des sept péchés capitaux. Le témoignage de Mary Alcock insiste particulièrement sur la gourmandise de Mary Ward pour qui le moindre événement serait prétexte à de somptueux banquets ; elle taxe aussi ses anciennes consœurs de paresse, leur indolence n'ayant rien de l'industrie nécessaire à l'apostolat. Enfin, dans huit de ses dix-neuf accusations, Mary Alcock souligne l'amour démesuré des Dames anglaises pour le luxe et l'argent. Or, ces reproches constituent eux aussi les bases de la diatribe contre les jésuites décrits comme sensuels, alliant la luxure à la paresse et à la gourmandise. L'accent est mis sur leur cupidité : citons par exemple le libelle d'Henry Compton, censé reproduire les instructions données aux jeunes jésuites en mission en Angleterre et mettant en exergue leur soif de pouvoir et de richesses. L'auteur assure qu'on enseigne aux postulants « comment se procurer la confiance de riches veuves », ou « comment monopoliser le contrôle des veuves et disposer librement de leurs richesses », chacune des

40. *Ibid.*, item 14, f.61.

41. Victor MacLure, *She Stands Accused, Being a Series of Accounts of the Lives and Deeds of Notorious Women, Murderesses, Cheats, Cozeners, on whom Justice was Executed, and of others who, Accused of Crimes, were Acquitted at least in Law; Drawn from Authenticated Source*, Londres, 1935, p. 56.

instructions visant à accroître la fortune de la Compagnie, aux dépens même de la morale<sup>42</sup>.

Selon les pamphlétaires anti-jésuites, les ignaciens ne reculent devant aucun stratagème pour piéger leurs victimes : le champ lexical du prédateur et de sa proie est décliné dans de nombreux ouvrages, tels ceux de John Gee ou de Samuel Harsnett, où les auteurs décrivent les spectaculaires mises en scènes auxquelles les missionnaires auraient recours pour amener les crédules à se convertir<sup>43</sup>. On y trouve de fausses possessions démoniaques, donnant lieu à des simulacres d'exorcisme tendant à prouver le pouvoir des clercs, ainsi que des apparitions de spectres terrifiants, selon des procédés scéniques utilisés au théâtre. Or, on dit aussi des Dames anglaises qu'elles « feignent des révélations pour confirmer leur Institut [...] ». Selon Francesco Ingoli, le secrétaire de *Propaganda Fide*, ce sont des manipulatrices, des séductrices menant tant leurs adeptes que l'Église à la destruction. À maintes reprises, il les accuse : « [Les Dames anglaises] séduisent les jeunes filles en les attirant dans leur Compagnie »<sup>44</sup> ; « par la séduction, elles ont convaincu diverses jeunes femmes d'entrer dans leur congrégation en leur faisant croire qu'elle était officiellement approuvée »<sup>45</sup>. Le thème de la séduction, que l'on retrouve si souvent sous la plume des auteurs anti-jésuites<sup>46</sup>, est repris ici par le clergé séculier pour condamner les « jésuitesses » comme autant d'ensorceleuses qui détournent les âmes du droit

42. Henry Compton, *The Jesuites' Intrigues, with the Private Instructions of that Society to their Emissaries*, Londres, 1669, pp. 35 et 38.

43. Voir entre autres John Gee, *The Foot out of the Snare. With a Detection of Sundry Late Practices and Impostures of the Priests and Iesuites In England*, Londres, 1624 et *New Shreds of the Old Snare*, Londres, 1624, ainsi que Samuel Harsnett, *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures to Withdraw the Harts of her Maiesties Subjects from their Allegiance and from the Truth of Christian Religion Professed in England, under the Pretence of Casting out Devils*, Londres, 1603.

44. ABC, C1, *Letters against the Jesuitesses*, 1630, f. 312.

45. ABC, C1, Francesco Ingoli, *Compendium of the Process made by the Nuncio of Cologne against the Jesuitesses*, f. 311.

46. Laurence Lux-Sterritt, « La séduction au service de la perfidie : représentations des missionnaires de la Contre-Réforme en Angleterre », à paraître.

chemin et fragilisent l'ordre établi. L'archiprêtre William Harrison les accuse de profiter de la vulnérabilité des Anglaises venues sur le Continent pour y être éduquées dans la foi catholique avant de rentrer au pays ; elles les séduisent, écrit-il, et les détournent de leur projet initial pour les persuader de se joindre à elles. Selon son *Informatio*, les couvents de Louvain et Gravelines sont floués par les Dames anglaises, qui les privent de leurs nouvelles novices, mettant ainsi en danger la survie des monastères traditionnels. Mary Alcock souligne également que l'Institut favorise la Compagnie de Jésus aux dépens des autres Ordres, déclarant que Mary Ward et ses consœurs ne respectent que les jésuites et dénigrent tous les autres clercs<sup>47</sup>.

Nous le voyons bien, si les séculiers prétendent qu'il est impossible d'envisager une Compagnie de Jésus pour femmes, ils attaquent pourtant les Dames anglaises, les « jésuitesses », comme on attaque traditionnellement les jésuites. Car même si le clergé ne reconnaît pas à l'Institut le droit d'exister, il est cependant bien là, et ses Dames anglaises s'emploient chaque jour à promouvoir l'idéal ignacien et à confier leurs adeptes aux jésuites. Les rapports de Robert Sherwood OSB et de Matthew Kellison prétendent d'ailleurs que le jésuite Roger Lee, ancien père spirituel de Mary Ward, serait le véritable fondateur de l'Institut. Pour le bénédictin, la présence des Dames anglaises en Angleterre n'a d'autre but que de préparer le terrain des jésuites, à qui elles confient la direction spirituelle de familles entières. Les disciples de Mary Ward représentent donc un double danger pour l'équilibre de l'Église, d'une part par les innovations qu'elles proposent et qui bafouent des siècles de tradition, d'autre part par leur dévouement total à la Compagnie de Jésus pour la promotion de laquelle elles travaillent sans relâche au détriment de tous les autres Ordres.

L'Institut de Mary Ward sera ainsi victime de la complexité du contexte religieux dans lequel il est né. Dans l'Église post-tridentine, où l'historienne Elizabeth Rapley remarque « une dichotomie masculin-féminin de plus en plus marquée, un antiféminisme agressif,

47. ADW, vol. 17 (1623-24), ff.59-62, *Godfather's Information about the Jesuitesses*, f.59, item 1.

un mouvement irrésistible vers le patriarcat »<sup>48</sup>, l'Institut des Dames anglaises est condamné comme un nouvel Ordre féminin jugé inacceptable et absurde. Mais cette simple opposition, rencontrée par ailleurs par nombre de nouveaux mouvements féminins au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, se double ici d'un écueil de nature plus politique : pour l'Église, déchirée par la tourmente qui oppose le clergé séculier aux jésuites, Mary Ward est un témoignage vivant de l'ascendant qu'exerce la Compagnie de Jésus sur les milieux dévots de l'époque. Outre son mépris des traditions monastiques, la mission de l'Institut donne un avantage non négligeable aux jésuites, leur confiant la direction de familles nouvellement converties. Dans le contexte des années 1620, une telle congrégation ne saurait qu'encourir la réprobation des adversaires de la Compagnie de Jésus.

C'est pourquoi, en septembre 1630, l'Église charge le nonce Pierluigi Carafa d'interroger sept des membres de l'Institut, dans leur communauté de Liège<sup>49</sup>. La transcription de l'audience est envoyée à Rome et étudiée par Francesco Ingoli, secrétaire de la *Propaganda Fide*, ouvertement hostile aux jésuites ; dans son rapport, il condamne l'Institut et demande que soient prises des mesures punitives. À l'issue des délibérations de la Congrégation le 21 novembre 1630, Urbain VIII remet l'affaire entre les mains de l'Inquisition, qui décide d'emprisonner Mary Ward en février 1631 à Munich. Le couperet tombe quelques temps plus tard, quand Urbain VIII déclare la suppression des dites « jésuitesses » dans sa Bulle *Pastoralis Romani Pontificis*. Mary Ward est déclarée hérétique, son Institut réduit au rang de secte bafouant tant la décence féminine que les prérogatives du clergé : le souverain pontife veut éradiquer « ces plantes nuisibles à l'Église de Dieu ». Il ordonne de les « arracher jusqu'aux racines, et pour les empêcher d'abonder, de s'étendre et de s'accroître, les détruire entièrement »<sup>50</sup> car, selon lui, les Dames anglaises menacent l'ordre établi bien plus qu'elles ne le servent.

48. Elizabeth Rapley, *The Dévotes : Women and Church in Seventeenth-century France*, Kingston, Ont., 1990, p. 3.

49. Immolata Wetter, *Mary Ward*, pp. 38-59.

50. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Z Thoisy, 312, Pièces relatives à la suppression de l'ordre par Urbain VIII en 1631. Traduction française de la bulle papale *Pastoralis Romani Pontificis*.

Après sa libération, Mary Ward se retire en Angleterre, où elle continue à œuvrer pour la communauté récusante avec quelques-unes de ses consœurs, à titre privé ; elle meurt dans le Yorkshire en 1645. L'Institut survit pourtant grâce à l'électeur de Bavière Maximilien I (1573-1651), qui permet aux Dames anglaises installées à Munich de continuer à faire la classe, à condition bien sûr de ne plus prétendre être un Ordre religieux<sup>51</sup>. C'est donc de Munich que partira leur effort renouvelé pour obtenir l'approbation papale. Ce nouvel Institut se concentre sur l'enseignement des filles, garde le cloître et ne revendique pas de vocation missionnaire ; il n'a, officiellement, plus rien en commun avec celui fondé par Mary Ward et supprimé en 1631. En 1749, Benoît XIV dans sa Bulle *Quamvis Justo* le reconnaît sous le nom d'Institut de la Bienheureuse Vierge Marie. Ce n'est que le 7 juin 2003 (près de quatre siècles après que Mary Ward déclare avoir reçu l'ordre divin, « Take the same of the Society »), que l'Église permettra enfin à la vocation de la fondatrice d'exister telle qu'elle l'aurait souhaité, en adaptant les règles d'Ignace de Loyola pour une congrégation de femmes à qui l'on octroie enfin le droit de porter le nom de Congrégation de Jésus<sup>52</sup>.

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51. Voir Henriette Peters, *Mary Ward*, pp. 594-97.

52. Je tiens à remercier M<sup>me</sup> Sophie Houdard (Université de Paris III - Sorbonne Nouvelle) pour ses précieuses remarques à propos de cet article.

« 'Virgo becomes Virago': Women in the Accounts of Seventeenth-Century English Catholic Missionaries », *Recusant History* 30.4 (2011) 537–53.

### Résumé :

D'importantes études ont révélé la nature kaléidoscopique de l'engagement des femmes dans le catholicisme anglais du dix-septième siècle. Elles étaient actives dans les domaines traditionnellement féminins, les œuvres de charité envers les pauvres, les visites aux malades et aux prisonniers, l'éducation des enfants et l'observation des rituels de la vie catholique au sein du foyer. Ces rôles ne sont pas spécifiques aux Anglaises mais se retrouvent partout dans l'Europe de l'époque. Néanmoins, les circonstances particulières de la mission anglaise exigent un engagement plus profond et plus radical. Puisque les sanctions pénales se concentrent en majorité sur les hommes, les femmes deviennent les alliées naturelles de la mission, prompte à exploiter les nombreux avantages qu'elles ont à offrir. Grâce à elles, les missionnaires trouvent des logements sûrs, financent leur entreprise et bénéficient de réseaux sociaux précieux, tout en restant discrets aux yeux des officiers qui surveillent surtout les hommes. En outre, la narration des exploits de ces faibles femmes en terre hostile permet aux missionnaires de construire un nouveau modèle de sainteté, typiquement anglais et parfaitement adapté à la situation du siècle.

7 985 mots

mots-clés : Angleterre moderne ; mission ; catholicisme ; récusance ; femmes

### Présentation du texte :

Cet article représente l'aboutissement d'une réflexion sur le rôle et la place des femmes dans la mission catholique en Angleterre. En 2009, j'avais présenté deux communications sur ce sujet. L'une portait sur le point de vue des auteurs anticatholiques. L'autre proposait au contraire une perspective interne, analysant le rôle des femmes d'après les biographies/hagiographies écrites par leurs confesseurs après leur mort, ou les extraits des rapports des missionnaires dans lesquels elles étaient mentionnées. J'y montrais comment les femmes, échappant plus facilement à la rigueur de la loi, constituent d'idéales alliées pour les missionnaires. Les veuves ou les femmes non mariées mettent à leur disposition leur fortune, leurs demeures et leurs réseaux ; plus leur statut social ou leur âge sont élevés, plus l'alliance est sûre puisque qu'il n'est pas socialement acceptable de s'en prendre à elles. Néanmoins, cette réflexion ne me semblait pas complète et c'est dans cette optique que je rédigeais cet article pour montrer également comment les femmes servent un autre propos, tout aussi avantageux pour les missionnaires : dans leurs récits, ces derniers mettent en exergue la fortitude, le courage et la constance de ces faibles créatures face aux persécutions incessantes de l'ennemi. Ils construisent un modèle de sainteté plus proche des Anglais que les modèles médiévaux ou continentaux, souvent mystiques et difficiles à imiter dans les circonstances de l'Angleterre du dix-septième siècle. Ces femmes pures mais vaillantes, « *virgoes* » et « *viragoes* » à la fois, permettent aux missionnaires d'inciter les catholiques à la détermination et à l'engagement, et servent à édifier leur lectorat même au-delà des côtes anglaises.

## ‘VIRGO BECOMES VIRAGO’: WOMEN IN THE ACCOUNTS OF SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH CATHOLIC MISSIONARIES

*by* LAURENCE LUX-STERRITT

In the account of his missionary work, the Jesuit John Gerard (1564–1637) famously explained how, after a few years of penury in ‘Mass equipment’, Catholic houses had become so well equipped that priests were able to set about their work immediately upon their arrival.<sup>1</sup> He recalled that in the last two years of his work (1604–06), he no longer needed to lodge in taverns but always found friendly dwellings to shelter him on his way. Most of these were run by women, whose prominence in the activity of harbouring was pointed out in many documents, including the minutes of the confession given to the Privy Council by the appellant priest Anthony Sherlock, who turned informer after his capture in 1606:

[Sherlock] grew into acquaintance with Lady Stonor near Henley-on-Thames and stayed with her three or four years, often saying mass in her house. Next he moved to Warwicks. and at Brailes and Welsford was with a widow named Margaret Bishop for two or three years. Then to Worcs., where he said Mass once or twice in the house of Lady Windsor and also at Mrs. Heath’s at Alchurch, at Hawkesley with Mr. Middlemore and at Tamworth in Warwicks. with Richard Dolphin two or three years. Then he was with widow Knowles at Ridware, with Mrs. Comberford at Wednesbury, with Mrs. Stanford at Parkington ...<sup>2</sup>

In the last three decades, historical and literary studies have drawn attention to the prominence of women in early modern English Catholicism, and many have attempted to explain it. John Bossy famously highlighted the fact that anti-Catholic laws had forced Catholic piety to retreat into the sphere of the household, where women traditionally held greater influence than in the wider public domain. According to him, English Catholic communities could therefore be seen as matriarchies.<sup>3</sup> Alexandra Walsham argued that the high proportion of female recusants was a direct consequence of the penal system which, since it was based on fines and confiscation, focused upon the prosecution of men whilst it left housewives virtually undisturbed.<sup>4</sup> Since then, important studies have revealed the multi-faceted nature of female involvement in seventeenth-century English Catholicism. Women were active in traditional activities such as charitable works extended to the poor, the sick, and to prisoners, motherly

duties concerning the religious education of children, or housewifely responsibilities for the observing of Catholic practice in the household. Those were universal roles for Catholic lay women everywhere; yet the particular circumstances of the English mission demanded more radical engagement. Women were harbourers, procurers, organisers of networks, they catechised broadly, and effected conversions in their neighbourhoods; some even baptised newborns and, in the face of peril and emergency, undertook roles which blurred the boundaries between laity and clergy.<sup>5</sup> Lisa McClain recently pointed out that the spiritual lives of Catholic believers in England depended upon flexibility; she highlighted that both men and women 'pushed the limits of orthodoxy, all the while remaining within the rather flexible bounds of the multi-faceted interaction between the institution of the Roman Church and the needs of believers'.<sup>6</sup> Thus, as priests worked for the preservation of the faith on English soil, lay women used their own skills with such success that they soon provided much of the secular infrastructure of the English mission. As expediency replaced customary gendered specialization, some female recusants were, for the first time, allowed to play roles which would, in ordinary circumstances, have incurred the censure of the clergy. The constant state of danger and emergency which suffused recusant life in early modern England actually rendered the services of these women too valuable to be foregone by the missionaries.

The personal circumstances of the women involved in the mission were varied. Of those who were married, some benefited from the assent of their husbands, whilst others did not; others yet were unattached, widows or spinsters. Whatever the reasons for their prominence in militant Catholicism, Englishwomen were some of the Church's most active allies in its attempt to re-conquer the kingdom, a fact which did not escape anti-Catholic writers and which provided them with much material to speculate about the feminised nature of the Romish faith.<sup>7</sup> Yet the information available to document the lives of Catholic laywomen in England usually stems from missionary accounts. For instance, the careers of harbourers such as the sisters Eleanor (1560–1626) and Anne Vaux (1562–1637?) and their sister-in-law, Elizabeth Vaux, born Roper (d. 1637?) are to be gathered from scattered information in the writings of John Gerard, S.J., notably his autobiography written in Latin in 1609 and widely circulated amongst Jesuit circles in the early seventeenth century.<sup>8</sup> This also yields valuable clues on the activities of Anne Line (1567–1601), with whom the Jesuit worked. The reports written by Henry Garnet (1555–1603), the English Provincial, to the Jesuit General Claudio Aquaviva, also provide some interesting insights into the collaboration between missionaries and their female helpers.<sup>9</sup> Some laywomen were even the objects of full-length biographies, authored by their chaplains and spiritual confessors. Such was the case of Margaret Clitherow (c. 1556–86), whose manuscript biography known as the 'Trew Reporte



of the Lyfe and Martyrdome of Mrs Margarete Clitherowe', was written by her secular confessor John Mush (1551–1612). This was soon printed and distributed as an abridged and more accessible version, *An Abstracte of the Life and Martirdome of Mistress Margaret Clitherowe* (Mesclin, 1619).<sup>10</sup> The *Vita* of Lady Magdalen, Viscountess Montague (1538–1608) was written and published in Latin by her secular confessor Richard Smith in 1609, before its translation into English and its publication by Cuthbert Fursdon in 1627.<sup>11</sup> The biography of Dorothy Lawson (1580–1632), was written in 1646 by William Palmes, or Palmer (c.1594–1670), the Jesuit who worked as her confessor during the last seven years of her life.<sup>12</sup>

Because of their hagiographical nature, these clerically-authored biographies must of course be handled with great care if one is to use them as sources of historical evidence. In this field, historians of medieval or Protestant piety can provide a useful methodological model to avoid the trappings of hagiographic sources.<sup>13</sup> Convincing studies have also reviewed the use of Catholic hagiographical works. Thus, writing about Clitherow's biography, Megan Matchinske evokes Mush's 'compromised construction' of the martyr's life without however rejecting his account wholesale.<sup>14</sup> More recently, in their lengthy article on Margaret Clitherow, Peter Lake and Michael Questier demonstrated that traditional clerical hagiographies can yet yield relevant information and enable us to build a more precise picture of Catholic communities.<sup>15</sup>

In 2004, Colleen Seguin wrote about the 'ambiguous liaisons' of female penitents with their confessors in the English missions. She noted that scholarly studies had so far focused upon the impact of such relationships upon the Protestant imagination, and deplored the lack of analysis of 'what the bonds meant to the parties themselves'. Her superb article addressed that gap, although the Protestant interpretations of such male-female relationships continued to exercise a strong centrifugal pull away from the subjects themselves.<sup>16</sup> The purpose of this article is somewhat different, since it poses the question of the perceived roles of female recusants in the mission in the eyes of missionary authors; by re-reading some selected *Lives*, it hopes to tease out some of the salient features which are commonly found in such clerical accounts, and to assess the value they gave to women in the mission. The narratives show that women procured the conversions of their households, taught and catechised children, and generally acted as intermediaries between the people and the few priests at work in their neighbourhoods. On a more pragmatic yet crucial note, they reveal how wealthy women offered the mission a level of safety which was not to be enjoyed with male harbourers. They gave priests access to their considerable resources, whilst often escaping the full brunt of the penal laws; moreover, they used gendered prejudices to their advantage, playing upon the trope of the harmless female the better to evade investigation. Finally, this study argues that the examples

of extraordinary women's dedication to their faith furnished missionaries with edifying models to hold up to the general Catholic community. These women were not consecrated nuns, they were not mystics, but they dedicated their lives to the survival of the mission; if they did not correspond to the ideal of the religious woman defined by the post-Tridentine Church, they offered a new model of female sanctity, one which was steeped in the world and served the purposes of the Counter-Reformation efforts in England.

Clerical accounts show that, in the particular circumstances of a community under penalty, English missionaries formed frequent alliances with married women and mothers. As John Bossy showed, the anti-pope laws which drove Catholicism to retreat within the domestic sphere had critical consequences on the roles of women, who were the customary keepers of familial religious observance.<sup>17</sup> Housewives, through their perpetuation of traditional practices, unambiguously defined their households as Catholic, which could partially explain why women played what Bossy called 'an abnormally large part' in a community which he saw as a matriarchy.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, Alexandra Walsham explained the important role of elite recusant women by pointing at malfunctions in a penal system which concentrated mostly on attacks against property and office-holding to punish non-conformity.<sup>19</sup> Because wives had no property of their own, this system did not apply to them. With the 1610 'Act for the Administration of the Oath of Allegiance and the Reformation of Married Women recusants', a recusant wife who refused to swear the oath was to be jailed without bail and it befell the husband to pay a fine of £10 a month (or one third of his estate) for her release. For each member of his household baptised or buried outside the established Church, he was to pay the sum of £100, and for each Catholic child, servant or guest dwelling in his house, a fine of £10. Since husbands, as the domestic wielders of authority, were expected to enforce conformity in their families, they bore the brunt of the law. Conversely, the inconsequential status of wives protected them, to a degree, from persecution; one could therefore argue that the English state's patriarchal scorn for women as property-owners unwittingly contributed to giving females an advantage in recusancy. Since married women were freer than their husbands to become active recusants without suffering the full consequences of the law, they naturally became key players in the mission at large. In that context, priests would gain undeniable advantages from alliances with housewives.

The much-used trope of the family as a little Church took on a special relevance in the circumstances of England, where the domestic sphere was the only possible space for Catholic practice. It was not rare for a female convert to Catholicism to procure the conversion of her spouse

and, perhaps more importantly, of their children. Although it was common practice for mothers to act as their children's early teachers and catechisers, this role became an advantage in the context of the mission. Thus, when Gerard wrote about one of his anonymous female converts, he congratulated himself upon the subsequent conversion of her three daughters, whom he secured 'with the mother's consent and help'.<sup>20</sup> The middle daughter contributed even further to the movement of Catholic revival since, upon marrying, she convinced her husband and became the centre of a thriving recusant household. In addition to the gift of herself and her three daughters, Gerard's anonymous friend also converted her own brother.

John Gerard appears to have valued his female allies partly for their interceding function. In his writings, he emphasised their roles as mediators, underlining how he gained the trust of entire families through his connivance with housewives. The conversion of a woman, to be celebrated in itself, appears to have been doubly valuable in his eyes since it was often the occasion of the children's conversions, even in households where husbands were conformists. Thus, John Mush reported that despite their father's Protestantism, Margaret Clitherow's children all grew to be staunch Catholics: her daughter became a nun at St Ursula's in Louvain in 1598, and her son joined the Capuchins in 1592, then the Dominicans. One of her stepsons also became a seminary priest in 1608, and the other died in Hull gaol, where he was imprisoned for recusancy, in 1604. Similarly, William Palmes noted that all twelve of Dorothy Lawson's children were sent to be educated in Catholic institutions abroad, with three daughters entering the holy Orders (one as an Augustinian canoness at Louvain in 1618, the others as Benedictines at Ghent in 1626 and 1631 respectively). Through such clerical accounts, mothers appeared as promising prospects, since they were the gateways to their households and precious allies in the securing of further conversions.

Yet this was far from the only asset to be enjoyed from such associations. Women influenced their neighbourhoods, sometimes through typically female networks, but often far beyond those. William Palmes showed the intercessory functions of Dorothy Lawson, especially when she assisted other women in labour. In her duties as a midwife, she procured the usual cordials but she also made use of holy relics to bring spiritual comfort to the parturient woman and did not hesitate to baptise infants if she feared for their lives. Moreover, Lawson's work exceeded all-female social circles, since she catechised her neighbours regardless of their sex. Palmes noted: 'When any was to be reconcil'd there-about, shee played the catechist, *so as I had no other share in the work but to take their confessions*'.<sup>21</sup> This shows that Dorothy Lawson undertook all the tasks which a missionary would face, short of sacramental duties.<sup>22</sup>

Palmes's narrative laid strong emphasis upon this aspect of Lawson's work, praising her skills for bringing about numerous conversions.

He recalled that before Lawson's arrival at Heton, 'there was but one Catholic family in the parish or circuit; no church-stuff but hers, which was carried to several places upon necessity. Att her departure from thence [...] to heaven, there was not one heretick family, and six altars were erected for divine service'.<sup>23</sup> When she moved to St. Anthony's, Dorothy Lawson had the name of Jesus painted in large letters upon her house in such fashion that it was visible to seamen, who would then know where to go to seek Catholic relief.

Women could be at the source of new, thriving Catholic communities; this was the case also with Lady Magdalen, Viscountess Montague. Her critics bemoaned the destabilising effect she had on her surroundings: 'since the Lady Montagues coming to dwel at Battle ... religion in that countrey, and especially in that towne, is greatly decayed'.<sup>24</sup> Richard Smith, her confessor, hailed this as one of his penitent's highest achievements, and chose to dedicate a large proportion of his biography to Montague's invaluable work as a furtherer of the faith. He recalled that she maintained an extended household of over eighty people, 'to support them in the Catholic religion'.<sup>25</sup> As she had a chapel built in her house near Hastings, the entire neighbourhood could gather and a close-knit Catholic community was allowed to thrive. Smith reported:

such was the concourse and resort of Catholics, that sometimes there were 120 together, some 60 communicants at a time had the benefit of the Blessed Sacrament. And such was the number of Catholics resident in her house and the multitude and note of such as repaired thither, that even the heretics, to the eternal glory of the name of the Lady Magdalen, gave it the title of *Little Rome*.<sup>26</sup>

Thanks to Lady Magdalen, a whole neighbourhood had access to religious instruction and services, and to the sacraments. This network was vast and socially diverse since the viscountess not only entertained members of the nobility but also extended her charity to the poor and the sick, whom she visited in their own houses and to whom she brought considerable relief.

John Gerard's writings reveal that the women of the Vaux family were also very active in the mission and undertook a myriad roles, amongst which those of facilitators, organisers, procurers and catechisers. Elizabeth Vaux, a widow under John Gerard's spiritual direction, turned her family seat of Harrowden (Northamptonshire) into a Jesuit base, building separate quarters for the priests on one side of the family chapel and erecting a separate wing for them, with private access to the property's gardens. Equipped with hiding holes, Harrowden became a true 'centre of operations'<sup>27</sup> where conforming Oxford graduates taught boys their secular topics while Jesuit priests undertook their religious instruction. Thus it was that a lay woman found herself at the head of a Jesuit College in England, enabling missionaries to educate boys before sending them secretly to Douai.

Elizabeth's sister-in-law, Anne Vaux (whom Gerard called the 'virgin'), was equally central to the organisation and activities of the mission. As Henry Garnet's life-long partner in religion, she organised annual meetings at White Webbs (Middlesex), a house she kept from 1600, and which served as the Jesuit headquarters. In the aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot and during the nation-wide search for Henry Garnet, Vaux was put under arrest for her harbouring activities; yet when after over two years of imprisonment (between 1606 and 1608) she secured her freedom on account of her failing health, she immediately resumed her activities as a helper of priests. She joined her sister Eleanor Brookesby in Great Ashby and there, they harboured many missionaries until Eleanor's death in 1626. At that time, Anne moved to Stanley Grange in Derbyshire where she ran a Catholic school.<sup>28</sup> Sent by the Council in 1635 to investigate 'a school kept at the house of Mrs Vaux, called Stanley Grange, Co. Derby, where sons of persons of quality are brought up under the tutorage of the Jesuits'<sup>29</sup>, Sir Francis Coke testified to the collegial nature of the house under 'the virgin's' direction. He wrote: 'There were beds and furniture for them in that little house to lodge forty or fifty persons at the least.'<sup>30</sup> Anne Vaux was still in activity in February 1637 and Stanley Grange remained a centre of Jesuit activity long after her death.

The clerically-authored *Lives* of recusant laywomen were written partly as testimonies of their commitment to the Catholic revival in England. Missionaries appreciated alliances with females in part for the access this gave them to families and extended social circles where women wielded great influence. However, the study of clerical accounts reveals that missionaries also valued their partnerships with women partly because they guaranteed a degree of safety which was not to be had with male harbourers.

Women offered considerable advantages with regards to the safety of the mission, especially if they enjoyed wealth and social status. Indeed, if women were relatively sheltered from recusancy laws, they could be prosecuted as harbourers of priests. On that account, it was their social position which therefore provided protection against pursuivants. Noblewomen benefitted from the respect due to their rank but also to their sex, thus enjoying more latitude than noblemen did. This enabled them to take bolder stands in their dedication to the mission, as was the case for Magdalen Montague, whose involvement became more pronounced and more public after her husband's death. Her biographer, Richard Smith, insisted upon the concord between the Viscount and his wife, a marital bliss which partly derived from their common views upon their faith. In his study of the Browne family Michael Questier argued that Lady Magdalen's 'opinions were influenced by and subsumed under those of her husband while he lived'.<sup>31</sup> Yet, as soon as she was widowed, Lady

Montague became an uncompromising recusant; her staff at Battle Abbey, Sussex was soon exclusively Catholic. She had a chapel built, maintained three priests, allowed her neighbours access to their services and spent much of her money to secure the release of gaoled recusants.

Lady Magdalen's involvement in the mission far outreached the domestic sphere; her dedication to the faith was notorious, and she was even willing to have a printing press established in her house, thereby entering the public sphere of controversy and polemic.<sup>32</sup> Yet if such women flouted English laws, their brazen militancy often went unpunished. Smith stressed that the Viscountess's noble status provided a degree of protection which she used to take the Catholic cause under her wing. In his thirteenth chapter, he gave examples of 'the admirable providence of God towards the Lady Madgalen', pointing out that her network (despite its notoriety) never came under threat.<sup>33</sup> As a prominent member of the aristocracy, Lady Montague enjoyed indulgence even on the part of His Majesty and when she became the object of an inquest in April 1607, she benefited from letters addressed by the King's Council to the Attorney General ordering that there should be no proceedings against her:

For so much [...] as the Lady Montague, the wife of Antony Viscount Montague, deceased, is lately called in question for default of conformity in religion according to the laws of this Kingdom, in regard that she is a noblewoman, aged, and by reason of her fidelity in the time of Queen Elizabeth was never called in question, it pleaseth the King's Majesty that in her old years she be free from molestation.<sup>34</sup>

Lady Montague was therefore one of the most valuable allies of the missionary priests working in Sussex, thanks to her social status but also to the respect and politeness due to her age and sex.

Cases such as this one exemplify the benefits to be drawn from associations with noble or gentle women, and clerical biographies abound with vignettes testifying to the same. Several are to be found in John Gerard's *Autobiography*, where the reader is told about the edifying endeavours of the Vaux women. As a known harbourer of priests, Lady Elizabeth Vaux was always under surveillance and, in the aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot, Harrowden was raided. John Gerard recounted that, after enduring several days of fruitless search, she decided to placate the pursuivants by revealing the existence of one of the hiding places. This, she hoped, would lead them to conclude that the priest had escaped, since he was not found in the secret chamber. Yet, the raid was to continue for nine days in total, and Elizabeth Vaux was taken into custody to the house of Sir John Swinnerton.<sup>35</sup> While her social respectability spared her the common gaol, she would also use the rhetoric of femininity to gain further trust and respect from her judges. Accused of being privy to the preparation of the Plot, she appealed to Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury (1563-1612), flattering his widely respected common sense, claiming

that no serious plotter would ever entrust secret plans to a woman. She argued: 'I do assure your lordship that there are many that will receive such persons that will not put their lives and estates in the power and secrecy of a woman.'<sup>36</sup> She openly endorsed the patriarchal prejudices on female weakness and indiscretion the better to evade suspicion. Clearly, she used both her social position and her gender as a tool to get herself out of a life-threatening situation. As a woman, she hoped to appear innocuous enough to secure her release.<sup>37</sup> Then, as soon as she was free, she joined Gerard in London and set up another house there without delay.

The women who worked with missionary priests often manipulated traditional role-definitions whilst outwardly appearing to comply with them. Elizabeth's sisters-in-law, Eleanor Brookesby and Anne Vaux, also used their status as females of social standing to deflect pursuivants' zeal: Eleanor's house was the headquarters where Henry Garnet, in his capacity as Superior of the English Jesuits, held yearly meetings with his missionaries until 1600. Since she and Anne hosted these meetings, the future of the entire mission relied on their cool-headedness in the face of peril. This was put to the test several times but in his report to the Jesuit General, Henry Garnet chose to highlight one particular incident in detail.<sup>38</sup> He described how, in October 1591, government agents raided the manor during a secret meeting. Five Jesuits, two seminary priests and one layman retired to a hiding place whilst Eleanor Brookesby, their hostess (and therefore liable to prosecution for harbouring) hid in a separate one. Garnet reported how Anne Vaux used to her advantage the received standards of womanly modesty when, assuming her sister's identity, she boldly faced the searchers. Since the raid occurred in the early hours of the morning, she pretended she had not yet risen and demanded enough time to make herself presentable before letting the search party in. This stratagem allowed the servants to conceal both the priests and the tools of their trade. She then welcomed the pursuivants, displaying humble hospitality; by offering food and drink, she appeared cordial and unthreatening, therefore showing she had nothing to hide.

Garnet's narrative bears all the signs of a carefully written account intended to have a great impact upon its reader. When reporting Anne Vaux's confrontation with the officers, Garnet switched to direct speech, a device widely used to increase the lively nature of an account. Hence, the reader becomes a witness to the unfolding drama, when Vaux is reported to exclaim: 'Do you think it right and proper that you should be admitted to a widow's house before she or her servants or children are out of bed? [...] Have you ever found me unwilling to open the door to you as soon as you knocked?' The dialogue shows that Vaux's coyness, and her evocation both of female decency and harmlessness worked as she hoped, when the officer replied: 'It's quite true. I've always had

courtesy from this lady, and you can take my work for it that she was not yet out of bed.'<sup>39</sup>

In a mission where raids were frequent, Henry Garnet deliberately chose to dedicate several pages to this particular one. The question is why? I suggest that episodes such as the Harrowden raid give him, and other clerical authors of reports which would be circulated either in print or in manuscript form, an opportunity to pass on a clear message to their readers. Jodi Bilinkoff argued that around the 1750s, new Catholic models of saintly behaviour were developed, which focused less on contemplative virtues than upon apostolic involvement in the world and 'usefulness' to the Church.<sup>40</sup> But Frances Dolan showed that this shift occurred earlier in England when she demonstrated that the Catholic biographies of the seventeenth century developed a new sub-genre which had evolved from traditional medieval hagiographies to biographies of exemplary subjects which aimed to edify readers whilst being steeped in the specific national context of English Catholicism.<sup>41</sup> I believe that the clerical writings studied in this essay do belong to this sub-genre; although they have traditionally been used to reveal some historical detail about the lives of recusant laywomen, these texts can also be read as efforts to develop an alternative to the hagiographies of contemplative saints. A closer analysis of their literary form can throw light upon some of the reasons which moved clerical authors to write about certain women at certain given times, and in particular ways.

Garnet's representation of Anne Vaux sprang from the conditions of the clandestine mission in England; in a context where the Tridentine religious model of enclosed contemplation could not be followed by Englishwomen, Garnet seized the example of this selfless 'virgin' to suggest a new, more national model of holiness.

I've no idea with what patience ladies in Italy would put up with this. Here, we have been sold into slavery, and have become hardened to this sort of barbarity. [...] The virgin always conducts these arguments with such skill and discretion that she certainly counteracts their persistence [...]. For though she has all a maiden's modesty and even shyness, yet in God's cause and in protection of His servants, *virgo* becomes *virago*.<sup>42</sup>

The particular situation of English Catholicism is pointed out keenly here, to suggest that the traditional archetypes of saintly behaviour valid in Italy do not fit the paradigm of the English mission. Through his choice of words—*virgo* and *virago*—Garnet portrayed Anne Vaux as an exemplary creature who combined the bodily weakness of the archetypal female with the unfailing courage of a true soldier of God. Indeed, it was through her active service to the Church that this otherwise un-extraordinary Catholic she earned her holiness.

It was not rare for the women who won distinction by their services to the Church to be depicted in such ways. Whereas on the Continent,



women would choose to retire into a convent, this was not an option for early modern Englishwomen who did not wish to live in exile. Yet, if staying in England meant abandoning their hopes of the 'perfect' life of contemplation, it was a choice which was abundantly praised in clerical texts, in which it was constructed as a form of holy service to the Church. Laywomen's involvement in the apostolate and the re-Catholicization of their country was hailed as their daily dedication to God. Henry Garnet described these women as 'holy women [...] consecrated to God'.<sup>43</sup> His lexicon is loaded with meaning, since these women were in fact not consecrated in the Tridentine sense; yet the text constructs them as Brides of Christ who, despite not being nuns, became holy through active service in the mission.

After twenty years of collaboration with Anne Vaux, Henry Garnet was arrested on 27 January 1606, in the aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot. His last correspondence with Anne shows a genuine bond of mutual trust and affection, but also a highly pragmatic working relationship where Garnet entrusted Anne with the continuance their work even after his death. He wrote: 'If you can stay in England and enjoy the use of the sacraments in such sort as heretofore, I think it absolutely the best [...] and I do wish that, if it may be, you and your sister live as before in a house of common repair of the Society, or where the Superior of the mission shall ordinarily remain'.<sup>44</sup> Anne Vaux had hoped to become a nun; yet Garnet advised her to stay in England where her piety could find daily opportunities to manifest itself in action and where her skills were much needed. In his ultimate recommendation before his execution on 3 May 1606, Garnet thought it fit to reiterate his advice and pleaded with his 'very loving and most dear sister' to maintain her activities in the mission, for he believed she would be most useful to God if she remained in the secular world to advance Catholicism in England.<sup>45</sup>

The tension between action and contemplation was not new, nor was it specific to England, but in the circumstances of the mission, it acquired particular significance. John Gerard's *Autobiography* praised Anne's sister-in-law, Elizabeth for her choice to remain in England upon the death of her husband. In his narrative, he deliberately compared Eleanor to biblical figures: 'she decided [...] to fulfil as nearly as she could the role of Martha, and of other holy women who followed Christ and ministered to Him and His apostles'.<sup>46</sup> Henry Garnet compared Anne Line to Roman matrons and praised the woman who, he wrote, was known and respected by all under the name of Mrs Martha. In fact, in his correspondence to the General Superior Claudio Aquaviva (1581–1615), he himself referred to Line as Mrs Martha more often than by her civil name, and it was under that name that she was condemned.<sup>47</sup>

In death, 'Mrs Martha' became the embodiment of female dedication to the recusant cause in England. Sentenced for harbouring priests, she suffered martyrdom at Tyburn on 27 February 1601. Relics were

recovered from her body immediately after the execution. Both Henry Garnet and John Gerard described her martyrdom, in typically hagiographical manner, although they served a slightly different purpose. This martyrdom gave them the opportunity to eulogise about 'Martha's' involvement in the mission, and to portray her as a simple laywoman who achieved holiness by renouncing the comforts of contemplative life for the toils of the mission.<sup>48</sup> The traditional simile with Martha and biblical women enhanced the holy nature of the Englishwomen, which shone through their dedication to the mission; it helped promote an alternative to the traditional post-Tridentine definition of Catholic identity.<sup>49</sup>

In studies which have attempted to tease out of such accounts some fragments of accurate evidence of Catholic lived experience, the authorial voice has always been acknowledged as problematic. Yet if hagiographers can at times obscure historical facts, they can also reveal a surprising amount of information upon their context. Clerics chose to write about certain women at specific times as a means to disseminate messages which were especially tailored for the national circumstances of the English mission. This was true of Jesuit reports such as Gerard's or correspondence with the General such as Garnet's, which would be widely circulated for the information and edification of other Jesuits. Such texts were not 'private' in the modern sense, but aimed at publicising a new English model of sanctity to a broader readership. The same idea was all the more applicable to published texts such as Mush's *Life* of Margaret Clitherow, Smith's *Life* of Magdalen Montague or Palmes's *Life* of Dorothy Lawson. Although A.C. Southern introduced Richard Smith's *Life* of Lady Magdalen Montague, as 'the only one of Dr. Smith's eleven works which can be described as entirely non-controversial',<sup>50</sup> several enlightening studies have since then demonstrated that we should question this interpretation of female biographies as devoid of any controversial intent.

Claire Cross pointed out that Mush's biography was inscribed within the tradition of hagiographical writings but also within his personal polemical agenda in the battle between secular clergy and Jesuits, or in the debate on the occasional conformity advocated by Thomas Bell (c. 1551-1610).<sup>51</sup> In times when the recusancy laws persuaded many Catholic to attend Protestant services, Mush's account is a clear condemnation of these Church Papists or 'lukewarm Catholics' whose company, he insisted, Clitherow 'lamentably misliked and loathed'.<sup>52</sup> Mush's uncompromising stand and his defence of full recusancy appear throughout the text, and Anne Dillon argued that the prominence of this authorial voice makes the *Trewe Reporte* as much a polemical treatise as it is the biography of Clitherow herself.<sup>53</sup> A similar intent is visible in Richard Smith's biography of Madgalen Montague, in which he recurrently praised her zeal 'not only in keeping but even in professing

the faith of Christ'. Smith excuses his penitent's former occasional conformity, which he imputes 'to the defect of instruction [rather] than want of zeal. For when she understood it to be unlawful she did most constantly abhor it.' Smith underlined Montague's courage and her will to suffer 'whatsoever it should please God' in her endeavours for the mission.<sup>54</sup> When reminding his readers of the harshness of the penalties for recusancy, which could cost the Viscountess much of her fortune, he reported her reaction: 'If the King will have two-thirds of my estate I will joyfully live with the rest, and I thank God, who hath permitted me to enjoy it hitherto and now permitteth that it be taken from me for professing His faith'.<sup>55</sup> Smith resorted to direct speech to increase the impact of this declaration upon the reader; his intention was to make the scene as real and vivid as possible, in order to move Catholics who feared for their worldly possessions to imitate Montague, who served a crucial exemplary function.

Anne Dillon claimed that '[w]hether the figure which emerges from the text is an historically verifiable one, rather than "a creation of legend, myth and propaganda", is less important than her function'.<sup>56</sup> Peter Lake and Michael Questier have demonstrated that such texts do yield valuable evidence about the lives and social contexts of their subjects, and historians should not ignore the biographical nature of such writings altogether. However, I agree with Dillon that female subjects were precious to their clerical biographers since they represented 'a model of virtue which was humanly achievable'.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, without going so far as to say with Frances Dolan that inspiring models were *more* useful than documents describing what particular women really did, it seems clear that these models did play a crucial part in efforts to maintain and further English Catholicism.<sup>58</sup>

In this ideal, laywomen were given a paradigm of Catholic perfection to which to live up: thus, all the accounts discussed in this essay emphasised the usual female virtues of humility, chastity, patience and charity. They all insisted particularly upon the obedience due to confessors and praised their subjects' utter reliance upon their spiritual fathers.<sup>59</sup> After extolling these typical virtues, however, biographers moved on to a more contextualised description of their subjects' zeal and constancy in the faith. They paint vivid pictures of the spiritual regimen they managed to maintain in their households. They detail a daily *horarium* which was akin to that of religious houses, in which time was carefully divided into long hours of daily prayer, meditation, frequent attendance to services and regular resort to the sacraments. The household itself was akin to a cloister, with rooms dedicated to specific saints, chapels, spaces for the catechizing of children, others for the private quarters of priests. Such accounts, therefore, showed laywomen who displayed exemplary fortitude in the face of peril and who, with courage, achieved a new spiritual ideal of holiness.

As Colleen Seguin and Frances Dolan have shown, this is one of the key aspects of these holy *Lives*: these were simple laywomen, occupied with the household duties and preoccupations common to all women at the time.<sup>60</sup> Margaret Clitherow and Anne Line were exceptions, since they actually became martyrs and saints, but the Vaux sisters, Magdalen Montague, Dorothy Lawson and countless others were not.<sup>61</sup> Therein lay the message: if these women could manage a lifestyle of such high spiritual standard, so could every Catholic in England, man or woman. Thus, clerical biographies valued their female subjects as edifying examples to be emulated by all in everyday life. In such works, full recusancy becomes a new type of martyrdom in itself.

The accounts written by missionary priests offer precious information about their authors' relationships with female helpers. They indicate that, in the context of the mission, Catholic women were granted a particular importance as maintainers of the faith, as facilitators and coordinators, even as agents in the network. The traditional divides between men and women and between lay and religious sometimes became redundant in recusant England. Clerical biographies show that, although not on equal footing with the priests, laywomen contributed to the success of the whole movement and were valued as assets to the mission. Because anti-Catholic penalties focused mostly on men, missionaries were shrewd enough to exploit the potential offered by women in England. Through them they could secure dwellings, finance their mission and utilise valuable social networks. Through them they were less conspicuous to the pursuivants, who often tracked down men rather than women. Through them they were protected by the prevalent notions which allowed ladies of social status a modicum of latitude. Thus their relationships with female helpers, although mutually rewarding and often deeply sincere, nevertheless found their source in a pragmatic rationale meant to further the re-Catholicization of England: female alliances were exploited partly because they offered unparalleled benefits.

One of these benefits was perhaps less immediately obvious than involvement in clandestine networks, yet equally as essential to Catholic life in England. At a time when readers were inclined to read the *Lives* of their contemporaries rather than those of the saints of the distant past, the need to connect with exemplars also called for more local models, specific to countries or provinces.<sup>62</sup> Through their hagiographical accounts of female achievement, English clerical authors therefore sought to stimulate a sense of national or local identity and to establish a paradigm for English Catholic women to imitate, thereby increasing the numbers of female agents in the mission, with all the advantages they represented.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Philip Caraman, *John Gerard. The Autobiography of an Elizabethan* (Oxford, 2006) (1<sup>st</sup> ed. London, 1951), 40: 'In nearly every house I visited later I would find vestments and everything else laid out ready for me.'
- <sup>2</sup> Anstruther, Godfrey, *Vaux of Harrowden, a Recusant family* (Newport, 1953), pp. 309–10; this is his summary of SP 14/18 n<sup>o</sup> 51.
- <sup>3</sup> John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570–1850* (London, 1976), p. 158.
- <sup>4</sup> Alexandra Walsham, *Church papists: Catholicism, Conformity and Confessional Polemic in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge, 1993), pp. 78–81.
- <sup>5</sup> Roland Connelly, *Women of the Catholic Resistance: in England 1540–1680* (Durham, 1997); Christine Peters, *Women, Gender and Religion in Late Medieval and Reformation England* (Cambridge, 2009); Marie Rowlands, 'Recusant women 1560–1640', in Prior, Mary (ed.) *Women in English Society 1500–1800* (London, 1985), pp. 149–80; Colleen Marie Seguin, "'Addicted unto piety": Catholic women in England, 1590–1690', unpublished PhD dissertation (Duke University, 1997); Claire Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe: English Convents in France and the Low Countries* (Basingstoke, 2003); Retha Warnicke, *Women of the English Renaissance and Reformation* (Westport, Conn., 1983); Diane Willen, 'Women and Religion in Early Modern England', in Sherrin Marshall (ed.) *Women in Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe* (Bloomington, 1989), pp. 140–66.
- <sup>6</sup> Lisa McClain, *Lest We be Damned. Practical Innovation and Lived Experience Among Catholics in Protestant England, 1559–1642* (New York and London, 2004), p. 9. See also her 'Without Church, Cathedral or Shrine: the Search for Religious Space among Catholics in England, 1559–1625', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 33.2 (2020), pp. 381–99.
- <sup>7</sup> The fields both of historical and literary research have recently produced revealing studies unveiling the uses of gender in works of anti-Catholic propaganda and in the Protestant cultural imagination. See for instance Arthur Marotti, 'Alienating Catholics. Recusant Women, Jesuits, and Ideological Fantasies', in his *Religious Ideology and Cultural Fantasy. Catholic and Anti-Catholic Discourses in Early Modern England* (Notre Dame, 2005), pp. 32–65 and *Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism in Early Modern English Texts* (Basingstoke, 1999); Claire Walker and David Lemmings (eds.) *Moral Panics, the Media and the Law in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 2009); Frances Dolan, *Whores of Babylon. Catholicism, Gender and Seventeenth Century Print Culture* (Ithaca, 1999); Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination, 158–1660* (Cambridge, 2006); Raymond Tumbleson, *Catholicism in the English Protestant Imagination. Nationalism, Religion, and Literature, 1600–1745* (Cambridge, 1998).
- <sup>8</sup> The first English translation of Gerard's autobiography can be found in John Morris (trans), *The Life of Father John Gerard of the Society of Jesus* (London, 1881); this essay uses the more modern translation by Caraman, *John Gerard*.
- <sup>9</sup> See Anstruther, *Vaux* and Philip Caraman, *Henry Garnet, 1555–1603, and the Gunpowder Plot* (London, 1964).
- <sup>10</sup> The lengthier version would only see its ways into print much later, when it was finally edited by William Nicholson as the *Life and Death of Mrs Margaret Clitherow* (London, 1849). This essay refers to the most widely used version, 'A true report of the life and martyrdom of Mrs. Margaret Clitherow', in John Morris, *The Troubles of our Catholic Forefathers* (London, 1877), p. iii.
- <sup>11</sup> This essay uses the version edited by A.C. Southern, *An Elizabethan recusant house, comprising the life of the Lady Magdalen Viscountess Montague (1538–1608). Translated into English from the original Latin of Dr. Richard Smith, Bishop of Chalcedon, by Cuthbert Fursdon, O.S.B., in the year 1627* (London, 1954).
- <sup>12</sup> This essay uses the version edited by G.B. Richardson, *The life of Mrs. Dorothy Lawson, of St. Anthony's near Newcastle-upon-Tyne* (London, 1855).
- <sup>13</sup> For Protestant studies, see Peter Lake, 'Feminine piety and personal potency: the "emancipation" of Mrs. Jane Ratcliffe,' *Seventeenth Century*, 2 (1987), pp. 143–65; Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley, Cal., 1992); Megan Matchinske, *Writing, Gender and State in Early Modern England: Identity Formation and the Female Subject* (Cambridge, 1998); Debra L. Parish, 'The Power of Female Pietism: Women as Spiritual Authorities and Religious Role Models in Seventeenth-Century England', *Journal of Religious History*, 17.1 (1992), pp. 33–46; or Lyndal Roper, *The Holy Household: Women and Morals in Reformation Augsburg* (Oxford, 1989).
- <sup>14</sup> Matchinske, *Writing, Gender and State*, pp. 53–4.
- <sup>15</sup> Peter Lake and Michael Questier, 'Margaret Clitherow, Catholic Nonconformity, Martyrology and the Politics of Religious Change in Elizabethan England', *Past and Present*, 185 (2004), pp. 43–90.

- <sup>16</sup> Colleen M. Seguin, "Ambiguous Liaisons"; Catholic Women's Relationships with their Confessors in Early Modern England'; *Archive for Reformation History*, 95 (2004), pp. 156–85.
- <sup>17</sup> Bossy, *The English Catholic Community*, pp. 110–12.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.
- <sup>19</sup> Walsham, *Church Papists*, pp. 78–81.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.
- <sup>21</sup> Palmes, *The life of Mrs. Dorothy Lawson*, p. 45, my italics.
- <sup>22</sup> Dorothy Lawson acquired the status of a living saint, whose presence reassured mothers in labour and was held by her neighbours as a token of protection. See Alexandra Walsham, 'Miracles and the Counter-Reformation Mission in England', *The Historical Journal*, 46.4 (2003), pp. 779–815, especially pp. 808–9.
- <sup>23</sup> Palmes, *The life of Mrs. Dorothy Lawson*, p. 26.
- <sup>24</sup> Letter dated September 1597, quoted in Questier, *Catholicism and Community*, p. 218.
- <sup>25</sup> Southern, *An Elizabethan Recusant House*, p. 39.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.
- <sup>27</sup> Anstruther, *Vaux*, p. 244.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 460.
- <sup>29</sup> State Papers Domestic, Charles I, vol. 294, item 74, July 1635, p. 303.
- <sup>30</sup> Letter to Sir John Cocke, dated 17 November 1625. J.C. Cox, *Three Centuries of Derbyshire Annals*, p. 286, as quoted in Anstruther, *Vaux*, p. 461.
- <sup>31</sup> Questier, *Catholicism and Community*, p. 209.
- <sup>32</sup> Southern, *An Elizabethan Recusant House*, p. 44.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- <sup>35</sup> Caraman, *John Gerard*, p. 197.
- <sup>36</sup> Henry Foley, *Records of the English Province* (London, 1877–83), pp. iv, 110.
- <sup>37</sup> For a revealing analysis of female pragmatic stylistic, see Alison Weber, *Teresa of Ávila and the Rhetoric of Femininity* (Princeton, 1990) and 'Little Women: Counter-Reformation Misogyny', in David Luebke (ed.) *The Counter-Reformation. The Essential Readings* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 143–62.
- <sup>38</sup> Report from Henry Garnet, Superior of the English Province, to Claudio Aquaviva, Superior General, Stonyhurst, *Anglia*, 1, p. 73, as translated in Anstruther, *Vaux*, pp. 186–91.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.
- <sup>40</sup> Jodi Bilinkoff, *Related Lives. Confessors and Their Female Penitents, 1450–1700* (Ithaca and New York, 2005), p. 6.
- <sup>41</sup> Frances Dolan, 'Reading, Work, and Catholic Women's Biographies', *English Literary Renaissance*, 3 (2003), pp. 328–57.
- <sup>42</sup> Garnet to Jesuit General Aquaviva, 1593, as translated in Anstruther, *Vaux*, p. 189.
- <sup>43</sup> Anstruther, I, p. 190.
- <sup>44</sup> Caraman, *Henry Garnet*, p. 423.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 368, H. G. to Anne Vaux before 5 March 1603. S.P.D. James I, Gunpowder Plot Book 2, no. 245.
- <sup>46</sup> Caraman, *John Gerard*, p. 148.
- <sup>47</sup> Garnet to Aquaviva, 11 March 1606, Archives of the Society of Jesus, Rome, *Anglia*, 2, p. 172, quoted in Caraman, *Henry Garnet*, p. 278.
- <sup>48</sup> Caraman, *Henry Garnet*, p. 281.
- <sup>49</sup> See McClain, *Lest We Be Damned*, p. 5.
- <sup>50</sup> Southern, *Vaux*, p. xiv.
- <sup>51</sup> Claire Cross, 'An Elizabethan Martyrologist and his Martyr: John Mush and Margaret Clitheroe', in Diana Wood (ed.), *Martyrs and Martyrologies, Studies in Church History 30* (Oxford, 1993).
- <sup>52</sup> Morris, 385. For similar comments, see pp. 382, 386 or 398 also.
- <sup>53</sup> Anne Dillon, *The Construction of Martyrdom in the English Catholic Community, 1535–1603* (Aldershot, 2002), especially pp. 289–92.
- <sup>54</sup> Southern, *Vaux*, pp. 41–2.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- <sup>56</sup> Dillon, *The Construction of Martyrdom*, p. 281.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>58</sup> Frances Dolan, 'Reading, Work and Catholic Women's Biographies', p. 356.
- <sup>59</sup> See Ellen Macek, "'Ghostly Fathers" and their "Virtuous Daughters": the Role of Spiritual Direction in the Lives of Three Early Modern Women', *The Catholic Historical Review*, 90.2 (2004), pp. 213–35 and Dillon, *The Construction of Martyrdom*.

<sup>60</sup> Seguin, 'Ambiguous liaisons' and Dolan, 'Reading, Work, and Catholic Women's Biographies'.

<sup>61</sup> Of the thirty people who were executed as harbourers and helpers of priests under the 1585 Act, only three were women: Margaret Clitherow (1586), Margaret Ward (1588) and Anne Line (1601). For an in-depth analysis of the gendering of Catholic martyrdom, see Susannah Brietz Monta, *Martyrdom and Literature in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2005).

<sup>62</sup> Bilinkoff, *Related Lives*, p. 104.

**« Qui est papiste n'est point anglais : identité et altérité dans les pamphlets anticatholiques de l'Angleterre moderne », in Martin Dumont (dir.), *Coexistences confessionnelles en Europe à l'époque moderne. Théories et pratiques, XVIe–XVIIe siècles*, Paris : Honoré Champion, 2015 (à paraître), pp. 134–52.**

### **Résumé :**

Depuis la Réforme d'Henri VIII (1529–1547) et son acte de suprématie, les loyaux sujets de la couronne doivent une allégeance absolue, politique et religieuse, à leur monarque. Or, tout au long de la période moderne, une minorité demeure pour qui ces changements sont le fruit d'une usurpation de pouvoir ; pour ces fidèles de la foi romaine, l'*Anglicana Ecclesia* est une aberration théologico-politique. L'existence cette communauté catholique au sein du royaume interroge les anglicans orthodoxes et devient l'un des lieux privilégiés d'un discours patriotique où le royaume définit ses valeurs par opposition à cet autre, que l'on utilise comme repoussoir. Certains choisissent de fustiger les erreurs théologiques des catholiques, que d'autres préfèrent mettre l'accent sur leur subversion des valeurs de la société-famille, tandis que d'autres encore les représentent comme des traîtres aux funestes desseins. Quelle que soit l'approche privilégiée, ces écrits contribuent tous à ostraciser, voire à diaboliser les catholiques qui représentent alors un anti-standard contre lequel se dessinent, en creux, les valeurs du royaume et son identité nationale naissante.

7 094 mots

mots-clés : Angleterre moderne ; Réforme ; anticatholicisme ; patriotisme ; identité nationale

### **Présentation du texte :**

Cet article a été produit à la suite de l'invitation de l'Institut de Recherche pour l'Étude des Religions, (Paris IV–Sorbonne) à la journée d'étude du 12 avril 2012, *Coexistences confessionnelles en Europe à l'époque moderne. Théories et pratiques, XVIe–XVIIe siècles*. J'avais travaillé sur un sujet connexe avec « La séduction au service de la perfidie » et « Mary Ward et sa Compagnie de Jésus au féminin », et je continuais à m'intéresser aux pamphlets et à la controverse anticatholique ; je proposais donc cet angle d'approche pour un public qui ne semble pas recevoir d'ordinaire beaucoup de contributions sur l'histoire religieuse de l'Angleterre. L'ouvrage collectif, chez Honoré Champion, connaît malheureusement de gros retards de production.



**QUI EST PAPISTE N'EST POINT ANGLAIS : IDENTITE ET ALTERITE  
DANS LES PAMPHLETS ANTICATHOLIQUES DE L'ANGLETERRE  
MODERNE.**

Laurence Sterritt

Après 10 ans de pouvoir, le Premier Ministre travailliste Tony Blair quittait son poste le 27 juin 2007. Quatre jours auparavant, il informait le pape Benoît XVI de son intention de se convertir au catholicisme. La foi de l'ancien Premier Ministre ne fut cependant officialisée qu'après son départ de Downing Street et rendue publique seulement six mois plus tard, en décembre 2007. L'anecdote de la conversion de Tony Blair suggère-t-elle que, dans la psyché collective de l'Angleterre du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, il demeure difficile de conjuguer catholicisme et anglicité ?

Avec la réforme d'Henri VIII (1509-1547), puis de façon plus pérenne durant l'âge d'or élisabéthain (1558-1603), l'Angleterre coupe tout lien avec la papauté, pour s'affirmer comme « empire » autonome, le monarque s'installant dans un césaro-papisme qui lui donne toute autorité sur son royaume mais aussi sur son Église<sup>1</sup>. La suprématie du monarque est affirmée légalement par l'Acte de Suprématie, appuyé par un serment d'allégeance que l'on exige des sujets de la couronne. L'Église *en* Angleterre — au sens d'Église catholique universelle sur le sol anglais — cède la place à une nouvelle Église *d'*Angleterre, indépendante et nationale. Placée sous l'égide du monarque, cette *Anglicana Ecclesia* n'est pareille à nulle autre, et si elle adopte un protestantisme modéré inspiré des mouvements continentaux, elle ne leur est en aucun cas inféodée. Sa doctrine se veut purifiée des erreurs

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<sup>1</sup>. En 1533, *The Act in Restraint of Appeals to Rome* déclarait déjà : « [C]e royaume d'Angleterre est un Empire [...] gouverné par un unique et suprême Chef et Roi », et reniait l'autorité du pape. L'année suivante, l'Acte de Suprématie officialisait la naissance de l'Église d'Angleterre, sous l'autorité suprême du roi, qui devenait ainsi chef de l'Église aussi bien que de l'État : « [L]e Roi, notre souverain seigneur, ses héritiers et successeurs, rois de ce royaume, seront pris, acceptés et réputés comme uniques chefs suprêmes sur Terre de l'Église d'Angleterre, appelée *Anglicana Ecclesia* [...]. » Traduction de l'anglais par nos soins.

du passé, recentrée autour des essentiels chrétiens, et repose sur les principaux piliers de la Réforme que sont la Bible, la foi, la grâce, et leur source unique, le Christ<sup>1</sup>. Mais elle demeure pourtant unique et spécifique à l'Angleterre. L'Acte d'Uniformité exige l'appartenance à la nouvelle Église d'Angleterre ; tout sujet anglais doit être anglican<sup>2</sup>. Il s'accompagne de l'orchestration d'une pratique religieuse qui doit être identique dans tout le royaume ; le livre des prières publiques – *The Book of Common Prayer* – veille à s'assurer que les paroissiens de chaque église sont exposés à la même doctrine et la même liturgie que leurs voisins. En 1563, les 39 Articles de Religion viennent exposer clairement les dogmes de l'Église établie, et les différencier de la tradition catholique romaine<sup>3</sup>.

Ainsi, les loyaux sujets de la couronne doivent une allégeance absolue, politique et religieuse, à leur monarque. Or, une minorité demeure pour qui ces changements sont le fruit d'une usurpation de pouvoir ; pour ces fidèles de la foi romaine, l'*Anglicana Ecclesia* est une aberration théologico-politique. La persistance de cette communauté catholique au sein du royaume interroge les anglicans orthodoxes et devient l'un des lieux privilégiés d'un discours patriotique où le royaume définit ses valeurs par opposition à cet Autre, ce papiste, que l'on utilise comme repoussoir. Dès la fin du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, les presses publient de nombreux pamphlets qui se proposent de démontrer la valeur de la pratique anglicane par contraste avec les erreurs, voire les impostures catholiques. Ainsi se crée une dichotomie très simple, qui fait des préceptes romains tout le contraire de ceux de l'anglicanisme. Au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, la controverse bat son plein et fait du catholicisme l'antithèse de la sainteté, du pape l'antéchrist lui-même, et de l'Église romaine la grande prostituée de

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<sup>1</sup>. Henri VIII ordonne la première publication officielle d'une Grande Bible en langue anglaise en 1539 et 1540. L'édition de 1611, connue sous le nom de King James Bible, deviendra l'édition de référence, toujours très utilisée aujourd'hui.

<sup>2</sup>. L'Acte d'Uniformité est d'abord formulé par le gouvernement d'Édouard VI (1547-53), fils et héritier d'Henri VIII, en 1549 et 1552. Il est réaffirmé par Élisabeth I en 1559 puis par Charles II (1660-85) en 1662 après la restauration de la monarchie.

<sup>3</sup>. Les 39 Articles, tout comme le livre des prières, sont toujours en vigueur de nos jours.

Babylone. Comme le montrent de récentes études historiques<sup>1</sup> et littéraires<sup>2</sup>, le message diffusé est clair : qui est papiste n'est point anglais.

Les polémistes illustrent cet axiome de diverses façons. Nous verrons ici que certains choisissent de fustiger les erreurs théologiques des catholiques, que d'autres préfèrent mettre l'accent sur leur subversion des valeurs de la société-famille anglaise, tandis que d'autres encore les représentent comme des ennemis de la couronne, des traîtres aux funestes desseins. Quelle que soit l'approche privilégiée, ces écrits contribuent tous à ostraciser, voire à diaboliser les catholiques, qui représentent un anti-standard contre lequel se dessinent, en creux, les valeurs du royaume et son identité nationale naissante.

**CRITIQUES DE LA FOI ROMAINE : IGNORANCE, IDOLATRIE ET IMPOSTURE**  
Nombre d'auteurs dénoncent dans le catholicisme une pratique rituelle axée sur le performatif, une religion matérialiste, qui oppose au *Sola Scriptura* protestant le poids de la tradition, les enseignements de l'Église, et la parole des prêtres. Ils affirment que si la Bible des catholiques demeure en Latin, c'est pour mieux maintenir le peuple

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<sup>1</sup>. Voir Peter Lake, « Anti-Popery : the Structure of a Prejudice », in Richard Cust et Ann Hughes (dir.), *Conflict in Early Stuart England*, Londres, Longman, 1989, p. 72-106 ; Peter Lake et Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat : Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England*, New Haven, Yale UP, 2002 et Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable Hatred : Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500-1700*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2006. Ces études tendent à démontrer que l'anticatholicisme de l'Angleterre moderne se manifeste surtout durant des périodes de crise où les valeurs de la nation protestante semblent en danger.

<sup>2</sup>. Voir Arthur Marotti, *Religious Ideology and Cultural Fantasy. Catholic and Anti-Catholic Discourses in Early Modern England*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 2005, p. 32-65 et Arthur Marotti (éd.), *Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism in Early Modern English Texts*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 1999 ; Claire Walker et David Lemmings (dir.), *Moral Panics, the Media and the Law in Early Modern England*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2009 ; Frances Dolan, *Whores of Babylon. Catholicism, Gender and Seventeenth Century Print culture*, Notre Dame, Ind., Cornell University Press, 1999 ; Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006 ; Raymond Tumbleson, *Catholicism in the English Protestant Imagination. Nationalism, Religion, and Literature, 1600-1745*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

dans l'ignorance de la vérité divine et permettre aux ecclésiastiques de la bafouer sans cesse.

Thomas Becon (1512-1567), dans *The Displaying of the Popish Masse*<sup>1</sup>, dénonce l'utilisation de la langue latine et s'applique à démontrer que la messe est une offense aux Saintes Écritures. Il s'insurge contre l'absurdité d'un discours dont le peuple ne comprend rien, et dont l'officiant lui-même – qu'il compare à un âne – n'a souvent qu'une compréhension parcellaire. La messe, selon lui, n'est pas seulement inutile : c'est un simulacre de sainteté exécrationnelle, « abominable », qui dupe ceux qu'il décrit comme « des âmes simples, grégaires et imbéciles »<sup>2</sup>. Pour Becon, les catholiques sont la proie des clercs qui les manipulent et les privent de toute chance de salut en les tenant dans l'ignorance. Dans son ouvrage, il dévoile un par un les manquements des prêtres à la volonté divine révélée dans les Évangiles : ils ne prêchent pas, ils servent l'Eucharistie sur un autel, et non sur une table en commémoration de la cène, et ils requièrent la genuflexion, alors que le Christ prit son dernier repas assis à sa table, et non à genoux. Contre la volonté du Christ, ils s'approprient la communion des deux espèces, mais la refusent au peuple<sup>3</sup>. Dans son analyse de la liturgie romaine, Becon dénonce les « abominables singeries de la Messe papiste », qu'il décrit comme un « monstre de mensonges »<sup>4</sup>. Pour lui, la nature idolâtre de la messe trouve sa plus claire expression dans la doctrine de la transsubstantiation, qui veut que l'on vénère une rondelle de pain et quelques gouttes de vin comme s'il s'agissait bien là de Dieu. Et l'auteur de s'exclamer : « O abomination ! O blasphème intolérable ! », « O insupportable idolâtrie »<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>. Thomas Becon, *The Displaying of the Popish Masse wherein thou shalt see, what a Wicked Idoll the Masse is, and what Great Difference there is between the Lords Supper and the Popes Masse : Againe, what Popes Brought in Every Part of the Masse, and Counted it Together in Such Monstrous Sort, as it is now Used in the Popes Kingdome*. Publié à Bâle en 1559, et distribué clandestinement sous le règne de la catholique Marie Tudor (1553-1558), ce pamphlet est l'objet de nouveaux tirages, cette fois officiels, à Londres en 1637.

<sup>2</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 47 et p. 53.

<sup>3</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>4</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 71 et p. 109.

<sup>5</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 125 et p. 146.

Les uns après les autres, tous les gestes de la messe sont analysés et décriés, pour faire de l'Office catholique un modèle négatif où tout est faux, corrompu et sali, une image parfaitement inversée du service anglican qui, lui, respecte la volonté de Dieu. Au-delà de sa critique de la messe, Becon dénonce l'obscurantisme de l'ancienne religion<sup>1</sup>. Les prières pour les âmes des défunts et l'existence du purgatoire sont critiquées comme de pures inventions, des offenses aux Évangiles. Selon lui, le pape et ses évêques ont, depuis des siècles, détourné le peuple des Saintes Écritures pour mieux les enfermer dans des pratiques impies, mais souvent lucratives. Ainsi les catholiques subjugués — ces « vils esclaves de l'antéchrist »<sup>2</sup> — préfèrent-ils au pouvoir salvateur de la foi et de la grâce leurs « colifichets », chapelets, agneaux de Dieu, cierges, encens, reliques, pèlerinages et bonnes œuvres.

Nombreux sont les auteurs qui, à l'instar de Becon, s'attardent sur la superstition des catholiques qui substituent à la foi et la grâce seules (*sola fide et sola gratia*) le pouvoir surnaturel des œuvres<sup>3</sup>. Selon ces pamphlets, le plus grand crime de la pratique romaine est d'attribuer aux clercs des pouvoirs qui n'appartiennent qu'à Dieu. Certains prétendent révéler au grand jour cette imposture par le biais de l'étude de prétendues possessions démoniaques. C'est ce qu'entreprend l'auteur anonyme de *A Whip for the Devil*, qui note avec sarcasme la grande familiarité de la religion catholique avec le malin. Selon lui, il n'existe « aucune religion au monde que le Diable affectionne autant que celle des papistes »<sup>4</sup>. Et de se moquer des techniques pseudo-magiques censées permettre aux exorcistes de commander le diable et de libérer l'individu possédé. L'auteur raille les prêtres qui utilisent l'eau bénite, l'encens, les saintes reliques mais aussi des objets plus surprenants comme des clés ou des pierres miraculeuses pour expulser

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<sup>1</sup>. Il dénonce les « messes idolâtres » (p. 10) des catholiques et voit dans le pape l'incarnation de l'antéchrist (p. 12).

<sup>2</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>3</sup>. Voir par exemple Richard Sheldon, *A Survey of the Miracles of the Church of Rome, Proving them to be AntiChristian*, Londres, 1616.

<sup>4</sup>. Anon., *A Whip for the Devil, or, The Roman Conjuror Discovering the Intolerable Folly, Prophaneness and Superstition of the Papists in Endeavouring to Cast ... Bodies of Men and Women by Him Possessed*, Londres, 1683, p. 2.

le démon, que l'on charme même parfois par l'usage de la musique<sup>1</sup>. Il insiste sur l'absurdité de ces rituels où la théâtralité le dispute à l'imposture, pour conclure : « [C]omme on reconnaît le Diable à son pied fourchu, on reconnaît un vrai Papiste à son mélange de piété et de superstition »<sup>2</sup>.

Le sensationnalisme des exorcismes et des possessions capture l'imagination des pamphlétaires, qui font de ces études de cas l'occasion de ridiculiser les superstitions romaines, mais aussi de démontrer l'imposture pratiquée à grande échelle par toute une institution. Samuel Harsnett, dans *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1603), brosse un portrait dévastateur des missionnaires jésuites venus du continent pour raviver l'ancienne foi en Angleterre. Dans son ouvrage, les Jésuites utilisent un savant mélange de tradition païenne, de rituel, d'idolâtrie et de superstition pour parvenir à leurs fins — qui n'ont rien de spirituel. Il s'étend à loisir sur plusieurs cas d'exorcismes publics qui, selon lui, n'ont d'autre but que se séduire les plus vulnérables pour mieux les exploiter. Il écrit : « [Le catholicisme] est la seule religion à attraper les imbéciles, les enfants et les femmes, car il n'est rien d'autre qu'une afféterie, un spectacle de marionnettes »<sup>3</sup>.

Harsnett affirme la véracité de ses dires, qu'il dit tenir des confessions de fraudeurs repentis. Ces derniers affirment que les monstres publiques des possédés sont en fait que supercheries ; ce sont des scènes préétablies, qui suivent un script comme au théâtre. Anne Smith, l'un des témoins de l'enquête d'Harsnett, déclare que, chaque jour, « elle apprenait la réplique qui devait déclencher sa crise », et qu'elle ne faisait que jouer un rôle. Selon l'auteur, ces mises en scène visent à impressionner la foule, venue pour contempler le pouvoir de l'exorciste sur les démons. Ce stratagème confère aux clercs une renommée de faiseurs de miracles et génère un revenu considérable ; de tels exemples permettent donc au polémiste de révéler l'impiété de ses adversaires, impiété qui se mesure à l'aune de son contraire, la

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Harsnett, *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures to Withdraw the Hearts of her Maiesties Subjects from their Allegiance and from the Truth of Christian Religion Professed in England, under the Pretence of Casting out Devils*, Londres, 1603, p. 191 et p. 20.

piété anglicane<sup>1</sup>.

La controverse tend donc à montrer que le catholicisme n'est que superstition et imposture, dupant les faibles au lieu de les secourir. C'est l'inverse même de la vraie foi, une anti-religion où tout n'est qu'erreur ou, pire, tromperie :

[les prêtres], délivrant la doctrine des démons pour l'amour du mensonge, utilisent la poudre-aux-yeux de leurs prétendus miracles pour persuader les crédules de se donner en esclavage à la Bête et de recevoir sa marque ; ce faisant, ils révèlent n'avoir d'autre dessin que la subversion des fondamentaux de la vraie religion, pure et sans tache, par des doctrines maudites, des maximes pernicieuses et des principes destructeurs, qui sont diamétralement opposés à toute Chrétienté sincère<sup>2</sup>.

Dans les libelles anglais, l'Église anglicane, qui sort grandie et anoblie de cette comparaison avec une religion dépeinte sous les traits les plus sombres. Le catholicisme devient synonyme de « contraire », c'est l'Autre contre lequel la pratique anglicane se définit. Or, cette notion d'altérité ne s'arrête pas aux considérations théologiques. Dans l'imaginaire collectif, l'appartenance à la confession romaine est associée également au chaos et au renversement des valeurs sociales qui unissent la famille-nation. Selon les polémistes, le catholique – même quand il s'agit d'un voisin, d'un ami, d'un parent proche – n'est pas un frère ; c'est un imposteur, un ennemi caché<sup>3</sup>.

#### CATHOLICISME ET MENACE SOCIALE : L'ENNEMI DOMESTIQUE

Au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, un discours xénophobe associe le catholicisme à

<sup>1</sup>. Voir Jane Shaw, *Miracles in Elighenment England*, Bury St Edmunds, Yale University Press, 2006, particulièrement le chapitre 2, « Protestantism and Miracles », p. 21-50.

<sup>2</sup>. Anti-Papist, *A Fair Warning to take heed of Popery, or a Short and True History of the Jesuits Fiery Practices and Powder-Plots, to destroy KINGS, ruin Kingdoms and lay Cities Waste*, Londres, 1679, p. 30.

<sup>3</sup>. Si cette représentation du catholique fleurit dans les pamphlets, elle est loin de toujours correspondre à l'expérience vécue par les sujets de la couronne qui, lors de leurs occupations quotidiennes, sont amenés à côtoyer, et à travailler avec des catholiques. Sur les limites de cette intolérance inter-confessionnelle, voir Anthony Milton « A Qualified Intolerance : The Limits and Ambiguities of Early Stuart Anti-Catholicism », in Arthur Marotti (dir.), *Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism*, p. 85-115.

l'étranger, et particulièrement à l'Espagnol, grand ennemi de la toute jeune Angleterre anglicane sur la scène internationale. Cet antagonisme prend toute sa dimension durant le règne de Marie Tudor (1553-58) qui, héritant de la nouvelle *Anglicana Ecclesia* instaurée par son frère Édouard VI (1547-53), abroge une à une toutes les lois sur l'indépendance, l'uniformité et le protestantisme pour restaurer un culte catholique romain sous l'autorité du Pape. Son union avec Philippe II, roi d'Espagne, confirme sa détermination à mettre l'Angleterre au service des pouvoirs catholiques. En outre, Marie commet des erreurs stratégiques majeures, comme son choix de partager avec Philippe la couronne d'Angleterre, et d'impliquer les troupes anglaises dans la guerre qui oppose l'Espagne à la France. La perte de Calais, dernière enclave anglaise en France, et les pertes humaines et financières qu'elle engendre, endommagent gravement la popularité déjà faible de la reine. Sa politique d'exécution de ses sujets protestants qui refusent d'abjurer envenime encore la situation. Il semble alors facile aux polémistes d'établir une équation entre catholicisme et tyrannie, et les représentants de la foi catholique sont perçus comme autant d'ennemis à la solde de Rome et de l'Espagne. À cette époque se multiplient de virulentes attaques contre la reine, que l'on accuse de trahir sa patrie et de la sacrifier sur l'autel du Pape ; imprimés sur le continent par des protestants exilés, ces libelles vilipendent cette « traîtresse affichée » qui « sous un nom anglais porte un cœur espagnol »<sup>1</sup>. Plus tard, sous Elizabeth I, la diatribe anti-espagnole est ravivée par le conflit armé qui oppose les deux pays, et l'année de la défaite de l'Armada au large des côtes anglaises (1588) marque un point culminant dans les publications qui associent l'anti-catholicisme à une xénophobie des plus féroces. Cependant, au dix-septième siècle, le ton de la controverse change ; la relative paix avec l'Espagne fait que la représentation du catholique « hispanisé » perd de son impact sur les foules<sup>2</sup>. Les auteurs délaissent donc peu à peu le discours stigmatisant le catholique-étranger pour

<sup>1</sup>. John Knox, *A Faithfull Admonition made by John Knox unto the Professours of God's Truth in England ... Emden, 1554*, p. 54 et 56.

<sup>2</sup>. Cette tendance sera à nuancer durant la crise de 1620-24, liée aux négociations du roi Jacques I (1603-25) avec l'Espagne ; l'alliance diplomatique qu'il espérait obtenir par le biais d'un mariage entre son fils et héritier Charles et Maria Anne, Infante d'Espagne, s'avérera de plus impopulaires.



mettre au contraire l'accent sur l'ubiquité des papistes de nationalité anglaise. La peur collective de ce frère-ennemi est renforcée par les modes d'existence des catholiques anglais. En effet, si certains – appelés « récusants » – déclarent leur foi publiquement en refusant d'assister au service anglican, ou en se soustrayant au serment d'allégeance, d'autres sont plus conciliants avec les exigences de la couronne. Ces schismatiques – que l'on nomme « Church Papists » – font acte de présence à l'Office anglican et prêtent serment d'allégeance afin d'échapper aux lois pénales qui les réduiraient à la pauvreté avant de les envoyer en prison<sup>1</sup>. Par leur apparente conformité, les « Church Papists » sont plus difficiles à détecter que leurs coreligionnaires « récusants », et ils sont donc perçus comme plus dangereux, car plus pernicious.

En outre, pour échapper aux sanctions qui se multiplient depuis les années 1580<sup>2</sup>, la pratique du catholicisme est devenue clandestine. Organisées autour de la sphère domestique, des communautés et des réseaux se développent. Les familles qui en ont les moyens offrent l'asile aux missionnaires – en majorité des Jésuites – qui, formés sur le Continent, reviennent en force sur le sol anglais depuis les années 1580<sup>3</sup>. L'ingéniosité des architectes permet souvent d'aménager dans les demeures les plus spacieuses des chapelles dissimulées, indétectables de l'extérieur, ainsi que des cachettes pour protéger les prêtres des raids du gouvernement<sup>4</sup>. C'est souvent toute la famille, au

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<sup>1</sup>. Alexandra Walsham, *Church Papists. Catholicism, Conformity and Confessional Polemic in Early Modern England*, Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer, 1993, p. 78–81.

<sup>2</sup>. 1581 (23: Elis. I, c.1), Acte pour Retenir les Sujets de Sa Majesté la Reine dans leur due Obéissance ; et 1585 (27: Elis. I, c.2), Acte contre les Jésuites, les Séminaristes et autres Personnes se soustrayant à l'Obéissance. 1592 (35 Eliz. I, c. 2) Acte sur les Récusants Papistes, renouvelé et renforcé en 1605 (3 Jac.1, c. 4).

<sup>3</sup>. Voir Godfrey Anstruther, *The Seminary Priests. A Dictionary of the Secular Clergy in England and Wales, 1558-1850*, Ware, St Edmund's College, 1975 ; Hugh Aveling, *The Handle and the Axe. The Catholic Recusants in England from Reformation to Emancipation*, Londres, Blond and Briggs, 1976 et John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850*, Londres, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1976.

<sup>4</sup>. Voir Frances Dolan, « Gender and the "Lost" Spaces of Catholicism », *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 32-4 (2002), p. 641-665, et Julian Yates, « Parasitic Geographies : Manifesting Catholic Identity in Early Modern England », in Arthur

sens large, y compris les domestiques, qui pratique ensemble, et il n'est pas rare que les coreligionnaires de tout le voisinage soient conviés aux messes secrètes de la maison.

Tandis que la communauté catholique s'organise ainsi à l'abri des regards<sup>1</sup>, la polémique reflète l'inquiétude que ce fonctionnement suscite dans l'imaginaire protestant<sup>2</sup>. De nombreux auteurs délaissent les questions théologiques pour aborder des sujets d'ordre plus sociologique et alerter l'opinion sur les dangers que court la société anglaise si elle continue à abriter en son sein de tels sujets. C'est ce qu'exprime Richard Bernard quand il écrit :

La ferme intention de continuer dans son catholicisme tout en se pliant au serment d'allégeance et en satisfaisant, par des gestes publics, les contraintes imposées par l'État, est bien plus pernicieuse envers l'État qu'une récusance franche et affichée<sup>3</sup>.

En réponse à ces préoccupations, le Parlement de 1614 considère une motion qui forcerait tous les catholiques à porter une coiffe et des chausses de couleur jaune afin de permettre aux sujets de la couronne d'identifier les traîtres potentiels parmi eux<sup>4</sup>.

Dans *A Toile for Two-Legged Foxes*, la métaphore du renard permet à John Baxter de faire des catholiques des prédateurs aussi impitoyables que sournois. Il remarque : « La seconde propriété du Renard est la ruse [...] Il est presque aussi difficile de révéler toutes ses tromperies que de sonder les profondeurs de Satan [...] car le Renard est très subtil »<sup>5</sup>. Baxter décrit un mode de vie caché, secret : « Les Renards à deux pattes n'osent pas vivre au grand jour, mais cherchent des terriers camouflés et errent par les chemins de traverse [...] »<sup>6</sup>. La

Marotti (dir.), *Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism*, p. 63-84.

<sup>1</sup>. Ronald Corthell, Frances Dolan, Christopher Highely et Arthur Marotti (dir.), *Catholic Culture in Early Modern England*, Notre Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.

<sup>2</sup>. Anthony Milton, « A Qualified Intolerance. The Limits and Ambiguities of Early Stuart Anti-Catholicism », in Arthur Marotti (dir.), *Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism*, p. 63-84.

<sup>3</sup>. Anthony Milton, « A Qualified Intolerance », p. 106.

<sup>4</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>5</sup>. John Baxter, *A Toile for Two-Legged Foxes*, p. 35. « The second propertie of the Foxe is wilinesse... To find out all his deceipts is almost as difficult as to sound Sathans depths... for the Foxe is full of subtletie ».

<sup>6</sup>. John Baxter, *A Toile for Two-Legged Foxes*, p. 12, 36.

nature furtive du papiste en fait ce qu'il appelle un « ennemi domestique »<sup>1</sup>. Le polémiste rêve alors « de placer une fenêtre sur sa poitrine, à travers laquelle nous pourrions voir si sa langue et son cœur s'accordent [...] Je suis convaincu que l'on détecterait alors bien des cœurs hypocrites dissimulés »<sup>2</sup>. Baxter s'érige en porte-parole d'une obsession nationale qui craint les « intentions secrètes » des catholiques, et souhaite exposer au grand jour leurs convictions et leurs croyances les plus privées. Selon lui, un papiste n'est jamais digne de confiance, puisque sa foi s'accompagne toujours de dissimulation. Et Thomas Bell de renchérir : « [S]i vous leur demandez ce qu'est un Jésuite, leur réponse est : tout le monde ; ce qui suggère que ce sont là des créatures qui changent de couleur comme des caméléons, selon leurs besoins »<sup>3</sup>.

La controverse fait écho à un climat de suspicion et de peur, s'en empare, et l'attise : les catholiques sont partout, et leur perfidie leur permet d'infiltrer jusqu'aux lieux les plus privés pour en saboter l'harmonie<sup>4</sup>. Le danger semble d'autant plus grand qu'il vient ici de l'intérieur, et non plus des étrangers comme les Espagnols. L'Autre catholique est tel une araignée ou un serpent que la nation découvre en son sein et dont elle redoute la morsure vénéneuse. Afin de démontrer ce point, les polémistes se penchent sur l'exemple des missionnaires qui détruisent l'équilibre des familles qui les accueillent, sans égard pour leur générosité et leur protection.

Ces publications accusent les missionnaires, et les Jésuites en particulier, de pervertir jusqu'aux valeurs essentielles de la famille anglaise en encourageant la désobéissance des femmes envers l'autorité du *paterfamilias*. En 1593, le supérieur des Jésuites anglais, Henry Garnet, donnait ses instructions aux épouses investies dans la mission en ces termes : « Vos maris n'ont aucune autorité sur votre âme, et leur pouvoir sur votre corps est limité : mais votre divin époux peut vous condamner corps et âme aux tourments éternels, ou vous récompenser d'un bonheur perpétuel »<sup>5</sup>. Ces injonctions sont connues

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12, 169.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Bell, *The Anatomie of Popish Tyrannie*, Londres, 1603, p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> Julian Yates, « Parasitic Geographies », p. 85-115.

<sup>5</sup> Henry Garnet, *A Treatise of Christian Renunciation*, p. 145, in D. M. Rogers (dir.), *English Recusant Literature, 1558-1640*, Menston, Scolar Press, 1970,

des polémistes, qui s'en saisissent pour représenter les relations entre les missionnaires et leurs hôtes comme autant d'occasions d'adultère. William Fennor, dans une anecdote scandaleuse, évoque par exemple le dépit d'un futur époux quand sa promise avoue porter l'enfant d'un Jésuite : « son ventre [était] plein de jeune os, dont [elle] confessa plus tard qu'ils étaient l'œuvre des Jésuites »<sup>1</sup>. Les allusions scabreuses aux relations qu'entretiennent les missionnaires avec les épouses de leurs hôtes sont légion, à tel point que les traditionnelles accusations de sodomie — chères aux réformés dans leurs invectives contre les moines — laissent à cette époque la place à des accusations d'adultère<sup>2</sup>. Les historiens parlent même d'une rhétorique du « cocufiage spirituel »<sup>3</sup>. La représentation des relations spirituelles en relations charnelles fournit aux polémistes une arme redoutable, à double tranchant, car si elle souligne la perversité sexuelle des missionnaires (les privant ainsi de toute aura de sainteté), elle met aussi en exergue leur pouvoir subversif, destructeur des liens les plus sacrés.

Thomas Morton, par exemple, s'insurge contre cette violence faite à l'ordre naturel de la famille. Il écrit : « Peut-on appeler cela religion ? [les catholiques] renient tous les liens naturels, ceux du mariage, ceux des parents naturels, ceux de la patrie naturelle ; ils mettent pour ainsi dire la Nature sens dessus-dessous et ôtent toute humanité aux hommes »<sup>4</sup>. Pour Morton, le catholicisme est facteur de désunion, il dissout les liens de loyauté et encourage les sujets à renverser toute autorité légitime, qu'il s'agisse de celle du *paterfamilias* ou, à l'échelle nationale, du monarque. Ainsi, la représentation du catholique comme ennemi des valeurs sociales qui unissent le royaume peut-elle être élargie, pour faire de « l'ennemi du foyer » l'ennemi du royaume, et de la couronne.

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<sup>1</sup>. William Fennor, *Pluto his Travails, or the Devils Pilgrimage to the Colledge of Iesuits*, Londres, 1612, p. 17-18.

<sup>2</sup>. Frances Dolan, *Whores of Babylon*, p. 89-93.

<sup>3</sup>. Colleen Seguin, « "Ambiguous Liaisons" : Catholic Women's Relationships with their Confessors in Early Modern England », *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 95 (2004), p. 156-85, citation p. 161.

<sup>4</sup>. Thomas Morton, *An Exact Account of Romish Doctrine in the Case of Conspiracies and Rebellion*, Londres, 1679, p. 3-4.

**SUJETS DU PAPE ET SUJETS DU ROI : LE PROBLEME DE L'ALLEGANCE  
POLITIQUE**

Les publications de John Baxter abondent dans ce sens ; il avertit ses compatriotes du danger papiste avec la métaphore suivante : « Le lierre rampe sur le sol, puis encercle d'abord la partie basse du chêne, et petit à petit gagne du terrain, pour ensuite étouffer jusqu'à sa plus haute branche, percer son écorce, sucer sa sève, et enfin causer la mort du tronc tout entier »<sup>1</sup>. L'image est explicite : selon Baxter, les activités des missionnaires visent tout d'abord les éléments les plus bas, les plus vulnérables de la société, le peuple, les femmes, pour atteindre ensuite des sujets socialement plus élevés et enfin causer la perte de la nation entière. Les missionnaires, qui opèrent à l'interface du privé et du public, fragilisent l'équilibre de la famille et mettent en danger l'État, dont elle est le microcosme.

Aux XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles, les polémistes voient dans le catholicisme un synonyme de trahison politique. À une époque où l'Angleterre est en position de faiblesse face aux grandes puissances catholiques du continent<sup>2</sup>, la propagande nationale met en exergue le courage d'un royaume ayant osé défier l'oppression papale pour retrouver sa liberté. C'est ce que l'on voit par exemple avec deux images très connues, l'une représentant Henri VIII terrassant le pape<sup>3</sup>, l'autre reprenant ce thème avec son fils Édouard VI<sup>4</sup>. Tous deux trônent en majesté, foulant de leurs pieds royaux la figure d'un Pape déchu, dépouillé de sa mitre et de ses attributs pontificaux. Ces représentations tentent de légitimer la suprématie royale tout en louant le courage du monarque, montré ici tel un sauveur, à l'image de la figure biblique du réformateur éclairé, qui affranchit son peuple de l'esclavage. C'est ce qu'exprime également le frontispice de la grande Bible de 1539-1540, où le roi Henri trône en majesté au centre de la page, et tend à ses évêques et à tout son peuple la première Bible officielle en langue

<sup>1</sup>. John Baxter, *A Toile for Two-Legged Foxes*, p. 37-38.

<sup>2</sup>. Le schisme opéré par Henri VIII en 1534 et réaffirmé plus tard par son héritière Élisabeth I en 1559, a fragilisé le royaume sur la scène internationale.

<sup>3</sup>. Voir illustration 1, tirée du livre de John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments of these Latter and Perillous Days, Touching Matters of the Church*, Londres, 1653.

<sup>4</sup>. Voir illustration 2, *Edward VI and the Pope : An Allegory of the Reformation*, c. 1547-70, National Portrait Gallery, Londres.

anglaise. Il fait ici figure de libérateur, tirant son royaume de l'ignorance et de l'asservissement en lui révélant la Parole de Dieu (« *Verbum Dei* ») ; la gravure met en scène un peuple en liesse, dont la gratitude s'exprime par ses cris de « Vive le roi » (« *Vivat Rex* »)<sup>1</sup>.

La traduction de la Bible est un facteur primordial de la construction d'un sentiment d'appartenance à une même entité, une nation-famille Anglaise, qui se distingue du reste de l'Europe. Dans l'Angleterre réformée, le pouvoir de Rome apparaît comme usurpé ; son autorité, dans le sens de pouvoir légitime, est mise en doute. Les modèles des rois de l'Ancien Testament sont utilisés pour soutenir l'établissement de la suprématie royale dès le début des années 1530. Dans *Collectanea satis copiosa*, somme de précédents et de textes produits par le conseil érudit du roi (Édouard Lee, Édouard Foxe, Thomas Cranmer et Nicolas de Burgo) à l'appui de la campagne contre l'autorité papale et cléricale, les exemples de David, Josias, Hézékiah ou Jehoshaphat servent à prouver l'autorité légitime du roi chrétien sur ses prêtres. Ces rois sont réputés pour leur zèle envers les commandements de Dieu, qu'ils veulent instaurer sur terre en détruisant abus et idolâtrie installés par la tradition ; ils sont aussi de grands réformateurs dans le domaine laïque (notamment pour la justice), investis d'une mission de purification de leur pays. Des ouvrages imprimés, tel *The True Difference Between Ecclesiastical and Royal Power*<sup>2</sup> ouvrent les conclusions de *Collectanea* au public. On y définit le pouvoir royal en termes bibliques afin de prouver la légitimité d'un roi sur ses prêtres, qui sont aussi ses sujets.

Une telle propagande veille à développer en Angleterre un sentiment national, où les sujets appartiennent à une famille dont le *paterfamilias* est le monarque, qui dirige l'État et l'Église. Ce césaropapisme, nous l'avons vu, est entériné par les Actes de Suprématie proclamés par les souverains successifs, auxquels le Parlement élisabéthain ajoute en 1563 un serment d'allégeance qui exige de tous les officiers de la couronne fidélité et obéissance. Dès lors se pose le problème de la double allégeance des sujets catholiques qui demeurent

<sup>1</sup>. Voir illustration 3, tirée de la Grande Bible de 1540.

<sup>2</sup>. Initialement publié en Latin, *De vera differentia regiae potestatis et ecclesiasticae, et quae sit ipsa veritas ac virtus utriusque*, Londres, 1534, l'ouvrage est traduit en anglais par Henry, Lord Stafford la même année.

fidèles au pape. Or, en 1570, Pie V publie sa Bulle *Regnans in Excelsis*, encourageant les catholiques d'Angleterre à ne pas reconnaître l'autorité d'Élisabeth, qu'il dit « prétendument reine d'Angleterre et servante du crime ». La fulmination de cette Bulle met les sujets catholiques dans une position fort inconfortable, et contribuera largement à la représentation du « papiste » comme traître en puissance. Le catholicisme, au-delà d'une question de foi, appartient donc aussi à la sphère du politique.

En outre, les événements se prêtent parfois à la représentation du catholique en traître : la vie d'Élisabeth I est menacée par de nombreuses conspirations<sup>1</sup> ; Jacques I (1603-25) est victime du Complot des Poudres, le 5 novembre 1605 ; Charles II (1660-85) lui-même, pourtant connu pour sa sympathie à l'égard des papistes, est au centre des rumeurs d'assassinats lancées par Titus Oates en 1678. Les polémistes se saisissent de ces crises pour alimenter un discours où catholicisme rime avec trahison. Les exemples seraient trop nombreux et nous nous contenterons ici d'un regard sur deux publications issues du complot des poudres.

Le 5 novembre 1605, le roi Jacques I<sup>er</sup>, la reine Anne, et Henri leur fils aîné et héritier sont présents pour présider à la grande ouverture du Parlement, qui réunit la chambre des Communes et, à la Chambre des Lords, les plus éminents nobles et clercs du royaume. C'est ce jour là que Guy Fawkes est capturé tandis qu'il s'apprête à faire parler la poudre. La conspiration, menée par un petit groupe de catholiques, est démasquée<sup>2</sup>. Tandis que les chaires résonnent des sermons rendant grâce à la providence divine qui a permis au Parlement d'échapper au désastre, la polémique anti-catholique s'enflamme.

Publié quelques mois plus tard, *The Divell of the Vault* brosse le portrait terrifiant d'un catholicisme dont la trahison s'apparente à celle de Satan. L'auteur dénonce des catholiques

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<sup>1</sup>. Entre 1569 et 1586, le règne d'Élisabeth I est menacée par une succession de complots visant à la remplacer par sa cousine, la catholique Marie Stuart, reine d'Écosse en exil en Angleterre.

<sup>2</sup>. Les comploteurs principaux sont, par ordre alphabétique, Thomas Bate, Robert Catesby, Everard Digby, le mercenaire Guy Fawkes, John Grant, Robert Keyes, Thomas Percy, Ambrose Rookwood, Francis Tresham, Thomas Wintour, son frère Robert Wintour, Christopher Wright, et son frère John Wright.

Dont la stricte religion fondée sur le mensonge / s'érige sur la défiance et la rébellion ; [...] / Dont la foi n'est que faction, bien que jusqu'ici voilée / de prétendue pure sainteté. / L'ambition bouillant dans leur sein, / telle la crue furieuse du Nil, / les pousse à ériger leur maudite Église / sur le sang du peuple et du Prince<sup>1</sup>.

Il s'abandonne alors à une description très visuelle, voire sensationnaliste, de l'atroce cruauté des catholiques assoiffés de sang ; se projetant dans l'imaginaire, il construit un scénario d'horreur pour décrire les conséquences du complot :

Quelle lugubre terreur c'eût été / Pour tous les survivants, les yeux pleins de larmes / de voir des cadavres démembrés / dispersés et jonchés sur le sol. / De voir de si nobles et Royales formes / dissipées dans les airs par le souffle de l'explosion. / Ici, des bras, et là des jambes, tout démembrés / gisent partout, mutilés<sup>2</sup>.

La suite de cette description particulièrement sanglante passe en revue la mère éplorée baignant de ses larmes le corps de son nourrisson réduit en lambeaux et les blessés, amputés, qui errent en état de choc dans les rues dévastées. L'aspect purement spéculatif d'une description fictive, qui se fait au conditionnel, n'ôte rien au message du libelle, qui fait ainsi des papistes des traitres voués à l'annihilation de la Nation anglaise. Le complot de Guy Fawkes et de ses associés devient l'occasion d'une présentation terrifiante des catholiques, ces félons sortis tout droit des enfers pour faire couler le sang des innocents, « comme des démons issus des profondes ténèbres / d'un enfer de flammes et de souffre »<sup>3</sup>.

Cette rhétorique de l'horreur est reprise à l'envi par bien des polémistes, qui s'indignent de la cruauté et la barbarie des papistes, et prêtent volontiers aux anglicans le statut de martyrs. Et c'est aussi là que réside la valeur de la polémique anti-catholique. Si elle érige le papiste en incarnation du Mal, elle contribue également à représenter l'Angleterre comme une terre sainte, choisie de Dieu, et contre laquelle ragent les ennemis du Bien. De telles diatribes se prêtent

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<sup>1</sup>. John Heath, *The Divell of the Vault, or the Unmasking of Murther In a Briefe Declaration of the Cacolique-Complotted Treason Lately Discovered*, Londres, 1606, (B).

<sup>2</sup>. *Ibid.*, C3.

<sup>3</sup>. *Ibid.*, D.



parfaitement à un syllogisme d'une simplicité limpide : si le catholicisme est à ce point perverti, s'il est l'instrument du diable, alors le royaume d'Angleterre, qui a su s'en détacher et adopter des préceptes diamétralement opposés ne peut être que pur et agréable à Dieu. L'avilissement du catholique contribue à l'éloge implicite du sujet Anglican, par opposition. Le 5 novembre devient alors – et reste toujours aujourd'hui – la fête nationale, et chaque année, de nouvelles publications marquent l'anniversaire de cette délivrance providentielle.

En 1628, Francis Herring publie *The Quintessence of Cruelty*, où il reprend les procédés de l'auteur de *Divell of the Vault*, et imagine les mêmes scènes sanglantes<sup>1</sup>. Le sous-titre de l'ouvrage (*or, Master-Peice of Treachery, the Popish Pouders-plot, Invented by Hellish Malice, Prevented by Heavenly Mercy*) illustre bien la dichotomie qui se met en place avec d'une part les catholiques associés à « la malice infernale » et de l'autre les anglicans, sauvés par « la miséricorde divine ». En outre, les illustrations de ce pamphlet participent de la même rhétorique, puisque l'on y voit les machinations de Satan déjouées par la Providence divine. Guy Fawkes est d'abord représenté s'afférant à ses funestes dessins en présence de « son père », Satan lui-même<sup>2</sup>. Mais cette première illustration met déjà en scène l'intervention divine, représentée sous la forme d'un rayon de lumière venu des cieux pour révéler le stock de poudre à canon. Plus loin, une autre planche oppose un « Guy Fawkes Infernal, avec un cœur Démoniaque / s'appêtant à l'instant à jouer son rôle diabolique » aux officiers de la couronne venus le démasquer, guidés par « la direction divine »<sup>3</sup>. De tels ouvrages permettent donc de soutenir le discours officiel des réformateurs qui voient en l'Angleterre du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle une nouvelle Israël, une terre sainte choisie de Dieu, et jalouée des nations corrompues.

Dans un royaume où la forme prise par l'Église établie à la fois reflète et façonne la définition d'une identité nationale unique, les activités

<sup>1</sup>. Francis Herring est l'auteur de l'original en latin ; la traduction et expansion en anglais est l'œuvre de John Vicars, *The Quintessence of Cruelty or, Master-Peice of Treachery, the Popish Pouders-plot, Invented by Hellish Malice, Prevented by Heavenly Mercy*, Londres, 1641.

<sup>2</sup>. Voir illustration 4, John Heath, *The Divell of the Vault*, A1.

<sup>3</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 39, verso. Voir illustration 5.

clandestines des catholiques et de leurs alliés sont perçues comme autant de menaces au bien commun. Le pamphlétaire Thomas Bell met ses lecteurs en garde :

Notez bien, noble lecteur, que de dépendre des Jésuites, c'est dépendre du diable ; et par conséquent, que de suivre les Jésuites et leur tragiques dessins, traîtres et sanglants, n'est rien de moins que de renier Dieu ; c'est abandonner sa sainte crainte et sa vénération ; c'est trahir votre prince ; c'est être l'ennemi de votre pays natal<sup>1</sup>.

#### CONCLUSIONS

L'anti-catholicisme est donc un élément non négligeable de la propagande sur l'identité nationale ; il brosse le portrait de l'Autre, celui que l'Anglais n'est pas. Dans l'Angleterre des XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles, chaque crise politique s'accompagne d'un regain d'activité polémique, visant d'une part à ostraciser les catholiques et, d'autre part, à consolider la cohésion nationale contre cet ennemi commun. Ce mouvement s'amorce très clairement sous le règne d'Élisabeth I et, en 1588, les anglicans ont la preuve que « Dieu est anglais » quand l'Armada de Philippe II d'Espagne subit une défaite aussi cuisante qu'improbable, grâce à une terrible tempête que la propagande a tôt fait d'interpréter comme une intervention divine. Quand l'Angleterre est de nouveau sauvée de l'anéantissement en 1605, les polémistes font de l'événement le lieu d'une bataille où le bien triomphe du mal. L'identité du royaume se cristallise alors autour de son Église nationale, de ses valeurs et de sa monarchie, et fait du catholicisme un concept incompatible avec le bien commun et l'Anglicité : malgré toutes ses supercheries et ses complots, le catholicisme ne peut pas triompher d'un véritable sujet anglais. C'est ce que montre John Gee à travers les exemples de femmes comme Mary Boucher qui, malgré les faiblesses propres à son sexe, parvient finalement à briser l'envoûtement des Jésuites et à « ôter son pied du collet », comme l'indique le titre même de la publication, *The Foot out of the Snare*. Gee fait de son ouvrage patriotique un éloge du bon sens anglais qui triomphe du non-sens papiste : la moindre femme, si simple soit-elle, peut déjouer les pièges du catholicisme romain si elle veut bien

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<sup>1</sup>. Thomas Bell, *The Anatomie of Popish Tyrannie*, Londres, 1603, p. 8.

écouter son anglicité<sup>1</sup>.

En 1688, l'incompatibilité entre catholicisme et identité anglaise atteint de telles proportions que le roi Jacques II (1685-88), héritier légitime de la couronne, mais catholique, sera détrôné par son propre parlement lors de la Glorieuse Révolution de 1688. C'est Guillaume d'Orange, un étranger – mais fervent défenseur de la cause protestante – qui deviendra alors chef de l'État et de l'Église d'Angleterre.

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<sup>1</sup>. John Gee, *The Foot out of the Snare, with a Detection of Sundry Late Practices and Impostures of the Priests and Jesuits in England. Whereunto is added a Catalogue of Such Bookes as in this Authors Knowledge have been Vented within Two Yeeres Last Past in London, by the Priests and their Agents*, Londres, 1624, p. 29.

**VIVRE SA RELIGION : LES IDEAUX A L'EPREUVE DU REEL**

**Avec Gilles Teulié, « Introduction », in *War Sermons*, Cambridge Scholars Press : Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2009, pp. vii– xviii.**

**Résumé :**

L'étude des sermons de guerre s'avère révélatrice des changements d'attitude qui accompagnent les conflits armés, car ils permettent de mettre en dialogue les divers aspects d'un sujet où le religieux et le politique s'entremêlent si étroitement qu'il devient parfois difficile de les distinguer. En effet, si la décision exécutive d'entrer en guerre appartient à l'État, le discours politique qui l'accompagne repose fréquemment sur des bases spirituelles puisque un conflit sans justification morale, éthique ou religieuse ne peut qu'être perçu comme un acte d'agression et de violence gratuite. Le concept de « guerre juste » devient alors l'un des ressorts essentiels de la rhétorique martiale. À la croisée des consciences politiques et religieuses, les sermons de guerre sont une source précieuse d'information sur les sociétés en conflit. Qu'ils soient en faveur ou hostiles à la guerre, les prédicateurs participent à l'édification de l'opinion de leurs paroissiens. Ces sermons ont façonné les processus mentaux de peuples qui, au fil des âges, s'en remettaient à leurs pasteurs pour les guider spirituellement et leur fournir l'appui moral dont ils avaient besoin en temps de crise. Cet ouvrage collectif offre de nouvelles contributions au débat sur les fonctions de la guerre, ses représentations et sa rhétorique, et le rapport avec l'identité des peuples.

5 052 mots

mots-clés : guerre ; sermons ; guerre juste ; patriotisme ; pacifisme

**Présentation du texte :**

Cette introduction, rédigée en collaboration avec Gilles Teulié, met en regard les diverses facettes des sermons de guerre du monde anglophone du Moyen-Âge à nos jours. L'ouvrage collectif revisite la notion de patriotisme, d'engagement, et de justification du conflit à travers les époques. L'introduction en particulier tente d'éclairer le paradoxe au cœur de la notion même d'un soutien spirituel aux conflits armés : comment une religion chrétienne peut-elle justifier la guerre, voire dans certains cas la recommander ou la glorifier ? Ce travail émane d'un colloque co-organisé avec Gilles Teulié et tenu à Aix-en-Provence en 2005. Bien qu'un peu éloigné de mon champ précis de recherche, il m'a permis d'explorer des pistes qui se retrouvent dans mon travail habituel sur le catholicisme anglais de l'époque moderne ; il pose les mêmes questions quant au sentiment d'appartenance patriotique, à la loyauté, et à la justification morale et spirituelle d'actes de violence.

War Sermons

Edited by

Gilles Teulié and Laurence Lux-sterritt

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P U B L I S H I N G

War Sermons, Edited by Gilles Teulié and Laurence Lux-sterritt

This book first published 2009

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-0546-7, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-0546-9

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## INTRODUCTION

GILLES TEULIE & LAURENCE LUX-STERRITT

That war is more than justified, that it is of solemn obligation, when required by the direct command of God is unquestionable.<sup>1</sup>

Some twenty-seven centuries ago, the Chinese military theoretician Sun Zu warned rulers that lack of popular support in times of war might herald their untimely downfall. Throughout history, monarchs asserted the legitimacy of their rule of divine right in order to secure their people's allegiance and to avoid any dissension with regards to their martial command. A ruler's authority was not to be questioned by commoners, and neither were his decisions to wage war. In order to embark upon military campaigns with the full support of public opinion, leaders often stressed the collusion of the political and the religious spheres to justify involvement. They depicted their wars as holy and sacred; they were not merely pleasing to the gods, they were also the expression of their divine will, and their direct intervention would guarantee victory on the battlefield. As illustrated by Roman generals' performing of pre-battle religious ceremonies to secure the gods' good will and by the Aztecs' sacrifices of war prisoners as tokens of gratitude for the divinities' help, mankind has always resorted to some form of spirituality in times of conflict. According to Azar Gat, such ritual ties led to the cohesion of a group of individuals who therefore could use their solidarity to oppose others;<sup>2</sup> subsequently:

[i]n war, the gods, temples, and cults constituted at one and the same time an entity to which appeals for help could be made, a sacred part of the shared culture for the defence and glory of which people could be easily aroused, and, indeed, a semi-independent source of warfare for the satisfaction of the gods' own special requirements, such as a human sacrifice. This powerful projection of the community in the supernatural

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Thomas T. Stone, *Sermons on War*. Boston: Pierce and Williams, 1829, 8.

<sup>2</sup> Azar Gat, *War in Human Civilization*. Oxford: OUP, 2006, 55.

sphere thus constituted as potent an instrument of and motivation for war as did other—more ‘real’- tangible or symbolic factors.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, war came to be considered not only as spiritually acceptable, but also a means of personal improvement; combat could become a process of redemption for soldiers who, through the selfless and ultimate sacrifice of their lives, gained eternal life in the afterlife.

From the very beginnings of Christianity, the incompatibility of the act of killing with the message of love expressed in the Gospels was tackled by theologians willing to reconcile the masses with this apparent contradiction. The importance devoted by the primitive Church to non-violence was close to Christ’s message of love and peace. Origen (185-253), one of the Fathers of the Church, argued in his *Contra Celsum* that no reason could ever justify the drawing of one’s sword. Yet others like Athanasius of Alexandria (296-373) or Ambrose of Milan (338-397), on the contrary, believed that killing an enemy on the battlefield was permitted and paved the way for future efforts at legitimising war violence in certain circumstances. During the slow process of Christianisation which followed Constantine’s Edict of Milan (313), the defence of the empire against invaders quickly became a Christian duty; in the context of the Barbarian invasions facing Rome in the 5<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Augustine of Hippo was prompted to delineate the concept of “Just War”. In his *City of God*, he expressed the idea that peace was order and war was evil; however, he also admitted that in the context of the invasions, waging war was necessary to bring order back to God’s creation. Figures as diverse as Isidore of Seville (560-636), champion of the Hispanic resistance to barbarism, or the Benedictine monk Gratian (359-383), author of the *Decretum Gratiani* (1150), justified war as a means of retribution through which injustice may be avenged. During this period, little distinction was made between the notion of just war and that of holy war; indeed, although great efforts were made to promote the Crusades, the spiritual unease of warriors forced to slay fellow soldiers had to be taken into account. Likewise, the Crusades witnessed blurring of the boundaries between military and religious activities, as embodied by the various military orders which created the unique status of monk-soldiers such as the order of the Hospital of St John (the Hospitallers), the Teutonic Knights of the Hospital of St Mary of Jerusalem (the Teutonic Knights) or the famed order of the Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon (the Knights Templar) among others. At the heart of these Orders’ *raison d’être* was the dual characteristic conferred to their members: as monks,

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<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 433.

they would devote their lives to God while as soldiers they would safeguard pilgrims to Jerusalem. Their martial mission was therefore based on defensive wars, as underlined by the supporter of the order of the Temple, French Cistercian abbot Bernard de Clairvaux, who stated to Hugue de Payens, co-founder of the order in a famous letter (*Liber ad Milites Templi: De Laude Novae Militae*, 1135) that the Templars had a double protection: an armor of faith and another of steel.

It was in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, however, that the theory of just war (*jus ad bellum*, or the right to wage war) was finally developed in its fullest form by Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) in his *Summa Theologica* (1266-1273).<sup>4</sup> According to him, a defensive war was always "just" whereas an offensive one could be justified only under three conditions: first, it should be waged by the legitimate and highest authority in the land (by kings, emperors or popes) and not be a private war. Secondly, it should be waged upon legitimate grounds, as justified retribution against the offence given by the enemy, and only as a last resort after exhausting all other means of pacification and justice. Thirdly and finally, the intentions behind the offensive spur should never be moved by personal interest but rather by a true moral concern for the common good.

One of the corollaries of the Protestant Reformation was a sharp decline of the notion of just war, since Reformers advocated a return to the pacifism of the primitive Church; following a different reasoning, Machiavelli's *The Art of War* (1520) also rejected the just cause theory, this time on the grounds that states need not justify their wars, so long as they obeyed their own political rules on the subject. Yet echoes from the medieval past remained, especially in the Counter-Reformation Church; in an effort to counteract the spread of Protestantism, the Spanish founder Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) created his Society of Jesus. Jesuits, although members of the regular clergy, were invested with a mission in the secular world; theirs was a work of conversion and conquest which was detailed in explicitly martial vocabulary in Loyola's own *Formula Instituti*. The Jesuits were 'to serve as a soldier of God, beneath the banner of the cross'; known as the 'Soldiers of Christ', they were acknowledged to be the foot soldiers of the Pope and playing a crucial role in the efforts of the counter-reformation in Europe and the Americas.

The just war theory was once more the object of polemic in the century of Enlightenment, since the philosophical shift towards reason was opposed to a theological discourse based on faith. Later on, the ideas of

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<sup>4</sup> A subsequent concept will follow: the *Jus in Bello*, or what is permissible in times of war.

“just war” and of “crusade” were debated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and dissident voices (such as those of the Society of Friends, or Quakers) claimed that God could not support warmongers. Yet, in Britain, advocates of the imperial triptych of the three Cs (Civilization, Christianity, Commerce) supported the concept of the “muscular Christian” and the nation’s mood for war. Such a brand of Protestantism encouraged individuals to fight a good war against the various guises of evil, be they personal (the inner struggle) or social in nature. For many, the civilizing mission, underpinned by the Christian ethos to evangelise, justified and legitimised war.

In the twentieth century, the fast-changing nature of warfare could not but provoke new reflections: thus, the idealized vision of war which had flourished since the 19<sup>th</sup> century met with disillusion in the 1920s. National churches had supported their state in the sustained efforts of World War I, but as the full scale of the devastation became clearer, they often questioned whether such horrors could ever be truly warranted. In the aftermath of the first global modern conflict, the promotion of pacifism took hold of consciences and many Christians were preaching peace in the 1930s, while totalitarian countries were establishing their power. Yet some clerics such as Kenneth Oliver, considered war as a lesser evil than Nazism: “I decided I could not stand aside and that if my services were required as a chaplain, I must go. War was evil, but submitting to a tyranny that threatened to enslave the whole of Europe was a far worse evil”.<sup>5</sup>

In the context of total conflicts such as the Second World War, the notion of just war became more obsolete and was replaced by that of ideological wars in which two ideologically-defined blocks faced each other. The nuclear bombs launched on Hiroshima and Nagasaki triggered new reflection on the changing face of war, as Michael Walzer noted: “A new kind of war was born at Hiroshima and what we were given was a first glimpse at its deadliness”.<sup>6</sup> With the atomic bomb, traditional warfare appeared outdated and armed conflicts bore the certainty of destruction on an unprecedented scale; thus, as nations became gradually aware of the deadly potential of the nuclear threat, they endeavoured to avoid military engagements whenever possible. The greater nations changed tactics for domination and, without jeopardising the defence of their own territory, began supporting relatively small-scale conflicts, often based on guerrilla warfare, in strategically important locations. In parallel, new types of war emerged, such as decolonisation wars, psychological wars, cold wars, or

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<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Oliver, *Chaplain at War*. Chichester: Angel Press, 1986, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars A Moral Argument with historical Illustrations*. New York: Basic Books, 269.

wars against “terror”. Interestingly enough, with the advent of global war against terrorism, the notion of a just war became actual once more: since the Gulf War of 1990 was both by claimed by the United Nations and accepted by Pope John Paul II as justified. Since then, some Western countries have defined other recent conflicts as “just”; the war in Iraq, for which the American President George W. Bush openly resorted to “crusade” rhetoric, testified that the spirit of the holy war had returned.

This collection of essays ponders upon the intricate relations between the military and the spiritual from the Middle Ages to the present day. In order to analyse human attitudes towards conflicts, it is necessary to dwell upon the nebulous area where the religious and political spheres interweave so tightly that they become virtually impossible to distinguish. Indeed, despite remaining the responsibility of the state, the political decision to go to war depends heavily on some spiritual underpinning since, without a moral, ethical, or religious justification, it stands for gratuitous violence and is often equated with aggression. In the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the opinions of Church and State leaders have differed greatly on the necessity to wage war. Keith Robbins reminds us that: “[...], in relation to specific conflicts over the last quarter of a century, church leaderships have expressed scepticism if not outright hostility to British military activity overseas”.<sup>7</sup>

Situated as they are at the intersection of religious and political awareness, war sermons are an invaluable source of information regarding societies in times of conflict. Indeed, whether favourable or hostile to the waging of war, preachers participated in the edification of their parishioners’ opinion. The writing, delivering or reading of sermons shaped the mental process of peoples who sought their ministers’ moral and spiritual guidance in times of crisis.<sup>8</sup> According to French theologian Laurent Gambarotto, writing about French Reformed Church pastors during the First World War, preachers were impregnated with a culture of war.<sup>9</sup> Through their sermons, preachers sometimes opposed their congregations’ positive viewing of war; Rev. F.W. Aveling and Rev. G.

<sup>7</sup> Keith Robbins, “Onward Christian Soldiers? British Churches and War in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century” in Gilles Teulié (ed.), *Religious Writings and War*, Montpellier, Les Carnets du Cerpac no 3, Montpellier UP, 177-197, (196, 197), 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Christiane D’Haussy (ed.), *English Sermons, Mirrors of Society*. Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1995, 23

<sup>9</sup> Laurent Gambarotto, *Foi et Patrie. La prédication du protestantisme français pendant la Première Guerre Mondiale*. Genève : Labor et Fides, 1996, 415.

Critchley, for instance, both opposed the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) and became the objects of intimidation and collusion; they both received threats of physical violence and endured the smashing of their houses' windows, until the latter was finally driven to resign.<sup>10</sup> Yet most preachers acted in accordance with the public mood, and through their assent, they helped legitimise popular opinion on specific wars.

This collection of essays inscribes itself within the renewed debate on the function of war, its representations and its rhetoric as generators of identity. Historians have already focused upon specific wars<sup>11</sup> or upon the sermons devoted to a particular religious group.<sup>12</sup> The purpose of our collection is somewhat different since it will trace, over the *longue durée*, the evolution of the rhetoric used from the pulpit to justify a divinely-ordained conflict or to condemn an unjust one. In the field of religious studies in the English-speaking world from the Middle Ages to the present day, an examination of the body of texts constituted by war sermons preached by Catholic or Anglican priests, Protestant pastors and ministers of other confessions, will throw considerable light on the evolution of ideologies. Sermons by their nature serve a multi-faceted function, they aim at the education, the edification and the exhortation of their congregations. As they commented upon events, homileticians and sermonists gave their audiences advice and moral guidelines; they combined the educational aspect of their sermons with exhortations which ranged from fund raising "to downright propaganda, when the influence of

<sup>10</sup> See Greg Cuthbertson, "Pricking the 'Nonconformist conscience': Religion against the South African War", in Donal Lowry (ed.), *The South African War Reappraised*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000, 169-185 (177).

<sup>11</sup> See Beverly Mayne Kienzle, *Cistercians, Heresy, and Crusade in Occitania 1145-1229: Preaching in the Lord's Vineyard*. Rochester NY: Boydell and Brewer, 2001; Christoph T. Maier, *Crusade, Propaganda and Ideology. Model Sermons for the Preaching of the Cross*. Cambridge: CUP, 2000; Charles Wilbanks, *The American Revolution and Righteous Community: Selected Sermons of Bishop Robert Smith*. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2007; William H. Duke, Jr., *For the Living in these Days. Responses to Terrorism. Sermons Preached by Virginia Baptist Ministers on the Sunday following the Septembre 11 Terrorist Attack*. Richmond VA: Centre for Baptist Heritage & Studies, University of Richmond, 2001; David B. Cheesbrough, *"God Ordained This War": War Sermons on the Sectional Crisis 1830-1865*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991; Unknown author, *Sermons on Slavery and the Civil War*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> See Marc Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching in Times of War, 1800-2001*. Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007.

the sermon is used as a weapon for political or social indoctrination".<sup>13</sup> This collection of essays will therefore attempt to decipher how ideologies were elaborated and implemented, through time, in order to exhort people to support wars. One of the essential keys to understanding the influence played by war sermons is the justification of war through Scripture, which cannot be dissociated from the notion of a just war and the way in which that theory evolved. Thus, peace sermons in times of war, as well as those using the metaphors of war and peace, are an integral part of this analysis since they are as revealing of religious positions about armed conflicts as sermons which supported war.

The following fourteen chapters are set in chronological order so as to show the evolution of war sermons through the ages. As the power of the Church increased in the Middle Ages, war in Europe became codified by Christian nations. The creation of the Truce of God set a standard for lords and knights and defined a religious framework for war. Clergymen came to play an essential role in war, as proved by the creation in mid-12<sup>th</sup> century of the "Bishop" as a chessman in the war game played by kings and aristocrats and the subsequent use of chess war terminology in 13<sup>th</sup> century sermons.<sup>14</sup> The military and the religious became so close that sometimes there was no difference as intertwined when, during the third crusade, the bishops of Lydda and Acre fought during the battle of Hattin (July 1187). Thus, the collection opens with the troubled times of the Crusades when, as Waltraud Verlaguet argues, sermons were an essential component of the emergence of a European ideal and shaped modern Western representations; at the core of the system which incited people to start their military pilgrimage to Jerusalem, preachers adjusted their rhetorical arguments in order to overcome the growing popular reticence which met the frequent calls for crusades. In chapter two, Catherine Hemet-Royer delves into the origin and evolution of medieval "propaganda": focusing upon Thomas Bradwardine's preaching of his *Sermo Epinicius* after the battle of Crécy, she demonstrates the importance of thanksgiving sermons as tools to uplift the deflated morale of the English troops. The writing of such war sermons was therefore, she argues, an essential part of a court preacher's activity; through such admonitions, clerics became an integral part of the war effort.

The Renaissance, and the Reformation in particular, heralded some important changes in sermon-writing and, in chapter three, Leticia Alvarez

<sup>13</sup> Christiane D'Haussy (ed.), *English Sermons, Mirrors of Society*. Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1995, 23

<sup>14</sup> See James Robinson, *The Lewis Chessmen*. London: British Museum Press, 2004, 23.



Recio highlights the emerging specificity of English Protestant sermons, in which homiletic literature became increasingly central. These highly-politicised writings encapsulated the rhetoric elaborated to protect England, its Queen and its faith against their enemies, whether they came from overseas (Spain) or from within (English Catholics). From then on, Protestant pulpiteers perpetuated the art of sermon writing and preaching in England as a codified literary genre of crucial consequence even in the highest of spheres. Thus, in early modern England, sermons became a means for the nation to unite against a common enemy, and to grow stronger in its conviction that God favoured that chosen kingdom, that new Israel. In chapter four, through an analysis of the rhetoric of John Donne's sermons, Marie-Christine Munoz shows that the dichotomy of war and peace came to represent the symbolic fight of good against evil. Donne distanced himself from strictly political issues regarding his monarch's legitimacy in waging war and, rather, chose to address individuals Christians, through the evocation of their inner struggle to lead a good life. This was a battle of momentous import, a daily war against moral evil, the principles of which applied, of course, in the more tangible instance of military conflict: the Christian, in the end, had to choose a side, and to fight for a cause. Thus, in sermons about war, the frontiers between the religious and the military, between spiritual and physical war, are constantly breached; indeed, both the conceptual framework and the rhetorical tools used to refer to moral struggle or martial warfare have much in common, and participate of the same effort to tackle issues as absolute as good and evil. Marie L. Ahearn, referring to New England's Militia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, commented upon the difficulty to distinguish between spiritual and military conflict: "Sometimes, in treating the dual theme of spiritual and temporal warfare, rhetorical distinctions blurred, and descriptions of spiritual war became interchangeable with war in this world; [...]"<sup>15</sup>

In Chapter five, Christine Ronchail studies the thanksgiving sermon of a French Reformed Church pastor celebrating the end of a conflict between two Protestant countries, England and the United Provinces. Although war sermons generally oppose a Christian nation to infidels, thus accounting for the obvious dichotomy between good and evil, this thanksgiving sermon, on the contrary, praises both sides, thereby raising the question of how two Protestant peoples can both benefit from the same divine support. Indeed, sermons focusing on the war effort were meant to emphasise the differences between opposing nations, to enhance the virtue

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<sup>15</sup> Marie L. Ahearn, *The Rhetoric of War. Training Day, the Militia and the Military Sermon*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1989, 56.

of the civilised “us” whilst demonising the barbaric “them”; their purpose was clearly to exacerbate antagonism and galvanise the troops. Peace sermons, on the contrary, focused upon the similarities which made a peace treaty possible between nations which had been formerly opposed. Since peace was a sign of God’s blessing, thanksgiving sermons showed that both sides were blessed, through peace, by divine grace. Peace was therefore construed as a sign of divine approval, as a reward bestowed upon two nations by the Almighty.

If the achievement of peace was understood as a clear sign of divine benevolence, war was, on the contrary, the symptom of God’s wrath, a punishment sent upon all sinners. Through his analysis of rhetoric, Michael Rotenberg-Schwartz, in chapter six, shows that 18<sup>th</sup> century British sermons presented war as a God-sent punishment for the sins of society: using a wide range of Biblical references, they both justified defensive wars and commented upon the wrath of God against sinners. However, their theology was enriched by humanist trends which condemned brutality even in justified or divinely-ordained wars, thus heralding the pacifism of later years.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, an emerging notion of pacifism was concomitant with a desire to exhort European countries to federate their populations. Indeed, since the Middle Ages, sermons played an important role in the slow creation of national identities in European countries; this theme, introduced in chapter one, is analysed further in chapter seven, where Pasi Ihlainen’s comparison of English and Prussian homilies demonstrates how 18<sup>th</sup>-century sermons contributed to the development of national awareness in both countries which, through religion and the preaching of war, developed a new sense of nationhood.

In chapter eight, Rémy Duthille sheds further light upon the transitional process which took place in the long 18<sup>th</sup> century, demonstrating the importance of fast sermons as a tool for dissenting preachers to contest the validity of the governments dealing with matters of war, while Anglican sermonists tended to be obedient supporters of the government’s military policy. Through his sermons, a critic like Richard Price revealed the preoccupations of his time, in particular about new types of conflicts such the war of the American Revolution, in which a colony rose against its mother country. Though Price did not intend to defend the principle of revolution, he nonetheless advocated the right of resistance and the sovereignty of a people. The same spirit of resistance of the American people was key to the ideology which galvanised the opposing camps in the other conflict which shaped and defined modern America, the American Civil War. Massimo Rubboli, in chapter nine,

tackles the problem which faced both Northern and Southern preachers: the justification of a civil war when “brothers fought against brothers”. In such a traumatic context, new elements of justification had to be invented to replace the traditional arguments based on the Old Testament; the issues of independence and of slavery were at stake, and the concept of transgression was examined by the ministers of both sides, with sometimes surprisingly converging views about the common sins of the divided nations.

Thus, preachers naturally tackle political issues in their war sermons, and conversely, politicians, particularly in the United States, include the religious sphere in their speeches. The complementary nature of politics and religion was exemplified by statesmen such as Paul Kruger, President of the Republic of the Transvaal, who at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century spoke in the Parliament in Pretoria and preached on Sunday at his local Dutch Reformed church. Many political leaders well-versed in theology were keen on delivering speeches which, in their content, were akin to sermons. In chapter ten, Marie Beauchamps considers the “political sermons” of two American presidents, Abraham Lincoln and Woodrow Wilson in times of war. Written to serve national consciousness during two major conflicts (the American Civil War and First World War), those sermon-like speeches used and, in turn, perpetuated images and elements of the American Christian tradition. The war-like religious rhetoric of these two Presidents-turned-priests played an important part in the shaping of modern America’s sense of identity.

A similarly glorified representation of war became increasingly embedded in the imperial mental process of newly industrialized countries across the Atlantic, especially so in the various wars opposing them to traditional “natives” from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Thus, sermons took on a certain entertainment value in Victorian England, and the nation’s fondness for religious admonition was acknowledged and catered for in 1835 with the publication of a guidebook listing the London churches and preachers where one might hear the best sermons delivered.<sup>16</sup> Since the emergence of low cost prints enabled cheaper publications, there was a growing popular demand for the printing of sermons originally written to be delivered orally only. Hearing, reading, and discussing sermons thus became a favourite activity amongst sections of the Victorian population.<sup>17</sup> Thus, some outstanding preachers have marked both their contemporaries

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<sup>16</sup> See Christiane D’Haussy (ed.), *English Sermons, Mirrors of Society*. Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1995, 23

<sup>17</sup> Robert H. Ellison, *The Victorian Pulpit. Spoken and Written Sermons in Nineteenth Century Britain*. London : Associated University Press, 1998, 33.

and subsequent generations and, through the intellectual quality and the stirring verve of their sermons, they have gained a place in history.

Keith Robbins, in chapter 11 focuses on one such outstanding man. Hensley Henson, who preached in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, represents a landmark in the relationship between war sermons and the subject of war. Instead of rousing the troops to battle and justifying conflicts as expressions of God's will, such sermons came to reflect the general mood of disgust about war, and especially the First World War. Hensley Henson's sermons were undoubtedly patriotic, since they supported the general view that Germany was to blame for the ongoing bloodshed; however, Hensley transcended this simplistic and dual vision of good and evil. Far from inciting his flock's hatred towards their German foes, he attempted to show that the Germans were the victims of their leaders' propaganda. He continued preaching a sense of shared humanity during the Second World War before he finally retired.

Hensley witnessed the emergence of new media which enabled preachers to propagate their religious message on a larger scale. It was during the Second World War that the BBC developed its network and increased its broadcasts, including religious ones in which sermons about war played a significant part. Yet there were difficulties intrinsic to the preaching of sermons on radio broadcasts. In chapter twelve, Suzanne Bray takes a close look at William Temple, who became the voice of Britain's conscience despite a state censorship which was symptomatic of the growing distrust between the political and the spiritual spheres, especially with regards to the issue of controlling the media. Thus, Temple had to submit his sermons to the approval of political authorities before being allowed to broadcast; pacifist preachers were forbidden to speak on the radio and, in some instances, Temple himself was censored despite his position of Archbishop of Canterbury.

The presence of war sermons on BBC radio programmes has continued since the Second World War; in chapter thirteen, Serge Auffret brings to the fore what he calls "mini sermons" aired on the often controversial programme *Thoughts for the Day*, and particularly the slots relating to the sensitive issue of the American and British intervention and the war in Iraq. This chapter highlights how speakers on the show were carefully selected in order to comply with the BBC's strict policies about the equal representation of all races, faiths and socio-economic categories, and shows that a radio programme of this format differs from traditional war sermons since it allows the expression of a multiplicity of viewpoints, and acts as a platform for a lively debate.

Yet even in today's modern world, voicing a variety of opinions and allowing the free expression of dissidence in matters of religion and war remains challenging. For all the evolutions and changes which have shaped the Western world since the Middle Ages, there remain some elements of continuity; thus, the final chapter of this volume concludes on the everlasting presence of the concept of Just War codified many centuries before, a concept which is still used in the context of modern war and which was a dominant theme in President Bush's campaign for the American war in Iraq. Through the sermons of some American Catholics priests, Anne Debray unveils the turmoil of people torn between their obedience to their Church, which advocated pacifism, and their allegiance to the state. In the events leading up to the war and once conflict was engaged, these dissident preachers expressed the untenable position of citizens whose faith could not be reconciled with their patriotism.

The links between State and Church, and between faith and war, are an intrinsic part of the historical mechanisms which influence a nation's relationship to warfare. Arguments used in the Crusades, or even earlier, are still current in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and by their very nature, war sermons will always put military conflicts in relation with the divine, thereby perpetuating dogmas such as that of Just War or divine retribution. However, new types of wars have also prompted new forms of rhetoric meant to guide and convince an audience. This anthology on war sermons has spanned five centuries in the hope to provide a better understanding of the devices through which parishioners are led to form an opinion upon the legitimacy of a war; such varied articles set war sermons in a historical perspective which sheds a light on the genre of writing and delivering sermons on or about war throughout the centuries in Western countries.

« Clerical Guidance and Lived Spirituality in Early Modern English Convents », in Lux-Sterritt, Laurence et Claire Sorin (eds.) *Spirit, Faith and Church. Women's Experiences in the English-Speaking World, 17<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> centuries*, pp. 60-91.

**Résumé :**

Ce chapitre explore divers aspects de la pratique de la spiritualité catholique dans les couvents anglais en exil à la période moderne. Au sein de la très normative Église post-tridentine, la vie conventuelle obéit à des règles strictes qui régissent tous les aspects de la vie en communauté et de la vie individuelle. Le concile de Trente avait imposé des règles générales, comme la clôture, mais chaque ordre suit la règle de son fondateur, et à l'intérieur de cet ordre, chaque établissement est soumis à ses propres règlements et constitutions. Enfin, chaque religieuse est placée sous la surveillance de sa supérieure et sous l'autorité de son père spirituel. L'analyse des rôles de ces directeurs dans la vie spirituelle des religieuses pose des questions d'autorité. Cette étude propose une esquisse des choix de pratiques spirituelles que les clercs, forts de leurs connaissances théologiques et de leur familiarité avec les écrits patristiques, proposent à leurs pénitentes. Elle montre également que, si certaines religieuses semblent entièrement dépendantes de leurs confesseurs, d'autres au contraire préfèrent trouver leur propre chemin vers le divin et développer une spiritualité personnelle. Les manuscrits indiquent que les méthodes performatives prescrites par les clercs ne sont pas toujours en corrélation avec l'expérience vécue des religieuses.

10 857 mots

mots-clés : couvents ; catholicisme anglais ; exil ; spiritualité féminine ; confesseurs

**Présentation du texte :**

Ce travail est issu des étapes préliminaires de mon dépouillement des manuscrits des religieuses anglaises en exil sur le continent. Il se fonde sur les manuscrits des bénédictines, des carmélites, des clarisses et des sépulchrines en majorité. Dans cet article, je souhaitais mettre en regard la pratique prescrite par le clergé et l'expérience vécue des religieuses à travers le spectre de la prière et de la contemplation. Cette étude marque donc un double tournant dans ma recherche, inaugurant une phase d'étude des manuscrits des religieuses anglaises et un intérêt particulier pour la religion vécue, en contraste avec la théorie prescrite.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### CLERICAL GUIDANCE AND LIVED SPIRITUALITY IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH CONVENTS<sup>1</sup>

LAURENCE LUX-STERRITT

In early modern England, Catholic subjects incurred harsh penalties on account of their faith, which was not only illegal but also considered akin to treason. The recognition of the Pope's spiritual authority was accounted incompatible with a subject's duty of obedience to the English monarch, who was both the head of state and the governor of the Church of England, as stipulated in Elizabeth I's 1559 Act of Supremacy. Later, in 1563, the Elizabethan *39 Articles of Religion* disavowed all the essential tenets of Catholic life. Pope Clement VII responded in 1570, excommunicating Elizabeth in a Bull calling Catholic subjects to deny the queen's authority. A movement of Catholic recovery was organized, mainly at the English college founded in 1568 at Douai by Cardinal Allen, for the training of young priests whose vocation was to return to England as missionaries. The mission, quickly spearheaded by the Society of Jesus, was so successful in its recruitment of trainees that the English Parliament passed an *Act Against Fugitives Over the Sea* in 1571, in order to dissuade the exodus of young men seeking ordination abroad. With time, it became treason even to hear the Mass, or to have commerce with known missionaries on English soil.<sup>2</sup> The severity of this penal system forced Catholics to withdraw to the relative safety of the household, and to practise their faith in secret.

Yet English Catholicism was diverse and multi-faceted. In order to avoid heavy fines, the forfeiture of their estates, imprisonment or even death, some chose to compromise with the established Church. They attended the compulsory Anglican services on Sundays, thereby publicly displaying their obedience to the letter of the law, but they continued to practise their own faith privately at home. The pragmatism of these so-

called Church Papists was often criticized by the more radical element of the English Catholic community, for whom attendance to Anglican services was a betrayal of the Roman faith.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, a considerable proportion of Catholics withdrew from the national Church and were therefore listed as non-conformists, or recusants, to bear the full brunt of the law.<sup>4</sup> Others still chose to emigrate to a Catholic country on the Continent, to live their faith openly and without fear of punishment, often in France or the Spanish Provinces.<sup>5</sup> After the disillusion which followed James I's accession to the English throne in 1603, an estimated 5,000 Catholics of both sexes fled persecution and found refuge on the Continent; although some of these expatriates led a simple lay life, many of them entered a religious institution.<sup>6</sup>

When they took the decision to enter a convent, English Catholic women began an entirely new life. Like all nuns, they left the secular world to become devoted to God; yet in their particular case, this separation from the world was made all the more significant since it entailed a life in exile on the Continent, far away from their homes. The first stable convent specifically for English members was a Benedictine house founded in Brussels in 1598. The Poor Clares followed suit in the town of Gravelines in 1607, the Augustinians in Louvain in 1609, then (amongst others), the Sepulchrines in Liège in 1642 and the Carmelites in Lierre in 1648. Each of these institutions, once securely settled, branched out to other cities, thereby multiplying the houses of each Order. The lives of these communities have recently been thrown into light thanks to the research undertaken by the AHRC-funded project entitled *Who Were the Nuns? A Prosopographical Study of the English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800*. Through its website, this project has made available a small sample of records documenting English convents and, most importantly, provided a searchable database allowing researchers to find out details about every single English woman who entered holy Orders at the time.<sup>7</sup> Used in conjunction with recent publications such as Claire Walker's *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe*,<sup>8</sup> and with the forthcoming volumes of edited primary sources to be published by Pickering and Chatto from 2012,<sup>9</sup> such new resources will undoubtedly open this yet little-researched field to exciting new scholarship.

This essay explores issues regarding the practice of Catholic spirituality in early modern English convents. In the highly normative Post-Tridentine Church, nuns were not left free to practise their faith according to their own will. The reforming Council of Trent (1545–63) had sought to regain control and impose order over every aspect of Catholic life, and had been particularly thorough in its dealings with female religious. Conventual life



thus obeyed several layers of strict rules. Blanket general rules were imposed upon all convents (such was the case of enclosure), but each Order also referred to the more precise Rules or Constitutions left by its founders (regarding silence, learning, asceticism or work, for instance). Finally, each individual followed the advice of her confessor or director, who guided her upon her spiritual journey. The analysis of the roles played by directors in religious women's spiritual lives poses several questions regarding the thorny issue of authority. What did learned directors, with their reliance upon theological knowledge, advocate as sound paths to the divine when advising women, with their reputedly weaker abilities? Was their guidance deemed indispensable for a religious woman hoping to find God? Did the rationalized methods advocated by clerics suit female spirituality and the women's lived experience?

### **Order, Method and Exercises: How to Experience Spiritual Union**

Spiritual guidance took many forms. Nuns would undertake spiritual exercises as a means to improve the state of their souls; each step of the exercises was designed to promote further union with God. Most communities used the Ignatian model of the Spiritual Exercises, adapted for the purposes of enclosed women. This was, in itself, a testimony to the success and popularity of Jesuit spirituality in the 17<sup>th</sup> century since, originally, Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556) had devised his Exercises for his Society, that is to say for men with a missionary vocation. Yet with time, Jesuits adapted the Exercises not only to the needs of laymen but also – against the recommendations of the founder himself – of lay and religious women.<sup>10</sup>

In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Jesuit Exercises became common practice in convents of all denominations. Through the performance of specific steps, and using ideas and images to contemplate and pray, nuns hoped to achieve indifference to and detachment from the world and from themselves; they endeavoured to leave behind all earthly preoccupations and offer their souls entirely to God, allowing him to work his will in them. Conventual archives abound in manuals dispensing advice for the undertaking of the Exercises; most were penned by clerics, but a few were authored by nuns themselves.

The Exercises taught the penitent a keen attentiveness to the work of God within her soul; they necessitated a thorough examination of conscience and strict guidance through each stage of the retreat. Ritual performance was crucial: it enabled the nun to forget herself and reach out

for the divine.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the women were encouraged to focus fully upon the observance of precise steps and the correct performance of the task. In *A Most Profitable, and Necessary Advertisement for all Such, who Shall Make the Spiritual Exercise*, Father Steven Robinson, once director of the Carmelites of Hoogstraten, called this "the true method of doing it well".<sup>12</sup>

You must begin those exercises by endeavoring to gain those dispositions, which are required to do them well. And to this end, you must attentively read in the very first day this same Advertisement once, or twice over, together with the Method of Mental Prayer. But in order you may the better comply with all these duties, and with more advantage, before, you begin this lecture, [...] you must 1st, kneel down, and recite devoutly a short prayer to obtain the Grace of doing it well [...]. 2dly, If you meet with some difficulty in the lecture, you must mark it down in a paper, which must serve to no other use, than this; and after words, you must beg of your Confessor the explication of it. 3dly, You must firmly purpose to exactly practise all the good advices, this lecture will furnish you with. [...] 5thly, As soon as you see the directour, lay open to him all your doubts, and difficulties.<sup>13</sup>

This quotation illustrates several characteristics of spiritual direction. The confessor was always presented as the point of reference, the wise guide helping the penitent through the difficulties of her retreat. He was the guardian of theological knowledge, able to explain a lecture and dissipate doubts. His authority was visibly embedded in the text, through the repetitive use of the imperative voice or of modal verbs such as "must" and "shall" with each injunction. Finally, the director expounded his method, warning nuns of the necessity to heed his orders exactly, step by step; for this purpose, his manual was divided into numbered sections, each often subdivided into bite-size directions, as in the example above. The performative aspect of this ritual was of such importance that it was to be laid out in detail before even touching upon the actual spiritual content of the exercise.

Yet not all the manuals for the undertaking of spiritual exercises were authored by clerics; some nuns took it upon themselves to guide their own Sisters through this essential part of their spiritual life. Their approach testified to their complete endorsement of clerical methods, offering simple adaptations of those. For instance, at the Sepulchrine convent of Liège, Elizabeth Ayray (1656–1705), in religion sister Victoria, wrote her own *Considerations for the Ten Dayes Exercises*. She prescribed a full course of ten days as practised annually by the Jesuits themselves. In other respects too, Ayray imitated the clerical model faithfully, ordering her manual in a similar fashion, and emphasizing the importance of a system

to be followed scrupulously. She divided her *Considerations* into ten sections (one for each day), each section being itself subdivided into smaller parts, in which nuns were to contemplate specific questions. For instance, after considering the current state of their souls, dwelling upon their sins, their bad habits, or their personal inclinations, nuns should dedicate the seventh day to spiritual concerns. Ayray advised the following questions for meditation:

What esteeme doe I make of the meanes of my salvation, of Holy Mass, confession, comunion [sic], prayer, meditation etc. 2dly, what preparation doe I make to prayer, to comunion, and confession? With what diligence and industry doe I make my 400 examins of confession? doe I performe my duty heerein out of custome onely, or with life and spirit?<sup>14</sup>

When following instructions, the nun was not to decide upon anything; her mind was set free of such preoccupations, as she focused solely upon the dutiful execution of the tasks set out for her. Order was paramount, and the instructions were systemized and numbered, with sections and sub-sections, to avoid any confusion or distraction. Thus entirely dedicated to the performance of the rite, the nun emptied her soul and, free of emotion or thought, she could reach serenity. Through this vacuum, she became a non-person, an expression of the medieval "empty vessel", or holy receptacle to be filled with the divine. A Benedictine writer used this image in a lively metaphor, urging her Sisters to empty their souls and make themselves available to God: "Thou art to be fild with good. Poure out the evell. Imagin that God would fill thee with hony: if thou art filld with vinegar, where wilt thou put the hony".<sup>15</sup> This pure soul, or virgin spirit, became "As a cleare glasse without spot".<sup>16</sup> From this stage onwards, divine love would fill the soul and make it ever purer in a self-perpetuating process: once the soul was ready to be united with God, divine love would in turn increase its purity, in an ever ascending spiral.<sup>17</sup>

The nuns' understanding of spiritual union as a journey made up of distinct stages followed the explanations dispensed by their directors. Father John Rigolené, SJ, copied Father Peter Champion's treatises on divine love for the benefit of the Carmelites of Hoogstraten. His first treatise, entitled *The Amiable Jesus or The Practise of Love towards our Lord Jesus Christ* explained how mystical union was divided into three stages of love: affective, effective and passive. In order to progress from the first stage to the last, nuns should undertake the Exercises with great zeal:

our own part, we ought with zeal embrace, and practise with diligence the exercises of divine love. Ther are three sorts, affective, effectual and passive. Affective are the inward affections which the soul produces towards the adorable person of Jesus Christ. Effectual are the proofs or effects which evidence the sincerity and solidity of our affections. Passive are the operations of Jesus Christ in a soul well dispos'd.<sup>18</sup>

Having stripped herself of all earthly concerns, the nun first experienced affective love. This love was not merely a base emotion, derived from the lower part of the soul and of a sensual nature; it was on the contrary a virtuous *affect*, detached from animal nature. Then, through her constant efforts, her perseverance and the performance of systematic exercises, the retreatant experienced effective love. According to the treatise, this love allowed the nun "to assimilate the soul to the word incarnate as far as this life is capable of assimilation." During this stage, they made themselves "like unto [...] the adorable Person of our Lord".<sup>19</sup> This required the practice of mortification, although punishment was not to be sought for its own sake, but rather as a way to experience something akin to the suffering of Christ.

Meditation upon Christ's Passion, evoking each station of the Cross according to a simple method, aroused feelings of compassion and empathy and brought nuns to mortify their own senses. This stage of their spiritual journey led them effectively to change their inclinations, desiring now to identify with the suffering Christ rather than to live a comfortable life. Transformed into purely spiritual beings, the nuns would finally experience passive love, a state in which they united with God so perfectly as to become one with him. They were then but strangers to themselves, mortified by the assimilation of the word incarnate, a living image of Christ on earth, unspoiled by human sin. Their rejection of the world did no longer spring from their own efforts, but from the supernatural and transforming effects of God's love. They no longer sought earthly friendships, entertainment or status, they were free from self-will and pride, transcending their mortal coil and uniting with the divine.<sup>20</sup> Of course, such passive love bore no common measure with earthly love: it was construed not as a "low" appetite but as an expression of the upper portion of the soul, a superior and virtuous *affect*. It was, after all, the true purpose of a religious life, the goal towards which all efforts reached, the one achievement nuns longed for.

Godly union affected the nuns not only spiritually but physically also, and Father Rigolené warned the Carmelites that the encounter came with such intensity that it was like a blow, a "stroak in the heart", a wound inflicted upon a body which then "pined" and "sighed" or "groaned". He

described this experience in highly physical terms, evoking the mystic's "languishing fits of love".<sup>21</sup> The Church felt that such intense experiences should be closely supervised, fearing that the women should misinterpret or misuse the workings of divine love.

### **Clerical Guidance as a Safeguard of Female Spirituality**

The guidance of confessors was the backbone of both male and female religious life in the early modern Catholic Church, but the relationships of penitents with their confessors could be quite traumatic. In fact, the sacrament of confession was one of the issues to which reformer Martin Luther (1483–1546) objected most energetically, having himself suffered great anxiety, even panic at the prospect while still an Augustinian monk.<sup>22</sup> Yet the Council of Trent saw fit to reinforce clerical authority even further; one of the collaterals of this policy was the vindication of confessors as the essential guides without whom no individual, religious or lay, male or female, could ever hope to purify their souls. For a religious person therefore, penance was at the very heart of the daily practice of devotion.

The Benedictines of Cambrai, for instance, used clerical instructions which called to their attention their human frailty. Retreatants were warned that, left to their own devices, they would necessarily stray in their choice of books and in their practice of meditation. They would misuse their time according to their whims. They would be blind to their own faults and would not see "their vices, their passions and spiritual necessities which, for want of that assistance, lurk in them undiscovered or if seen they appear in borrowed dresses, which self love never fails to clothe them with".<sup>23</sup> They could not hope to direct themselves since a guide must, by definition, already know the way. Such enlightenment was the privilege of confessors who, as they trained for that purpose, were familiar with the teachings of the Church and the wisdom of theology.

If clerical guidance was necessary to both men and women religious, it was deemed all the more crucial for nuns since, as the general introduction to this volume highlights, women were believed to be defective by nature.<sup>24</sup> Their perceived physical, moral and spiritual inferiority was said organically to bind them to terrene vices and make them prone to sin.<sup>25</sup> Women, in the image of their collective mother Eve, were easily duped and would always incline towards the satisfaction of their senses rather than Godly obedience and humility. In order to underpin this general belief, Tridentine decrees pointed to examples of unruly nuns: through the ages and across the whole of Europe, women who were allowed to develop

their own relationship with the divine could be deceived.<sup>26</sup> Some who believed they experienced Godly visions were in fact possessed by demons, which manipulated them with as much ease as the serpent had manipulated Eve. Thus, since the Middle Ages, priests had become expert at discerning holy experiences from demonic ones; nuns who claimed to have received special favours from God through ecstasies or visions were to be closely examined. The 17<sup>th</sup> century, also known as the *siècle des saints*,<sup>27</sup> abounded in cases of visionary women; some of them, upon examination, turned out to be deliberate frauds, whilst others were declared possessed by devils. This period of intense devotion would test the exorcists' methods to the limit and be the theatre of abuses in this field, much to the outrage of Protestant polemicists.<sup>28</sup>

To avoid the scandals caused by uncontrolled female mysticism, strict clerical guidance was deemed necessary.<sup>29</sup> In *A Most Profitable, and Necessary Advertisement*, Father Robinson instructed the Carmelites of Hoogstraten and repeatedly emphasized the importance of submission to clerical guidance. Nuns, he declared, must rely upon the counsel of their directors, without which they could not achieve divine union. They should never enter into any exercises or retreat unsupervised since, despite their best intentions, the outcome would be blighted by their flawed nature. He explained:

To make the Spiritual Exercises is nothing else, than to retire yourself from the noise, and distractions of the world, that you may the better for a few day's time treat with God, and with your soul, by the means of a prudent directour about the reformation of your life, and of the true method of doing it well [...].<sup>30</sup>

Directors were the "means" to spiritual enlightenment; to some extent, Robinson implied, they were the representatives of the Lord on earth, nearly on a par with God. Indeed, Robinson defined the purpose of the Spiritual Exercises as "to take advice of God upon the state of life you have embraced"; then, in lieu of God's advice, he immediately proceeded to give his own: "I advice you to begin those exercises with a clear, and open manifestation all your thoughts and intentions to your unworthy directour." It was clear that God's advice and the director's were to be considered as one and the same. The implication was that, since God trusted confessors to lead their penitents' souls to him, the nuns should trust them also without any reluctance.

Clerics were well-versed in theology and intimate with the divine mysteries; they were therefore deemed able to gauge the spiritual needs of individuals and of communities better than the interested parties themselves.

Overall, Robinson encouraged his penitents "to blindly obey to the directions, and advices, of their Confessour, whom God has chosen to this employment".<sup>31</sup>

With few exceptions, nuns generally recognized the authority of their spiritual directors as a necessary condition for a holy religious life. Although by then reputed wilful and somewhat rebellious since she had left the Order of the Poor Clares, Mary Ward (1585–1645) wrote during a retreat:

I will endeavor to be always greatly united with my derector, because God dos govern me and enfuse his holy grace into my soule by him, he also doth manifest the devine will, and following his derection I shall infallibly receive sufficient grace to execut the same perfily.<sup>32</sup>

In the papers of the Cambrai Benedictines, copies of dozens of letters authored by various spiritual directors have been preserved.<sup>33</sup> Each of these came as an answer to the solicitations of nuns who requested the advice of their confessors on points of spirituality and conscience. In their replies, clerics sometimes appear overwhelmed by their penitents' demands. When nuns wrote in distress about their directors' delayed replies, they were chided for their impatience. When one requested extensive guidance on a particular point, the cleric wondered: "doe you intend I shall compose a book for you?"<sup>34</sup>

Yet even as he wrote on the subject of obedience and submission, Robinson bemoaned the tendency which he found in some nuns to withhold information from their confessors, and to follow their own methods of meditation.<sup>35</sup> Manuscripts belonging indiscriminately to all the Orders recommended the greatest mistrust towards one's own self-will, or personal preferences in matters of spirituality. Those who did not blindly submit to the guidance of clerics may do so for a variety of reasons, all of which were denounced as sinful. For instance, a document addressed to beginners in the Benedictines of Cambrai warned new Sisters against overzealous righteousness which would make them consider any criticism as misguided; it also denounced misplaced shyness, which could prompt them to shrink from the full disclosure of their sins for fear of losing their confessor's esteem.<sup>36</sup>

The sheer abundance of writings reinforcing the authority of spiritual directors and highlighting their guidance as an absolute necessity testifies to underlying tensions. Indeed, if many women endorsed this gendered and hierarchized view of their spiritual journey, some found it difficult to comply with, especially when the divine calls they experienced did not meet with the approval of clerics. Mary Ward herself, despite her earlier

resolution to submit to her confessor's will, found it impossible to compromise with the divine order she had received in 1611 to found a Society of Jesus for women. For the beginning she knew clerics would never accept such a vocation; she later recalled receiving both God's command and his warning in a letter to her Jesuit supporter John Gerard: "Take the same of the Society. Father General will never allow it. Go to him."<sup>37</sup> Indeed, the Jesuit General never approved Ward's vocation, and neither did the Pope; the "Jesuitess" was to spend twenty years attempting to secure approbation for an Institute which, though it seemed to her to be God's plan, failed to comply with the Church's norms. Yet she refused to deviate from her path which she held directly inspired by God and therefore nonnegotiable.<sup>38</sup> When God's will and the will of clerics were not the same, how did women negotiate the tensions between the two sources of authority they had been taught to value above all else?

### **Nuns' Lived Experiences: The Issue of Unmediated Mysticism**

Personal experience of divine union was at the centre of the spiritual lives of nuns. The obituaries of various communities testify to the mystical enlightenments of many other women such as Clare Vaughan (1638–87) in religion Dame Clare, from the Pontoise Benedictines, or Catherine Gascoigne<sup>39</sup> (1623–90), in religion Dame Justina of Santa Maria, from the Paris Benedictines, whose obituary declared:

*seeking God puerly in all she did, and suffered, she made great progress in contemplation & union with him whom her soule loved. [...] and by this stricte union of her soule with God she receiued that devine light to finde out, & faithfully trace, those secret, & hidden ways of perfection, to which she afterwards arrived.*<sup>40</sup>

When nuns wrote about their lived experiences of spiritual union, they expressed their entire dedication to a God who had come to represent their entire world. Dame Justina's aunt, also named Catherine Gascoigne (1601–76), wielded much authority in the Cambrai Benedictines, of which she was twice Abbess.<sup>41</sup> She wrote poetry which was representative of this trend:

One thing alone I crave,  
Namely  
All in everything.  
This One



I seek,  
The only One  
Do I desire.  
Rooted in One  
Is all,  
From the One  
Flows all.  
This is the very One  
I seek  
Will have  
Only then  
Be[en] filled.<sup>42</sup>

Her sister, Margaretta (1608–1637), in religion Margaret, also wrote poetry in which she expressed the complete annihilation of her self and hailed God as the alpha and omega of her entire world:

I would see nothing  
Heare nothing  
Feele nothing  
Know nothing, [...]  
Have nothing  
But thee and thy will.<sup>43</sup>

Nuns devoted their every waking moment to God; they dedicated their thoughts, their work, their prayers to him and lived, it appears, in a state of perpetual longing. Such Christo-centric devotion clearly placed God at the heart of the nuns' *raison d'être*; they existed for him only, even in their most common daily acts. In these devotional writings, confessors and advisers are emphatically *not* on a par with Christ, in comparison to whom all fades into insignificance.

An intense sense of craving emanates from the many manuscripts in which religious women envisaged the blissful end of their spiritual journey through contemplative, passive love:

O my dearest Lorde and my God, O my best beloved spouse and friend choosen above all others. O my love, my refuge, my joy, and whatsoever my heart can desire? [...] O that my soule with all its powers myght perfectly be united unto thee, never more to be separated from thee, but allwaise to rest in thee, that so enjoying thy sweet embraces it may be drowned and melted into thy owne divine substance.<sup>44</sup>

English nuns from all Orders wrote about their experiences of mystical love, and embraced their passive state with particular zeal as a type of

"contemplative activism".<sup>45</sup> They evoked their yearning to meet their bridegroom in texts which abound with metaphors of all-consuming love and longing. Whether in verse or prose, the women presented themselves as lovers, pining for the object of their passion. These writings, focused upon the moment of impending union with God, provide an interesting contrast to other devotional texts; there, the lexical field changes, leaving aside the usual register of reserve to reclaim a more passionate vocabulary. To express this heightened experience, the word "desire" is found recurrently. When writing about "the dear object of [her] love", the style of one Poor Clare author becomes a stranger to restraint; as Father Champion announced in his treatise used by the Carmelites, the nun pines, sighs, groans, and languishes; she expresses feelings which possess her "ardently", "with an incomparable ardour", and "with passion".

The common topos of the furnace of love, so dear to Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross,<sup>46</sup> is found in numerous documents; in this particular example, the nun confesses: "my hart burns with desire to see & possess you", "I burn with desire to take my flight towards heaven".<sup>47</sup> The Benedictine Catherine Gascoigne echoed the same sentiment when she described her life,

aspiring daily to be wholly burn'd with this inflamed love and nothing know but him alone, whom I desire to be my portion, part & all in all to me.<sup>48</sup>

Another Benedictine called for God to enter her soul, "that [...] I may be quite consumed in thy love".<sup>49</sup> Ultimately, many used images of penetration, when they felt their hearts pierced with God's love; the fleshy boundaries of the body no longer appear hermetic but are erased to allow the merging of the nun's physical entity with God's spiritual being, as they unite to become one. A Poor Clare writer, considering Jesus's crowning with thorns, eloquently showed the blurring of the self when she wrote:

I adore you, O the God of my hart, I adore your ineffable love which has reduc'd you to this state. [...] make an end of your work, transpierce your hart with your thorns, O good Jesus, let them come forth of that sacred head, all bath'd with your blood and burning with your love, as enflam'd darts to pierce me with their points & enflame with their fire.<sup>50</sup>

Through her *imitatio Christi*, the nun experienced the pain inflicted upon Jesus in his Passion, and in their mystical union, it was no longer clear where her self ended and God began.

Although devotional writings usually express deep contempt for emotions as the expressions of bodily cravings, desire and passion appear rehabilitated in the context of mystical love. This was made possible by the shift operated in the very experience of divine union, during which all was bathed in God's glory and therefore made holy and pure. The passions of a mystic, it was understood, bore nothing in common with animal appetites. At this stage of passive love, or pure love, the nun was free of lowly emotions; she became filled with spiritual transports, a bliss so intense and Godly that it could not be adequately expressed in words.<sup>51</sup> Because of the limitations of earthly language, the vocabulary used to describe these holy experiences had to be borrowed from that of human love, for lack of anything better, although this remained highly inadequate. Thus, many scholars have commented upon the undeniably sensual, even erotic nature of some accounts describing the spiritual union of a pure soul to her bridegroom.<sup>52</sup>

Unsurprisingly, clerical authorities were somewhat concerned with the potentially sexualized nature of mystical raptures; since the Middle-Ages, even the most renowned female mystics fell under the close scrutiny of Church delegates dispatched to assess the veracity and the Godliness of their visions. Saint Teresa of Avila (1515–82), who had been canonized by Pope Gregory XV in 1622, had been investigated by several priests to ascertain whether her unorthodox spiritual methods were inspired by God or evil spirits. Teresa, before becoming a great Saint and exemplar for generations of religious women, had experienced long years of discontent due to conflicts with her directors, who were troubled by her unmediated, powerful spiritual experiences. Later, when her sanctity was recognized and she was asked to testify in writing, she took the opportunity to chastise spiritual directors who, she claimed, were so enamoured with their authority that they condemned anything which eluded them, failing to recognize God's work as it unfolded in front of their very eyes. Those were no longer useful spiritual guides but rather impediments to an inspired soul, and she accused them of attempting "to tamp God down by controlling her".<sup>53</sup>

Thus, the relationship between spiritual direction and mystical union was a delicate, sometimes tense affair. Many nuns could not envisage their journey to the divine without the clear guidelines given by their confessors, or without the help of the methodological landmarks provided in the Spiritual Exercises. But experiences varied and, for others, such guidance proved restrictive, even stifling; far from providing spiritual light, it rather snuffed it out.

For such religious, contemplation and passive prayer were the privileged paths to holiness. This method required much less intervention on the part of the spiritual director, and was advocated by Augustine Baker (1575–1641) when he took his position with the Cambrai Benedictines between 1624 and 1633.<sup>54</sup> Baker doubted the suitability of Jesuit directors for contemplative nuns, and argued that methods fitted for missionary and active religious were not ideal for the direction of convents.<sup>55</sup> Thus, instead of following a specific list of prescriptions to meditate upon, as in the Jesuit Exercises, he encouraged nuns to read and ponder upon the texts of late medieval mystics, which he glossed over and discussed in his own prolific devotional treatises. Baker's influence on the reading practices of the Cambrai Benedictines resulted in the gradual building of a rich library both at Cambrai and at its daughter house in Paris. Indeed the catalogue of the Parisian house testifies to the variety of the nuns' collections, which included many lives of saints such as St Bridget, Julian of Norwich, or Anne of St Bartholomew.<sup>56</sup>

Baker thought that religious persons should be allowed to find their own way to God, under His divine guidance and that of illustrious role models such as the revered saints of the late-medieval period. Spiritual directors, he argued, should be used only when the retreatant faced a particular difficulty, and not viewed as quasi-divine themselves. He complained:

it is a too common tendency for directors to make their penitents dependent upon them, to the detriment of their spiritual progress, besides other inconveniences. [...] A director must not, then, bind all souls to begin by the same method, for it is sure not to suit some. He should teach each soul how to become illuminated by God Himself through prayer and abstraction.<sup>57</sup>

Baker extolled contemplative prayer, which led to mystical union with God without the need for predefined methods or exercises of the Ignatian type. In order to guide the Benedictine nuns along this path, he wrote for them an impressive corpus of over sixty manuscript treatises between the 1620s and the 1630s, in which he intertwined his own words with those of reputed mystics such as Tauler, Fitch, Blossius, St John of the Cross or even women such as Julian of Norwich or Teresa of Avila. When the new chaplain Father Francis Hull arrived at Cambrai in 1629, this became a matter of controversy and Baker was accused of exhorting the nuns to refuse clerical guidance. Yet his teachings resonated well with the Cambrai community and beyond, and it prompted some nuns to undertake a task they would normally shy away from: they began writing about

spirituality and about lived religious experience in their own names, voicing their opinions on the matter.

Dame Catherine Gascoigne wrote to defend a spiritual path which was less strictly regulated than that prescribed by the Ignatian method. She advocated a type of mystical contemplation inspired by holy exemplars such as Julian of Norwich (1342–1416), whose *Showings of Love* she partially transcribed. In two of her manuscripts, *A Relation on her Form of Prayer* and *A Defense of Augustine Baker's Way of Prayer*, she promoted passivity and detachment in order to allow the soul to be penetrated by God in contemplation. Gascoigne expressed her confidence in God's grace as a much surer path towards spiritual union than any exercises undertaken through the retreatant's own will. She wrote:

for many times I find a great & strong desire to please, and praise God and yet am not able in any sort to doe it [...]. But thus I see there is no way but patience & resignation, till it pleases Him who only can enable me, [...] for methinks the more I strive or force my self the further I am from it. For everything methinks, even thinking of good and holy things, doe rather breed images and cause multiplicity in the soul, and are distractions & impediments to me in my prayer, and tendance towards God, so I must keep myself in as much quietness as may be.<sup>58</sup>

When alluding to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, she used images of force and violence made to the soul; her choice of lexical field evoked toil and vexation rather than smooth progress towards a goal. Her preferred method required the annihilation of personal will and an entire reliance upon God's benevolence. She clearly stated that souls were enabled by God only, thereby implicitly reducing the power of directors.

Dame Gertrude More (1606–33), also from the Cambrai Benedictines, found her spiritual fulfillment in Baker's methods; she wrote a vehement defense both of his spiritual teachings and of the right of nuns to read and learn from the devotional writings of holy exemplars. In her *Apology for Herself and her Spiritual Guide and Director, Venerable Augustine Baker*,<sup>59</sup> she reminded clerics that despite their wisdom and experience, the ultimate judge of a soul's holiness was God, not priests:

God, [...] changeth not His opinion of us according as the humour of the Confessor may be. [...] Who sees not that this is turning religious obedience (in those that simply desire to perform it) to a policy abominable to be thought of or named! O my God! was this Thy meaning when we vowed ourselves to Thee? Or, rather, didst not Thou say, 'Be wise as serpents and simple as doves?'; Thou didst not say, 'Be so foolish under

pretence of blind obedience, that thou shalt not know thy right hand from the left!<sup>60</sup>

Those were very daring words to be written by an early modern nun; they implied that the common practice of spiritual direction had been perverted and abused by priests who so enjoyed their power over their penitents that they had lost sight of their duty to enable souls to reach union with the divine. To her, obedience was due to God before all creatures and therefore, if a nun's path was dictated by God, she had no choice but follow it. But in her previous experience, when she attempted to do this, she had encountered the opposition of her director, who insisted she must follow the Exercises. In this respect, she argued, clerics sometimes went against God's will.

To Gertrude More, the Jesuit model, which most of her English Sisters followed, was in fact alienating nuns from their true spiritual quest. Instead of seeking God only, nuns were preoccupied by the good opinion of their directors and the exact performance of a myriad Exercises they did not understand. She argued that these methods, though perfectly attuned to the Jesuit vocation, were simply not adequate for the simple souls of religious women. The anxiety attached to their correct performance caused confusion, and prevented the soul from soaring towards her heavenly spouse. She wrote:

For, [...] by making our obedience to regard Superiors, we trouble and perplex ourselves in thinking it must be done with this circumstance, and in this manner, and at this time, and divers other circumstances little to the purpose, or else we shall not perform our obedience in perfection. This is to tire out ourselves and make ourselves weary of obedience, and not to serve God with alacrity and cheerful willingness. This is to find His yoke intolerable, and not sweet and easy [...].<sup>61</sup>

Similar convictions were echoed by another prolific writer, Dame Barbara Constable (1617–84), who had entered the Benedictines of Cambrai in 1638, five years after Baker's departure.<sup>62</sup> Although she did not enjoy a personal relationship with Baker himself, she wrote abundantly to defend Bakerism and its non-interventionist, anti-authoritarian approach to spirituality. Amongst her works, *Advices For Confessors and Spirituall Directs* (1650), *Speculum Superiorum* (1650) and *Considerations for Preests* (1653) were addressed to clerics and daringly proffered advice on spiritual direction.<sup>63</sup> Thus, Constable dared to turn the tables upon the hierarchical order which had been the very backbone of the Tridentine Church.<sup>64</sup> She compared the practices of her day with those of holier eras,

and “the ill priests” of her times with their more saintly predecessors. She transcribed thousands of folios of devotional treatises and instructions, and was the author of at least six original works between 1649 and 1663. Such prolific activity stemmed from her desire to testify to the efficacy of unmediated mystical union,<sup>65</sup> and to offer a compendium of theological and meditational knowledge coming from unquestionable sources: the Scriptures, the primitive Fathers of the Church, and the most renowned mystics and saints, whose lives many nuns read daily, some in Latin, many in English translation. Such were, she argued, the true sources of spiritual guidance, and these holy writings were to be preferred to the performance of systematic exercises.

The Cambrai controversy and the examples of several English religious women such as Mary Ward demonstrate that, even for the most devoted daughters of the Church, it was not always possible to comply with the guidance of spiritual directors. This tension did sometimes –as in the case of Cambrai– stem from the inadequacy of the methods employed. The Jesuit *Exercises* were devised for the use of men, and of missionaries: nuns were neither, and the Cambrai rebels argued that their contemplative and enclosed status warranted a different approach. But there was far more to the issue of nuns’ spiritual guidance than the dispute around Jesuit instructions; at the core of this problem lay a deep-seated diffidence towards female spirituality and an unresolved disagreement about the very essence of spiritual life and the devotional methods which structured it.

### Conclusion

The histories of early modern English convents in exile reflect the bigger picture of European female monasticism. On a pragmatic level, they faced the same problems with their new settlements, they knew the same wavering between great success and uncertainty, and they were linked to the political and socio-economic circumstances of both their lands of asylum and their home land. Their spiritual lives too reflected the climate of the times. As consecrated women, nuns strove to dedicate their every waking moment to the glory of God; in order to help their souls to shed its earthly bounds and soar towards the divine, they followed the advice of their confessors and spiritual directors, who prescribed methods to turn their mind and soul away from the world and towards their heavenly goal. In many communities, nuns practised the Jesuit Spiritual Exercises, often adapted to suit their needs and abilities. Some followed the ten day course, others preferred a half-course of five days, whilst others still believed that three days were sufficient.

Adaptation was necessary, if only because nuns were not to be missionaries in hostile lands, and therefore did not have the same requirements as the Jesuit fathers. Moreover, a deep-seated gendered prejudice meant that some advisors believed women did not have the necessary resilience to remain focused over the course of the full ten days. This was the case of Father Robinson, who estimated that a simple three-day Exercise was "sufficient for [the Carmelites of Hoogstraten] to profit by".<sup>66</sup> As illustrated in the writings of Dames Catherine Gascoigne or Gertrude More, some nuns themselves endorsed the gendered prejudices of the age to argue that the Exercises were not suited to women's limited intellect and, more importantly perhaps, to the way in which their spirituality naturally expressed itself.

It was believed that women were different spiritual creatures than men; to some, this meant they were less endowed with grace and more likely to be led astray by their sensual nature. Such an approach validated the need for minutely precise spiritual direction, in which the women did not take any initiative and did not enjoy any leeway in the practice of their devotions. Yet to others, female defectiveness on the contrary made women more likely to know God, since they were unhindered with superfluous knowledge or rational thinking. In Cambrai, Augustine Baker himself argued that women's natural inferiority forced them to rely more heavily upon God. Hence, their flawed nature was in fact a spiritual gift:

Women in their verie nature are more religious then men. [...] And though we cannot enter into all the reasons of nature, yet we maie conjecture [...] that women being of a colder complexion are more fearful and have lesse confidence in themselves which urgeth them upon occasions of feare [...] to recurre unto God for help as by the verie instinct of nature [...] And thus in the verie course of nature have they some advantage over men [...]<sup>67</sup>

Thus, according to Baker, women should not follow the strenuous path of the Spiritual Exercises, which was not only ill-suited to their enclosed vocation but was in fact unnecessary. His advocating of a less interventionist form of spiritual direction resonated widely amongst the English Benedictine communities and beyond, where the nuns embraced a more contemplative, unmediated union with God. This, of course, opened the door to much controversy, as mysticism had always been regarded with great caution by the Church authorities. When women were left to experience divine love on their own, could they be trusted not to defile the experience with base sensual appetites? Mystical writings did indeed convey the spiritual lived experience in highly sensual terms. Could



women be trusted to commune with good when their nature made them so vulnerable to evil?<sup>68</sup>

The Catholic reaction to female mystics was polarized, elevating the nuns who gained clerical trust to the rank of saints and casting down those who did not as devils, lunatics or heretics. Yet the ambiguity about women visionaries was not the prerogative of the Catholic Church; it was shared also by Churches of other denominations in 17<sup>th</sup>-century England, as Phyllis Mack has shown in her study of Quaker visionary women.<sup>69</sup> It seems that those who incurred the censure of their institution were deemed guilty of loving their God in an inappropriate, embodied manner. Yet, as Simone Weil beautifully put it:

To reproach mystics with loving God by means of the faculty of sexual love is as though one were to reproach a painter with making pictures by means of colors composed of material substances. We haven't anything else with which to love.<sup>70</sup>

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Personal thanks go to Caroline Bowden (Queen Mary University, London) for getting me involved in what she simply described as "the nuns project" in 2008. I owe her the discovery of an unsuspected wealth of archival resources, and a new direction in my research.

<sup>2</sup> 1581, 23: Elis. I, c.1, Act to Retain the Queen's Majesty's Subjects in their Due Obedience; et 1585, 27: Elis. I, c.2, Act against Jesuits, Seminary Priests and such other like Disobedient Persons.

<sup>3</sup> Alexandra Walsham, *Church Papists. Catholicism, Conformity and Confessional Polemic in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Brian Magee, *The English Recusants: A Study of the Post-Reformation Catholic Survival and the Operation of the Recusancy Laws* (London: Burns and Oates, 1938); John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570–1850* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1976).

<sup>5</sup> The Spanish Provinces, or Spanish Netherlands, were regions ruled by Spain in the Low Countries, spanning most of Flanders (some parts of today's Northern France, Belgium and Luxembourg).

<sup>6</sup> Hugh Aveling, *The Handle and the Axe. The Catholic Recusants in England, from Reformation to Emancipation* (London: Blond and Briggs, 1976), 98. See also Peter Guilday, *The English Catholic Refugees on the Continent, 1558–1795* (London: Longmans and Green, 1914).

<sup>7</sup> See the project website on “Who were the Nuns? A Prosopographical study of the English Convents in exile 1600–1800.” Accessed August 23, 2011. <http://www.history.qmul.ac.uk/>.

<sup>8</sup> Claire Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe. English Convents in France and the Low Countries* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

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<sup>10</sup> See for instance Christopher Chapple, *The Jesuit Tradition in Education and Mission. A 450-Year Perspective* (Scranton: University of Scranton press, 1993) and J. J. Scarisbrick, *The Jesuits and the Catholic Reformation* (London: Historical Association, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> On the relevance of ritual, see my “Émotions religieuses et rituels catholiques: l’amour dans les couvents anglais en exil”, at <http://britaix17-18.univ-provence.fr/texte-seance3.php>.

<sup>12</sup> Baltimore Carmel, Maryland (henceforth BCM), Box 5. Steven Robinson, *A Most Profitable, and Necessary Advertisement for all Such, who Shall Make the Spiritual Exercise*, (1747), item 2.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, items 5–9, my italics. All quotations preserve the original spelling of the manuscripts; the punctuation has been modernized only where the original obscured the meaning of the text.

<sup>14</sup> Archives of the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre, Colchester. Victoria Ayray, *Considerations for the 10 Dayes Exercise*. The document is undated and not foliated.

<sup>15</sup> Archives départementales du nord, Lille (henceforth ADN). Benedictines 20H–40, MS *God is to be loved before all things*, item 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, item 10.

<sup>17</sup> BCM, Box 5. MS, *Dark Night of a Soul, or the Perfect Mortification, which Prepares the Soul to Union with God*: 2d: “The purer is the soul, the more closely is united to God; this union consists in this that God dos invest the soul, penetrates her, and so transformes her into himself, that she is as it wer deifi’d. The like more or less, as the chrystal glasse is expos’d the sun is pure and clearer, the more dos the sun enlighten it, darts its rayes, and imparts its proper qualities.”

<sup>18</sup> BCM, Box 5. John Rigolene, S.J., *Smal Treatises of Devotion set forth by Father Peter Champion of the Same Society*. “First Treatise, The Amiable Jesus or The Practise of Love towards our Lord Jesus Christ”, f.3.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, f.11.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 12: "to banish unprofitable visits, conversations, natural friendships, excessive laughter, profuse merriments, drolleries. [...] 5<sup>o</sup> to check pride, haughtiness, ambition and all is great in the estimate of the world, which in the eyes of God is meer baseness. Liberty of spirit conformes our interior to the interior of Jesus Christ".

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 16.

<sup>22</sup> Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: New American Library, 1950), 40–2.

<sup>23</sup> ADN, Benedictines 20H–28, *Directions for the retreat*, f.4: "They follow their own fancy in the choice of the books they read and the method they use in their meditations, they spend their time as humour suggests [...]."

<sup>24</sup> See also Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion Of Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Margaret Sommerville, *Sex and Subjection: Attitudes to Women in Early Modern Society* (London and New York: Arnold, 1995) and Alison Weber, "Little Women: Counter-Reformation Misogyny", in *The Counter-Reformation: The Essential Readings*, edited by David Luebke (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 143–62.

<sup>25</sup> Megan Brock's essay in this volume demonstrates quite plainly that the issues surrounding women's physicality still affect their positioning in today's Catholic Church.

<sup>26</sup> Daichman, Graciela, *Wayward Nuns in Medieval Literature* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986).

<sup>27</sup> Louis Châtellier, *L'Europe des dévôts* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987); Louis Cognet, *Post-Reformation Spirituality*, trans. by P. J. Hepburne-Scot (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1959).

<sup>28</sup> For a Protestant author's take on the discerning of spirits, see John Gee, *The Foot out of the Snare: With a detection of sundry late practices and impostures of the priests and Jesuits in England. Whereunto is added a catalogue of such bookes as in this authors knowledge have been vented within two yeeres last past* (London: Robert Milbourne, 1624). On the practice itself, see among others, Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle-Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Michel de Certeau, *La Possession de Loudun* (Paris, Julliard, 1978) and *La Fable mystique: XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris, Gallimard, 1982); Benoît Garnot, *Le Diable au couvent: Les Possédées d'Auxonne (1658–1663)* (Paris: Imago, 1995); and R. Po-Chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540–1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), especially the chapter entitled "Holy Women, Beatas, Demoniacs", 144–58.

<sup>29</sup> On the crucial roles played by Confessors, see Rudolph Bell, "Telling Her Sins: Male Confessors and Female Penitents in Catholic Reformation Italy", in *That Gentle Strength: Historical Perspectives on Women in Christianity*, edited by Lynda L. Coon, Katherine J. Haldane, and Elizabeth W. Sommer, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1990), 118–33; Jodi Bilinkoff, *Related Lives. Confessors and their Female Penitents, 1450–1750* (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 2005) and Patricia Ranft, "A Key to Counter Reformation

Women's Activism: The Confessor-Spiritual Director", *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 10 (1994): 9–23.

<sup>30</sup> BCM, Box 5. Steven Robinson, *A Most Profitable, and Necessary Advertisement*, Item 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, item 6.

<sup>32</sup> Mary Ward, "35 Resolutions Taken during the Spiritual Exercises in Saint Omer, 1610–1615", in *Mary Ward und ihre Gründung. Die Quellentexte bis 1645*, edited by Ursula Dirmeier, *Corpus Catholicorum* vols. 45–48 (Münster: Ashendorff Verlag, 2007), vol. 45, 163.

<sup>33</sup> ADN, Benedictines 20H–10, ff. 466 *et passim*.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* f. 488.

<sup>35</sup> BCM, Box 5. Steven Robinson, *A Necessary Advice—which Endeavour to Read with the Greatest Attention You Can* (1747, following the Most Profitable and Necessary Advertisement), item 4.

<sup>36</sup> ADN, Benedictines, 20H–31, *Advice to Beginners*, ff. 2–3: "when their Superior does not approve of their spirit, and maner of proceeding, they judge that they do not understand it, and that they are not spiritual [...] They are affraid of declaring their sines to him in confession openly and plainly lest they should disesteeme them".

<sup>37</sup> Mary Ward to Father John Gerard, April 1621, in Dirmeier, *Mary Ward*, vol. 45, 437.

<sup>38</sup> See Jeanne Cover, *Love—The Driving Force: Mary Ward's Spirituality: Its Significance for Moral Theology* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Marquette University Press, 1997).

<sup>39</sup> She was the niece of Margaret Gascoigne and Catherine Gascoigne, Abbess of Cambrai.

<sup>40</sup> Hanson, Joseph, ed., "The English Benedictine Nuns of the Convent of Our Blessed Lady of Good Hope in Paris, Now St. Benedict's Priory, Colwich, Staffordshire. Notes and Obituaries", *Catholic Record Society*, Misc. VII 9 (1911): 334–413, 353.

<sup>41</sup> She was Abbess in 1629–1641 and 1645–1673.

<sup>42</sup> Stanbrook Abbey, Catherine Gascoigne, *One Thing Alone I Crave*.

<sup>43</sup> Downside Abbey, Gillow, MS Baker, 4, f. 149, as cited in Walker, *Gender and Politics*, 150.

<sup>44</sup> ADN, Benedictines, 20H–37, *On the Love of God*, f.185.

<sup>45</sup> Walker, *Gender and Politics*, 148.

<sup>46</sup> St John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love*: "O sweet [...] O tender wound! [...] In Your sweet breathing, so full of glory and good things, how tenderly You fill me with Your love", stanza 4.

<sup>47</sup> Anonymous, *Sighs of a Soul who Desires to Leave the World to Go & Unite Herself to God in Heaven*, items 6 to 11.

<sup>48</sup> Bibliothèque Mazarine, MS1202 iv, Catherine Gascoigne (1724).

<sup>49</sup> ADN, Benedictines 20H–37, f. 186.

<sup>50</sup> Archives of the Monastery of the Poor Clares, Much Birch, Herefordshire. Anonymous, *Of the Crowning with Thorns*, from the sickhouse book (1732), f.6.



<sup>51</sup> The Sepulchrine Mary Dennett (1730–81), in religion Christina of the Sacred Heart, was elected Prioress from 1770 to 1781. When writing about her visions, she declared that she “an Immense deal more to say” but could not express it. Archives of the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre, Colchester. Christina Dennett, *Vision of the Sacred Heart*, 1766.

<sup>52</sup> See for instance Caroline Walker-Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption. Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone, 1992).

<sup>53</sup> See Elizabeth Rhodes, “Teresa de Jesus’s *Book* and the Reform of the Religious Man in Sixteenth Century Spain”, in *Gender, Catholicism and Spirituality. Women and the Roman Catholic Church in Britain and Europe, 1200–1900*, edited by Laurence Lux-Sterritt and Carmen Mangion (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 68–82, 69. See also the excellent work by Alison Weber, *Teresa of Ávila and the Rhetoric of Femininity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>54</sup> On Augustine Baker’s mysticism and the controversy around his spiritual direction of the Cambrai Benedictines, see for instance B. Weld-Blundell, ed., *Contemplative Prayer: Ven. Father Augustine Baker’s Teaching Thereon from “Sancta Sophia”* (London, 1907) and J. McCann and H. Connolly, eds., *Memorials of Father Augustine Baker and Other Documents Relating to the English Benedictines* (London: CRS 33, 1933). Also Claire Walker, *Gender and Politics*, 143–47.

<sup>55</sup> B. Weld-Blundell, *Contemplative Prayer*, 52.

<sup>56</sup> Bibliothèque Mazarine, MS4058, ff.143–206, *A Catalogue of Manuscript Bookes Belonging to ... the English Benedictine Nuns ... in Paris*. Also Anselm Cramer, “‘The Librarie of the Howse’. Augustine Baker’s Community and their Books”, *Analecta Carthusiana* 204 (2002): 103–10; Jan Rhodes, “Dom Augustine Baker’s Reading Lists”, *The Downside Review* 38.111 (1993): 157–73.

<sup>57</sup> B. Weld-Blundell, *Contemplative Prayer*, 54.

<sup>58</sup> Bibliothèque Mazarine, MS 1202 iv, Gascoigne, *Defense of Father Augustine Baker’s Way of Prayer* (1633), ff. 383–4.

<sup>59</sup> Gertrude More’s manuscripts were published posthumously in the form of two separate works edited by Augustine Baker himself: *The Holy Practices of a Divine Lover, or the Sainctly Ideot’s Devotions* (Paris, 1657) and *Confessiones Amantis, or Spiritual Exercises, or Ideot’s Devotions*, to which was added the *Apology* (Paris, 1658).

<sup>60</sup> Benedict Weld-Blundell, ed., *The Writings of Dame Gertrude More* (London: R. & T Washbourne, 1910), 246–47, §44–45.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*; 296, §59.

<sup>62</sup> Heather Wolfe, “Reading Bells and Loose Papers: Reading and Writing Practices of the English Benedictine Nuns of Cambrai and Paris”, in *Early Modern Women’s Manuscript Writing: Selected Papers from the Trinity/Trent Colloquium*, edited by Victoria Elizabeth Burke and Jonathan Gibson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004): 137–56.

<sup>63</sup> Respectively, Downside Abbey Archives, MS 82146/629 (1650), Colwich MS 43 (1650) and Downside Abbey MS 82145/552 (1653).

<sup>64</sup> Jenna Lay, "An English Nun's Authority: Early Modern Spiritual Controversy in the Manuscripts of Barbara Constable", in *Gender, Catholicism and Spirituality. Women and the Roman Catholic Church in Britain and Europe, 1200–1900*, edited by Laurence Lux-Sterritt and Carmen Mangion (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 99–114, 110. See also Heather Wolfe, "Dame Barbara Constable: Catholic Antiquarian, Advisor and Closet Missionary", in *Catholic Culture in Early Modern England*, edited by Ronald Corthell, Frances E. Dolan, Christopher Highley and Arthur F. Marotti (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 158–88.

<sup>65</sup> Stanbrook Abbey, Barbara Constable, *Gemitus Peccatorum or the Complaints of Sinners*, uncatalogued.

<sup>66</sup> BCM, Box 5. Steven Robinson, *A Most Profitable, and Necessary Advertisement*, Item 6.

<sup>67</sup> Stanbrook Abbey, Baker MS 2 fols 189–90, The Book D, cited in Walker, *Gender and Politics*, 148–9.

<sup>68</sup> Similar questions seem to apply to female ministry in the Anglican Church today, as Églantine Jamet-Moreau's essay indicates later on in this volume.

<sup>69</sup> Phyllis, Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>70</sup> Simone Weil, *The Notebooks of Simone Weil*, 2 vols, trans. Arthur Wills (London: Routledge and Ken Paul, 1956), 2: 472.

« Introduction », in Caroline Bowden (ed.), *English Convents in Exile, 1600-1800*, vol. 2, *Spirituality*, Londres : Pickering & Chatto, 2012, pp. xv-xxiii.

### Résumé :

Des entreprises féminines du catholicisme anglais de la période moderne, on ne connaissait jusqu'ici que peu de choses au-delà des noms et des biographies de certaines récusantes militantes, telles que Margaret Clitherow, Dorothy Lawson, Anne Line, Magdalen Montague ou les sœurs Vaux. Pourtant, des milliers d'autres femmes sont engagées pour la cause catholique et vivent leur piété avec ferveur au cours des dix-septième et dix-huitième siècles. Grâce aux travaux du projet *Who were the Nuns? A Prosopographical Study of Convents in Exile, 1600-1800*, les chercheurs savent désormais grâce à l'ouverture de couvents destinés à accueillir les Anglaises, 3.271 d'entre elles ont, durant cette période, fait le choix de l'exil pour entrer dans les ordres. Elles prennent le voile pour devenir augustiniennes, bénédictines, bridgettines, carmélites, clarisses, dominicaines, franciscaines, ou sépulchrines, choisissant dans chacun de ces cas une règle médiévale et cloîtrée plutôt que la vie active pourtant alors en vogue sur le continent, ou la mission prônée par Mary Ward. Cette édition publie pour la première fois de nombreux manuscrits appartenant à ces ordres ; son but est de documenter les divers aspects de la vie spirituelle des religieuses, depuis leur entrée au couvent jusqu'à leur mort.

10 206 mots

mots-clés : couvents ; religieuses anglaises ; spiritualité ; manuscrits ; exil

### Présentation du texte :

Pour cette introduction, je souhaitais écrire une véritable mise en contexte des manuscrits édités, annotés et commentés dans le volume. Il me paraissait crucial de remarquer que les Anglaises qui traversaient la Manche pour prendre le voile choisissait un mode de vie rigoureux, qu'elles jugeaient conforme à l'idéal contemplatif, plutôt qu'une existence laïque dans l'une des congrégations qui fleurissaient alors. Afin de représenter clairement les étapes de la vie d'une religieuse, j'ai opté pour une division en cinq parties. La première illustre les rites de passage et les cérémonies du postulat et du noviciat à la profession, et finalement la mort ; elle met en évidence les valeurs attendues d'une religieuse. La deuxième partie se penche sur la direction spirituelle, compilant des textes de conseil ayant pour but de compléter le travail des confesseurs quant aux exercices spirituels, aux retraites, à l'examen de conscience et à la prière. La troisième partie présente les textes qui expliquent les règles de la vie monacale, dévoilent la signification des mystères de la messe, ou encore révèlent le sens du calendrier liturgique. La quatrième partie offre un aperçu des textes écrits et lus dans les couvents à des fins d'édification. Ce sont des extraits d'hagiographies et des publications officielles telles que le *Martyrologue* romain, mais aussi des nécrologies de religieuses, qui jouent un rôle important dans l'édification des générations futures. Enfin la cinquième et dernière partie offre un bref regard sur la grande variété de documents que les sœurs rédigent soit pour elles-mêmes soit pour leurs communautés. Certains sont de nature prescriptive, mais d'autres donnent accès à leur expérience vécue de la spiritualité. Ils révèlent des détails précieux de la face cachée de la vie conventuelle.

ENGLISH CONVENTS IN EXILE, 1600-1800

GENERAL EDITOR  
Caroline Bowden

Volume 2  
Spirituality

*Edited by*  
Laurence Lux-Sterritt



PICKERING & CHATTO  
2012

*Published by Pickering & Chatto (Publishers) Limited  
21 Bloomsbury Way, London WC1A 2TH  
2252 Ridge Road, Brookfield, Vermont 05036-9704, USA  
www.pickeringchatto.com*

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relevant copyright holders and to clear any relevant copyright issues.  
Any omissions that come to their attention will be remedied in future editions.

BRITISH LIBRARY CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION DATA

English convents in exile, 1600–1800. Part 1.

1. Nuns' writings, English – Europe. 2. Nuns' writings, English – America.  
3. Monastic and religious life of women – Europe – History – 17th century –  
Sources. 4. Monastic and religious life of women – Europe – History – 18th  
century – Sources. 5. Monastic and religious life of women – America – History  
– 17th century – Sources. 6. Monastic and religious life of women – America  
– History – 18th century – Sources. 7. Nuns – Intellectual life – 17th century –  
Sources. 8. Nuns – Intellectual life – 18th century – Sources. 9. Nuns as authors  
– History – 17th century. 10. Nuns as authors – History – 18th century.  
I. Lux-Sterritt, Laurence. II. Hallett, Nicky. III. Bowden, Caroline Mary Kynaston.  
271.9'004'09031-dc23

ISBN-13: 9781848932142



This publication is printed on acid-free paper that conforms to the American  
National Standard for the Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials.

*Typeset by Pickering & Chatto (Publishers) Limited  
Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by the MPG Books Group*

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## INTRODUCTION

### The Catholic Reformation and Active Vocations

The sixteenth century was a time of far-reaching redefinition for the Catholic Church. Faced with the increasing success of Protestant endeavours across Europe, and in response to shifts and evolutions within its own ranks, it undertook a slow but necessary Reformation which changed the face of Catholic practice. In an effort to promote interaction with the people, amongst whom it sent teachers and spiritual guides, the missionary Society of Jesus had taken Catholic devotion beyond the walls of the monasteries and into the homes of the lay people. Its founder, Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556), like the friars before him, pursued the ideal of the 'mixed' life, a compromise between contemplation and action, weighted in favour of the latter.<sup>1</sup> The Jesuit formula claimed to imitate the life of Christ himself and achieve perfection through evangelization. Since monastic enclosure was not compatible with the Jesuit brief, the Society's Constitutions offered a *via media* which stressed activism, and which was ratified by Pope Paul III's in his 1540 Bull *Regimini Militantis Ecclesiae*. Thus, whilst it eluded traditional monastic definitions, the Society responded to the practical needs of the Catholic Reformation and was therefore approved by the papal authorities.

The new direction taken by the Church was officialized in the decrees of the reforming Council of Trent (1545–63), which experienced difficulties in harmonizing its line of action across the boundaries of gender. Whilst it allowed apostolic vocations for male Orders, it declared that religious women could only be enclosed. When considering female religious life in 1563, the Council of Trent endorsed Boniface VIII's Bull *Periculoso* (1298) regarding enclosure.<sup>2</sup> Session 25 of the Council ordered bishops to enforce enclosure upon all the nunneries under their jurisdiction.<sup>3</sup> Later, Pius V extended female enclosure even further, in two constitutions applying to women in the third orders who lived together in communities under solemn vows. *Circa Pastoralis* (1566) and *Lubricum Vitae Genitus* (1568) indicate that, by the end of the sixteenth cen-

tury, the clerical body was firmly convinced that the cloister was a necessary and essential part of female religious life.

Yet, after the turmoil of the religious wars which tore France asunder between 1562 and 1598, such policies became hard to apply in a seventeenth century which heralded a new era of Catholic piety. In Paris, but also in smaller provincial towns, a new culture of salons, devout circles and elementary schools flourished, as the public manifestations of this spiritual revival.<sup>4</sup> In the context of religious zeal of the so-called *siècle des saints*, women played a central role in the efflorescence of new devout endeavours. Their involvement was such that it led to what Elizabeth Rapley called a 'feminization of the Church'.<sup>5</sup> This spirit of devotion, embracing the movement of re-Catholicization of the masses spearheaded by the Society of Jesus, inspired women who felt a vocation to renew the bonds between the Catholic Church and the common people, in the world. Thus were founded secular companies of devout (unenclosed) ladies who worked to catechize children, bring relief to the poor and solace to those in hospitals and prisons.

The rekindling of female devotion manifested itself through the development of charitable networks and devout salons, following the example of renowned *Parisiennes* such as Madame Acarie (1566-1618) or Madame de Sainte Beuve (1562-1630).<sup>6</sup> At that time, female lay involvement in the French Catholic Reformation became even more ardent than its male counterpart and, in the first decades of the century, women's opportunities reached far beyond their traditional roles both in the Church and in society at large.<sup>7</sup> This stirring new breath of devotion owed much to the influence of François de Sales (1567-1622). The bishop of Geneva, faced directly with Calvinism, proposed in his 1608 *Introduction à la Vie dévote* to involve believers 'in towns, in households, at court' and generally 'in the world' in a truly devout life.<sup>8</sup> He exhorted the mystically-minded not to shrink from the concrete world but, on the contrary, to anchor their existence (including secular concerns) in spirituality. His writings encapsulated the spirit of the age, an era in which public zeal for a devout life was manifest in the multiplication of new religious congregations working daily in the world to strengthen the links between secular and religious.

In France, male companies such as César de Bus's Fathers of the Christian Doctrine (1598), Pierre de Bérulle's Oratory (1611) or Vincent de Paul's Fathers of the Mission (1625) became extraordinarily successful. On the other hand, new female endeavours such as the Congrégation de Notre-Dame (1597), François de Sales's Visitation (1610-16) or the Filles de la Charité (1634) flourished alongside their male counterparts and shared the same apostolic essence. Their main vocation was not the observance of a monastic way of life but rather an evangelical brief which implied constant interaction with others. They taught,

visited hospitals and prisons, helped the poor and generally aimed to restore the damaged links between the people and the Catholic Church.

In the context of the development of active female companies, Mary Ward's Institute provided a unique and exceptional case. Mary Ward (1585–1645) and her English Ladies partook in the evangelical drive of the Counter-Reformation, undertaking the secular and religious instruction of girls on a systematic basis. They strove to strengthen the faith in women and, through the training of young girls, to shape the piety of the wives and mothers of future generations. The English Institute followed the model of the Society of Jesus, which was not an approved Rule for women. Although its members were not nuns, they viewed themselves as religious. Within a few years, houses were opened across the Continent: after St Omer (1609) came Liège (1616), followed by Cologne and Trier (1620–1), Rome (1622), Naples and Perugia (1623), Munich and Vienna (1627) and finally Bratislava and Prague (1628). Mary Ward and her followers were therefore female missionaries who, despite their infringement of Tridentine Decrees, viewed themselves as members of the regular clergy, in the same way as their Jesuit exemplars.

The boldness of Mary Ward's mission led to the official condemnation of her work. After years of controversy, the foundress was condemned by Urban VIII in 1631; the Pope, in his Bull *Pastoralis Romani Pontificis*, denounced her as a heretic and ordered the English Ladies to disband, thereby signalling the end of the first English Institute – but by no means the end of its spirit and charism, which still endures today. Mary Ward's Ignatian project was the only one of its kind, and its history has been the object of much research and excellent publications.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, all known documents relating to the Institute have recently been published and beautifully edited,<sup>10</sup> thereby giving researchers access to the whole spectrum of documentation relating to Mary Ward's endeavour. For that reason, the editors of this series have chosen not to include Ward's English Ladies in our corpus on English convents in exile. Yet our volumes partake of the same movement towards an easier access to English Catholic sources, and are to be seen as a complement to the publications which already exist.<sup>11</sup> The aim of this volume is to unveil some of the rich and varied sources which document the spiritual life experienced in enclosed English convents.

### A Conventual Revival

In her study of active companies, Elizabeth Rapley noted that 'the Catholic Reformation has been portrayed as a watershed in religious life, the turning away from the old medieval monastic ideal of flight from the world to a new ideal of involvement and service in the world.'<sup>12</sup> Yet in the case of English Catholics, it seems that this pattern does not hold. The *Who Were the Nuns?* project has

indeed revealed that conventual life continued to have a strong appeal for recusant families, who often chose religious exile for those of their daughters who showed such an inclination. In doing so, they partook of the momentous revival which was not limited to apostolic endeavours but also rekindled more traditional forms of piety. As monasticism attracted increasing numbers of men and women, the sheer volume of entrants caused existing houses soon to reach their full capacity, and new foundations opened at a great rate across France and Flanders. Amongst these new convents were twenty-five English houses which (with the notable exception of the Bridgettines who finally settled in Lisbon) flourished in the northern regions of France and across Flanders.<sup>13</sup> It is noticeable that, when English women entered the religious life on the Continent, they usually chose some of the long-established and most respected Orders. They became Augustinians, Benedictines, Bridgettines, Carmelites, Dominicans, Franciscans, Poor Clares or Sepulchrines, rather than members of newer enclosed Orders such as that of the Ursulines.<sup>14</sup> Why did they do so? Although we cannot presume to have an answer to this question, it is possible to surmise that the national conditions of English Catholicism may have influenced such choices. As elsewhere, much may have depended upon the perceived respectability and the good reputation of the establishments. But the particular circumstances of the English mission may also be a factor. They demanded of women a more radical engagement than the usual roles of catechizers of families and providers of neighbourly charity. Recusant women were harbourers and procurers of priests; they organized Catholic networks and catechized beyond their households. They converted friends and neighbours. Some even baptized newborns and, in the face of peril and emergency, undertook roles which blurred the boundaries between laity and clergy.<sup>15</sup> Lisa McClain has pointed out that both recusant men and women 'pushed the limits of orthodoxy, all the while remaining within the rather flexible bounds of the multi-faceted interaction between the institution of the Roman Church and the needs of believers'.<sup>16</sup> As expediency replaced customary gendered specialization, women were allowed to play roles which would, in ordinary circumstances, have incurred the censure of the clergy. It is perhaps partly because activism was the daily lot of recusants in England that some women longed to embrace a life of contemplation, a path to spiritual perfection which was denied them if they remained in their native country.

In fact, many of the recusants who chose to stay in England modelled their household routines on the regularity of a religious Order. The imitation of the cloister was a widespread practice amongst them. In her autobiographical notes, Mary Ward herself recorded how she had felt deeply impressed by her grandmother, Ursula Wright, who had spent fourteen years in prison for refusing to renounce her faith. During her stay with her at Ploughland, near Holderness, East Yorkshire, she had seen how the old lady wove acts of asceticism into the

fabric of her life, constantly alternating monastic observances with her daily chores. A little later, between 1600 and 1606, she was introduced to the quasi-monastic lifestyle observed by Lady Grace and Sir Ralf Babthorpe at Osgodby.<sup>17</sup> In an attempt to imitate the regularity of conventual offices, the Babthorpes observed a daily *horarium*.<sup>18</sup> On working days, the priest said two morning Masses, one for the servants at six o'clock and the other at eight o'clock for those who did not attend the first. Every afternoon, at four o'clock, he said Vespers and Compline for the gentry members of the household. On Sundays and holy days, the members of the household heard Mass and sermons and the children were later taught catechism. Members of the Babthorpe family meditated and prayed daily, followed the *Spiritual Exercises* and retired to bed at nine o'clock after their evening Litanies. Finally, when she became a widow, Lady Grace<sup>19</sup> embraced the contemplative life and became an Augustinian canoness at Louvain.

For many women like Grace Babthorpe, conventual life might have come to represent an ideal of spiritual perfection, a far-distant dream to which they aspired from a young age. The texts selected in the first section of this volume show that the entrance into religion was a momentous event, which was prepared with the utmost care, and celebrated with great solemnity. As Caroline Bowden underlines in her General Introduction (Volume 1, pp. xi–xxviii),<sup>20</sup> during the time between postulancy and profession, candidates were interviewed twice by representatives of their local bishops. Their entrance into the novitiate and, later, their profession were subject to a vote taken by the nuns in chapter. The requirements were stringent, and the expectations were high: candidates and novices were given to read texts which detailed the necessary qualities in a good nun, and prescribed behavioural means to achieve those virtues. Becoming a nun was not to be undertaken lightly, since profession and the solemn vows it entailed were considered binding for life. Much was at stake, for the candidate – and her family – as well as for the community that welcomed her in its midst.

Indeed, from the moment she entered the novitiate, a nun became entirely guided by intricate sets of rules and regulations which covered every moment of the day and night, and every aspect of her life. As well as obeying the Rule of her Order, which by definition was prescriptive and served to organize communal life around a shared set of values and practices, her daily routine was regulated by the *horarium* defined in the Constitutions of her community. When awakening, dressing, eating, working, praying, going to bed, even during recreation, each activity was undertaken in an orderly manner, following the prescriptions provided in the Constitutions. Those who occupied a particular office (such as mistress of the novices, or chantress) also had to follow the rules attributed to their duties. Moreover, spiritual activities were controlled through a framework of texts on how to pray, how to prepare for the examination of conscience, how to make a good retreat, how to undertake the spiritual exercises, how to behave

during the Divine Office, how to approach the Holy Sacraments, how to seek divine union, how to imitate Christ, how to do penance, or how to contemplate death. In short, women collected and read a broad range of manuscripts for their individual and corporate instruction, in their effort to achieve the spiritual ideal of the perfect contemplative nun.

The work undertaken by the *Who Were the Nuns?* project has brought to light an immense wealth of material still extant in archives in England, on the Continent, and in the United States. A considerable proportion of all these manuscripts is of a spiritual nature; such is the abundance of these sources that it would be possible to take the present endeavour of publication much further and to edit several more books of primary sources for each Order. Yet to remain within the parameters allocated to a single volume in this publication, the process of selection had to be somewhat drastic. The selection of texts aimed to illustrate the various aspects of nuns' spiritual lives in English convents, from the moment they entered the novitiate until their death. The volume is divided into five sections relating to the different types of texts which accompanied a religious woman through her daily life.

Part I illustrates the stages of a nun's life, from postulancy, to noviceship, to profession, and finally death. The scripts for the clothing ceremonies give vivid insight into the rites of passage which defined religious life. These ceremonies were important moments for all concerned, and as the documents show, every detail was predetermined, following a precise and highly symbolic rite; nothing was left to chance. The other texts in this section, directing nuns on how to choose new members and setting demanding criteria, highlight the very essence or spirit of nunship.

Part II presents a selection of texts for the nuns' spiritual guidance and individual instruction; they offer advice on the many spiritual duties of a nun, and were meant to complement the work of the confessors and spiritual directors. They told the women how to perform their personal spirituality, and gave them methods for spiritual exercises, retreats, examination of conscience and prayer in its many forms. Although some of these texts were written by abbesses and prioresses, the great majority were penned by the communities' confessors, chaplains, spiritual directors, or even the male superiors of the Order. In this matter, the influence of Jesuit spirituality was immense, since most of the convents represented here took Jesuits as confessors; their instructions for the *Spiritual Exercises* and their spiritual treatises, taken together, present a clear view of Jesuit spirituality as it was taught and practised by English nuns.

Part III complements the previous section, presenting the texts which helped nuns in their communal spiritual duties. Such texts aim to ensure that nuns understood the nature of the spiritual and institutional framework around which their lives revolved. They explained the Rules they obeyed, and unveiled

the significance of the mysteries of the Mass; they revealed the meaning of the liturgical calendar, and of the specific rites of various Offices. In short, they ensured the correct understanding and performance of corporate spiritual life.

Part IV offers an insight into the texts read – and written – in convents for the purposes of edification. These are excerpts from hagiographies and official printed texts such as the Roman martyrology, but also from manuscripts which relate more directly to the convents themselves, as in the instance of nuns' obituaries, which played an important part in the edification of future generations.

Finally, Part V presents texts which were not only read and used by nuns but also authored by them. This section offers a brief look into the wide variety of documents which nuns wrote – in verse and in prose – either for themselves, or for their communities. Like clerical papers, they can be of a prescriptive nature. But often, through their personal notes, nuns expressed their lived experience of spirituality. These papers are immensely precious because they reveal something of the hidden side of conventual life. Indeed, if historians know much about prescriptions and rules, they know little about how they were received and practised, and about their impact upon the women themselves. Although most are of a devotional, sometimes even mystical nature, some papers do exist to show that nuns were no strangers to controversy, as was the case for the Benedictines of Cambrai and Paris.<sup>21</sup>

#### Notes

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2. See E. M. Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women: Periculoso and its Commentators, 1298–1545* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1997).
3. 3–4 December 1563, Decree on regulars and nuns, ch. 5, in N. Tanner (ed.) *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (London, 1990), vol. 2, pp. 777–8.
4. See amongst others H. Brémond, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France depuis la fin des guerres de religion jusqu'à nos jours*, 11 vols (Paris: Armand Colin, 1971); P. Chaunu, *L'Église, culture et société: essai sur réforme et contre-réforme* (Paris: SEDES, 1984); F. Le Brun (ed.), *Histoire des catholiques en France du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle à nos jours* (Toulouse: Privat, 1980); and R. Taveneaux, *Le Catholicisme dans la France classique, 1610–1717*, 2 vols (Paris: SEDES, 1980), vol. 1, pp. 22–8.
5. E. Rapley, *The Dévotes: Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France* (Montreal: Queen's University Press, 1990), pp. 193–6.
6. F. E. Weaver, 'Cloister and Salon in Seventeenth-Century Paris: Introduction to a Study in Women's History', in R. M. Gross (ed.), *Beyond Androcentrism. New Essays on Women and Religion* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977).



7. L. Châtelier, *L'Europe des dévots* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987); H. O. Evencnett, *The Spirit of the Counter-Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968) and Rapley, *The Dévotes*. Also M. C. Gueudré, 'La Femme et la vie spirituelle', *Dix-Septième Siècle*, 62 (1964), pp. 47–77, and C. McCarthy, 'Ignatian Charism in Women's Congregation', *Way*, supplement 20 (1973), pp. 10–18.
8. F. de Sales, *Introduction à la vie dévote* (1609; Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p. 37.
9. M. C. E. Chambers, *The Life of Mary Ward, 1585–1645*, 2 vols (London: Burns & Oates, 1882–5); M. Oliver, *Mary Ward 1585–1645. 'That Incomparable Woman'* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1960); A. Hamilton, *Mind and Maxims of Mary Ward* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1959); J. Grisar, *Die ersten Anklagen in Rom gegen das Institut Maria Ward 1622. Historiae Pontificae*, 22 (Rome: Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1959) and *Maria Ward's Institut vor Romischen Kongregationen (1616–1630), Miscellanea Historiae Pontificiae*, 27 (Rome: Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1966); M. Littlehales, *Mary Ward (1585–1645). A Woman for All Seasons: Foundress of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1974) and *Mary Ward, Pilgrim and Mystic* (London: Burns & Oates, 1998); A. Clarke (ed.) *The Heart and Mind of Mary Ward* (Wheatampsted: Anthony Clarke, 1985); M. E. Orchard (ed.), *Till God Will: Mary Ward through her Writings* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985); H. Peters, *Mary Ward: A World in Contemplation*, trans. H. Butterworth (Leominster: Gracewing Books, 1994); J. Cover, *Love – The Driving Force: Mary Ward's spirituality: Its Significance for Moral Theology* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1997); and I. Wetter, *Mary Ward. Under the Shadow of the Inquisition* (Oxford: Way Books, 2006).
10. U. Dirmeier (ed.), *Mary Ward und ihre Gründung: Die Quellentexte bis 1645*, 4 vols (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2007), and C. Kenworthy-Browne (ed.), *Mary Ward, 1585–1645: A Brief Relation with Autobiographical Fragments and a Selection of Letters* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008).
11. For instance, A. Hamilton (ed.), *The Chronicle of the English Augustinian Canonesses of the Lateran, at St Monica's in Louvain, 1548 to 1625* (Edinburgh: Sands, 1904). See also the primary sources published by the Catholic Record Society: M. J. Rumsey (ed.), 'Abbess Neville's Annals of Five Communities of English Benedictine Nuns in Flanders 1598–1687', Catholic Record Society, misc. V, vol. 6 (1909), pp. 1–72; J. Gillow and R. Trappes-Lomax (eds), 'The Professions and Obituary', in *The Diary of the 'Blue Nuns'*, Catholic Record Society, vol. 8 (1910), pp. 236–74; Reverend Mother Prioress of Colwich and J. S. Hansom (eds), 'The English Benedictines of the Convent of our Blessed Lady of Good Hope in Paris, now St. Benedict's Priory, Colwich, Staffordshire', Catholic Record Society, misc. VII, vol. 9 (1911), pp. 334–413; The Right Reverend Lady Cecilia Heywood, Abbess of Stanbrook and J. Gillow (eds), 'Records of the English Benedictine Nuns at Cambrai 1620–1793', Catholic Record Society, misc. VIII, vol. 13 (1913), pp. 20–81; The Lady Abbess of East Bergholt and J. S. Hansom (eds), 'Registers of the English Benedictine Nuns, Brussels ... 1598–1856', Catholic Record Society, misc. IX, vol. 14 (1914), pp. 174–99; W. M. Hunnybun and J. Gillow (eds), 'Registers of the English Poor Clares at Gravelines, including those who Founded Filiations at Aire, Dunkirk and Rouen, 1608–1837', Catholic Record Society, misc. IX, vol. 14 (1914), pp. 31–164; Mother Prioress of New Hall and R. Trappes-Lomax (eds), 'Records of the English Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre at Liège CRSS', Catholic Record Society, misc. X (1915), pp. 2–31; The Lady Abbess of Teignmouth and the Archivist (eds), 'Registers of the English Benedictine Nuns of Pontoise OSB, etc.', Catholic Record Society, misc.

X, vol. 17 (1915), pp. 248–326; The Lady Abbess and Community (eds), 'Obituary Notices of the Nuns of the English Benedictine Abbey of Ghent in Flanders 1627–1811', Catholic Record Society, misc. XI, vol. 19 (1917), pp. 1–92; R. Trappes-Lomax (ed.), The English Franciscan Nuns (Brussels, Nieupoort, Bruges, Winchester, and Taunton) 1619–1821, and the Friars Minor of the same Province 1618–1761', Catholic Record Society, Franciscana, vol. 24 (1923), pp. 177–254 and 'The Prioress and community of Carisbrooke, Isle of Wight (eds), 'Records of the Nuns of the Second Order', Catholic Record Society, Dominicana, vol. 25 (1925), pp. 176–241.

Rapley, 'Her Body the Enemy: Self-Mortification in Seventeenth-Century Convents', *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History*, 21 (1994), p. 26.

See C. Bowden's General Introduction (Volume 1, pp. xi–xxviii).

When perusing the archives of French Ursulines, the incidence of English entries appears extremely rare. One instance is Marie Marguerite de Gordon, in religion Ursule de la Misericorde, who entered the Amiens community. See *Lettres de décès et éloges funèbres des Religieuses Ursulines de France*, tome II, Ms 4991 (R88733). Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal, Paris, p. 273 – Amiens, 18 December 1692.

Connelly, *Women of the Catholic Resistance: In England 1540–1680* (Durham 1997); Peters, *Women, Gender and Religion in Late Medieval and Reformation England* (Durham: Pentland Press, 1997); M. Rowlands, 'Recusant Women 1560–1640', in M. Rowlands (ed.) *Women in English Society 1500–1800* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 149–180; C. Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe: English Convents in France and the Low Countries* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); R. Warnicke, *Women of the English Renaissance and Reformation* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983); D. Willen, 'Women and Religion in Early Modern England', in S. Marshall (ed.) *Women and the Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp. 140–66.

McClain, *Lest we be Damned. Practical Innovation and Lived Experience among Catholics in Protestant England, 1559–1642* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), p. 181.

See also her 'Without Church, Cathedral or Shrine: The Search for Religious Space among Catholics in England, 1559–1625', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 33:2 (2020), pp. 181–99.

Peters, *Mary Ward*, pp. 44–54.

Hamilton, *The Chronicle of the English Augustinian Canonesses*, p. 180. See also Connelly, *Women of the Catholic Resistance*, pp. 191–3.

Grace Babthorpe (1621–35), LA 013.

See Bowden, General Introduction (Volume 1, p. xviii)

On the Paris Benedictines and the Baker controversy, see Dom J. McCann and Dom P. Connelly O. S. B. (eds), 'Memorials of Fr Augustine Baker (1575–1641) and other Records Relating to the English Benedictines', Catholic Record Society, vol. 33 (1933).

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## PART V: NUNS' WRITINGS

The documents presented so far demonstrate the extent to which reading was one of the most central activities of conventual life, together with prayer and work; in its various forms – privately in cells and the infirmary, or communally in the choir, the refectory or the workhouse – it occupied a considerable part of the day. The previous sections give samples of the wide variety of reading undertaken by early modern English nuns. Part II presented documents intended for the nuns' spiritual guidance, ranging from loose papers to lengthy treatises written for that purpose. They could be of an explanatory nature, or take the form of practical guides. Thus, writings expounding the virtues of a good nun formed the basis of a religious woman's instruction. Then, methods to achieve this ideal were many, as were methods for taking the spiritual exercises and documents delivering advice upon contemplation, prayer or retreats. Part III showed that nuns also read liturgical papers. They learnt from didactic documents elucidating the liturgical calendar, or explaining the rituals and mysteries of the Mass. Being thus instructed, they were better able to become spiritually involved in the performance of their duties during the Divine Office. Finally, a proportion of their reading was to be edifying and inspirational, to stir their spirits towards the imitation of Christ or the emulation of Christian exemplars. As indicated by the excerpts in Part IV, hagiography and martyrology played an important part in the fashioning of a nun's spiritual mindscape, since they set the highest of standards, towards which every religious woman was supposed to strive.

The sum of the nuns' readings therefore left a deep imprint upon their lived experience in the convent. In the process of learning, readers passed their lessons through their own emotional, spiritual and intellectual filters and, in some cases, they left testimonials of the intricate process of transformation during which they appropriated the precepts which were imposed upon them.<sup>1</sup> The fifth and last part of this volume therefore presents documents of a rather rare and precious kind: writings authored by nuns themselves. The very activity of writing was problematic in early modern convents, since it appeared to contradict the traditional virtue of humility and the precept of silence. Moreover, the misogyny of the age posited that women's intellects were not suited to the activity of writ-

ing, which would breed in them the sin of pride. Yet despite these reservations, the English convents produced a non-negligible amount of nun-authored manuscripts. Besides the writings which were held acceptable for women religious, such as transcriptions, translations or chronicles (or 'histories') of their houses, they produced letters, poetry, contemplations and even polemic texts.<sup>2</sup>

The attribution of those documents is highly delicate. Most of them were not initially intended to be used by the community but were written privately, on loose papers, as nuns jotted down their thoughts, intentions and the fruits of their contemplation. These devotional notes are often incomplete, non-sequential and are almost never dated or signed.<sup>3</sup> It was upon the nun's death that her notes could lose their private nature and be compiled into a collection for communal use. These could remain anonymous, but some were attributed to their author. Such documents varied greatly in nature; many of them mimic or mirror what the nuns read. Some provide prescriptive advice to prepare for significant stages of a nun's life or to undertake spiritual exercises, in documents which resemble those written by male clerics. This section provides two instances of such literature used by the Sepulchrines of Liège, one for the renewal of the holy vows ('How to make or renew our vows with spirit & affection' (pp. 389–94), and the other to prepare for the Ignatian *Exercises* ('An other preparation to the exercise. Where be the days of thy life' (pp. 375–82)). Such documents tell posterity of the manner in which nuns, as readers, digested and appropriated the prescriptive material which they read, and how they expressed their own, female versions of those papers.

Conventual authors also wrote on the subject of meditation, which was at the centre of their contemplative lives. Thus, Victoria Aray, a Sepulchrine at Liège, wrote 'A Most Devout and Efficacious Prayer to our Blessed Redeemer in the honour of his Bitter Passion' (pp. 383–7). Interestingly, it is obvious that she intended this piece as a guide for communal practice rather than a purely private document. Her work is reminiscent of traditional clerical pieces such as 'Christ having suffer'd in his flesh' (pp. 203–16, above). The Passion of Christ was the object of much of the nuns' writing, since it was the focal point of their strife to imitate their Saviour. Another example is provided below with a Poor Clare document containing various meditations on Christ's sufferings. The same principle applies to the Eucharist, whose centrality in the nuns' lives is mirrored in their writings. The documents reproduced here show examples of guidance on the devotion to the Holy Sacraments, taken from Poor Clare manuscripts from Rouen. 'Of the ardour & zeal which we ought to have to approach the holy mysteries' (pp. 409–14) and 'The chief points of our holy ceremonys in which the Sisters must daily renew them selves' (pp. 401–8) both present the Eucharist as a central devotion. They urge the nuns to take frequent communion and help them to prepare their souls each time through prayers and contemplation.

Cecily Cornwallis's 'Eight Meditations for the Octave of the Most Blessed Sacrament' (pp. 415–22) served a similar function.

Hence, some of the nuns' own literary production remained advisory or even prescriptive, in an echo to clerical regulatory papers. Yet some of these pieces were meant to enable religious women to achieve a state of contemplation such that they would no longer need the guidance of documents and could relinquish themselves to God's direct inspiration at work within them. For instance, litanies facilitated a sort of spiritual trance through the automatism of repetition, as can be seen 'The Litany of the Holy Name off Jesus' (pp. 423–6) and 'The Litanies of the Blessed Virgin Marye' (pp. 427–8) used by the Benedictines. When reading successfully fulfilled its purpose and enabled nuns to access the highest levels of contemplation, it often left them with the pressing need to record their experiences. Thus, much conventual literature describes the highly intimate episodes experienced by their authors; it tells of mystical union and divine love, of amorous longing, passionate embraces and unequalled bliss. The Sepulchrine Christina Dennett evoked her happiness in 'An Intellectual Vision Relating to the Sacred Heart of Jesus' (pp. 429–36), where she described a vision in which Jesus tenderly uncovered his heart to her, and trusted her to promote the festival in honour of his Sacred Heart. Dennett tells of her brimming emotions in a text which, like so many mystical accounts, relies upon the language of love. The anonymous Poor Clares document entitled 'The sighs of a soul who desires to leave the world to go & unite herself to God in Heaven' (pp. 437–44) goes even further in this direction.

Whether in verse or prose, the women presented themselves as lovers, pining for the object of their passion. They evoked their yearning to meet their bridegroom in texts which abound with metaphors of all-consuming love and longing. These writings, focused upon the moment of impending union with God, provide an interesting contrast to other devotional texts; there, the lexical field changes, leaving aside the usual register of reserve to reclaim a more passionate vocabulary. Benedictine documents from Cambrai such as 'I give my selfe to thee my God with my whole hart & soule' (p. 445) or 'O my God I love thee with all my heart above all things' (pp. 447–8) show that although devotional writings usually express contempt for emotions as the expressions of bodily cravings, desire and passion appear rehabilitated in the context of mystical love. This was made possible by the shift operated in the very experience of divine union, during which all was bathed in God's glory and therefore made holy and pure.

However, not all of the nuns' writings were either of a prescriptive or of a mystical nature, and quite a proportion of their production fell somewhere between those two extremes. Such was the case of some of the poetry written by Anne Throckmorton, an Augustinian from the Paris community. Her poems reflect

the broad variety of her concerns. They document her devotions, exemplified here with the poem 'For St Theresa' (p. 457), but also give details of events which marked the life of the convent, such as her celebration of the Mother Superior's patronizing of a statue of St Augustine (see 'Upon St Austin's Statue put up by reverend Mother Tildesley' (p. 458)). Some interpersonal pieces provide insight into her relationships with other nuns; 'On the yearly day of a Profession' (pp. 451–2), 'For a Profession of a friend' (pp. 453–4) and 'Upon the clothing of a friend' (p. 455) testify to the deep feelings attached to the ceremonies which marked the entrance of a young woman into religion. Although we hardly have any records of the emotions experienced by religious women upon the occasion of their own clothing, for instance, these short pieces provide a rare insight into how others felt about the clothing or profession of one of their friends. Anne Throckmorton also wrote more personal poetry, among which her moving condolences and support 'To a friend upon the death of her sister' (p. 456) and a poignant piece upon her sister's travel to England, which testifies to her genuine concern for her sibling's physical and spiritual safety ('When my sister Betty went to England' (pp. 459–60)).

Finally, some nuns wrote works which, though prefaced with the usual professions of humility, meekness and ignorance, were of a much more polemic nature. In this section, it would be impossible to bypass the writings produced by the Cambrai Benedictines in the aftermath of the controversy caused by the spiritual direction of Augustine Baker. Baker (1575–1641) took his position with the Cambrai Benedictines in 1624, barely six months after the foundation of the convent.<sup>4</sup> He was sent by the General Chapter of the English Benedictine Congregation in response to the nuns' request for spiritual direction. The community, it appears, was unhappy with the Jesuit direction it had received so far. Although most communities could not envisage their journey to the divine without the methodological landmarks provided in the spiritual exercises, experiences varied and, for Cambrai, such guidance proved too restrictive. Baker himself doubted the suitability of Jesuit directors for contemplative nuns and argued that methods fitted for missionary and active religious were not ideal for the direction of convents.<sup>5</sup> Instead of following a specific list of prescriptions to meditate upon, he encouraged nuns to ponder upon the texts of late medieval mystics. He extolled contemplative prayer, which led to mystical union with God without the need for predefined methods of the Ignatian type. In order to guide the Benedictine nuns along this path, he wrote for them an impressive corpus of over sixty manuscript treatises, in which he intertwined his own words with those of reputed mystics such as Tauler, Fitch, Blosius, St John of the Cross or even women such as Julian of Norwich or Teresa of Ávila. When the new chaplain Father Francis Hull arrived at Cambrai in 1629, this became a matter of controversy and the practices of the Cambrai nuns fell under investigation.

Although Baker was neither a Jansenist nor a Quietist,<sup>6</sup> his personal brand of piety was the object of much suspicion.

This attack upon Baker's teachings prompted some nuns to undertake a task they would not normally envisage: they wrote about spirituality and about lived religious experience in their own names, voicing their personal opinions on the matter. Dame Catherine Gascoigne wrote to defend a spiritual path which was less strictly regulated than that prescribed by the Ignatian method. She advocated a type of mystical contemplation inspired by holy exemplars such as Julian of Norwich (1342–1416), whose *Showings of Love* she partially transcribed. In her 1633 poem which starts 'My prayer I know not how to express' (pp. 461–6), Gascoigne explained her spiritual practices to the Superiors of the English Benedictine Congregation, who led the enquiry against Baker. In this, and others of her writings, she promoted contemplative passivity to allow the soul to be penetrated by God. She expressed her confidence in God's grace as a much surer path towards spiritual union than any exercises undertaken through the retreatant's own will. At that time, her writings were supported by those of Dame Gertrude More (1606–33), who also wrote a vehement defence both of Baker's spiritual teachings and of the right of nuns to read and learn from the devotional writings of holy exemplars (see her 'Apology for Herself and her Spiritual Guide' (pp. 467–76)).

The intensity of the Baker controversy left the community of Cambrai in a state of turmoil, which came over it in waves over the next decades. Individualities had been encouraged to express themselves, in the convent and beyond. The last documents of this section are excerpts from 'Some speeches made in chapter' (pp. 477–89), made by Mother Christina Brent during her time as Superior; they testify to the tensions and disorder which affected the community, opposing one faction to another in an atmosphere which was far from the spiritual harmony and sisterly benevolence which supposedly united a religious community. In such troubled times, the Superior found strong support of her authority in the Constitutions, and she sought to bring an end to dissention by the strict application of the moral framework provided by the Benedictine Rule, in which individuals all obeyed the same precepts and were ordered to forget themselves and live to serve their Order and God only.

#### Notes

1. See H. Wolfe, 'Reading Bells and Loose Papers: Reading and Writing Practices of the English Benedictine Nuns of Cambrai and Paris', in V. E. Burke and J. Gibson (eds), *Early Modern Women's Manuscript Writing: Selected Papers from the Trinity/Trent Colloquium* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 137–56.
2. See I. Grundy, 'Women's History? Writings by English Nuns', in I. Grundy and S. Wiseman (eds), *Women, Writing, History, 1640–1740* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1992), pp. 126–38.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
4. On Augustine Baker's mysticism and the controversy around his spiritual direction of the Cambrai Benedictines, see for instance B. Weld-Blundell (ed.), *Contemplative Prayer: Ven. Father Augustine Baker's Teaching Thereon from "Sancta Sophia"* (London, 1907), and J. McCann and H. Connolly (eds), *Memorials of Father Augustine Baker and Other Documents Relating to the English Benedictines*, Catholic Record Society, vol. 33 (1933). Also C. Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe. English Convents in France and the Low Countries* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 143–7.
5. Weld-Blundell (ed.), *Contemplative Prayer*, p. 52.
6. Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638) was bishop of the nearby town of Ypres and the leader of the religious movement later known as Jansenism. What began as an attempt to clarify and implement Augustinian theology soon took in France a much more polemical turn, and Jansenism was linked to Gallican tendencies, and to a rejection of ultramontanist. Some time later, another movement came under scrutiny in France: Quietism, originally preached by Miguel de Molinos (1628–96), was a reaction to Jansenism. It advocated 'quiet' or passive contemplation, which was believed to enable mystical union. Its mystical element, defended by such figures as François de Salignac de La Mothe-Fénelon (1651–1715) and his spiritual companion Jeanne-Marie Bouvier de La Motte-Guyon (1648–1717), met with great opposition, notably from Bishop Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704), who enjoyed great influence at the French court of Louis XIV.



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## SEPULCHRINES: 'AN OTHER PREPARATION TO THE EXERCISE. WHERE BE THE DAYS OF THY LIFE'

'An other preparation to the exercise. Where be the days of thy life'; held by the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre at Colchester (under the label R.4 in box D.1), United Kingdom.

The document transcribed here is a section taken from a 129-page manuscript book belonging to the Sepulchrines of Liège and kept by the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre at Colchester.<sup>1</sup> This is the first section of the book, and also that which appears to have been written first; its spelling and script point to an early seventeenth-century document. The sections of the volume seem to have been written in as many as six or seven different hands, and at different times. For instance, a copy of a letter is dated 1632, whilst other documents appear written in an eighteenth-century hand. This document is akin to the clerical writings meant to accompany nuns during their retreats. It is prescriptive in nature, and provides several meditations for particular times. It is meant as a guide to those undertaking the *Spiritual Exercises*; the author refers to Jesuit precepts and teachers throughout, thereby indicating a strong Ignatian influence upon her spirituality.

### Note

1. This document is introduced initially on p. 153, above.

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'An other preparation to the exercise. Where be the days of thy life'; held by the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre at Colchester (under the label R.4 in box D.1), United Kingdom.

<p. 1> An other preparation to the exercise.<sup>1</sup>

Where be the days of thy life

Alasse self-love, the flesh, the world and the divill hath [*sic*] taken up the greatest part of them whereof they will serve them selves at the hower of death to tempt the[e], notwithstanding thy dayes are not yett spent. Allmighty God hath yett in his hands a part, that part of thy life that is past is the surest, the best & peradventure the greatest, that which remain's is uncertain, shut up in the hand of God which how long it will last thou knowest not.

There remaines noe other way to secur thy salvation, but to imploy the rest of thy dayes, fewer or more, in a serious & fervent seeking of thy soveraigne good to the end that, have-ing gotten perdon of thy sinns and being delivered from thy ennemyes, thou maist ordre thy life according to the will of God & the salvation of thy soule.

<u> To perform this there is noe better occation than by these spirituall exercises, the which thou art therefor to undertake & accept as a singulare favour from the hand of God, endeavouring to make them with all diligence possible.

To this purpos it will be good to consider how many spirituall helpes thou hast past over with out profit, to noe small preiudice of thy soull and the displeasure of God, wherefor lay hands on this occation & indeavour to make use of this hapy time.

Peradventure it will be the last spirituall exercises by which Allmighty God callis thee to his love & friendship; take head least thy ingratitude put any hinderance to this great worke.

Have recours to the Blessed Virgin and angell guardian, to thy good patron, St James, St Helena, St Augustin, St Ignatious, St Francis of Borgea, St Mary Magdalen, St Tresia [*sic*] & others; beggin[g] of them the impetration <p. 3> of light to see & stringth to put in practis all that appertaines to thy salvation.

Pater & Ave.

## Meditation for the next morning after the 5 dayes exercise

The ground of this meditation are the words of our Saviour Matthew: 7: Everyone that heareth my words and doth them shall be likened unto a wise man that built his howse upon a rocke and the winds blew, and they beate aganst that howse and it fell not for it was founded upon a rocke. And everyone that heareth my words and does them not shall be like a foolish man that built his howse upon the sandes & the raign fell the floud's came the whind's blew and they bear against the howse and it fell & the fall therof was great.<sup>2</sup>

<u> Consider that in this 5 dayes exercise Christ our Savoiur [*sic*] hath been speaking to your heart, and thou hast heard him that is firmly believed them: he hath told the[e] that God alone is thy finall end and to be sought for a bove all things; that all things els are but mean's to help to this end, that to forsake God & to adhere to his creatures is sinne, that sinne unrepented causeth a bitter life, a frightfull death, a severe judgment & everlasting torments. That Christ our Lord & his rull's or constitutions are the onely sure way to returne to God, to whom if thou dost constantly stick, thy life will be full content, thy death of security, thy sentance of happiness & thy end of bliss eternall; is not this most Heavenly & solide doctrine? ~

Consider that now it is in thy hands to play the foole or the wisman, if believing these eternall principles thou framest thy life accordingly unto them, like the wiseman thou buldest <p. 5> upon an imoveable rocke. Let temptations come, [from] either the earth, or thy owne flesh as flouds, or from the ill suggestion of those aeriall powers the divills as winds, from Heaven by God's special premision for thy triall as raigne,<sup>3</sup> thy resolutions & good purposes of perfection will ever stand like stately buildings seated upon a rocke. But if thou dost believe those principles and not live accordingly, whar soever thou doest thou buildest like the foole upon mear sand, that is upon thy own feeble forces, thy own erroneous judgment, & inconstant will, wherin thear is lesse sollidity than in a heap of sand; what mervaille then if either the affection of flesh & bloud like flouds, or the breath of others mouths by which the divill blowes like wind's, or last tryall coming from a bove by thy Superiors lay all thou hast built flat upon the ground which indeed is a lamentable fall.

Here thanke God for speaking to <u> thee and aske Grace to conserve in thy heart for ever his holy words; resolve with the same Grace to conserve in thy heart for ever his holy word's & resolve with the same Grace to build all the rest of thy life, thoughts, words & deads upon them, & soe with the wise virgins thou doest either willt enter into the mariage banquet; if thou doest otherwise expect noe other reward than to heare what the foolish virgins *nescio vos. I know you not.*<sup>4</sup>

Te Deum Laudamus<sup>5</sup>

A meditation concluding the spirituall exercises, answerable to that by which it was begun

Our Lord in your first p[re]parations [for] meditation sayed he would allure you into his solitude & retirement, <p. 7> and there, would speake unto your heart, that is which should prove to your true comfort, your answere was you would imbrace his instructions and willingly heare and hearken to what he should please to say unto you. Consider that he hath allured you indeed, and call to miend, what he hath sayed to you, and be sure to practise itt presently whilst it is fresh in your heart, your resolution in strength & you in heart.

Amongst other things which hee hath sayed unto your heart, you will find one to be that hee in requitall expects that you allure him likewise unto a solitude of yours; prepare with-in your heart for him onely as St Catherine of Sienna<sup>6</sup> did, and thear detaine & intertain him, as time was he went into a desert place and the multitude sought him & came even unto him, that hee should not depart from them; and those to disciples when our Lord made semblance to goe further forced him, saying tarry with us because it is towards night.<sup>7</sup>

In this your solitude he will expect & <u> with good reason that you alsoe speake to his heart, that is to his full comfort & contentment, which is done by assuring him that what in these dayes he hath sayed unto you shall by his Grace be performed; what a comfort, benefitt, honnour, and glory is it to be able to afford to soe ever loveing & once for me soe afflicted heart of my Lord Jesus Christ.

An examen according to the additions

If she prepared her self over night according to the additions, considering what dispositions of miend she ought most of all to have desier.

If after being in bed for the space of an Ave Maria, I think of my medetation and noe so[o]ner a wake but presently shakeing of all other thoughts I busied my mind a bout the marter of my meditation firmly purposing to keepe a strict watch over my self.

If whilst I put one my clouths my thoug[ths] were upon my meditation stirring up <p. 9> in my self that affection which I would will to have.

If according to the additions, being one or too paces distant from the place wher I am to make my following meditation, devoting my mind I consider our Lord Jesus present, beholding what I was to doe & wether I receiv'd him with an humble bended body.

If I use the preludes wether my discours was without distractions or dry if in the point wherin I found my desired devotion I stayed without passing further, wether I used the colloquiums with Pater & Ave.

If I avoidid all thoughts of joy and deprived myself of the lights as divers mys-  
teryes, requiers, if I abstained from laughter or words provokeing therunto, if I  
looked freely upon any one of my pennaces [*sic*], and their threefold ends: if and  
[*sic*] exact & perfect observance of the distrebuton of time; if att the appointed  
time I examened my self how I have observed my additions.

<u> A meditation of preparation to the exercise

1: What is become of all these empresses, queen's and ladyes of hon[ou]r that  
once did flourish in the world and now received their last doome? what is  
become of their traines, their pleasures, their joylities? All is past like a dream; I  
will likewise upon my dayes that are vainly past and bewaylle my vainly spending  
of them.

2 point

What would many of those ladys & perhaps religious that neglected there  
souls in the state of religion, now give for 8 or 10 such dayes as God by his divin  
providence puts into my hand's? to how low a consideration would they submitt  
them selves? what behoves me to doe?

3 point

What advantage shall I have by spending this pretious time will;<sup>8</sup> how <p.  
11> great a losse by employing it ill; that both are eternall & accordingly make  
such generious resolutions as becomes one that knowes the difference betwext  
time & eternity. Conclud with an oblation. Pater: Ave

How to know when our prayer hath succeedid il[l] by our o[w]ne fault.

1. If I have ben negligent in preparing of my meditation & not forceing what  
fruit I would indeavour out of every point.
2. If after propounded my points I came distractedly & couldly to begin my  
prayer.
3. If in time of prayer I either voluntary wondred a bout with my senses or  
minde or use[d] litle or noe diligence to put a way such distractions as  
occured.
4. If in time of prayer I placed my selfe in an irreverent posture.

If being guilty of any of these four things my prayer succeeded ill by my one  
fault; if I be not guilty in any of thes four things then I may comfort my self  
knowing that the ill success of my prayer did not happen by any fault of mine.

This is the doctrine of Father Lancicius.<sup>9</sup>

<u> Those things which the devil endeavours to draw religious to, are

1. the endeavours to stir up a love to terrene commodities such as [*sic*] are  
allowed of in religion, as in cloth, diet, office, place of living, chambre, &c.

2. To draw us from vertue with fond feares of sickness, weakness of body, imparing or health, of to[o] much labour, &c. ----
3. To bring us into an oblivion of death, judgment, Hell & Heaven, &c. ----
4. To bread a tediousness & hatred of spirituall things by proposing I know not what difficulty in the way of virtue.
5. To make us doe or actions out of custome & for the love or fear of men.
6. To make us contemne litle things & by frequent disobsarvances in litle matters bring us to naughty freedome & liberty.
7. To make us desert our good purposes from time to time & to find I know not what fond excuses -----
8. To bread in our minde an alleination & aversion from Superiours & those who are to dirictes us & from our Brother in whom we live with all -----  
[the next page, numbered 13, is non sequential; it contains points 17-20]

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SEPULCHRINES: 'A MOST DEVOUT AND  
EFFICATIOUS PRAYER TO OUR BLESSED  
REDEEMER IN THE HONOUR OF HIS BITTER  
PASSION'

Victoria Aray, 'A Most Devout and Efficacious Prayer to our Blessed Redeemer in the honour of his Bitter Passion'; held by the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre at Colchester (under the label R.4 in box D.1), United Kingdom.

The document transcribed in full here is a seven-page section taken from the same 129-page manuscript book belonging to the Sepulchrines of Liège and kept by the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre at Colchester.<sup>1</sup> The excerpt below, entitled 'A Most Devout and Efficacious Prayer to our Blessed Redeemer in honour of his Bitter Passion', was written by Victoria Aray (1684–1705), LS009, during her novitiate in 1683. She also wrote other sections including 'Meditations of the Incomparable doctor St Augustine; Of his Conversion' (pp. 21–30 of the manuscript), 'An Elegium and Abridgement of the Life of Reverend Father Francis Williams of the Society of Jesus' (pp. 65–82),<sup>2</sup> and 'Several Particular Devotions of Reverend Father Francis Williams' (pp. 83–91). Other sections, though undated, appear to have been written in an early eighteenth-century hand. The subtitle of this prayer indicates that it was intended to serve not only its author, Victoria Aray, in her private devotions, but the entire community as a method for the evocation of the stage of Christ's Passion. The very orderliness of this prayer and mental evocation was meant to ensure its efficacy.

Notes

1. See p. 153, above, for the initial presentation of this book.
2. Francis Williams, alias William Crimmes, S. J. (1622–81) converted to Catholicism and entered his noviceship at the age of thirty-seven. In the 1660s he was sent to Liège where he taught divinity and philosophy, and became the confessor and spiritual director of the Sepulchrines. Later, he was sent to work as a missionary in England, and became rector and master of the novices at Watton.

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'A Most Devout and Efficacious Prayer to our Blessed Redeemer in the honour of his Bitter Passion'; held by the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre at Colchester (under the label R.4 in box D.1), United Kingdom.

<p. 31> A Most Devout and Efficacious Prayer to our Blessed Redeemer in the honour of his Bitter Passion

Which whosoever shall humbly recite before the image of a crucifix, with a pure intention and perfect resignation, severall dayes together, may confidently hope to obtaine of the divine mercy, a full grant of their lawfull demands.

O deare Jesu, my Blessed Saviour and Redeemer; the sweet comforter of all sad, desolate & distressed soules. Behold thy poore servant, humbly prostrate at the foote of thy Holy Cross, deploring her miserie, imploring thy mercy and beseeching thee to take pity & compassion upon her in this her present and pressing affliction, infirmity, poverty, temptation, trouble, or whatsoever other spirituall or corporall necessity.

Heare my prayers, O assured refuge of all afflicted wretches, behold my tears, consider my sorrows and remedy my distresses: for finding myself encompassed with greivous calamities, by reason of my great crimes, I know not whether to fly for succour, or to whom I may make my moan, but to thee, my meek and merciful Saviour, with a full hope and confidence that thou, O my <u> loving Redeemer, wilt vouchsafe to lend the cares of thys ordinary piety and accustomed clemency to the humble petition of thy poore child.

And by that sweetness which thy blessed soul resented at the same time of thy alliance with our human nature, when resolving with the Father and the Holy Ghost to unite thy divine person to mortal flesh for mans salvation, thou sent'st thy Angel to the Holy Virgin Mary with those happy tidings, and clothing thyself with our nature, our humanity in her chast entralls, remainedst true God and true man for the space of nine months in her sacred womb.

By the anguish thou enduredst when the time of thy designed Passion drawing nigh thou prayedst to thy eternal Father that if it might stand with his divine



providence, thou desiredst that bitter chalice might pass away from thee, yet concluding with a most perfect act of resignation. Not my will, O Heavenly Father, but thine be fulfilled.<sup>1</sup> By the outrageous injuries, scornful disgraces, cruel blowes, contumelious blasphemies, forged witnesses; fals accusations and unjust judgments, which thou, innocent lamb, patiently endured.

<p. 33> By the shackles which fettered thy limbs, the tears which flowed from thy eyes, the blood which trickled from thy whole body.

By the fears, sorrows and sadness of thy heart, and by the shame thou receivedst by being stripped of thy garments to hang naked on the Cross in the sight of thy sorrowful Mother, and in the presence of all the people [*sic*].

By thy royall head crowned with thornes, and smitten with a reed, by thy thirst quenched with vinegar and gall, by thy side opened with a spear and issuing forth blood and water, to refresh our souls with that living fountaine of thy love and mercy.

By the sharp nails wherewith thy tender hands and feet were cruelly perced & fastned to the Cross.

By the recommendation of thy departing soul to thy Heavenly Father, saying: Into thy hands I command my spirit.<sup>2</sup>

By thy praying for thy enimies, saying: O Father forgive them, for they know not what they doe.<sup>3</sup>

By thou giving up the ghost when thou cryedst <p. 34> out with a lowd voice: My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me,<sup>4</sup> and then bowing down thy blessed head to reach us the kiss of peace, saying: All is finished.

By the great mercy thou showedst towards to good' thief, saying: This day thou shalt be with me in paradise.<sup>5</sup>

By thy descent into limbus, and the joy thou communicatedst to the just souls there detained.

By the glory of thy triumphant resurrection and the comfortable apparitions thou frequently mad'st for forty dayes space to thy sacred Mother, to thy apostles, and to thy other chosen friends and servants.

By thy admirable ascension, when in the sigh of thy Mother and thy apostles thou wert elevated into Heaven.

By the myraculous comming downe of the Holy Ghost in forme of fiery tongues whereby thou replenished the hearts of thy diciples with thy love and gavest them strength and couradge to plant thy faith in the whole world.<sup>6</sup>

By thy dreadfull day of general judgment, in <p. 35> which thou art to give sentence upon all mankind.

By all these, sorrows, joys, passions, compassions, and whatsoever else is near and deare to thee in Heaven and upon earth, take pity on me; O compassionate Redeemer, heare my prayer, and grant me that for which I now most humbly and heartily petition thee.

Mention here the thing you desire or reflect mentaly upon it.

Give me, O gracious Saviour, a speedy and efficacious feeling of thy divine succour and comfort, who according to the accustomed sweetness of thy tender heart art wont to grant the requests of them who feare and love thee, even to theire souls desire and satisfaction.

Bestow on me also, O my Blessed Lord Jesu, a constant faith, a confident hope, a perfect charity, a cordial contrition, a sincere Confession, a competent satisfaction, a diligent custody of my self from future fallings, an heroick contempt of the world, a compleat conquest of my passions, a zealous imitation of thy exemplary life and conversation; an entire accomplishment of my vows; an absolute mortification of my self-will, a <u> willing readiness to dy for thy love & honour, a finall perseverance in Grace and good works, a happy departure of my soul out of this world, with my perfect senses about me, the Holy Sacrament to strengthen me, thy self, O Deare Jesu, to comfort me, thy sacred Virgin Mother, with the Saint my particular patrons to pray for me and my good Angel to conduct me to eternal rest, eternal life, eternal happiness. Amen.

A Prayer to our good Angel.

O Holy and happy spirit, who by our merciful creators appointment hast been my faithfull keeper; my freindly comforter and my charitable protectour, from the first instant of my birth until this present moment; I humbly crave thee to continew thy care and custody over me in all places, in all company, upon all occasions, preserve me; O my good Angel, defend me and deliver me both whilst I sleep and when I am awake from all diabolicall incursions, from all evil temptations, from all dangers of soul and body, and from a <p. 37> sudain and unprovided death, be thou graciously pleased to represent my wounds, my wants & my wishes, to our common Lord and master, and obtaine for me thy poor pupil courage to overcome my self and strength to get a compleat victory over sin, satan, an[d] sensuality, especially if there lurks any secret crime in my conscience, obtain for me light to deiscerne it, a will to detest it, time to confess it, and Grace to amend it. Abandon not my poor soul, I beseech thee, O blessed spirit, for the love of sweet Jesus, who hath not spared his dearest blood and life to save it; but remaine constantly faithfull, favourable and friendly unto me all the moment of my life and take a special and particular care and charge of me in my deaths last gasp and agony. Defend me then in that dreadful hour; O powerful guardian; from the fury of my sworne enemy, and convey my departing soul into the bosom of my dearly beloved Lord and maker, there to praise him with thy self for ever more.

<u> O my good guide, I ágain and again iterate this my humble sute most earnestly, beseeching the[e] neighter<sup>7</sup> to forsake me dureing this transitory life,

nor to forget me when all the world will leave me: that through thy safe and secure conduct, I may surpass through the wearisome troubles of this earthly pilgrimage as that I may find eternal rest in the Heavenly paradise. Amen.

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## POOR CLARES: 'THE CIRCUMCISION'

'The Circumcision'; held at the Poor Clares monastery of Much Birch, Herefordshire, United Kingdom.

The document transcribed below belonged to the Poor Clares of Rouen and is part of the 130-pages sick house book kept at the Poor Clares monastery of Much Birch, Herefordshire.<sup>1</sup> This is the first document in the volume; it contains meditations on the subject of the circumcision and the stages of the Cross. The pagination is very haphazard and erroneous in several places. Opposite each page of text on the right-hand-side, a print is pasted on the left-hand page, illustrating the topic. On some of the pictures, the nuns have drawn upon the print; on the first picture of 'The Effusions,' illustrating the prayer in the garden, they have added drops of blood upon Christ's brow and hands in vivid red ink, and upon the floor at his feet. On the second picture, illustrating the flagellation, the drops of blood are much larger in size and more abundant. They run down from Jesus's head, they stream freely down his shoulders; they are present also upon his legs, and a pool of red blood underlines the bottom of the illustration, at the feet of the suffering Christ. In a rather gruesome detail, droplets of red ink have been carefully added unto the cheeks of his tormentors, and upon their instruments of torture.<sup>2</sup> This document highlights Christ's suffering and uses both rhetorical and graphic devices to elicit empathy in the reader.

### Notes

1. See the presentation of the document p. 95, above.
2. For these images see Appendix 2: Illustrations, on pp. 496-7, below.

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'The Circumcision'; held at the Poor Clares monastery  
of Much Birch, Herefordshire, United Kingdom.

<p. 2> The Circumcision

O Divine Jesus, is it possible you should be punis'd for me & that I should still remaine guilty? O infinite mercy, have compassion on the prodigal child, O divine purity cure the leper, O eternal life, raise the dead soul; make one drop of your precious blood distill upon me to the end that all seeing my conversion may glorify you & acknowledge your infinite power, hidden under such apparent weaknesses; behold the sinner at your feet, and since you would suffer such a rigorous torment to make me feel the sweetness of your love, pour this love so abundantly in my hart that all my sins may be fully pardon'd. Amen.

<u> The Effusions. [picture entitled: XVIII Croix. La tristesse dans le jardin]<sup>1</sup>

<u> The prayer in garden

Your love cannot suffer any delay, O divine Jesus, it presses you without cease & to expect only two or 3 hours the beginning of your sufferings is a great torment for you. You do not pray till the soldiers load you with chains, that the Jews & gentils fill you with reproaches, that unhumane executioners tear your innocent flesh & fasten it to a Cross; you abandon your self to so bitter a grief that you are oblig'd to complaine, & seek some solace among stupid men, unable to compassionate your paine; let your infinit love be prais'd glorified & eternally ador'd, O my God and my Saviour. Amen.

<p. 3> The Effusions. [picture entitled: XXV Croix. La flagellation]<sup>2</sup>

<p. 4> The flagellation

Behold the hour, O my Jesus, in which your most pure & innocent flesh is going to be rent & torn, your veins open'd & your precious blood pour'd out for my remedy; what hart can see to be executed upon you. O my only & true good so cruel a sentence. O my treasure, O my love, I am so seiz'd with grief & astonish-

ment that I cannot speak a word but I cast my self at your feet & kiss the earth water'd with your blood I confess there my misery & expect your mercy. Amen.

<p. 5> The Effusions. [picture entitled: XXVI Croix. Le coronnement]

<p. 6> The crowning with thorns

I adore you, O divine Jesus, as my true King, I acknowledg' you for my Sovereign Lord, in the midst of all these wounds which you have receiv'd to cure mine. I adore you, O the God of my hart, I adore your ineffable love which has reduc'd you to this state. I give you infinite thanks for so many mercys, make an end of your work, transpierce your hart with your thorns, O good Jesus, let them come forth of thar sacred head, all bath'd with your blood and burning with your love, as enflam'd darts to pierce me with their points & enflame with their fire.

<p. 7> The Effusions. [picture entitled: XXXVI Croix. Le dépouillement et le breuvage de fiel]

<p. 8> The pulling of his garments

Consider, O my soul, with what ardour the Jews prepare what is necessary to crucify our Saviour; hearken to their crys, behold with what fury they teare off his garments, already sticking to his wounds. Look upon this body all torn & bloody, penetrate unto thar hart, you will find it wholly taken up with your miserys & fasten'd to Heaven to manage the reconciliation; approach to him, and prostrate at his feet, say in embracing them: Suffer me O my Saviour & my love that I embrace your sacred feet, I will fasten unto them my hart, before they are fasten'd to the Cross, and be consumm'd with your love before death steales you from my eyes. Embrace with those divine hands, before they are pierc't with nailes the sinfull soul for whom you endur'd such terrible torments.

<u> The Effusions. [picture entitled: XXXVII Croix. Le crucifiement]

<u> The nailing to the Cross

I adore you, O adorable victim, charg'd with the sins of the world. Consider O my soul the cruelty with which they fasten Jesus to the Cross, with what sweetness & submission he extends himself upon it; behold how they draw his arms, how they thrust great nailes in his hands, & feet, thro' the nerves which are parts so sensible; feel if you can his dolours, & if you cannot, desire at least to feel them, & beg of Jesus Christ to imprint in your hart what he feels in his sacred body; mollify O my God the hardnes of my hart to the end that your nailes may penetrate it, to the end it may be sensible of your dolours, your love & the hatred you beare to sin which has redn'd you to this state. Amen.

<p. 9> The Effusions. [picture entitled XXXVIII Croix. L'elevation de la Croix]

<p. 10> The crucifixion

You are then lifted up upon the Cross, plac'd between Heaven & earth, expos'd to the eyes of the whole universe, O God of my hart, O love of my soul, I adore you. O glory of the just & crown of the blessed, I adore you. O source of eternal goods, I adore you; O lamb of God who blots out the sins of the world, I adore you. O tree of life charg'd with all the fruits of Grace & glory, I prostrate myself at your feet & acknowledg that you are my only hope; if I am poor you are infinitely rich, if I am a sinner you are my Saviour, if I am in slavery you are my deliverer, if I am miserable you are mercifull, if I am tepid you are all enflam'd with love, and I find in you, O my Jesus, the remedy of all my evils.

<p. 13> The Stations. [picture entitled: XVII Croix: La cene avec les apotres]

<p. 14> To the Holy Sacrament

O my Jesus, who have celebrated the paschal supper, whilst the Jews sought to put you to death, I adore you. Instituting this divine and admirable Sacrament. This is, O my Jesus, the beginning of your great mysterys, & the consummation of your love for men; they seeke to kill you & you propose to give them life; let us never forget, O Jesus, this excess of your love; render our harts cenacles prepar'd to receive you; let the desire & hunger after adorable pasch<sup>3</sup> where you we eate your sacred flesh transport us; let the love of our enemys and a profound peace in sufferings accompany our Sacrifices & Communionis & disengage our harts from earthly things to thirst after those of Heaven. Amen.

popular place of pilgrimage became the object of an acrimonious dispute between two residents from nearby villages, who fought for its control. See C. Harline, *Miracles at the Jesus Oak: Histories of the Supernatural in Reformation Europe* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).

6. *doctor Leon ... doctor de Burge*: these men have not been identified.
7. *the ark of God ... Obededom*: see 1 Chronicles 13:14: 'And the ark of God remained in the house of Obededom three months: and the Lord blessed his house, and all that he had'.
8. *Lady Mary Crispe*: Marie Crispe (1687–1757), BB 050, was abbess of the community of Brussels from 1719 to 1757.
9. *Theodosia Waldegrave*: Theodosia Waldegrave (1666–1719), BB 191, officiated as abbess of the community from 1713 to 1719.
10. *her own mother ... monastery*: her mother was Mary Collins (1683–1728), BB 043.
11. <p. 155>: erroneous pagination; this should be p. 156.
12. *Sister Barbara Wilson*: Barbara Wilson (1742–78), BB 197, was a lay Sister at Brussels, although the notice implies she was able to write.
13. <p. 165>: wrongly paginated 164 in original.

## Part V: Nuns' Writings

### Sepulchres: 'An other preparation to the exercise. Where be the days of thy life'

1. *Another preparation ... exercise*: The title of the section (*Another Preparation*) implies that it comes after a first preparation, and the binding is loose against the cover. Moreover the text starts mid-flow, as if already part-way through its discourse. It is therefore possible that some pages may be missing at the very start of the book.
2. *a foolish man ... was great*: see Matthew 7:24–27: 'Every one therefore that heareth these my words, and doth them, shall be likened to a wise man that built his house upon a rock, And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and they beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded on a rock. And every one that heareth these my words, and doth them not, shall be like a foolish man that built his house upon the sand, And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and they beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall thereof'.
3. *raigne*: rain.
4. *I know you not*: see the story of the foolish Virgins, in Matthew 25:8–12: 'And the foolish said to the wise: Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out. The wise answered, saying: Lest perhaps there be not enough for us and for you, go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. Now whilst they went to buy, the bridegroom came: and they that were ready, went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut. But at last come also the other virgins, saying: Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answering said: Amen I say to you, I know you not. Watch ye therefore, because you know not the day nor the hour'.
5. *Te Deum laudamus*: 'We praise thee, O God' (Latin).
6. *St Catherine of Sienna*: Catherine of Siena (1346–80) was a Dominican tertiary who urged God to take her heart for himself. In one of her most famous ecstasies, God con-



sented to take Catherine's heart from her chest, and presented her with his in exchange. See p. 344, n. 5 in this volume.

7. *tarry with us ... toward night*: see Luke 24:29: 'But they constrained him; saying: Stay with us, because it is towards evening, and the day is now far spent. And he went in with them.'
8. *will*: well.
9. *Father Lancicius*: Nicholas Lancicius, S. J. (1574–1652). See p. 336, n. 2.

### Sepulchres: 'A Most Devout and Efficacious Prayer to our Blessed Redeemer in the honour of his Bitter Passion'

1. *Not my will ... fulfilled*: see Luke 22:42: 'Father, if thou wilt, remove this chalice from me: but yet not my will, but thine be done.'
2. *Into thy hands... my spirit*: see Luke 23:46: 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.'
3. *O Father ... what they do*: see Luke 23:34: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'
4. *My God ... forsaken me*: see Matthew 27:46: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'
5. *This day ... in paradise*: see Luke 23:43: 'And Jesus said to him: Amen I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with me in paradise.'
6. *By the miraculous ... whole world*: see Acts 2: 1–4: And when the days of the Pentecost were accomplished, they were all together in one place: And suddenly there came a sound from Heaven, as of a mighty wind coming, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them parted tongues as it were of fire, and it sat upon every one of them: And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they began to speak with divers tongues, according as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak.'
7. *neither*: neither.

### Poor Clares: 'The Circumcision'

1. *picture entitled ... La tristesse dans le jardin*: see Figure 1 on p. 496.
2. *picture entitled ... La flagellation*: see Figure 2 on p. 497.
3. *adorable pasch*: A reference to the paschal mystery, that is to say the Passion of Christ, his death, and his resurrection.

### Poor Clares: 'The chief points of our holy ceremonys in which the Sisters must daily renew them selves'

1. *pour out*: pour out.
2. *it being ... monastick life*: In the second part of his *Summa Theologica*, the Dominican theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) deals with obedience in subjects and religious persons. He argued: 'Man is subject to God simply as regards all things, both internal and external, wherefore he is bound to obey Him in all things.' (II–11–104)
3. *St Peter Damian*: The Benedictine Peter Damian, or Petrus Damiani (c. 1007–72) was a fierce proponent of the strictest discipline in monastic houses; he introduced the practice of flagellation in the hermitage of Fonte Avellana, of which he became prior in 1043. He

« *Divine Love and the Negotiation of Emotions in Early Modern English Convents* », in Bowden, Caroline et James E. Kelly (dir.), *The English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800: Communities, Culture and Identity*, Farnham : Ashgate, 2013, pp. 229–45.

### Résumé :

Dans les couvents de la période moderne, les humeurs, les passions et les émotions sont dépeintes comme autant d'attaques contre l'intégrité de la spiritualité des religieuses. Ces désordres émanent du corps et sont décrits comme des obstacles à la vocation contemplative, dont le but ultime est l'union divine grâce à la purification de l'âme. Mais pour se montrer digne de l'amour de Dieu, les nonnes doivent mener un combat perpétuel contre leurs émotions naturelles. Les règles de son ordre et les constitutions de son établissement régissent donc la vie de la religieuse jusque dans ses moindres détails, ceux sont des guides qui l'assistent dans sa quête spirituelle et l'abandon progressif de son être de chair. Dans leurs écrits, les sœurs bénédictines anglaises opèrent une dichotomie absolue distinguant l'amour des hommes de l'amour divin. Au contraire de l'affection qui naît de la partie animale de l'âme, l'amour divin est un affect insufflé par Dieu lui-même dans la religieuse en contemplation. Il transcende l'humain. Pourtant, quand elles décrivent leurs expériences vécues, les sœurs doivent composer avec les limites de l'humain, qui ne sait exprimer l'ineffable que par des images évocatrices d'un amour sensuel et des réactions physiques telles que la joie ou les pleurs. Ce corps qu'elles s'appliquent à subjuguier durant leur vie entière semble bien être pourtant le vecteur de leur spiritualité.

7 526 mots

mots-clés : bénédictines anglaises ; spiritualité ; émotions ; catholicisme ; amour divin

### Présentation du texte :

Cet article est le fruit d'une réflexion menée en 2011 et 2012 sur l'opposition apparente entre les sens et les émotions humaines et leur sublimation dans l'expérience du sacré. Le séminaire de recherche sur les îles Britanniques du LERMA avait exploré le thème des émotions durant deux années (2010–2012, <http://britaix.hypotheses.org/past-programmes/emotions-2010-2012>) et j'avais également présenté des pistes préliminaires de réflexion lors du colloque annuel du groupe de recherche *Historians of Women Religious in Britain and Ireland* à Queen Mary University, Londres en 2011 (« 'Until Death do us Unite': Spiritual Love and Longing in Early Modern English convents »). Lorsque j'ai été invitée à prendre part à l'ouvrage collectif issu du projet *Who Were The Nuns?*, j'ai souhaité développer ce thème plus en détail puisqu'il s'inscrivait dans mon projet de recherche sur l'expérience vécue de la vie religieuse. En outre, il me semblait incongru qu'un ouvrage sur les religieuses, comportant quatorze chapitres, n'en dédie pas un seul à la spiritualité qui était pourtant la raison d'être des couvents anglais en exil. Ce travail a été une première étape dans l'exploration de la religion vécue et la mise en relation du corps et de la spiritualité, projet que j'ai ensuite développé plus en profondeur dans ma monographie, *Living Spirituality*.

The English Convents in Exile,  
1600–1800

Communities, Culture and Identity

Edited by

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ASHGATE

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Published by  
Ashgate Publishing Limited  
Wey Court East  
Union Road  
Farnham  
Surrey, GU9 7PT  
England

Ashgate Publishing Company  
110 Cherry Street  
Suite 3-1  
Burlington, VT 05401-3818  
USA

[www.ashgate.com](http://www.ashgate.com)

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

**The Library of Congress has cataloged the printed edition as follows:**  
The English convents in exile, 1600–1800: communities, culture, and identity /  
edited by Caroline Bowden and James E. Kelly.  
pages cm. – (Catholic christendom, 1300–1700)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4094-5073-3 (hardcover : alk. paper) 1. Monastic and religious life of women–Europe–History–17th century. 2. Monastic and religious life of women–Europe–History–18th century. 3. Monastic and religious life of women–England–History–17th century. 4. Monastic and religious life of women–England–History–18th century.

I. Bowden, Caroline Mary Kynaston. II. Kelly, James E. (James Edward), 1981-  
BX4220.E85E54 2013  
271'.9004–dc23

2013013630

ISBN 9781409450733 (hbk)



Printed in the United Kingdom by Henry Ling Limited,  
at the Dorset Press, Dorchester, DT1 1HD

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## Divine Love and the Negotiation of Emotions in Early Modern English Convents

Laurence Lux-Sterritt

... no love is true but that which is in Him, and for Him, and without impediment to His love. All other loves are false, slippery, perverse, and vain, as not being founded in God, the ground of all true and happy love.<sup>1</sup>

Thus wrote Gertrude More<sup>2</sup> on the subject of divine love, a spiritual emotion she described as antithetical with its earthly counterpart and which, to her, was the source of all other godly feelings. Her dual interpretation of 'good' and 'bad' emotions owed much to the widely held belief, derived from St Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, that 'passions' were symptoms which emanated from the body in order to manifest the disorders of the soul. This perception was a direct consequence of the anthropology of the age, which often opposed the spiritual to the carnal. It suggested that there were two types of emotions: bodily (or worldly) emotions, which were deemed dangerous, and spiritual emotions, which appeared valuable.

The study of emotions has recently become the focus of interest in research centres worldwide.<sup>3</sup> It has attracted funding from the most prestigious awarding bodies and generated a wealth of excellent publications exploring the new field of 'emotionology'.<sup>4</sup> The lens of emotions studies

<sup>1</sup> *The Writings of Dame Gertrude More*, ed. by Benedict Weld-Blundell (London, 1910), p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> Gertrude More (1625-33), CB137.

<sup>3</sup> To cite but a few: Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the Studies of Emotions (University of Western Australia, dir. Philippa Maddern); Centre for the History of the Emotions (Queen Mary, University of London, dir. Thomas Dixon); CHEP ('An International Network for the Cultural History of Emotions in Premodernity'); and EMMA ('Pour une anthropologie historique des émotions au Moyen Âge', dir. Damien Boquet and Piroška Nagy).

<sup>4</sup> Amongst many others, these general publications on emotions in history are most useful: Lucien Febvre, 'La sensibilité et l'histoire: Comment reconstituer la vie affective d'autrefois?', *Annales d'histoire sociale* 3.1/2 (1941): pp. 5-20; Daniel M. Gross, *The Secret History of Emotion: From Aristotle's Rhetoric to Modern Brain Science* (Chicago, IL,

has been used to offer new readings of religious experience(s) in general, and I believe it can yield new and revealing insights into the history of early modern nuns.<sup>5</sup> This chapter explores the affectivity of the English Benedictine nuns in exile in the seventeenth century in the Southern Netherlands and in France, and relies mostly on documents which belonged to the houses at Cambrai and Paris.<sup>6</sup> Many were never expected to be read beyond the walls of the enclosure.<sup>7</sup> I have deliberately chosen to quote them abundantly, in the hope of allowing the nuns' voices to speak out for themselves, on that most intimate subject of emotions.

In conventual writings, the 'terrene' affections which emanated from the senses and gratified the appetites were unanimously condemned, whilst only one emotion was praised as holy and spiritual: that of divine love. Zealous contemplative nuns embarked upon a personal crusade against their natural emotions, which they envisaged as obstacles separating them from their divine lover. To achieve their goal, these nuns had to die to the world and to themselves, forsaking any interaction with mundane society and abandoning any sense of their own self-worth. In order to meet such stringent demands, religious women followed various paths, and whilst some found solace in the Jesuit *Spiritual Exercises*, others such as the Benedictines of Cambrai adopted different types of spiritual techniques to tame their worldly emotions. Yet regardless of the methods they chose, all nuns strove towards the same goal: they hoped to become strangers to the world and to themselves, in order to become wholly available to divine love. Only then, once they were free of all human feelings, could these contemplatives experience perfect union with their heavenly bridegroom.

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2006); William M. Reddy, 'Historical Research on the Self and Emotions', *Emotion Review*, 1.4 (2009): pp. 302–15, and *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge, 2001); Barbara H. Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions in History', *American Historical Review*, 107.3 (2002): pp. 821–45; Richard Soradji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford, 2000). See also Peter and Carol Stearns, 'Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards', *American Historical Review*, 90 (1985): pp. 813–36.

<sup>5</sup> The modern taxonomy of 'emotions' is used in this chapter as a general term, although the primary sources documenting seventeenth century convents preferred terms such as 'affects', 'appetites', 'passions' or 'humours', which all convey similar, though not strictly identical meanings.

<sup>6</sup> The Order first settled in Brussels in 1598. This was followed chronologically by another foundation in Cambrai (1623 – under the authority of the English Benedictine Congregation), Ghent (1624), Paris (1650), Boulogne (1652, relocated to Pontoise in 1658), Dunkirk (1662) and Ypres (1665). Ypres ultimately became an Irish house.

<sup>7</sup> On the functions of reading and writing in the convent, see Heather Wolfe, 'Reading Bells and Loose Papers: Reading and Writing Practices of the English Benedictine Nuns of Cambrai and Paris', in Victoria E. Burke and Jonathan Gibson (eds), *Early Modern Women's Manuscript Writing* (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 135–56.



### The Badge of Contemplative Perfection: Dying to the World, to Others and to Oneself

'Oh, that I could esteeme all things as dunge and filth!': such was Gertrude More's cry, as she expressed her determination to feel nothing but disgust for earthly matters.<sup>8</sup> Yet in that very exclamation, the tension is clear between her godly intentions to detest the world and her natural tendencies to cling to it despite herself. The personal writings of her sisters at Cambrai show that these feelings were shared by others in the community. How could one hope to know the divine love of God if she remained hindered by lowly human affections? This seemingly unsolvable problem was at the core of all religious life, and especially of female contemplative life, since early modern standards credited women with a more sensual and emotive nature than men.

The Catholic Reformation reflected these gendered prejudices when it extended its conception of male religious life to include new, active forms of life, whilst on the contrary reinforcing strict medieval rules for all female religious. In convents, everything was devised in order to curtail women's reputed natural inclinations to sensual pleasures and to mitigate their emotional weakness. When they joined contemplative communities, women became enclosed in accordance with the 1563 decree of the Council of Trent, later strengthened by Pius V's 1566 constitution *Circa Pastoralis*. As new English convents settled in Northern France and in the Spanish Netherlands,<sup>9</sup> they had to adapt the architecture of the buildings they purchased to ensure a complete physical separation from the outside world: high walls were built around the houses and gardens, bars were added to windows, parlours were fitted with grates draped in cloth.<sup>10</sup> The passing of small items was negotiated through 'turns', ingenious swivelling devices which permitted the exchange of goods without any contact between the people involved.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Gertrude More, *The Holy practices of a Devine Lover, or the Sainctly Ideots Devotions* (Paris, 1657), p. 262.

<sup>9</sup> The only exception was the house of Syon, a Bridgettine foundation which settled in Lisbon.

<sup>10</sup> On the difficulties of some of these adaptations, see Caroline Bowden, 'Community Space and Cultural Transmission: Formation and Schooling in English Enclosed Convents in the Seventeenth Century', *History of Education*, 34.4 (July 2005): pp. 365–86.

<sup>11</sup> In the Constitutions of the Benedictine houses, the chapter on enclosure occupies an important place. See the *Brussels Statutes Compyled for the Better Observation of the Holy Rule of the Most Glorious Father and Patriarch S. Benedict* (Ghent, 1632), chapter 5, 'Of the Inclosure', pp. 18–22. The terms of the enclosure appear particularly rigorous in the *Constitutions pour l'observance de la règle du glorieux père et patriarche saint Benoist, dans le monastère des religieuses bénédictines angloises du titre de Notre-Dame de Bonne-Espérance, sous la supériorité de Monseigneur l'éminentissime cardinal de Retz, archevêque de Paris, et ses successeurs*, Bibliothèque Mazarine, Paris, Ms 3326.

But the idea of separation from the world applied to more than geographical location. The link with the outside had to be broken psychologically as well as spatially; correspondence, the exchange of gifts, even conversations were limited to the minimum and then only under the supervision of the abbess or the prioress.<sup>12</sup> Such stringent rules were meant to ensure that new entrants 'died to the world' and abandoned the worldly affectivity which was deemed incompatible with the vocation of a contemplative nun.<sup>13</sup>

In his vivid depiction of life in the Franciscan Dutch convent of Bethlehem in Louvain, Craig Harline showed the dire consequences of laxity in this field: enslaved by their affection for the people they had left behind, indiscreet nuns spent their days at the grate and favoured human company over divine contemplation. Their levity caused public scandal but also affected the convent from within when their unbridled worldliness divided the community into cliques and factions.<sup>14</sup> In order to avoid such pitfalls and prepare for divine love, nuns were encouraged to go much further than simply shun the outside world: they had to abandon mundane attitudes even inside the cloister. Prescriptive literature warned them against the dangers of particular friendships (or any particular enmities) and demanded they show the same indifference to one and all.<sup>15</sup> One of the English Benedictines from Cambrai testified to the difficulty of such detachment when she confessed her inability to break her friendship with one of her sisters and asked for spiritual guidance on the matter. She felt guilty about this relationship which, although born inside the convent

<sup>12</sup> See chapter 40 of the Benedictine Rule, 'How it is Unlawfull for the Sisters to give or receive any letters or Presents', or chapter 9, 'Of letters and Messages', of the Brussels Statutes; yet, Claire Walker has shown the remarkable discrepancy between the Rule, or the clerical instructions which prohibited correspondence as a threat to the nuns' commitment to enclosure, and the reality of cloisters' epistolary activities. See "'Doe not Suppose me a Well Mortified Nun Dead to the World": Letter-Writing in Early Modern English Convents', in J. Daybell (ed.), *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing 1450-1700* (Basingstoke, 2001), pp. 159-76.

<sup>13</sup> If dying to the world was the ideal of a spiritual life, it was rarely possible to achieve it fully; publications have shown that nuns maintained daily commerce with the outside to ensure the survival of their institutions, and sometimes even to support the Catholic cause outside the convent. For the English Benedictines, see, for instance, Caroline Bowden, 'The Abbess and Mrs Brown: Lady Mary Knatchbull and Royalist Politics in Flanders in the Late 1650s', *Recusant History*, 24.3 (1999): pp. 288-308; Claire Walker, 'Prayer, Patronage, and Political Conspiracy: English Nuns and the Restoration', *The Historical Journal*, 43.1 (2000): pp. 1-23 and 'Loyal and Dutiful Subjects: English Nuns and Stuart Politics', in James Daybell (ed.), *Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1450-1700* (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 228-42; or Heather Wolfe, 'Dame Barbara Constable: Catholic Antiquarian, Advisor and Cloister Missionary', in R. Corthell, F.E. Dolan, C. Highley and A.F. Marotti (eds), *Catholic Culture in Early Modern England* (Notre Dame, IN, 2007), pp. 158-88.

<sup>14</sup> Craig Harline, *The Burden of Sister Margaret. Inside a 17<sup>th</sup>-Century Convent* (New York, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> See the *Benedictine Rule*, chapters 53 and 56.

walls, remained of the same nature as the worldly passions of the secular world. The reply she received was virulent, to say the least: its author took on the voice of God and, in this persona, reproved the penitent:

... through a complacence which she hath for a gentlewoman that is in the convent ... she loves better to comply with her then me & to be tyed to her then me. When this creature comes to see her in her cell, she chases me away from her to receive her, & she thinkes no more on me, but thinkes only of diverting herselfe with her ... Thus they spoyle one another, & incourage one another to love the world, instead of incouraging one another to love nothing but me.<sup>16</sup>

This passage illustrates why it was so essential that a religious woman should die to all other creatures: her passions 'spoiled' her, they contradicted the very *raison d'être* of her religious vocation, since they distracted the soul from God. Interestingly, the object of the nun's affection is referred to as a 'gentlewoman' rather than a nun. She may have been a secular woman boarding for a time with the nuns, but it is equally possible that the term was used slightingly as an indictment of the worldly temperament of a woman who should have been more spiritually inclined.

The perfect religious was supposed to consider secular affectivity as incompatible with her godly vocation. In Cambrai, Gertrude More made it clear that earthly love turned the soul into 'a slave' of passions.<sup>17</sup> God only should be the object of a nun's emotions, whilst she should remain indifferent to everything else: 'Shall I any more be so miserable as, by loving, having, adhering to, or desiring any created thing, to become estranged from Thee, in Whom I have placed all my hope, love, and desire?'<sup>18</sup> These feelings were shared by her co-sister, Margaret Gascoigne,<sup>19</sup> who was determined to free her soul of worldly attachments:

O love, how strong art thou! Thou, O love, I say, that wast able to draw my Saviour & Redeemer into this vaile of miserie; when wilt thou forcibly draw me from the love of earthly and faiding things, & farther from the inordinate & pestilent love of my owne selfe that is the root and spring of all other my corrupt & vitious love?<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Archives départementales du Nord (hereinafter ADN), Lille, Ms 20H-43: *Just reproaches of our Lord to a soule who will not free herselfe from the love of a creature, nor herselfe. Considerations to love our Lord, & that a creature is unworthy to be loved by us for her owne sake, or in regard of herselfe.*

<sup>17</sup> *The Writings of Dame Gertrude More*, p. 20.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>19</sup> Margaret Gascoigne (1629-37), CB077.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

Those were strong words, opposing divine union to a human love which was described here as 'corrupt' and 'vicious': it was an animal emotion born from the baser instincts of flawed, carnal individuals who sought nothing but their own gratification. Such emotions were not only considered misdirected, they were to be shunned as degenerate and sinful. And as Gascoigne's quotation indicates, the root of such evil was to be found in the most 'pestilent' sort of love, which was the love of oneself.

Thus, in the same way as nuns died to the world outside and to other people, they also endeavoured to leave behind their secular selves and their emotional weaknesses. Their new names in religion, which replaced those they were given at birth, symbolized the death of their secular beings and the birth of a new religious identity inspired by the holiness of the saint whose name was adopted. In the cloister, the self was to be progressively subdued in order to allow nuns to become blank slates on which the divine spirit would inscribe its will. This could be achieved through mortification of the senses (through physical asceticism), as well as the humiliation of emotions (through moral asceticism). It required constant effort on the part of the nun, who was to wield a daily battle against temptations. Christina Brent,<sup>21</sup> who served as abbess of the Cambrai Benedictines between 1641 and 1645 and again from 1677 to 1681, wrote soliloquies in which her intellect warned her soul of the dangers to which it was exposed. The soul's enemies, she wrote, were 'the world, the divill and our owne sensuality'. Freeing one's soul from these perils was 'the payne upon which in effect all our successes depend'.<sup>22</sup> Acutely aware that affections were natural to her, she urged her soul to embrace this fight with unflinching courage. From the moment she became a novice, Christina Brent viewed her vocation in terms of hardship and struggle:

Our life is truly said to be a warfare upon earth, there being a continuall combat to be undertaken against the world and the divill besides our owne evill affections & unruly passions which joyne with our enemies, in which respect it is necessarie to be ever armed both with expectations of difficulties and resolution to go through them, always calling to mind that glorious victories are only gained in hard enterprises ...<sup>23</sup>

Thus, the pursuits of a religious woman became shrouded with the aura of a mystical quest, a mission in enemy territory. One was to fight every moment of every day to overcome one's 'passions' and navigate through a minefield of temptations and sins.

<sup>21</sup> Christina Brent (1629-81), CB015.

<sup>22</sup> ADN, Ms 20H-10, f. 771.

<sup>23</sup> ADN, Ms 20H-10, *Reflexions when she was Novice*, f. 815.

Conventual manuscripts portrayed emotions as factors disrupting a life which was otherwise regulated in its smallest details.<sup>24</sup> Such disorders, emanating from the body, were impediments to a contemplative vocation. Christina Brent even compared those who followed their worldly feelings to horses and mules and chastised them for 'becoming slaves to creatures, lyeing, groveling in the base filth of earthly pleasures, no otherwise then as beasts following their sensuall Appetites, or rather being intralred unto them'.<sup>25</sup> To her, those religious who slavishly complied with the demands of what she called 'the inferior portion of the soule' betrayed their very purpose in life; they partook of the great lie which gave false value to earthly things.<sup>26</sup> As such, they were guilty of abandoning God's design for them by not exercising the spiritual or intellectual portion of their souls.

Similar opinions were voiced by many nuns, and echoed clerical treatises.<sup>27</sup> When the prioress of the Paris community, Justina of Santa Maria Gascoigne<sup>28</sup> encouraged her sisters 'to forsake & renounce your selfe', and 'to [l]earne to acustome your selfe to mortifie your undue inclinations & affections'.<sup>29</sup> In order to domesticate 'unruly passions', religious women must mortify natural feelings such as 'anger, impatience, melancholy, fear, or scrupulosity' and cultivate 'peace, tranquillity, and cheerfulness, not suffering passions to be raised in our mind'.<sup>30</sup>

#### Paths to Contemplative Perfection: Choosing One's Way to God

The *raison d'être* of any contemplative vocation was to forsake one's personal affective bonds to the world in order to give oneself entirely to God. As they endeavoured to shake off the shackles of earthly emotions, religious women were helped by a great abundance of prescriptive literature and clerical guidelines. Most influential were the three monastic vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, designed to guard nuns against sin, and to which the Benedictines added a fourth promise of 'conversion of [their]

<sup>24</sup> St Augustine, bishop of Hippo (354-430) and St Thomas Aquinas (1224-74) strongly influenced the early modern approach to emotions.

<sup>25</sup> ADN, Ms 20H-10, f. 781.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., f. 783.

<sup>27</sup> See Book II, chapter IX on 'The mortification of the affections' by Augustine Baker, in *Contemplative Prayer: Ven. Father Augustine Baker's Teaching thereon from "Sancta Sophia"*, ed. by Benedict Weld-Blundell (London, 1907), pp. 138-40.

<sup>28</sup> Justina of Santa Maria Gascoigne (1638-90), CB075.

<sup>29</sup> Colwich Abbey, Ms H71, Justina Gascoigne's Instructions to Chapter, ff. 38-39.

<sup>30</sup> Augustine Baker, in *Contemplative Prayer*, Weld-Blundell, p. 70.

manners'.<sup>31</sup> At Cambrai, Christina Brent referred to these four vows in martial terms, as weapons which allowed her nuns to win their battle against their worst enemies.<sup>32</sup> The goal was to crucify the flesh through abnegation and a 'mortification of the senses'.<sup>33</sup>

The vow of chastity 'disengages & purifies the heart from sensuall & carnall affections';<sup>34</sup> what is meant by chastity here does not encompass sexual urges only, but all sensuality. It is well-known that, in some Orders, particularly zealous individuals acted against their bodies with sometimes troubling violence. Some ate only the leftovers of their sisters' meals. Others poured ashes on their portions to spoil the taste and quenched their thirst only with vinegar. Others still used the discipline until their habits and the walls of their cells were stained in blood.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, English Benedictines generally (and those in Cambrai more specifically) appear to have been somewhat wary of such excesses, which could cause overzealous nuns to think themselves more deserving than their sisters.<sup>36</sup> With few exceptions, the English Dames preferred less ostentatious exercises of abstinence, whose only goal was to please God in all humility, through His will rather than their own. Such abnegation aimed at freeing nuns from their own self-will and vanquishing all sense of their own self-worth; it was a form of spiritual obedience to God.

In a manual destined for the novices at Cambrai, the author reminded new recruits that the vow of poverty was also a precious ally in the humiliation of the self. Since most English Benedictines came from the upper echelons of society, they had been raised with a certain sense of their social worth; many were used to being addressed with deference and enjoyed delicate apparel as well as the finer things in life.<sup>37</sup> When they abandoned these privileges to enter the convent, they became equal in religion to the other choir sisters, their private property became communal and their natural pride was chastised.

<sup>31</sup> See, for instance, ADN, Ms 20H-11: 'Povertie, Chastitie and Obedience and Conversion of my manners', profession of faith by Joan Seller, 20 March 1631 at Cambrai.

<sup>32</sup> ADN, Ms 20H-10: 'It is an empire conquest commaund not over men but the spiritual enemies of our souls, the world, the flesh, the divill, by a religious poverty, chastitie and obedience.'

<sup>33</sup> ADN, Ms 20H-37, *Love of God*, f. 145.

<sup>34</sup> ADN, Ms 20H-17, *A Short Treatise on the Three Principall Vertues and Vows of Religious Persons*, ff. 129–130.

<sup>35</sup> See my *Redefining Female Religious Life: French Ursulines and English Ladies in Seventeenth-Century Catholicism* (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 168–74.

<sup>36</sup> ADN, Ms 20H-31, *Advice to Beginners*.

<sup>37</sup> See the *Brussels Statutes*, chapter 2, 'Of Povertie', pp. 11–14. See also Silvia Evangelisti's study of Italian convents, 'Monastic Poverty and Material Culture in Early Modern Italian Convents', *Historical Journal*, 47.1 (2004): pp. 1–20.

Moreover, monastic vows were buttressed by clerical guidance on how to tame natural inclinations. Nuns were taught to rely upon the counsel of their directors and advised never to enter into any spiritual exercises unsupervised since, despite their good intentions, the outcome was likely to be blighted by their flawed nature. They were warned that, if they relied on their own decisions, they would misuse their time according to 'their fancy' and stray in their choice of books or their practice of meditation. They would not see 'their vices, their Passions and spiritual necessities which, for want of that assistance, lurk in them undiscovered or if seen they appear in borrowed dresses, which self love never fails to clothe them with'.<sup>38</sup> It was taken as a universal truth that clerical guidance was crucial to the progress of religious women.

Jesuit direction was in great demand in continental convents in the post-Trent Spanish Netherlands and France. This did not apply only to active congregations, but also to enclosed teaching Orders and sometimes to more traditionally contemplative institutions.<sup>39</sup> In the particular context of English Catholicism, it also seems likely that many nuns would have had prior experience of Jesuit confessors at home, in their recusant circles; amongst the Benedictines, several sisters counted Jesuits amongst their close kin. It is therefore not surprising that many Benedictine convents should have relied on Jesuit directors and spirituality, especially since several of them were founded before the revival of the English Benedictine Congregation.<sup>40</sup>

However, supervision by Jesuit directors did not suit all nuns, especially when, with time, the initial flexibility of Loyola's *Exercises* evolved towards a set method of meditation which tended to exclude mystical forms of spirituality.<sup>41</sup> Amongst the English Benedictines, some communities argued about the thorny issue of spiritual directors. Although the house in

<sup>38</sup> ADN, Ms 20H-28, *Directions for the Retreat*.

<sup>39</sup> The Jesuit example influenced the missionary vocation of Mary Ward's institute; see M.C.E. Chambers, *The Life of Mary Ward (1585-1645)*, 2 vols (London, 1882-85); Henriette Peters, *Mary Ward: A World in Contemplation*, trans. by Helen Butterworth (Leominster, 1994); or Immolata Wetter, 'Mary Ward's Apostolic Vocation', *The Way*, supplement 17 (1972): pp. 69-91. It also had great impact upon teaching Orders such as the French Ursulines; see Philippe Annaert, *Les Collèges au féminin: Les Ursulines; Enseignement et vie consacrée aux dix-septième et dix-huitième siècles* (Namur, 1992); or Marie-Andrée Jégou, *Les Ursulines du faubourg Saint-Jacques à Paris 1607-1662. Origines d'un monastère apostolique* (Paris, 1981).

<sup>40</sup> The revival of the English Benedictine Congregation began in 1607 and was made official in 1633 by Urban VIII's Bull known as '*Plantata*'.

<sup>41</sup> Claire Walker notes that 'One of the proponents of this school was Alfonso Rodríguez whose *Practice of Perfection and Christian Virtues* reduced Loyola's spirituality to conventional practicality'. See *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe: English Convents in France and the Low Countries* (Basingstoke, 2003), p. 141.

Brussels had initially allowed Jesuit confessors, Abbess Joanna Berkeley<sup>42</sup> soon wished to withdraw her community from the Society's influence. This provoked the outrage of some of the sisters, such as Lucy Knatchbull<sup>43</sup> or Mary Roper Lovel,<sup>44</sup> who decided to leave the house with the intention of founding a new one under the Society's direction. Although this early 1609 attempt failed, it foreshadowed the developments of 1624, when Lucy Knatchbull was part of a small group who left Brussels to found a new community in Ghent under the Jesuits' spiritual care.<sup>45</sup> In the late 1620s and early 1630s, the already troubled house in Brussels became divided into two clans: those who insisted upon Jesuit confessors and those who, on the contrary, would not have them.<sup>46</sup>

The Brussels dispute has been the object of fine studies, and it is not the purpose of this chapter to try to unravel the complex factors which caused such troubles in the community.<sup>47</sup> It will suffice to say that this episode was revealing of the nuns' commitment to self-determination in matters of spiritual direction. If they were to 'kill the old Adam in [themselves]',<sup>48</sup> religious women ought to be allowed to choose a method which was suitable to their personal inclinations and which they found helpful, rather than restrictive or burdensome. In the pursuit of appropriate means to seek divine love, some felt that the structure of the Ignatian *Exercises* did not bear fruit, and opted for a different type of spirituality. Thus, in Cambrai, the community came to reject Jesuit direction as unsuited to Benedictine life. In an echo of the complaints made by her sisters in Brussels,<sup>49</sup> Dame Gertrude More explained that, though the *Exercises* were perfectly suited to the Jesuits, they were not at all so for enclosed nuns, since Loyola had

<sup>42</sup> Joanna Berkeley (1581-1616), BB015.

<sup>43</sup> Lucy Knatchbull (1611-29), BB107.

<sup>44</sup> Mary Roper Lovel (1564-1628, left before her clothing).

<sup>45</sup> The community at Pontoise - a daughter house from Ghent - later became another staunch defender of the method propounded in the *Spiritual Exercises*.

<sup>46</sup> Claire Walker, 'Securing Souls or Telling Tales? The Politics of Cloistered Life in an English Convent', in Cordula Van Wyhe (ed.), *Female Monasticism in Early Modern Europe: an interdisciplinary view* (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 227-44.

<sup>47</sup> Peter Guilday, *The Catholic Refugees on the Continent, 1558-1795* (London, 1914); David Lunn, *The English Benedictines, 1540-1688: From Reformation to Revolution* (London, 1980); Claire Walker, 'Securing Souls or Telling Tales?'

<sup>48</sup> Tobie Matthew (ed.), *The Life of Lady Lucy Knatchbull* (London, 1931), p. 394.

<sup>49</sup> Agnes Lenthall had complained to Archbishop Jacob Boonen: 'the speret and dederctions of the fathers of the Societie of Jesus is quite diferent from the simplicities of our holye Rule, and that ther directions and examples hath wrought such effects that ther is little left since of the Rule of S Benedict amongst us ...', in AAM, Fonds Kloósters, Englese Benedictijnen/12, Agnes Lenthall to Jacob Boonen, 18 January 1629.



devised his method for men in an active vocation, and never intended them for female contemplatives.<sup>50</sup>

Cambrai was somewhat atypical, since it was to develop its own unique spiritual identity. In July 1624, the newly established community had welcomed a member of the freshly restored English Benedictine Congregation, Augustine Baker (1575–1641), as their spiritual guide. During his nine-year stay, Baker transformed the spiritual course of the community, to the extent that Cambrai's very identity became known as 'Bakerite' and remained so long after Baker's departure in 1633 and his death in 1640.<sup>51</sup> In this particular brand of spirituality, nuns were allowed to undertake their spiritual journey at their own pace, improving their contemplation gradually, according to their own capacities.<sup>52</sup> Gertrude More expounded this flexibility, which she opposed to the Jesuit practices which 'all uphold the same form, and grow in all things too rigid for other Orders.'<sup>53</sup> Baker's way, she claimed, allowed her 'to reform [her]self in all inordinate affections to created things, and this more by quietness than by extraordinary force'. She believed with Baker that, if rid of its earthly hindrances, the soul would naturally follow its spiritual vocation and soar toward God. She wrote: 'If we should die unto ourselves / And all things else but Thee, / By natural impulse would our souls / Ascend and closely be / United to our Centre dear, / To which our souls would hie, / Because as proper then to us / As fire to upwards fly.'<sup>54</sup>

Gertrude More praised the simplicity of Baker's way, which sought to empty the penitent of all worldly emotions or representations, to allow her to be penetrated by the Holy Spirit. She implicitly criticized the Ignatian method when she wrote that 'every image of a created thing is an impediment to the said simplicity, and therefore it is to be rejected wheu the soul applieth itself immediately to God.'<sup>55</sup> Contrary to the Ignatians, Baker gave much leeway to the penitent soul to follow her own path, without relying on specific exercises or images. The nun was to abandon herself to God entirely. Through this vacuum, she became an expression of

<sup>50</sup> *The Writings of Dame Gertrude More*, pp. 250–52.

<sup>51</sup> On the subject of Augustine Baker's manuscripts and spiritual heritage, see Anselm Cramer, 'The Librarie of the Howse': Augustine Baker's Community and their Books', in *Analecta Cartusiana*, 204 (2002): pp. 103–10; Claire Walker, 'Spiritual Property: The English Benedictine Nuns of Cambrai and the Dispute over the Baker Manuscripts', in Nancy E. Wright, Margaret W. Ferguson and A.R. Buck (eds), *Women, Property and the Letter of the Law in Early Modern England* (Toronto, 2004), pp. 237–55.

<sup>52</sup> See David Lunn, 'Augustine Baker (1575–1641) and the English Mystical Tradition', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 26.3 (July 1975): pp. 267–77.

<sup>53</sup> *The Writings of Dame Gertrude More*, p. 251.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

the medieval 'empty vessel', a holy receptacle to be filled with the divine.<sup>56</sup> One nun used this image in a lovely metaphor, urging her sisters to make themselves available to God: 'Thou art to be filld with good. Poure out the evell. Imagin that God would fill thee with hony: if thou art filld with vinegar, where wilt thou put the hony.'<sup>57</sup> This pure soul, or virgin spirit, became 'as a cleare glasse without spot'.<sup>58</sup> From this stage onwards, divine love would fill the soul entirely and make it ever purer, in a self-perpetuating process.

As the example of Cambrai illustrates, nuns strongly believed that the wrong type of guidance was likely to hinder their spiritual journey and to foster worldly emotions – such as frustration, desperation, anger and fear – all of which conspired to keep them away from the one, perfectly spiritual emotion which they sought: divine love.

#### Divine Love as the Ultimate Spiritual Emotion

On the way to perfect union with their heavenly bridegroom, women religious practised devotional exercises meant to effect a deep change in the inner portion of their souls. Yet despite their best efforts to soar towards the divine, they remained beings of flesh and blood; time and again, they bemoaned this obstacle to mystical union, this flesh upon the wings of the soul 'which makes it unable to fly'.<sup>59</sup> The Platonic image of the soul as entombed in the body was recurrent in their writings; Gertrude More, for instance, referred to her carnal shell as a 'grievous burden of flesh and blood'.<sup>60</sup> Later, Christina Brent lamented: 'The bodie is my onlie burden.'<sup>61</sup> Since the body was such a hindrance to contemplative perfection, many nuns looked forward to death as a happy moment, a long-awaited passage to a better state where they would be free from the slavery of base human emotions. One author argued that those who truly love God 'court eternall life, they lament the delay'.<sup>62</sup> Death, the object of so much trepidation in most living creatures, became a desirable liberation, a liminal moment in which the nun would finally be born unto her spiritual self. Gertrude More, in her exercises, envisaged her own death as a deliverance: 'who

<sup>56</sup> See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 1987).

<sup>57</sup> ADN, Ms 20H-40, writings on Love, 'God is to be loved before all things' (item 2).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, item 10.

<sup>59</sup> ADN, Ms 20H-40, item 23.

<sup>60</sup> Gertrude More, *The Holy Practices of a Devine Lover*, p. 56.

<sup>61</sup> ADN, Ms 20H-10, f. 287.

<sup>62</sup> ADN, Ms 20H-40, Writings on Love, item 4.

shall deliver mee from the Bodye of this Death? ... I desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ.' To her, this life on earth was a time of trial and spiritual death and, in reverse, she expected her physical death to usher her spiritual renaissance in perfect union with her heavenly spouse. She longed for death, which alone would allow her finally to know divine love: 'When shall this earthly Tabernacle be dissolved, and my soule be made one with thee?'<sup>63</sup> Such rhetoric was common in the devotions of early modern religious women, and typical of the Benedictines of Cambrai.

For the accomplished religious, death was therefore not a source of anxiety or fear, since it put a stop to decades of slavery to the body, its distempers, and its vile natural emotions. Death heralded the beginning of a truly spiritual fulfilment in which the nun, united with God, would experience the only supremely worthy emotion of divine love. On her deathbed, the zealous contemplative took care 'to dispose her soule for the sweet embraces of her heavenly spows',<sup>64</sup> before she 'passed to her reward' or 'rendered her pious soul into the hands of her creator'.<sup>65</sup> From this perspective, death was understood as freeing, since it allowed, finally, the full experience of divine union.<sup>66</sup>

It was when contemplating this blissful prospect of disembodied divine union that nuns resorted to the most affective language to be found in their manuscripts. In evocation of their bridegroom, in expectation of his love, these censors of worldly passions wrote with nothing less than intense emotions. 'O my Happynesse! O my only delight! O joye of my hart! O my Hope, my sollace, my beginnunge, and end!'<sup>67</sup> The breathless rhythm of Gertrude More's short interjections combined vividly with the repetition of exclamation marks to communicate the ardour of her emotions and the fire of her desire for her divine lover. With the reiteration of the pronoun 'my', More expressed her affective bond with her God, her sense of belonging to Him, and of being nothing but Him.<sup>68</sup> In the happy state she dreamed of, after her liberation from human weakness and debilitating

<sup>63</sup> Augustine Baker (ed.), *The Spiritual Exercises of the Most Vertuous and Religious D. Gertrude More*, pp. 139 and 150 respectively.

<sup>64</sup> 'Abbess Neville's Annals of the Five Communities', ed. Mary Justina Ramsey, CRS, 6 (London, 1909), p. 31; Eugenia Pulton's obituary.

<sup>65</sup> Obituary of Mary Vavasour, in *Obituaries of the Brussels Benedictines*, Downside Abbey, ff. 90-91. On the functions of obituary writing in the convent, see Caroline Bowden, 'Collecting the Lives of Early Modern Women Religious: Obituary Writing and the Development of Collective Memory and Corporate Identity', *Women's History Review*, 19.1 (2010): pp. 7-20.

<sup>66</sup> Gertrude More, *The Holy Practices of a Devine Lover*, p. 68.

<sup>67</sup> Baker, *The Spiritual Exercises*, p. 152.

<sup>68</sup> See Marion Norman, 'Dame Gertrude More and the English Mystical Tradition', *Recusant History*, 15.1 (May 1979): pp. 196-211.

passions, her 'Happynesse', 'delight', 'joye', 'hope', or 'solace' all sprang from union with Jesus Christ and were therefore divine in nature, to be differentiated from the baser kinds of natural emotions. Such heightened feelings were the goal for which all zealous nuns yearned in their pursuit of spiritual perfection and divine love. More's co-sister, Margaret Gascoigne, also proclaimed her longing for this holy union:

Yet art thou my most true Lord & lover, & I will yet farther presume to say, & againe & againe to say, that thou art hee whom my soule desireth, longeth, & coveteth to love ... Come, O come, my most sweet Lord, into the garden of my soule, & gather the fruites of my labour; Come I beseech thee, on whom I desire to bestow the fruites of all mine actions.<sup>69</sup>

In Gascoigne's writings, the word 'desire' featured recurrently, as did evocations of ardour, yearning, longing and pining. The same longing was also expressed poignantly in this anonymous document:

O my dearest Lorde and my God, O my best beloved spouse and friend choosen above all others. O my love, my refuge, my joy, and whatsoever my heart can desire? ... O that my soule with all its powers myght perfectly be united unto thee, never more to be separated from thee, but allwaise to rest in thee, that so enjoying thy sweet embraces it may be drowned and melted into thy owne divine substance.<sup>70</sup>

In this passage, as in so many others, the nun conveyed her anticipated happiness at the time of her intimate union with the divine lover through highly sensual prose in which she called upon all of her senses to represent the perfection of her bliss. Thus, she could feel her bridegroom's 'sweet embraces' and through the common metaphors of drowning or melting, she merged entirely with God and became lost in His immensity. Gertrude More used the same images when she wrote of being 'drowned and swallowed up in that ocean of Divine Love' or of melting away through the excess of her passion.<sup>71</sup> She yearned to be penetrated and filled by divine love and she called, breathless: 'O love! love! flow into my soul that I may sigh and pant after God alone and praise this my Beloved for all eternity!'<sup>72</sup>

Such emotive prose was typical of that left by her Benedictine sisters at Cambrai, and it echoed the rich heritage of the European mystics who have

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>70</sup> ADN, Ms 20H-37, *On the Love of God*, f. 185.

<sup>71</sup> *The Writings of Dame Gertrude More*, p. 77.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

fascinated both historians and literary scholars for decades. Divine love was, in turn, a burning furnace of love, a dart piercing the heart through and through, an ocean in which to swim or drown, or a vivifying fountain at which to quench one's spiritual thirst. These images were reminiscent of those used by holy exemplars such as St John of the Cross, or Teresa of Ávila. Through the ages, mystical union with God was ever expressed in the language of the senses and emotions. The physical and affective nature of the mystical experience was actually one of the reasons why the clerical authorities of Teresa's Spain held the *alumbrados* in the highest suspicion, and why Teresa herself had to prove the godly origin of her ecstasies.<sup>73</sup>

The emotive expression of the spiritual experience of divine love was as mysterious to contemporaneous witnesses as it is now. Modern studies of mysticism have duly noted the vibrant sensuality, or indeed the eroticism, of the accounts documenting mystical encounters with God.<sup>74</sup> Yet, the nuns' amorous longings and their experiences of divine penetration may not be best interpreted as sexual arousal or indeed orgasmic pleasure.<sup>75</sup> These modern and secular readings fail to take into account that the religious women who felt such physical expressions of their union with God experienced them as entirely different from animal appetites. As the brides of Christ sought to unite with their heavenly bridegroom, they were consumed by a desire which far transcended any human love: these were the spiritual affects of spiritual creatures.<sup>76</sup> If any confusion between divine love and its base human counterpart was permitted, the fault lay with the very limits of human language, since divine lovers had no other words but those of earthly love to express their spiritual transports. Those were constraints which could not be overcome. Reflecting upon this seeming contradiction, French philosopher Simone Weil once wrote that 'To reproach mystics with loving God by means of the faculty of sexual love is as though one were to reproach a painter with making pictures by means of colors composed of material substances. We haven't anything else with which to love.'<sup>77</sup> And indeed, many times did nuns lament the

<sup>73</sup> See Gillian T. W. Ahlgren, *Teresa of Ávila and the Politics of Sanctity* (Ithaca, NY, 1996), p. 15; and Stephen Haliczer, *Between Exaltation and Infamy: Female Mystics in the Golden Age of Spain* (Oxford, 2002).

<sup>74</sup> Amongst others, see Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference and the Demands of History* (Chicago, IL, 2002); Elizabeth Petroff, *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism* (New York, 1994).

<sup>75</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum (ed.), *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York, 1992), p. 86.

<sup>76</sup> Thomas Dubay, S.M., *Fire Within: St. Teresa of Ávila, St. John of the Cross, and the Gospel - On Prayer* (San Francisco, CA, 1989), p. 41.

<sup>77</sup> Simone Weil, *The Notebooks of Simone Weil*, trans. Arthur Wills (2 vols, London, 1956), vol. 2, p. 472.

inadequacy of such words to convey divine emotions; Gertrude More herself remarked: 'Who can express what passeth between such a soul and Thee? verily neither man nor Angel is able to do it sufficiently.'<sup>78</sup> What was expressed in the language of emotions was in fact experienced on a different level altogether, spiritually, and that only when the bride of Christ had managed to eradicate her own, human passions. Successful nuns became one with their God by transcending the humours or passions of this mortal coil. In this heightened spiritual experience, Augustine Baker explained, 'The soul is now so elevated in spirit that she seems to be all spirit, and, as it were, separated from the body.'<sup>79</sup>

Thus it appears that the early modern understanding of emotions or 'passions' as the undesirable affects of distempered bodies led religious women to consider feelings as contradictory with a contemplative vocation. Helped by their monastic vows, and guided by prescriptive literature and clerical advice, zealous nuns tried to root out emotions from their lives: they cut themselves off from the pleasures of the world, forsook personal friendships and sought humility in an effort to experience the affective vacuum which alone could allow them to be entirely receptive to divine love. This life on earth was a time of trials where contemplatives attempted symbolically to die to the world's physicality, which kept them away from their spiritual rebirth in Christ; yet there was hope, for successful abstraction from emotions was rewarded with divine union:

... as soon as the world is cast forth & the heart is cleansed from all longation of sinn & affection to creatures, presently the entire satiating & ravishing Love of the eternal spouse Jesus Christ Crucified enters and takes full possession thereof.<sup>80</sup>

Women religious' rapport with emotions was, however, more complex than this dichotomy between evil, worldly feelings and godly, spiritual affects. In the case of the Bakerite spirituality embraced by the English Benedictines of Cambrai, union with God was experienced in highly physical, emotive ways. The Cambrai nuns owed much to the mystical heritage of earlier times and although they themselves did not report divine visions, raptures, or ecstasies, they partook of the same movement which valued an immediate (unmediated) experience of divine love. What they felt during moments of perfect prayer, in contemplation of their heavenly bridegroom, was by necessity experienced through the body and

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>79</sup> Augustine Baker, in *Contemplative Prayer*, p. 412.

<sup>80</sup> ADN, Ms 20H-17, *A Short Treatise on the Three Principall Vertues and Vows of Religious Persons*, ff. 122-23.

its emotions. Although these spiritual emotions were construed as entirely distinct from animal passions, they did find their source in the body, and expressed themselves in joy, tears, or sensory images such as burning or drowning. Hence, it seems that the corporal shell which nuns sought to subjugate – or even to escape altogether – if it could be a hindrance to contemplative perfection, could also be the very locus of the experience of divine love, and the opportunity for spiritual bliss.