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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,  
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Married Nuns in the French Revolution:  
The Sexual Revolution of the 1790s

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in History

by

Kathryn Elizabeth Marsden

Dissertation Committee:  
Professor Timothy Tackett, chair  
Professor Sarah Farmer  
Professor Ulrike Strasser

2014



## **DEDICATION**

To

my mother, Debora Marsden, who taught me that I could be whatever I wanted to be, and who has supported me every step of the way.

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Married Nuns in the French Revolution: The Sexual Revolution of the 1790s

By

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Doctor of Philosophy in History

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The French Revolution was also a cultural revolution that redefined the relationship of the family to the state and precipitated unprecedented religious changes in French society. In the eighteenth century, *philosophes* attacked religious celibacy, which previously had been viewed as a higher spiritual calling. Defining celibacy as detrimental to society and unpatriotic, reformers instead promoted marriage as a productive institution that served as the basis of civil society. Almost from the first moments of the Revolution, legislators—concerned that religious vows violated individual rights—considered the dissolution of monasticism. Although women religious hastened to petition the National Assembly in defense of their way of life, the political and religious schism caused by the oath to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy ended the sympathetic relationship that had developed between nuns and legislators. The dominant image of nuns transformed from victim to fanatic. The perceived counterrevolutionary sentiments of nuns justified the complete suppression of convents in 1792. Revolutionary propaganda and the loss of a secure social status encouraged former nuns to marry.

Previously historians have believed that nuns' marriages were motivated by active religious persecution that took place during the dechristianization campaign of 1793-1794. Reinvestigating the best source of information on married nuns—the Cardinal Caprara archives of petitioners who requested reconciliation with the Catholic Church under the Empire—reveals that nuns' marriages were not really motivated by Revolutionary dechristianization campaigns. Instead married nuns explained that they believed that they had the right to marry, that they fell in love, or that they had married to secure economic stability. Moreover, looking at complete departmental studies we find that nuns' marriages were not as rare or historically inconsequential as formerly thought. Historians have underestimated the number of married nuns and failed to recognize marriage as an important survival strategy, especially for the youngest nuns. In fact, many nuns internalized revolutionary discourse that promoted companionate marriage and individual rights. Their correspondence provides proof of a sexual revolution that overturned a previous sexual order, rejected celibacy, and more firmly entrenched a pro-nuptial culture in Revolutionary France.

## INTRODUCTION

The dechristianization movement during the French Revolution—lasting from 1793 to 1794—was a pivotal moment in the history of France and in the history of religion and state relations as a whole. For the first time since Late Antiquity a major European power attacked the Christian religion itself, openly seeking to destroy its power and influence. The closure of monasteries, the entry of former clerical members into secular life, the marriage of both male and female clerics, and the subsequent reintegration of these married priests, monks, and nuns into the Catholic Church would have lasting influences on French society, a society that would never again be quite as Catholic or quite as Christian as under the Old Regime. These dramatic religious transformations were particularly significant, moreover, in that they coincided with a major shift in patterns of sexual behavior and gender relations that had been evolving over the course of the eighteenth century.

Suzanne Desan has argued that the tumult of the 1790s was not just a political Revolution, but also a social revolution that changed the nature of relationships between women and men and parents and children.<sup>1</sup> To take this idea further, I believe that the Revolution of 1789 was also part of a larger a sexual revolution that overthrew the perceived value of celibacy in French society, redefined marriage as an affectionate relationship as well as a civil contract, and reoriented sexuality to the service of the

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<sup>1</sup> Suzanne Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

nation.<sup>2</sup> This study will explore these issues by looking at the changing attitudes towards women religious and monasticism in general in the eighteenth century as well as the correspondence of nuns who married during the Revolution.

Although they were a relatively small segment of the population, nuns received an inordinate amount of attention under the Old Regime and during the Revolution.

Numerous eighteenth century treatises proposed drastic reforms and even the dissolution of convents, which were seen to be discordant with the precepts of an Enlightened society. Sentimental and pornographic literary fiction promoted the idea that convents were filled with young women imprisoned against their will, rallying critical public opinion against the institution of monasticism.<sup>3</sup> In 1789, deputies quickly took up the question of what was to be done about nuns and convents under a new regime that doubted the utility and morality of the religious tradition of celibacy. Nuns are important to this history of social, religious, and cultural change because they stood at the center of these debates for *philosophes* and Revolutionaries alike.

In attacking celibacy, the social critics of the late-eighteenth century and the Revolution advocated marriage as a companionate relationship that would form the social basis of an egalitarian society. Nuns, as victims of parental despotism, unequal inheritances practices, and the arbitrary authority of the Old Regime which allowed forced vocations, became a special symbol of the social ills of celibacy and lost productive potential occasioned by monasticism. In discussing the fate of monks, priests,

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<sup>2</sup> Faramerz Dabhoiwala, *Origins of Sex: A History of the First Sexual Revolution* (London: Allen Lane, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Denis Diderot, *La Religieuse* (Paris: Editions de la Seine, 2006); Olympe de Gouges, *Le couvent ou Les vœux forcés : drame en trois actes* (Paris, 1792).



and nuns, Revolutionaries emphasized that the Nation was a family and that marriage was a civic duty.

Although a rather small faction of society, a closer look at the experiences of married nuns during the Revolutionary decade can be used to illuminate larger changes in sexual and religious attitudes that would have a profound impact on French society in the nineteenth century. Explicitly linking the political agenda of dechristianization with social changes related to marriage and sentimental love will help to reveal the ways in which the French Revolution was not simply a political event—but rather an event that profoundly influenced individuals’ religious and social experience.

Identifying demographic changes in the decade of the Revolution undoubtedly linked to sexual and marriage practices, Martyn Lyons, has lamented that no window “penetrates the secret of the confessional.”<sup>4</sup> While this is true for the vast majority of the French population, a large series of exceptional correspondence written during the early Napoleonic period by members of the Catholic clergy who had married between 1791 and 1801 at least renders more transparent this segment of society’s attitudes towards religion, marriage, and sexuality.<sup>5</sup> The letters were addressed to Cardinal Caprara, the papal legate charged with implementing the Concordat—the newly signed treaty between Bonaparte and the Pope—and reintegrating members of the clergy who, in the Church’s eyes, had committed “grave errors” during the Revolution. The letters often provide extraordinary personal testimony in the form of confessions about the individual’s sexual

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<sup>4</sup> Martyn Lyons, *Napoleon Bonaparte and the Legacy of the French Revolution* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> Now preserved in series AF-IV 1895-1920 at the Archives Nationales in Paris.

and familial experiences over the previous decade and speak to a deep-seated connection to the Catholic Church that ten years of religious upheaval could not rupture.

Under normal conditions such documents would have been transferred to the Vatican archives and probably would have been destroyed. Indeed, canon law has long prohibited the preservation of written records relating to confession. The letters were preserved only through the autocratic authority of Napoleon, who confiscated the Caprara papers after the break down of diplomatic relations between Paris and the Vatican in 1808.<sup>6</sup> Thus, by historical accident, these documents are preserved in the Archives Nationales de France, in Paris.

The “confessions” convey in remarkable detail individuals’ reasons for abandoning the clergy and marrying, as well as the attitudes of family and spiritual advisers towards this decision. Indeed, the more detailed letters also recount the conditions of the petitioners’ entrance into religious life—a decision that many of writers complain was not always voluntary. The intimate stories recounted in the Cardinal Caprara letters provide a window into the private lives of people struggling to make sense of the new religious and sexual worldview offered by Revolutionary ideology. These extraordinary sources can thus contribute to our understanding of the impact of the French Revolution on men and women’s private lives, religious experiences, and public gender roles—a legacy that would extend well into the twentieth century.

A close reading of the documents also serves to contextualize changes in opinions towards sexuality, marriage, and celibacy occasioned by Enlightenment philosophy and revolutionary social reforms. Former nuns did not choose to marry in a cultural or social

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<sup>6</sup> Jeannine Charon-Bordas, *Le Legation en France du Cardinal Caprara 1801 - 1808 : repertoire des demandes de reconciliation avec L'Eglise* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1979).

vacuum. Their petitions relate personal experiences of a larger cultural transformation that questioned the validity of perpetual religious vows, criticized celibacy, and endorsed sentimental marriage as the basis of society. In many ways these transformations can be viewed a sexual revolution that further entrenched heterosexual marriage as the political basis of enlightened society. A close reading and analysis of these petitions, also calls into question two general historical beliefs: that forced vocations were rare in the late-eighteenth century and that nuns were forced to marry during the Revolution. Reasserting nuns' marriages as a valid historical event, speaks to the need to reinterpret dominant historical narratives of revolutionary cultural change and re-assess the cultural and social forces that resulted in this unprecedented situation.

Over the course of two centuries the content of the Caprara archives has been sadly neglected. Catholic historians of the nineteenth century regarded the marriages of nuns to have been coerced by civil authorities or anti-clerical fanatics. Often themselves members of the clergy, they preferred to gloss over clerical marriages or underestimated the impact of the phenomenon in regional studies of the clergy's Revolutionary exploits.<sup>7</sup> Historians of the left, often interested in more overtly political questions, neglected to interrogate the reasons behind clerical marriages, confining this history to the realm of anecdote and anomaly. To a certain extent the subject remained taboo and considered unworthy of serious scholarly attention until the twentieth century.

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<sup>7</sup> Xavier Maréchaux, "Les prêtres mariés sous la Révolution Française" (Doctoral, Université de Paris I, 1995), 1.

Albert Mathiez first called attention to the Caprara archives in 1926.<sup>8</sup> In his short article, Mathiez told the stories of some of the priests, monks, and nuns who wrote to Cardinal Caprara on the subject of their marriages or their desire to marry. However, he did not contextualize the stories or relate them to larger revolutionary events. More recently, T.J.A. LeGoff and Claude Langlois published a somewhat lengthier study of the married male clergy based on the archives.<sup>9</sup> They argued that the marriages of priests were above all the product of active dechristianization campaigns, and that few clergymen married of their own volition. Most importantly this article provides a detailed geographic analysis of clerical marriages. Timothy Tackett and Langlois in their article, “A l’épreuve de la Révolution,” found marriage was not always the final step towards secularizing for the abdicating clergy.<sup>10</sup> Rather clergymen married without abdicating and *vice versa*.

John McManners<sup>11</sup> and Michel Vovelle<sup>12</sup> have looked at the issue of priests’ marriages in the context of the dechristianization of 1793-4. McManners does not believe that priests who married viewed themselves as having renounced the Catholic religion, rather their marriages can be viewed as referendum on the need for reform within the Church. Michel Vovelle’s authoritative analysis *Religion et Révolution: La déchristianisation de l’an II*, provides one of the most extensive studies of

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<sup>8</sup> Albert Mathiez, “Les prêtres révolutionnaires devant le Cardinal Caprara.,” *Annales Historiques de la Révolution française* 3 (1926): 1–15.

<sup>9</sup> Claude Langlois and TGA Le Goff, “Les vaincus de la Révolution: Jalons pour une sociologie des prêtres mariés,” in *Voies nouvelles pour l’histoire de la révolution française*, 1978, 281–312.

<sup>10</sup> Tackett, Timothy and Langlois, Claude, “A l’épreuve de la Révolution: 1770-1830,” in *Histoire des catholiques en France du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle à nos jours*, ed. Lebrun, Francois (Toulouse: Privat, 1980), 215–89.

<sup>11</sup> John McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church* (London: S.P.C.K. for the Church Historical Society, 1969).

<sup>12</sup> Michel Vovelle, *Religion et révolution : la déchristianisation de l’an II* (Paris: Hachette, 1976); Michel Vovelle, *The Revolution against the Church : From Reason to the Supreme Being* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991).

dechristianization in general. He argues that priests' abdications and marriages could be used as a measure of dechristianization in various parts of France. Vovelle studies the relationship between priests' marriages, the oath to the civil constitution, and *déprêtrisation*, and dechristianization to expose the areas that were particularly touched by Revolutionary religious policies.<sup>13</sup>

Most historians who have studied the clerical marriages of the Revolution have considered them to have been the product of force and coercion.<sup>14</sup> To this end, they cite the fact that overwhelmingly priests' marriages took place between 1793-4, the moment of the most intense anticlerical persecution. More recently, Claire Cage and Xavier Maréchaux have questioned the interpretation that the vast majority of priests' marriages were contracted involuntarily under the threat of death, prison, or deportation. Rather, Cage points out the "complex practical and personal considerations" that shaped priests' decisions to marry.<sup>15</sup> She especially emphasizes Revolutionary constructions of masculinity that linked citizenship and patriotism to marriage and fatherhood. Not only does Cage make the connection to the short-term dechristianization campaign of 1793, but she also demonstrates that clerical marriages were part of the longer-term dechristianization movement that marked the eighteenth century and redefined celibacy as a "social crime."

Similarly, noting that the vast majority of married clerics who wrote Caprara desired to have their marriages rehabilitated, Maréchaux raises the question of why

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<sup>13</sup> Langlois and Le Goff, "Les vaincus de la Révolution: Jalons pour une sociologie des prêtres mariés"; Timothy Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France: The Ecclesiastical Oath of 1791* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986).

<sup>14</sup> Langlois and Le Goff, "Les vaincus de la Révolution: Jalons pour une sociologie des prêtres mariés"; Kenneth Fenster, "The Abdicating Clergy of the Gironde," *The Catholic Historical Review* 85, no. 4 (1999): 541–65.

<sup>15</sup> Claire Cage, "'Celibacy Is a Social Crime': The Politics of Clerical Marriage, 1793-1797," *French Historical Studies* 36, no. 4 (Fall 2013): 603.

priests who had married under duress during the Revolution would choose to stay with their spouses rather than return to the priesthood under the Empire.<sup>16</sup>

The majority of these studies of clerical marriage, however, have been overwhelmingly quantitative in nature, focusing primarily on the sociology of the individuals appearing in the correspondence. Similarly to the male clergy, in his study on the rise of secular congregations of the *supérieure-général* during the nineteenth century in *Le catholicisme au féminin*, Claude Langlois has interpreted “l'épreuve” of nuns' marriages to be “plus ou moins contraint.”<sup>17</sup> Langlois minimizes the importance of married nuns, estimating that only 500, or 1%, of all nuns in France married, compared with 6 or 7% of the male clergy. Langlois also contends that the majority of these marriages took place at the height of the brutal phase of dechristianization. He emphasizes the unwillingness, isolation, and constrained nature of the women's marriages: "dans l'ensemble, le mariage semble avoir été, contrairement à ce qui se passe pour les hommes, plutôt subi que désiré.”<sup>18</sup>

In fact, with the exception of Langlois's short discussion and of one brief article by Ruth Graham,<sup>19</sup> historians have scarcely mentioned the hundreds of letters written by women religious who married during the Revolution—thus entirely glossing over the crucial gendered dimension of the Caprara documents. Graham uses the Cardinal Caprara letters requesting the rehabilitation of marriages contracted by clerical members during the Revolution to quantify women's most common motives for marrying. She also counts

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<sup>16</sup> Maréchaux, “Les prêtres mariés sous la Révolution Française,” 8.

<sup>17</sup> Claude Langlois, *Le Catholicisme Au Féminin: Les Congrégations Françaises à Supérieure Générale Au XIXe Siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 1984), 8.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>19</sup> Ruth Graham, “Married Nuns Before Cardinal Caprara: A Sociological Analysis of Their Petitions,” in *Pratiques Religieuses, Mentalités et Spiritualités Dans l'Europe Révolutionnaire, 1770-1820 : Actes Du Colloque, Chantilly, 27-29 Novembre 1986* (Turnhout : Brepols, 1988).

the number of women who wanted to stay with their husbands, finding that the majority had no desire to return to the religious life.<sup>20</sup> While identifying important trends—women’s desire to stay with their husbands and the marginal importance of forced marriages—Graham largely neglects the content of the letters themselves and fails to link the significance of former nuns’ marriages to the larger events of the French Revolution. This article is most useful as a starting point for a more in depth exploration of female religious’s letters in the Caprara archives.

Few historians have considered the historical importance of the experiences of the women religious who wrote Cardinal Caprara on the subject of their marriages. Only recently, Gwénaél Murphy has provided an excellent regional study of nuns in Poitou that recognizes women’s varied reactions to the Revolution and the closure of convents.<sup>21</sup> Viewing marriage as an important avenue to the secularization of former women religious, Murphy postulates that the historiographical silence surrounding nuns’ marriages has three possible reasons: “leur nombre négligeable, le tabou, la difficulté de la recherche en archive.”<sup>22</sup> Murphy’s detailed and personal account offers a new approach to women religious’ participation in the Revolution and brings to light the stories of women religious who were not counterrevolutionary and may have even supported revolutionary religious reforms, helping to correct one-sided interpretations that have painted all French nuns as martyrs and resisters. He devotes a single section in his

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Gwénaél Murphy, “Les religieuses mariées pendant la Révolution Française,” in *Le genre face aux mutations: Masculin et féminin, du Moyen Âge à nos jours* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2003), 243–54; Gwénaél Murphy, “Femmes de Dieu et Révolution Française dans le Poitou: Etude de la réception de l’événement révolutionnaire par les religieuses poitevines” (Doctoral, Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales de Paris, 2010); Gwénaél Murphy, *Femmes de Dieu et Révolution Française dans le Poitou: Etude de la réception de l’événement révolutionnaire par les religieuses poitevines* (Saarbrücken: Éditions universitaires européennes, 2010); Gwénaél Murphy, *Rose Lauray, religieuse poitevine (1752-1835): Féminité, religion et Révolution dans le Poitou* (Geste Editions, 2002).

<sup>22</sup> Murphy, “Les religieuses mariées pendant la Révolution Française,” 245.

dissertation to married nuns, tantalizingly suggesting that women's sympathies were more complex than previously recognized as they struggled to make a life outside the convent. In particular, Murphy's study demonstrates the possibilities of an analysis of nuns that investigates the "fiction in the archives," meaning to explore the language used, the rhetorical strategies, and the stories told, as individuals sought to explain, justify, and rationalize their marriages.<sup>23</sup> Such an approach offers rich insights into the religious and sexual mentalities of the Revolutionary generation which can be linked to a longer term and less violent dechristianization, identified by Vovelle, that began earlier in the eighteenth century.<sup>24</sup>

Recent scholars who have addressed the broader significance of convents and nuns in France, such as Mita Choudhury, have continued to emphasize the martyrdom of those nuns who were imprisoned or even guillotined for refusing to give up their communal life and Catholic values.<sup>25</sup> Studies of particular female religious orders in the period of the French Revolution have overwhelmingly treated those who openly rejected the Revolution and were either persecuted, fled the country, or went into hiding. They seem to dismiss the Revolution as a hiccup in the illustrious history of French convents without taking into account the considerable number of women with more ambivalent experiences of the Revolution or the long-term consequences of nuns' revolutionary secularization.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Natalie Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France*, 1st ed. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990).

<sup>24</sup> Michel Vovelle, *Piété Baroque et déchristianisation en provence au 18e siècle : les attitudes devant la mort d'après les clauses des testaments* (Paris: Plon, 1973).

<sup>25</sup> Mita Choudhury, *Convents and Nuns in Eighteenth-Century French Politics and Culture* (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004).

<sup>26</sup> Genevieve Reynes, *Couvents de femmes: La vie des religieuses contemplatives dans la France des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Fayard, 1987); Marie de Chantal Gueudré, *Histoire de l'ordre des Ursulines en France*. (Paris: Editions Saint-Paul, 1958); Bernard Dompnier and Dominique Julia, *Visitation et*



Chapter 1 will provide an overview of the female ecclesiastic society of the Old Regime. The nuns who faced the Revolution came from various social classes, lived in urban and rural environments, and were part of thriving communities and decaying institutions. They formed part of communities with very diverse histories that devoted themselves not only to prayer and penitence but which were also increasingly devoted to active charity in the often in the form of teaching or nursing. Although nuns and their activities are not easy to typify, they all made up a special branch of the first estate, a membership that defined their social position or *état*.<sup>27</sup>

Historians have questioned if convents were not already becoming obsolete in the decades before the Revolution intervened and hastened their closure. This chapter will argue that primarily the particular culture of each religious house mattered the most in accessing the veracity of the traditional narrative of ‘decadence and decline’ that previously defined the history of Old Regime convents.<sup>28</sup> However, the reforms of Trent and of the early eighteenth century had largely restored order and regularity at a time in which the literary public began to negatively assess female monasticism and worry the

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*visitandines aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles: actes du Colloque d'Annecy, 3-5 juin 1999* (Saint-Etienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Etienne, 2001); Marie-Ange Duvignacq-Glessgen, *L'Ordre de la Visitation à Paris aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1994); Choudhury, *Convents and Nuns in Eighteenth-Century French Politics and Culture*; Dominique Dinet, *Religion et société: les Réguliers et la vie régionale dans les diocèses d'Auxerre, Langres et Dijon (fin XVIe-fin XVIIIe siècles)*, Histoire moderne 41 (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1998); Marie-Claude Dinet-Lecomte, *Les soeurs hospitalières en France aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles: la charité en action* (Paris: H. Champion, 2005); Ivan Gobry, *Les martyrs de la Révolution française* (Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1989).

<sup>27</sup> For the purposes of this dissertation, and following a French tradition that privileged their membership in the first estate over the lack of tonsure and religious office, women religious will be included in the definition of clergy. See: J. Michael Hayden, “States, Estates, and Orders: The Quality of Female Clergy in Early Modern France,” *French History* 8, no. 1 (March 1, 1994): 51–76. Thus, when describing circumstances that equally affected men and women, I will often use the gender neutral term “clergy member.”

<sup>28</sup> Reynes, *Couvents de femmes*.

most about the *vocation forcée*, or the practice of coercing women into professing unwillingly.

Chapter 2 will turn to the political and legal interventions that first touched women religious in the early years of the Revolution. Despite concerns that perpetual religious vows violated personal liberty, the total destruction of monasticism was not foreseeable in 1789. Initially, nuns and revolutionary authorities cultivated a positive—although paternalistic—relationship influenced by a gendered anticlericalism that viewed nuns as victims deserving of protection, whereas monks were treated much less favorably.

As the Revolution progressed and followed a more radical religious policy, this relationship broke down. The controversy surrounding the oath to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy brought many women religious into open rebellion against revolutionary religious policy as they refused to accept the replacement of their accustomed spiritual advisers by constitutional priests and bishops. By the beginning of 1792, the dominant image of nuns as fanatics became entrenched in the consciousness of the legislative deputies who feared that nuns were using their state paid pensions to subsidize the refractory clergy and engage in counter-revolutionary activities.

Seeking to breakdown convents as a site of resistance to Revolutionary authority and still believing that nuns could be reintegrated in society, potentially by marrying, the deputies voted the definitive closure of convents to take effect on October 1, 1792. The majority of nuns would, however, resist as long as possible the “liberty” granted to them by revolutionary authorities. Chapter 3 will consider the options that were open to women religious when their convents closed.

The history of nuns' resistance and persecution is well known and often presented as *the* story of nuns in the Revolution. As some of the most vulnerable members of society, women leaving convents reentered the secular world shortly before the Terror and active dechristianization campaigns would persecute the clergy and impose a new morality divorced from Catholic dogma. Rather than facing the guillotine and being martyred for their faith, the majority of nuns quietly secularized, leaving little archival trace of their activities during the Revolution.

However, those nuns who married and wrote Cardinal Caprara provide evidence of what secularization was like for women religious. A reinvestigation of this source allows a reevaluation of nuns' marriages, which this chapter argues were not so closely tied to dechristianization as the marriages of the male clergy. Looking at the letters and new sources on married nuns, allows for a quantitative analysis that suggests that marriage was an important survival strategy for a large segment of nuns who were forced from their convents. Rather than citing persecution or dechristianization as the motivation behind their marriages, nuns commonly explained that they married in order to provide for their economic needs or find a place in society. They also admitted at a startling rate that they fell in love, engaged in illicit sexual relationships, or were influenced by revolutionary interpretations of individual liberty. Rather than an insignificant footnote to the dechristianization movement of the Revolution, nuns' marriages were an important historical event that sheds light on the lived reality of the cultural and religious changes associated with the Revolution.

Chapter 4 looks more closely at nuns' explanations of their marriages. Although the common view of forced marriages, or *mariage blanc* contracted to protect clergy

members from persecution, would have been a perfectly valid excuse for their actions, nuns rarely justified their marriages in these terms. Rather, they stated that they were caught up in the Revolution or forced by circumstances rather than by persecution. Some even candidly reported that they preferred marriage to the cloister. One of the most common themes that emerges from these documents is that former women religious keenly felt the lack of alternatives to marriage. They maintained that they made a logical choice in circumstances where upholding their original commitment became impossible and in doing so, secured a social position, economic stability, and in some cases an affectionate partnership.

More surprisingly, a fairly substantial number of nuns informed Caprara that they had doubts about their original vocations; that they had undertaken this commitment because of family pressure, abuse, or force rather than out of a sincere calling to the religious life. Although Caprara was interested in cases of forced vocations, this information did not contribute to accomplishing the petitioner's goal of rehabilitating her marriage. Former nuns' reflections on their vocations and entrance into religious life make a case for reevaluating women's understanding of this commitment, an understanding that may well have evolved in the face of Revolutionary reforms that advocated the rights of the individual and redefined marriage as a civic virtue.

## CHAPTER 1

### Nuns in the Old Regime: Facts and Fictions

It is impossible to understand the attitudes of the Revolutionaries towards women religious and the reactions of many nuns themselves after 1789 without a preliminary examination of the earlier history of French convents. In recent years our understanding of women religious in the Old Regime has been reevaluated in a series of studies, most notably by Elizabeth Rapley who uses quantitative methods to interrogate received wisdom about nuns of the eighteenth century.<sup>29</sup> She and other historians have often found a considerable disparity between the verifiable facts and the stories told about convent life by the historians of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is particularly important to explore the differences between public perceptions and the realities of female monastic life under the Old Regime. I will outline the ways in which the council of Trent regulated and reformed the rules that governed women religious and discuss the changes in France's population of women religious that took place from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. Particularly, I will weigh in on the common historiographical question of whether French convents, like the communities of male religious, were experiencing a crisis of recruitment and a precipitous decline in the eighteenth century. Overall, this chapter will argue that despite declining numbers, female religious communities were healthier than they had ever been.

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<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Rapley and Robert Rapley, "An Image of Religious Women in the Ancien Regime: The Etats Des Religieuses of 1790-1791," *French History* 11, no. No.4 (1997): 387–410; Elizabeth Rapley, *The Lord as Their Portion: The Story of the Religious Orders and How They Shaped Our World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2011); Elizabeth Rapley, "Women and the Religious Vocation in Seventeenth-Century France," *French Historical Studies* 18, no. 3 (April 1, 1994): 613–31.

Enlightenment novelists, however, continued to draw on popular tropes of reluctant nuns to criticize celibacy, absolutism, and perpetual religious vows. Anti-clerical writers blamed convents for the depopulation of France, lambasted the religious education given to girls, and popularized the assessment that convents were aristocratic, wasteful institutions that imprisoned young women against their will. Real-life cases of forced vows and popular sentimental novels engrained the reality of this abuse onto the public consciousness and served as one of the most persuasive arguments for government intervention in religious reform and ultimately the closure of monasteries during the early Revolution.

In parallel with criticisms of forced vocations, beginning under the reign of Louis XIV political commentators grew increasingly concerned about the perceived decline in France's population. Under the direction of Colbert, the Crown carried out a pronatalist agenda under which marriage and reproduction were lauded not only as a means of increasing the wealth of the nation but also as means to enhance social discipline. Concurrent with governmental efforts to encourage marriage, a subtle change in *mentalité* took place in certain sectors of society that began to place increased value on love, compatibility, and individual choice in marriage. The cultural changes may or may not have impacted female monastic recruitment, but they certainly influenced the way that contemporaries viewed celibacy. Increasingly, companionate marriage and family formation overtook monasticism in the esteem of the state and French society.

### **Female Ecclesiastic Society of the Old Regime**

Although it might seem easy enough to define the word “nun” or describe the kind of life she led, the great diversity of monastic orders and the often great difference between rules and reality complicates these simple tasks. Just as they had in the middle ages, the nuns of the Old Regime swore solemn vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. Beyond these three vows, female ecclesiastic society of France becomes more difficult to generalize. Typically the nun of the Middle Ages was aristocratic woman living behind the high walls of an ancient, richly endowed abbey. Her order, likely Benedictine, Dominican or Franciscan, prescribed a strict routine of prayer and penitence. Practicing restraint and silence, the timeless rituals of the Church punctuated her days and years. Although this nun certainly still existed in the stricter and more traditional contemplative convents, by the eighteenth century a woman seeking to join a convent had considerably more choices than her sisters of a thousand or even three hundred years before. She could ask herself if she preferred to live in town or the country, how strictly she wanted to observe her Rule, and how physically demanding she wished that Rule to be. Especially in the wake of the Catholic Reformation, she could also decide if her vocation included an additional devotion: service to her community and fellow man by teaching, nursing, reforming prostitutes, or converting protestants.

Regardless of vocation, one point of similarity in the lives of women religious was their elevated social status. Swearing solemn, perpetual vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience that bound them for life<sup>30</sup> raised nuns into the first estate—the ecclesiastical

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<sup>30</sup> One of the exceptions to this rule were the canonesses or *chanoinesses seculières*, an ancient order of aristocratic women primarily concentrated in the Northeast of France, and most associated with Germanic modes of monasticism. In defiance of ecclesiastic discipline, they were neither cloistered nor bound for life if they wished to marry. They also continued to hold personal property whose usufruct might be lent to the institute for the duration of their tenure. These positions were accompanied by profitable benefices that were often passed between female members of a family. Needless to say, their existence often presented a conundrum for ecclesiastic authorities. They should not be confused with later institutions of *chanoinesses*

order—which occupied a place of privilege, standing closest to the king and god. Their religious devotions reflected honor back on their families, and society believed in the powers of nuns’ intercessory prayers. Membership in the regular clergy endowed them with certain legal and social privileges. They could not be taxed or tried in lay courts. Yet their vows also subjected them to the principle of “civil death” which made them ineligible to inherit or engage in civil contracts. In particular ways, their religious commitment to celibacy raised them above their sex, distanced them from secular women and made them capable of undertaking responsibilities denied to other women. Subject neither to a father nor a husband, religious celibacy offered nuns a life that was in many ways beyond the limits of patriarchal control.<sup>31</sup>

Typically the monastery also reproduced the social hierarchy of the secular world. Abbesses, prioress, or mother superiors ruled much like queens in their domain—indeed the abbesses of certain monasteries were powerful feudal lords in their own right. Choir sisters, those nuns who paid a full dowry and were expected to sing the divine offices, also staffed important positions within the convent’s administration such as treasurer or novice mistress. Lowest on the social scale were those nuns accepted into the convent as a form of charity or with a nominal dowry to perform the difficult domestic labor that kept the house running. These *converses* or lay sisters generally were not counted among the “real” nuns and could not vote in elections. Instead of sitting in the choir for religious

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*régulières* such as the *chanoinesses augustiennes* who were full *religieuse*. See: Agnès Gerhards, *Dictionnaire historique des ordres religieux* (Paris: A. Fayard., 1998); John McManners, *French Ecclesiastical Society Under the Ancien Régime; a Study of Angers in the Eighteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961), 489.

<sup>31</sup> J. Michael Hayden, “States, Estates, and Orders: The *Qualité* of Female Clergy in Early Modern France,” *French History* 8, no. 1 (March 1, 1994): 51–76.



services they, like the laity, were confined to the nave of the church.<sup>32</sup> *Soeurs tournière*, lay sisters who controlled the cloister gate, occupied a liminal position within the convent and only they could leave to carry out the business of the convent in the world. The population of a convent normally included a variety of laywomen as well. Novices, pensioners, boarding students, and visitors lived in a convent but were separated as much as possible from the nuns.

Among Pre-Reformation contemplative orders, the degrees of austerity, conformity to the Rule, class make-up, and richness of endowments resulted in a great diversity of forms and practices among female monasteries as two example from convents of the Parisian basin will show.<sup>33</sup> Outside the walls of Paris richly endowed abbeys that enjoyed royal patronage ringed the capital. Choir sisters in abbeys, such as Longchamp or Montmartre—both established in the twelfth century—were drawn from the upper reaches of the nobility who vied to place their daughters in such prestigious intuitions. Longchamp followed a mitigated rule of Saint Clare, which allowed the nuns to own property and inherit goods.<sup>34</sup> Called *Urbanistes*, the nuns kept servants, received visitors, feasted on delicacies bought with their private pensions, and generally lived a life that could be said to have been an extension of the court.<sup>35</sup> Longchamp's carnival ball was heavily attended and those who wished to see and be seen paraded the route to the abbey for the nuns' sumptuous Easter services. The nuns themselves were on occasion

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<sup>32</sup> Barbara R Woshinsky, *Imagining Women's Conventual Spaces in France, 1600-1800: The Cloister Disclosed* (Farnham, Surrey, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 4.

<sup>33</sup> McManners contends that in the eighteenth century "the typical does not exist." McManners, *French Ecclesiastical Society Under the Ancien Régime; a Study of Angers in the Eighteenth Century*, 7.

<sup>34</sup> Sophie Hasquenoph, *Histoire des ordres et congrégations religieuses en France du Moyen Âge à Nos Jours*, Les classiques de champ vallon (Seyssel, France: Champ Vallon, 2009), 496.

<sup>35</sup> Barbara Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity: Pious Women and the Catholic Reformation in Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 56; Hasquenoph, *Histoire des ordres et congrégations religieuses en France du Moyen Âge à Nos Jours*, 496; Jo Ann McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996), 527.

said to ride out in carriages.<sup>36</sup> These types of monasteries often catered as much to economic or political advantage as religious devotion. Here and in similar aristocratic convents, the cycle of decay and reform repeated itself again and again throughout their history as nuns with casual vocations slipped into worldliness.<sup>37</sup>

On the other hand, within the walls of Paris, at the Franciscan convent of Ave-Maria, the nuns known as Poor Clares fasted year-round except on Sundays, never ate meat, and went barefoot even in winter.<sup>38</sup> They owned no property and depended on the alms collected by their brother Franciscan friars to maintain their house. These nuns performed all of the community's work themselves. From their foundation in the fifteenth century they adhered vigorously to the discipline of their Rule and never required reform as did most of the pre-Reformation monasteries of Paris and, indeed of the rest of France.

Aristocratic families of the capital may have admired the fortitude of the Poor Clares, but for their own daughters they preferred more comfortable religious orders that respected the dignity of their birth. Drawing their recruitment largely from the bourgeoisie, the Clarisses in their the poverty and asceticism isolated themselves from the power struggles of influential families who saw religious vocations as a way to advantageously place their children in the power-centers of the Church.

Notwithstanding regulations calling for the strict cloisterization of nuns convent walls were not impermeable to outsiders. The laity attended services held in their chapels and some communities gained reputations for the quality of their music.<sup>39</sup> Noble ladies

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<sup>36</sup> Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Le tableau de Paris*. vol.1 (Paris, 1782), 293-5.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Biver, *Abbayes, monastères, couvents de femmes à Paris : des origines à la fin du XVIIIe siècle*. (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1975); Genevieve Reynes, *Couvents de femmes: La vie des religieuses contemplatives dans la France des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Fayard, 1987), 9.

<sup>38</sup> Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, 56.

<sup>39</sup> Silvia Evangelisti, *Nuns: A History of Convent Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 114; Pierre Hélyot and Maximilien Bullot, *Histoire des ordres monastiques, religieux et militaires, et des*

who patronized convents often considered them as their own private retreats. A well-to-do woman could find sanctuary behind convent walls when experiencing marital problems, or security when her husband was away or died, she could choose to spend her final years as a pensioner, or, in the case of bad behavior, she could be locked in by the authority of her husband.<sup>40</sup>

Although contemplative convents ostensibly provided the space for pious women to reject the concerns of the world and devote themselves to meditation and the perfection of religious practice, the convent cannot be said to have existed apart from the society that produced it.<sup>41</sup> Despite the high walls that enclosed them, convents were integral to the social, economic, and cultural life of early modern Europe. From their foundation the religious function of convents competed with the economic and social imperatives imposed by powerful families and the civic power structure. They were, in short, an extension of the patriarchal family, a base of power and influence as well as a container for excess population. But they could also serve as a site empowerment for women and a domain of female agency.<sup>42</sup> If female religious institutions offered women a certain degree of autonomy and some freedom from patriarchal limitations, they also more deeply inscribed certain gendered limitations. Women had either to marry or vow themselves to perpetual virginity practiced in conditions outlined, approved, and surveilled by male ecclesiastical authorities.

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*congregations seculieres de l'un & de l'autre sexe, qui ont esté establies jusqu'à present; contenant ... Les vies de leurs fondateurs & de leurs reformateurs: avec des figures qui representent tous les differens habillemens de ces ordres & de ces congregations.*, vol. IV (Paris: N. Gosselin, 1714).

<sup>40</sup> Gwénaél Murphy, "Le deuil et le voile," in *Veuf, veuves, et veuvage dans la France d'ancien régime: Actes du colloque de Poitiers, 11-12 juin 1998* (Paris: Champion, 2003), 319.

<sup>41</sup> Woshinsky, *Imagining Women's Conventual Spaces in France, 1600-1800*, 159.

<sup>42</sup> Anne Jacobson Schutte, *By Force and Fear: Taking and Breaking Monastic Vows in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011), 8–9.

Out of the ruins of the Wars of Religion, Counter-Reformation France experienced a massive upsurge in devotional piety and a compelling impetus to reform in the interests of combatting charges of immorality and impropriety raised by Protestant dissidents. The Council of Trent, which met sporadically between 1545 and 1563, reflected the culmination of the spirit of the Catholic Reformation, that especially concerned itself with the discipline of the clergy.<sup>43</sup> The council, in particular took measures designed to bring monasteries back to the original discipline outlined in the rules of the various orders. Indeed over the centuries, luxury and worldliness had crept into institutions that had been conceived to be dedicated to poverty and prayer.<sup>44</sup> Even chastity needed to be reestablished among some monks and nuns.<sup>45</sup> Some sixteenth century chroniclers complained about the immodest dress of women religious or their coquettish behavior in the parlor.<sup>46</sup> More rarely, stories circulated of abbesses leaving their convents to give birth or of illicit convent abortions.<sup>47</sup> In the face of a lack of discipline in both big and small matters, the cloister was viewed as the cure for bringing irregular houses back in line with their original Rule.

Slowly and painstakingly older orders were reformed according to the dictates of the Church and their particular order, even if it meant dispersing nuns and dismissing abbesses.<sup>48</sup> New religious orders exploded on the scene, often devoted to active charitable

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<sup>43</sup> Rapley, *The Lord as Their Portion*, 169.

<sup>44</sup> John McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France: The Clerical Establishment and Its Social Ramifications*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 495.

<sup>45</sup> Paul Lesprand, *Le Clergé de la Moselle pendant la Révolution*, vol. 1 (Montigny-lès-Metz: Lesprand, 1934), 82.

<sup>46</sup> Biver, *Abbayes, monastères, couvents de femmes à Paris*.

<sup>47</sup> Olwen Hufton, "Whatever Happened to the History of the Nun?" (presented at the Hayes Robinson Lecture Series No. 3, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2000).

<sup>48</sup> Elizabeth Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister: Daily Life in the Teaching Monasteries of the Old Regime*, McGill-Queen's Studies in the History of Religion 17 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 68.

works in line with the project of the Catholic Reformation in such areas as teaching or nursing.<sup>49</sup> These new institutions as well as traditional contemplative convents attracted new recruits in droves. Between 1604 and 1650 at least forty-eight new religious houses for women were founded in Paris and the surrounding suburbs.<sup>50</sup> The population of religious women similarly exploded in cities and towns across France. By mid-century, for the first time in centuries, the female religious population outnumbered the male religious.<sup>51</sup>

As a large population of energetic young nuns stood poised to perform acts of charity, the Council of Trent reiterated in the strongest of terms the necessity of cloisterization for all female religious.<sup>52</sup> The reestablishment and toughening of the rules of strict cloister seemed like the best way to cultivate virtue, protect the virginity and reputation of women religious, and return to monastic discipline. Certain newer orders like the Ursulines were devoted to the education of young girls originally did not include cloister in their regulations. However, Trent's proclamation dampened but ultimately did not hinder the expansion of their institute and mission as the Ursulines finally accepted the cloister.<sup>53</sup> Other communities, however, managed to avoid strict enclosure in carrying out their missions of active charity by inventing a new form of religious life.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Rapley, *The Lord as Their Portion*; Evangelisti, *Nuns*; John McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church* (London: S.P.C.K. for the Church Historical Society, 1969).

<sup>50</sup> Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, 7.

<sup>51</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 16; Elizabeth Rapley, *The Devotes: Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France* (McGill-Queen's University Pr, 1993), 193.

<sup>52</sup> Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister*, 113; Elizabeth M Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women Periculoso and Its Commentators, 1298-1545* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 127; Evangelisti, *Nuns*, 45.

<sup>53</sup> Evangelisti, *Nuns*, 64; Rapley, *The Lord as Their Portion*, 146.

<sup>54</sup> Although I discuss the advent of active orders here, it is important to remember that the Catholic Reformation also resulted in an expansion of contemplative orders that welcomed strict enclosure as a means of renouncing worldly ties. See, Rapley, *The Lord as Their Portion*, 142–5; Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, 136; Reynes, *Couvents de femmes*.

*Congrégations*, less formal, more democratic religious orders, which only required from their members simple vows of limited--but renewable—duration, opened up the choice of religious vocation to women of simpler means and humbler origins. These societies, often dedicated to performing the hard work of educating, nursing, and proving charity for the poor, accepted new recruits without regard to social origins or dowry. Referencing Martha instead of Mary, *congrégations* necessitated that their sisters perform their work with a zeal and enthusiasm that demanded a willing vocation. Although secular sisters unbound by the rules of strict enclosure did not officially exist in canon law, some bishops such as Francois de Sales (who helped develop the model for simple vows), admiring their devotion and recognizing their social utility, sanctioned, protected, and promoted the work of *congrégationistes* within their jurisdictions.

Unfortunately for them, the growth and resurgence of monastic orders coincided with a period of economic crisis at the end of the seventeenth century. The obviously expanding religious population caused concern for state and local officials, as well as social commentators on several levels. Increasingly large convents, hospitals, and schools dominated the urban landscape. Cash-strapped towns that lamented the loss productive inhabitants and the removal of land and from the tax base sought to keep new convents out.<sup>55</sup> The crown, also concerned about decreasing tax revenue, resented the expansion of a non-taxable class deemed by current political theory to be non-productive and at worst a drain on the nation's limited resources.<sup>56</sup> In these ways the female religious houses of the Catholic Reformation can be said to have been a victim of their own success.

Moreover, critics continued to lambast convents in terms that reflected the circumstances

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<sup>55</sup> Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister*, 27.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

of the pre-Tridentine era, lamenting the decadence and inhumane practices that supposedly prevailed behind cloister walls.

Louis XIV's adviser, Jean-Baptiste Colbert was especially concerned about the unchecked growth of monasteries and planned extensive reforms such as a raising of the age of profession, the limitation of the value of religious dowries, and reductions in their population and property holdings. By the late seventeenth century, the crown openly declared, “Women's convents ought to subsist only insofar as they are useful to the State, through the edification of prayer, though the instruction and education of children, through the care of the sick and the poor.”<sup>57</sup> Ironically, just as the religious communities of the Catholic-Reformation sought to accomplish these ends the government raised the most objections to their existence and expansion.

The extent to which lax, ill-run convents survived into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has remained a major point of contention among historians.<sup>58</sup> Revolutionaries certainly believed that decadence ruled in convents and inhumane practices and forced vocations continued. Secular historians of the nineteenth century continued this assessment, arguing that “decadence and decline” best defined the state of monasticism under the Old Regime. Anticlerical historians persisted in this assessment, leading Léon Abensour to pronounce in 1923 “C'est que les ordres religieux féminins, comme les ordres religieux masculins, sont, à la fin du XVIIIe siècle, en plein

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<sup>57</sup> Cited in: *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>58</sup> Reynes, *Couvents de femmes*; Rapley, *The Lord as Their Portion*; Léon Abensour, *La femme et le féminisme avant la révolution* (Nabu Press, 2011); Gwénaél Murphy, “Femmes de Dieu et Révolution Française dans le Poitou: Etude de la réception de l'événement révolutionnaire par les religieuses poitevines” (Doctoral, Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales de Paris, 2010); McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church*; McManners, *French Ecclesiastical Society Under the Ancien Régime; a Study of Angers in the Eighteenth Century*.

décadence.”<sup>59</sup> Moreover the presumption of decline has pervaded the historiography of French convents to the point that Genevieve Reynes in 1987 was confident in pronouncing that the history of Old Regime convents “pourrait donc se résumer en trois mots: renaissance, apogée et déclin,”<sup>60</sup>

Most historians espousing such views have preferred to believe reformists' and revolutionaries' judgments of convents, an assessment that seems to have been based on stereotypes that were both popular and true in the sixteenth century. Leaving aside the question of a precipitous pre-Revolutionary decline, most recent historians by and large agree that by the eighteenth century French nuns were essentially chaste, poor, and otherwise conscientious servants of the church, despite a few high-profile examples to the contrary.<sup>61</sup>

Indeed the narrative of decadence developing around Old Regime convents also reflected less and less the reality of post-Tridentine monasticism. In fact, many of the new religious orders of the seventeenth century could not have afforded to live luxuriously even had they desired to do so. For perhaps the first time in centuries, a great many women religious can be truly said to have lived in poverty. Established without the spectacular endowments of the Middle Ages, post-Reformation convents depended mostly on the dowries contributed by their nuns. The life expectancy of nuns grew at the same time that the price of dowries dropped. In the seventeenth century, the dowry that a nun brought to her community was rarely enough to provide for her care for the rest of

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<sup>59</sup> Abensour, *La femme et le féminisme avant la révolution*, 278.

<sup>60</sup> Reynes, *Couvents de femmes*, 18.

<sup>61</sup> Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister*; Rapley and Rapley, “An Image of Religious Women in the Ancien Regime: The Etats Des Religieuses of 1790-1791”; Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*; McManners, *French Ecclesiastical Society Under the Ancien Régime; a Study of Angers in the Eighteenth Century*.



her life. Moreover, the agricultural depression of the late seventeenth century ruined the investments of many convents, putting some communities in dire straits.

Although Colbert was not completely successful with his program to reform French monasticism, in the late seventeenth century the crown did take steps towards making convents both useful and profitable to the state. In 1696, following the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes [1685], the crown required convents to imprison Protestant women and children with a view of converting them.<sup>62</sup> The king also commanded the payment of back taxes, in a new and stricter application of the *amortissement* policy, which required the first estate to immediately pay back taxes on property acquired since 1641. This policy had a particularly negative financial impact on newly established and less wealthy convents that expanded in the hey-day of post-Catholic-Reformation piety. In order to balance the budgets some convents had to admit lower-class postulants take on adult boarders and engage in other economies that made them less prestigious in the eyes of the elite.<sup>63</sup>

The greatest blow to convent solubility, however, came in the 1720s with the John Law scandal. Many communities invested heavily in the speculation, and when the market crashed their investments were lost. They were ruined and forced to ask the government for help to ensure their survival. The result of the appeal brought the monarchy into the business of regulating monastic communities, closing those considered to be superfluous, unhealthy, or unable to manage their finances. The *commission de secours*, established to aid struggling religious houses, paid out pensions to 558 houses in

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<sup>62</sup> Woshinsky, *Imagining Women's Conventual Spaces in France, 1600-1800*, 162; Murphy, "Le deuil et le voile."

<sup>63</sup> Woshinsky, *Imagining Women's Conventual Spaces in France, 1600-1800*, 284.

its first five years alone.<sup>64</sup> The commission's activities reached their height in 1751. By this point, the commission even slated prosperous houses for closure when it deemed that certain geographic locations were overloaded with religious.

This great culling of female monastic houses coincided with the Jansenist quarrel which brought many women religious into conflict with the monarch and the bishops.<sup>65</sup>

The austere devotions favored by Jansenists especially appealed to women religious even after such practices had been largely eliminated among the rest of the French population. The Jansenist controversy further soured the relationship between king and convent that had been on the rocks since Louis XIV. Nuns' rebellion against the king and the Church hierarchy provided an additional excuse for dispersing communities and subjecting defiant mother superiors to the surveillance of male ecclesiastical authorities.

When it ceased its activity in 1788, the commission had presided over the closure of 244 female houses.<sup>66</sup> State intervention not only closed dying communities but also weeded out weak or irregular houses with bad reputations. While in the seventeenth century convents' populations were often too large to gainfully employ all members, in the eighteenth century the authorities began closing convents whose numbers fell below a certain norm.<sup>67</sup> In this way, government intervention did much to bring convents back into line with their original discipline while at the same time breaking down traditional church privileges. By mid-century, the combined efforts of the *commission de secours* and Tridentine reforms had transformed the practices of female monasticism in France. Surviving convents balanced their budgets and curbed worldliness. These reforms largely

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<sup>64</sup> Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister*, 24.

<sup>65</sup> Dale K Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560-1791* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

<sup>66</sup> Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister*, 24.

<sup>67</sup> Rapley, *The Lord as Their Portion*, 219.

succeeded in bringing previously overpopulated convents into line with their original rules and ensured that all members of the community were usefully occupied, resulting in healthier and more serious monastic communities.<sup>68</sup>

Overall from 1720 to 1789 the number of women religious in France declined by one third or more.<sup>69</sup> Claude Langlois estimated that France of 1790 counted 44,000 cloistered nuns, 8,000 secular sisters, and around 1,000 canonesses.<sup>70</sup> A similar estimation for 1660s counted 80,000 female religious within the same territorial boundaries.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, Elizabeth and Robert Rapley have shown that the 1790-1 censuses of female religious communities reveal a steadily aging population in France, which, if this state of affairs had continued, would have resulted in the dying out of certain communities had the Revolution not precipitously closed their doors.<sup>72</sup>

As the population of convents aged, it became increasingly difficult to attract younger women to keep communities functioning, and many were indeed “in danger of becoming geriatric societies.”<sup>73</sup> These communities also had a tendency to be less well off financially. Longer lives, falling dowries, and dismal recruitment meant that the finances of female religious houses were often in jeopardy. Writing in 1778 one mother superior lamented “nos maisons de Provence commencent à finir, soit par manque de sujets, soit

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<sup>68</sup> Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister*, 80–2.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>70</sup> Claude Langlois, *Le Catholicisme Au Féminin: Les Congrégations Françaises à Supérieure Générale Au XIXe Siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 1984), 83.

<sup>71</sup> Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister*.

<sup>72</sup> “the median age of the cloistered population in 1790 was 48 years (or an average age of 48.4 years). Fewer than a quarter of the total number were under 35. Over 42 per cent were between 35 and 54, a full third were over 55. Ten per cent (1,272 women) were in their seventies, eighties and nineties.” See: Rapley and Rapley, “An Image of Religious Women in the Ancien Regime: The Etats Des Religieuses of 1790-1791,” 394.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

par pauvreté.”<sup>74</sup> However, did this decline in recruitment signal the deterioration of the French female monasticism? Were women religious themselves loosing the zeal for religious life?

Although the reasons for the decline in recruitment are not altogether clear, some historians, among them Jean Queniart, attribute the dearth of postulants to an "afaiblessement de foi."<sup>75</sup> Contemporary commentators similarly blamed growing anticlerical sentiments disseminated by the Enlightenment. For most commentators, the decline in the clerical population went hand in hand with the growing decadence and wastefulness of the monastic orders. The public firmly believed that monks and nuns had nothing to do but "eat, sleep, and pray" and from mid-century onwards a significant element of literary opinion was largely hostile to monasticism.<sup>76</sup>

Furthermore, we can point to a drop in upper-class recruitment due to a breakdown of the relationship between France's elites and monastic institutions, which began as early as the late seventeenth century. Changing religious devotions resulted in the upper classes placing fewer of their daughters in religion. "Certainly," Rapley writes, "the changing *mentalité* of the very echelons of society which had traditionally provided the monastery population—the *gens de bien*- was an important factor in its decline."<sup>77</sup> Jean Queniart also identified this change in devotional attitudes among the elite: "Touchées les premières par la reforme catholique . . . ces categories sont aussi les premières à se détacher, ou tout au moins à se contenter d'une religion d'habitude bien insuffisante pour susciter de

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 402–3.

<sup>75</sup> Archives Nationales: G/9/151-4. "Mémoire sur les Communautés de Religieuses non Cloîtrées," nd.

<sup>76</sup> Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister*, 25; Lesprand, *Le Clergé de la Moselle pendant la Révolution*, 1:78–9.

<sup>77</sup> Rapley and Rapley, "An Image of Religious Women in the Ancien Regime: The Etats Des Religieuses of 1790-1791," 396.

nombreuses vocations."<sup>78</sup> Although the elite of France might not have been "dechristianized," the intense devotion that had once characterized the desire for religious vocations was becoming rarer among the upper classes.<sup>79</sup>

Anne Schutte, among other historians, postulates that higher-class families increasingly practiced some form of family planning that resulted in fewer excess children to place in convents.<sup>80</sup> Demographic and sociological studies of the aristocratic population of eighteenth century Toulouse demonstrate a drop in both the number of children born to aristocratic parents and elite religious vocations. Although family planning is a difficult assertion to prove, the evidence is compelling and would speak to a further weakening of the traditional relationship between the elites of France and the Catholic Church.<sup>81</sup>

One of the most compelling reasons for the loss of the elite's support for female religious houses, however, may have been related to the financial difficulties and government intervention that closed many houses. Many families had long looked to the convent as a secure way to settle and care for their daughters. The poverty and abrupt closures that some houses endured in the course of the eighteenth century brought an air of uncertainty to the institution and made families think twice about this investment. After all, they did not want their daughters to suffer from a loss of status and poverty, and perhaps worst of all, of their returning to the parental house after a convent's failure.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Jean Quéniart, *Les hommes, l'Église et Dieu dans la France du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1978), 306.

<sup>79</sup> McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France: The Clerical Establishment and Its Social Ramifications*, 1:488–9.

<sup>80</sup> Schutte, *By Force and Fear*, 254.

<sup>81</sup> François Lebrun, *La vie conjugale sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: A. Colin, 1975), 164–5.

<sup>82</sup> Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister*, 87.

Nuns themselves blamed the falling popularity of convent education for depriving monasteries of young recruits. Furthermore, some superiors resented the royal decree raising the age of profession in 1768 from 16, established by Trent, to 18 for women and 20 for men, believing that younger women were more likely to profess and sustain religious life. This measure was intended to prevent forced vows and ensure serious vocation. Some convents, however, viewed this as an open attack on their recruitment.<sup>83</sup> While nuns recognized the utility of priming young girls for the rigors and peculiarities of religious life, fewer families sent their daughters away as *pensionnaires*. Madame Campan, lady in waiting to Marie-Antoinette, suggested that by the mid-eighteenth century families preferred sending their daughters to the convent only for a year of preparation for first communion.<sup>84</sup>

This data nonetheless reflects the fact that women were entering religion at a later point in life and living longer lives, well above the average for overall French society.<sup>85</sup> Elizabeth Rapley believes that later professions and living longer might actually have contributed to a resurgence in convent populations if the Revolution had not abolished solemn vows. Rather than lending credence to the traditional narrative of decadence and decline that prefigured the end of convents in France, Rapley identifies several factors that contributed to the decline in monastic population, none of which necessarily reflects a lack of morale among the nuns themselves.

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<sup>83</sup> Rapley, "Women and the Religious Vocation in Seventeenth-Century France."

<sup>84</sup> Reynes, *Couvents de femmes*, 255; Jean Boussoulade, *Moniales et hospitalières dans la tourmente révolutionnaire* (Paris: Letouzey & Ané, 1962), 13.

<sup>85</sup> Rapley and Rapley, "An Image of Religious Women in the Ancien Regime: The Etats Des Religieuses of 1790-1791," 398.

Rapley argues that the decline in population was above all a "mandated rather than spontaneous decline."<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, the decline in numbers of female religious began much earlier than the drop in male religious's numbers, which is commonly attributed to dechristianizing influences.<sup>87</sup> For the most part, the serious decline in male religious population began in the 1770s and 1780s, by which point the population of female religious had already reached an all time low.<sup>88</sup> This decline, largely an imposition from outside, not motivated or controlled by the women religious themselves, cannot speak to the sincerity or strength of vocations. In fact, female religious houses of the late eighteenth century may have been stronger than ever. They performed acts of charity according to their various orders, tightly controlled their finances, and indeed with the exception of a few notable institutions they were more disciplined and adherent to the rules of their orders than they had been in the previous centuries.

Paradoxically, public attitudes towards female monasticism turned the most critical at this point when convents were the most healthy and regular. Contemporary diarist and social observer, Sebastian Mercier lambasted the institution, contrasting the perceived backwardness of monasticism with the overall atmosphere of Enlightenment optimism, "Les couvents sont jugés. Les curiosités excessives, la bigoterie et le cagotisme, l'ineptie monastique, la bégueulerie claustrale y règnent. Ces déplorables monuments d'une antique superstition sont au milieu d'une ville où la philosophie a répandu ses lumières mais les murailles de ses prisons sacrées séparent les victimes de toutes les idées régnantes."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister*, 84.

<sup>87</sup> Jean Quéniart, *La Bretagne au XVIIIe siècle: (1675-1789)* (Rennes, France: Ouest-France, 2004), 490.

<sup>88</sup> Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister*, 82.

<sup>89</sup> Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*. Vol, VII (Paris, 1782), 93.

Similarly, the entry for "Religieuse" in Diderot's *Encyclopédie* deplores the perceived negative financial and demographic effects of monasticism on the civil state.

Louis de Jaucourt wrote:

On se plaint sans cesse, & toujours sans succès, que la vie monastique dérobe trop de sujets à la société civile: les *religieuses* sur-tout, dit M. de Voltaire, sont mortes pour la patrie; les tombeaux où elles vivent sont très-pauvres. Une fille qui travaille de ses mains aux ouvrages de son sexe, gagne beaucoup plus que ne coûte l'entretien d'une *religieuse*. Leur sort peut faire pitié, si celui de tant de couvens d'hommes trop riches, peut faire envie.

Il est bien évident que leur grand nombre dépeuple un état."<sup>90</sup>

His definition that encouraged pity for nuns at the same time as it condemned the avarice of monks would have rung true to many of his contemporaries who held similar opinions about the wastefulness of female monasticism and the shameful decadence of male religious orders.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the existence of forced vows was an open secret, one that neither Church nor lay society generally questioned.<sup>91</sup> The council of Trent, however, took measures to guard against forced vocations as well as forced marriages, placing in both cases the requirement of personal consent above the dictates of the state or family.<sup>92</sup> The regulations to ensure willing professions insisted on a novitiate

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<sup>90</sup> *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.*, eds. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert. University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project, Vol 17(Spring 2013 Edition), Robert Morrissey (ed), <http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/>. 77-8.

<sup>91</sup> Jean Labbaye, *Un Diocèse pendant la Révolution: Clermont-Ferrand* (Le Puy-en-Velay: Impr. Jeanne d'Arc, 1989), 10.

<sup>92</sup> Schutte, *By Force and Fear*, 53–4.



of at least one year, requiring the bishop to examine all postulants before profession, and pronounced anathema against anyone who coerced an unwilling religious profession. The council even established a procedure by which religious could reverse invalid vows.<sup>93</sup> In order to assure that young women were prepared to commit to life-long vows, the council further set the legal age that she could take vows at sixteen, later raised by the *commission des réguliers* raised this age to eighteen.<sup>94</sup>

Theoretically, a profess had numerous opportunities to state her reluctance for the religious life and a year of novitiate in which to change her mind. Yet the reforms of Trent in this regard were not entirely effective.<sup>95</sup> Looking at Vatican records of cases where *religieux* and *religieuses* attempted to reclaim their vows from the seventeenth to eighteenth century, Anne Schutte demonstrates that going against the will of her family was not particularly easy for a young person to do.<sup>96</sup> Pressured by the family and sometimes by the nuns who stood to profit from her dowry, the profound lack of social alternatives often prevented a young woman from voicing her objections to becoming a nun.<sup>97</sup> Some of the petitioners studied by Schutte had to wait years before filing their appeals, until those who had pressured them were dead.

The clerical establishment also had an interesting view of divine providence when considering reluctant professions. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries nuns wrote openly in their chronicles about those members who struggled to accept their

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<sup>93</sup> According to the decree *Concerning Regulars and Nuns*, a religious had 5 years to approach his or her ordinary about an unwilling profession unless mitigating circumstances prevented him or her from acting earlier. See: *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>94</sup> Legal age of profession can become a thorny question because at some points French and canon law disagreed. For example, the Edict of Orleans (1560) raised the age of profession to twenty-five for men and twenty for women. In 1579 the Edict of Blois returned to the original sixteen for both men and women.

<sup>95</sup> Reynes, *Couvents de femmes*, 41.

<sup>96</sup> Schutte, *By Force and Fear*, 52–88.

<sup>97</sup> Lesprand, *Le Clergé de la Moselle pendant la Révolution*, 1:78–9.

status, but eventually came to embody the perfect nun. According to the prevailing view iterated in the obituaries studied by Elizabeth Rapley, these women, plagued by reluctant vocations were, “only acquiescing in God's design for her by coming to accept the inevitability of profession.”<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, McManners cites the example of a spiritual handbook from 1750, in which a confessor finding a novice has not entered the convent of her own free will nor by pronounced vocation must not hasten to liberate her. Rather he was advised, “it must not be assumed [she] is not called, for God uses various methods to direct us to our destiny.”<sup>99</sup>

Contemporaries—lay and to some extent clerical—understood the social machinations that produced *religieuses* and condoned and overlooked such practices as long as they were not too violent.<sup>100</sup> Subtler forms of coercion that could compel young women to enter a convent included indoctrination and guilt. Often a young girl intended by her family for the religious life would be sent to live at a convent as a *pensionnaire* at a very young age. Allowed to leave only just before the legal age to take vows, these young women might find themselves overwhelmed by the outside world and longing for the cloister. In fact, seventeenth century parental advice guides presented it as natural and responsible parenting to condition religious vocations and provided the blueprint on how to make children submit to the parents’ will:

When the children's state is decided for them early, it is easy to present them with this perspective as a matter of habit, and thus to place before their eyes the various objectives that reason desires them to consider...The order of duties, the choice of pleasures compatible with

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<sup>98</sup> Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister*, 180.

<sup>99</sup> McManners, *French Ecclesiastical Society Under the Ancien Régime; a Study of Angers in the Eighteenth Century*, 503.

<sup>100</sup> Reynes, *Couvents de femmes*, 20, 43.

the role which they will have to fulfill, will develop naturally in the knowledge of their situation.<sup>101</sup>

Some parents, sure of their desire for a monk or nun in the family, dedicated their children to the religious life from birth although this practice had diminished by the eighteenth century.<sup>102</sup> Parents considered the unquestioned disposition of their children to be well within their rights, a prerogative that increasingly brought tyrannical parents into conflict with the more scrupulous religious authorities over questions of reluctant professions and forced marriages over the course of the seventeenth century.<sup>103</sup>

Bourdaloue was one of many eighteenth century reforming preachers who denounced parents who abused their authority to place children in religion for financial reasons. He preached against sacrificing daughters purely because a marriage dowry would be more costly,

L'établissement de cette fille coûterait: sans autre motif, c'est assez pour la dévouer a la Religion. Mais elle n'est pas appelée a ce genre de vie: il faut bien que'elle le soit, puisqu'il n'y a point d'autre parti pour elle. Mais Dieu ne la veut pas dans cet état: il faut supposer qu'il l'y veut et faire comme s'il l'y voulait. Mais elle n'a nulle marque de vocation...Cependant on conduit la victime dans le Temple, les pieds et les mains liés, je veux dire, dans la disposition d'une volonté contrainte, la bouche muette par la crainte et le respect d'un père qu'elle a toujours honoré. Au milieu d'une cérémonie brillante pour les spectateurs qui y assistent, mais funèbre pour la personne qui en est le sujet: on la présente au prêtre, et l'on en fait un sacrifice, qui bien loin de glorifier

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<sup>101</sup> Cited in Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister*, 153.

<sup>102</sup> Reynes, *Couvents de femmes*, 20.

<sup>103</sup> Jean de Viguierie, "La Vocation Religieuse et Sacerdotale En France Au XVII et XVIIIe Siecles," in *La Vocation Religieuse et Sacerdotale En France XVII-XIX Siecles* (Angers: Universite d, 1979), 32. On the other hand, the Church also irked parents and the state by upholding marriages and professions made without parental consent. These cases were considered under the stringent regulations regarding rapt de séduction. See: Barbara B Diefendorf, "Give Us Back Our Children: Patriarchal Authority and Parental Consent to Religious Vocations in Early Counter-Reformation France," *Journal of Modern History* 68, no. 2 (1996): 265–307.

Dieu et de lui plaire, vient exécration à ses yeux, et provoque sa vengeance.<sup>104</sup>

Although the evidence for the price of dowries in the early modern period is difficult to ascertain in any systematic manner, it is possible that economically it cost three to twenty times more to establish a daughter in marriage rather than in a convent.<sup>105</sup> Colbert even considered the high price of marital dowries to be one of the main reasons why parents placed their daughters in religion.<sup>106</sup> Ultimately, it is most important that contemporaries believed that settling a daughter in religion was a cheaper alternative to marriage than actually establishing the ratio between marital and religious dowries. Reynes suggests that especially for the upper classes the huge disparity between marrying off a daughter and placing her in a convent meant that families with more than one daughter were likely to concentrate their resources on the most marriageable one.<sup>107</sup> Despite the church's official condemnation of force and fear used to compel vocations, clergymen struggled throughout the early modern period to convince parents that this was an abuse of power and against the wishes of the Church and God.

It is likely that “sociological vocations,” professions solicited through family pressure and economic strategies rather than a sincere calling for religious life, were becoming less common in the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>108</sup> Recognizing reluctant professions as a socioeconomic phenomenon, with potentially negative consequences on the lives of the young people and on religious orders, Trent and governmental

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<sup>104</sup> Quoted in: Georges May, *Diderot et “La religieuse”*; étude historique et littéraire. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 171.

<sup>105</sup> Schutte, *By Force and Fear*, 56–7; Reynes, *Couvents de femmes*, 47.

<sup>106</sup> Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister*, 20.

<sup>107</sup> Reynes, *Couvents de femmes*, 47.

<sup>108</sup> Schutte, *By Force and Fear*, 146.

interventions of the eighteenth century had both addressed this abuse. The success of these measures is, however, difficult to evaluate because both Church and State still created great hurdles to religious bringing suit in royal or ecclesiastical courts for their freedom.<sup>109</sup> In general, it is likely that forced vocations were becoming more rare because parents and guardians more often respected the wishes of young people in regards to a religious vocation. Changing public opinions regarding monasticism and individual rights, as well as an evolution in sentiment among families, combined to institute a reform desired by both Church and state.<sup>110</sup> Although men and women were still subjected to overwhelming force and fear in order to coerce them to make solemn vows, the evidence suggests that the phenomenon was on the decline. That the forced vocation would draw the most attention in literary and public discourse at this time suggests that part of the furor was caused by growing anticlerical sentiments.

### **Nuns in Literature**

As a literary figure, the nun had been a stock character since the Middle Ages. Stories of licentious nuns and priests were a favorite medieval genre, which made fun without implicitly attacking celibacy and the institution of monasticism itself. Rather than biting social critique these stories represented a preference for the 'the world turned upside-down' genre, "In these tales, the simple pleasure of hearing a dirty story is enhanced by the undermining of powerful institutions and supposedly austere reputations."<sup>111</sup> The nature of such stories, nevertheless, began to change towards the end

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 5, 103–5.

<sup>110</sup> In fact, while the crown had an interest in reducing the monastic population and assuring that religious vocations were legal, presented with cases of forced vocation or clandestine marriages the *Parlements* more often upheld parental authority. In this way, royal authority had a tendency to be somewhat conflicted on the issue of forced vows.

<sup>111</sup> Woshinsky, *Imagining Women's Conventual Spaces in France, 1600-1800*, 224.

of the seventeenth century when they came to adjoin more serious censure to scandalous entertainment.

Drawing on the medieval licentious nun, eighteenth century imaginative literature further developed the romantic figure of the unhappy nun. Popular pornographic novels and plays dramatized the human suffering and depraved practices that resulted from forcing women into convents. Writers imagined lovelorn women imprisoned behind cloister walls, tortures carried out by vicious superiors, and unnatural sexual practices born of isolation. The reading public devoured stories featuring unhappy women religious as tragic heroines, and gradually the romantic version of the nun even eclipsed the more familiar, mundane image of women religious in the real world.

For the eighteenth century reading public the forced vocation became a fixation. However, it was more than “un des thèmes favoris des romanciers en mal de copie.” It was a cultural phenomenon that spoke to the concerns and desires of the readers who devoured the stories and believed in the truth behind them.<sup>112</sup> In particular Mita Choudhury, while not denying that *vocations forcées* did occur, believed that the phenomenon received more public attention in the eighteenth century than it deserved. She characterizes the literary fashion for *vocation forcée* narratives as an “obsession.”<sup>113</sup> She argues that the figure of a beautiful young woman imprisoned in a convent by her cruel family that caught the imagination of gothic writers and readers really was an allegory aimed predominately at attacking general practices of despotism and the infringement of natural rights. The nun in the *philosophe’s* writing became the “anti-

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<sup>112</sup> May, *Diderot et “La religieuse”*; étude historique et littéraire., 171.

<sup>113</sup> Mita Choudhury, *Convents and Nuns in Eighteenth-Century French Politics and Culture* (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004), 100.

Sophie”—a woman denied the right to fulfill her destiny and condemned to reproduce the licentiousness and arbitrary frivolous authority of the monarchy itself.

Indeed the attractive romantic figure of the reluctant nun enjoyed a long history and wide circulation, well before the public devoured Diderot’s dramatic and shocking novel, *La Religieuse*. In the late seventeenth century, the purported letters of a lovesick and melancholy nun to her French lover, *Les Lettres portugaises* (1669), circulated widely. It was one of the first tracts of a sentimental and anticlerical genre in which the nun would play a primary role as well as a foundational work in the genre of the epistolary novel.<sup>114</sup> The letters became so popular that the phrase “*lettres portugaises*” entered the contemporary vocabulary as a metaphor for sentimental, lovelorn letters.<sup>115</sup> These letters of love and disappointment rang so true for contemporaries that many believed that they were the actual correspondence of a Portuguese nun named Doña Maria, despite the rumors suggesting they were actually written by a French noble. Furthermore, the letters have continued to inspire believers in the twentieth century and literary theorists still advance various conjectures about the identity of the Portuguese nun.

Imagining the forbidden space of the cloister, authors fantasized about the illicit sexual practices of women deprived of men, developing another enduring trope: the seduction of a young nun by a depraved member of her own community. While little evidence of lesbian sexual relationships exists, this trope—like so many perceptions of nuns in the Old Regime—held currency because readers believed it to be true. After all, corruption bred corruption, and pseudo-scientific authors insisted on women's inability to

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<sup>114</sup> Manuela Mourão, *Altered Habits : Reconsidering the Nun in Fiction* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 2.

<sup>115</sup> Woshinsky, *Imagining Women’s Conventual Spaces in France, 1600-1800*, 247.

control their sexual desire, further arguing for the unhealthfulness and dangerous effects of female celibacy and monasticism as an institution.

Eighteenth century authors often evoked the despotism of the family, in which the convent served as either a prison for unruly or unfortunate young women or a storage house for surplus offspring. These had also been popular themes in the previous centuries, increasingly, however, lesbianism also stood-in as a social critique of the dangers of celibacy. *Venus dans le cloître, ou la Religieuse en chemise* (1682) by Abbé du Prat, one of the most widely disseminated works of convent pornography consists of dialogues between Sister Angélique and Sister Agnès.<sup>116</sup> Unhappy at her profession, Angélique eventually gives into Agnès's advances, her illicit sexuality symbolically proving her rebellion against a society and Church that would imprison her against her will.<sup>117</sup> *Les nones galantes ou l'amour embéquiné* (1740)<sup>118</sup> and the play *Sophie ou la vocation forcée* (1780) continued the tradition of critiques that focused on the sexuality of unwilling nuns and the corrupt sexual practices born of celibacy and unwilling vocations.

Robert Danton and Simon Burrows have recently demonstrated that such pornographic material was among the most widely circulated of the Old Regime.<sup>119</sup> Burrows heads The French Book Trade in Enlightenment Europe Project, that uses database technology to quantify and map the trade of the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel (STN), a large Swiss publishing house operational from 1769 to 1794. The

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<sup>116</sup> This is based on sales charted in the STN's database under the category of "convent literature" [http://fbtee.uws.edu.au/stn/interface/query\\_books.php?t=keyword&e=rawsales&id=k0217&g=everywhere&d1=01&m1=01&y1=1769&d2=31&m2=12&y2=1794&d=table](http://fbtee.uws.edu.au/stn/interface/query_books.php?t=keyword&e=rawsales&id=k0217&g=everywhere&d1=01&m1=01&y1=1769&d2=31&m2=12&y2=1794&d=table)

See next paragraph.

<sup>117</sup> Mourão, *Altered Habits*, 14.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>119</sup> Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: Norton, 1996). Simon Burrows, presentation conference, *The Bicentennial Comes of Age? 2010*. See database, <http://fbtee.uws.edu.au/stn/interface/>



STN sold works of their own as well as of other publishers and dealt in books that were otherwise banned in France. The database is capable of ranking the sales of types of books or counting the number of times that particular titles were sold. It is thus an important tool in tracking the dissemination of ideas across Enlightenment Europe.<sup>120</sup>

Although the number of sales for such titles as *Venus dans le cloître, ou la Religieuse en chemise* in the STN database are small in comparison with the top sellers, which included Mercier's *Le Tableau de Paris*, they demonstrate that “anti-clerical works” and “convent literature” were also popular genres in the mid- to late- eighteenth century. Timothy Tackett has encouraged historians not to overlook the influence of imaginative literature on public opinion, noting that novels, more often than philosophical tracts seemed to have influenced the worldviews of the future deputies to the Constituent Assembly.<sup>121</sup>

Diderot's *La religieuse* (1760)<sup>122</sup> condensed all of the themes revolving around the image of the nun into a single tragic narrative inspired by the real-life attempt of a French nun to reclaim her vows. Diderot's descriptions seemed to confirm the truly horrifying infighting and cruelty of women deprived of men and of purpose. Not only was Suzanne's

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<sup>120</sup> <http://fbtee.uws.edu.au/main/>

<sup>121</sup> Timothy Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

<sup>122</sup> Although Diderot wrote *La religieuse*--the pseudo-autobiographical account of Suzanne Simonin's attempt to reclaim her forced vows, in 1760, it was not officially published until 1796. The history of the novel's dissemination is complicated, as is the story that that Diderot and his friends created the story as an elaborate joke to bring their friend the Marquis de Croismare back to Paris. (Vivienne Mylne, “Truth and Illusion in the ‘Preface-Annexe’ to Diderot’s ‘La Religieuse,’” *The Modern Language Review* 57, no. 3 (1962): 350.) The “Préface-Annex” (1770) and the serialized novel itself were published in Grimm’s literary journal, *Correspondence littéraire* (1780-2). Although Georges May characterizes the journal’s circulation as “elite” and “insignificant,” I suspect that the story circulated more widely than previously believed and was in fact fairly well known before its bestselling debut. May was not able to take into account more recent studies on lending libraries and book clubs and potentially did not appreciate the power of letters and rumor to pass on a good story, although he does admit that manuscripts may have been copied by hand and circulated this way. (May, *Diderot et “La religieuse”; étude historique et littéraire.*, 22.) I believe that Diderot was not able to keep this masterpiece under his hat and will therefore treat it as part of the popular genre of pornographic convent literature that informed late-eighteenth century attitudes towards female monasticism.

life endangered by the extreme punishments meted out to her, but her remonstrations to reclaim her vows fell on deaf ears.<sup>123</sup> Suzanne's trials and ultimate fall into immorality demonstrated that a perverse environment corrupted even its most virtuous members. The account of her conventual experiences explored the different kinds of disorder that reigned in closed societies. In this tragic tour de force, Diderot managed to include virtually all of the critiques of the convent in circulation at the time: decadence and luxury, the forced vocation, parental despotism, the tyranny of superiors and the church hierarchy, and the detrimental physical effects of celibacy.<sup>124</sup>

Allied to the forces of tyranny and immorality, priests and parents were able to corrupt and abuse Suzanne for no other reason than the situation of her birth. *La Religieuse*, filtered through the lens of French society, generated sympathy for the plight of illegitimate children, younger sons, and women without dowries, all of whom were subject to the manipulations that resulted in unwilling vocations. *La Religieuse* and stories like it not only fueled negative stereotypes about the convent, it also fed a popular vein of anticlericalism. Rumors and real-life cases supported Diderot's claim to the reality of Suzanne's situation. The purported factual basis of the novel served to encourage concerned audiences that real-life Suzannes languished behind convent walls. The popularity of negative conceptions of nuns mirrored already circulating anticlerical criticisms of celibacy and the depravity of religious orders. As Lynn Hunt argued in *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, the decadence and excesses of the aristocracy

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<sup>123</sup> Sadly, Suzanne's story of her family and fellow nuns conspiring to block her access to authorities who would be able to evaluate her case resemble the real-life tales told in Schutte, *By Force and Fear*.

<sup>124</sup> Denis Diderot, *La Religieuse* (Paris: Editions de la Seine, 2006).

were characterized as female vices.<sup>125</sup> The convent, under this gendered system of logic, was deemed especially regrettable as it corrupted the natural virtue of the women it imprisoned. Perceived as a site of laziness, debauchery, and the unjust incarceration of young women, convents came to symbolize the abuses of aristocratic government. Uniting gender, religion, victimhood, aristocracy, and celibacy, nuns became a potent and popular symbol of the need for reform. Their association with aristocracy and the Church pointed to two of the main sites of political contention as debates erupted in France in the late 1780s.<sup>126</sup> A symbol of the ills of the Old Regime, like the *lettre de cachet*,<sup>127</sup> the nun ensured that the perceived abuses of the forced vocation and aristocratic despotism of the convent would receive as much attention as issues involving the secular clergy.

*La religieuse*, as titillating fiction and biting social critique, was instantly popular among audiences that had been primed to believe the sentimental truths, and thus the reality of constraint and abuse behind the story. ‘Suzanne’ became a rallying cry for the reform of convents and a byword for the undeniable truth of forced vocations, confirmed by the public's willingness to believe anticlerical slander, no matter how fantastical.<sup>128</sup> The enduring quality of the salacious images of the nun would prove important because abuses that had been carefully rooted out by reform and a return to discipline still informed public perception of convents and nuns.

Moreover, real life cases of forced vocation upheld the notion that the abuse was widespread. The plot of *La Religieuse* closely paralleled the real life story of Marguerite

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<sup>125</sup> Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 105.

<sup>126</sup> Choudhury, *Convents and Nuns in Eighteenth-Century French Politics and Culture*, 100.

<sup>127</sup> Reinforcing the connection between despotism and the convent, *lettre de cachet* for upper class women most often meant a one-way ticket to the monastery.

<sup>128</sup> Mourão, *Altered Habits*, 37.

Delamarre and her attempts to repeal her religious vows in 1758. Like many young women destined by their families for the religious life, Marguerite was placed in a convent at a young age and rarely saw her parents. Although there is no conclusive proof as to what caused this only child's parents to send her away, Georges May suggests that Marguerite's mother may have feared losing her husband's inheritance to her daughter.<sup>129</sup> Although she spent little time in the secular world, as a teenager Marguerite showed signs that she was disinclined to take the veil. Evidence revealed in her case before the Parlement de Paris, confirmed that Marguerite was placed in novitiates in three of the most prestigious convents in Paris, although each time she left without taking vows. Marguerite further supported her case with evidence from the Visitandines with whom she had passed her youth. They recalled that they had refused to accept Marguerite into their community despite her mother's insistence because they knew that she had no religious vocation.<sup>130</sup> The Parlement de Paris, however, upheld Marguerite's status as a religious and refused to release her from the convent.<sup>131</sup>

The fictionalization of the forced vocation should not overshadow the fact that up until the Revolution women were still compelled to pronounce life-long vows for which they felt indifference or repugnance even though the practice was falling out of favor. Historians focusing on the obsessive nature of the eighteenth century literary fascination have routinely trivialized the extent to which forced monarchizations still occurred.<sup>132</sup> Choudhury claims that only two French women sought to have their vows overturned in

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<sup>129</sup> Georges May. It is not entirely clear why Marguerite filed her complaint with the Parlement de Paris rather than taking her case to the Vatican courts. She perhaps did not know that that she had this option, which would have likely taken a more sympathetic view of her case.

<sup>130</sup> May, *Diderot et "La religieuse"*; *étude historique et littéraire*.

<sup>131</sup> Choudhury, *Convents and Nuns in Eighteenth-Century French Politics and Culture*, 105.

<sup>132</sup> Choudhury, *Convents and Nuns in Eighteenth-Century French Politics and Culture*.

the eighteenth century.<sup>133</sup> Schutte, however, finds thirty-two in the Vatican archives<sup>134</sup> and McManners makes mention of another women who successfully overturned her vows.<sup>135</sup>

Certainly in 1790, French society would find nuns more reluctant to leave their convents than legislators expected, but that in itself is not proof that forced vows were a thing of the past. Church, state, and family archives conspire to render the phenomenon invisible. While it is important to remember that most nuns felt called to their vocation and entered religion freely and willingly, the number of nuns who reluctantly pronounced vows for which they felt little inclination, regretted their decision, or even experienced psychological or physical abuse that that left no other choice can not easily be counted. The known cases may represent only a small majority of cases for which the archives have not yet been found or have been destroyed. While the literary world of the eighteenth century may have exaggerated forced vocations, historians have no proof that they have not minimized the impact of forced vocations in numbers and on women's lives.

Beyond condemning forced vocations and celibacy in general, *philosophes* also expounded on the proper social roles of men and women. In *La Voix du Sage* Voltaire wrote that women, “sont néés pour la propagation, et non pour reciter du Latin, qu’elles

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 115. Marie-Michelle de Couhé de Lusignan won her case two years before Marguite Delamarre presented her suit.

<sup>134</sup> Schutte's study has been the only one to look at the question systematically among the Vatican archives, which mostly involve cases in Italy, France, and Spain. The Council of Trent created a committee, the Holy Congregation of the Council (Scara Congregazione del Concilio, SCC) to handle all issues arising from questions of enforcement Trent's disciplinary decrees. Schutte studies all of the cases of forced vows brought before the SCC between 1668-1793. Online database: <http://faculty.virginia.edu/monhell/database.php> Schutte's database does not mention either Delamarre or de Couché de Lusignan.

<sup>135</sup> McManners, *French Ecclesiastical Society Under the Ancien Régime; a Study of Angers in the Eighteenth Century*, 499. Claudine-Alexandrine Guérin de Tencin, the mother of Jean le Rond d'Alembert, does not figure in the accounting of either Choudhury or Schutte having presumably received her secularization directly from the pope.

n'entendent pas. Une femme qui nourrit deux enfants et qui file, rend plus de service à la Patrie, que tous les couvents n'en peuvent jamais rendre."<sup>136</sup> Enlightenment social critics worried that Protestant nations were pulling ahead of France in technology, inventiveness, and population, all accomplished by having abolished celibacy and introduced divorce—an institution that supposedly favored loving, productive marriages. They lauded marriage as a valuable institution for social cohesion, one materially that benefited the nation by the production of its most important natural resource: children. According to social commentators, the regeneration of France and its people depended on the abolition of celibacy, the promotion of marriage, and the equitable distribution of resources among all children. Indeed the title of a 1665 memorandum for Colbert summed up the growing social tendencies: “Ways to Encourage Marriage and Make Religious Vows More Difficult.”<sup>137</sup>

Beyond the opinions of the *philosophes* and government policymakers, many historians have argued that the early modern family certainly experienced a revolution in sentiment that favored marriages contracted on the basis of partnership and affection and more investment in each child. In the Middle Ages passionate love and marriage were considered to be incompatible, yet by the seventeenth century writers increasingly championed loving, equal relationships between spouses—the companionate marriage. To be sure, during the Catholic Reformation marriage took on new positive nuances as “reformers urged the faithful to view marriage as a vocation in which men and women might earn their salvation, and reiterated that to perform the work of a good husband,

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<sup>136</sup> Voltaire, *La Voix du sage et du peuple* (Amsterdam: Chez Le Sincere, 1750), 11.

<sup>137</sup> Leslie Tuttle, *Conceiving the Old Regime: Pronatalism and the Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 47.

wife, father, or mother was to do God's work in the world."<sup>138</sup> Many historians recognize an increasing emphasis on love and mutual respect within the family that would fundamentally alter the way that society viewed questions of marriage and religious vocation.<sup>139</sup> As the Ancien Regime came to a close, the kind of parental despotism that favored forced vocations or limited individual choice in marriage was becoming more aberrant as families increasingly respected the choices of their children in regards to marriage and vocation.

Nuns of the eighteenth century had an almost exclusive lock on social services from imprisoning women to nursing orphans and the ill. They taught children and provided refuge, and at no point in their history had they been so devoted to the public good. Despite falling numbers, their populations were largely in good health as far as finances, discipline, and morale were concerned. The diversity of practices of the various

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 136–7.

<sup>139</sup> Choudhury, *Convents and Nuns in Eighteenth-Century French Politics and Culture*, 101; Tuttle, *Conceiving the Old Regime*; Allan H. Pasco, *Revolutionary Love in Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century France* (Farnham, Surrey, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009); Dena Goodman, "Marriage Choice and Marital Success: Reasoning about Marriage, Love, and Happiness.," in *Family, Gender, and Law in Early Modern France* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009); Richard Rand, *Intimate Encounters: Love and Domesticity in Eighteenth-Century France* (Hanover, N.H. : Princeton, N.J: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College ; Copublished and distributed by Princeton University Press, 1997); Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe*, Past and Present Publications (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Hanley, Sarah, "Family and State in Early Modern France: The Marital Law Compact," in *Connecting Spheres: Women in a Globalizing World, 1500 to Present*, ed. Boxer, Marilyn and Quataert, Jean (New York, 2000), 61–103; Philippe Ariès, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*, Nouv. éd., L'Univers historique (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973); Jeffrey R. Watt, *The Making of Modern Marriage: Matrimonial Control and the Rise of Sentiment in Neuchâtel, 1550-1800* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1992); Francis Ronsin, *Le Contrat sentimental : débats sur le mariage, l'amour, le divorce, de l'Ancien Régime à la Restauration* ([Paris]: Aubier, 1990); Olivier Blanc, *L'amour à Paris au temps de Louis XVI*, Pour l'histoire (Paris: Perrin, 2002); André Burguière, *Le Mariage et l'amour en France: de la Renaissance à la Révolution*, L'Univers historique (Paris: Seuil, 2011); Maurice Daumas, *Le Mariage amoureux: histoire du lien conjugal sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Colin, 2004); Lebrun, *La vie conjugale sous l'Ancien Régime*; Julie Hardwick, "Seeking Separations: Gender, Marriages, and Household Economies in Early Modern France," *French Historical Studies* 21, no. 1 (1998): 157–80; Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977); James F. Traer, *Marriage and the Family in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1980).

orders might make them difficult to characterize, but contrary to eighteenth century slander and certain historians, decadence and decline do not describe the vibrant and useful orders that populated Old Regime France. Careful reforms dictated by Trent, forced government downsizing, and women religious's own devotion weeded out corrupt and irregular houses and insisted on active and willing callings, to the point that women religious should enjoy perhaps a larger share of the glory of what John McManners has called the "Golden Age of Catholicism."<sup>140</sup>

Some abuses may have persisted, especially in certain institutions dominated by the nobility. Highly disciplined and socially useful convents were, however, tarred with the same brush. Influenced by bad press and changing values—especially anticlericalism—contemporaries judged the convent and celibacy harshly at the same time as ideas of companionate marriage and the importance of the family as a unit of economic and social order came into vogue.<sup>141</sup> Literarily, the convent became a convenient and provocative symbol for critiquing the perceived abuses of the Old Regime. The nun herself represented the lost potential, the wasted fertility of France, which was sacrificed to despotic and superstitious practices—most explicitly, to clerical and aristocratic urges that undermined the rights of the individual and the good of the Nation. Revolutionary legislators who would act on these anticlerical currents of thought could not believe in the willing nun, nor the utility of celibacy. In the name of individual liberty, convents and solemn vows were one of the first ideological Bastilles that the National Assembly would attack in the early days of the French Revolution.

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<sup>140</sup> McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France: The Clerical Establishment and Its Social Ramifications*, 1:3.

<sup>141</sup> Choudhury, *Convents and Nuns in Eighteenth-Century French Politics and Culture*, 100–1; Tuttle, *Conceiving the Old Regime*.



## CHAPTER 2

### *Religieuses into Citoyennes? Negotiating the Revolution, 1789 to 1792*

The relationship between women religious and Revolutionary authorities underwent a fundamental transformation between 1789 and the closure of monasteries and the dispersal of nuns in 1792. Deputies to the National Assembly, influenced by the perception of women religious as innocent victims of family tyranny and dishonest priests, originally viewed nuns with sympathy and indulgence. This attitude changed to one of hostility over the course of 1792 as nuns protested against the closure of their communities, rebelled against the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, and hid dissenting priests. Deputies to the Constituent and Legislative Assemblies had much more sympathy for women religious when they conformed to passive, stereotypical gender roles. Lobbying for their right to liberty, as they did by writing to the Ecclesiastical committee and actively opposing the Civil Constitution, frustrated and annoyed authorities to the point that the prevailing image of the nun morphed from victim to fanatic in a very short period. This politically charged image, like that of the reluctant nun, overrode all other perceptions to the point that both contemporaries and historians often overlooked those women who persisted in supporting the Revolution and the benefits it brought to them.

All too often the Revolutionary history of nuns has been limited to the famous martyred nuns of Orange, Angers, and the Carmelites of Compiègne, when historians have addressed women religious at all.<sup>142</sup> Hagiographical works written by Catholic

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<sup>142</sup> *I Leave You My Heart: A Visitandine Chronicle of the French Revolution: Mère Marie-Jéronyme Verot's Letter of 15 May 1794* (Philadelphia, Pa: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2000); Lucien Misermont

historians of the nineteenth and twentieth century further enshrined the counterrevolutionary efforts of the nuns of France, with anticlerical historians of the left repeating these themes without caring to further investigate.<sup>143</sup> Written in broad strokes, with nuns painted as a monolithic group with homogenous opinions and reactions, historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries--just as many contemporaries and *philosophes*—have viewed nuns as either helpless victims or counterrevolutionaries; passive bystanders or martyrs of a Revolution for which they felt no sympathy. In fact, nuns in general were active participants in the struggle between the Church and the Revolution.<sup>144</sup>

Historians have long been reluctant to engage with the complicated relationship between women religious and revolutionary authorities and have consigned their Revolutionary participation to compulsively protecting their traditions and religion. Nuns have been viewed as natural counterrevolutionaries and little attention has been given to their initial acceptance of revolutionary values and their negotiations with revolutionary authorities in 1789-1791. Only in recent years have scholars carefully examined the content of nuns' petitions to the National Assembly.<sup>145</sup> Studies by Gemma Betros and Gwenaél Murphy reveal that women religious actively engaged in the Assembly's debates about the future of monasticism. They wrote letters and petitions that argued for

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et al., *Les bienheureuses Filles de la Charité d'Arras: dernières victimes de Jeseph Lebon à Cambrai* (Paris: V. Lecoffre, 1920).

<sup>143</sup> Michel Vovelle, *Religion et révolution : la déchristianisation de l'an II* (Paris: Hachette, 1976).

<sup>144</sup> Rapley, Elizabeth, "'Pieuses Contre-Révolutionnaires': The Experience of the Ursulines of Northern France, 1789-1792," *French History* 2, no. 4 (1988): 20.

<sup>145</sup> Gwénaél Murphy, "Femmes de Dieu et Révolution Française dans le Poitou: Etude de la réception de l'événement révolutionnaire par les religieuses poitevines" (Doctoral, Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales de Paris, 2010); Gemma Betros, "Liberty, Citizenship and the Suppression of Female Religious Communities in France, 1789-90," *Women's History Review* 18, no. 2 (2009): 311; Elizabeth Rapley and Robert Rapley, "An Image of Religious Women in the Ancien Regime: The Etats Des Religieuses of 1790-1791," *French History* 11, no. No.4 (1997): 387-410.

their public utility and solicited the protection of the legislators in their rights as citizens to chose their own future.<sup>146</sup> Exceptionally, these studies also address an issue that has been little examined: those nuns who solicited their freedom from the monastery and chose to leave early when offered the opportunity by revolutionary legislation. Although some nuns, like many Frenchwomen, rejected elements of the Revolution they saw as threatening their traditional religion, others accepted the need for reform, and in certain cases welcomed the opportunity to escape the monastery. There were also a considerable number who felt unconnected to larger ecclesiastical or political questions and who just wished to continue their work and get on with their lives. A main difficulty in revising our notions of women religious' reactions to the events after 1789 has been a lack of documents produced by women quietly assenting to the dominant values of Revolutionaries. For this we must often rely on local studies and unpublished documents hitherto little studied in comparison to the more romantic tales of martyred nuns.

### ***Cahiers de Doléances***

In the months preceding to the Estates General of 1789, French citizens were called upon to reflect on the need for change and reform in their society. Drawing up the *cahier de doléances* across towns and administrative districts in March and April of 1789, questions of taxation and finance undoubtedly drew the most concern and criticism, however, the need for reform of the Catholic Church was also frequently mentioned.<sup>147</sup> Thus, numerous *cahiers* demanded the proper funding of the *curé*, the local parish priest

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<sup>146</sup> Betros, "Liberty, Citizenship and the Suppression of Female Religious Communities in France, 1789-90," 313.

<sup>147</sup> Shapiro, Gilbert, "What Were the Grievances of France in 1789? The Most Common Demand in the Cahiers de Doléances," in *Revolutionary Demands: A Content Analysis of the Cahiers de Doléances of 1789* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 266, 279.

who not only provided religious instruction but also performed a great many social services.

According to Murphy's accounting, one hundred eighty-two of the six hundred twenty-six general *cahiers de doléances* printed in the *Archives Parlementaires* mentioned the regular clergy.<sup>148</sup> Most often they railed against the avarice of monks, while only ten per cent of these mentioned *religieuses* specifically. Certain themes stand out among the *cahiers* that did address women religious, including demands for the suppression of female religious communities, lowering the age of profession, regrouping religious houses, defending women religious' social utility, and generally protecting of convents for women. Regrouping Murphy's themes into largely "positive," "negative," or "neutral" categories depending upon their impact on women religious, we find that sixty-nine *cahiers* can be classified as viewing female religious communities negatively, whereas fifty-three promoted the interests of women religious.<sup>149</sup> Murphy found that only 4.5 per cent of those that mentioned nuns were "franchement hostiles."<sup>150</sup> The urban elite drafters of the petitions—primarily influenced by the rampant anticlericalism of the eighteenth century, worried that monasteries had become too rich without serving a purpose in French society and that they were sites of idleness and luxury, a place to

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<sup>148</sup> Murphy, "Femmes de Dieu et Révolution Française dans le Poitou: Etude de la réception de l'événement révolutionnaire par les religieuses poitevines," 110. General *cahiers* were produced from local preliminary *cahiers* (except for the petitions of the nobility which were written directly by the assembly) in a progressive process of election that often weeded out humble local concerns and favored the interests of the upper-bourgeoisie, local officials, and lawyers. (Tackett, Timothy, "The West in France in 1789: The Religious Factor in the Origins of the Counterrevolution," in *Revolutionary Demands: A Content Analysis of the Cahiers de Doléances of 1789* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 336. While the edited version of the general *cahiers* published in the *Archives Parlementaires* present a few problems, it is agreed that they "represented the consensus of opinion from a large area." Beatrice Fry Hyslop, *A Guide to the General Cahiers of 1789: With the Texts of Unedited Cahiers* (New York: Octagon Books, 1968), 44.

<sup>149</sup> The neutral themes included demands to raise or lower the age of profession, and demands to forbid religious dowries since none of these proposals would have a definitive impact of the communal lives of nuns.

<sup>150</sup> Murphy, "Femmes de Dieu et Révolution Française dans le Poitou: Etude de la réception de l'événement révolutionnaire par les religieuses poitevines," 120.

permanently park excess children of the upper class. They asked that these institutions and their resources be transformed so as to practically serve the state. Six petitions demanded the suppression of religious vows and only one went so far as to demand that nuns should be allowed to marry.<sup>151</sup>

The hostility that manifested itself in the *cahiers* that addressed women religious was most often directed against contemplatives.<sup>152</sup> Some petitions expressed ambivalent attitudes towards the monasteries in their district, with many communities declaring that they were overburdened with nuns, some of whom did nothing to contribute to the wellbeing of the community. Most often, according to the general *cahiers*, communities demanded that *religieux* and *religieuses* be regrouped into sustainable numbers that would also serve a useful purpose in society. Others requested the abolition of dowries and the advancement of the age of profession. Nevertheless, some *cahiers* actually asked for the lowering of the age of profession and another thirty-two wrote in defense of the social utility of religious orders.

Overall, the decline in recruitment, the criticisms of the 1780s, and the *cahiers de doléances* suggest that while the elite in French society often viewed monasticism negatively, few people at this time could imagine the complete suppression of religious orders.<sup>153</sup> For the most part, French society seemed to demand a meaningful reform that would not only reduce the number of convents, but would also direct their members to the service of the nation. The *cahiers* also demonstrated that the relationship between the people and their local secular clergy tended to be more positive than their relationship

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>152</sup> *Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860*, vol. 6, Première Série, 1879, 181. Hereafter, *AP*.

<sup>153</sup> John McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church* (London: S.P.C.K. for the Church Historical Society, 1969), 9.

with the regular clergy, although nuns were often spared from the harshest critiques. Citizens praised their own local *bon curé* and lambasted practices such as the *portion congrue* that impoverished local priests and privileged the higher clergy who were often viewed unfavorably. Despite a deep vein of anticlericalism, the majority of French Catholics seemed to remain faithful to the precepts of their religion, even as they desired transformations in the structure of the church.

In the 1780-90s some elements of public opinion also increasingly questioned the merits of clerical celibacy. Pamphleteers argued that celibacy was unnatural and created a class of men and women untied to the nation, who were essentially “anticitizens.”<sup>154</sup> In the worst cases, they insisted, it led to illnesses associated with abstinence or masturbation and debauchery.<sup>155</sup> Even some clergymen themselves argued against celibacy, citing the example of the primitive church in which institutionalized celibacy did not exist. These pamphlets also extolled the virtues of a married clergy that would be both more in touch with the needs of married parishioners and also a benefit to the development of the nation.<sup>156</sup>

Despite the larger financial and political questions facing the deputies to the National Assembly, a considerable amount of attention was focused on the regulation and reform of the clergy, especially those aspects that would touch the regular clergy. Considering that proportionally nuns only represented one per cent of the French population, the national legislative body devoted an inordinate amount of attention to

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<sup>154</sup> Claire Cage, “‘Celibacy Is a Social Crime’: The Politics of Clerical Marriage, 1793-1797,” *French Historical Studies* 36, no. 4 (Fall 2013): 605.

<sup>155</sup> Anna Clark, *Desire: A History of European Sexuality* (New York ; London: Routledge, 2008), 106–7.

<sup>156</sup> Cage, “‘Celibacy Is a Social Crime’: The Politics of Clerical Marriage, 1793-1797,” 604–5.

them, demonstrating that the question of monasticism remained important to the deputies. Indeed from October 1789 to May 1793, the *Archives Parlementaires* recorded forty-nine motions, letters, and decrees concerning nuns.<sup>157</sup> On November 2, 1789, the same day that they decreed that the property of the Church would be put at the disposal of the nation, the deputies also declared the suspension of solemn vows. This decision was solidified and extended on February 13, 1790 when the assembly announced the definitive suppression of vows. From this point on, all monks and nuns would be free to leave the convent. Those who chose to stay would face changes in the operation of their houses. Communities with fewer than twelve members would be regrouped into larger houses. For the men this would take place with out reference to or respect for their various orders or ways of life. Municipal authorities were required to visit all monasteries to poll the members on their decision to stay or go. These administrative excursions into the cloister also served as an opportunity to inventory the goods of monastic houses. These first legislative interventions set the tone for an increasing interference in the lives of women religious.

The most divisive of all Revolution legislation concerning religion was passed in July 1790. The Civil Constitution of the Clergy, a radical reorganization of the French Church instituted many of the reforms that were universally recognized as necessary, desired by the clergy, and outlined in the *cahiers de doléances*, but was indeed a more radical document when considered in its entirety than originally envisioned by those seeking reform. It abolished benefices and chapters without cure of souls, it provided a

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<sup>157</sup> Murphy, “Femmes de Dieu et Révolution Française dans le Poitou: Etude de la réception de l’événement révolutionnaire par les religieuses poitevines,” 120.

reasonable living to the parish clergy, it reduced the number of dioceses to correspond with the new political organization of departments. In short, it broke down the privileges of the aristocracy within the Church and ended the scandalous financial injustices of the Old Regime. Why then did a proportion of the parish clergy who had often led the charge for reform end up opposing the very changes they had previously supported? In the first place, some parish clergy would lose income; others saw the parishes and dioceses they had served for decades abolished from underneath them and were granted only a reduced pension with. Certain were also reluctant to accept appointment to ecclesiastical office through election by the laity, as the Civil Constitution proposed. Furthermore, a pro-papal contingent claimed that none of these restructurings could take place without the approval of the Pope.<sup>158</sup> While many partisans of reform within the church wanted to find a way to make these proposals acceptable to the clergy of France, the greatest obstacle remained the clergy's own refusal to accept the Assembly's imposing such radical changes without consulting either their own councils or Rome.

Notwithstanding the controversy, Louis XVI, under great pressure, promulgated the Civil Constitution on August 24 1790. The clergy of France awaited their pensions, and the impending sale of ecclesiastical property would not inspire confidence unless the reforms of Civil Constitution were made permanent. The bishops, however, tergiversated, claiming that they needed a response from Rome before they could move forward. As the sale of ecclesiastical property approached, the press accused them of exaggerating their scruples in order to disrupt an auction that they could not openly oppose.<sup>159</sup> Seeking to bring the controversy to a close—assuming the parish priest would not abandon the

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<sup>158</sup> McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church*, 41.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.



revolution he had helped to create—the Assembly pressed the issue and on November 27, 1790 decreed that all bishops and parish clergymen would have to swear an oath of support for the Civil Constitution or forfeit their salary and position.<sup>160</sup> Nigel Aston has called the oath requirement “a referendum on whether one’s first loyalties were to Catholicism or to the Revolution.”<sup>161</sup>

The moment in 1791 when priests were called upon to swear an oath to uphold this controversial document has been identified as a seminal moment in the Revolution that set up a schism that would lead to civil war and terror. The oath also proved to be watershed moment in the relationship between nuns and revolutionaries. It marked the end of the early honeymoon period of patriotic cooperation and precipitated political cleavages in French society that would result in violent opposition towards the Revolution.<sup>162</sup> The question of the oath created a division between the “jurors” who supported the Civil Constitution and swore to uphold it, and the refractory priests who considered the Revolutionary Church schismatic and insupportable. A third group remained indecisive, not knowing how to react in the face of questions of such importance. The polarization of the nation around these issues led to the persecution of refractory priests who quickly became linked—in the public imagination and sometimes in reality—to the forces of Counter-Revolution inside and outside France. Even the clerical members of the National Assembly were deeply divided over this obligation, and only about one third swore the oath before the deadline.<sup>163</sup> Among bishops

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>161</sup> Nigel Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France: 1780-1804* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 167.

<sup>162</sup> Timothy Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France: The Ecclesiastical Oath of 1791* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1986), 6.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 112–3.

the rate was even lower. Many felt divided between their loyalty to the Revolution and their personal and religious beliefs. As the oath was extended to all functionaries who wished to hold a post in the new Constitutional Church, priests faced a difficult decision, one that was often influenced not just by their own opinions and that of the ecclesiastical hierarchy but also by those of their friends, relatives, and parishioners.

Across France oath taking began on January 2, 1791. Nearly 55% of the parish clergy swore the oath, but geographically overall rates of refusal were uneven. In some areas, the population was split nearly evenly over this issue, in others one side or the other dominated. On the whole, the clergy of the Centre, Ile-de-France, and the Southeast accepted the Civil Constitution, whereas that of Flanders, Artois, Alsace, and Brittany rejected it.<sup>164</sup> The oath requirement not only precipitated a schism among the clergy but also raised the ire of French Catholics. Forcing the issue of the oath generated hostility to the Revolution and allowed counter-Revolutionary forces, which had previously lacked motivation besides the protection of aristocracy and privilege, to rally around traditional Catholicism and monarchy.<sup>165</sup>

Women--both religious and lay-- publicly took sides over this issue. They protected their favorites, shunned the other side, and intimidated those who opposed them. To support the Civil Constitution became a litmus test for patriotism. Those who opposed it became instantly allied with the forces of aristocracy, despotism, and Counter-Revolution.<sup>166</sup> Many nuns, who were at this time exempt from the oath, led the charge against juroring priests and violently protested sharing their churches with those whom they called heretics and schismatic. In resisting the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, such

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<sup>164</sup> McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church*, 49.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

women religious voluntarily took a political stance in defense of themselves, their vocation, and their religious beliefs. Nuns' greatest defiance was in pugnaciously resisting the replacement of their accustomed spiritual directors. In many instances, they refused to take the sacrament from a juroring priest or even to allow him to enter their chapels.

Although they themselves were not directly concerned in the legislation, the decisions of their accustomed male spiritual advisors to take the oath or not directly impacted women religious who were faced with the directive to accept replacements for the refractory priests who refused to swear the oath. Later, those women religious involved in public teaching and nursing activities would be required to take the oath as well. Throughout 1791 an uncomfortable entente prevailed between legislative deputies and women religious many of whom increasingly supported the refractory side of the growing schism within the French Church. This strained relationship would break down over the course of 1792, with the first motion to suppress all religious houses that supported refractory clergy being proposed in January. Measures to forbid wearing religious habits and the confiscation of convent bells followed. Finally, on August 18, 1792 the Assembly declared the complete suppression of women's religious houses, to be effective on October 1, a measure envisioned both as opposing counterrevolutionaries and as supporting individual liberty. Hospital and teaching sisters were exempted from dispersal until suitable replacements could be found. Nevertheless, debates and laws concerning the future of women religious were not accepted passively. From the beginning, these debates and interventions were met with a flurry of correspondence from

the monks and nuns concerned. Women religious resisted and attempted to negotiate revolutionary changes to fit their way of life.

But to return to 1789, as the Estates General recreated itself as the National Assembly that summer, deputies geared up for an agenda of reforms far more radical than the token tax increases envisioned by the king when he had reluctantly consented to the calling of the nation's representative body. Over the course of a heady summer reform turned to Revolution, sparking even greater controversies and widening the net of reform to cover all aspects of French society. On August 4, the National Assembly's members renounced numerous privileges in what has sometimes been called a veritable frenzy. This "destruction of feudalism" opened the way for a radical reevaluation of the position of the Church and its clergy within French society. Often suggested in the *cahiers de doléances*, the appropriation of Church property for service to the national debt crisis was rapidly placed on the agenda.

Not only was the sale of Church property important in that it deprived the First Estate of much of its power and wealth, the desacralizing tendency of creating inventories and haggling over church property did much to reinforce the growing anticlericalism that defined the Revolutionary era.<sup>167</sup> Writers and commentators as well as deputies accused the higher clergy of being more preoccupied with maintaining their wealth than with their religious functions. By the autumn, sweeping plans for the reorganization and rationalization of the Church were being debated. Purely from an economical viewpoint, the church would have to operate more efficiently; in this scheme of things monasticism was a luxury that many in the Assembly considered the French state could do without.

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 30.

After all, the greatest of these objections had already been overcome by the monarchy's interference in the regular orders throughout the eighteenth century. Under the Old Regime both Louis XIV and Louis XV had manipulated ecclesiastical revenues and tax privileges and reorganized elements of the regular clergy when they deemed it advantageous for the state. Indeed, the example of the *Commission des Réguliers* [1766-1780] showed just how easily religious orders could be suppressed.<sup>168</sup> The complaisance of the pope and the higher clergy in this recent encroachment upon ecclesiastical territory set a precedent for the crown and the National Assembly to act without consulting the ecclesiastical authority. As the sovereign voice of the nation, the Assembly asserted its right to follow this precedent and even to expand upon it.<sup>169</sup> As the regular orders faced the chopping block, very few objections arose from secular society. Indeed the deep vein of anticlericalism shared by many of France's elite not only confirmed the nation's need for these measures financially but also ideologically in order to rid the state of unproductive parasitical intuitions.

The decision to appropriate church land in order to wipe out the national deficit and pay clergymen as state employees was not motivated entirely by financial exigencies. Ideology also played a role especially in regards to monasticism. Great jealousy and disdain for monks had developed in the later half of the eighteenth century, largely as the result of the bad press of the *ancien régime* and the waning of morale and sense of purpose within the institutions themselves. In fact, Choudhury has described the double standard for monks and nuns as a kind of "gendered anticlericalism" in which nuns were to be pitied but monks were to be disdained for their useless lifestyle and refusal to

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 28.

work.<sup>170</sup> Women religious, remained an important figure in the imaginary of the men seeking to recreate and regenerate the French state. In these men the legacy of anticlerical and Enlightenment critiques of celibacy intersected with the imaginative literature concerning convents of women. The nun of 1789 was perceived as an innocent victim whom the National Assembly could gallantly save, a poor soul longing for the light of freedom. Envisioning themselves in a paternalistic role, the deputies of the National Assembly considered themselves as fathers of liberty to oppressed peoples, a romantic notion that especially lent itself to the imaginative images of the nun that were in circulation at the time. Their symbolic power would continue to grow over the course of the Revolution as their image, and the meaning behind it morphed to reflect new concerns.

The first attacks on monastic institutions in the fall of 1789 resembled those of the previous *Commission de Secours* and the *Commission de Réguliers*. On September 23, 1789 the National Assembly proposed to regroup monks and nuns into communities of at least twelve to fifteen members regardless of monastic order or rule.<sup>171</sup> On October 30, 1789 Mirabeau, acutely aware of the currency of the forced vows controversy, asked “qu’on libère ces religieux qui sollicitent leur suppression...mais qu’on ne confonde pas avec ce petit nombre de religieux la quantité innombrable de religieux et de religieuses qui, dans leur solitude, implorant la miséricorde divine pour être conservés dans leur état.”<sup>172</sup> The next day, however, the more radical La Rochefoucauld proposed for the first

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<sup>170</sup> Mita Choudhury, *Convents and Nuns in Eighteenth-Century French Politics and Culture* (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004), 156. See also: Anne Jacobson Schutte, *By Force and Fear: Taking and Breaking Monastic Vows in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011), 114.

<sup>171</sup> Murphy, “Femmes de Dieu et Révolution Française dans le Poitou: Etude de la réception de l’événement révolutionnaire par les religieuses poitevines,” 121.

<sup>172</sup> *AP*. IX, 125.

time that religious orders be completely suppressed, with pensions provided for those who left and houses put aside for those who wished to continue the religious life until their deaths.<sup>173</sup> La Rochefoucauld emphasized, however, the need for suppression: “de pareilles institutions ne conviennent pas à un peuple libre et qu’il falloir inévitablement ouvrir la porte des cloîtres”<sup>174</sup> Nevertheless while thoughts of complete suppression and the incompatibility of religious orders with a free society began to circulate, the Assembly was, as of yet, unprepared to go forward with this scheme.

On November 2, 1789 the National Assembly decreed the suspension of solemn vows and that the property of the church would be put at the disposal of the nation.<sup>175</sup> Underlining that this was not an attack on the church’s property nor on all monastic houses, but rather a controlled attempt to identify excess property and convents, the Assembly declared that monastic orders were forbidden from receiving any novices until each province had decided how many monasteries they wished to keep.<sup>176</sup> Those religious who wished to break their vows were permitted to leave and present novices would be sent home immediately. Cécile Maurin, mistress of novices of the *Bénédictines de Notre Dame de Calvaire* of Poitiers saw clearly the future of convents under these conditions, “Que deviendrons nos cloîtres sans postulantes? Ils ne seront bientôt plus que des hospices de vieilles religieuses impotentes et tristes.”<sup>177</sup> Recognizing these interventions as attacks on their very existence, some women religious did not hesitate to tell their side

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 614.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 575.

<sup>175</sup> Rapley, Elizabeth, “‘Pieuses Contre-Révolutionnaires’: The Experience of the Ursulines of Northern France, 1789-1792,” 461.

<sup>176</sup> Murphy, “Femmes de Dieu et Révolution Française dans le Poitou: Etude de la réception de l’événement révolutionnaire par les religieuses poitevines,” 122.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 123.

of the story and demonstrate their uneasiness with the changing world of the early Revolution.

### **Nuns Speak: Letters to the Ecclesiastical Committee**

While the deputies debated the future of monasticism in France, convent walls proved to be more porous to political news than one might have expected. Directing their requests and petitions to the National Assembly, women religious defended their way of life, asserted their rights and contributions as citizens, and asked for the Assembly's intervention in matters of importance for them. Between November 2, 1789 and February 13, 1790 the Assembly would receive almost 300 petitions preserved in the archives of the Ecclesiastical Committee from women religious eager to participate in the new culture of public political discussion.<sup>178</sup>

In the great flood of letters written to the Ecclesiastical committee, however, the orders born of the Counter-reformation, devoted to charity, nursing and education were largely underrepresented in favor of the older, contemplative orders that had enjoyed the patronage of the monarchy in times past. The contemplatives recognized that in the face of modern rationalizing tendencies they had the most to fear from public demands of utility. The newer orders devoted to charity, which served essential social functions, either found less time or less reason to defend their way of life to the Nation. According to Murphy's study, fifty-five per cent of the petitions came from contemplatives, which was in fact disproportionate to their total number.<sup>179</sup> Overall, out of 256 petitions only 29 came from hospital nuns, who obviously felt themselves to be less threatened, and who,

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<sup>178</sup> The contents of AN, D/XIX/16, the archives of the ecclesiastical committee that contain correspondence from nuns, have not been catalogued and thus at this point we can only estimate the number of petitions contained in these dossiers.

<sup>179</sup> Murphy, "Femmes de Dieu et Révolution Française dans le Poitou: Etude de la réception de l'événement révolutionnaire par les religieuses poitevines," 104.



considering their arduous tasks caring for the sick and lower status, simply had less time and capability to write. The nuns who wrote instead sought to overcome negative stereotypes about their work and commitments.

Some women religious, like the *Visitandines* of Paris, even published their petitions to present their cause for the consideration of the general public. These communities appreciated the importance of the new public political sphere and knew that engaging in it would be the key to their survival. The letters to the deputies were not meant for their eyes only, but were conceived as announcement to the entire Nation that nuns would gladly renew their commitments. Nuns showed that they were aware that if they were seen publically to love their *état* then the Assembly would not legitimately be able to argue that the suppression of all convents was necessary to liberate poor unhappy nuns.<sup>180</sup> Aware that forced vows provided the best ammunition against convents, some communities' petitions combatted the idea that they accepted postulants without true vocations in order to increase their wealth. The writers pointed out that such practices would actually work against the community's interests, damaging their reputations and *esprit de corps*.<sup>181</sup>

Some of the nuns attacked the stereotypes and misconceptions surrounding forced vows. An address from the Carmelites of Saint Denis aimed to correct the misapprehensions many people had about their vocation: they “affect to consider nuns in general as victims, sacrificed to human interests; they claim the return to them a liberty that they miss; they suppose that they await with joy the moment when they are returned to society,” such “suspicion's and imputations,” they contended, misrepresented the

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<sup>180</sup> Betros, “Liberty, Citizenship and the Suppression of Female Religious Communities in France, 1789-90,” 319.

<sup>181</sup> Archives Nationales, D/XIX/16. Hereafter, AN.

happiness that most nuns found following their freely chosen vocation.<sup>182</sup> The nuns of Sainte Claire in Lyon explained “It was only after the most serious tests that we were admitted, and we respect too much the sanctity of our state, the inner peace which we possess, to introduce here those whose vocation [was not] marked and expressed by the most solid perseverance.”<sup>183</sup> The Visitandines called the issue of forced vows an exaggeration used to malign them, not a valid reason to defame the entire religious state: “Quelques Religieuses (dont la malignité exagère le nombre) se repentent, dit-on, de leur état; mais une telle supposition pourrait-elle affaiblir nos titres? Quel Législateur a jamais cru devoir dissoudre un Corps, parce qu’un ou plusieurs de ses membres s’y trouvaient malheureux?”<sup>184</sup>

These same nuns of the Visitation wrote one of the most compelling petitions addressing the concerns of the Assembly and arguing for the continuation of their order. They described the utility of their convent as providing a resource and refuge for widows, the ill and “les Personnes disgraciées par la nature,” a mission which they believed, could not be “onéreux à la société.”<sup>185</sup> They explained that their institution prevented society from being burdened by women unable to work. Reasserting their love of their vocation and their connection to the Nation, the nuns asked, “Combien de fois nous sommes-nous dit à nous-mêmes, parlant du choix libre de notre genre de vie? Les Défenseurs de la Liberté doivent être les nôtres.” Deploying the language of the Revolution and playing on the paternalistic sentiments of the Assembly, the nuns asked the deputies to recognize

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Quoted in Betros, “Liberty, Citizenship and the Suppression of Female Religious Communities in France, 1789-90,” 319.

<sup>184</sup> AN, D/XIX/7 and AN, D/XIX/16; “Requête à l’Assemblée Nationale de la part des Religieuses de la Visitation de Sainte Marie de France.”

<sup>185</sup> AN, D/XIX/7.

their liberty to live as they wished while pointing out the hypocrisy of forcing women to give up a way of life that they found fulfilling.

Their writings established that they were touched by Enlightenment sensibilities and the possibilities of the Revolution. Women religious took up the language of the Revolution and symbolically, if not physically, entered the public sphere to justify their choice of enclosure. Not hesitating to promote their role in public life, nuns engaged in a type of feminism, in which they interpreted the new rights and liberties of the Revolution as belonging to them without reference to their sex or to their estate.<sup>186</sup> They envisioned themselves as citizens with the right to engage in public discourse through their petitions, while also preserving the sanctity of the cloister. Further exhibiting their devotion to the Revolution, nuns underscored their willingness to donate their goods for the benefit of the nation, however, they expected that by doing so they might also be allowed the liberty to pursue their lives as they desired, just like other citizens. What they wrote and how they expressed themselves demonstrated the extent to which they had assimilated the values of the Revolution and hoped to shape their futures in accordance with these values.

Not all women religious, however, were attuned to the new Revolutionary values. Murphy found several examples among the archives of the diocese of Poitiers of nuns who had not assimilated the new values of social utility. They instead justified their existence by their antiquity, their aristocracy, and their prayers.<sup>187</sup> According to Murphy's study of nuns' petitions, contemplatives were much more likely to cite their desire for solitude and isolation, the imprescriptibility of perpetual vows, and fear for the future as

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<sup>186</sup> Betros, "Liberty, Citizenship and the Suppression of Female Religious Communities in France, 1789-90," 314.

<sup>187</sup> AN, D/XIX/19.

reasons for wanting to continue the religious life.<sup>188</sup> They were also much less likely to mention their social utility, whereas teaching and hospital orders chiefly justified themselves in these terms.

The *Dominicaines* of Castelasarrazin stated that their purpose was “de nous sanctifier par la retraite, la prière, le jeûne et le travail.”<sup>189</sup> The *Calvairiennes* of Poitiers summarized their activities as “honorer la passion et la mort de Jésus-Christ...et prier pour la conversion des infidèles.”<sup>190</sup> Murphy sees these attitudes as an example “de sujets historiques en décalage complet avec leur époque, s’inscrivant dans une temporalité différente, théologique et religieuse.”<sup>191</sup>

Nevertheless some of the letters provide rare evidence of the reception and internalization of revolutionary discourse amongst French nuns. Considering that this rhetoric penetrated the heart of the cloister, we can see that even many contemplative nuns were not so isolated as sometimes believed.<sup>192</sup> The correspondence of nuns in 1789 and 1790 rejected the idea that they were just victims and instead argued for their rights as individuals, essentially regarding themselves as equal citizens without reference to gender limitations, demonstrating the extent to which the language of liberty of the early Revolution was broadly defined.

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<sup>188</sup> Murphy, “Femmes de Dieu et Révolution Française dans le Poitou: Etude de la réception de l’événement révolutionnaire par les religieuses poitevines,” 105.

<sup>189</sup> AN, D/XIX/5.

<sup>190</sup> Murphy, “Femmes de Dieu et Révolution Française dans le Poitou: Etude de la réception de l’événement révolutionnaire par les religieuses poitevines,” 111.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>192</sup> Betros, “Liberty, Citizenship and the Suppression of Female Religious Communities in France, 1789-90,” 314.

The 5, 000 signatures<sup>193</sup> collected on these petitions in defense of religious orders, however represent an institutional response directed and controlled by the hierarchy of the convent, most interesting for taking the temperature of ideas circulating in convents of that time. We must recognize that these documents may not have represented the opinions of all those who signed them. On the contrary, they record a broad swath of reactions, making them useful for recognizing the extent to which political news penetrated convent walls and identifying the issues at stake for nuns as the Assembly debated their future.<sup>194</sup> Some nuns were compelled by their vows of obedience to sign the petitions that they were not allowed to read.<sup>195</sup> Moreover, it is not unusual to find the signatures of nuns who went on to marry and secularize definitively on documents expressing undying devotion to their vocation.

A small group of nuns wrote on November 4, 1789 that they had been forced by their superior to sign a document addressed to the National Assembly that they were not allowed to read.<sup>196</sup> They explained that they “*aiment notre état et l’ayant embrassé du coeur et d’affection. . .mais nous sommes indignés de la conduit de trois ou quatre père cordeliers.*”<sup>197</sup> Some fifty-odd letters from individuals or small groups reached the National Assembly calling for the liberty to leave their houses, in fact, encouraging suppression.<sup>198</sup> These individual letters shed light on aspects of dissent and discord within certain convents. Thirty-five out of these letters asking for the suppression of religious

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<sup>193</sup> Out of the 300 petitions that Murphy studied, he counted over 5,000 signatures to the documents, often signed by entire communities.

<sup>194</sup> Betros, “Liberty, Citizenship and the Suppression of Female Religious Communities in France, 1789-90,” 313.

<sup>195</sup> Murphy, “Femmes de Dieu et Révolution Française dans le Poitou: Etude de la réception de l’événement révolutionnaire par les religieuses poitevines,” 115.

<sup>196</sup> AN, D/XIX/16. One of the nuns who composed this letter of dissent would go on to marry.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

vows came from contemplative convents confirming that those who were most dissatisfied with their vocations were the women who were bound by perpetual vows.<sup>199</sup> On February 13, 1790 *abbé* Montesquiou berated the Assembly, “Until now, I have only received letters and addresses from nuns who want to stay in their cloisters. You cannot and should not force them to renounce their ways.”<sup>200</sup> But clearly the *abbé* had not read all of the letters. Some letters upholding the belief that women were being held against their will behind convent walls reached members of the National Assembly and helped consolidate their attack on perpetual vows. From L’Abbaye de Moutons in Avranches on October 8, 1789, two biological sisters wrote of the “affereux despotism” that reigned in their convent. They called their life there “esclavage,” affirming reports about the lack of liberty in the cloister. “Nous ne pouvons plus supporter cet état,” they wrote and asked that “si la liberté n’est pas donné générale” that they at least be allowed to leave the convent.<sup>201</sup> Enough of these kinds of letters questioning the freedom of women religious in making professions and their general happiness and liberty in their convents arrived in the Assembly to crystalize ideas of victimization and forced vows. However, being outliers to the general affirmation of the love of their vocation, legislators were faced with a difficult question of whether to proceed with the complete suppression of female religious orders.

On September 23 1789 an Augustinian *chanoinesse* of Châtellerault, Rose Lauray, addressed a letter to the Assembly in which she praised the “sage” project of giving *religieuses* a pension and their liberty. She wrote that “depuis l’âge de 17 ans, je l’ai

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<sup>199</sup> Murphy, “Femmes de Dieu et Révolution Française dans le Poitou: Etude de la réception de l’événement révolutionnaire par les religieuses poitevines,” 117.

<sup>200</sup> AP. XI., 590.

<sup>201</sup> AN, D/XIX/16.

perdue [ma liberté], il y a vingt ans que je mène une vie remplie d'ennui et d'amertume.” Confirming the stereotype of forced vows, she wrote: “je n’ai jamais pu me faire une habitude d’un état que j’abhorre, je ne l’eusse jamais pris si mon père ne m’y eusse forcé, il m’a sacrifié à sa haine et à sa vanité.”<sup>202</sup> Nevertheless, two months later, Rose Lauray signed the collective petition of the *chanoinesses* de Chatellerault in defense of their vows.<sup>203</sup>

Letters written by small groups or individual nuns exposed the tensions that lay underneath the institutional and spiritual unity that seemed to dominate the official petitions. Dissenting nuns smuggled out hastily written protests against authoritarian superiors some of whom were said to have changed rules within their houses. A few even complained that they were being held against their will and encouraged the National Assembly in its fight against perpetual vows. The letters from individuals “provide evidence of decisions taken too young, of forced vocations, or of abusive or unhappy situations perpetuated by the very structure of the convent.”<sup>204</sup> One letter writer insisted that petitions in support of convents were “dictated by the old nuns” who feared for their survival outside of the convent. She claimed, “of 400 nuns only four would not wish to leave.”<sup>205</sup>

The difficulties for these women to express a dissenting opinion cannot be underestimated. They wrote furtively and in fear of retribution or interception. Ultimately, the number of women who agreed with the dissenters or whose missives were confiscated would be impossible to determine. These types of letters often, in fact, show

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Betros, “Liberty, Citizenship and the Suppression of Female Religious Communities in France, 1789-90,” 325.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 323.

a degree of ambiguity, with some letter writers protesting that they did not mean to oppose the religious state in itself, but rather objected to certain treatments and situations. Petitions from unhappy nuns did not necessarily propose an escape from the religious life, rather they asserted the autonomy to choose their way of life. In fact for women religious, the liberty that they desired did not always match the definition of liberty that the National Assembly promoted. One letter-writer complained about “les jalousies, les rapports, les caballes” that reigned in her convent after the death of a good superior.<sup>206</sup> Apparently failing in her demand to move to another house, she tried taking her grievance outside of official ecclesiastical channels in order to improve her living situation. Another letter-writer begged the National Assembly’s intervention in a matter, which, she claimed, involved her liberty of conscience. Living in the midst of a latter-day Jansenist quarrel, she complained that her superior publically punished her for demanding the liberty to take communion with the priest of her choosing and according to the schedule of her Order. Although she loved her *état* she believed that she should be allowed to select her own confessor and to decide and how often to confess. Asking the Assembly to involve itself in internal matters of convent discipline, she requested that they order her superior to respect her liberty of conscious or to move her to a different house.

Interestingly, such letters reveal women’s belief in the National Assembly’s ability to effect change—on a grand, as well as on a personal scale. Betros also identified the spirit of Jansenism in certain letters, “determined to be heard, [women religious] questioned the legitimacy of convent hierarchies and decried the despotism produced

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<sup>206</sup> AN, D/XIX/16.



therein.”<sup>207</sup> In many ways, nuns looked to the Assembly to solve their internal problems, while paradoxically taking an active part in demanding that the Assembly respect their liberty.

Some convents petitions also focused on the practical concerns that suppression would entail. How were women forced from their communities supposed to support themselves? The Montauban community of Sainte Claire warned that several of their nuns, “having no other family than that which religion gave them, would find themselves isolated, lost and without resources.”<sup>208</sup> Women religious recognized the difficulties that would come with finding lodgings and employment as well as with being cut off from the system of support that they relied upon in old age and in sickness.

In many ways, convents’ petitions did persuade lawmakers to act less radically than they might otherwise have done. Jean-Baptiste Treilhard delivered the Ecclesiastical Committee’s initial recommendations for suppression in a report on December 17, 1789. This report, which was openly hostile to male religious communities, encouraged the Assembly’s special protection of women religious due to the fact that they were “victimes de la faiblesse de leur sexe”<sup>209</sup> He contended that “leurs besoins, leurs occupations, leurs goûts, leurs habitudes sont si différentes des goûts, des besoins, des habitudes de notre sexe qu’elles méritent un traitement particulier.”<sup>210</sup> Murphy argued that instead of recognizing the essential role of female religious orders in education, hospital care, and charity and admitting that they were indispensable, the deputies of the Ecclesiastical Committee preferred to justify the conservation and different treatment of

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<sup>207</sup> Betros, “Liberty, Citizenship and the Suppression of Female Religious Communities in France, 1789-90,” 322.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 320.

<sup>209</sup> *AP. X.*, 625.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

*religieuses* on the basis of gender bias.<sup>211</sup> The sexual differences enshrined in law in regards to the treatment of the regular clergy continued a tradition of gendered anticlericalism under which monks were to be scorned for their choice of lifestyle but nuns were to be pitied and excused for their unenlightened ways.

In the debates of February 11 and 13, 1790 Dupont de Nemours suggested that the suppression of religious orders “serait une operation excellent pour les finances.”<sup>212</sup> No longer solely relying on arguments of forced vows to justify the closure of convents, deputies came up with new rationalizations for the permanent closure of convents. On February 13, 1790 they forbade the profession of perpetual vows and permitted men and women bound by them to receive a pension upon leaving the cloister. Secular orders devoted to teaching and nursing, however, would remain at their posts for lack of immediate replacements. Furthermore convents that fell below fifteen members would be suppressed and the nuns would have the choice between rejoining another house and secularizing. Negotiating between the desires of religious institutions while listening to the voices of individual women, the National Assembly had attempted to craft a piece of legislation that would accommodate all women involved as well as further the anticlerical ideological agenda. Their success at crafting such an impossible compromise was indeed limited.

### **Abandoning the Cloister**

On March 12, 1790 Sister Saint Clément of the Hotel Dieu of Paris, regretting the exception made for hospital sisters, implored the National Assembly to set her free as well. Even though she admitted she had entered religious life voluntarily she now longed

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<sup>211</sup>Murphy, “Femmes de Dieu et Révolution Française dans le Poitou: Etude de la réception de l’événement révolutionnaire par les religieuses poitevines,” 124.

<sup>212</sup> *AP*. XI., 544.

to be released from her vows. She begged them, “arracher de l’esclavage une victime qui gémit de porter des chaînes dont elle s’est chargée volontairement, il est vrai mais qui du moment qu’elles les a eue prises ait eu le plus grand regret.” She claimed that her decision to profess had been made “avec trop peu de réflexion.”<sup>213</sup> Soeur Saint Clement’s story represented the complexities of the issues at stake: she took her vows freely and later regretted them. In any other situation, the Assembly’s legislations would allow her to leave the convent, however her essential work at the hospital prompted local revolutionary leaders of the section Hotel-Dieu to reject her request to leave. In many ways, the Assembly’s legislation managed to destabilize religious houses, introduce fear for the future, provoke new conflicts within communities, at the same time as leaving some women whose work was deemed indispensable in situations that they found unacceptable. Indeed within two years this compromise solution would break down because of growing hostility against religious orders, the financial pressures of war, and the association of religious communities with fanaticism and counter-Revolution. Women religious, regardless of order or social utility, would be definitively turned out of their convents in October 1792 just in time to face the adversity and violence of dechristianization and the Terror.

After the suppression of solemn vows, many French people, including a large number of the deputies in the Assembly believed that women religious would come flooding out of convents to reclaim their rightful place in society; that of wife and mother. Contemporary political philosophy held that experiencing the joys of marriage as well as its responsibilities would transform these victims of Old Regime tyranny into productive citizens. Several ironic engravings suggested an efficient solution to the

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<sup>213</sup> AN, D/XIX/16.

problem: nuns and monks would simply find conjugal bliss together. Figure 1 represents one of this popular theme where, in a reversal of roles, the third estate presides over the marriages of monks and nuns who file out of their former monasteries. Despite the circulation of many political cartoons mocking monks, nuns, and celibacy, the archives fail to yield any images with a sympathetic slant towards monasticism.<sup>214</sup>



**Figure 1** *Le Tiers État mariant les Religieux avec les Religieuses* (Paris, 1790), Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

<sup>214</sup> Derek Edward Dawson Beales, *Prosperity and Plunder: European Catholic Monasteries in the Age of Revolution, 1650-1815* (Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 247.

Indeed, the representatives of the National Assembly and perhaps some sections of French society were genuinely surprised by nuns' reactions to their benevolent decrees. Overwhelmingly, convent gates remained closed and locked. The anticipated celebration of liberty failed to materialize. By and large it is not surprising that the vast majority of nuns decided to remain in their convents. Many of the women were older and had very little experience with secular society, much less with earning a living. Additionally, the large number of noble women in convents meant that many nuns' families had emigrated and that they had nowhere else to go. Furthermore, according to the laws of the Church, any nun setting foot outside the cloister without permission faced excommunication. Their exceptional fidelity to the religious state, however, did not mean that all nuns who stayed did so out of love of their vocation and religious conviction. Rather family pressure, the group mentality of the convent—supported by dogmatic superiors who emphasized the betrayal of God that breaching the cloister represented—the fear of the outside world, and the absence of material and social support in this decision undoubtedly combined to keep many women who might have otherwise chosen to leave behind convent walls. An unhappy secular sister lamented her situation, “Chez les turques il y a plus d’humanité; elle [la supérieure) est plus dure que le Gouverneur de la Bastille de Paris.”<sup>215</sup> Although she was only held by simple vows, she pointed out “nous pouvons sortir, mais étant sortie quoi devenir?”<sup>216</sup> Profound fear of the future did much to keep dissatisfied nuns in their communities, even those who had suffered forced vows.

Even though voluntary defections from convents remained very rare, they nonetheless exposed some tensions behind convent walls. Three months after her

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<sup>215</sup> AN, D/XIX/16. Oct. 22, 1789, Marie Louise de La Providence, Maison de la Providence, Douai (Nord).

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

provocative letter to the Assembly, Rose Lauray tried, and failed by only one vote, to be elected as the superior of her convent. On April 13, 1790 she became the first nun to voluntarily leave. Her departure created a public discussion<sup>217</sup> in which her cousin—an influential member of the Constituent Assembly—took part defending her right to leave in his letter published under the title of, *Lettre de M Creuzé de Latouche, member de l'Assemblée Nationale à Madame \*\*\*\* ci-devant religieuse, sortie de la communauté de \*\*\*, en vertu des décrets de l'Assemblée Nationale.*<sup>218</sup> Rose Lauray continued her vocation of teacher until her death in the nineteenth century; however, she did so in a lay capacity, demonstrating that she did not regret her choice of *métier*, she just objected to following it within the confines of a religious community.

Historians have often remarked on the exceptional solidarity of female religious institutions before they were finally forced to close in 1792. Relying on Cardinal Capara's archives, which counted only seventy-seven petitions relative to defections in 1791-1792 and the documents assembled by the Ecclesiastical committee, that recorded ninety-four cases of nuns leaving early, many historians have vastly underestimated the number of the voluntary ruptures. In the two departments that he studied, Murphy counted 51 *religieuses* who left of their own accord between April 1790 and September 1792. This represents only 5% of the population of women religious of these departments, but is in fact “dix fois supérieur aux estimations données pour l'ensemble du royaume d'un fait qui a toujours été minoré, sous-estimé, présenté comme des cas à

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<sup>217</sup> Marc-Antoine Reynaud. *Lettre à une religieuse sortie de son couvent, et qui a prétendu justifier sa sortie par le décret de l'Assemblée Nationale.* Auxerre, 1790.

<sup>218</sup> Paris, 1790

part sans valeur représentative.”<sup>219</sup> Instead Murphy finds value in this small percentage. Not only does he prove that many more women religious left earlier than previously thought, he also shows that these defections took place in 20 different convents, affecting more than 500 nuns or half of the nuns in the diocese. For these nuns, women deserting the cloister not only further disrupted their lives but also broke down the solidarity of the convent. Women leaving the convent brought home the reality that living according to solemn vows had become a choice instead of a sacred obligation upheld by Church and State.

All types of convents and all social classes of nuns, nobles slightly more than others, were touched by the defections. In small groups or individually women left. Unfortunately, the reasons for these isolated defections are hard to ascertain, as the women involved were unlikely to leave any written evidence justifying their decisions. Murphy’s study suggests that most often defectors were middle-aged nuns who had grown dissatisfied with their communities, normally with grudges against the convent’s hierarchy or with complaints against the group dynamics within the cloister.<sup>220</sup> The average age of the nuns who left their convents was forty-six.<sup>221</sup> At least some made it clear to authorities that they left the convent due to an insupportable atmosphere even though they would have liked to continue the religious life under other circumstances.<sup>222</sup> Only a few nuns mentioned that they were leaving the convent because it had never been their choice to become a nun in the first place.

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<sup>219</sup> Murphy, “Femmes de Dieu et Révolution Française dans le Poitou: Etude de la réception de l’événement révolutionnaire par les religieuses poitevines,” 170.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 168–77.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

Less often entire convents came apart at the seams in the face of government intervention.<sup>223</sup> For example, upon questioning at the end of January 1791, six of the thirteen female Franciscans at Montmorillon replied that they wished to leave. The other seven, who had originally wanted to stay, substantially changed their minds, marking the first closure of a convent in the diocese of Poitiers.<sup>224</sup> The few institutional exceptions to the fidelity of convents underlined the importance of good governance, observance of the Rule and, and willing postulants within female religious communities. In Paris, at the great and wealthy abbey of Montmartre—long known for its exceptional worldliness—out of fifty professed nuns, the prioress and eleven others stated their intention to leave in protest of the “despotic” practices of the abbess, Madame de Montmorency-Laval.<sup>225</sup> In a less affluent part of the capital, the nuns from one of the poorer convents, Sainte-Madeleine, defected *en masse*. Here, of the thirty-eight nuns who sought their freedom, many among them in fact had been incarcerated in this house of correction for fallen women before taking vows.<sup>226</sup>

Closures also took place when communities fell below the required numbers or when authorities judged them to be too active in hosting masses conducted by refractory priests. Until 1792 and the official closure of all monasteries, nuns had the option to take refuge in a larger community. In the diocese of Poitiers in 1791, fifty nuns from closed communities chose this option while another twenty-seven decided to return to their

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 131–140.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>225</sup> McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church*, 32; Paul Biver, *Abbayes, monastères, couvents de femmes à Paris : des origines à la fin du XVIIIe siècle*. (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1975), 492.

<sup>226</sup> Jean Boussoulade, *Moniales et hospitalières dans la tourmente révolutionnaire* (Paris: Letouzey & Ané, 1962), 64–5; Pierre Hélyot, *Histoire des ordres monastiques, religieux et militaires, et des congregations seculières de l'un & de l'autre sexe*, vol. III (Paris, 1721), 372.



families or live in small groups.<sup>227</sup> These women were either very brave or left in the knowledge that they had someone to take care of them. Still more women to be sure, remained behind convent walls for lack of alternatives. This choice especially would have been hard for the women to make before August 1792 when the National Assembly determined the amount of the pensions to be paid to former women religious.

Despite some significant examples to the contrary, the fidelity of nuns to their vows was truly extraordinary and proved the lie of anticlerical literature that claimed that they were just a mass of victims waiting to be liberated. Men's houses, in contrast, melted away with startling speed. The reasons for this had to do both with their lives under the Old Regime and their treatment under the new. Monks often lived in houses with a smaller and less cohesive population. There is some evidence that, in fact, morale among monks had been failing since the 1770s.<sup>228</sup> The National Assembly's different treatment of the male and female orders, however, may have had much to do with the mass defection of the men. Whereas women could remain united in their own houses and under the same order as always, men were to be lumped together regardless of order and lifestyle. Without knowing where they were to be sent, who would be their superior, or under what conditions they were to live together, monks were told to pick a side. Choosing to take their pensions—which the Assembly fixed much earlier than those for women—many decided to leave and take their chances in the world rather than wait and see how this system would work out. Men, after all, could much more easily start their lives anew in the secular clergy or in a different career field. For women religious,

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<sup>227</sup> Murphy, "Femmes de Dieu et Révolution Française dans le Poitou: Etude de la réception de l'événement révolutionnaire par les religieuses poitevines," 154.

<sup>228</sup> Michel Vovelle, *Piété Baroque et déchristianisation en provence au 18e siècle : les attitudes devant la mort d'après les clauses des testaments* (Paris: Plon, 1973), 198–200; Jean Quéniart, *La Bretagne au XVIIIe siècle: (1675-1789)* (Rennes, France: Ouest-France, 2004), 600–5.

opportunities outside the convent were virtually nonexistent. In practice this meant that most would continue communal life for the next two years under uncertain conditions with fear for the future, but, more or less left to function with increasing amounts of government surveillance.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

**Figure 2** *La Discipline Patriotique ou le fanatisme corrigé* (Paris, 1791), Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

Full-scale political battles broke out over such seemingly banal issues as nuns' refusal to turn over the keys to their chapel or their insistence on ringing their bells to welcome

refractory priests and bishops.<sup>229</sup> In the Spring of 1791 nuns also became a focus for popular religious disputes. Departmental archives record numerous episodes of female religious houses brought into conflict with their communities over their support of the Revolution. In April crowds of Parisian women attacked the nuns of a teaching congregation, charging them with instructing the pupils in “propos contre la patrie” and plotting against the Revolution with refractory priests.<sup>230</sup> The women publically spanked the nuns in an incident of “patriotic discipline” which would be widely reported and emulated. On other occasions, especially around traditional processions and moments of importance for the community, women religious incensed the crowds by their refusal to participate in the accustomed manner, such as bell ringing, singing for the procession, or offering certain gifts.<sup>231</sup>

### **The Beginning of the End**

From 1791 until the fall of 1792 municipal authorities’ interventions within convent walls would multiply rapidly. They came to receive declarations of professes’ intentions, to verify elections when *converses* were given the right to vote, to make inventories, and to supervise the confiscation of the bells. Beginning in January 1792, nuns began to be suspected of hiding refractories behind their walls and participating in forbidden, clandestine masses, actions that made them counterrevolutionaries by association. As Revolutionary tensions increased, the isolation and solitude of the convent was also frequently interrupted by authorities searching for refractory priests, or

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<sup>229</sup> Louise Coudanne, *Chroniques de moniales: les bénédictines du Calvaire du Faubourg Saint-Germain dans la tourmente révolutionnaire* (Saint Nicolas les Cîteaux, France: ARCCIS, 2003), 50; Alan I Forrest, *The Revolution in Provincial France: Aquitaine, 1789-1799* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1996), 176.

<sup>230</sup> Gemma Betros, “The French Revolution and the Catholic Church,” *History Today*, 2010.

<sup>231</sup> Alponse Aulard, *La Révolution Française et les Congrégations: Exposé Historique et Documentaire* (Paris: E. Cornély, 1903), 46.

by demands that the nuns take the liberty-equality oath<sup>232</sup> and quarter soldiers. Municipal and district authorities came to divide the nuns' property according to what they were allowed to take with them and, finally, escort them from the buildings in the fall of 1792. Convents' superiors dealt with each of these intrusions in their own particular way. Some communities refused to respond to letters or to open their doors to the authorities, counting on their strong walls to keep the Revolution at bay. Others accommodated the new laws and carried on as best they could. Yet, as their own petitions showed, high walls and parlor grills could not keep news from filtering in.

Minimizing the threat that nuns presented and over-representing the impact of voluntary defections, Mathion de Léopold of the Legislative Assembly's Ecclesiastical Committee announced that "dans les couvents de femmes comme ailleurs... la voix de la liberté nous a rendu des milliers de citoyennes." He insisted "ne sont restées dans les cloîtres que trois ou quatre religieuses, tristes victimes de l'orgueil et des préjugés."

These victims, however, posed certain problems:

Il est enfin contraire à la tranquillité publique parce que trois ou quatre religieuses restées au fond d'un cloître prennent sur leurs subsistances pour soudoyer un prêtre non conformist... parce que cet aumônier est ordinairement le président du conciliabule aristocratique de tous les prêtres non assermentés de la ville et du canton, parce que ces conciliales enterretiennent l'orgueil et la division entre les citoyens... ces petites congrégations de femmes

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<sup>232</sup> Originally, nuns were exempted from the oath to the Civil Constitution because they were not considered public functionaries. In 1792, *congrégations* of teaching and hospital sisters who intended to stay at their posts were ordered to take the oath or be removed. In reality, there was no one to replace them and sisters who refused to swear continued to staff schools and hospitals. In August 1792, after the arrest of the Louis XVI, those who wished to receive their pensions were required to swear the liberty and equality oath: "Je jure d'être fidèle à la nation et de maintenir la liberté et l'égalité ou de mourir en les défendant." Municipal and departmental records on nuns swearing the oath have not been fully explored. Furthermore, in many districts, authorities had more important concerns than nuns swearing oaths and continued to pay out pensions without reference to this formality. Some historians contend that nuns massively rejected the two oaths, whereas others argue that many nuns found no reason to object to the liberty-equality oath. This topic deserves treatment in a systematic study.

superstitieuses sont à la fois très dispendieuses, très indécentes et très dangereuses.<sup>233</sup>

From victims imprisoned against their will who deserved protection, Mathion de Léopolde's statement completes the transition of nuns into fanatics latched on to a superstitious religion which now presented a danger to the Nation.

Women religious' rebellion against the replacement of their accustomed spiritual advisers in the wake of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy made it politically impossible not to move forward with the complete suppression of monasticism. Moreover, revolutionary thought increasingly emphasized marriage as an integral part of citizenship, linking the family to patriotism and the regeneration of the Nation. Celibate women sapped resources and presented a dangerous specter of women without family, without men. Sterile, they themselves contrasted sharply with the fecund femininity chosen to represent the Republic. Viewing female convents as "Bastilles, with refractory priests for jailors," the National Assembly treated the institutions of women religious much like that symbol of despotic authority that they had torn down brick by brick in 1789. On August 18, 1792, eight days after the fall of the monarchy, the Legislative assembly voted definitive legislation to close all monasteries except those devoted to nursing, effective October 1.<sup>234</sup>

Fear and suspicion, augmented by the advance of foreign armies, motivated harsher measures against refractory priests, until such hostilities came to a head with the September Massacres of 1792. Motivated by rumors that traitors within the prisons would

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<sup>233</sup> AP. XXXVII., 155.

<sup>234</sup> Elizabeth Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister: Daily Life in the Teaching Monasteries of the Old Regime*, McGill-Queen's Studies in the History of Religion 17 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 123.

turn against France as the enemy approached from Verdun, vigilantes opened up the prisons and tried the prisoners, executing their “sentences” immediately. Over the course of several days, some 1,200 prisoners were put to death, among them at least 200 priests who had been awaiting deportation.<sup>235</sup> The effect of the massacres on the morale of *religieuses* cannot be underestimated. Whatever their fears about leaving the convent may have been before the massacre, it undoubtedly brought home the high stakes of the revolutionary religious questions. Following the massacres, Murphy characterized the closures in Poitou as “massive et rapide.” Within the space of a few short weeks three quarters of the region’s religious communities were closed. By October 2, 1792, as the law required, the only remaining religious communities were the fourteen hospital orders whose functionaries would have to serve until suitable replacements were found.<sup>236</sup> Across France, women religious turned out from their houses retreated to their families, lived in small groups, or did their best to replicate the communal life outside the convent. A new solution, however—one that just a couple of years earlier would have seemed unthinkable—was becoming a reality; nuns were leaving their convents and marrying.

This chapter has explored the factors that contributed to the change in general opinion of nuns from victims to fanatics over the course of a few short years. The legislative uncertainty faced by women religious slowly undermined their institutions, resulting in a slow hemorrhage of members before most were forced from their houses in 1792. Overall—despite small but significant instances of discord and abuse—the nuns of

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<sup>235</sup> Pierre Caron, *Les massacres de septembre*. (Paris: En vente à la Maison du livre français, 1935), 94–5.

<sup>236</sup> Murphy, “Femmes de Dieu et Révolution Française dans le Poitou: Etude de la réception de l’événement révolutionnaire par les religieuses poitevines,” 188. In fact suitable replacements were never found and many hospital nuns continued to serve throughout the Revolution in a lay capacity.

France valiantly resisted attempts to cast them as victims and refused interventions in their traditions and lifestyles. Their general abhorrence of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, which they viewed as schismatic, as well as their support for the refractory clergy gradually turned both public opinion and the support of the Assembly against them. Moreover, symbolically tied to superstition and fanaticism their existence grew hard for Revolutionaries to tolerate as they sought to erase the vestiges of the Old Regime and fight counterrevolutionary elements.

As nuns resisted and showed genuine attachment to their vocations, additional rationales were necessary to justify their suppression. Despite the utility of the teaching and hospital orders, it became politically impossible to condone their existence in the charged atmosphere of 1792. The loss of official sanction for their way of life, eviction from the only homes they now knew, and the command to disperse left women religious with three choices: fight, flight, or secularization. It is this last choice, in the form of marriage, which the next chapter will explore.

## CHAPTER 3

### Married Nuns: A New Appraisal

In 1791, an orphaned daughter of Parisian merchants abandoned her convent, the *dames de la Conception* on rue Saint-Honoré. The reasons for Marie-Marguerite-Françoise Goupil's decision are unknown. Perhaps she had already developed a strong affiliation with the Revolution and considered that the cloister infringed upon her liberty. She began to attend meetings at the *Société fraternelle des deux sexes*, where she met her future husband.<sup>237</sup> At the age of 34, she signed the parish register of Saint-Gervais on February 7, 1792 along with her husband, Jacques-Réné Hébert, the radical journalist, most famous for his vulgar rendering of Revolutionary discourse in the journal, *Père Duchesne*.<sup>238</sup>

Goupil and Hébert's marriage was not a unique event although it does not conform to standard historical narratives that often ascribe the revolutionary marriages of monks, priests, and nuns to the forces of dechristianization and the persecution suffered by the clergy during the Terror. Goupil and Hébert married for love, before the closure of convents, and before the violence of the Terror could even be imagined. But to what extent was this nun's marriage an exception to the larger pattern of marriages contracted by former women religious? How common was it for the former women religious who married to adopt the values of the Revolution and to fall in love?

Historians have often studied the marriages of the clergy in the context of the dechristianization campaigns that swept across France in the Year II of the Revolutionary

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<sup>237</sup> Louis Jacob, *Hébert, le Père Duchesne, chef des sans-culottes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 89.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*



calendar (September 22, 1793-September 21, 1794). Focusing on the marriages of priests, especially on those who abdicated their ecclesiastical functions, studies have found that the majority of clerical marriages were tied to persecution. For the male clergy, both secular and regular, Xavier Maréchaux estimates that 5,900 married during the Revolutionary decade. Of these the “grand majorité” or 70% married during the Terror, suggesting that their marriages were not “librement consentie.”<sup>239</sup> Vovelle agrees that although priests began to marry before the dechristianization campaign, the majority of marriages, like ninety per cent of the abdications of the priesthood, happened in a wave of dechristianization inspired by representatives on mission.<sup>240</sup> While Maréchaux noted that no law officially encouraged the marriage of priests, in some departments married priests could evade deportation and overcome suspicion of counterrevolutionary activity.<sup>241</sup> Some forms of encouragement to marry were more complex than the threat of prison or deportation. For example, the representative on mission in Nièvre, Joseph Fouché, announced September 25, 1794 that priests had one month to marry, adopt a child, or take in a needy person in order to continue to receive their pensions.<sup>242</sup>

The dechristianization movement not only encouraged the clergy to marry because it was a sign of their abdication of their religious positions but also because it was believed to cultivate morality and promote civic virtue. Revolutionary thought closely linked marriage with citizenship and the family with patriotism and the regeneration of

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<sup>239</sup> Xavier Maréchaux, “Les prêtres mariés sous la Révolution Française” (Doctoral, Université de Paris I, 1995), 282.

<sup>240</sup> Michel Vovelle, *The Revolution against the Church: From Reason to the Supreme Being* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991), 10–11.

<sup>241</sup> Maréchaux, “Les prêtres mariés sous la Révolution Française,” 88.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

the Nation.<sup>243</sup> The revolution urged priests to marry because, first of all, “it assumed that intimacy, the yeast of sensibility, would allow them to transcend their individual interests in favor of the general will; second, because it regarded marriage and fatherhood as matters of patriotic service and civic obligation.”<sup>244</sup> The connection was underlined by Fouché’s tendency to attack celibacy while celebrating festivals dedicated to “married love.”<sup>245</sup>

The marriages of former monks, nuns, and priests represented a definitive break with the values and religious culture of the Old Regime. Although nuns’ marriages may not have been considered to be the political act that priests’ were, they also signaled a new allegiance to a culture that valued marriage over celibacy. Having lost the *état* of *religieuse*, wife and mother were the only social identities that remained for women. According to Revolutionaries, nuns’ marriages reintegrated them into the secular world, unshackled them from the influence of counterrevolutionary forces, and also freed them to perform their destiny as women. Even though Revolutionary laws prohibited women from playing a public political role, the ideals of republican motherhood and companionate marriage enshrined the supremacy of the virtuous woman in the domestic sphere, a sphere in which she could act freely and with moral authority. These ideas would go on to define womanhood and gender expectations in the nineteenth and

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<sup>243</sup> Claire Cage, “‘Celibacy Is a Social Crime’: The Politics of Clerical Marriage, 1793-1797,” *French Historical Studies* 36, no. 4 (Fall 2013): 604–5.

<sup>244</sup> Verjus, Anne, “Gender, Sexuality, and Political Culture,” in *A Companion to the French Revolution*, ed. McPhee, Peter (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012), 206.

<sup>245</sup> John McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church* (London: S.P.C.K. for the Church Historical Society, 1969), 87.

twentieth centuries, thus affirming the long-term impact of a cultural revolution that overthrew the ideal of celibacy as a higher calling.<sup>246</sup>

Citing lack of sources and a negligible historical impact, studies of the married clergy have rarely raised the subject of women religious beyond remarking that they were certainly fewer in number and that nuns were much more likely to have married a priest or monk than the male clergy was to have married a nun. Women religious, unconcerned by deportation laws, faced less pressure to marry, although marriage could sometimes save them from a stint in prison. As women and without a public religious role, their marriages have been assumed to have less political, and therefore less historical value. Their motivations in marrying have rarely been questioned, as it has been assumed that their marriages followed a similar pattern to that of the male clergy. Overall, these studies have minimized the numbers of married nuns and failed to connect their marriages with the larger cultural trends of the Revolution.

Ruth Graham was the first to devote a short article to the marriages of nuns. Although her article is largely quantitative, Graham raises issues that seem to be unique to married nuns. For example, she finds that some married nuns mentioned that they had professed too young or with no vocation for religious life.<sup>247</sup> She also finds that women were most likely to cite their lack of resources as their main motivation in marrying. For this reason, she postulates, their marriages continued throughout the Revolutionary decade instead of being overwhelmingly concentrated in 1793 and 1794, as were the men's marriages. Like the majority of studies of the male married clergy, Graham's

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<sup>246</sup> Jennifer J Popiel, "Making Mothers: The Advice Genre and the Domestic Ideal, 1760-1830," *Journal of Family History* 29, no. 4 (October 2004): 339–50.

<sup>247</sup> Ruth Graham, "Married Nuns Before Cardinal Caprara: A Sociological Analysis of Their Petitions," in *Pratiques Religieuses, Mentalités et Spiritualités Dans l'Europe Révolutionnaire, 1770-1820 : Actes Du Colloque, Chantilly, 27-29 Novembre 1986* (Turnhout : Brepols, 1988), 324.

article is based off of the archives of Cardinal Caprara, legate of the pope in France during the Empire.

Charged with implementing the Concordat and regularizing the situation of those clergymen who had violated ecclesiastical discipline during the Revolution, Capara's mission was designed to return as many priests as possible to their religious functions in order to shore up the decimated French clergy and restore regular religious observance across France. During his legation between 1801 and 1808 Cardinal Caprara received roughly 6,000 petitions from individuals or groups requesting various dispenses in light of the changed circumstance of the Revolution.<sup>248</sup> By the end of his mission, Caprara had received 2, 727 petitions from married priests requesting the regularization of their situation. The vast majority of these petitioners requested the legitimization of their marriages in order stay with their spouses even though the Church officially preferred the dissolution of what it considered to be illicit marriages.<sup>249</sup> In contrast, he only received 381 requests for the rehabilitation of nuns' marriages.

An exhaustive accounting of all nuns who married during the Revolutionary era would undoubtedly be impossible.<sup>250</sup> In estimating the total number of married nuns, including those who died or did not write Caprara, Claude Langlois has considered 500, or one per cent of all Old Regime nuns, to be the maximum.<sup>251</sup> According to this estimation, 76% of all married nuns asked for reconciliation with the Church. Comparing

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<sup>248</sup> These petitions are currently housed at the Archives Nationales de France under the call numbers AF/IV/1895 to AF/IV/1916 and AF/IV/1919 to AF/IV/1920. The cardinal's papers relating to the implementation of the Concordat and affairs of state, which include the discussion of the rehabilitation of Talleyrand's marriage, are housed in the F19 series.

<sup>249</sup> Jeannine Charon-Bordas, *Le Legation en France du Cardinal Caprara 1801 - 1808 : repertoire des demandes de reconciliation avec L'Eglise* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1979), 54.

<sup>250</sup> That is, apart from comparing the census of convents of 1790 with the état civil of every municipality in France for the ten years of the Revolution, a herculean task that has been completed for three departments.

<sup>251</sup> Claude Langlois, *Le Catholicisme Au Féminin: Les Congrégations Françaises à Supérieure Générale Au XIXe Siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 1984), 82.

this with the male clergy, Marechaux finds that 46% requested the rehabilitation of their marriages. Looking at a regional study, we find that in Meuse, only 11 out of 28 married nuns, or 49%, would ask for the rehabilitation of their marriages.<sup>252</sup> From a smaller sample of 300 nuns in Poitou, only 2 out of 25 married nuns (or 8%) asked for reconciliation.<sup>253</sup> Considering these lower percentages of those asking for reconciliation it seems likely that Langlois' under-estimated the number of married nuns who failed to contact Caprara.

Of course, compared to the total number of nuns in France in 1790--55,000,<sup>254</sup>-- the number of married nuns is indeed small, even if we revise our estimate up to 800-1,000. However, in his regional study of Poitou, Murphy finds that 22% of surviving nuns in 1800 between the ages of 25 and 50 had contracted a marriage during the Revolution. This surprising proportion, he argues, "possède un sens, une force. Elle empêche de reléguer le mariage des religieuses au rang d'anecdote."<sup>255</sup> Despite the relatively small number of married nuns, the fact that the youngest women religious married at such a startling rate proves that marriage was an important and popular option for former women religious after the closure of convents. Moreover, it is just this segment of the population, that was most able to recreate their lives after the destruction of the Old Regime and, most likely to be influenced by the larger cultural changes of the Revolution, especially new attitudes towards religion and marriage.

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<sup>252</sup> André Gaillemin, *Dictionnaire biographique des prêtres, religieux et religieuses nés en Meuse et des prêtres, religieux et religieuses en Meuse pendant la Révolution et au Concordat: 1789-1803*, ed. Société des lettres, sciences et arts, 4 vols. (Bar-le-Duc: Société des lettres, sciences et arts, 1983).

<sup>253</sup> This information comes from Murphy's unpublished *cahier de recherche* from Poitiers. Special thanks to Professor Murphy for allowing me access to this information.

<sup>254</sup> Langlois, *Le Catholicisme Au Féminin*, 60.

<sup>255</sup> Gwénaél Murphy, "Les religieuses mariées pendant la Révolution Française," in *Le genre face aux mutations: Masculin et féminin, du Moyen Âge à nos jours* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2003), 248.

Indeed after the closure of convents in 1792, nuns had limited choices about where to go and what to do. Some could return to their families, but this was not always an option for nuns whose families lived too far away, who had emigrated, or whose abuse had caused them to enter the convent in the first place. Some resisted dispersal and continued to live clandestinely in small groups with the tacit approval of local authorities who recognized the difficulties associated with attempting to resettle these women. Others chose to secularize by finding employment—as teachers for example—or by marrying. Unfortunately, information on the women who successfully achieved a professional insertion after the closure of convents is limited and beyond the scope of this chapter.<sup>256</sup> Although marriage was likely not as commonplace as quietly adapting to the world outside the convent, a new look at the Caprara archives and other sources on married nuns encourages viewing the marriages of nuns as an important survival strategy during the Revolution, one with significant cultural connotations in the context of the Revolutionary dechristianization campaign and the attendant pro-nuptial culture of the Revolution.

The present sample, the most complete study of married nuns to date, includes 449<sup>257</sup> women religious who married, of whom three hundred eighty-one<sup>258</sup> wrote to

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<sup>256</sup> Murphy's regional study, Gwénaél Murphy, "Femmes de Dieu et Révolution Française dans le Poitou: Etude de la réception de l'événement révolutionnaire par les religieuses poitevines" (Doctoral, Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales de Paris, 2010). provides the best source available regarding the professional lives of former nuns.

<sup>257</sup> See the Appendix for a complete database with names, references for these married nuns, and date of marriage. In fact, the number of known married nuns is 505. Detailed information concerning 56 of the married nuns from Murphy's unpublished research is unavailable, thus, these nuns were not included in the present study.

<sup>258</sup> Claude Langlois cites 326 (See: Langlois, *Le Catholicisme Au Féminin*, 82.) and Ruth Graham counts 356 (counting those who wished to marry as well 29 "foreign" nuns.) An exhaustive study of Cardinal Caprara's archives turned up a few others who had been overlooked or misclassified in Jeanne Charon-

Cardinal Caprara between 1802 and 1808 on the subject of their marriages or the desire to be relieved of their vows in order to contract marriage. An additional sixty-eight married nuns were found in various other sources, including pension records and regional biographies of the clergy during the Revolution. These women religious came from all over France and its occupied territories. Priests and monks who wrote to Cardinal Caprara have not been considered unless, of course, they married a nun. This decision keeps the focus of the sample on the specific concerns of women religious in the Revolution, while recognizing the work of other scholars on married priests and monks as useful points of comparison.<sup>259</sup>

Married monks, nuns, and priests writing to Caprara were instructed to include information on where and when she or he professed or took orders, if they made the choice freely and without restraint, when they had married, and to whom. Caprara also asked that petitioners explain their motivations for marrying and express repentance and regret for their error. Few letters actually contained all of the required information, and Caprara was often obliged to send petitions back for lack of information. Shorter, more formulaic letters sometimes hardly gave enough information to identify the petitioner and her former convent. These letters also did not always include the exact date of the marriage, sometimes only how many years ago it happened or that the couple married in the “time of the Terror.” Some letters were so short that they did not include the

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Bordas's inventory. Like Graham, I include women who wrote asking for permission to marry, unlike her, however, I saw no reason to exclude petitions coming from nuns outside the borders of modern France, as they too were influenced by the events of the Revolution.

<sup>259</sup> Claude Langlois and TGA Le Goff, “Les vaincus de la Révolution: Jalons pour une sociologie des prêtres mariés,” in *Voies nouvelles pour l'histoire de la révolution française*, 1978, 281–312; Cage, Claire, “Unnatural Frenchmen: Priestly Celibacy in Enlightenment and Revolutionary France” (Doctoral, Johns Hopkins University, 2011); Albert Mathiez, “Les prêtres révolutionnaires devant le Cardinal Caprara,” *Annales Historiques de la Révolution française* 3 (1926): 1–15; Maréchaux, “Les prêtres mariés sous la Révolution Française.”

necessary expressions of repentance and were resubmitted to the bishop to ensure of the petitioners' sentiments of remorse and sincere religious conversion.

In other cases, the letters included much more information in the hope of influencing the papal legate to favor the woman's case.<sup>260</sup> In fact some follow the format of a veritable confession in written form.<sup>261</sup> These letters often provide more information on the petitioner's entrance into religious life, recount her experiences outside the convent, and delve more intimately into her motivations for marrying. While there is little reason to doubt the veracity of the tales the women told in their petitions, it is important to remember that the documents were produced nearly a decade after the events and indeed that the petitioners wrote their stories for the express purpose of achieving reconciliation with the Church. In point of fact some historians have questioned if—at least for the male clergy—the petitioners did not have the tendency to exaggerate the persecution they experienced and the risks they ran by not marrying.

The majority of petitions do contain the basic information of the religious order, the husband's name, and the date and location of the marriage. For Cardinal Caprara the date of the marriage was of the utmost importance. Marriages contracted after August 15, 1801—one month after the signing of the Concordat, which, in the eyes of the Church officially ended all religious upheaval associated with the Revolution—could not be rehabilitated, unless the nun involved could find a persuasive reason for her vows to be invalidated.<sup>262</sup> For this reason, even if the date of the marriage is not noted in the letter preserved in the archives, the fact that Caprara accepted or rejected the petition provide proof that the marriage either fell before or after the cut off date. Thus, not all dates of

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<sup>260</sup> Charon-Bordas, *Le legation en France du Cardinal Caprara 1801 - 1808*.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*



marriage are exact—two categories especially stand out: “during the Terror” and “after the Concordat.” Additionally, some correspondents used the Republican calendar rather than the Gregorian calendar.<sup>263</sup> All in all, the date of marriage is known for 279 nuns in the sample. While the number of marriages during the Terror is elevated, overall more than half of all marriages (131) took place after 1794. In comparison, 75% of the male clergy who wrote Cardinal Caprara married during the time of active dechristianization.<sup>264</sup>

This new information suggests that persecution did play a role in promoting clerical marriages, yet this one factor cannot explain the prolonged period of marriages that continued into the Napoleonic era.<sup>265</sup> The data thus seems to confirm the generalizations of Ruth Graham who showed that in the Caprara correspondence, women who explained their marriages as the product of persecution or coercion tended to have married during the Terror, whereas those who emphasized their lack of resources outside the convent were likely to have married at any time during the revolutionary decade.<sup>266</sup>

Additionally, a small spike in marriages occurred in 1796. It was too soon, however, to be linked to the coup of Fructidor in 1797, which revived certain anti-clerical policies and religious persecution for a short period of time. Finally, a slight spike in the number of marriages in 1801—the highest number since 1796—may imply that the Empire had in some way encouraged clerical marriage. Conversely, none of Napoleon’s policies can be said to have supported such marriages. This spike, rather, may have been

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<sup>263</sup> For those who provided only the year of their marriage, calculations between the Republican Calendar and the Gregorian calendar render dates given as “an IV,” for example, inexactly as either 1795 or 1796. As the reverse problem exists if a petitioner gave the date as 1794, (this being either year II or III in Republican terms) preference has been given to translating all dates into the Gregorian format with a small likelihood of error that does not affect the overall patters of marriage date.

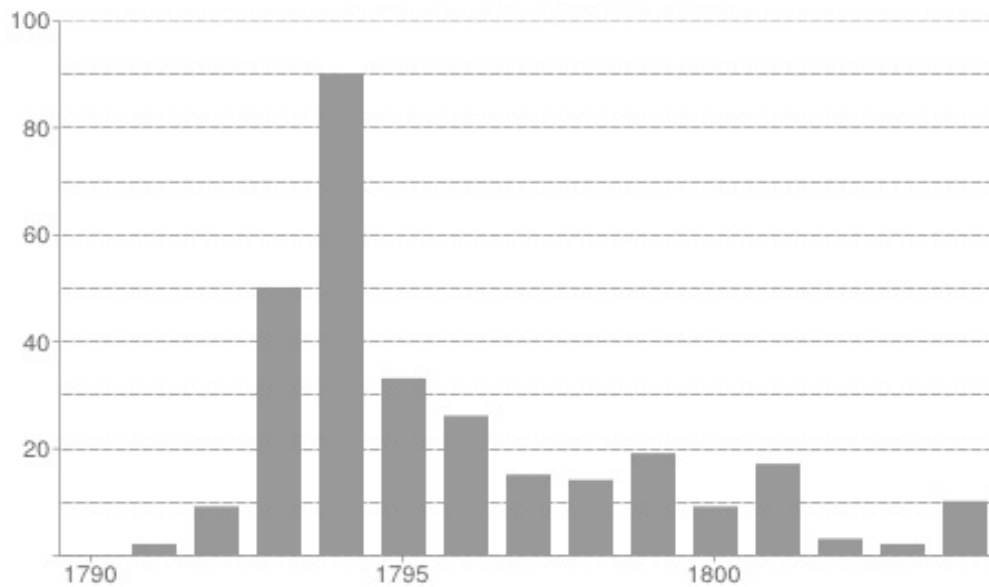
<sup>264</sup> Maréchaux, “Les prêtres mariés sous la Révolution Française,” 205; Langlois, *Le Catholicisme Au Féminin*, 82.

<sup>265</sup> 41 marriages took place after 1799.

<sup>266</sup> Graham, “Married Nuns Before Cardinal Caprara: A Sociological Analysis of Their Petitions,” 327.

caused by women seeking to avoid returning to convents that were slowly and quietly reopening across France, or it may have been the product of women seeking to regularize pre-existing relationships as stability returned to France. Although it cannot currently be explained, it is interesting that when the return of convents seems most likely for the first time in nine years that some women would chose to take steps to make their secularization definitive.

**Table 1: Number of Marriages by Year**



Like the date of marriage, was the geographic distribution of nuns' marriages also less tied to clerical persecution and dechristianization? We know from Michel Vovelle's study, that dechristianization campaigns were most active in the Parisian basin, the Center, the North, and along the Rhône River, largely passing over the Massif Central. To

the southwest, less vigorous campaigns took place in a diagonal across the Loire Valley to Aquitaine. The area around Toulouse also experienced some significant manifestations of dechristianizing sentiments. Areas that dechristianization largely passed over included Brittany, the Pyrenees, the Massif Central and the Alps.<sup>267</sup>

In comparison, Le Goff and Langlois identified three zones that were most touched by the marriage of the male clergy: Paris, the frontier regions of the Nord/Pas-de-Calais, the East, and the Vendée.<sup>268</sup> They also localized a concentration of clerical marriages in the bishopric of Toulouse. The epicenter of both dechristianization and clerical marriage was, however, Berry and the Nivernais, making up the Central departments from Vienne to Nièvre. In the Berry-Nieveranis we find an area that was chronically short of priests, who were, furthermore, on average, older than the national average,<sup>269</sup> suggesting that the long-term dechristianization discussed by Vovelle was already having an affect on the religious sentiments of this area.

Unfortunately, a detailed geographic study of nuns' marriages is limited by a lack of data on the regional distribution of nuns under the Old Regime. Certainly some areas were more densely populated with convents, just as some regions counted a higher population of parish clergy including priests and their vicars.<sup>270</sup> No one has yet completed a geographic study of the female ecclesiastic society of the Old Regime, which would facilitate a direct comparison of areas of the highest female clerical density to the number

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<sup>267</sup> Vovelle, *The Revolution against the Church*, 43.

<sup>268</sup> Langlois and Le Goff, "Les vaincus de la Révolution: Jalons pour une sociologie des prêtres mariés," 287.

<sup>269</sup> Tackett, Timothy and Langlois, Claude, "Ecclesiastical Structures and Clerical Geography on the Eve of the French Revolution," *French Historical Studies* 11, no. 3 (1980): 364.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 356.

of married nuns in the region. Such a study would enable us to confirm that in different centers of nuns' marriages different forces of dechristianization were at work.

Similarly to the maps of dechristianization and of the marriages of male clergy, concentrations of nuns' marriages are indeed found in the Center of France, although the more complete information provided by Murphy's work in the Poitou skews the data towards the west. The bishopric of Bourges experienced one of the highest concentrations of married nuns, which can also be definitively linked to active dechristianization campaigns. Although we cannot say for certain if the population of nuns in the Center was above or below the national average, or if, these communities were thriving at the end of the Old Regime, we know that this area was a hotbed of both long-term and short-term dechristianization culture.<sup>271</sup>

The question of dechristianization and nuns' marriages becomes more complicated in the area around Paris. Known both for a large population of women religious and fervent anticlericalism, one might expect Paris to be the epicenter of female clerical marriage. The Parisian region, however, counted fewer married nuns in this sample than the Center. The largest concentration of married nuns is found in the Nord/Pas-de-Calais, a highly clericalized region, that is known to have supported many vibrant female religious communities and to have endured an intense dechristianization campaign. Further study will be needed in order to compare the regional effects of dechristianization and female clerical society.

Not surprisingly we find only one marriage in Brittany, the center of strong Catholic sentiment and Counterrevolutionary rebellion. Across the Midi, fewer marriages took place, although Gironde, Dordogne, and Drôme counted a middling number, thanks

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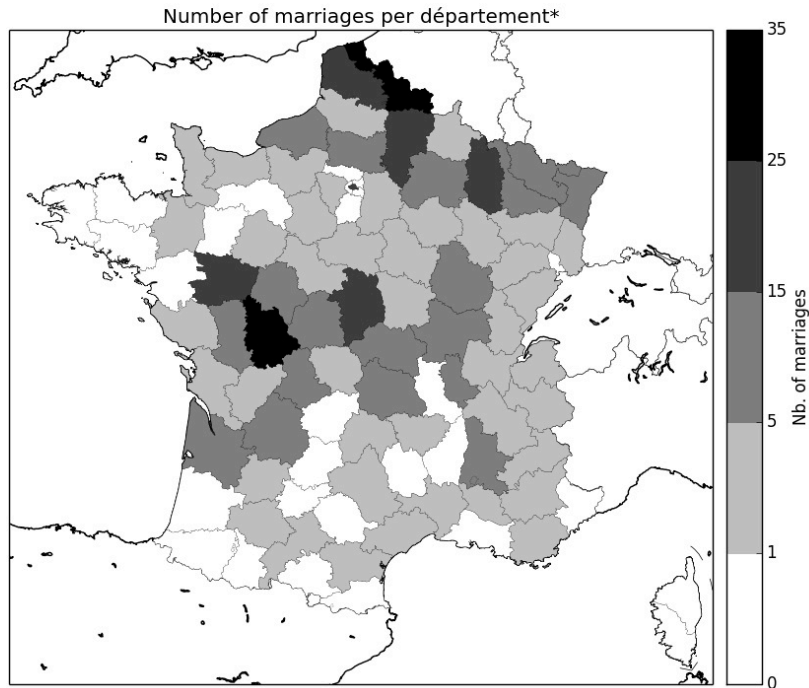
<sup>271</sup> Michel Vovelle, *Religion et révolution : la déchristianisation de l'an II* (Paris: Hachette, 1976).

in part to their higher populations of women religious there. Few marriages took place in the Basque country, across the Pyrenees and into Provence and the Alps. These areas of France had never been highly clerical, as evidenced by geographic studies of priests that show these areas continually had to import priests from other areas of higher clerical recruitment. Timothy Tackett even suggests that the influence of these “foreign” priests may have also negatively impacted relationships between the clergy and the laity, if not contributing to hostile anticlericalism, at least to a strong indifference to the Church hierarchy.<sup>272</sup> Monasticism was also not as widespread along the Mediterranean as in other parts of France. The convents of the South had indeed been facing a steady decline in vocations from the beginning of the eighteenth century that left the Revolution to close down the dying institutions along the Rhône, largely populated by geriatric nuns.<sup>273</sup> Overall, excluding the concentration of married priests in the West and around Toulouse, the geography of nuns’ marriages follows a similar pattern to that of the male clergy, and to some extent that of active dechristianization. When a regional study of the population density of nuns in the Old Regime is completed, a more accurate comparison can be made between areas of concentration of convents and that of clerical marriages.

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<sup>272</sup> Timothy Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France: The Ecclesiastical Oath of 1791* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 238.

<sup>273</sup> Elizabeth Rapley and Robert Rapley, “An Image of Religious Women in the Ancien Regime: The Etats Des Religieuses of 1790-1791,” *French History* 11, no. No.4 (1997): 387–410.



**Figure 3: Marriages by Department**

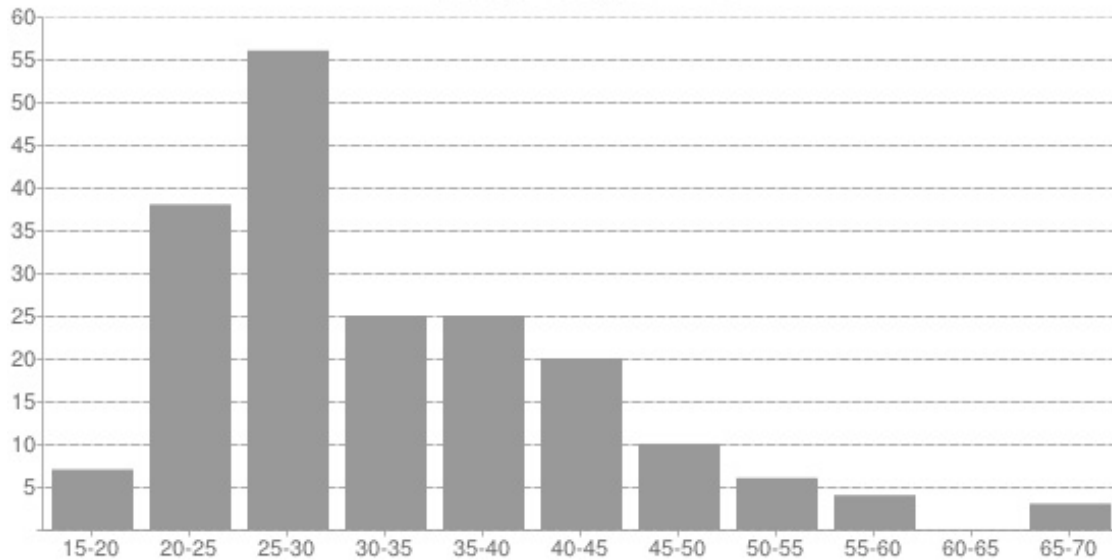
In his regional study, as we have already discussed, Gwenaél Murphy found that the youngest nuns in Poitou were the most likely to marry. In our sample, we can see that nuns across all age groups married, with nuns marrying even at 56 and 66. However, women religious were most likely to have married between the ages of 24-29 across the decade. According to Elizabeth Rapley’s calculations gleaned from the census of convents in 1790, the median age of all nuns in France was 48.<sup>275</sup> Comparing this with

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<sup>275</sup> Rapley and Rapley, “An Image of Religious Women in the Ancien Regime: The Etats Des Religieuses of 1790-1791,” 406.

our chart of married nuns' ages in 1792 we can see that nuns who went on to marry were overwhelmingly younger than the average age of all nuns across France.

**Table 2: Ages of Married Nuns in 1792**



As we saw in Chapter 1, female religious orders under the Old Regime can be roughly classified into two different types: contemplative and active. Some of the older contemplative orders had experienced a sharp drop in popularity in the late eighteenth century while recruitment increased in less aristocratic orders that were active in society and devoted to charity, nursing, and teaching. Although Rapley did find that the older, contemplative orders housed the most ancient members the difference in median age distribution between the two groups was not enough to be significant.<sup>276</sup>

The most frequently represented orders in our sample were the Benedictines (53), followed by the Ursulines (44). These two orders, one ancient and contemplative, the

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 403–4.

other a product of the Catholic Reformation and actively devoted to education, counted the most members in France, according the census of 1790. Murphy also noticed the marked tendency to marry among contemplative and teaching sisters, whereas, sisters of charity were underrepresented.<sup>277</sup>

On the contrary, various *congrégationistes*, with their simple vows were also heavily represented (41). Those women who did not make binding perpetual vows, may in fact be underrepresented in the Cardinal Caprara archives. Marie Lebesson, a *fille de charité*, stated in her petition that she had never renewed her simple vows, which lasted only for a three-year period. After this time she felt herself perfectly free to marry.<sup>278</sup> Caprara, strictly interpreting his mandate from the Vatican, chose not to acknowledge the institutional existence of "simple vows," and recommended that a simple dispense from a bishop would be sufficient to regulate her situation.

Overall, the religious order to which she belonged did not seem influence a former nun's decision to marry. The orders are largely represented in proportion to their populations, although the Carmelites, known for their rigid devotion to their vocation, may be slightly underrepresented. As we saw in Chapter 1, the particular practices and leadership of individual convents most determined the nuns' relationship to their vocation. The likelihood of defecting before October 1792 and later marrying was often increased by certain factors that proved detrimental to the morale of a particular religious house. In a rather unique example, Murphy found that six women Carmélites of Poitiers, a quarter of the convent, went on to marry. Murphy attributes this considerable desertion of religious vows to the harshness of the rule in this house and to the superior's deliberate

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<sup>277</sup> Murphy, "Les religieuses mariées pendant la Révolution Française," 246.

<sup>278</sup> AN, AF/IV/1911, d.2.,17.



efforts to deprive her followers of information prior to the dissolution of convents. By doing so, she left her nuns even more unprepared to face changed circumstances of the Revolution.<sup>279</sup> Few other convents could count so many married nuns among the former sisters, however, clusters of 2 or 3 married nuns per convent is very common, suggesting that the example of one marriage could encouraged others.

In their study of married clergy, Claude Langlois and TGA Le Goff argued that the elevated number of former nuns who married members of the clergy reflected their isolation and limited social opportunities, a position that Ruth Graham echoed. Having lived in closed societies, removed from contact with men, women leaving convents were vulnerable and unlikely to know any other suitable marriage partners. Nuns, they argued, inside and outside of the cloister, depended on their masculine superiors.<sup>280</sup> Graham concurred “that the comparatively small percentage of petitioning nuns who had married—and that almost one fourth of them had married priest—indicated the social isolation of these nuns.”<sup>281</sup>

According to the current sample, two hundred twenty-two former nuns married laymen (50.8%), whereas, one hundred twelve married former clergy members (25.6 %), a proportion similar to that found to Graham and Langlois's studies.<sup>282</sup> Information concerning one hundred three married nuns' husbands (24%) is, however, unknown. The nature of the Caprara documents, furthermore, is more likely to reveal if the specific marriage was contracted with a priest or a monk. Therefore it is likely that few or none of

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<sup>279</sup> Murphy, “Femmes de Dieu et Révolution Française dans le Poitou: Etude de la réception de l'événement révolutionnaire par les religieuses poitevines,” 216.

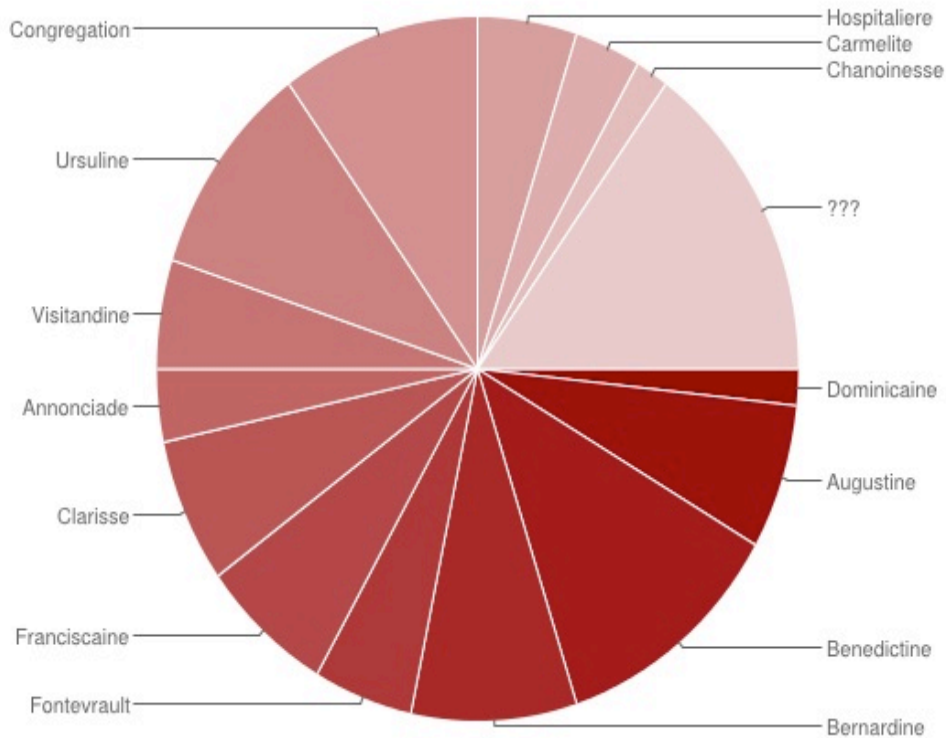
<sup>280</sup> Langlois and Le Goff, “Les vaincus de la Révolution: Jalons pour une sociologie des prêtres mariés,” 302.

<sup>281</sup> Graham, “Married Nuns Before Cardinal Caprara: A Sociological Analysis of Their Petitions,” 323.

<sup>282</sup> Langlois finds that 21.9% of nuns married other clergy members whereas 9.1% of monks married a nun and only 7.6% of the secular clergy did so. See: Langlois, *Le Catholicisme Au Féminin*, 83.

the unknown husbands was a member of the clergy. Reevaluating the Caprara archives, it seems that women married to clergymen were among the most likely to seek rehabilitation of their marriages after the Concordat and to make a mark on the historical record, unintentionally favoring the reporting of marriages contracted between nuns and clergymen.

**Table 3: Married Nuns by Religious Order**



Unfortunately, as Ruth Graham observed “not many nuns obliged the social historian by mentioning their familial backgrounds” in the petitions to Cardinal

Caprara.<sup>283</sup> The lack of information on the social class of former nuns and their marriage partners makes it difficult to evaluate Langlois' assertion that nuns often married below their original social class.<sup>284</sup> Overall, the Caprara archives are unsuited to this kind of analysis. Very few women mention in passing the social class of their families and isolated information about a husband's occupation makes it difficult to determine if nuns who married likely faced a “déclassement sociale.”<sup>285</sup>

However, Murphy's detailed study of married nuns in Poitou is much more suited to drawing conclusions about the social class of former nuns and their husbands. He concluded that, the social origins of the nuns' husbands corresponded to the dominant urban professions, with the professions of *artisans*, *commençants cultivateurs*, *laboureurs*, and *propriétaires* most commonly being mentioned.<sup>286</sup> Most of the husbands in our sample for which professions are known were artisans (24) or members of the professional classes (23) including notaries, court officials, teachers, and government agents. The next most common category was the bourgeoisie—in general merchants and those involved in trade (13). Other women married members of the military (16) and a small number (6) married gentry. Eleven women stated that they had married *laboureurs*, a category that can be considered to have been made up of rich peasants. Another eleven married farmers, the exact term most commonly used was “*cultivateur*.” For the majority of the sample however, the occupation of the husband is unknown (226) and no speculation can be made as to the social status of the husband.

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<sup>283</sup> Graham, “Married Nuns Before Cardinal Caprara: A Sociological Analysis of Their Petitions,” 327.

<sup>284</sup> Langlois, *Le Catholicisme Au Féminin*, 82.

<sup>285</sup> Less than 10 nuns mention their family's social status and these mentions include anything from “petit noblesse pauvre,” to “artisan's daughter,” to referencing an upbringing characterized by “extreme poverty.”

<sup>286</sup> Murphy, “Les religieuses mariées pendant la Révolution Française,” 247.

Of the sixty married nuns from Murphy's sample whose social origins are known, 29 contracted marriages with a man below their own social status. 9 married into families with similar status to their own and 22 contracted marriages with a man more fortunate than their own fathers, most often a widower from a previous marriage.<sup>287</sup> Murphy found that in general the husbands were often a bit older than their wives. Overall, it seems that the marriage fortunes of former nuns were mixed, almost as many married above their social status as married below. If many of them experienced a "déclassement sociale" in marrying, this probably reflected the fate of many French men and women in the tumultuous years of the Revolution in which the fortunes of many families rose and fell.

On the other hand, the social upheaval of the Revolution resulted in at least one married nun's startling social advancement. Marie-Anne Roy, the daughter of a day laborer, who entered the Carmélites of Poitiers as a *soeur converse* in 1789, found employment as a servant in the home of Charles Gouvreau (whose profession is listed as *juge*) after closure of her convent. She married her employer in 1801 after the death of his wife. After his death, in 1803 she married a friend of her former husband, the magistrate René Sozé.<sup>288</sup>

While Cardinal Caprara explicitly asked for the motivations behind the marriage in rehabilitation requests, in fact, not all married nuns made the reasons behind their decision clear. Motivations were cited in 175 petitions.<sup>289</sup> Forty-two petitions explained their marriages by references to violent dechristianization campaigns, making use of such

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>288</sup> Murphy, "Femmes de Dieu et Révolution Française dans le Poitou: Etude de la réception de l'événement révolutionnaire par les religieuses poitevines," 217.

<sup>289</sup> Here only information from Cardinal Caprara's archives will be cited, as very few other historical documents lend insight into the circumstances behind nuns' marriages.

key words as “Terror,” “persecution,” “forced,” and “fear.” Even more commonly, however, women emphasized that economic hardship had led them to marry during the Revolution (46 cases). Ruth Graham found that “virtually all the nuns who married because they lacked resources married laic husbands, but by a two to one majority the nuns who married to avert persecution married priests.”<sup>290</sup> Additionally, nuns who married because of lack of resources tended to be younger than those who married for reasons relating to Terror and persecution.<sup>291</sup>

Certainly violent dechristianization during the Terror, which cast a veil of suspicion over all but the most radical members of the clergy, contributed to many clerical marriages. Threats of deportation and long miserable stints in overcrowded, insalubrious prisons encouraged some members of the clergy to contract marriages in violation of their vows. Only one nun specifically reported that she had been 'forced' to marry.

Overall, only 8 *ex-religieuses* reported that they had contracted “*des mariages blancs*,” or sham marriages. These often occurred when the partners were older, and all but one of the marriages was contracted with a fellow clergy member. The oldest nun to marry, Marie Desmeutiers contracted a *mariage blanc* with a widower responsible for the children from his previous marriage. He died two years later. Although she affirmed that the marriage was never consummated and that the spirit of her vows remained unbroken, she still asked to be secularized rather than returning to the convent, a task that seemed too difficult at the age of 78.

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<sup>290</sup> Graham, “Married Nuns Before Cardinal Caprara: A Sociological Analysis of Their Petitions,” 326.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

Caught up in the torrent of the Revolution, clerical couples were just as likely as nuns married to laymen to insist on the necessity of staying together and the impossibility of returning to their lives before the Revolution. Although one would expect former clerics to claim that their marriages were forced, thereby excusing themselves from any guilt, former priests and nuns nonetheless overwhelmingly expressed their desire to contract valid marriages and receive a dispense from their vows. Couples expressed a variety of reasons for their reluctance to separate: some claimed to be too old and feeble to return the rigors of monastic life, others cited the necessity of the family economy for their survival, others objected that they had grown attached to each other over the years, while others claimed that it was impossible to leave their spouse without magnifying the public scandal they had caused.

In an instance of anti-clerical fervor, in 1793, the Parisian priest Jean-Baptiste Warnet's Jacobin club called on him to defend the honesty of the clergy. His response so enflamed his audience that they insisted that he imprisoned him and condemned him to death. He was, however, offered a reprieve if he would marry. Rather than face the guillotine, he chose to marry a former benedictine, Catherine-Josèphe Duflos, with whom he later established a school in Pontoise. He explained to Cardinal Caprara that he believed that not only would their spiritual welfare benefit from the “consecration” of their marriage, but that it would also be “qu’un sujet d’édification pour la publique qui nous confie l’éducation de la jeunesse.”<sup>292</sup> Like Warnet, many former priests and nuns believed that the only way to repair their subversion of public morals was by contracting a valid marriage and receiving dispensation and the nuptial blessing from the Catholic

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<sup>292</sup> AN, AF/IV/1910, d.14.,67. Hereafter, the Caprara Correspondence will be referred to by carton number, dossier, and piece number only. See the Appendix for further details.

Church. This sentiment echoed the wishes expressed by the majority of clerical couples. Despite the extenuating circumstances that often surrounded their marriages, many clerical couples that did not originally marry of their own free will nevertheless desired to remain together.<sup>293</sup>

Few petitions stated that the correspondents were actually victims of persecution or had been arrested because of their clerical status. More commonly letters, like that of Jeanne Martin, an Ursuline from Bourges, described a more general coercive situation. The petition from her and her husband states “mépris des lois de l’église et de leurs vœux solennels, ils se sont laissés entraîner dans cette malheureuse chute par l’égarement épidémique que regnait alors en France par la crainte des violences qui s’exercoient alors sur les prêtres, religieux et religieuses et par l’admis important de ceux qui étoient chargés alors de l’administration de leur commune.” They married in July 1794.<sup>294</sup> Many marriages, viewed later as the product of persecution, may have actually been contracted, more precisely, because of *fear* of persecution. Despite the circumstances of their marriage, Martin and her husband preferred secularization to returning to their respective orders. Although they lived separately and had no children they wanted to legitimize their marriage because of the “great attachment” they had for each other.<sup>295</sup>

Women also commonly blamed poverty for their inability to uphold their vows during the Revolutionary context. Overall, 46 nuns cited the lack of resources as the

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<sup>293</sup> Maréchaux also finds that among the male clergy even those who claimed to have contracted their marriages unwillingly wished to remain with their spouses. Maréchaux, Xavier, “La place des prêtres mariés dans l’histoire de la révolution française,” in *Mélanges Michel Vovelle*, by Jean-Paul Bertaud et al. (Paris: Société des Études Robespierriistes, 1997), 89.

<sup>294</sup> 1908 11 279.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

deciding factor in their decision to marry. All who mentioned their governmental pensions complained of their inability to live on this modest and irregularly paid amount. Without an income that supported their economic independence, nuns could often rely only on their families and other protectors to survive.

Indeed former nuns experienced difficult financial times outside of the convent. While nuns in general were not accustomed to luxury,<sup>296</sup> the most efficient use of resources--pooling pensions with other nuns, for example--was forbidden. Women without families often attempted to work; however, women's opportunities for work were harshly limited. Because they were suspected of harboring counterrevolutionary sympathies, nuns were forbidden from teaching after 1792—one of the few jobs for which many of them would have been qualified.<sup>297</sup> Women from contemplative orders were most likely ill-prepared for any kind of profession. Murphy found extreme cases of poverty that forced some nuns into mendicancy and in some cases prostitution.

Charlotte Bardet's petition, from La Boissière-d'Ans (Dordogne), provides a good example of a woman who struggled to support herself. When she left the convent she returned “chez une mère inhumaine [qui lui sumise] aux plus mauvaise traitements.”<sup>298</sup> Her family wanted her pension and threw her out when it was not paid. Charlotte tried to find employment at a girls' school, but even then her salary was only paid irregularly. Ultimately, she had to marry “a basely born man” to provide for herself. At the time of her letter, she had two children with her husband and was pregnant with a third. Of course, she had no option but to stay with her husband, but she also wanted to “réparer le

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<sup>296</sup> Rapley and Rapley, “An Image of Religious Women in the Ancien Regime: The Etats Des Religieuses of 1790-1791.” Rapley found that the majority of convents were, in fact, very frugal.

<sup>297</sup> McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church*, 72. There is evidence that some nuns continued to teach despite the injunction.

<sup>298</sup> 1909 13 39.



scandale qu'elle a donné... que la seule chose qu'elle avoie à faire...était de contracter mariage selon les règles de l'église." The scandal that she had caused, she believed could only be done by contracting a marriage according to the rules of the Church."<sup>299</sup>

Twenty-nine petitioners used the key words, pressure, example, advice, and persuasion--which can broadly be understood as peer pressure --to describe the decisive factor in their decision to marry. "Citizeness" Marie-Anne Thiriot at the age of fifty decided to marry in 1794, after having spent nearly thirty years in the convent. Her husband, whom she termed "Citizen" Jean-Augustin Gillot, had spent an equal amount of time in the priesthood before their marriage. At the respective ages of fifty and sixty, the couple explained their marriage: "solliciter par des parents at amis et entraînés par l'exemple."<sup>300</sup> Thiriot and Gillot's letter, however, is not quite typical in comparison with those of other former ecclesiastic couples. The curious use of "citizen" and "citizeness," suggests that the couple had redefined themselves in the ten years of the Revolution as secular individuals first and foremost. The couple, of course, used deferential language in framing their petition to the Cardinal, however, not to the ostentatious extent of others. Rather than "throw themselves at that feet of the cardinal to beg the mercy of the Church," they "humbly beg to be allowed to persist in the state of marriage."<sup>301</sup> Neither wanted to return to the religious life, implying that they had grown too old and unaccustomed to the routine to return.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> 1908 10 95

<sup>301</sup> Ibid. also 1897 1 62-3.

<sup>302</sup> 1908 10 95.

Twenty-five former nuns used terms that diminished their own agency in order to explain their decision to marry. They were instead “entraînée dans l’erreur” or caught up in the circumstances of the Revolution. Ten long years of Revolution--without the support of the Church and with little hope of a return to orthodoxy--combined with persuasive social pressure, the force of the example of other clerical marriages, and the security of a “status” convinced some clergy members that marriage and making a new life were the most natural solutions.

Even though the language of these women’s petitions often suggests that they did not consider themselves primary actors, some nonetheless asserted themselves by co-opting the language of the Revolution and reminding the Cardinal that without the benefit of fore-knowledge, they felt compelled to adapt to a new order—a completely new regime—at a time when it was not clear if the Catholic Church would ever again exist in France. Forty-year-old Guislaine Goubet wrote that “aveglés et entraînés par l’esprit de vertige que inondé la France dans la Révolution,” she married.<sup>303</sup> Augustine Masson, a *religieuse annonciade* from Versailles found herself the “object of public execration” upon leaving her convent just for her status as a former nun. Far away from her family, and without anyone else to counsel her, she decided to marry. “À la fin,” she wrote, “persuader que j’avais fait des vœux [je] pouvais les rompre.”<sup>304</sup> Masson’s logic reflected revolutionary objections to perpetual vows: if all were indeed free and possessed of liberty as Revolutionary rhetoric maintained, individuals had the right to change their minds—either in religious vocation or in the choice of marriage partner.

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<sup>303</sup> 1909 12 134.

<sup>304</sup> 1901 11 84

Ruth Graham found that the average age of former nuns who were influenced by revolutionary propaganda was about ten years younger than those who had married because of persecution or because they lacked resources.<sup>305</sup> Helene Tausia from Condom (Gers) stated that “she was caught up in the impetuous torrent of the revolution. [She and the Abbé Lagarde] had been influenced by the representative on mission and married in 1793. They did not believe that the new laws in any way impinged on their faith. Rather they believed at that time that they had the right to marry.”<sup>306</sup> Furthermore, despite their marriage and Lagarde’s services for the police during the Terror, they told Cardinal Caprara that they had “never ceased to be good Catholics.”<sup>307</sup>

Many of the letters in which the authors claim to have been caught up in events or to have believed that they had the right to marry seem to show a kind of confusion between Church and State. Because of the vast changes in Revolutionary law and the state’s relationship to the Catholic Church, many seemed to have believed that the basic tenants of Catholicism had also been amended to allow for clerical marriage, rather than recognizing that the dominant values of the society and state had been divorced from religious orthodoxy.

Twenty-five other women religious claimed to have been caught up in the momentum of the times and married without thinking that they might have infringed religious law. These former nuns expressed confusion over the legality of their marriages or of their vows. Paula Debrun, a *Clarisse* from the Aude, stated that she had been “seduit par le nullité de mes vœux.”<sup>308</sup> Her letter spoke of a true affection for her husband

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<sup>305</sup> Graham, “Married Nuns Before Cardinal Caprara: A Sociological Analysis of Their Petitions,” 327.

<sup>306</sup> 1907 6 161-7.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> 1907 9 180-2.

and children and of her earnest desire to rehabilitate her marriage, render her children legitimate in the eyes of the Church, and make amends for the scandal her marriage may have caused.

Twenty-six women wrote that love, seduction, sexual desire or pregnancy motivated them to marry. Jeanne Lacoutre, a former Clarisse at Confolens (Charente), wrote to Cardinal Caprara in 1802 that she “avait fait profession à dix-huit ans” in 1786, “sans se douter des engagements qu'elle prenait par les insistances de son père,” quickly she understood “qu'elle n'était point faite pour cette vie recluse.” Candidly, she told Caprara that she welcomed the “bienveillance des députés [qui] la libérer de cet état.” In 1793 she married a soldier, Jean Cueille, “qui est bon pour elle et qu'elle aime sincèrement.” She asserted that she “ne regrette point d'avoir engagé les liens du mariage mais souhaiterait élever ses enfants dans la foi catholique.”<sup>309</sup>

A surprising number of petitioners honestly admitted in their letters to Cardinal Caprara the primary role of sexual desire in motivating them to marry. Rosalie Jouve of Langeac (Haute-Loire) emphasized her youth and irresponsibility in making her vows. Upon leaving the convent she was seduced and became pregnant. She married in 1801 and regretted to Cardinal Capara having infringed on her vows, which at the time “je crois être de nulle valeur.”<sup>310</sup> Marie Lebesson, a *congrégationiste* from Indre also believed that her vows were no longer valid. She wrote that she believed herself to be “parfaitement libre” and because she found that it was “le moyen plus legitime de satisfaire un penchant naturel auquel on se trouve dans l'impuissance de resister.”<sup>311</sup> She continued, “les loix imperieuses de la nature” had endowed her with sexual desire and

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<sup>309</sup> 1907 5 25.

<sup>310</sup> 1906 6 242.

<sup>311</sup> 1911 2 17.

she found herself “entraînée par une penchant irristable.”<sup>312</sup> Caprara’s response counseled her to live in conjugal chastity.

Marie Souliée of Châlons-sur-Marne (Marne) wrote Cardinal Caprara to ask for dispensation to marry after 1801. She was forced to profess at 16, against the laws of France, when the suppression of religious vows was becoming a foregone conclusion. Her confessor, feeling that her youth put her in danger of seduction, supported her petition to marry. He believed that her marriage would be the remedy against concupiscence and included the popular adage “désir de fille est un feu qui dévore, désir de nonne est cent fois pis encore.” Caprara was not moved by this petition that surpassed the mandate of his mission. He rather curtly replied: “non conceditor.”<sup>313</sup>

In France, women could not legally take vows until the age of eighteen and according to the reforms of Trent, women entering convents had to be examined by a bishop as well as the convent’s superior to ascertain the veracity of her vocation. Former nuns’ letters to Cardinal Caprara, however, suggest that even on the eve of the Revolution these reforms had not been entirely successful. Seventy-seven women out of 448 stated that they had taken vows against their will. According to Graham's study of the Caprara archives, forced vows were the most common motive for marriage.<sup>314</sup> Of these, several made their vows before the legal age, under pressure from their families. Others expressed ambivalent feelings towards their vocation, claiming that they had entered the convent reluctantly, out of obedience and timidity, or that they had taken their vows too young without really understanding the significance of the commitment. It is difficult to

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> 1916 1 173

<sup>314</sup> Graham, “Married Nuns Before Cardinal Caprara: A Sociological Analysis of Their Petitions,” 324.

classify these groups separately as their letters rarely differentiate between pressure and force. Some nuns stated that physical violence and abuse at home drove them to accept a religious life. Others cited parental coercion and the simple understanding that they had no other option but to obey their parents' will.

While Revolutionaries believed that forced vows were a significant problem in convents, they vastly overestimated and romanticized the issue. Several recent historians have argued that the Revolutionaries' preoccupation with forced vows, a powerful reason to oppose convents and perpetual vows in the name of individual liberty, was without justification.<sup>315</sup> The large number of nuns who mention this in their petitions, however, suggests the need to reinvestigate the issue of forced vows in the eighteenth century.

If marriage and sexuality marked milestones in a nun's secularization, the birth of children most fully marked the point of no return. In the two *departements* that he studied, Murphy found that married nuns in Poitou gave birth to 127 children between 1793 and 1806. Fifty-one of the eighty-one marriages from his sample were productive, proving that at least two thirds of the marriages were consummated. For the married priests, Vovelle postulated that the low proportion (60%) of productive marriages proved that many were chaste, sham marriages.<sup>316</sup> Maréchaux, however, believes that 54% of those who wrote Cardinal Caprara had children.<sup>317</sup> Ruth Graham found that the percentage of nuns' marriages that were fertile was less than the number of priests' marriages that produced children. According to her estimates, only 40% (or 146

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<sup>315</sup> Mita Choudhury, *Convents and Nuns in Eighteenth-Century French Politics and Culture* (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004), 157.

<sup>316</sup> Vovelle, *The Revolution against the Church*, 84.

<sup>317</sup> Maréchaux, "Les prêtres mariés sous la Révolution Française," 204.

marriages) of nuns' marriages resulted in children. Ruth Graham believes that “doubtless this low percentage derives from the nuns’ advanced years.”<sup>318</sup>

Cardinal Caprara was interested in the offspring of the clergy who asked him for reconciliation, and specifically asked petitioners to include whether or not the relationship had resulted in children. Not all, however, complied, and this information was almost never included in biographical dictionaries of the clergy. From this sample it is unknown if 303 of the marriages were or were not fertile. We do know that 127 marriages, or 28% of the sample did result in children.

Several nuns admitted that they bore children out of wedlock. Being seduced or subscribing to a new sexual paradigm in which sex and marriage did not always come together was part of a Revolutionary and long-term eighteenth century trend that saw an increase in illegitimate births as well as an increase in Revolutionary nuptiality. Recognizing the precarious position of their children in regards to Church doctrine, former *religieuses* who became mothers often referred to the “malheur” of their children. While they were willing to express appropriate regret, the women's expressions of love and insistence that they would not abandon their children and evince a change in sentiments from previous centuries where women often put religious duty over their children.<sup>319</sup>

Very few historians have considered the larger significance of this aspect of clerical marriage. Unfortunately, it is unknown exactly how many descendants married nuns had. Despite fortitude in archival research, Murphy failed to discover a single child

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<sup>318</sup> Graham, “Married Nuns Before Cardinal Caprara: A Sociological Analysis of Their Petitions,” 329.

<sup>319</sup> See Barbara Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity: Pious Women and the Catholic Reformation in Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). for several examples of women who abandon their children to join convents in the seventeenth century.

of a married nun who occupied a prominent post in the nineteenth century that would allow us to glean more information about their attitudes and upbringing.<sup>320</sup> Lacking personal documents it is impossible to know the attitudes of decedents of clergy members to their parents' marriage, or even if they were aware of the fact. Certainly, however, this legacy of clerical marriage remains one of the most tangible and long-term results of Revolutionary dechristianization.

Nun's marriages were certainly less tied to the dechristianization campaigns that swept across France in 1793-1794 than has often been suggested, although geographically areas that experienced the most intense dechristianization campaigns did experience more marriages. As a particularly important survival strategy of the younger nuns who were forced from their convents in 1792, married nuns engaged in a longer term cultural revolution that denigrated celibacy and promoted companionate marriage and the family as the basis of society. Lacking resources to survive alone in the world, many nuns married because the Revolution had closed off one of the only opportunities for single women to find social security. A significant number, however, fell in love or married when pregnancy forced the issue, demonstrating that far from sham marriages or products of persecution, many nuns married because they were caught up in the circumstances and culture of the time.

In the end, we can see that former nuns like Françoise Goupil, Madame Hébert, who were influenced by Revolutionary ideals and married for love were not all that uncommon. Like many married nuns she left her convent when she was still young enough to bare children. Although she remained attached to her Catholic faith, she was persuaded by the need for a new position in life after the closure of convents and became

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<sup>320</sup> Murphy, "Les religieuses mariées pendant la Révolution Française," 248.



a wife and mother. Where Goupil's life takes a significant departure from that of other married nuns is her and her husband's high-profile involvement in the Revolutionary politics of Paris, that would result in their deaths. The only known married nun to face the guillotine, she was put to death on April 13, 1794 alongside the wife of her husband's rival, Lucile Desmoulins.<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> Jacob, *Hébert, le Père Duchesne, chef des sans-culottes*, 90.

## CHAPTER 4

### Married Nuns: In Their Own Words

Je connais peu de documents humains d'un intérêt aussi saisissant. Ils ne nous disent pas seulement les trivulations les avatars tragiques ou comiques de leurs auteurs; ils nous étalent, parfois avec une naïveté qui touche au cynisme le coeur humain dans toute sa nudité.<sup>322</sup>

-Albert Mathiez, 1926

In the centuries succeeding the Revolution, Catholic historians wrote edifying tales of the persecution suffered by women religious who bravely resisted the efforts of Revolutionary authorities who sought to destroy their way of life. The martyrdom endured by the Carmelites of Campiègne guillotined in Paris, the Filles de la Charité d'Arras, the Ursulines of Valenciennes, the thirty-two nuns executed in Orange, and an undetermined number who faced the firing squads of the west became the story of nuns in Revolution. And so in large part, it has remained, in exclusion to the much more commonplace stories of former nuns who secularized.<sup>323</sup>

The Caprara documents offer the only insights into women religious' experiences of the Revolution and the life trajectories that led them to marry. The stories former nuns tell complicate and confuse traditional narratives of nuns' Revolutionary participation and, as Mathiez remarked, expose the human drama that underlies the political events of the Revolution. The letters do not describe one relationship to the Church, one reaction to the Revolution, or one impression of marriage and sexuality. Rather over three hundred

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<sup>322</sup> Albert Mathiez, "Les prêtres révolutionnaires devant le Cardinal Caprara.," *Annales Historiques de la Révolution française* 3 (1926): 2.

<sup>323</sup> Mita Choudhury, *Convents and Nuns in Eighteenth-Century French Politics and Culture* (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004).

voices give differing impressions of the same historical and personal events. Some stories followed expected patterns, but others recounted unexpected and sometimes salacious experiences of life under the Old Regime and the Revolution. Listening to what the women said and how they explained their actions offers us perspective on how women, especially women who experienced a loss of social status, lived the Revolution and recreated their lives after the traumatic destruction of their world.

Like Natalie Zemon Davis's *Pardon Tales* the petitioners to Cardinal Caprara constructed narratives and put a human face on stories that sought to justify their actions.<sup>324</sup> The women framed their petitions in terms that argued for excusing the faults that they had committed and that they believed would mostly likely allow them to return to the Church. The documents, produced with the express purpose of achieving reintegration within the Church by the rehabilitation of clerical marriages, emphasized the petitioner's worthiness of mercy and her sincere repentance and recognition of her sin.

Interpretation of these sources, like all documents, poses problems for the historian. Written many years after the facts, the author's memory may not have been correct. Although few Catholics would lie to a Cardinal, it was certainly possible that the petitioner omitted certain details or structured and distorted others in order to frame her petition in the most flattering light. Ten years after the closure of most convents, the women had tales to tell, but very little of this information would have been seen as relevant for obtaining the rehabilitation of their marriages. In any case, some likely held back as much as they revealed. The petitioners wrote for their audience and for this

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<sup>324</sup> Natalie Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France*, 1st ed. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990).

reason they tended to emphasize remorse and regret while glossing over embarrassing breaches in conduct.

The letters written to Caprara cannot be considered an unbiased sample of nuns' motivations for marrying. As we saw in the previous chapter, not all married nuns sought reconciliation with the Church after the Concordat. Divining the reasons behind the silence and paucity of historical records is never an easy task. Some married nuns may not have been aware of the opportunity. Others may have assumed that their marriages were valid. Death had already claimed some. In certain dioceses, the bishops refused to cooperate with Caprara for political reasons. Some considered such marriages, contracted according to the laws of the Republic, as perfectly valid and not in need of rehabilitation. Other bishops--often restored Old Regime bishops--with a grudge against the Constitutional clergy, objected completely to the project of reconciliation and may have refused the publication of the offer of reconciliation in their dioceses. Additionally, some married nuns may have considered their original vows invalid because they were made before the legal age or were the product of force or coercion. Such a justification could calm the conscience and allow them to avoid dragging up the past. Moreover, over the previous ten years, the religious sensibilities of a proportion of married nuns' almost certainly evolved away from the Catholic Church.

By telling their stories former nuns hoped to obtain reconciliation with the Church and legitimize their marriages. This was extremely important both for social and spiritual reasons. Regularization of marriages contracted in violation of Catholic doctrine offered these women an opportunity to return to the good graces and sacraments of the Church

and restore their reputations in the community. Many former nuns wrote of their desire to repair the public scandal they had caused, as well as the desire to set their souls aright and rejoin the community of the faithful by allowing them to receive the sacraments.

In writing Cardinal Caprara, doubtless, many women found it convenient to keep their letters as short and to the point as possible. Writing a short formulaic letter, adhering closely to Caprara's template, and focusing on expressions of remorse left little room for offending the Cardinal or dwelling on the other particular sins that accompanied the marriage. Almost half of the letters written to Caprara followed this format. These letters most often explained the marriage as a product of the Revolution, with no elaboration of motivation or circumstances that led to the marriage. Brevity limited the individual's need for reflection about her past motivations and sentiments that could be difficult to explain following the turbulence of the previous decade. Some suppliants wrote their letters personally. Third parties, like a notary or a parish *curé* composed others; in some cases, rendering a story with its own human inconsistencies and personality into formulaic, legalistic language.<sup>325</sup> When the story was filtered through a third party, the woman's voice is further distanced from the historian seeking to uncover her thoughts and feelings.

Many of the shorter petitions followed a template suggested by Cardinal Caprara's mission, in which they laid out the facts of who they married and when, followed by expressions of remorse and sincere repentance and a promise to live in conjugal chastity. Although many characterized their marriages and children as a "malheur," as a misfortune occasioned by the Revolution, they often reiterated the language of the sample petition that Caprara circulated, which stated that the pope wished to come to the aid of

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<sup>325</sup> For an example of a formulaic letter that offers little food for analysis, see: 1908 10 31-2.

“les religieux des deux sexes qui ont eu le malheur de contracter mariage pendant la révolution.” They mirrored this language by writing that they had “le malheur de contracter un mariage” and followed with vivid expressions of remorse, stating that they “were overcome by grief for their error.” Although the circumstances of their marriages might have been unfortunate, the majority of the petitioners also expressed sincere attachment to their spouses and refused to separate.

Therèse Beaupré a Carmelite from Nancy (Meurthe-et-Moselle) and her husband, Nicolas Remec--former monk and constitutional *curé* from Metz wrote that they could not separate because of “l’inclination mutuelle qui existe entre eux, l’habitude qui la resserre encore, le besoin qu’ils ont de réunir leurs moyens pour exister.”<sup>326</sup> Economic need had united them, but the years that they had passed together and the reliance they had for one another, had developed into a real affectionate relationship that would make their separation untenable. Although this couple does not go so far as to profess their love for each other, “l’inclination mutuelle” does suggest that their marriage had progressed from an economic partnership to a relationship akin to that of a companionate marriage.

Other letters more candidly expressed the love and happiness that some former nuns found in their marriages. Louise Bain described the welcoming reception offered by her only relation, a cousin, who took her in after the closure of her Fontrevaultist convent in Angers (Maine-et-Loire). Bain had professed her solemn vows one day after her eighteenth birthday in 1772, and when in 1792, she found herself far away from the rest of her family, she was grateful for her cousin’s generosity in providing for her. Slowly, “by daily habit,” according to her letter, she grew to love him and was finally impelled to accept his offer of marriage because of “l’impression donnée par la législation qui existait

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<sup>326</sup> 1909 12 42 This wording is repeated word for word by Marie Josephe de Fleury (1904 5 155).

alors, la disposeraient insensiblement à accepter l'offre qu'il lui fut de l'épouser, et de la mettre en fin du besoin pour le reste des ses jours."<sup>327</sup> Across the formal language of the notary who wrote her letter, one can hear the tender tones of a human mixture of emotions, even as they were carefully rendered to fit the situation: "l'exposante avait trouvé le bonheur, si le bonheur peut exister hors la religion."<sup>328</sup> Bain claimed to have "la chastété conjugale," and she hoped that the manner of her "conduite pieuse et exemplaire" had caused the scandal of her original marriage to be forgotten.<sup>329</sup>

The relationship that Bain described conformed closely with the models of marriages most often presented in sentimental novels and promoted by the certain segments of the bourgeoisie.<sup>330</sup> Revolutionaries promoted such companionate marriages, based on mutual respect and affection, as the basis of virtuous citizenship.<sup>331</sup> That nuns would portray the relationships they contracted outside of the convent in such terms demonstrates the point to which the culture of sentiment and revolutionary familial expectations were quickly able to penetrate their consciousness. That they thought it important enough to mention in their letters to Cardinal Caprara that had found love and happiness in their marriages implies, that many former nuns accepted these cultural norms as their own.

Looking more closely at women religious' state motivations for marrying, we can see that the cultural and social forces of the Revolution often combined to make marriage

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<sup>327</sup> 1907 6 61-2.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> Dena Goodman, "Marriage Choice and Marital Success: Reasoning about Marriage, Love, and Happiness.," in *Family, Gender, and Law in Early Modern France*, ed. Suzanne Desan and Jeffrey Merrick (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009).

<sup>331</sup> Lindsay A. H. Parker, *Writing the Revolution: A French Woman's History in Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

seem like the only option for many nuns. Rather than being forced to marry, as so many historians have explained clerical marriages, former nuns made complex calculations of personal survival in a world that offered few alternatives for single women. Nuns experienced the closure of convents as a loss of identity, social status, and physical safety. As the Revolution undermined the foundations of their faith and closed their homes and source of livelihood, it is little surprising that many women felt lost and powerless in the early years of life outside the convent. Writing that they had been “entraîné” or “dragged into” the events of the Revolution, reflected the sense that many former nuns had of limited choices that would ultimately “force” them to marry.

Many other petitioners likened the Revolution to an irresistible tide that overcame them. Marie Josephe de Fleury a *congrégationiste* from Mirecourt (Vosges) wrote that “par suite de la révolution française qui pendant dix ans a désolé la France et l’église Gallicane surtout, d’une manière si terrible, entraînée par le torrent du mauvais exemple, séduite par de mauvaises suggestions, elle a contracté mariage selon les lois civiles de la république.”<sup>332</sup> Outside of the convent, former nuns experienced a deluge of propaganda, example, advice, and financial want that pushed them to marry.

Marie-Françoise Baron, a former Augustine from the convent of the St. Sepulcre in Bourges wrote from Vierzon (Cher) that in 1793, “réduite à un état de détresse affreuse” and unable to return to her family home because of the mistreatment she suffered there, “n’ayant pour subsister qu’une modique pension payée par le gouvernement de France en assignats de modique valeur” she consulted her parish priest about her situation. Her recounting of this conversation doubtlessly convinced Caprara that former nuns were

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<sup>332</sup> 1904 5 155-6.



inundated with advice, even from unexpected sources, that encouraged them to marry during the Revolution:

Antione Murent curé constitutionnel de la paroisse de Vierzon qu'elle consulta avant de procéder à son mariage lui répondit qu'elle pouvait *salvâ conscientia* accepter les promesses de mariage qui lui étaient proposées par le dit Adrien Germain, attendu qu'il regardait comme nuls ses vœux de religieuse que le recours au St. Siege pour en obtenir dispense était alors impossible et qu'au surplus l'état de détresse ou elle se trouvait la dispensait de l'observation de la loi du célibat religieux qui n'était qu'une loi ecclésiastique qui n'obligeait pas dans une pareille circonstance.<sup>333</sup>

These arguments proved convincing to Baron and her husband. They wrote that they had regarded their marriage as valid until the ministrations of the *curé* of their parish opened their eyes to a more orthodox view of their marriage. Although they had no children to hinder their separation, Baron performed important economic functions in her husband's business and could not abandon him without ruining his livelihood as well.

Revolutionary laws specifically upheld the right of former clergy members to marry. Seeing others do so normalized the situation and further broke down ecclesiastic discipline. The example set by those who married also lent credence to the belief that former clergy members did indeed have the right to marry. Gabrielle Picaud, a *soeur converse* with the hospital of St. Joseph in Moulins (Allier), a notable center of clerical marriage, wrote that she found herself orphaned and without resources beside her “modique pension” after the dispersal of her community. She wrote, “voyant quantité de personnes religieuses se marier et croyant que la révolution avait abrogé les lois qui lui défendait le mariage, elle s'étais mariée civilement ... dans le temps où le culte n'était pas permis.”<sup>334</sup> Without family she could turn to and experiencing increasing financial

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<sup>333</sup> 1907 9 146-7.

<sup>334</sup> 1907 8 8-10.

constraint, she allowed herself to be convinced by the example of other clerical marriages that she was no longer beholden to the vows she had made.

The language of some petitions further suggests that some women had internalized the Revolutionary language that they had been steeped in during the past decade.

Augustine Masson, a former Annonciade from Versailles experienced economic and social isolation after she was forced from her convent. She explained

sans espérance de pouvoir la rejoindre ayant à peine de quoi vivre, d'autre part se voyant par la seule qualité de religieuse l'objet de l'exécration publique sans appui et sans ressource, je formai le dessin de me marier et malgré les remords d'une conscience timorée, je me laissai à la fin persuader que *j'avais fait des vœux contre nature et que je pouvait les rompre.*<sup>335</sup>

Calling on revolutionary definitions of individual liberty, Masson broke her vows in order to regain a social position that guaranteed her subsistence.

The Revolution's religious reforms not only served to question some of the most basic assumptions of Catholic discipline, but also sowed misinformation among some poorly informed clerical members. Suzanne Sainte-Marie wrote “Que quand même son voeux de chasteté avoit été libre, il n'a été valide qu'autant que le souverain pontife l'a agréé; or sa sainteté ayant consentie à la suppression des couvents, il est a présumer qu'elle a consenti à l'annuellement des voeux du pauvres religieuses pour sauver leur honneur et salut.”<sup>336</sup> For this former nun, the convent functioned as the location for perpetual vows. These vows, outside the cloister, endangered women's honor as well as their physical and spiritual welfare. The erroneous belief that the pope had consented to release French nuns from the observance of their vows was only mentioned a few times

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<sup>335</sup> 1901 11 84. My emphasis.

<sup>336</sup> 1908 11 108-9.

in the letters to Cardinal Caprara, however, such misinformation is surprising and demonstrates the strength of the forces of secularization.

Under the Old Regime, church and state were inextricably intertwined. This mutually reinforcing relationship seemed to have influenced nuns' thinking on the nature of their vows. A rather high proportion of married nuns claimed to have married in good faith, believing that their vows were not valid or had been abrogated by law. Although an argument could be made that the nuns involved should have known better than to believe that civil laws could overturn the vows they had made before God, many expressed doubt and confusion about the effects of Revolutionary legislation that rendered perpetual vows illegal. A certain number of former clergymen also seemed to have believed in the power of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy to reform French Catholicism and overturn religious vows. Ultimately, those who focused on the legality of their vows seem to have defined *le célibat* and the religious vocation as an *état*, or an estate, and as such, equally destructible as the status of nobility had proved to be.

Marie Barbe Cuvillier from the Abbaye de Corbie (Pas-de-Calais) told her *curé* “se voyant privé de son *état*, elle a crû pouvoir en conscience prendre un autre, en foi.”<sup>337</sup>

Under this interpretation, former nuns genuinely believed themselves freed by all the obligations contracted by their religious profession. Furthermore some married nuns seemed to take this logic to its ultimate conclusion: that being deprived of their estate that were obligated find a new one. Margurite Barbe Dauphin, a Benedictine from the Abbaye Notre-Dame d'Yerres (Essonne) wrote that she returned to her family in 1792, “elle a été tellement obsédée par les discours des personnes qui l'entouraient et qui lui répétaient qu'elle pouvait d'après les lois de la république et qu'elle devoir dans les circonstances où

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<sup>337</sup> 1904 5 6-10.

elle se trouvait, accepter un parti qui se présentait.”<sup>338</sup> Social pressure to marry dogged her to the point of an obsession and in the process redefined for her duty in life.

A petition from 1802, on the part of Therese Davranche, a Berardine from Seine-Maritime expressed just such a sentiment. She found that outside the cloister she no was no longer able to uphold her vows, “jeune encore [et] née avec des passions vives et n'ayant plus l'espoir de voir le rétablissement de sa maison ou communauté, elle crut *devoir* prendre l'état du mariage.”<sup>339</sup> She considered, like many other nuns who married, that marriage was the only viable solution to the problems posed by life outside the convent. She wrote, “persuadée que, vu l'état des choses, elle obtiendrait facilement la dispense de ses vœux et se trouvent dans une espèce d'impossibilité de les observer où milieu des dangers du monde, elle contracta donc civilement le mariage il y a huit ans avec un homme libre et généralement estimé.”<sup>340</sup> For a young woman alone, the dangers of seduction further contributed to the need for the social protections and status offered by a respectable marriage.

After years or decades, of a tightly controlled and regimented life of retirement, entrance in the secular world could easily prove be disorienting and overwhelming. Having lost the companionship and sense of community fostered in the monastery, those who lacked family and friends surely felt completely abandoned outside of the protective walls of the cloister. Furthermore, the cultural context of the world they had known was drastically changed. Accustomed to obedience and submission, former nuns would have been easy prey for seduction and exploitation. The cloister had not only protected former nuns from the realities of making a living, but also from sexual awareness and

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<sup>338</sup> 1904 5 123-6.

<sup>339</sup> 1905 1 516-21. My emphasis.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

enticement. Exposure to the opposite sex was a novelty and temptation that many younger women found themselves incapable of resisting.

For some former nuns proximity to the opposite sex led naturally to sexual exploration. After the expulsion from her convent, Thérèse Goubet, a *soeur converse* from Saint Lazare in Cambrai (Nord) lived in the same house as Alexandre Carez, a capuchin brother. As the petition written by the vicar of Notre Dame cathedral in Cambrai explained, “après avoir passé un assez longtemps ensemble sans s'occuper d'autres objets que des moyens de se soutenir mutuellement contre les tentations auxquelles leur entrée dans le monde les exposait, ils eurent le malheur de s'oublier au point d'avoir et d'entretenir entre eux un Commerce Criminel qui ne fut découvert que par la grossesse de la dite Thérèse Goubet.” Situations such as Goubet's necessitated that the couple marry for the benefit of the child. They married, according to their *curé* “dans le faux espoir de réparer ce scandale.”<sup>341</sup>

While courtship practices were evolving in the eighteenth century, among the popular classes premarital sex was, in certain cases, considered a normal part of the road to marriage, especially after a marriage contract had been signed.<sup>342</sup> Under the Old Regime, the pregnancy of a respectable young woman was considered proof of a promise of marriage, as only a promise of marriage would have induced a respectable young woman into the physical act of intercourse. With suitable evidence of a courtship, the father named in the *déclaration de grossesse* could be made to marry the women.<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> 1904 4 51-2.

<sup>342</sup> André Burguière, *Le Mariage et l'amour en France: de la Renaissance à la Révolution*, L'Univers historique (Paris: Seuil, 2011), 335–52; Jean Quéniart, *La Bretagne au XVIIIe siècle: (1675-1789)* (Rennes, France: Ouest-France, 2004), 177.

<sup>343</sup> Olga Cragg and Rosena Davison, eds., *Sexualité, mariage et famille au XVIIIe siècle* (Québec: Presses Université Laval, 1998), 224.

Revolutionary sexual practices were slow to respond to the change in laws that favored voluntary fatherhood and removed traditional protections for unwed mothers.<sup>344</sup> There is even some indication that the Revolutionary era was also a time of increased sexual liberty, which may have contributed to former nuns being severely tempted in the secular world. Several nuns confessed that they entered into sexual relationships after leaving the convent. Like Therese Goubet, they only thought of marriage when the natural consequences of sexual relations resulted in a pregnancy.

Marie Sarron similarly married after she found that she was pregnant. She wrote that she left her convent, "où elle avait du moins trouvé un abri contre la séduction [après] elle a le malheur d'y succomber lorsqu'elle a été replongé dans le siècle et elle n'a consenti à épouser le dit Jean-Baptiste Esmery, que parce qu'elle était enceinte de l'enfant qui est le fruit de leur union." She further justified her departure from ecclesiastic discipline by explaining that her vocation was reluctant, "conduite par ses parents dès l'âge de quatorze ans dans le monastère de Longpré (Aisne) d'où elle n'a pas eu la liberté de sortir jusqu'a celui de dix neuf ans qu'elle a émis ses vœux, elle ne s'est déterminée à cette démarche que par une crainte respectueuse envers eux."<sup>345</sup> The weakness of her vocation and her lack of knowledge about the ways of the world made her easy prey for seduction.

As we saw in the previous chapter, a large number of married nuns mentioned in their petitions to Caprara that they had undertaken their religious professions unwillingly. Many former nuns also cited the violence and ill treatment of their families as a factor in

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<sup>344</sup> Suzanne Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 179.

<sup>345</sup> 1905 1 101-4.

their entrance into the convent. Still more expressed ambivalent feelings towards their vocation, claiming that they had entered the convent under pressure, or that they had taken their vows at a tender age without really understanding the significance of the commitment. Although this may have been a means of attenuating responsibility for their actions, it still suggests that, at the end of the eighteenth century, parents placed significant pressure on their daughters to enter convents.

Sociological vocations—religious vocations undertaken as part of a family’s economic strategy for socially establishing children—were not an uncommon cause for parents and guardians to pressure women to profess against their will.<sup>346</sup> Marie Preseau of Aisne described herself as “[une] victime malheureuse...destinée à l’état religieux...malgré la plus forte répugnance.” At the closure of her convent she returned to her family where she suffered “mauvais traitements” that encouraged her to marry in order to escape the abuse.<sup>347</sup>

Similarly, Marie-Anne Remy from Alsace explained that “qu’étant d’une famille nombreuse il lui fut représenté par ses parents que pour le bien de ses frères et soeurs, il serait utile qu’elle se fasse religieuse.”<sup>348</sup> Remy’s sociological vocation freed resources to establish her brothers and sisters in the world. Despite her large family, at the closure of her convent she found herself alone, not finding a refuge with her parents or nine brothers and sisters. She wrote asking for permission to make an advantageous marriage that would secure her subsistence and position in society. Asserting her right to such a dispense while at the same time criticizing those who married without asking permission,

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<sup>346</sup> Anne Jacobson Schutte, *By Force and Fear: Taking and Breaking Monastic Vows in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011), 152.

<sup>347</sup> 1910 3 137.

<sup>348</sup> 1906 1 96-9.

she wrote “en bonne forme, ne voulant pas imiter ceux qui par mépris pour l'Eglise se sont dispensés de cette formalité et devenus par là un objet de scandale pour les bons chrétiens.”<sup>349</sup>

While most reluctant nuns were pressured by their families, some nuns were indeed forced to make their vows by violence and abuse. Jeanne Redon from Agen (Lot-et-Garonne) wrote that she made her vows at 16 “sans vocation...par une violence ouverte de sa famille.” She had wanted to get married but her family refused to give her a dowry. She left her convent early and successfully secularized, making a living by teaching before she married.<sup>350</sup> Likewise, Judith Levayer writing from Nantes (Loire-Atlantique) in 1803, explained that her father was violent

lorsque j'étais encore fort jeune il m'estropia d'un coup qui me rompit deux côtes, quand je fus plus avancée en âge ma vertu se trouva exposée auprès de lui. Les risques que je courait dans la maison paternelle me forcèrent de la quitter et j'entrai au noviciat de la trinité de Rennes.

She fled to the cloister to escape violence and possible sexual abuse. However, she found that she did not like the cloister and asked her father to take her back. He responded that if “je sortais il me casserait les bras... je fis vœux d'embrasser un état pour lequel je n'avais point de gout.”<sup>351</sup>

Marie Anne Brière a Visitandine from the department of Nièvre wrote that “ses parents pieux,” who had themselves broken a promise to enter religious orders promised to consecrate their first born to the convent as “victime d'expiation.” As a child, she passed considerable time in the convent with the understanding that her father would

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<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> 1904 3 70.

<sup>351</sup> 1906 1 137-9.



never consent to her marriage. One day he arrived unexpectedly to find her reading a letter from her lover. He was so incensed that he resolved to place his daughter in a *maison de force by lettre de cachet*. She escaped the house and took refuge with her aunt, otherwise "il m'aurait tué sur le champs d'un coup de fusil." When her father came to take her back, she begged him on her knees to be allowed to go to any religious community of his choice.<sup>352</sup>

He placed her with the Visitadines so that she would be well guarded. She remained in her convent until the closure, although she would have left if she had not feared her father who "écrivait toujours despotiquement." After the closure of her convent, "je retournai chez lui croyant que la révolution l'avait fait changer d'opinion à mon égard; nullement, il voulait me tenir strictement à mon devoir. J'essayé, mais la jeunesse et les passions me tourmentaient vivement je pensais toujours à mon amant, malgré que le désespoir l'eut fait établir après ma profession." Finally, she had enough and decided to leave her father's house and her homeland. She went to Châteauroux (Indre) with a cousin where she became a "Jacobine, fille mondaine." She married, but lived unhappily with her husband, Jean-Baptiste Couturier, former *curé* and canon who was the first to abdicate in the department of Cher. He held to his revolutionary ways, calling Caprara an "imposteur" and "les autres des traiteurs" not wanting anything do with reconciliation. "Nous nous tourmentons l'un et l'autre," she explained the difference of age and temperament not allowing them to get along. She wrote secretly in 1804, explaining to Caprara that her husband, who neither believed in God nor the devil would not have approved of her request. For the sake of keeping the peace in her house and

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<sup>352</sup> 1908 11 301-4.

allowing her to raise her children as Catholics, Brière was granted the nuptial blessing without the presence of her husband.<sup>353</sup>

Louise Authier from Le-Puy-en-Vélay (Haute-Loire) was forced to profess before the legal age. She explained that: “Qu’après avoir éprouvé depuis l’enfance jusqu’a l’âge de dix-sept les traitements les plus durs de la part d’un père aveuglé par les préjugés de sa naissance si défavorables pour les cadets et par sa prédilection pour un enfant issu d’un second mariage, j’ai été conduite contra ma volonté dans la ci-devant abbaye de Fontevrault et forcée d’y prononcer des voeux que mon coeur a toujours désavoué.”

Authier blamed the power of her father to dispose of his children from an earlier marriage in preference of his new family for his having forced to her to profess. “En l’an 1792 la tempête révolutionnaire qui a désolé la France, a rompu la cloître...[j’ai été] rejeté dans le monde avec trois soeurs qui avez été comme moi victimes du même pouvoir arbitraire.” Revolutionary discourses surrounding paternal authority seems to have encouraged Authier to question the power her father held over her and her other siblings, and redefine it as arbitrary and illegitimate. Furthermore, she considered that her own vows, sworn unwillingly at an age prohibited by French law, were invalid.<sup>354</sup>

After leaving her convent, Authier had no one to turn to; her two brothers in the priesthood were not in a position to help her nor were her sisters. All alone facing persecution, she had been “persuadée de la nullité de mes voeux” and married. This situation allowed her to help her brothers and sisters throughout the Revolution. Even

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<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

<sup>354</sup> 1898 6 134.

though her husband died in 1800 she still asked to be secularized in recognition of her original unwillingness to be a nun.<sup>355</sup>

One nun who also protested against her vows, Antoinette Dumas, further justified her 1799 marriage by explaining that she made her vows at an Augustine convent at the age of 16, contrary to French law. Caprara, more concerned with canon than French law, responded “lors de l'émission des voeux solennels avait déjà atteint l'âge prescrit par le Concile de Trente, et je ne vois pas comment on pouvait prononcer la nullité de sa profession.” Luckily for Dumas, she married two years before the cut off date of August 15, 1801.<sup>356</sup>

The date of August 15, 1801, likely would have meant little to former women religious before they wrote to Caprara. Although the terms of the Concordat were reached in July 1801, they would not be published in France until April of 1802.<sup>357</sup> The pope viewed August 15 as the end of the disorders and dangers of the Revolution, however, for many former nuns the conditions that encouraged them to marry persisted. Lack of social status, lack of resources, and lack of protection from seduction did not end with the signatures of the pope and Napoleon, and some of those women who married after this deadline resented the implacable attitude of Caprara and the pope towards their marriages. Often these petitions from those who wished to marry or who had married after the 1801 deadline included the most biographical information in an attempt to sway Caprara to favor the woman's request.

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<sup>355</sup> Ibid.

<sup>356</sup> 1908 10 4-6.

<sup>357</sup> Rodney Dean, *L'Église constitutionnelle, Napoléon et le Concordat de 1801* (Paris: R. J. Dean, 2004), 300; Jeannine Charon-Bordas, *Le Legation en France du Cardinal Caprara 1801 - 1808 : repertoire des demandes de reconciliation avec L'Eglise* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1979), 4.

Charlotte Bardet of La Boissière-d'Ans (Dordogne) wrote to Cardinal Caprara to explain that at the closure of her convent, she went back to her family where she was mistreated and finally kicked out when her pension was not paid. She worked as a governess for a while, but “vivant dans le monde elle y a trouvé les occasions du mal.” She had two children out of wedlock before she accepted the proposal of marriage offered to her by “un homme de bonne naissance” by whom she was pregnant. Assuring the Cardinal of her sincerity, her *curé* wrote, “maintenant elle reconnaît ses fautes, elle s'en repent, elle veut les réparer elle désire mettre sa conscience en repos, se mettre dans la voie du salut, l'assurer et réparer le scandale qu'elle a donné.”<sup>358</sup> Regrettably, Bardet married in September 1801, the difference of three months and an event that she could not have possibly known about stood between her and a clear conscience.

Although, Caprara responded, “Non conceditur.” He sympathized with Bardet's situation,

Je plains bien sincèrement la triste position de cette infortunée religieuse mais vous savez que le bien général doit l'emporter sur les intérêts particuliers des individus. Rien n'est impossible à l'aide de la grâce divine et vos conseils et votre charité pourront faciliter à cette Brebis égarée le retour dans la voie du salut.<sup>359</sup>

However, he did not suggest what steps she should take to ensure her salvation. Should she leave her husband and children? Would she be able to receive the sacraments before she died? Currently, we cannot say for certain what became of women like Bardet, for whom the indulgence of the Church was out of reach.

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<sup>358</sup> 1906 1 227-34.

<sup>359</sup> 1892 15 66.

Even with the publication of the Concordat, the re-formation of convents happened only slowly and for the majority of orders, not at all.<sup>360</sup> In essence this date was imposed arbitrarily before the legal sanction of religious orders and without provision to help nuns who continued to suffer from the conditions associated with the lack of social status. Those who wrote asking to be allowed to marry further protested that they had not done so during the Revolution because they wanted to follow the proper channels and receive dispensation from their vows first.

Writing in 1805, Geneviève Corroy, a *religieuse* Récollette from Paris, asked for permission to marry for the sake of her financial well being and place in society. “Sa Sainteté adoucie journellement par de semblables grâces accordées aux deux sexes, le sort de malheureuses victimes de la révolution: serais-je donc la seule qui n'obtient droit rien de sa bienveillance et de sa charité,” she asked. Her upstanding conduct in comparison with those who married during the Revolution, she thought, should entitle her to special indulgence. If convents were to reopen, she wrote, “je suis prête encore à rentrer dans le mien. Mais nous pouvons pas nous flatter à ce point là, nous ne pouvons pas même en concevoir l'espoir.”<sup>361</sup> Despairing of the hope to see her convent reestablished, and in fact, not even being able to conceive of it, Corroy's assessment demonstrates just how thoroughly France's network of convents had been decimated in the previous decade.

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<sup>360</sup> Claude Langlois, *Le Catholicisme Au Féminin: Les Congrégations Françaises à Supérieure Générale Au XIXe Siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 1984), 77; Gemma Betros, “Napoleon and the Revival of Female Religious Communities,” in *Revival and Resurgence in Christian History*, ed. Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory, vol. 44, *Studies in Church History*, 2008, 191.

<sup>361</sup> 1910 3 106.

For those like Corroy, who were willing to return to the convent, it was not always easy to do so. Napoleon tightly controlled the religious life of France under his reign. In order to legally re-form religious orders need express permission from Jean-Etienne-Marie Portalis, minister des Cultes, was required. While a few communities such as the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary in Picpus (Paris) did illegally form during the late Revolution and Empire, the religious orders that the nuns of the Old Regime belonged to were either slow to reform or definitively died out. Furthermore, opposed as revolutionaries themselves were to contemplative monasticism, Napoleon forbid all but the active orders that he found useful.<sup>362</sup> The few nuns who wrote that they would return to the cloister often pointed out that there was, in fact, no cloister to return to.

Moreover, Napoleon's civil code, by re-entrenching the patriarchal rights of men in marriage, prohibited former nuns to leave their civilly wedded husbands.<sup>363</sup> Caught between civil law and ecclesiastical law, women under the Empire were even prevented from legally divorcing their husbands in order to return to their original obligations. Writing in 1806, Marie Epigat, from Tarn reported that she had been “entraînée par le torrent de la Révolution” and married in 1796. Although she was, “pénétrée de douleur de la faute qu'elle a commise” and wanted to leave her husband to retire to a convent, she found it impossible. Her husband would not consent and she understood that by “les lois du nouveau code civil, il peut la forcer d'habiter avec lui.”<sup>364</sup>

Epigat's situation recalls just how constrained women's choices were over the course of the Revolutionary era. From being forced into a convent, a woman could also

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<sup>362</sup> Betros, “Napoleon and the Revival of Female Religious Communities,” 190–1.

<sup>363</sup> Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France*, 301–3.

<sup>364</sup> 1910 14 24.

have been forced out of it in 1792. Seeing no other choice than marrying after the closure of convents, many women chose to secularize in this way.

However, the end of the Revolution also put an end to egalitarian divorce laws, making marriage just as restrictive of women's individual liberty as perpetual vows had been under the Old Regime.

Significantly, only three out of the three hundred eighty five married nun petitioners who mentioned the question to Cardinal Caprara wished to return to the cloister. For the most part married nuns refused to separate from their husbands citing economic reasons, the attachment they had for each other, and the scandal that would accompany the separation. The vast majority of married nuns seeking rehabilitation sought to regularize their marriages and atone for breaking their vows. A few (16) divorced before the Concordat, although they also asked for secularization.<sup>365</sup>

Taking a look at the stories of secularization told by married nuns, problematizes traditional narratives surrounding clerical marriage and the Revolutionary participation of nuns. Far from being forced marriages, the confessions that married nuns made to Caprara reveal that revolutionary discourse surrounding religious vows and marriage sometimes proved persuasive. That women's own sentiments sometimes echoed these new values about individual, is one of the most revealing and most neglected aspects of the Caprara archives.

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<sup>365</sup> Ruth Graham, "Married Nuns Before Cardinal Caprara: A Sociological Analysis of Their Petitions," in *Pratiques Religieuses, Mentalités et Spiritualités Dans l'Europe Révolutionnaire, 1770-1820 : Actes Du Colloque, Chantilly, 27-29 Novembre 1986* (Turnhout : Brepols, 1988), 329.

## CONCLUSION

Despite being trapped between the exigencies of Napoleon and the dictates of the pope—and understandably failing to please both—Caprara pursued his dual mission for nine years to implement the Concordat and bring order to the French clergy. Between 1802 and 1808 Cardinal Caprara responded to thousands of postulants for the Church’s indulgence. His moderation and level-headedness ultimately consecrated and consolidated the emperor’s “gift of thirty million French souls” to the Catholic Church.<sup>366</sup> After 1805, Pius VII—growing ever more frustrated with Bonaparte and fearful of delicate missives falling into the wrong hands—instructed Caprara on several occasions to return to Rome bearing the archives of his mission, in violation of a previous agreement with the emperor. At the age of 77, in failing health, and worn out from the constant battles between his two masters, Caprara hunkered down in the Hôtel Brion in Paris. He died there on June 21, 1810, leaving his archives to the French government, allowing historians to consult them to this day.<sup>367</sup>

Unfortunately, we have very little information on the fate of married nuns after Cardinal Caprara completed his mission. As best we can tell, very few former nuns actually wished to dissolve their marriages and return to the cloister.<sup>368</sup> Citing their marriage as a misfortune and yet refusing to leave their families, they expressed the ambivalent feelings that such women must have felt, trapped between religious duty and

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<sup>366</sup> Steven Englund, *Napoleon: A Political Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 181.

<sup>367</sup> Jeannine Charon-Bordas, *Le Legation en France du Cardinal Caprara 1801 - 1808 : repertoire des demandes de reconciliation avec L'Eglise* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1979).

<sup>368</sup> Only three former nuns told Caprara that they wished to leave their husbands to return to the cloister, but it is not entirely clear that they genuinely wanted to do this, as they all insisted on the legal impossibility of separation.



the love and obligation that tied them to their families. The only reliable information on the longer-term trajectories of married nuns comes from Murphy's extensive archival combing in Deux-Sèvres and Vienne. In these two departments, he found that secularization would be definitive for two-thirds of married nuns. Of eighty-one marriages, seventy led to widowhood for the women involved.<sup>369</sup> However, a significant number—almost one third—found their way back to the convent after the death of their spouse. Most of them lodged as *pensionnaires* in a lay capacity within the convent. Only four ultimately obtained Episcopal authorization to retake the veil.<sup>370</sup>

The long-term impact of nuns' Revolutionary secularization becomes most apparent when we consider the recreation of convents under the Empire and the Restoration. The women who established convents in the early nineteenth century were rarely those who had experienced monasticism under the Old Regime. According to Claude Langlois, only one in nine of those who had been in contemplative orders returned to the cloister, whereas six out of ten former *congrégationistes* took part in reformed communities.<sup>371</sup> Ultimately, the Revolution definitively winnowed out the abuses of the eighteenth century, even the pernicious *vocation forcée*. In the nineteenth century, female religious orders would be socially useful and well disciplined institutions that finally transformed the Old Regime image of the nun.

The dominance of the former congregationist sisters is not surprising. Under the Empire, Napoleon's religious and social policies favored the resurgence of active orders

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<sup>369</sup> Gwénaél Murphy, "Les religieuses mariées pendant la Révolution Française," in *Le genre face aux mutations: Masculin et féminin, du Moyen Âge à nos jours* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2003), 251.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, 351–2.

<sup>371</sup> Claude Langlois, *Le Catholicisme Au Féminin: Les Congrégations Françaises à Supérieure Générale Au XIXe Siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 1984), 80.

devoted to teaching and nursing, especially such centrally organized orders as the *Filles de la Charité*.<sup>372</sup> The reestablishment of contemplative orders was officially discouraged, even if some communities like the *Dames des Sacrés Coeurs de Jésus et Marie*—with the stated mission of atoning for the Revolution—were founded clandestinely in the heart of Paris. For the most part, contemplative orders would have to wait for the Restoration to be officially recognized. However, they would never again be as prominent as under the Old Regime. In the nineteenth century, French female ecclesiastical society would be completely dominated by the model of congregations of women with active vocations bound by simple vows.<sup>373</sup>

The present dissertation has not argued that the story of married nuns is the only story of the women religious of the French Revolution. Nor has it sought to minimize the historical impact of those *religieuses* who suffered and sometimes died at the hands of Revolutionary authorities, a topic of inquiry already well known to historians. When the gates of the convents were opened, nuns did not come flooding out *en masse*, praising the Revolution that liberated them. That the great majority of women religious rejected the command to disperse is a historical fact. In comparison to the male clergy, a larger proportion of nuns remained faithful to their vows. However, this fidelity of the majority must be balanced with the considerable number of exceptions. There were nuns who aided the forces of counterrevolution and who ultimately died for their beliefs during the Terror. Yet there were other nuns—whose stories are neither so dramatic nor so visible—

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<sup>372</sup> Gemma Betros, “Napoleon and the Revival of Female Religious Communities,” in *Revival and Resurgence in Christian History*, ed. Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory, vol. 44, *Studies in Church History*, 2008, 188.

<sup>373</sup> Langlois, *Le Catholicisme Au Féminin*; Jo Ann McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996).

who sought only to live everyday lives in a world that no longer accepted the existence of religious celibacy. Nuns arrested, interrogated, and guillotined have produced both legends and documents. Nuns who found work and sustenance and who integrated themselves into society in a struggle to survive outside the convent have left much less fodder for historical storytelling.

The seldom-told accounts of women religious who believed in the values of the Revolution, who saw their convents as prisons, and who married—not by force, but for love or for practical considerations—help contextualize the lived reality of the Revolution and break down the dichotomies of pro- and counter-revolution that have so often defined the historiography of women’s Revolutionary participation. These stories also provide a window for exploring the cultural and gender changes of the eighteenth century that the Revolution enacted as social policy. Although the Church insisted that celibacy was a higher calling than marriage, many social commentators of the eighteenth century vocally disagreed, arguing that celibacy was both unnatural and anti-social. In overturning the privileges of the Church, the Revolution also attacked celibacy, defining good citizens as those who married and founded families.

Throughout the eighteenth century and under the Revolution, these cultural transformations were central to the diverse images of the nun. For Revolutionaries, her celibacy—coerced by parental tyranny—represented the abuses of a sterile and wasteful aristocracy. Reclaiming the nun as a citizen, as well as a wife and mother demonstrated the power of revolutionary ideology to triumph over the Old Regime. Nuns’ correspondence with Cardinal Caprara reveals that even though they may not have seen themselves as renouncing the Catholic Church, revolutionary rhetoric that promoted

companionate marriage and individual liberty at the expense of perpetual vows was extremely persuasive in some cases.

By the time of the Revolution, as we have seen, most monasteries for women were socially useful, and well-regimented, although the specific traditions and rules of the various religious houses determined their character. Ironically, at this point when the great majority of convents were healthy and well disciplined, public opinion turned against the institution of monasticism, due in large part to the virtual obsession of eighteenth century fiction writers with the *vocation forcée* and the victimization of young women placed in convents against their will. In reality, this kind of abuse was probably slowly diminishing, although some women were still routinely coerced to make religious professions for which they had little inclination.<sup>374</sup>

During the Revolution, however, the dominant image of the nun was transformed in the minds of legislators from victim to fanatic. Deputies to the National Assembly had originally seen nuns as innocent victims of parental tyranny who would welcome liberation with the opening of the convents. When the majority of such women protested the closure of the convents—arguing that their liberty to pursue their chosen way of life should also be protected—and when many came to support the refractory clergy in the wake of the controversy surrounding the Civil Constitution, the conservation of the convents became politically impossible. The dominant image of the nun morphed into that of a counter-revolutionary fanatic. The pro-nuptial culture of the Revolution placed ever greater pressure on former monks and nuns to do their civic duty to the Nation and to marry. The closing of the convents was envisioned as the first step in the liberation of

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<sup>374</sup> Anne Jacobson Schutte, *By Force and Fear: Taking and Breaking Monastic Vows in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011).

citizens for service of the Nation. Ironically, many of the former nuns felt they had no alternative but to choose marriage and motherhood. As Roderick Phillips has noted, there was the suggestion that the bodies of monks and nuns, like their landed property, could now be coopted for service to the Nation.<sup>375</sup>

Such marriages have often been described as the product of force and fear, imposed above all by dechristianizing Revolutionary officials. However, as we have shown, such a position is often belied by the petitions of married nuns who asked for rehabilitation. The women rarely mentioned being forced to marry. They stressed rather that outside the cloister they experienced a loss of status, identity, and economic independence. Marriage was viewed as a logical choice for former nuns who were convinced that Roman Catholicism would never return to France and that the convents were closed forever. Some nuns also candidly admitted that they had fallen in love and that they had believed in the Revolutionary rhetoric that told them they had the right to marry. Moreover, we can see that marriages took place across the entire Revolutionary decade and into the nineteenth century, both before and after the violent campaigns of dechristianization. Marriage was a common survival strategy, in particular, for the youngest nuns. Departmental studies demonstrate that twenty per cent of those between the ages of 20 and 50 married at some point in the revolutionary decade. Rather than being an unimportant anecdote in the history of revolutionary dechristianization, the marriage of nuns was a significant historical event in the long-term secularization of former women religious and indeed in a sexual revolution that promoted marriage and childbearing.

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<sup>375</sup> Phillips, Roderick, "The Attack on Celibacy in Eighteenth-Century France," *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History* 17 (1990): 169.

This dissertation had argued that nuns were important historical actors in a major cultural and social change that occurred in the late-eighteenth century, and which the Revolution solidified and intensified through law and social policy. The image of the reluctant nun was harnessed to the service of a political agenda that decried the injustices and social dangers of celibacy. The Revolution coopted this popular trope in order to argue for the dissolution of monasticism, which was seen to be socially unproductive as well as incompatible with the Revolution's doctrine of individual liberty.

Previously historians have considered that there was little of importance to learn from studying nuns' revolutionary marriages. They believed that nuns' marriages followed the same patterns as those of the male clergy, and that their small numbers provided additional evidence of nuns' exceptional fidelity to their vows. We have found, however, that some nuns were not immune to the pull of Revolutionary cultural changes that encouraged marriage. In fact, the previous estimates regarding the number of married nuns were far too low. These estimates were based on the erroneous belief that the vast majority of all married nuns contacted Cardinal Caprara. We now know that the proportion of married nuns asking the papal legate for rehabilitation was substantially lower than previously estimated. For the majority of married nuns who contacted Caprara, and indeed the majority of all married nuns, nuptial union marked a definitive secularization. For some former nuns it may also have marked a definitive break with the Catholic Church.

Rather than being a product of the short-term dechristianization of 1793-94, the marriages of nuns represented a significant shift in opinions regarding celibacy and marriage, opinions that can be linked to the longer-term trends of dechristianization

identified by Michel Vovelle. This dechristianization in turn can be considered as an integral component of the Sexual Revolution that transformed cultural expectations in relation to marriage, love, and familial relationships. As we have seen, Revolutionary laws that ensured equality in marriage did not survive into the nineteenth century. Napoleon's Civil Code prohibited women from leaving their husbands or initiating divorce proceedings and locked women into marriage just as Old Regime law had enclosed nuns within their convents. This sexual revolution, unlike that of the twentieth century, ultimately had little to do with liberation. Rather it demoted the previously revered status of celibacy and elevated the status of marriage within society. Nevertheless, the rhetoric of the companionate marriage altered couples' expectations in marriage. Marriage no longer represented a simple economic and social contract between two families, but rather an intimate and loving relationship between two partners. Some nuns' letters speak to this transformation.

Paradoxically, the story of married nuns is also the story of a revolution in religious vocations. As we have seen, very few contemplative nuns found their way back to the convent in the nineteenth century. Congregation sisters, on the other hand, returned to their former vocation in larger numbers. Recruitment in these orders exploded as the century progressed, essentially transforming the image of monasticism from retreat and prayer into a vision of active charity and involvement in society. The destruction of the Revolution offered an opportunity to recreate French female monasticism on virgin territory, unencumbered by the abuses and culture of the Old Regime. Essentially, the Revolution acted as a forest fire that cleared the land, allowing for new flourishing growth to take place. Indeed, female French missionaries of the nineteenth century would

diffuse their message of charity and education across the globe, changing forever the image of the French nun into *la bonne soeur*, a woman of social commitment, religious revival, and universal education in a century of exploration.



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## **APPENDIX**

### **A Database of Married Nuns**

The following table lists all of the individuals on which this study of married nuns is based. Unless otherwise indicated, they have been identified through a careful reading of the archives of Cardinal Caprara held in the Archives Nationales, series AV/IV, dossiers 1895 through 1920. In the table they are listed by carton, dossier, and piece number. Other sources are identified either by archival call number or author and page number. Unfortunately, systematic information on all aspects of the lives of individual married nuns is not known. For this reason there are a fair number of unknowns for specific individuals.

Name	Reference	Date of Birth	Convent Location	Location of Marriage	Husband's Profession	Husband's Name	Age in 1792	Religious Order	Date of Marriage	Forced Vows	Children
Ainard, Marg.	1902 04 157; 1904 5 30-2			Herault	prêtre	P. Maurin	24	Visitandine	1793		
Alleaume, J-M	Murphy, 2010. p.135	1763	Fontenay-le-Comte (Vendée)	Poitiers (Vienne)			29	Visitandine			yes
Allier	1909 2 242	1774		Malines, Flanders		J-B Hudelot	18	Ursuline	wants to marry	x	
Arnault, Anne	1908 11 333; Gaillemín, p. 439	1766	Metz	Verdun	prêtre regulier	B. Schuartz	27	Dominicaine	1794		yes
Aucapitaine, M-A	1904 3 273-77		Allier	Allier	prêtre, professeur prêtre	N-G Gueillot		Benedictine	1793		
Aucapitaine, Mag.	1909 13 148; 1894 52 30		Allier	Allier	prêtre régulier, curé con., ministre	Y-L Cheffaud		Benedictine	1793		yes
Auger, Lou.	1908 10 188- 99; 1893 33 6,86			Yrouerre (Yonne)	Menuisier	Louis Rabelet		Visitandine	1794	x	
Aulneau, J-T	Murphy, 2010. p.136	1741	Guesne (Vienne)	Poitiers (Vienne)	ouvrier en tissage		51	Visitandine	1808		
Aumerle, Jul.	Dommanget, p. 154			Beauvais (Oise)	abbé	E Croison			1793		
Authier de St. Sauveur, J	1898 6 134		Maine-et-Loire	Maine-et-Loire	ingénieur en chef de la Marine	Leo. Frangin	32	Fontevrault	1794	x	
Bain, Lou.	1907 6 61-2	1754	Loire-Atlantique	Angers		Robert	38	Fontevrault	1799	x	
Baizelon, Chris.	1910 04 030		Geneva	Belley (Ain)		F-J Coullion		Visitandine	1801	x	
Bapst, M-A	1893 34 23			Thouars (Deux-Sevres)		A. Curtet					

Bardet des Lascombes, C.	1909 13 39								Clarisse				
	1906 1 227-34; 1909 13 39; 1891 14 11; 1892 15 66;		La Boissière-d'Ans	Cubjac (Dordogne)					G. Faure	30	Clarisse	1801	yes
Bardet, Char.	AD24 IL/365	1762	(Dordogne)	Vierzon (Cher)									
Baron, M-F	1907 9 146-7; 1892 25 47		Cher							28	Augustine	1793	x no
	1905 1 92-6; 1891 8 75; 1891 10 30;												
Barthelemy, J. M	Gaillemin, p. 443	1768	Nancy (Meurthe-et-Moselle)	Meuse					Adrien Germain	24	Clarisse	1794	x
Bassulina, C-J	1910 4 16		Italy	Italy					F Cailloux	35	Augustine	1805	no
	1907 9 183-5; 1892 25 5-8	1757	Paris	Paris					P. Flessset	53	Franciscan	1801	
Beaufanchet, A-M	1906 1 334-8; 1892 28 18		Marsat (Puy de Dôme)						E Boucherat		Fontevrault	1793	
Beaumont, M-L	1910 14 088		Bapume	Bapaume (Pas de Calais)						40	Augustine	1801	
	1909 12 42 1907 7 80-2; 1892 30 12;		Nancy	Nancy							Carmelite	1795	
Beguinot, F	1892 21 60		Nancy	Nancy					N. Remece		Chanoinesse	1793	
Belin, A	1905 1 574-77; 1891 9 88			Bligny sur Ouche (Cotes-d-Or)					Ch. Ragon		Ursuline	1794	
Bellon, M	1907 9 66-8 1895 2 56-8; 1891 12 88, 13 53; 1892 15		Isère	Alixan (Drôme)					Ant. Severin		Ursuline	1795	yes
Berg, M de	11, 22 47		Germany	Grinlinghaus en, Germany					Cl. Lardent				after

Berlin de Melly, A	1898 6 047	1726	Auxerre (Yonne)	Auxerre (Yonne)	vicaire	C-J Remy	66	Congreg.	1793	no
Bernoin, Marg.	1904 5 060			Bourges (Cher)	prêtre	L-J Vautier		Annonciade	1794	x yes
Berthelot de Marsau	1920 03 001, 1893 37 70		Charolles/Saône-et-Loire	Saône-et-Loire		P Gaignault		Congreg.	after	
Berthier, Claud.	1910 14 049, AN D/XIX/7		Auxonne (Yonne)	Bourgoin-Jallieu (Isère)	serrurier		31	Ursuline	1793	yes
Besse, I	1908 10 76-9			Chambrey (Savoie) dio		P Deschamps	28	Augustine		yes
Beu de Chaubusson	1905 1 150-5		Saumur (Maine-et-Loire)	Maine-et-Loire		J-J Bricout		Ursuline	1793	x yes
Beun, Jeanne	1907 7 161-7		Deux-Sevres	Fors (Deux Sevres)	prêtre			Ursuline		
Beuquet, J-Marg.	1903 7 046 1892 30 012		Reims (Marne)	Jura	instructor	Martin	22	Congreg	want	
Beutignie	1909 2 210; 1910 3 90-2; 1894 52 81		Marseille (Bouches-du-Rhône)	Marseille (Bouches-du-Rhône)				Franciscan	1802	x yes
Blaise, F	1898 6 184		Pont-à-Mousson (Meurthe-et-Moselle)			L. Adoul		Clarisse		
Blanc, Lou.	1905 1 32-9; 1891 8 22, 10 25	1769	Rodez (Aveyron)	Rodez (Aveyron)			23	Congre.	1799	x yes
Bias, J-Marg.	1908 10 56-8		Le Quesnoy (Nord)	Chambrai (Nord)			40	Augustine	1795	
Blondeaux, Th.	1910 14 066			Cambrai (Nord)	potier	Ant. Bentignie		Franciscan	1794	yes
Bobin, M	Murphy, 2005. p.138	1765	Loudun (Vienne)		aubergiste	Louis Brou	27	Congre.	1794	
Bock, M de.	1905 1 147-8		Seine-et-Oise	Poissy (Seine-et-Oise)	superior of Dominicans	Jac. Vinay	26	Dominicaine	1793	yes

	1904 4 87-9; 1907 7 103-8; 1892 21 75, 1892 15 75		Sarlat (Dordogne)	Sarlat (Dordogne)		Ch. Grandjean		Clarisse				yes
Boire, M	1892 15 75		Niort (Deux- Sevès)		Voiturier Postillon							
Boisnard, M- Rad.	Murphy, 2010. p. 202	1764- 1859		Paris	prêtre	L Montier	28	Carmelite Ursuline		1793		yes
Boillenot, A	1907 7 126-8 1907 7 3-4; 1908 11 206-7; 1892 22 21; 1893 35 6		St. Flour (Cantal)	Pierrefort (Cantal)	notaire	P Tainturier				Congre.	1793	x yes
Bonafos, Rose	1893 35 6											
Bonhomme, M-P	1905 1 562-8; 1891 8 51-2, 9 89		Saint-Yrieix-la- Perche (Haute- Vienne)	Dordogne	gentilhomme	Ant. Teisset	22	Clarisse		1793	x	yes
Boniface, Lou.	1908 10 175-7		Bapaume (Pas- de-Calais)	Metz (Moselle)		F Brouhaud L. Le Febvre		Franciscan		1794		
Borde, A de	1893 33 3 1908 11 264; 1893 35 14, AN D/XIX/7			Dordogne								
Borniche, H	AN D/XIX/7		Chateau Thierry (Aisne)	Chateau Thierry (Aisne)			29	Congre.		1796		
Boscade- Vigouroux	1910 14 001		Puy-de-Dôme	Puy-de-Dôme		L-Ant Fauvet		Ursuline				
Boulard, M- Cat.	1907 8 72-4	1767	Orléans (Loiret)	Orléans (Loiret)		J Lautron	25	Fontevrault		1794		yes
Bourceau, Cat.	Murphy, 2010. p. 228	1763- 1838	Poitiers (Vienne)	Poitiers (Vienne)	vigneron	F Liger	29	Ursuline				
Bourgeois, A	1907 8 46-7; 1892 22 38			Limoges (Haute- Vienne)		P Sabourin		Augustine				no
Bourgeuil, Cune.	Gaillemin, p. 447	1761	Verdun (Meuse)	Verdun (Meuse)	prêtre, contrôleur des mètres or et argent	Ch. Fayole	31					
Bouron, Char.	1904 5 136-40; 1891 8 1, 10 26; AN D/XIX/7		Poitiers (Deux Sevès)	Deux Sevès		Ant. Sibille		Ursuline		1797	x	yes

Bourron, M-R-F	1904 3 107; 1891 12 11; AN/D/XIX/7		Fontenay-le-Comte (Vendée)	prêtre, secretary of prefecture	M. Thalani (Thalamy)		Ursuline	1793		
Boursier,	1892 19 2				J-A Cavoileau					
Bousse, M	1897 3 091; 1909 2 80-1		Lyon (Rhône)	prêtre		24	Visitandine	1794		yes
Boutet, Cat.	1914 13 203	1764	Bourges (Cher)	prêtre	Colin	28	Benedictine	1793		no
Bouvier, M	1910 14 074		Valence (Drôme)		Ch Bisson		Ursuline			
Boy, M-Mad.	1911 2 044		Orléans (Loiret)	prêtre	J-H Dauphin		Congre.	1794		
	1909 12 070; 1893 42 28, 45									
Brachet, M	87	1771	Buis (Drôme)	propriétaire	Ch. Menier		Ursuline	1794	x	yes
			Thilouze (Indre-et-Loire)	notaire	Baudille Julien				x	
Brault, J	1909 13 89; 1894 51 54	1752		notaire						
	1907 6 4-6; 1891 13 18; 1892 20 85, 86									
Brazey, Marg.	1892 20 85, 86		Allier	notaire	P Bassereau	21	Benedictine	1793		yes
Brehon,	1892 23 32				E Duteil					
			AD18 "Papiers de Maurice Ribault de Laugardière"							
Bret, Ursule	311/5					28	Fontevrault	1794		
Breuhet, Gab.	1909 13 48		Indre	Vicaire con.						
Brieffer, M-Mad.	1902 6 293		Ribecourt (Nord)		J Judee		Franciscan			
			Bas Rhin		A Coupeuz		Ursuline			

	1908 11 301-4; 1893 31 71, 32 46; AD18 "Papiers de Maurice Ribault de Laugardière"			Chateauroux (Cher)	prêtre			23 Visitandine	1794	yes
Brière, M-A	311/5	1769		Auhois-en- Perthois (Meuse)	aubergiste	J-B Couturier	42 Congre.		1795	
Briolat, M	Gaillemín, p. 449		Toul (Meurthe- et-Moselle)	Meaux (Seine- et-Marne) Azay-le- Rideau (Maine-et- Loire)	huissier	N. Champion		Bernardine		yes
Brion, J- Char-S	1909 12 112									
	1908 11 203; 1893 36 4; AN D/XIX/7		1756 Maine-et-Loire			Ant. Ridad	36 Fontevrault		1794	
Brosson, Fel. D/XIX/7	1907 9 95-7; 1892 26 48; AN D/XIX/7			Soissons (Aisne)		F. Roy	22 Fontevrault		1794	
Brucelle, M- Ade-Con.	AN D/XIX/7		Reims (Marne)	Hautivillers (Oise)	maître décode	Luc. Labarre	37 Bernardine		1797	yes
Caboche, M- Marg.	1907 7 159-60; 1892 22 11									
Caffin, Mad- Rad	1909 03 051, AN D/XIX/7		Thouars (Deux- Sevres)	Thouars (Deux-Sevres)		J-T Dodé	23 Benedictine		1794	yes
	1909 2 260; 1920 4; 1892 26 77; 1893 33 32, 43 68; Caro. 1894 53 31			Armentières (Nord)		N. Sausier Labaudrie	Franciscan		1802	x yes
Calmon, Reine	1908 11 231, 1893 35 54		Paris	Paris		P-J Dufour	Hospitalière			
	1908 11 342; 1893 32 36, 34					Ant-Ch Garnier				
Capon, Ame. 83			Valenciennes (Nord)	Valenciennes (Nord)			Augustine		1797	yes



	1907 6 229-234; 1891 7 44; 1892 21 3; 1907 7 11-18; 1899 10 1-7		Lille (Nord)	Lille (Nord)			Druon Massele		Hospitaière					
Carnin, Cat. de			Nord	Arras (Pas-de-Calais)	prêtre, pont et chaussées				Bernardine				yes	
Caudron, Hy.	1902 6 61			Boismont (Meurthe-et-Moselle)	charpentier		P. N. Boniface		Franciscan		1795	x	yes	
Causier, Cat.	1908 11 84; 1893 38 36			Le Puy-en-Velay (Haute-Loire)	capitaine des chasseurs		N. Bourguignon					want	x	yes
Chabanassi, Mari.	1906 1 182-5; 1920 3, 1894 59 8			Dun-le-Roi (Cher)			M. Moron		43 Annonciade		1794			
Chabenat, J de	AD18 "Papiers de Maurice Ribault de Laugardière" 311/5			Saint-Médard-d'Excideuil (Dordogne)			Silvain Hottereau-Desbruges l'aine		30 Clarisse				yes	
Chabrol, Fel.	1905 1 569-73, 1891 9 89, 11 41	1768		Cusset (Allier)	prêtre				40 Benedictine		1794			
Chambonnière, Claud.	1907 6 7-11		Allier	Chateau Thierry (Aisne)	merchant		J-Pas. Choisy		36 Congre.		1800			
Chambron, M-L	1910 14 075, DSC05663			Cote d'Or	prêtre		Phil. Cactret		Ursuline		1794			
Champpeaux, P-S-J	1908 10 31-2		Cotes d'Or	Chatillion-sur-seine			JB Rebourceau							
Champion, Cat.	Gaillemin, p. 451			Vignot (Meuse)			P-N		29 Congre.		1794			
Chatriot, M-F	1907 9 33-5, 1892 27 46		Seine-et-Marne	Moulins (Allier)			Champion		Dominicaine		1794		yes	

	AD18 "Papiers de Maurice Ribault de Chaulois, M-Laugardière" Rad.	1770-1854	Poitiers (Vienne)	Poitiers (Vienne)	agriculteur, géomètre	N-M Jerome	22		1796		
	1907 8 11-13; 1892 22 48, AN D/XIX/16		Clermont-Ferrand (Puy-de-Dôme)	Moullins (Allier)	propriétaire, officier, criminel tribunal	J Boistard Gab.		Clarisse	1795		
	Chauvigny, Marg.	1910 15 1	Allier	Allier	chanoine	Mustier		Benedictine	1794		
	Chevallereau de Boistragon, L	Murphy, 2010. p.230	1735-1813	Poitiers (Vienne)		E Chaudagne		57 Ursuline	1795		
	Chevret, M-H-A	1905 1 185	Seine-et-Marne	St. Malo (Ile-et-Vilaine)		L-Ch Coudray?	27	Benedictine			
	Chrétien, N	1908 11 291; 1893 34 46	Dijon (Côte-d'Or)	Dijon (Cote-d'Or)		F Jourdan		Augustine	1795		
	Christophe, A-M	1907 6 145, 1893 34 46	Nancy (Meurthe-et-Moselle)	Meurthe-et-Moselle	cultivateur			Annonciade	1797		yes
	Clemenceau, M-B	Murphy, 2010. p. 84	Poitiers (Vienne)	Poitiers (Vienne)	boucher	J. Bongard	44	Congre.	1793		
	Coffin, M-R	1894 53 13; DSC03175	Thouars (Deux-Sevres)	Thouars (Deux-Sevres)		Clau. Gibault		Benedictine	1794		
	Coinchelein, M-A	1909 2 192; 1899 9 70; 1893 39 3	Meurthe-et-Moselle	Guerville (Yvelines)	moine	Saussier La Baudrie	27	Annonciade	1794		yes
	Conjour, M-Ade.	Murphy, 2010. p. 146	1761-1836	Poitiers (Vienne)		F Mahu	31	Visitandine			
	Corneau, J	0713 01 204	1740	Poitiers (Vienne)	marchand	J-B Fleury	52	Carmelite	1793		
	Corroy, Gen	1910 3 106; 1894 50 25, 52		Poitiers (Vienne)		J de Berne	25	Franiscan		wants to marry	

Coupy, Ant-C	1904 5 27-8; 1907 7 70-5		Limoux (Aude)		prêtre			Congre.	1794		yes
Courtaud, M-A	1905 3 34			Clermont-Ferrand (Puy-de-Dôme)		F-Rou. de Villalier		Benedictine	1794		
Courtois, Mad-Jos.	1904 3 132-55; 1891 3 36		Cavaillon (Vaucluse)	Cavaillon (Vaucluse)		A. Noyer		Benedictine		x	
Cousseau du Vivier, T-Aug.	Murphy, 2010. p. 148	1760-1810	Poitiers (Vienne)	Neuville				32 Visitandine	1797		
Couturier, M	Murphy, 2010. p. 181	1723-1813	Fontenay-le-Comte (Vendée)	Poitiers (Vienne)		Mat. Carcaillon		69 Franciscan	concupine		
Cuvillier, Bar.	1892 19 2; 1904 5 6-10	1763		Pas-de-Calais	prêtre			29 Benedictine	1794		yes
Cuzin, M	1905 3 16-8; 1892 15 3, 48		Charolles (Saône-et-Loire)	Charolles (Saône-et-Loire)	marchand	Ben-J Boursiez		28 Clarisse	1794	x	yes
Dalphonse, M-A	1909 12 4	1760		Nièvre	prêtre	Didier		32 Benedictine	1793		
Danon, A-Jus.	1910 5 010; 1894 59 68; AN D/XIX/7		Chateau-Thierry (Aisne)	Azy-sur-Marne (Aisne)		P Delapierre		32 Congre.	1801		
Darvin, M-R Bar.	1908 11 200; 1893 36 4; AN D/XIX/7		Compiègne (Oise)	Compiègne (Oise)		A. Copinet		51 Benedictine	terror		
Daubert, Marg-Mad.	1905 1 25-7	1768	Aisne	Aisne	maître tailleur	Séb. Margader		24 Fontevrault	1796	x	yes
Dauphin, Marg-Bar.	1904 5 123-6		Val-de-Marne			P-J-M Sebot		25 Benedictine	1801		
David, Marg-Cl.	1908 10 195-7; 1893 34 3		Joinville (Haute-Marne)	Haute-Marne		H Monseur		27 Visitandine			
Davion, Cel.	1906 1 83-5; 1891 14 10		Nord	Nord		JL Le Mineur		Franciscan	after concordat		
Davranché, T-E-C	1905 1 516-21; 1891 5 35, 8 42-3, 9 10	1769	Seine-Maritime	Seine-Maritime		L. Durchon		23 Bernardine	1794	x	yes

De Biseau, Aug.	1902 4 113		Mons, Belgium	Belgium		Vaillant	19 Congre.	wants to marry	x	
Deborde, A	1908 10 144-6; AD24 1L/385	1769	Nontron (Dordogne)	Nontron (Dordogne)			23 Clarisse			yes
Debrun, Pau.	1907 9 180-2, 1892 25 4		Aude	Castelnaudary (Aude)			Clarisse		x	yes
Defooz, J	1910 4 27	1761	Maastricht, Holland	Ourthe, Belgium	negociant	Clausade	35 Franciscan	1800		
Degandt, A-Cat.	1909 2 101		Belgium	Escaut, Belgium		Jac-Jos. Thyri	Bernardine	wants to marry		
Degant, I	1909 2 47-50		Belgium	Belgium		Jac-Jos. Reytsens	Bernardine			
Delalande, M-J	AD18 "Papiers de Maurice Ribault de Laugardière" 311/4			Cher	prêtre	AJ Hoornaert		1794		
Delanoue, M	1897 1 35		Saumur (Maine-et-Loire)	Saumur (Maine-et-Loire)	prêtre	T Pion	Ursuline	1795		
Delanoue, Ren.	1901 12 59; 1898 3 59-61	1748	Saumur (Maine-et-Loire)	Varennes-sous-Montsoreau (Maine-et-Loire)	prêtre vicaire, secretaire de la municipalité		44 Ursuline	1793		
Delhalle, Rose	1909 2 25		Ourthe, Belgium	Ourthe		JL Merlet	Bernardine	wants to marry	x	
Delhuto, M-A	1908 11 90			La Chatre (indre)	receveur des domaines		Fontevrault	1794		yes
Demende, M-V	1907 9 63-5; AN D/XIX/7	1751	Belgium	Sourdeval (Manche)	cultivateur	Phil. Lecamus	41 Benedictine	1794		
Demoré, Clau.	1909 13 96	1754	Semur-en-Auxois (Côte-d'Or)	Val-Suzon (Côte-d'Or)	propriétaire, maire	M Lucien	37 Ursuline		x	
Des Guers, Adélaïde	1905 3 27-8		Grenoble (Isère)	Grenoble (Isère)		Ber. Gautier	Visitandine	1797		yes

	1908 11 174; 1893 36 61; Gaillemín, p.												
Desaux, Bar.	461	1753	Reims (Marne)	Haute-Marne		E-J Dervieu	39	Clarisse					
Descourte- Louyal, Mar.	1909 13 54		Limoges (Haute-Vienne)	Limoges (Haute- Vienne)	prêtre	E Guérin		Congre.		1794		yes	
Desmandrill e, M-C	1894 52 30			Wavrin (Nord)		Ben. Lesme							
Desmoutiers, M	Murphy, 2010. p. 206		Poitiers (Vienne)	Poitiers (Vienne)	jardinier	N Trecat	68	Carmelite		1793			
Despaze, J-C	1908 11 60; 1893 38 79		Malmédy, Belgium	Ourthe, Belgium		Jac. Riguet	31	Augustine		1796			
Deverneuil, E-H-Char.	1904 5 96-8; 1892 18 59	1766	Marne	Paris		L. Willmet	26	Augustine			x		
Domé, Eug.	1907 8 14-6, 1892 23 35		Douai (Nord)	Valenciennes (Nord)				Benedictine				yes	
Du Brémont, Clot.	1902 6 254-6		Haute-Loire	Allier		Guis. Query	21	Benedictine	want		x		
Du Buisson, M-Cat	1904 4 47-50		Aisne	Aisne, d'Origny St.Benoite	ouvrier en bastes		41	Benedictine		1799		no	
Dubois, Hen.	1909 13 124; 1894 49 86; AN/D/XIX/16		Nord	Lille (Nord)	marchande	Pierre Mallart	36	Bernardine		1795			
Duchateau, Fel.	1909 2 281; 1919 2		Le Quesnoy (Nord)	Cambrai (Nord)		L Lallon		Augustine			x		
Duchateau, M	1910 3 123; 1906 1 305-9; 1892 25 52		Seine-et-Marne		moine, épicier	Marchal	27	Benedictine		1804			
Duchet, Agn.	1908 10 162			Bourges (Cher)		J-M Ribiche		Fontevrault		1793	x	yes	
Duchet, Mon.	1905 1 218- 225		Cher	St. Amand (Cher)	commissaire du gov't	F Aujouanet		Congre.		1792		yes	
Duclermortie r, Cat.	1909 12 8; 1894 48 65		Lille (Nord)	Lille (Nord)	militaire	J-B Thevenard- Guérin		Clarisse		1799		yes	

Ducoudray, M	1907 8 19-20 1891 14 84; 1892 15 47			Lussac-les-Eglises (Haute-Vienne)		Ant. Devaux		Franciscan	1796		
Duflot, --				Paris	prêtre, prof d'ecole publique	J. Jonon					
Duflot, Cat-J	1910 14 67			Pontoise (Seine-et-Marne)				Hospitalière	1794		
Duflot, M-T	1903 3 2-5			Bapaume (Nord)		J Boniface-Warnet.		Congre.	1795		
Dufour, Pie.	1909 12 152			Pas-de-Calais	prêtre	Duron-Brulant		Benedictine	1794		
Dugallois, M	1909 12 155, 1893 47 26			Angoulême (Charente)	prêtre vicaire, secretaire de municipalité	Ch. Guillot					
Dumas, Ant.	1893 32 2; 1904 4 58-9; 1892 17 62			Agen (Lot-et-Garonne)	prêtre	Séb. Dieudonné		28 Annonciade	1794	x	yes
Dumas, Ant. 2.	1908 10 4-6			Autun (Saône-et-Loire)	journalier	Gra-Fel. Redon des Fosses		20 Augustine	1799	x	yes
Dumenil, Gab.	1907 8 5-7; 1892 39 12	1746		Paraclet (Aube)		L Buisson		46 Benedictine			
Dupeyroux, M-F				Riom (Puy-de-Dôme)	propriétaire	J-Fr-X Gand		Hospitalière	1798		
Dupire, M	1894 48 26; 1909 12 16-19			Valenciennes (Nord)		L Laurent		Bernardine			
Dupoitier, Clau.	1908 11 33; 1893 40 5				prêtre	P-A Gustin		Franciscan			
Duquesnel, pr	1893 38 19			Beauvais	prêtre	S. Dody					
Duniez, F	1909 2 5; 1910 3 196-7, 4 1-2; 1894 56 8			Arras (Pas-de-Calais)	prêtre	married religieuse				1793	yes

Durif, A	ADD63 U TRA/29; U TRA/69/1265; Marsden, 2011	d. 1797		Puy-de-Dôme		J-B Prouvert							
Duval de Villemont, A	1910 15 34			Fauville (Eure)		E Chabozi		Congre.					
Duval, M- Marg.	1908 10 250-2; AN D/XIX/7			Rouen (Seine- Maritime)	moine			38 Benedictine	Terror				
Elion, Lou.	Murpy, 2010. p.121	1755- 1812		Poitiers (Yenne)		C. Vestu- Nevy		37 Congre.	concubine				
Elius, Joachim	1909 10 79; 1893 45 64		Valenciennes (Nord)	Valenciennes (Nord)		Desforges							
Emmerich, M-F	1910 3 050			Aix-la- Chapelle	frère lai	J. Feron		Carmelite	wants to marry				
Engelborgks, M-Cat.	1901 11 66- 66bis		Brabant, Belgium	Tongerren, Belgium	militaire	Matt. Lejeune		25 Franciscan		1797		yes	
Epigat, Marie	1910 14 24		Tarn	Toulouse (Haute- Garonne)		F Demaillet		Bernardine		1796			
Ernst, M	1907 7 150-1		Haute-Rhin	Battengheim (Haute-Rhin)		Fr. Cathala		Dominicaine		1799			
Estard, Bon.	1904 5 21-3		Paris	Paris	moine	J. Ackermann		27 Bernardine		1794		yes	
Estienvrot, Elis.	1910 14 25, AN D/XIX/7		Angers (Maine- et-Loire)	Montsoreau (Maine-et- Loire)		N Laroze		22 Fontevrault		1803			
Etiemme, M	1908 10 163-5; 1893 33 37		Montelimar (Drôme)	Chabeuil (Drôme)	cultivateur	J Fomriaux				1796		yes	
Fabre, Francoise	1905 1 523-9			Var		J Eymord		Ursuline		1793			
Fantin, Jeanne	1909 13 26			Embrun (Haute-Alpes)		Jos. Piston ainé		Augustine					
Farez, S	1908 11 226		Valenciennes (Nord)	Valenciennes (Nord)		Ph. Cavailhon		28 Bernardine		1796		yes	

Fariaux, Reine de	1899 10 37 1919 2 1; 1891 11 32-3; 1892 15 55	1770		Laon (Aisne)	prêtre, Chef du bureau des Ponts et Chaussées	Ant. Place	22	Bernardine	1794		
Faroux, T			Valenciennes (Nord)	Valenciennes (Nord)		N Courteau		Augustine			
Faureau, Suz.	AD18 "Papiers de Maurice Ribault de Laugardière" 31J/4				Cher	prêtre			1793		
Fayen, Ju.	1907 8 81-3; 1892 23 16		Mont Blanc (Haute-Savoie)	Grenoble (Isère)		F Pealoux Phil. Guillemont		19	Bernardine	1796	yes
Feechez, Elis.	1908 10 140	1766	Liège, Belgium	Liège, Belguim				26	Augustine	1800	
Fleury, Em. 305	1907 6 7-11; 1905 1 295- 305	1768	La Rochelle (Charente- Maritime)	La Rochelle (Charente- Maritime)		J-G Beauvois		24	Hospitalière	1797	x yes
Fleury, M-A- R	1907 6 56-60		Oise	Collinances (Oise)	aubergiste	H-Aug. Parenteau		25	Fontevrault	1799	
Fleury, M- Jos. de	1904 5 155-6, Gaillemín, p. 468	1768	Vosges	Meuse	boulangier	L. Aubrey		23	Congre.	before Concordat	yes
Fontaine, M- Cat.	1904 5 76-78, 1892 18th 66, Gaillemín, p. 469	1751	Bar-le-Duc (Meuse)	Metz (Moselle)	officier	N Aubert		41	Congre.	1799	
Fontanier, P	Cage, 2011. p. 127			Cantal		P Rousseau					
Fortin, Suz.	1907 9 148-50; 1892 25 43		Côtes-d'Or	Seurre (Côte- d'Or)	manouvrier	Cla. Leupard		36	Clarisse	1795	x yes
Foudary, M	1904 4 8			Champaix (Puy-de- Dôme)		J Riset			Visitandine	1792	



Fougère, M-F	AD18 "Papiers Laugardière" J/828					Indre	prêtre	Ph. Collanges	46	Fontevrault	1793		
Frison, F	1910 14 26					Moselle	prêtre	M. Aigrefeuille		Ursuline			no
Froter la Messelière, M-Adé.	1909 13 4; Murphy, 2011. p. 68	1767-1803	Poitiers (Vienne)	Poitiers (Vienne)	avoue au tribunal	P Collignon		25	Benedictine		1794		Yes
Froter la Messelière, M-Elis.	Murphy, 2011. p.233	1763	Poitiers (Vienne)	Poitiers (Vienne)	comité de surveillance	Aug. Pallu		29	Ursuline		1793		yes
Fumey, Clau.	1904 3 80; 1891 12 42		Salins-les-Bains	Jura	maître de forge	Nachet			Clarisse		1794	x	yes
Funel, M	1904 5 17-18; 1892 19 31			Mougins (Alps-Martime)		Ch-Jos. Pery			Clarisse				
Gabez, M-Cel.	1908 10 247-9; 1893 32 81		Le Quesnoy (Nord)	Le Quesnoy (Nord)		Jos. Euzieres			Augustine		1795		yes
Gagel, A-Bar.	1899 9 130			Meurthe-et-Moselle					Congr.		1792		
Gardemeux, F	Murphy, 2011. p. 211	1748-1821	Poitiers (Vienne)	Montmorillon (Vienne)	Charpentier			44	Carmelite		1798		
Gauma, J	1908 10 168-9	1745	Bourges (Cher)	Bourges	prêtre	F Bernard		47	Annonciade		1794		
Gauma, M	1908 10 166-7	1749	Bourges (Cher)		prêtre	V de la Mellere		43	Annonciade		1794		
Gautier, Ren.	1908 11 216		Angers (Maine-et-Loire)	Montreuil-Bellay (Maine-et-Loire)		F Paulier		29	Fontevrault		1799		
Gerard, M-A	Gaillemin, p. 472	1744	Sorey (Meuse)	Vagney (Vosges)				48	Clarisse				
Germain, Oubine	1910 4 35	1766	Haute-Vienne	St. Yrieix (Haute-Vienne)		Clau. Jeancolas		26	Clarisse		1805	x	yes
Gillet, F	1907 08 004			Puy-de-Dôme	prêtre				Franciscan		1793		

Giraud, Elis.	1907 9 40-2; 1892 27 41		Charolles (Saône-et-Loire)	Bordeaux		J Richard		Ursuline	1793		yes
Giroux, Ant.	1904 5 68-9		Charolles (Saône-et-Loire)	Charolles (Saône-et-Loire)		N. Largeteau	24	Visitandine	1799		
Gletry, Rad.	Murphy, 2011. p. 294	1766- 1840	Poitiers (Vienne)	Poitiers (Vienne)	propriétaire	Ferdinand Dupont	26		1817		
Goubet, Guis,-J	1909 12 134		Arras (Pas-de- Calais)	Bapaume (Pas- de-Calais)	comis octroi	P Boisson	29	Chanoinesse	1794		yes
Goubet, T	1904 4 51-2		Cambrai (Nord)	Cambrai (Nord)	fr lai capucin	J-B Boniface	31		1794		yes
Goupil, F	Jacob, 1960. p. 183	1756- 1794	Paris	Paris	journaliste	Alex. Carez	36	Franciscan	1792		
Goux, --	Dommanget, p.158		Oise	Oise	curé	Jac-Rene Hébert	22				
Graille, M	1910 5 19		Panniers (Ariège)	Vaucluse	ancien officer	L Sallentin		Ursuline	1806		
Gravel, M-A	Gaillemin, p. 476	1749				Fr. Fevrier	44				
Guary,---	1893 34 1			Haute-Vienne		J Migot					
Guery, F	Gaillemin, p. 479	1755	Ligny (Nord)	Ligny (Nord)	ancien chirurgien	Neuville	37	Annonciade	1794		
Guilbert, M- A	1905 1 205-10; 1891 14 78	1736		Geneviève (Seine- Maritime)	moine	Jos. Laumont	56	Hospitalière	1794		yes
Guillé, M- Cat.	1910 15 75			Maine-et- Loire	prêtre	N Quesnel	18		1793		
Guillon, Vict. de	Murphy, 2011. p. 120	1768- 1839	Poitiers (Vienne)	Poitiers (Vienne)	marchande	Fr. Mini	24	Congre.	1800		Yes
Guiol, M-T	1907 9 211-13; 1892 23 80		Toulon (Var)	Toulon (Var)	moine	J-Mat. Leclard		Visitandine	1794		
Guiot de Ponteil, M	1897 1 033		Paris	Corbeil (Seine- et-Oise)		Phil. Inortola		Benedictine			
Haag, M- Mad.	1896 2 117; 1896 2 117-9							Franciscan	wants to marty		

Hangoubart, M-Ame.	Gaillemín, p. 481	1764	Laon (Aisne)				28	Hospitallière			
Henry, A-E	1919 1 1		Belgium	Leuven, Belgium		Ch. Denis		Bernardine	1801		
Hernant, J-F	1910 14 2		Pas-de-Calais	Pas-de-Calais	moine, prêtre	J-F Meulemans		Franciscan	1793		
Hernault de Montiron, C.	1904 5 128; 1904 5 128-131; 1907 6 241; 1892 18 71			Maine-et-Loire	moine, prêtre	P Thery		Franciscan	1794		
Hérolde, M-A	1904 3 172; 1891 13 13, 1904 3 172-3; AN D/XIX/16; 0105 55 437	1760	Meuse	Meuse		Brun	32	Chanoinesse	1794		
Hertier, --	1908 11 394			Clermont-Ferrand (Puy-de-Dôme)		Ant Renoy					
Hibert, Vict.	1910 15 74; 1916 19 71			Metz (Moselle)	prêtre	religieuse		Clarisse	1794		
Hirly de la Gaste, M-A	1898 6 16		Angers (Maine-et-Loire)	Angers (Maine-et-Loire)	moine prêtre	J Muller		Bernardine	1794		
Humbert, Marie	1909 12 119; 1891 14 30; 1893 43 65. Gaillemín, p. 486	1743	Meuse	Ancerville (Meuse)	cultivateur	N Marchal	49	Ursuline	1794		
Hutinet, M-B	1908 11 51; 1893 39 50; AN D/XIX/16		Meurthe	Meurthe		J-B Gerardin.	28	Annonciade	1797		yes
Jacques, M-C	1907 7 176-7	1762	Vervins (Aisne)	Vervins (Aisne)		Jos. Froment	30	Franciscan			

	1905 1 501-7; 1891 5 77; AN D/XIX/7; Gaillemín, p. 488		1751 Paris		Paris	moine	Phil. Soumagne	41	Hospitaière	1799		yes
Jacquinet, R			Lunéville (Meurthe-et- Moselle)		St. Mihiel (Meuse)	griffier	N-C Bocquillon	38	Congre.	1793		
Jacquot, M- Bar.	488	1754			Niort (Deux- Sèvres)	sieur	J-B Sauce	49	Ursuline	1795		
Jally, T	1904 4 081	1743	Soissons (Aisne)		Soissons (Aisne)	prêtre	P-Ben. Bougouin		Fontevrault	1798		
Joly, M-L-G	1910 15 47											
	1906 6 242-52; 1907 6 242-52; 1891 10 85; 1892 21 10; 1894 62 64		Langeac (Haute-Loire)		Langeac (Haute-Loire)		P Couillard		Dominicaine	1801	x	yes
Jouve, Rosalie												
Juski, Aim- Ang.	1910 14 40; 1912 4 34				Andelot (Haute- Marne)	prêtre				1794		
Juski, Jeanne	1901 11 38-40	1759	Metz (Moselle)		Metz (Moselle)	moine	Clau. Rollin	33	Clarisse	1794	x	no
Kenor, M-F	1907 7 57	1753			Liège, Belgium Thionville (Moselle)		C. Collignon	39	Bernardine	1794		
Koll, Mad.	1899 9 101		Moselle				J-F Crahay	42	Franciscan			
L'Allier, Marg.	Querneu- Lamerie, p. 72	d.1795	Maine-et-Loire		Maine-et- Loire	prêtre	Ch. Cuvilier	24	Hospitaière	1794		
LaBarre, J-F de	1907 9 49-52; 1893 34 60		Paris		Paris?		F Besnard	55	Congre.	1796		yes
	1892 16 46; 1898 6 164-6; AN D/XIX/7	1754	Besançon (Doubs)		Besançon (Doubs)			38	Clarisse	1799		yes
Lacour,--	AN D/XIX/7											
Lacoutre, J	Murphy, 2011. p. 139		Confolens (Charente)			soldat	Henriot	27	clarisse	1793	x	yes
Lacroix, Cat.	Gaillemín, p. 490	1747	Besançon (Doubs)			prêtre	J Cueille	45	Bernardine	1794		

Lagrance, H-F	1908 11 268		Saône-et-Loire	Charolles (Saône-et-Loire)	propriétaire	Cl-Ph. Tabey	Visitandine	1796		
Laisne, M-A	1909 13 92		Cher	Valençay (Indre)		Clau. Baudot	24 Fontevrault	1793		yes
Lallart, Ang	1908 11 229			Pas-de-Calais		Cle-Fs Ravenel			1801	
Lantoine, M-J-S	1904 3 27-9			St. Quentin (Aisne)		G Pelletier	Augustine		1794	
Laude, B-J	1907 6 205-8		Cambrai (Nord)	Cambrai (Nord)		J Reguet	27 Augustine			
Laurens de la Besge, M-Elis.	Murphy, 2011. p. 270	1759-1806	Poitiers (Vienne)	Montmorillon (Vienne)	cultivateur	L. Hay	33 Hospitalière		1794	
Laurent, F	1905 1 211-13; 1891 14 79	1757	St. Denis (Seine)	Versailles (Seine-et-Marne)	garde-chasse	Melchior Debrou	35 Visitandine		1796	
Lavergne du Montceau, Rosa.	Murphy, 2011. p. 83	1762-1814	Poitiers (Vienne)	Angles (Vienne)	marchande	A. Soudre	30 Benedictine		1792	yes
Lavidale, J	1908 11 162	1766	(Gironde)	Libourne	garde-maison	J Malteste	26 Ursuline		1795	yes
Le Besson, M	1911 2 17		Indre	St. Benoît (Indre)	prêtre, marchand	Gui. Arragon	28 Congre.		1798	
Le Roy du Royer	1909 2 11		St. Omer (Nord)	Boulogne-sur-Mer (Pas-de-Calais)	gentilhomme	J-E Guittard	34 Franciscan		1804	
LeBlond, M	1903 7 90-1					Ant-J Demusnier d'Avinquerque				
LeChevalier, Rose	1909 13 11			Rouen (Seine-Maritime)		F-G Aucher	20 Benedictine			x yes
Leclerc, Clem.	1904 5 132-4; 1892 18 60		Lille (Nord)	Wallers-les-Valenciennes (Nord)		L de Bray	24 Augustine		1799	x no
LeCllopée, Marg.	1907 6 117-8			Bourges (Cher)	prêtre	Jos. Diverchy	21 Benedictine		1794	

Ledieu, M	1910 14 34	1753		Sillé-le-Guillaume (Sarthe)			C. Gabard	39	Augustine	1795		
LeFaux, J	1910 15 48		Chartres (Eure-et-Loir)		journalier	Jos. Lacourture			Bernardine	1798		yes
Leglaire, M-A	Gaillemin p. 495	1767		Aube	moine	F Vaudolon	25			1793		
Lemierre, M-Bar.	1909 12 39		Marechiennes (Nord)	Lille (Nord)	moine	N-F Breton		43	Chanoinesse	1795		
Lemoine, Lou-A	1910 14 47		Angers (Maine-et-Loire)	Maine-et-Loire	Captaine	B Ysengrin	21		Benedictine	1795		yes
	1904 5 161; 1891 6 30;			Epiez-sur-Meuse (Meuse)		Lalene de Laprade		34	Dominicaine	1793	x	yes
Lemoine, M-Bar	Gaillemin, p. 496	1758	Toul (Meurthe-et-Moselle)		femmier					1793	x	yes
Lenoble, M	1908 10 201-3; 1893 34 87			Puy-de-Dôme (Caen (Calvados))	officier	F Coquart	24		Bernardine	1799	x	yes
LeRoi, Lou-Fél.	1910 15 28					Joly			Ursuline			
Leroy, M-Lou.	Cage, 2011. p. 153				prêtre				Benedictine			
	1908 10 235-9; 1892 22 24; 1893 33 46				moine, curé	Dom-L Jabre-Duplessis				1793		
Leturgez, M-A	1893 33 46			Arras	con				Congre.	1793		
Levayer, Jud.	1906 1 137-9; 1892 19 65, 25 24		Rennes (Ille-et-Vilaine)	Rennes (Ille-et-Vilaine)		H. Lechon	26		Congre.	wants to marry	x	
Libaudiere de Sandemoy, M	Murphy, 2011. p. 125	1766-1836	Poitiers (Vienne)	Montmorillon (Vienne)	tanneur		26		Congre.	1797		
Ligot, Marie-Agnes	1908 11 298, 1893 34 47			Liège, Belgium	prêtre	J Jouinet			Benedictine	1798		
Logniflet, J-Cl.	1893 37 083			Honnecourt-sur-Escaut (Nord)		N. Libois						

Lomde, Ant. Loménie, Gen.	1920 4; Murphy, 2011. p.216	1767-1843	Poitiers (Vienne)	Poitiers (Vienne)	Chasseur à cheval, marchand		25	Carmelite	1796	Yes
Loquifèz, J-CI	1908 10 41		Yonne	Yonne	prêtre, moine	And. Cretin		Fontevrault		
Loriaux, Jeanne	1908 11 322		Arras (Pas-de-Calais)	Arras (Pas-de-Calais)	worker	J. Jagot Lacoussière		Clarisse		
Lorrier, Char-Céc.	Gaillemín, p. 447	1768	Angers (Maine-et-Loire)			J-P Dubois	24	Hospitalière	1798	
Lormier de Semilly,	1902 5 19-21; 1892 26 68	1768		Paris		J Mangin	24	Bernardine	1794	yes
Louis, A-T	1907 7 144-6		Metz (Moselle)	Metz (Moselle)	prêtre régulier			46	Congre.	
Louis, M-Jos.	1896 2 50		Rochefort, Belgium	Sedan, Ardennes		N Jacquet			terror wants to marry	yes
Louis, PR reg	1898 8 58			Nancy (Nord)				Annonciade		no
Magnée, Hen.	1909 12 087, 1893 45th 66		Meurthe-et-Moselle		forestier	unnamed religieuse		Bernardine		
Maguy, Ger.	1904 3 195-97; AN D/XIX/7		Seine-Maritime	Eure	Organiste	Séb. Lebrun	22	Annonciade	1794	yes
Mainsat, Mad.	1898 6 52-4	1762	Dordogne	Bergerac (Dordogne)		Jac. Girod	30	Congre.	1796	yes
Mairet, Urs.	1907 9 99-103; 1892 26 31			Dijon (Côte-d'Or)		P. Dupuyfils		Bernardine	1795	
Malbert, M-Elé.	1907 9 53-5; 1892 27 34		Paris	Paris	negociant	J-B Gyenet		Bernardine	1793	yes
Mallet, Eup.	1908 11 9; 1893 42 13			Nord		NLeBlanc		Franciscan		
Manguiot, Luc-Rose	1897 4 152		Metz (Moselle)	Metz (Moselle)		Ed. Le Groux		Carmelite	Terror	
Marais-Bignon,--	1907 6 44-6; 1892 19 58; AN D/XIX/7		Calvados	Bayeux (Calvados)			25			

Marcou, A	1908 11 80		Tours (Indre-et-Loire)	Indre-et-Loire										
Mare, Claud. de	1894 50 61			Val-Suzon (Côtes-d'Or)		J Cavalier								
Maréchal, A	1897 1 62-3		Savoie	Savoie			25	Bernardine				x	yes	
				Azay-le-Rideau (Indre-et-Loire )										
Marion, A	1893 38 43			Besançon		F Pugen						x	yes	
Marquand, M-Cl	1904 3 11-15		Haute-Saône	Besançon (Doubs)			28	Benedictine					yes	
Marquet, Eli	1908 11 18; 1893 41 69			Échenon (Cotes d'Or)		Hya. Hutinet	29	Carmelite						
Martin de Chizai, J-Del.	1907 7 87			Issodun (Cher)		N Delettre	44	Ursuline				1794	no	
Martin, Elis-P	1908 11 279		Paris	Paris		P Baudon	26	Hospitalière				1796	no	
Massoc, Jean	1898 3 092			Lot-et-Garonne		A. Caurier		Hospitalière					terror	yes
Masson, Aug-Amé.	1901 11 084			Versailles (Seine-et-Marne)		unnamed religieuse		Annonciade						
Maudoit, FéL.	Murphy, 2011. p.191	1758-1855	Poitiers (Vienne)	Poitiers (Vienne)		Maquiny	34	Franciscan				1798	yes	
Maynée, Hen.	1909 12 87		Ourthe, Belgium	Sarre, Germany and Belgium		Ant. Deschamps		Annonciade						
				St. Vert (Haute-Loire)		P. S. Lebrun	27	Benedictine				1794	x	yes
Mazal, J	1908 11 65; AN D/XIX/7		St. Flour (Cantal)	Aurillac (Cantal)		F. Freydefont		Visitandine				1794		
Meghe, Marie	1905 1 11-13			Sourdeval (Manche)		J. Thibal								
Mende, M-Vict. de	1892 27 8			Chalons (Marne)				Benedictine						
Menessié, Etienne	1898 8 188			Pernes (Vaucluse)		unnamed religieuse	37	Ursuline					x	
Merle, Lou-Cat.	1898 6 55; 1892 26 6		Vaucluse											



Merlin, M-Cla.	1910 14 3		St Ouen (Pas-de-Calais)	Pas-de-Calais				Bernardine	1793			
Meyraud, M	1907 7 97-101			Bordeaux (Gironde)	militaire	M-Ant. Guilloto	26	Ursuline	1794	x	yes	
Miani, Irè.	1909 2 342; 1894 52 44	1768	Naples, Italy	Villefranche	capitaine	A. Duroux-Guithem	24	Clarisse	1802	x	yes	
Millet, F	AD18 "Papiers Laugardière" J/828			Chatillon (Cher)	prêtre, prof.	F Roudière, Gui.	32	Hospitalière	1794			
Millier, J	Gaillemin, p. 509	1753		Etain (Meuse)		Bidault	39	Hospitalière				
Millon, Anne	Gaillemin, p. 509	1766	Paris	Rupt (Haute-Marne)		Ancelle	26	Hospitalière	1800			
Millon, Cat.	Gaillemin, p. 509	1769	Toulouse (Haute-Garonne)	Rupt (Haute-Marne)		N Risse	23	Hospitalière	1798			
Moho, E-B-F	1901 12 050, DSC05648		Soissons (Aisne)	Ressons Le Long (Aisne)	prêtre	J Collignon Séb. Rémi	37	Hospitalière	1793		yes	
Monbine, --	1908 11 40			Paris				Carmelite	1797			
Montagne, J-J.	1892 24 034; 1907 9 191-3; AN D/XIX/7		Corrèze	Gironde		Bulaire	34	Visitandine	1795		yes	
Morel, M-T-V	1909 2 308		Beauvais (Oise)	Oise		Compayre Jac.		Benedictine	1804			
Morrisset, Suz.	Murphy, 2011. p. 277	1744-1827	Poitiers (Vienne)	Andrigny		Regnier	55	Hospitalière	1799			
Mottard, M-B	1894 62 83			Namur, Belgium		L Brissonnet			after Concordat			
Motte, M-Mic.	1909 2 137; 1910 3 148-51			Liege, Belgium	chanoine			Benedictine	wants to marry	x		
Mouchy, M-L de	1907 6 221-4; 1892 20 78		Somme	Montdidier (Somme)		JF Rohart		Ursuline	1797		no	
Moussu, M-R.	1909 12 29		Anjou	Marolles (Sarthe)		P Maillard		Ursuline	1796			
Nautonier de Castelfranc, F	1905 1 578-81; 1891 9 73		Indre-et-Loire	Tours (Indre-et-Loire)		F Jouanneau						

Navrac, M	Querneu-Lemerie, p.119	1762	Maine-et-Loire	Maine-et-Loire	prêtre	G Viro	30				
Negrier de la Dauge, A	Murphy, 2011. p. 28	1763-1835	Poitiers (Vienne)	Poitiers (Vienne)	cultivateur	J-Leo. Chateau	29	Benedictine			
Nelissen, M-B	1910 14 64; 1894 57 33	1774		Moselle		P Bugeas Lam. Wynand	18	Annonciade	1801		
Nerac, M	AD49 2L/133			Maine-et-Loire							
Neuvil, Rose-V	1908 11 92; 1893 38 6, AN D/XIX/7	1767	Aisne	Villers-Hélon (Aisne)			25	Benedictine	terror		
Nevezé, Claud.	1908 10 83-5; 1892 30 72	1770		Riom (Puy-de-Dôme)			22	Congre.	1799		
Neyroud, Jul.	1908 11 30; 1893 40 90			Grenoble (Isère)		Coquery		Bernardine	1794	yes	
Niel,-	1897 3 111		Radepont (Eure)	Maine-et-Loire	prêtre, aumônier militaire	L Michel		Bernardine	terror		
Nihel, M-J-P	1901 11 29			Paris	prêtre	unnamed religieuse		Ursuline	terror		
Oegues, Vict-	1910 14 22			Versailles (Seine-et-Marne)		unnamed religieuse			1795		
Olivier, M	1905 1 149, AN D/XIX/16		Bourges (Cher)	Mareuil (Cher)		Stanis. Droulez	22	Carmelite	1800	yes	
Outhier, Joes.	1904 4 1-2; 1892 16 44, 17 46, 19 37; AN D/XIX/7		Jura	Besançon (Doubs)		C. Troignon	24	Hospitalière	1796	x	
Parraire, M	1909 12 6			Bordeaux (Gironde)		Fred. Juillerat		Clarisse	1798	yes	
Parmentier, Félicité	1910 15 9			Epernay (Marne)		J Labaut		Ursuline	1798		
Parot, J	1910 3 7, 1909 2 34, 156-60, 187-9; 1910 4 4-6; 1893 42 9			Vesoul (Haute-Saône)	frère convers			Annonciade	1804	yes	

Pequeur, Marie-Barbe	1891 12 50-1; 1904 3 65-9	1745	Marchiennes	Nord, Arras		Sér. Ficheur	47	Augustine	1799		
Pelleve,	1892 24 26					Ficheur					
Péreau, Reine	1909 13 021; 1894 54 84		Cher	Bourges (Cher)	prêtre con. prêtre, curé		40		1793		yes
Perrot, M-J	1905 1 31, AN D/XIX/16		Meuse	Allier	con. prêtre, cultivateur	A. Naudin J-B.	24	Benedictine	1794		yes
Petit, M	1907 8 29-30			Bourges		Hugault J-B	27	Visitandine	1795		yes
Picaud, Gab.	1907 8 8-10; AN D/XIX/6		Moulins (Allier)	Moulins (Allier)		Boucault	25	Hospitaliere	1796		yes
Pigage, M- Lud-Jos.	1904 5 90; 1892 17 86		Douai (Nord)	Douai (Nord)		Champagna t		Franciscan	1796		yes
Pignier, Mad- M	1905 1 214-6		Maine-et-Loire	Maine-et-Loire		Ant-L Poitou	26	Fontevrault	1794		yes
Pillon, M-A	1909 12 101		Nièvre	Noyers (Oise)	tailleur d'habits	G. Lemasson		Fontevrault	1796		
Pingot, Aug- Mel.	AN D/XIX/16			Seine-et- Marne		P. Caulliez		Chanoinesse	1791		
Poinsignon, A-Mad.	1905 1 17-18, 1891 14th 41		Meurthe-et- Moselle	Champenoux (Meurthe-et- Moselle)				Franciscan	1800	x	
Ponceau, M- R-Jos.	1909 2 256			Lille (Nord)		Jos. Gooz		Hospitalière	wants to marty		
Poncet, Phili.	1910 14 50		Bellevue les Bains (Saône- et-Loire)	Saône-et- Loire		de Cherveny?		Ursuline			
Ponsardin, Marie Anne	Gaillemin, p. 521	1762		Meurthe-et- Moselle		Jos. Prodon	30				
Pouillande, Alb-Jos.	1915 14 260, 1909 13 84-8			Lille (Nord)	juge de paix	J-N Mathieu	38		1795		no
Pourcin, Elis.	1909 2 216; AN D/XIX/7	1765	Digne	Digne (Alpes- de-Haute- Provence)	officier	Jos. Dustar	27	Visitandine	1801	x	
Pradier, M	1908 11 375; AN D/XIX/7		Cantal	Haute-Loire	prêtre	F Paraut	29	Fontevrault	1794	x	yes

Preseau, M-Ang-Cat	1910 3 137; 1920 6; 1894 50 24, 55		Aisne	Aisne		J Duchier	23	Benedictine	1804	x	
Prévost, Agn.	1908 10 96-8 1907 8 64-7, 1892 22 85			Chateau-Thierry (Aisne)	prêtre vicaire con, greffier, justice de la paix	Ch. Chalenton					
Proost, T	1892 22 85		Nord	Nord	greffier	Clau. Delège		Hospitalière	1792		yes
Proville (de)	1892 25 61			Carcassonne (Aude)		Sr. Clarisse					
Quazi, T	1907 9 144-5, 1892 25 52	1747	Indre	Levroux (Indre)	hussier		45	Fontevrault	1794		yes
Quennoel,-	1910 4 23			Soissons (Aisne)		G. Collet		Benedictine	1805	x	
Quéré, M-A	1901 11 64-5 1891 12 20-1, 13 1; 1904 3 101-4			Ile d'Oleron (Charente-Maritime)	prêtre	unnamed converse	17				no
Rebierre, M-Del.	1904 3 70; 1891 11 13, 12 43, 1904 3 70-3			La Souterraine (Creuse)		Babinot		Benedictine		x	
Redon, J				Agen (Lot-et-Garonne)	vicaire con.	F Lefebvre	47	Visitandine	1794	x	no
Regnard, M-Mag.	1904 3 184-6	1767	Saumur (Maine-et-Loire)	Saumur (Maine-et-Loire)		J Sicard	25	Visitandine	1794	x	yes
Régnier, M-Sch.	1907 9 155 1891 13 13; 1892 25 33		Picardie	Pas-de-Calais		J Delaveau	28	Augustine	1796		yes
Remy, --	1891 13 13; 1892 25 33			Bas-Rhin					after Concordat		
Remy, M-A-J.	1906 1 96-9			Alsace				Clarisse	wants to marry	x	no
Renard, M	Murphy, 2011. p. 282	1762-1836	Poitiers (Vienne)	Poitiers (Vienne)	vigneron	J-B Bigarre	30	Hospitalière	1795		
Richard, F	1905 1 530-4		Nord	Nancy (Nord)		P Artus	42	Carmelite	1795		

Ridel-Malbeck, Ant. von	1910 3 156, 1920 3			Cologne, Germany		Dom. Masson		Benedictine	wants to marry	x	
	1902 2 108; 1910 5 1-3; 1891 1 21, 2 28; 1892 28 24; 1894 61 59			Frevent (Pas-de-Calais)	notaire imperial				1804	x	yes
Riffart, Char.											
Rigonnier, Mad.	1898 8 190				prêtre	Engramelle			1795		
Riviola, A	1909 2 266; 1893 33 42			Asti, Italy				31	Benedictine	1804	x
Robin, J-Hel.	Murphy, p. 31	1755	Poitiers (Vienne)	Montmorillon (Vienne)	laboreur			37	Benedictine	1793	x
Robin, M	1905 1 413	1731	Cher	Cher	prêtre, maire, notaire	Louis Diouillet		41	Fontevrault		
Rochar, M	AN D/XIX/16		Avignon (Vaucluse)			L. Hugault					
Rochery, Elis.	1910 14 055		Soissons (Aisne)	Soissons (Aisne)	prêtre, prof.	Ch. Jancourt			Congr.	1794	
Roger, --	1892 26 20			Moulins (Allier)						after Concordat	
Roger, Rad.	1898 2 38			Saône-et-Loire					Benedictine	1797	no
Rogier, A	1906 1 343			Puy-de-Dôme	marchand	E Godinot			Ursuline	after Concordat	
Rohart, cure	1893 33 72			Lille (Nord)		Lau Tirole					
Romnay, T de	1910 15 31			Bruille (Nord)	cultivateur	unnamed religieuse			Benedictine	1801	
Roussel, M-Cat-Clot.	1909 12 46; 1893 47 25			Pas-de-Calais		J-L Le Sage			Ursuline	1793	x
Roussel, Marie-Anne	1904 4 084			Andelys (Eure)							
				Nancy (Nord)	tourneur en faïence				Benedictine	1798	
Routhier, Cat G	1908 10 198; 1908 10 198-200; 1893 34 9	1759		Lunéville (Meurthe-et-Moselle)		J Mausay-Drouin		33	Ursuline	1800	x

Rouvière, Marg.	1905 3 23; 1892 15 65		Montpellier (Heraut)	Montpellier (Heraut)		J. Simonot		Congre.	1797		no
Rouzé, M-Cat-Jos.	1910 15 64			Nord		J Cambon			1801		
Roy, M-A	Murphy, 2011. p. 221	1765-1849	Poitiers (Vienne)	Poitiers (Vienne)	judge	Eug. Carlier	27	Carmelite	1801		
Rubellin, M-N	1920 5			Annecey (Haute-Savoie)		Ch. Gouvreau		Clarisse	wants to martyr		
Sainte-Maire, Jos.	1904 5 84-6; 1891 9 81; 1892 17 82; Gaillemin, p. 530	1749	Metz (Moselle)	Verdun (Moselle)	prêtre religieux, cure con		47	Congre.	1795	x	no
Sainte-Maire, Suz.	1908 11 108-9		Metz (Moselle)	Moselle	bourgeois	J-Mat. Hoffmann		Congre.	1794	x	
Sancier, M-Gen.	1910 14 021		Andelys (Eure)	Dangu (Eure)			43	Benedictine	1796		no
Sandré, Bar.	1907 7 93-4		Metz (Moselle)	Metz (Moselle)	revendeur	J. Belhoste	35	Congre.	1794		yes
Sarron, M-J-Céc.	1905 1 101-4; AN/D/XIX/7	1756	Aisne	Nery (Oise)	maître decole	Gas. Michel	36	Fontevrault	1796	x	yes
Sauvagat, Sch.	Murphy, 2011. p. 108	1763	Poitiers (Vienne)	Poitiers (Vienne)	marchande	J-B Esmery	29	Congre.	1796		Yes
Savé, Vict.	1907 9 214-7		Sezanne (Marne)	Sezanne (Marne)	prêtre moine, curé con	L. Gibaud	32	Benedictine	1793	x	yes
Schlecht, Chris.	1905 1 483-7; 1891 9 12-13, 10 12			Cologne, Germany		C. Desplanche		Hospitalière	1798		
Seve, M-Gab.	1905 1 126-41; 1891 6 49, 9 38		Nantua (Ain)	Lyon (Rhône)		A. Mödler		Congre.	1794	x	yes
Sibille, F	1904 5 14-16; 1892 19 1			Bapaume (Pas-de-Calais)		J-HLe Fèvre		Bernardine	1798		
Sido, Marg.	1904 4 90, 1892 17 11			Metz (Moselle)	moine	Phil. Dufeuille	35	Franciscan	1795		

Simon, Marg.	1905 1 465-76, 1891 11 7		Marne	moine, procureur, maître de pension	J. Noirel		Congre.		
	1907 7 147				J-B Lhomme		Bernardine	1792	x yes
Simony, M-F	149; 1892 22 8-9		Var						
Solange-Flore Clerjault, M-A	AD18 "Papiers Laugardière" J/828		Bourges (Cher)	prêtre, agent of commune	V. Estalle	25	Fontevrault	1793	
Sonnier, M-Elé.	1908 10 112-5	1768	Lyon (Rhône)		Ch. Pelet	24	Ursuline	1796	
Sonyer-Dulac, J-M	1908 10 213-15		Haute-Loire		J Thonier		Bernardine	1795	yes
Soullée, Mari.	1916 1 173; 1891 12 59; AN D/XIX/16		Marne	Chalons-sur-Marne (Marne)	Michel Deberin	19	Bernardine	wants to marry	x
Steinen, Caro. de	1906 1 365-70; 1895 2 78-91; 1892 23 9; 1894 52 19		(Roer) Germany and Netherlands	Cologne, Germany			Benedictine	1803	
Tausia, Hel.	1907 6 161-7; AN D/XIX/7		Condom (Gers)	Condom (Gers) commissaire de la police	protestant	33	Clarisse	1794	yes
Temporal, M-Char.	1910 15 76; 1916 19 80			Bourg-en-Bresse (Ain)	J. Lagarde			1794	
Theubet, --	1894 53 046				J Augerd				
Thierry (née de Huvé)	1904 4 97-8; 1892 17 7		Vesoul (Haute-Saône)	Doubs			Annonciade		x yes
Thiriot, M-A	1908 10 95; Gailemin, p. 535	1753	Ligny (Meuse)	Meuse	Thierry	38	Ursuline	1794	
Thirion, Cat.	1909 12 57		Charente-Maritime	Saintes (Charente-Maritime)	J Gillot		Carmelite	1792	x
Thival, M-Clau.	1899 9 162			Neufchatal	Louis			1795	

Tissot, F-Ben.	1904 5 40-2		Gard	Vaucluse	militaire	J-Jac. Reboloul		Visitandine	1801		
Toffelin, Cat-Jos.	1908 11 117		Douai (Nord)	Douai (Nord)	musicien	Jac-Ch. Baron	27	Bernardine	1794		yes
Toffelin, Céc.	1899 09 007		Douai (Nord)	Douai (Nord)	moine	Lau. Plancoeq		Bernardine	1793		yes
Touche, M	1907 7 39-40			Valance (Drôme)	prêtre	J-B Flament		Augustine	1794		yes
Toulet, M-Jos-T	1898 6 178		Douai (Nord)			J-B Tourrette		Franciscan			
Toulet, Vict-F-Agn.	1909 13 43		Arras (Pas-de-Calais)		prêtre			Dominicaine	1791		
Tourdys, M	Murphy, 2011. p.40	1741-1814	Limousin			Jos. Droulet	51		1799		
Touvenin, Cat.	Gailemin, p. 536		1764 Etain (Meuse)	Metz (Moselle)	garde maison	Ant. Bourdenl?'	28				
Travault, A-M-T	1910 14 071		Neufchateau (Vosges)	Neufchateau (Vosges)	commis au ministre des Finances	J-Fr Renaux		Clarisse	1794		yes
Travers, M-Ang-Ade.	1905 1 281-3; AN D/XIX/7	1759	Rouen (Seine-Maritime)	Rouen (Seine-Maritime)	prêtre	N-P Tissier	33	Benedictine	1794	x	yes
Trémisot, Marg-Elis.	1910 3 93	1756	Côte-d'Or	Châtillon (Côtes-d'Or)	propriétaire	J-M Bouteiller	36	Ursuline	1801		
Tribard, Véro.	1905 1 535-6, 1891 10 2		Cher	Cher	prêtre régulier	Coffinet	50	Bernardine	1794	x	
	1910 15 73; 1916 19 75-6; 1894 59 65										
Trié, Mad-F	1894 59 65		Etampes (Seine-et-Oise)	Eure-et-Loire	prêtre	J-D Olivier	33	Augustine	1794		
Ulre de Mollans, F	1916 18 111			Soissons (Aisne)	prêtre	unnamed religieuse					Terror
Vachon, Elis.	1919 2 2			Limoges (Haute-Vienne)		J-L Carré					
Van Keirsbrick, T	1897 4 86			Bruges, Belgium				Augustine			
Van Pradelles, Eug.	1910 14 11		St. Omer (Pas-de-Calais)	St. Omer (Pas-de-Calais)				Franciscan	1794		



Vanderlinde, J.	1910 4 032; 189	1758		Moselle		Jos. Clabau	34	Franciscan		1806		
Vandolve, Alex.	1905 1 375-86; 1891 6 77, 9 55, 10 86		Belgium	Ravensberg, Germany		Jos-Antoine Louvrex		Bernardine		1796	x	yes
Vanswevelt, Ida	1906 1 11-13		St. Germain (Meurthe-et- Moselle)	Liege, Belgium		And. Massé			wants to marty			
Vaquier, M										1792		
Verchin, M- Marg.	1910 4 21			Nord		N Guillaume		Franciscan		1801		
Vezier, M- Luce	1904 5 62-7; 1892 15 64, 18 74		Soissons (Aisne)	Soissons (Aisne)		J Leblond		Benedictine		1793		yes
Viala, J	1907 6 73-9; 1892 17 17, 21 4			Lyon (Rhône)	chirurgien	Léo. Enare		Dominicaine		1800	x	no
Vibert, Pier.	1907 9 26-8; 1892 27 62		Ain	Ain		Jacques		Bernardine				
Villemey, Jean-F	1900 1 153; 1899 9 126-7; 1898 6 164-6			Paris	prêtre			Clarisse				
Viot, M	1910 15 50			Ardennes	marchand de cheveux	unnamed religieuse		Ursuline		1793		
Vonweed, M- A	1908 11 281; 1893 34 71			Cologne, Germany	inspecteur	E. Abraham						
Vryens, Ger.	1908 11 70	1743		Liege, Belgium		F. Périn	49	Franciscan		1799		
Willot, M-T	1908 10 26-9; 1892 29 8		Douai (Nord)	Douai (Nord)	soldat	J Mairehaus		Franciscan		1795		yes
Witting, C	1895 2 96-7	1760		Aix-la- Chapelle, Germany		P-Jos. Deligny	32	Augustine	wants to marty			