Breaking Habits: Identity and the Dissolution of Convents in France, 1789-1808

Corinne Gressang

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BREAKING HABITS: IDENTITY AND THE DISSOLUTION OF CONVENTS IN FRANCE 1789-1808

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Kentucky

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This dissertation uses the concept of identity to investigate the ways religious women navigated the French Revolution. Even as their religious identities were thrown into question, these women’s religious commitments remained important to them. As the French revolutionaries began to reform aspects of the ancien régime, the Catholic Church came under attack. The fate of priests, monks, and nuns came into question. Traditionally, religious women cared for orphans, the sick, and the poor, educated young girls, housed widows, rehabilitated prostitutes, and provided a respectable alternative community for aristocratic women. Despite every effort by the revolutionaries to dissolve their patterns of living, certain nuns adjusted themselves to the changing political climate, and their practice of faith survived the religious legislation that suppressed their convents and congregations. Adapting to new circumstances after the dissolution of their religious houses was complicated for women who could not own property because of the vow of poverty, could not marry because of their vow of celibacy, and could not swear the required oaths to liberty and equality because of the vows of obedience to the Catholic Church. Nearly every nun broke at least one of these vows. The nuns were able to navigate the uncertainty of the Revolution by relying on their religious identity as devotees of an unchanging deity. Anchoring their identity in religion did not preclude changes to their sense of self and their relationship with the secular world, but it allowed them to retain some sense of stability in the face of challenges.

As unlikely harbingers of revolutionary changes, female members of monastic institutions took an active role in shaping the practice of Catholicism and crystalizing the changes wrought by the Revolution. By adapting the performance of their identity to survive severe religious persecution, the nuns redefined what it meant to be a woman, a Catholic, and a member of French society. Religious belief helped some Catholics to answer the essential question of self, morality, and community when fundamental bases of identity were in flux. Religious women solidified the revolutionary changes, wittingly or unwittingly, through the daily practice of new responsibilities, by engaging in the world outside the cloister, and by making, breaking, and leveraging different aspects of their identities.

Former nuns were expected to become laywomen in a short period of time, and the special status of religious women disappeared. New rights to own property or to live wherever they chose, however, conflicted with the rules of the convent and their
permanent vows. Historians must reconsider what liberty, fraternity, and equality meant to members of religious communities. Nuns found freedom in obedience. They found death, at least the symbolic death to the world that accompanied taking religious vows, was a path to eternal life. And they found security in their identities as nuns even at a time when expressing that identity could result in imprisonment. Some women did not embrace the freedom offered by the Revolution and preferred the spiritual freedom offered in the convent. While the revolutionaries espoused a fraternity between all Frenchmen, the women in the convent already had a sisterhood and a spiritual family with which they identified.

Mother superiors and individual nuns often advocated for themselves in letters to the National Assembly, both to dissolve and preserve these convents. Furthermore, between 1802 and 1808, the Catholic Church sent a papal legate to adjudicate letters, known as the Caprara letters, written by men and women who hoped to rejoin the church. These letters help explain their actions in the church’s absence. Other primary sources used in this study include diaries, letters, and printed memoirs from nuns during the French Revolution.

Perhaps more than any other group in revolutionary France, nuns had to react to changes that affected the aspects of their daily life that defined their identity. They dressed the same, patterned their lives after a highly regimented ritual of prayer and singing, and occupied themselves in a shared mission within their communities. Nuns’ intersectional social, political, religious, and gender identities help us to understand how the Revolution affected individuals. Drawing on concepts from the work of identity theorists, this dissertation makes three arguments. First, nuns’ religious identities were a source of stability in the face of the uncertainty created by the Revolution. Secondly, female religious women had a great deal of agency in choosing which identities to adopt during the Revolution. Lastly, nuns played a role in shaping the return of convents and congregations, and their experiences during the Revolution changed both secular and religious ideas about convents. In the daily practice of new responsibilities, engaging in the world, and taking on new identities, they crystallized the revolutionary changes. My research tells the story of women who lived complicated lives and do not fit into the neat categories we have created for them. In understanding how these women made sense of the Revolution and their place in it, we can better understand how to deal with conflicts between personal religious beliefs and the public performance of various identities.

KEYWORDS: Nuns, Identity, Convents, Religion, Catholicism, French Revolution

Corinne Alyssa Gressang

(Name of Student)

04/30/2020

Date
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to A.J., my nephew. Although he is not yet in this world, I already love him with my whole heart.
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1 Cody Foster, Andrew Quirk, Lesley Nash, Josh Wills, Carson Benn, Ryan Essinger, Austin Zinkle, Scott Kenkle, Wesley Davis, Emma Smith, Kelly Cabana, and Ruth White.
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

On May 6, 1803, Marie Joseph Dantrages, a sixty-five-year-old Visitandine nun and former superior of her convent in Langres, wrote to the newly appointed papal representative, Cardinal Caprara, to ask for a dispensation of her vow of poverty. Still devoutly Catholic and particularly concerned with her salvation as she neared the end of her life, she had several temporal concerns to settle first. Like thousands of other women whose convents and congregations were dissolved during the Revolution, Dantrages needed to ask for forgiveness to achieve a dispensation of her vows. Despite having been turned out of her convent over a decade ago, Dantrages asked for special permission to make a will and give her possessions to her fellow sisters when she died. She asked the legate “to allow her to dispose of what belongs to her in favor of her dear most indigent sisters and companions … by stipulating her intentions in her will.”² Previously, when a nun took a permanent vow of poverty, she gave up her right to individually own anything, and she was excluded from inheritances. During the Revolution, Dantrages inherited property from a relative that she used to support herself. By accepting an inheritance, she had benefitted from the Revolution’s changes, which allowed her to make a will and have personal property. By seeking the Church’s permission to leave that property to her convent sisters, however, she reaffirmed her identification with and responsibility for them. She was still performing the role of Superior even as she asked to take advantage of a civil and revolutionary law. Dantrages remained Catholic because we know that “her conscience [dictated] that she obtain from the [H]oly [S]ee a special

² « De permettre qu’elle dispose de ce qui lui appartient en faveur de ses chère sœurs et compagnes les plus indigentes … » AN AF IV 1902, Dossier 4, pièce 99.
authorization for this act.” 3 But, Like many nuns in the 1790s, Dantrages had taken on new roles, reshaped her identity, and practiced her faith by more directly interacting with God outside of the church structure.

This dissertation investigates the ways religious women navigated the French Revolution, and how, even as their religious identities were thrown into question, they continued to provide both assurance and comfort for formerly vowed religious women in times of uncertainty. As the French revolutionaries began to reform aspects of the ancien régime, 4 the Catholic Church came under attack. The fate of priests, monks, and specifically nuns came into question. Traditionally, religious women cared for orphans, the sick, and the poor, educated young girls, housed widows, rehabilitated prostitutes, and provided a respectable alternative community for aristocratic women. Convents and their inhabitants, therefore, featured prominently in the social, economic, political, and religious landscape of France. Despite every effort by the revolutionaries to dissolve their patterns of living, certain nuns adjusted themselves to the changing political climate, and their practice of faith survived the religious legislation that suppressed their convents and congregations. Adapting to new circumstances after the dissolution of their religious houses was complicated for women who could not own property because of the vow of poverty, could not marry because of their vow of celibacy, and could not swear the required oaths to liberty and equality because of the vows of obedience to the Catholic Church. Nearly every nun broke at least one of these vows. These pressures challenged their entire sense of being and their purpose in life. The nuns were able to navigate the

3 « …en dictant ses intentions testamentaires pour l’édification et l’acquis de sa conscience qu’elle a obtenu du saint siège une autorisation spéciale pour cet acte. » AN AF IV 1902, Dossier 4, pièce 99.

4 The social and political system in France before the Revolution broke out in 1789.
uncertainty of the Revolution by relying on their religious identity in an unchanging deity. Anchoring their identity in religion did not preclude changes to their sense of self and their relationship with the secular world, but it allowed them to retain some sense of stability in the face of challenges.

As unlikely harbingers of revolutionary changes, female members of monastic institutions took an active role in shaping the practice of Catholicism and crystalizing the changes wrought by the Revolution. By adapting the performance of their identity to survive severe religious persecution, the nuns redefined what it meant to be a woman, a Catholic, and a member of French society. Religious belief helped some Catholics to answer the essential question of self, morality, and community when fundamental bases of identity were in flux. Religious women solidified the revolutionary changes, wittingly or unwittingly, through the daily practice of new responsibilities, by engaging in the world outside the cloister, and by making, breaking, and leveraging different aspects of their identities.

Ideas about what role every man and woman could play in the new France were some of the most controversial issues to emerge during the Revolution. Questions about rights and who was entitled to them was one of the conundrums of the new Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789). Former nuns were expected to become laywomen in a short period of time, and the special status of religious women disappeared. New rights to own property or to live wherever they chose, however, conflicted with the rules of the convent and their permanent vows. Historians must reconsider what liberty, fraternity, and equality meant to members of religious communities. Nuns found freedom in obedience. They found death, at least the symbolic death to the world that
accompanied taking religious vows, was a path to eternal life. And they found security in their identities as nuns even at a time when expressing that identity could result in imprisonment. Some women did not embrace the freedom offered by the Revolution and preferred the freedom offered in the convent. While the revolutionaries espoused a brotherhood among all Frenchmen, the women in the convent already had a sisterhood and a spiritual family with which they identified.

Since nuns had more limited opportunities upon leaving their convents than their male counterparts—many of whom successfully adapted to secular life as teachers, notaries, soldiers, mayors, and other professions—their story of survival outside of the convent was all the more surprising. Only a small number took the traditional path towards marriage after dissolution. Although the National Assembly and the Legislative Assembly provided them a civil pension, former nuns found it difficult to live on this meager and sporadically paid income. Former religious women had to find other means of subsistence that departed from their religious life in ways they had never imagined. Some of them engaged in the economy, married, had children, and otherwise adopted, in part, the identity the revolutionaries imagined for them. Others, however, carved out new spaces of existence, which changed the practice of Catholicism for devout women.

The nineteenth century would see a tremendous amount of growth in the number of active religious congregations in France, along with a rise in popular religious practice and a more emotional individualized practice of Catholicism referred to as liberal or Romantic Catholicism. The cloistered contemplative orders, on the other hand, never

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fully recovered. Without the Revolution dissolving the convents and forcing French convents to begin anew from scratch, this shift towards religious orders more actively involved with the world might have taken a different path. The convents and congregations that returned to France had to adjust to the circumstances of the Revolution and were more active and flexible. The experience of the Revolution opened new ways to be Catholic that women whose convents were dissolved first practiced. They had experience with controlling money, non-permanent vows, and leveraging their useful services in teaching and charity. Therefore, the nineteenth-century religious changes can partially be explained by the influence of nuns and ex-nuns and their involvement in redefining the identity of the nun, woman, and Catholic during the French Revolution.

The very existence of women who willingly resisted individual identities and natural rights challenged the foundations of the Revolution. *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* wrote that rights were natural, and rational men and women would embrace them once the external forces which led to their neglect of these rights were lifted. The nuns’ rejection of “natural” rights challenged their basic assumptions about those rights. A new category of single women, “ex-nuns,” or unmarried women who were neither residing in their parents’ house until they could be married nor widows, complicated the social landscape, which traditionally women close to two honorable paths: marriage or the convent. Although there were some notable exceptions, the vast majority of women were expected to marry. In the Old Regime, as historian Elizabeth Rapley argued, “the women who did not marry had no respectable option but to embrace religious life. ‘Maritus aut murus’—a husband or a cloister—these were her only
choices.” In carving out spaces to practice their faith, serve their communities, and engage in the economy as both individuals and newly defined social groups that former nuns maintained, remade, or abandoned their identities.

Religious women expanded their work in nursing and their individual engagement with finances, inheritances, and businesses. After the Revolution, these women did not wish to curtail their embrace of these rights and favored more flexible rules and convents. As the Catholic Church returned to France, its representative, Cardinal Caprara, sanctioned the marriages of religious women, granted dispensations of their vows of poverty, and compromised with the Revolution. Too often, this compromise was explained through political concerns of Napoleon or the Pope, but the nuns themselves wrote to make themselves heard at every stage of the Revolution. This dissertation explains how religious women skillfully navigated the Revolution on their own terms and through their own actions, and they were not passive victims of revolutionary legislation.

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8 Due to the diverse nature of religious institutions on the eve of Revolution, I will take a brief moment to clarify terminology. In general, women who took solemn, permanent religious vows are nuns. These nuns lived in convents and cloisters. Occasionally, I use nuns as a catch all term for vowed religious women during the Revolution, but I have tried to be as specific as possible. Sisters were those women who took simple or annually renewable vows. Sisters lived in houses or communities— and not cloisters. In instances when cloistered women called other members of their order “sisters,” I preserved their original terminology. Many of the women in this dissertation had both religious and secular names, and I tried to respect the names that they used for themselves, thus indicating how they wished to be identified. The term “ex-nun” will be used for those women who left their (cloistered) convents before dissolution or those who were forced from their convent after 1792. Formerly religious women will be used more broadly to talk about both sisters and nuns who lived outside of their former convent identities.
1.1 Theoretical Framework

In addition to exploring the agency that religious women had to alter their condition, this project offers an opportunity to explore the usefulness of the concept of identity as a historical tool. Perhaps more than any other group in French society prior to 1789, nuns, when they took their vows, chose a new identity that would encompass most aspects of their daily life. Once they had done so, they reinforced that identity by dressing like their sisters, following a highly regimented routine of prayer and singing, and participating in the shared mission of their communities. Rejecting the typical path of marriage, they embraced a life that offered them the possibility of rising to leadership positions, obtaining education, and enjoying a particular form of female sociability. This experience in the convent identified them strongly with their particular religious community and with the Catholic Church. Their identities were always defined within these communities, yet nuns’ intersectional social, political, religious, and gender identities help us to understand how the Revolution affected individuals. It is this intersectionality that makes possible such a robust discussion of identities during the Revolution. The French Revolution, however, marked a significant shift in definitions of identity, making this time a fruitful period for study. The nuns teased apart elements of their identity in reaction to the circumstances in which they were placed to negotiate their new reality. Despite all these changes, their religious identity offered them a source of stability, and even an explanation for the discomforts they suffered.

Religious identity helps to anchor individuals to an unchanging deity, a comprehensive worldview, and a comprehensive set of rituals. Therefore, while so much of this dissertation is about changing identities and reimagining one’s relationship to...
others, the expelled nuns, that is, those who remained in their convents until they were forced to leave, kept one essential constant: their identification with Catholicism. Their practice of Catholicism may have changed during the Revolution, but religion became a source of consistency in the face of crisis. My ideas about religious identity in periods of uncertainty are based on Michael A. Hogg, Janice R. Adelman, and Robert D. Blagg’s article, “Religion in the Face of Uncertainty.” They contend that “Religions are social groups that focus people’s spiritual and existential curiosity and provide ideological and behavioral guidelines for this curiosity and for daily life.” In times of difficulty, group identities, such as those formed by entering a religious order, may have helped to reduce feelings of uncertainty. The authors demonstrated that “social identity processes associated with group membership satisfy people’s fundamental need to reduce uncertainty about who they are, what they should think, how they should behave, and how others will perceive and treat them.” This contention is crucial for our understanding of why nuns would often maintain their Catholic identity even as other facets of identity were in flux. They could leave behind their performative practice of their religious order, their communities, their places of worship, their patterns of living, and even their dress because they retained an assurance of their relationship with their God.

Few other groups in eighteenth-century France had an identity as strongly defined as women who took the habit. Although these nuns could never have complete certainty about the future during the Revolution, one of the ways they reduced some individual

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uncertainty was by identifying with a group.\textsuperscript{11} Religion created a sophisticated and well-developed ideology and worldview. Therefore Catholicism, and specifically religious life, provided a “meaning-making framework and moral compass that serve[d] basic psychological needs ranging from existential meaning to social identification and connection and a sense of certainty and stability.”\textsuperscript{12} Therefore, when faced with the uncertainty as to where they fit into the new social order of the Revolution, religion may have helped alleviate some of that uncertainty for those nuns who chose to remain Catholic.\textsuperscript{13} Most nuns who were forced from their convents rested on their faith in God, eternal salvation, and their religious identities as both a coping mechanism to reduce the uncertainty of the future and to help negotiate the circumstances of the Revolution.

In times of uncertainty and instability, maintaining a stable identity become both more difficult and more necessary for these women. The French Revolution was just the kind of juncture or crisis in which religion might provide the stability Hogg et al. suggested. The Revolution was a crucial juncture in breaking old identities and making new ones. Jeremy Popkin has explored this idea in a brief chapter in the \textit{Oxford Handbook of the French Revolution}, titled “Revolution and Changing Identities in France, 1789-99.” He asserts that “By acting in new ways that expressed their rejection of their pre-Revolutionary identities as subjects, commoners, and as a member of many of the corporate groups to which they had belonged before 1789, people simultaneously

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Hogg, et al., “Religion in the Face of Uncertainty,” 74.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Hogg, et al., “Religion in the Face of Uncertainty,” 76.
  \item \textsuperscript{13} The conclusion of this study was that in the face of uncertainty, religious groups were more likely to turn to extremism. While this study was conducted in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century and related specifically to Israel and Palestine, I think it could still say something important about the importance of maintaining ascetism during the uncertainty of the Revolution. I believe for some women their identity as Catholics but more specifically as nuns became more important than ever. Hogg, et al., “Religion in the Face of Uncertainty,” 79.
\end{itemize}
asserted new identities: as citizens, as members of a nation composed of legally equal individuals, as ‘patriots.’”¹⁴ He further argues that identity—which had previously been set, based on birth and fixed social markers—suddenly was in flux. No group better shows the dramatic ways in which identities could be made and remade during this time than the nuns. They were threatened with the loss of the identities which they had embraced for most of their lives. Suddenly, they had to come to terms with new identities that were forced upon them or make new identities of their own.

This identity, based on a relationship with God, was not without precedent. There were other examples of women sacrificing the self in periods of crisis to become more fully “in Christ.” Christians played a unique role in the “body of Christ,” and this communal relationship remains important, especially when few physical markers of the church remained. In Robyn Wrigley-Carr’s book chapter “Theresa of Avila: The Christian Mystic,” she argues, “being free from self was key to Theresa’s new identity of being ‘in Christ.’ No longer was she only concerned with her honor and personal esteem, now her entire identity was centered around Christ.”¹⁵ Thus, the ultimate goal of monastic life was to subjugate the self to an identity in Jesus. Mystics, in the post-reformation period, similarly to the most devout religious women in the Revolution, were willing to make extreme sacrifices to fulfill their spiritual vocation. Bo Karen Lee, in her research on Madame Jeanne Guyon, a seventeenth-century devout woman, argues that “her theological and spiritual framework provided resources with which she could

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confront the ecclesial and political structures of her day.”16 In taking the commitments and devotions that these women felt about their vocation and religious identity seriously, we can better understand their sense of self. For religious women, Lee argued, “self-surrender toward God was not only the path to finding one’s true self, but also the secret to the deepest enjoyment possible in God.”17 For women who held tightly to their religious faith, we must understand their identity within their communities and their identity with their God to understand their reaction to suffering and persecution.

Our current thinking on identity has developed through the study of both psychology and sociology.18 Erik Erikson, a psychologist, influenced by Freud, firmly believed that identity was located deep in the ego, and although it interacted with the environment, it was found solely in the individual and, therefore, immune to external changes.19 However, the sociological interpretation of identity found that identity was the result of “interaction between the individual and society.”20 Sociologists like Peter Berger and Nelson Foote argued that identity is continuously created and recreated in each new

18 The way that the social sciences use identity and the sense of self must start with the disruption of identity which first occurred during the Enlightenment. Philip Gleason, a historian, argued modern discussions of identity began with the disruption of the unity of self in Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690). Gleason reasoned that “the unity of the self was not a problem so long as the traditional Christian conception of the soul held sway, but it became a problem when Locke declared that a man's ‘Identity ... consists in nothing but a participation of the same continued Life, by constantly fleeting Particles of Matter, in succession vitally united to the same organized Body.’” Locke, therefore, challenged the foundation of the self since it was no longer grounded in the soul. The idea that the Christian’s soul belonged to God and was the central organizing anchor of identity appeared in diaries written by nuns during the French Revolution. Philip Gleason, “Identifying Identity: A Semantic History,” The Journal of American History 69, No. 4 (1983): 912.
20 Gleason, “Identifying Identity,” 918.
This tension between identity as deep, internal, and permanent as opposed to identity as shallow, external, and changing has caused a great deal of confusion. For the nuns, during the Revolution, we see that their public and social identification changed with their circumstances. However, for the nuns in this study, their religious identity as Catholics was internal and fixed to provide a sense of stability during this time. Historians must consider Catholic women’s community relationships to help explain their actions, but we cannot forget that vowed religious women maintained a fixed relationship with their deity.

Recent scholars have criticized the overly broad use of “identity” in the social sciences. According to historian Frederick Cooper and sociologist Rogers Brubaker, “the prevailing constructivist stance on identity— the attempt to ‘soften’ the term … by stipulating that identities are constructed, fluid, and multiple— leaves us without a rationale for talking about ‘identities’ at all ... ‘Soft’ constructivism allows putative ‘identities’ to proliferate. But as they proliferate, the term loses its analytical purchase.”

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22 Gleason, “Identifying Identity,” 919. Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). Taylor sees some of the problems for the Western European sense of self is that it alienated itself from its biblical moral foundation. The goal was to become calculating with rationality and not use a consciousness grounded in a moral and religious foundation. In introducing rationality with Descartes and other great thinkers of this time, the method of knowing (and thus, the sense of self) turned inward. Platonic (Augustinian) morality is thus embedded in our very institutions, so although we have made this inward turn, he still seems to think that we must seek out the good. He sees the Enlightenment as a disaster, manipulative, and incoherent. (Enlightenment philosophy, whatever its gains, was thus empty because it was divorced ideas of self from their religious and moral origins). The nuns rejected this orientation of self that looked to the individual instead of heavenward, while the revolutionaries, largely, embraced it. Charles Taylor in, Sources of the Self, argued that the central problem with identity was the fact that the modern man, beginning with Descartes, looked to a calculating utility and rationality for the sense of good, thus looking inward for a sense of self. The Revolution during the dechristianization period embraced ideas of self that were divorced from religion and traditional morality, while the nuns, for the most part, strengthened and solidified their religious identity to provide a sense of self.

If identity is everything, then it, therefore, becomes nothing, and not helpful as an interpretive or analytical tool. However, the case of the nuns in the revolutionary era offers a unique opportunity to study a group that had a solid sense of their own identity, and who deliberately and publicly adopted a new religious identity by taking their vows. Furthermore, even as their social identities remained fluid and constructed, their religious associations remained fixed. In Cooper and Brubaker’s ‘hard’ meaning of identity, there must be a certain level of sameness among all the members of a particular group. 24 Their conclusion that this sameness oversimplified the individuality of each member of a shared identity was valid, but nonetheless, we need not abandon the term as an analytical concept altogether when talking about nuns. No group displayed the level of shared identity that members of religious convents shared. They dressed the same, had the same schedule, confessed the same beliefs, and had often grown up in the same geographic location. Therefore, if there ever existed a group which could be said to have a common identity, members of a convent are the closest group to meeting this hard meaning proposed by Cooper and Brubaker.

Whereas they had a clear identity before the Revolution, nuns found themselves having to choose between expressing and suppressing different aspects of their identities during the Revolution. In understanding how identities are constructed in the practice of living and interacting in communities, I am indebted to Erving Goffman and Judith Butler, who explored the role of performativity. Ritual and practices of gender or social interactions help explain the behavior of nuns and how their actions informed their identities. I argue that the nuns’ identities were partially constructed through their

patterns of behavior, and thus, when those patterns changed, their sense of self and identity in their communities changed as well. Goffman’s *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*, first published in 1956, argued that most interactions are performances before certain audiences.25 Human interaction is a theater where actors must consider the setting, the props, and the characters they are assigned to play.26 Goffman described the self as “an image pieced together from the expressive implications of the full flow of events in an undertaking,” or the self as “a kind of player in a ritual game who copes honorably or dishonorably.”27 While interacting socially, the self is wholly constructed from the ritual performance and the environment that surrounds the “actor.” This sociological framework seriously considers the impact of ritual on the creation of ideas about the self, but it entirely neglects the possibility that there is anything internal that could impact the actors’ decisions and interactions. To understand the nun’s interactions in the world, we must look at the performativity of their interaction with others, including the way they emphasized their frailty or innocence, but we cannot forget there was something internal which remained unperturbed by circumstance, since it was based on prayers and spiritual interactions with God.28 Although Goffman might object to the notion that we can study anything internal, nuns during the Revolution, having been trained to perform a certain role, suddenly discovered that they had to perform in a completely different theater, without their usual props, and in front of a completely

28 Saint Vincent de Paul, the founder of the Daughters of Charity, argued that when they served the poor and the sick, they were serving God, himself.
different kind of audience. Since they had to construct a new kind of performance with no external guidance, they had to rely on their internal identity with their deity.

Similarly, in her book, *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that gender identity, in particular, is always constructed. There is “no gender identity behind the expression of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results.” For her, identity is only something that is performed, and through this process, the identity is created. Nuns, therefore, by performing their prayers and wearing their habits, created their gendered identity. Performativity, for Butler, is both “the way in which the anticipation of gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself” and “ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body.” The nuns who were nearly always engaging in rituals were in a constant state of performatives behavior that produced an externalized identity. This identity was gendered and created, not expressed. Butler helped illuminate how the intersectionality of race, gender, class, and sexuality “always work as background for one another, and they often find their most powerful articulation through one another.” While it was undoubtedly true that the nuns’ identities were formed through the ritual performance of their duties, prayers, and community involvement, I disagree that this ritual was a mere performance. Recognition of the importance of earnest religious zeal as a source of identity complicates Butler’s picture. Unlike gender, which was an identity that influenced a

30 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv.
31 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xvi.
person’s sense of self and their relationship to the world, these women’s religious identities also interacted with their sense of the next world.

Despite the many difficulties with the term, identity provides an analytical tool to talk about the many internal and external ways dissolution impacted the nuns, their communities, and the broader social structures of their day. Because their patterns of life were so highly regulated and defined before the Revolution, the disruption of those patterns challenged their identities and produced unexpected complications in their lives. The study of these women allows us to consider whether identities can be remade by acts of will or whether they persist in spite of attempts to erase them. What does it mean to be a Catholic, when the institution of the church is removed? What does it mean to be a nun when there is no longer a convent, and the expression of that identity is criminalized?

This dissertation will make several arguments about identity. First, although vowed religious women’s commitment to Catholicism remained, their ways of expressing that identity changed over the course of the revolutionary decade. The experience of living through the Revolution impacted the nuns’ role in society. She negotiated whether it was possible to practice her faith and, if so, how she could do so. Second, in the daily practice of performing new roles and new patterns of living, the nuns took an active role in shaping what they wanted their lives to look like under unprecedented circumstances. They became shopkeepers, wives, mothers, inheritors, and landlords often for the very first time. These identities would never have been possible for cloistered individuals without the Revolution, but once they were available, the nuns grew into their new roles. Nursing and teaching congregations could leverage their skills and labor to obtain certain religious freedoms. Third, members of religious communities relied on their religious
identities in periods of uncertainty and crisis. The more they could sacrifice their own sense of self, the more they could identify with being “in Christ.” They could also use these religious identities to their advantage. Nuns often found themselves leveraging the identity of the naïve nun, or the innocent and harmless woman to avoid conflict. In periods of extreme persecution, they could self-identify with the martyrs, the saints, or the Israelites to make sense of suffering. The nuns’ external expression of their identities was thus malleable, and they often proved adept at performing different identities when the need arose. They became well-practiced at defending their usefulness, holiness, and value in order to defend their personal religious beliefs in the shifting political climate. Identity theory is one of the most effective ways to explain how the nuns not only survived the Revolution, but lobbied for a more flexible practice of their religious vows.

1.2 Discussion of Sources

Studying the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of women living in the convents is obstructed by the paucity of primary sources and the fact that their writing was nearly always monitored by a male spiritual advisor. Since nuns were not supposed to have individual identities in the convent, we do not have the same number of diaries and letters that other literate women produced.32 The first major set of documents that help us to understand the convents during the Revolution are the letters written to the National Assembly concerning the status of their communities at the start of the Revolution. In the National Archives in Paris, the D XIX series has letters written by nuns and mother superiors asking the National Assembly to preserve or modify their organizations. These

32 There were exceptions, of course, most well-known were the mystics in the seventeenth century. Especially the spiritual writings of Theresa of Avila, Sor Juana, or 17th-century nuns of Siena. I believe Gabrielle Gauchat, the subject of Chapter four owes much of her pattern of writing to these examples.
letters describe the state of their convents before they were dissolved. Not only do we have a record of the landholdings and possessions of the convents, but we also see the last record of all the nuns living in France before the dissolution of the convents.\(^{33}\) The more substantial part of this series is census records collected by revolutionary representatives in 1790. Representatives visited the convents and made inventories of the convents’ personnel and possessions for every specific order or congregation in France.

The most important source for this study are the petitions written between 1802 and 1808 by nuns or their representatives to the papal legate, Cardinal Caprara, who was charged with reorganizing the Church in France, granting dispensations for religious women who had broken their vows, recognizing marriages conducted by the Constitutional Clergy, and otherwise repairing the transgressions committed by French Catholics during the Revolution.\(^{34}\) Historians are indebted to the work of Jeannine Bordas-Charon, an archivist in the 1970s who spent the better part of the decade creating an inventory of the archives and describing the legation’s work in Paris between 1802 and 1808.\(^{35}\) These letters were written by monks and nuns who wished to be forgiven for violations of their vows during the Revolution and be welcomed back into the Catholic Church. Most of these letters concerned women who asked to be relieved of their vows because they did not have the money or opportunity to re-cloister themselves, or women

\(^{33}\) The F 19 series also contains documents relating to religion during the revolutionary decade, specifically correspondence between government representatives and the church. F 19 also includes information relating to the congregations within each of the dioceses. While I used this series to get context for some of the things going on, this series does not contain the kind of personal record of the convents during the revolution that the other two series did.

\(^{34}\) These letters remained in France serendipitously. They were originally intended to be sent to the Vatican, but by 1808, the relationship between the Pope and Emperor Napoleon had soured, so these documents were seized by the Emperor. They are contained in the AF IV 1895 to 1914.

who asked that their marriages be recognized by the Catholic Church. While the monks outnumbered the nuns, there were thousands of women who requested a dispensation from their vows. Although most letters were written in a very formulaic manner because of the oversight of male spiritual advisors, they provide a record of all the nuns who desired a special dispensation in order to be welcomed back into the church. During the decade between the dissolution of the convents and the Concordat, many nuns behaved in ways that were not congruent with their vows, let alone with Catholic doctrine. These letters offer a window into the lives of these women during the Revolutionary decade. Their confessions and desperate pleas for forgiveness tell us much about the conditions of the Revolution and the way these women understood the events happening around them.

Additionally, diaries, letters, and memoirs help give us a picture of what these nuns experienced during the Revolution. However, these sources are less representative than the archival documents. They were often preserved and published in order to inspire piety among others. These examples of courageous religious resistance helped revive the Catholic Church in the nineteenth century. This was particularly true for records describing the martyrs of the faith. Many of the women who left the faith or acted dishonorably disappeared from the records. In addition to these published sources on the martyrs that were used for edification, other printed sources in this study include memoirs, printed breviaries, ceremonial books, newspapers, novels, plays, and engravings and political cartoons depicting nuns.

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37 This is further complicated by the fact that religious women changed their names if they left the faith and it was incredibly difficult to determine if they were a former nun if they entirely shed that identity.
Despite this diversity of sources, we lack testimonies from nuns who left the convent and did not write to Caprara to be relieved of their vows. Since these women completely abandoned their religious identities, they do not appear in the church’s and the government’s records after their departure from the convent. Therefore, there is a selection bias in favor of those women who were earnestly concerned with repairing their relationship with the Catholic Church because those are the records that Caprara preserved. The number of martyrologies and diaries written by women who were staunch defenders of the faith, or by their supporters who wanted them to appear that way, reflected a nineteenth-century concern for offering pious examples for devout Catholics to emulate. Furthermore, although we may not have access to many sources that could tell the story of those nuns who abandoned their religious identities between 1790 and 1792, their experience is no less real nor less important. This available evidence, even if limited, nevertheless provides useful evidence for demonstrating the importance of identity as an analytical concept.

1.3 Historiography

In the two centuries that have passed since the French Revolution, historians have focused a great deal of energy trying to explain its impact on society, the economy, politics, and religion. With the advent of social history, the experience of everyday men and women came into sharper focus. However, even as women gained greater scholarly attention, the documents relating to nuns remain understudied. The nuns’ stories contribute to our understanding of church history, gender and family relations, and the development of science and medicine. By narrowing the inquiry to the study of identity formation, we can see how Catholic identity unified women in periods of turmoil. Yet,
the experience of the Revolution also changed what it meant to be a Catholic woman during this time. This study also contributes to the broader histories of Catholic monasticism before and after the Revolution, gender histories, and the history of medicine, charity, and nursing in France. Perhaps most importantly, this dissertation helps link the changes in the nineteenth century to processes that began in the eighteenth century. Certainly, the Revolution marked a crisis point in the Church’s history, but the changes between the ancien régime and the nineteenth century owe some credit to the actions the nuns took during the Revolution. The efforts of these nuns to maintain or restore their identities as Catholics after 1802 are early signs of the religious revival that would mark France in the nineteenth century. Only by studying the nuns’ agency during the Revolution in crafting their identities can we appreciate their contributions to the history.

One of the biggest debates in the Catholic historiography concerns the state of the Catholic Church on the eve of the Revolution. Historians of Catholicism in the revolutionary period, such as André Latreille, John McManners, and, more recently, Nigel Aston, argue that the Church showed no sign of decline or weakness before the onslaught of anti-religious legislation and sentiment which accompanied the Revolution.38 In fact, McManners argues that there was a sort of Catholic Enlightenment in the decades before the Revolution that revitalized the church. Latreille in L’Église Catholique et la Révolution. goes so far as to say, “As for religious life, it still shows real

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vigor. Eighteenth-century France cannot be said to be dechristianized.”

John McManners’s student, Nigel Aston, in his book, Religion and Revolution in France, 1790-1804, citing examples like baptismal practice, tithing, and church attendance, tries to show that France was as devout as ever. These historians describe the attack on the Catholic Church as sudden, directed by government authorities, and directly caused by the Revolution. However, this does not explain the reforms already underway to close convents in the eighteenth century. It also does not account for the popularity of engravings and novels critiquing Catholicism and especially convents.

Michel Vovelle’s Piété baroque et déchristianisation en Provence au XVIIIe siècle (1973), written in the 1970s, suggests a more complicated picture than Latreille’s. Using the methods of the Annales School to study wills in Provence quantitatively, Vovelle shifts his focus away from the institutional church to study popular religious sentiment. He argues that the decline in religiosity and the feminization of religion were processes that had begun before the Revolution and started with the laity. Challenging the traditional Catholic narrative, Vovelle argues that wills were better indicators of “true beliefs in a period of almost unanimous practice” of Catholicism (rather than baptismal records or parish records of sacraments) because there was less chance that these wills would just be a “façade” of religious sensibility.

Since wills typically followed a predetermined form that can be quantified to chart decreases in donations given for

masses, Vovelle proves that fewer people were choosing to be buried in certain sacred places, fewer had masses said for their souls, there was less concern about the decoration and pomp that usually accompanied funerals, and all of this resulted from a decrease in concern about individuals’ salvation. Additionally, Vovelle finds that women were less likely to adhere to the general “dechristianization” of French society than men. At least in their wills, women continued to have masses said for their souls, decorate their funeral ceremonies with the greatest of pomp, and show a fear for the afterlife.42 Vovelle constructs a new narrative of dechristianization as a slow process, springing from popular sentiment, that started long before 1789.

Shifting away from popular religious practice of the laity to the impact of religious women in the centuries before the Revolution, Elizabeth Rapley and Mita Choudhury study nuns who actively helped shape religion. Even though her focus was on an earlier period, Rapley’s *The Dévotes: Women & Church in Seventeenth-Century France*, showed that women who joined religious orders played an active role in reshaping the Church and society. Rapley demonstrated how the seventeenth-century need for teachers to educate the populace and root out heresies sparked interest in active, uncloistered, teaching institutions. Rapley contended that women’s organizations such as the Visitandines and the Ursulines wanted to be uncloistered and active, operating like male orders such as the Jesuits. Women preferred doing good in the world rather than retreating from it. This rush to join active religious congregations that categorized the seventeenth century began to wane in the eighteenth century, driving the government to step in and shut down some of the older contemplative orders whose membership had

42 This practice of increased religiosity and church attendance among women which was an undeniable facet of the nineteenth century church had its roots much earlier.
declined. Rapley’s argument that women had an active role in creating new types of religious institutions in the seventeenth century inspired me to look for the ways that women were actively shaping religious life during and after the Revolution.43

Mita Choudhury, in her book *Convents and Nuns in Eighteenth-Century French Politics and Culture*, reveals the development of criticisms of the convents for being useless obstacles to the establishment of a rational male-dominated political order.44 Choudhury studies Enlightenment critiques of religious life and how they were applied specifically to women. The *philosophes*, such as Denis Diderot, depicted the convent as contrary to nature, “a place of servitude and despotism,” and actually subversive to the French form of government.45 Choudhury frames much of her argument around the role of gender in changing contemporary opinions on convents. Nuns were in a unique position, outside of the authority of fathers and husbands.46 She also uses sadistic or erotic images to demonstrate the Enlightenment beliefs about the unnaturalness of the convent.47 Influenced by Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, Choudhury’s work analyzes the “representation and discourse surrounding nuns,” their role as agents, objects, and symbols.48 *Convents and Nuns in Eighteenth-Century French Politics and Culture* ends with the French Revolution. This dissertation reframes the Revolution as its own period

45 Choudhury, *Convents and Nuns*, 27.
46 Jansenism, a controversial set of religious beliefs popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth century in France was portrayed as a feminine religion that emphasized deference and submission. Choudhury, *Convents and Nuns*, 52.
47 Choudhury, *Convents and Nuns*, 146, 150, 164, 166.
of change based on some of the observations about convents in Choudhury’s book. Convents had already come under the symbolic attack long before the Revolution, which made their physical dissolution less surprising. Their foundations had been slowly and symbolically dissolved for the past century.

As we consider the historiography concerning religion during the revolutionary era, from 1789 to 1799, we find some historians who understand the changes that occurred as a continuation of pre-revolutionary developments. Michel Vovelle’s *La Révolution Contre l’Église. De la Raison à L’Être Suprême*, demonstrates how this “shocking” moment of sudden anti-religion sentiment was not so shocking at all. This “second dechristianization” (1793-1794) “was not spontaneous, or diffuse, but was a willful endeavor to eradicate institutions practices and beliefs, crowned by the attempt to see a new cult, that of Reason…” He calls historians’ refusal to see the popular roots of dechristianization, “a conspiracy of silence.” He also notes that as these attacks on Christianity intensified, so did dechristianization. The dechristianization of the Year II “brought to light the true indifference which had already begun,” and therefore, was both a new manifestation, but also, the culmination of previous dechristianizing waves. This debate over the origins and the shape of France’s long movement towards laïcité has occupied much space in the historiography of France in the eighteenth and nineteenth

49 Jennifer Popiel’s *Rousseau’s Daughters* is another important work which helps to frame the Enlightenment attitudes towards teaching and women and how the revolutionaries sought to implement them.


centuries. Vovelle’s interpretation has inspired a new generation of historians to see the violence of the Year II as the culmination of a long period of dechristianization that had its roots in the actions of ordinary people.

My dissertation is not the first to study the clergy, monks, or nuns during the Revolution. For example, Xavier Marechaux, a student of Vovelle, supported his mentor’s dechristianization thesis in his study of priests who married during the Revolution. Marechaux’s Noces Révolutionnaires: Le Mariage des prêtres en France, 1789-1815, published in 2017, showed how a large number of priests who married rejected celibacy, which indicated the development of dechristianization of the previous decades. Marechaux’s book, along with E. Claire Cage’s Unnatural Frenchmen: The Politics of Priestly Celibacy and Marriage, 1720-1815, used the Caprara documents to investigate the role of Enlightenment ideas about celibacy in religious men’s decisions to marry. Cage argued that priestly celibacy was already under attack during the Enlightenment and that the priests’ decision to marry helped support the Revolution’s ideological changes. Their histories show the longer trends towards eliminating celibacy as part of this long history of dechristianization. More importantly, for this dissertation,

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53 One book that has contributed to this literature on the connection between religion and Revolution was Dale Van Kley’s Religious Origins of the French Revolution, which showed how the monarchy had solidified into “sacred absolutism.” Therefore, to understand the Revolution we must understand what it would take to dismantle the idea of sacred absolutism. The King made the French struggle against Jansenism a central focus in the eighteenth century. In reforming the French state, it would necessarily mean reforming the French Church. In the century before the Revolution Van Kley shows pockets of these impulses to reform which culminated in the 1791 Civil Constitution of the Clergy. Like Vovelle, he sees the Revolution as culmination of forces that began decades or even centuries earlier. Dale K. Van Kley, The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560-1791 (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1996).


they both demonstrated the value of the Caprara documents, the basis of much of my own work.

Unlike the nuns, who were offered no place in the Constitutional Church created by the revolutionaries, priests could demonstrate their acceptance of the Revolution by joining the ranks of juring “Constitutional” clergy. Timothy Tackett’s *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France: The Ecclesiastical Oath of 1791*, undermined the Catholic historiography that suggested that most Catholics rejected the Revolution because he found over half of the priests initially took the oath to liberty and equality.⁵⁶ In this period of crisis, Tackett demonstrated, the laity often followed the example of their local priest. Tackett did not pay close attention to the convents and women religious who took the oath and played a similar role in swaying public sentiment (or resistance) to the Revolution. Similarly, Joseph F. Byrnes’s *Priests of the French Revolution: Saints and Renegades in a New Political Era*, showed that a large percentage of the constitutional clergy embraced the reforms of the church. He studied “religious attitudes” and “psychological experiences,” paying attention to priests and bishops who assumed a dual function, that was both political and ecclesiastic.⁵⁷ Yet, a similar study of nuns who adopted some revolutionary changes and resisted others has not been written before this dissertation.

Perhaps the most important figure of the Constitutional Church was the abbé Henri Grégoire, a prominent member of the National Assembly and the National Convention. He found no inherent contradiction between a firm religious faith and

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political support for the Revolution. Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall in *The Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution: The Making of Modern Universalism*, used the life of Grégoire to add nuance to the general narrative that the Enlightenment and Christianity were opposed to one another. Grégoire’s education and early life suggested a comingling of religious and Enlightenment education, which created his strong attachment to a change through an enlightened religion and “regeneration.” During the Revolution, Grégoire was an enthusiastic prophet of universalism through regeneration. Rita Hermon-Belot, however, in her book, *L’Abbé Grégoire. La politique et la Vérité*, showed how Grégoire saw his political agenda as inseparable from his commitment to truth and God. Hermon-Belot focused on Grégoire’s “constant conception of a Christianity as inseparable from republican values, and vice versa, which constitutes… the political truth of this man.” Male clergy found ways to reconcile religion and Revolution through the Constitutional Church, but religious women didn’t have this opportunity, since the revolutionaries did not create a “constitutional” convent equivalent for them.

No such study of comparable scholarly value exists on women’s convents during this time. However, Kathryn Marsden’s 2014 dissertation, “Married Nuns in the French Revolution: The Sexual Revolution of the 1790s,” is the most comprehensive study of religious women during the French Revolution based on the Caprara letters, even though she only looked at the married nuns. Her dissertation argued that the “Revolution of 1789 was also part of a larger 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 nation.” Some of the problems with this approach, as Marsden recognized, were the paucity of sources written by the women themselves claiming their actions were a refutation of the sexual norms, the fact that the married nuns were such a small percentage of the overall population of displaced nuns, and the perhaps overstated claim of a sexual revolution. This is particularly problematic if we take a longer look at the history of these religious women to see the growth in religious professions in the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, these works helped to situate my study in the enormous collection of requests and legislation connected to the papal legate. In studying the priests, monks, and nuns who embraced revolutionary reform, Marechaux, Cage, Byrnes, and Marsden introduced some of the conflicts the church had to face as it attempted to re-establish itself in France.

In addition to Marsden’s thesis, there are several other important recent works on nuns during the Revolution. Gwénaël Murphy’s two regional studies of nuns during the Revolution demonstrate the diverse experience of nuns after dissolution in Poitiers. In his book, Rose Lauray, he points out how even the term “ex-religieuse” did not exist before the Revolution. Murphy chronicles the struggle of a Poitivine nun who voluntarily left her convent in 1790 and took up a new identity as a citizen ex-nun. Murphy thus proved that the sisters who left their spiritual family could have a real impact on the broader community. This book focused on just one woman’s life to show how she renegotiated her identity as a woman, as a Catholic, and as a hospital worker. She eventually returned

61 Gwénaël Murphy, L’Affaire Rose Lauray, religieuse poitevine (1752-1835) (Paris : Le Geste, 2002).
to the faith, but not to the cloister. Murphy’s work on Rose Lauray gives a unique glimpse into the real-life situations in which these women were placed.

Murphy’s other significant book, *Les religieuses dans la Révolution française*, which grew out of his dissertation project, was a regional study of nuns during the Revolution in Poitiers. He began each of his chapters with a micro-biography of one of the nuns in Poitiers. Individual stories highlighted how individual nuns fit into the larger narrative of the Revolution and the far-reaching impact they had on the region. He found that most nuns returned to their families, but each woman experienced the closing of the convent in a different way. The diversity of women’s experiences during the Revolution has never been captured so effectively. However, like nearly all of the secondary literature on nuns from the Revolution, Murphy’s book focused on one particular department or just one particular nun. While these works on particular convents or particular geographic areas were very helpful and valuable, a general history of nuns in France at large has yet to be written for this era. Although it would be impossible to tell the complete story of every nun in France, in expanding the scope, this dissertation complements the work that Murphy began to show that this was not just a phenomenon limited to Poitiers, and the nuns interacted with each other across administrative districts. They often relied on each other and religious networks to survive. By connecting these groups across geographic regions, we gain a better picture of their movement and strategies for survival.

63 A. Aulard was one of the first historians to tackle the issue of writing a history of the convents during the French Revolution. His 1903 book *La Révolution Française et les congrégations* recognized the problems the *congrégations* posed to the state and their subversive nature as resistors was first explored.
In addition to Murphy, Gemma Betros, an English-speaking scholar, studied the experience of Parisian nuns during the Revolution. Like Murphy, she limited the geographic scope of her study. However, she studied a collection of letters and documents that few historians have used. She used the letters written by nuns themselves between 1789-1790, in the D XIX series at the National Archives. Her article, “Liberty, Citizenship and the Suppression of Female Religious Communities in France, 1789–90,” showed the agency these nuns had when they wrote to the National Assembly both in favor of and against the prospect of closing the convents. Betros argued, “rather than wait for the Assembly to decide their fate, the women represented in these letters attempted to influence the Assembly’s policies by using the language and concepts of the Revolution to argue their case.” 64 Women had an active role in determining the course of events and the meaning of citizenship. She shows how nuns “complicated revolutionary plans in such a way that the Assembly could not legitimately proceed with the outright suppression of female religious communities.”65 This article encourages historians to think critically about the meaning of liberty for these women. It was not just in these letters in 1789 and 1790 that women lobbied on their own behalf to shape their future. I show how the nuns continued to shape and reshape their identities to survive and negotiate their positions under increasingly difficult legislation.

Much like Betros, Suzanne Desan showed how women took the initiative and embraced new roles during the Revolution. She, however, focused primarily on laywomen, as opposed to inhabitants of the convents. Desan’s Reclaiming the Sacred:

Lay Religion and Popular Politics in Revolutionary France demonstrated that the Revolution created many positive opportunities for women, both secular and religious. In the Yonne, during the Directory period (1795-1799), women helped organize “White Masses” or masses celebrated without a priest. Desan found that religious women took on essential roles in sheltering refractory clergy, organizing church services, and sometimes saying mass themselves. In taking up these new opportunities, they had a great deal of agency in instituting change.⁶⁶

The history of women and the family, unfortunately, has too often ignored the nuns, with a few notable exceptions. Suzanne Desan’s later book, The Family on Trial in the French Revolution, further explored the role of women and helped illuminate the way that the Revolution reformed family ties, gender roles, and marriage expectations.⁶⁷ Despite the small number of women who were nuns, the economic and familial system depended on convents as an outlet for excess daughters. Yet, gender and family historians have ignored the vital contribution of nuns to both of these histories. For example, Joan Landes’s Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution and Dominique Godineau’s The Women of Paris and their French Revolution both attempted to capture the woman’s experience of the Revolution without discussing monasticism.⁶⁸

There needs to be more understanding of nuns as women who merit study even by scholars of women’s history who are not interested in religion. Furthermore, convents’

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role in raising orphans, teaching children, and providing an outlet for excess daughters remains ignored in most studies of the changing family dynamics of this period.

One of the most fundamental ways that women were able to ameliorate their social, religious, and economic positions was through their labor and self-advocacy. Olwen Hufton evaluates both in her book, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution*. Hufton studied the social and political impact of women’s labor with a particular interest in the role of nuns. While other groups, such as slaves and the poor, successfully challenged the limits placed on their citizenship, women remained second-class citizens throughout the Revolution. The National Assembly, which believed that it offered women something of inestimable worth by liberating nuns, still held tightly to the intellectual baggage of the Enlightenment which depicted nuns as young, beautiful, distressed women, who had been forced into a convent, and thus denied a future as wives and mothers.\(^{69}\) The idea of the revolutionaries as rescuers was not one that Hufton accepted at face value. Furthermore, Hufton argued that most of the aging members of the old aristocratic contemplative orders refused to disband and instead wanted to be combined with other houses rather than receive their pension and freedom.\(^{70}\) They undermined the project of the Revolution by allowing the non-juring clergy to say mass in their chapels and robbing the Constitutional Church of its clientele. The nursing sisters continued to administer last rites and secure proper Christian burial for those placed in their care. They refused to use the constitutional clergy in their own funerals and thereby


\(^{70}\) Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship*, 60. The Ursulines and Visitation lost their teaching function but tried to find other reasons for their existence. Less than 1% wrote letters of thanks for their liberation to the Assembly.
continually questioned their legitimacy.\textsuperscript{71} She calls for historians to investigate this topic further because a complete history of the nuns had yet to be written, a call this dissertation tries to answer.\textsuperscript{72}

Hufton’s interest in women also intersected with the history of nursing. In the eighteenth century, nuns and religious women did most of the hospital and charity work in France. Despite their ubiquity, historians have not paid the nuns adequate attention. When the historians did mention the religious network of hospitals, it was only to criticize them for their unscientific methods and inefficiency.\textsuperscript{73} There are a few important historians who studied the nursing sisters without being overly critical.\textsuperscript{74} Hufton’s book, \textit{The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France, 1750-1789}, although it concludes just as the Revolution begins, remains one of the most important English-language histories for understanding the conditions of hospitals, which were primarily staffed by religious women on the eve of Revolution. Another one of the foremost authorities on sick and poor in France is Colin Jones. His books, \textit{Charity and 'Bienfaisance': The Treatment of the Poor in the Montpellier Region, 1740-1815}, and \textit{The Charitable Imperative:}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{71} Despite their best efforts to undermine the regime. The Sisters of Charity were driven from their convent at bayonet point in 1792 and sisters found outside the house in her religious garb was pinned down, skirt raised, and her bare bottom was beaten with a broom. These events led many of the sisters to abandon their religious garb and continue their jobs as \textit{citoyennes de secours}.
\item \textsuperscript{72} Olwen Hufton made this plea most emphatically when she was invited to be the Hayes Robinson Lecturer in 1999. She presented at the Royal Holloway at the University of London on March 2, 1999. In this talk, called “Whatever Happened to the History of the Nun,” she argued that “Family history, welfare and educational history, a new kind of religious history, and perhaps—above all—cultural history and the preoccupations with textual analysis, have all found the nun relevant to their unfolding concerns.” Olwen Hufton, “Whatever Happened to the History of the Nun,” \textit{Hayes Robinson Lecture Series}, No. 3 (2000), 5.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Bernard Ploneron, \textit{Les reguliers de Paris devant le serment constitutionnel : Sens et conséquences d'une option} (Paris: Vrin, 1964). Plongeron’s book was one of the most important early works on this period but it ignored women entirely.
\end{itemize}
*Hospitals and Nursing in Ancien Régime and Revolutionary France*, demystify the complicated system of hospitals in France and their administration.⁷⁵ His books recognize the nuns as not just antiquated obstacles to progress, but indispensable, knowledgeable, and more competent than previous historians believed. He, like others, described their labor as impossible to replace because there was no other motivation quite like eternal salvation to motivate caregivers. Without this promise of eternal life, hospitals could not find enough workers to staff their wards.

Perhaps the best source for understanding these nursing sisters and the communities in which they worked was Dora Weiner’s *The Citizen Patient in Revolutionary and Imperial Paris*. Weiner reframes the history of hospital reform to encompass both the revolutionary and Napoleonic eras. In doing so, she disproves assumptions that the impulse to completely overhaul healthcare in France, coming out of the Enlightenment, had failed.⁷⁶ By including the Empire and the Bourbon Restoration, we see that these original recommendations were eventually adopted. Most importantly, she argued that the revolutionaries underestimated the contributions of nursing sisters. “Had the revolutionaries been more aware of these women’s valuable contributions, they might have proceeded with greater circumspection and less haste in dissolving the

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⁷⁶ There were proposals about reforming hospitals so that they would be run more efficiently. Since the government was already supplementing the funding necessary to run such hospitals, there was suspicions that the Church was not handling this money as efficiently as they could. Having a state-controlled hospital and charity systems was the eventual goal for many ardent reformers but this was only a very disastrous, short-lived experiment during the Directory period. Dora Weiner, *The Citizen-Patient in Revolutionary and Imperial Paris* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).
nursing orders,” she writes. While her study is limited to the city of Paris, Weiner showed that legislators used Paris to extrapolate the needs of the other departments when making national policies. The revolutionary reformers wanted to secularize hospitals because of the inefficiencies of the Catholic administration, the desire to reorient medical science to have primacy over religion, and the need to cut the staff required by sisters and priests who had servants in the hospitals. However, she argued that the survival of these hospitals throughout the Revolution relied on the efforts of former nursing sisters to continue serving in secular capacities because of their duty to their vocation and their patients. They were an essential component to the entire system of social welfare that, despite the revolutionaries’ threats, could not be replaced.

A final body of historiography related to my project is concerned with religious women in post-revolutionary France. Although this dissertation will end with 1808, with the end of the Caprara legation and the limited return of some religious congregations, the changes of the Revolution extended far beyond the scope of this dissertation. Claude Langlois’s *Le Catholicisme au Féminin* continues to be the most complete picture of the changes that the Revolution brought to nineteenth-century convents. Langlois evaluated the exponential growth of religious orders in the nineteenth century. He cited the formation of about 400 new religious houses and the proportional growth of women involved in convents and congregations before and after the Revolution. He found that the number of religious women grew from 4 per 1000 in 1789 to about 7 per 1000 in the

1880s. Langlois meticulously constructed a complete picture of the type of religious organizations which returned to France and found the dominance of the non-cloistered congregations rather than the traditional convent model. However, his book treats nursing orders as mere servants of the male doctors and servants, which mis-categorizes the services they provided. Langlois’s research challenges narratives about the trajectory of dechristianization in the context of the nineteenth-century Catholic revival. Carol Harrison’s *Romantic Catholics*, and Thomas Kselman’s *Miracles and Prophecies* and *Death and the Afterlife* offer a counterpoint to this story of “dechristianization.”

Although Harrison and Kselman were interested in the laity as the gulf between the clergy and the popular practice widened, the nuns helped us to understand the practice of the faith from women who both served the laity but had little power in the institutional church. The history of Catholicism in the nineteenth century did not suggest that the church was dead. The Revolution thus marked both continuity and change, both of which nuns took an active role in fostering.

My research bridges the *ancien régime* to the nineteenth century by examining the actions of the nuns themselves. In making, remaking, and continually adjusting their identities, they took actions to shape the kind of future religious congregations could have in France. In a similar vein, marriage was only one among many options from which women who were forced from their convents had to choose. Vowed religious women adjusted their practice of faith to the circumstances in which they were placed. Their


ability to negotiate their identities and move between groups in a rapidly shifting environment help explain how devout Catholics confronted the challenges of Revolution. The identities religious women adopted were not solely instituted from above by the Catholic Church nor the government, but actively chosen from below by the women themselves. Nuns who survived the Revolution and those who perished during it had a small, but important, part in contributing to the changes to French Catholicism.

1.4 Chapter Outline:

The first chapter of this dissertation discusses religious orders in the eighteenth century, Enlightenment critiques of those religious orders, and the identity-forming ritual of entering a religious order. This chapter helps us understand the situation in which nuns found themselves in 1789 when the Revolution began. The second chapter analyzes the women’s religious orders’ attempts to maneuver and negotiate their position in the early period of the Revolution between 1789 and 1791. This chapter relies primarily on the documents produced in 1790 and 1791 when government representatives visited the convents to inform women of their right to leave and to take a census of the persons living in each of the monasteries and convents. In the archives, these documents are sometimes accompanied by letters from the nuns and abbesses pleading on behalf of their religious organization. Their ability to leverage their identity as teachers and nurses in order to preserve their identity as nuns demonstrated a willingness to negotiate aspects of their identity and that the idea of a citizen nun was not impossible in 1790.

Chapter Three evaluates how the nuns reacted to increasingly severe persecution in 1791 and the dissolution of the convents in 1792. Previous attempts at a peaceful coexistence between their Catholic and French identities faced popular resistance. One
Visitandine abbess, named Marie-Jérome Vérot, later wrote a letter about her experience during this period, which provides the scaffolding for this chapter. Her letter shows how maintaining her solidarity during this time of uncertainty provided comfort for the nuns, and how they were able to maintain this sense of camaraderie even as they crossed into other countries. In the face of the Constitutional Church, the nuns were important resisters and arbiters of orthodoxy.

The fourth chapter, which spans the period from the final dissolution of convents at the end of 1792 until free worship was restored in 1795, is based mainly on the diary of Gabrielle Gauchat, a Visitandine nun whose religious identity transcended the convent and her community. She set up a spiritual oasis in her home as she weathered the period of most severe persecution. Her individualized practice of her faith under persecution focused on her emotional connection to God. Her identification with heaven helped to separate her from the turmoil and uncertainty, which accompanied the Reign of Terror for religious men and women.

The fifth chapter talks specifically about those women who lost their lives at the hand of the revolutionaries during the Reign of Terror. Martyrdom was not an identity that the representatives of the Committee of Public Safety imposed on most nuns. Those who wound up on the guillotine did so because they were responding to what they regarded as a calling by God. The women who suffered this fate had to choose to take up this identity intentionally. The memory of these victims has been idealized and used for spiritual edification in the ensuing centuries, even inspiring an opera in the 1950s. The standard practice of faith was typically not enough to get a woman killed; she had to
intentionally and publicly flout the laws. The identity of the “martyr” was a vocation, and some felt compelled to take up this call.

The final three chapters deal with the daily lives of these nuns during the Revolution. Chapter Six explains how the involvement of ex-nuns in the economy changed their sense of self, and how many grew accustomed to having this freedom from their vows of poverty. The Revolution completely transformed inheritance laws, and former nuns suddenly became heiresses to fortunes they never intended to possess. When the Church returned to France, their economic situation encouraged some women to ask for a dispensation to allow them some level of control over their finances despite their vows of perpetual poverty. The seventh chapter explores the changes in identity formation that accompanied marriage. Women who decided to marry during the Revolution, although few in number, ended up adopting the identity the revolutionaries had imagined for the former nuns. Their practice of these new roles reflected the lack of practical alternatives but also the influence of Enlightenment ideas. The final chapter discusses nuns whose marriages were atypical, or whose requests were more complicated for the papal legate to answer. Some contended that they were never suited for religious life, and marriage was their true religious calling, while others had children out of wedlock. These exceptional cases show that the Revolution opened nuns up to new experiences and identities, which neither the church nor the government were fully equipped to handle. The mere existence of children from these unions worked to solidify the revolutionary changes.
CHAPTER 2. PATTERNS OF LIVING AND IDENTITY IN THE ANCIEN RÉGIME

2.1 History of Women and Religious Houses before the Revolution

Religious women in France can be divided into two distinct groups in the eighteenth century. The first group were members of religious orders, who were typically more aristocratic and had to provide a dowry to enter. Such convents were firmly cloistered and concerned primarily with contemplation rather than service. The nuns strictly followed a religious rule, said their daily prayers, and took permanent religious vows. Traditionally, the Catholic Church was much more comfortable with women safely stowed behind the convent grate. These upper-class women were often permitted yearly allowances and gifts of money, food, clothing, books, paintings, and devotional images, which were a departure from the restrictions required of nuns, but allowed them to live a lifestyle very similar to the one they had left.81 The largest and best-known religious orders on the eve of the Revolution were the orders of the Annunciation, Benedictines, Carmelites, Cistercians, Dominicans, Franciscans, Ursulines, and Visitandines.82 In the eighteenth century, however, these religious organizations came under threat from Enlightenment critiques, economic difficulties, and declining vocations.

The other group was the congregations, where women took non-permanent or simple vows, were un-cloistered, and most often involved themselves in teaching, nursing, care for orphans and the elderly, or other charity work. While previous orders had certainly taught or cared for their communities, the congregations’ focus was first on

service and then on prayers. Perhaps the best and fastest growing example of such an order was the Daughters of Charity, which grew out of the Lazarists and the Ladies of Charity and was formed mainly under the leadership of Saint Vincent de Paul in 1633. De Paul did everything possible to steer clear of canon law complications. He avoided the permanent vows by having his congregants renew their vows yearly. They were called a “confraternity,” a “society,” or a “company” rather than a religious order; they established “houses” and not convents; and their director was a “sister servant” rather than a mother superior. But perhaps the most significant difference, as the historian Colin Jones noted, was the belief that “a sister’s sanctity should take second place to the primordial duty of service to her neighbor.”83 In the words of the founder, even if the sister was in the middle of a prayer or mass when someone needed help, she was to leave to perform her duties to the poor or “to leave God for God.”84 Women who could often not afford the cost of entering the firmly cloistered orders preferred the active congregations. Therefore, even before the Revolution, many of the older houses were declining.

Figure 2.1 Fille de la Charité servant les Malades

85 « Fille de la Charité servant les malades » Estampe (Chez H. Bonnart vis-à-vis les Mathurins). Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Estampes et photographie, RESERVE FOL-QB-201 (58). http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb41504163m
In the seventeenth century, France experienced a shift in the religious vocation. New orders like the Ursulines and the Visitandines expanded rapidly because, although cloistered, they behaved much more like active religious congregations. They were more devoted to teaching or nursing, adhered to a less severe rule, and gave women more freedom. The Visitandines, which began as a small group who took simple vows, became one of the largest orders in France, but they were eventually forced to take solemn vows. The practice of their vocation had two main exercises: “the [first], contemplation and prayer, which is practiced mainly in the houses; the [second], the service of the poor and the sick, mainly of the same sex.” Therefore, Mary, or our Lady of the Visitation, was chosen as the patron because she performed a “solemn act of her charity towards the neighbor” by “visiting and serving St. Elizabeth during her pregnancy, and nevertheless composed the hymn of the Magnificat.” She held worship and service together in her calling. By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the prayerful life of contemplation was not enough without the useful works of service. Members of these communities chafed against the restriction of their movement in the world outside the convent walls, specifically because they involved themselves in more practical religious work of teaching, charity, or nursing. These orders expanded rapidly in the seventeenth century;

86 Originally, the Visitation convents were supposed to be active and uncloistered. Saint Francis de Sales clashed with Marquemont, the bishop of Geneva, who insisted on enclosure. Resistance to these innovations was in part motivated by the concern about non-permanent vows on family fortunes. If these women could return or seek a dowry this could destroy the concentration of family wealth that cloisters offered. Marquement won, and de Sales had to give into his demands of instituting the cloister. Elizabeth Rapley, The Dévotes: Women & Church in Seventeenth-Century France (Buffalo: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990), 34-41.


88 Devos, L’origine sociale des Visitation, 22.

89 Often these visits to the sick had to be monitored, and they could never visit men except in the most dire, life-threatening situations.
for example, Paris gained three new Visitation convents in 1619, 1626, and 1660.90
Convents always held a precarious place in the social landscape of France according to
historian Marie-Ange Duvignacq-Glessgen because, “on the one hand, [noble families]
fear the accumulation of convent’s wealth as a threat to the families, on the other hand, it
[was] in their interest to … offer asylum to girls who could not or did not want to
marry…For the sake of prestige or sincere piety, lords and high magistrates must protect
foundations of new orders stemming from the movement of the Counter-Reformation.”
However, by the eighteenth century, it became clear that not all convents in France were
viable. Some struggled with recruitment and economic solvency.91 Despite this rapid
proliferation of the active religious congregations like the Daughters of Charity and the
cloistered orders like the Visitations and Ursulines who also prioritized service, the
numbers of the contemplative orders began to drop off before the Revolution.

In the eighteenth century, older contemplative orders wrote to Versailles
complaining of hunger from underfunded convents and their utter inability to do anything
about it. Convents in the seventeenth century had expanded beyond sustainable levels.
Orders had difficulty maintaining their members into old age, and without new recruits,
their communities became untenable. Some would only have three or four women living
in houses on the brink of starvation. There was a genuine paradox between the fortune in
real estate that these convents were criticized for hoarding and the daily financial

90 Marie-Ange Duvignacq-Glessgen, L’Ordre de la Visitation À Paris aux XVIIe Siècles (Paris : Les
91 Duvignacq-Glessgen analyzed the number of professions for the three visitation convents in Paris and
found that after an original spike in recruitment in the seventeenth century, the convents rarely got
more than one profession in the six years. The total number of nuns began to stagnate as well
leading up to the Revolution. These findings are best summarized in the graphs on pages 79 to 84.
Duvignacq-Glessgen, L’Ordre de la Visitation À Paris, 79-84.
difficulties convents experienced. Their wealth was tied up in landholdings and not always available for necessities. Contemplative orders specifically suffered more considerable financial difficulties because they had higher expenses and less income.92

In 1727, as a response to these complaints, the French government set up the Commission de Secours to provide funds to these suffering communities.93 Between 1727 and 1788, a program of suppression and consolidation of convents was designed by this commission, eventually closing close to 250 of the 2,000 convents in France.94 The Commission des réguliers in 1768 also set out to count the number of monastic men and women in France. This commission completely ignored lay congregations and new orders.95 Therefore, those monasteries that survived were already well-practiced at convincing authorities of their utility and financial viability.96 Female religious orders learned from this experience of having to argue for their utility. Those involved in teaching or nursing or those who practiced simple vows were not suppressed by this commission because they had sources of income and, therefore, were not liable for closure.

94 The Commission des réguliers in 1768 also set out to count the number of religious men in France but with some glaring exceptions including the new orders and excluding the newly expelled Jesuits. They estimated 2,972 houses of monks containing some 26,674 monks by these numbers fell drastically on the eve of the revolution. Estimates in 1768 do not include the expulsion of Jesuits. Derek Beales, “France” in Prosperity and Plunder: European Catholic Monasteries in the Age of Revolution, 1650-1815 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 85.
Rents from their properties and other incomes from their massive landholdings were insufficient; therefore, more convents turned to other forms of income. Taking on boarders, both young women who stayed in the convent to gain an education, older women, and widows, added some revenue from their payments to reside in the convent. These women occupied an intermediate position because they were not full members of the convents and did not follow all of their religious patterns of living, but they also spent much of their time immersed in the daily activities of the convent. Eventually, some of the convents made a distinction between the “little sisters,” or young girls being educated for the religious life, and those girls who were educated in the convent for a life eventually outside of the convent walls.97 Pensionnaires or those who paid to reside in the convent were an important albeit small supplement to the dowries, donations, and other regular sources of income. Boarders were always an essential source of income for the Visitandines and Ursulines.

In the decades before the Revolution, there was also a decline in new vocations to the strictly cloistered orders in favor of the less strict congregations. This may indicate a decline in religiosity in France in the decade before the Revolution.98 However, Elisabeth Rapley has argued that the decline in the strictly cloistered communities was not the whole story; there was also an explosion of pious women who engaged in teaching and took simple vows. These women sought to serve the world instead of retreating from it. Most notably, Colin Jones cited the rapid expansion of the Daughters of Charity just before the Revolution, when “the community took on fifty-four new hospitals between

97 Duvignacq-Glessgen, L’Ordre de la Visitation À Paris, 237.
98 Michel Vovelle’s Piété baroque et déchristianisation en Provence au XVIIIe siècle argued that French religious zeal was already declining before the Revolution began.
Their work in education, teaching, care for orphans, the elderly, and the mentally ill was rewarding, and many women found a compelling alternative to the cloisters in their congregations. Before the Revolution, France certainly did experience a decline of the contemplative orders, but this assertion was incomplete because there were also signs of change in the expansion of the Daughters of Charity.

2.2 Becoming a Nun: Taking on New Habits

Taking up the call to either a firmly cloistered life in a contemplative order, or the dirty and dangerous work of nursing required a complete change of identity. A woman’s entire pattern of living would have to be transformed. Her individual identity was subjugated to her group identity with other members of the order. The ritualized and highly regulated performance of work and prayers was one of the most visible ways that nuns expressed their identity. Certain rituals marked important moments in their adoption of new externalized identities. The first identity-forming ritual was when a woman became a Postulant, a status that she would retain for three to six weeks. After that time, she would be allowed to take the habit, at the discretion of the Mother Superior. At this point, she became a Novitiate or Novice, where she would remain for ten to fifteen months. After this time, most women were required to pass an examination to assure the validity of their vocation before they were officially accepted by their Superior. After another six months of spiritual formation, the young novitiate would finally be ready to take her final vows. In some orders, there was a class division in the convent. The more affluent women with dowries and from a higher social rank could become nuns of the choir, where they were often required to study another two years to perform their

functions as teachers or to take up positions of leadership in the convent. Meanwhile, the converse sisters, women from a lower social class, performed chores or service to the community, and occupied a lower rank.  

While each order or congregation’s ceremonies varied slightly, all of them involved a distinct moment of shedding a former identity to take on a new one. For nuns, taking the distinctive religious clothing or habit was “the sign of their definitive departure from the world and their inclusion in the spiritual family.” Taking the religious habit of a particular community was not something that a nun did individually, but only with the active participation of every member of the religious order. The sisters, although sharing a collective identity in their convent, had a strict hierarchy based on the length of their profession at these ceremonies. The Superior sat at the head on one side, and the assistant on the other. The other sisters assembled themselves according to the length of their profession, giving preference to the nuns who had been in the convent longer. The candidate was in the middle of the choir. The mistress of the novices was at the side of the assistant to help the Superior of the convent and to dress the postulant. Every sister had a place in the convent, and she knew exactly where she belonged. She knew what to do or say at each moment to perform her role in the ceremony.

100 Gwenaël Murphy, L’Affaire Rose Lauray : Religieuse Poitevine (Geste èditions: La Creche, 2001), 104.
101 For most there was a separate ceremony to become a postulant and then a novice.
103 As will be discussed in the divine office, the group was often divided in two choirs.
104 Sœurs de Notre-Dame de Charité de Lisieux, Cérémonial pour donner l’Habit aux Sœurs de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame de Charité, (Lisieux : F.B. Mistral, 1809), 16-B-813 Bibliothèque nationale de France, pgs. 8-9.
The prayers and the ceremony were spoken or sung entirely in Latin. This language was another aspect binding the Catholic Church together in one common tongue and identity regardless of national or political boundaries. After the mass and the sermon, the superior asked the new novice, “My daughter, what are you asking? declare your intention before this whole assembly.” The candidate responded, “I asked one thing to the Lord, and it is the one I still ask now, that I stay in this holy house every day of my life.” The applicant had to affirm both her calling from God and also her own ardent desire to enter the house. God was ultimately sovereign over her vocation, but the postulant and the community had to take actions together to make this identity a reality.

There was one other essential figure at the habit ceremony: the priest. In most elements of life in the convent, a priest or another male spiritual advisor oversaw or officiated the ceremonies and convent practices. The priest performed most of the spoken roles in the ceremony, and it was the priest who pronounced, “You will no longer be called [given name]. But only [name chosen when entering the convent].” Acting as God’s representative on earth, the priest did important symbolic work in identity formation and reformation within the convent. He, imbued with the authority of God himself, transformed a regular woman into a “sister,” giving her a new name and a new identity. He did not, however, concern himself with the actual daily practice of this identity transformation. This was evident from the role performed by the mistress of the

105 « ma fille, que demandez-vous ? déclarez votre intention devant toute cette assemblée. » Cérémonial... Notre-Dame de Charité, 16-B-813, BnF, 13.
106 « J’ai demandé un chose au Seigneur, & c’est celle que je demande encore maintenant, que je puisse demeurer en cette sainte Maison tous les jours de ma vie. Cérémonial... Notre-Dame de Charité, BnF, 13.
107 « Vous ne serez plus appelée N. Seulement mais NN. » Cérémonial... Notre-Dame de Charité, BnF, 25.
novices and the assistant, who were the ones who dressed the new nun during the ceremony. The ceremony ended with the singing of Psalms, the novitiate kissing the feet of all of the members of the order—beginning with the superior—and the sisters filing out in order of their rank.

For devout women, taking the habit was a special calling from God.

During the ceremony, when a postulant declared her intention to take the habit, the Superior described the life she would enter.

It is true, my daughter, that this is the house of the Lord, and it is therefore fitting that those who dwell therein serve Him all their lives and with all their heart, in all purity, service, and holiness. Take for them that word of our Lord and our master; ‘If anyone comes after me, let him totally renounce himself, carry his cross every day, and follow me.’ This is the school of the mortification of sense & of one’s own will; One must continually crucify the inner and outer man until one has made him die with all his evil inclinations, his vicious habits, and his unregulated desires.

The goal of the contemplative life was to put to death all the temptations of sin and to take up the path Jesus desired for his followers. The continual prayer and edification of the soul was all aimed towards “mortification” of the self, of the individual will, and of both internal and external earthly identities. The goal was to lose the self and subjugate it entirely to the identity God chose for His servant. Identity in the convent was always subjugated to a heavenly calling. Instead of seeking the natural life, nuns sought “a totally

108 Cérémonial... Notre-Dame de Charité, BnF, 26.
109 Cérémonial... Notre-Dame de Charité, BnF, 33-6.
110 « Il est vrai, ma fille, que c’est ici la maison du Seigneur & qu’il convient par conséquent que celles qui y demeurent, le servent toute leur vie & de tout leur cœur, en toute pureté serveur & sainteté’ elles doivent y prendre pour elles cette parole de notre Seigneur & notre maitre ; si quelqu’un veut venir après moi, qu’il renonce totalement à soi-même, qu’il porte sa croix tous les jours, & qu’il me suive,, C’est donc ici l’école de la mortification des sens & de volonté propre ; on y doit continuellement crucifier l’homme intérieur & extérieur jusqu’à ce qu’on l’ait fait mourir avec toutes ses inclinations mauvaises ses habitudes vicieuses & ses désirs dérégles. » Cérémonial... Notre-Dame de Charité, 16.
supernatural and divine life” that “conformed to the image of the crucified Jesus.”

While this was never fully realized on earth, it was the goal of contemplative life to get a little closer to this perfection every day.

Figure 2.2 shows a Benedictine wearing a special outfit for her profession ceremony. She was dressed in white, a symbol of purity, as she offered her life as a perfect sacrifice to the Lord. Benedictines were a traditional, cloistered, contemplative order that had one of the most severe observances of the Rule of Saint Benedict. The performance of rank and status at each of the ceremonies helped to solidify not only the novice’s identity but that of the other sisters as well. Depending on their rank, they wore different clothes and performed different duties, which helped them answer existential questions of belonging and purpose.

111 « … d’un vie toute surnaturelle & toute divine… se rendre conformes à l’image de Jesus crucifié » Cérémonial... Notre-Dame de Charité, 16.

Figure 2.2 Benedictine Habit for Taking the Profession

While in theory female religious women entered a new ‘spiritual family’ where the sisters would all love each other equally, social hierarchy and family ties seeped into nearly every convent in eighteenth-century France. The idea that nuns were “sisters” and, therefore, “daughters” of the “mother” superior, and that they were all under the authority of a heavenly “father” helped to recreate a patriarchal system even in the convent. Entering the convent meant creating a new set of symbolic kinship ties. However, in some cases, there were actual family ties between siblings, aunts, nieces, and sometimes even mothers and daughters in the convent. Mothers whose daughters entered religious life would often board in a convent after they had been widowed. Aunts encouraged their nieces to enter the convent and inherit their leadership roles. There were all sorts of earthly family ties that the sisters maintained even as they created new spiritual family relationships. In addition to these real family ties that followed them into the convent, they could also maintain contact with their family through letters and visits. Therefore, there was always a tension between the shedding of their worldly and family identity and the persistence of those identities that were simply recreated within the convent.

The next ceremony in a novice’s path to becoming a full nun was the Profession, when she took her solemn vows. Taking the exact same positions as in the habit ceremony, the sisters assembled before the exposition of the sacrament. Again the novice declared her intention, “I ask my Father, for the love of God and of our Savior Jesus Christ, to be accepted to the profession, according to the regulations, in the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity, to exercise my whole life in the services to the poor, by

114 Evangelisti, Nuns, 9.
obedience, poverty, and perpetual chastity.” After her pronouncement, in response to Reformation critiques of forced vows, the Superior verbally verified that she was taking the vows freely and that it was her choice. The novitiate’s formal vows were then recited exactly according to memorized script. For a Lady of Charity, it went like this:

In the name of Father & Son & Holy Spirit. So be it. Eternal Father, all-powerful and all good, though I am very unworthy to appear in your presence, pressed nevertheless for the desire to be all yours, and animated by the confidence which your merciful goodness gives me in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ and of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God, of my good Angel, of Saint Joseph, of Saint [the saint’s name chosen to be the novitiate’s name ],, my Patroness, and of your celestial Heart; I vow, your divine majesty, to keep a perpetual chastity, to remain all my life in the service of the poor, to keep a holy poverty, according to the rules of our Congregation and the explanation that I have been given and to obey according to the same rules, to our most honored mother and very worthy Superior, Madame St. or Ste. [Name of the Mother Superior], and to those who will succeed her. I make a firm resolution, oh my God! to keep these four vows in all the perfection that will be possible for me; to observe exactly and constantly all the rules of the house, and for all my sisters a cordial charity; I humbly pray to you, my God, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the merits of His holy passion, to make good on the vows and resolutions that I now offer you, and as you have given me the grace of the deign to grant me still that of keeping faithfully & constantly until death, in the General Hospital of Lisieux, [this day & year].

115 « Je demande mon Père, pour l’amour de Dieu & de notre Sauveur Jésus-Christ, d’être reçue à la profession, selon les règlements, en la Congrégation de Notre Dame de Charité, pour m’y exercer toute ma vie au services des pauvres, par obéissance, pauvreté & chasteté perpétuelle. » Cérémonial... Notre-Dame de Charité, 48-9. Because this ceremony is for a congregation, not a cloistered convent, it seems to be missing some of the key elements of the full profession ceremony, including the cutting of the nun’s hair and the anathema, usually delivered by a Bishop or his vicar. A nun, such as the superior, would not be qualified to administer sacred vows.

116 Cérémonial... Notre-Dame de Charité, 50.

117 « Au nom de Père & du Fils & du Saint-Esprit. Ainsi soit-il. Père éternel, tout puissant & tout bon quoique je vois très-indigne de paraître en votre présence, pressée néanmoins du désir d’être toute à vous & animée de la confiance que me donne votre miséricordieuse bonté, en présence de notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ & de la très-Stee-Vierge marie, mère de Dieu, de mon bon Ange, de saint Joseph, de sainte N., ma patronne & de votre Cœur celeste ; je fais vœu votre divine majesté, de garder un chasteté perpétuelle, de demeurer toute ma vie au service des pauvres, de garder une la sainte pauvreté, selon les règles de notre Congrégation, & l’explication que l’on m’en a donnée & d’obéir selon les mêmes règles, a notre très-honorée mère & très digne Supérieure, madame St. ou Ste. N.N., & à celles qui lui succéderont. Je fais une ferme résolution, o mon Dieu ! de garder ces quatre vœux, dans toute la perfection qui me sera possible ; d’observer exactement & constamment toutes les règles de la maison, & d’avoir pour toutes mes Sœurs une charité cordiale ; je vous prie très humblement mon Dieu, au nom de notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ, & par les merites de sa sainte passion, d’avoir agréable les vœux & résolutions que je vous offre.
While every convent could have its own unique wording, this order’s script gives us a good idea of the types of vows a woman was required to make, including the commitments to poverty, chastity, obedience, and, in this case, service to the poor. Although the vows would be difficult to keep, the nuns believed that God would support their efforts and sanctify them. The novitiate would have the help of the Trinity, her patroness, and a whole community of sisters.

Immediately after taking her vows, the sister returned to the choir to pray and sing Psalms with the others. She was called out of her place among the other sisters to be blessed with the cross by the Superior and to receive a benediction.118 Afterward, the superior would say, “My sister, you are dead in the world, and you must be to yourself, to live only for God.”119 The nun must no longer identify herself according to the world, but only within the context of God and His plan. This ceremony ended with the newly professed sister kissing the feet of the members of the order according to their rank. Finally, all the sisters knelt and sang the Ave Maria.120 The nun was now considered dead to the world. She could not inherit property, marry, or engage in the secular world at all. In practice, this may have been more difficult to achieve, but the symbolism was clear.

maintenant & comme vous m’avez donné la grâce de les faire daignez m’accorder encore celle de les garder fidèlement & constamment jusqu’à la mort, en l’Hôpital général de Lisieux, ce jour & an. » Cérémonial... Notre-Dame de Charité, 59-63.

118 Cérémonial... Notre-Dame de Charité., 65-67.
119 « Ma sœur vous êtes morte au monde, & vous devez l’être à vous-même, pour ne plus vivre qu’à Dieu. » Cérémonial... Notre-Dame de Charité, 65-67.
120 Cérémonial... Notre-Dame de Charité, 84.
2.3 Daily Life in the Convent

Although many convents followed the rule of Saint Benedict, different convents could, if they chose, amend or make their own set of rules their inhabitants needed to follow. The Visitandines adopted the rule of Saint Augustine because it was more flexible and did not require women to wake up to say the office in the middle of the night. Each community kept their own schedule tightly, even if by the eighteenth century, this schedule did not look the same at every convent and congregation. All nuns who took solemn religious vows had daily prayers to recite. They patterned their existence around hearing mass, receiving sacraments, and different practices of asceticism. Much of the Ursulines nuns’ work revolved around the education of aristocrats’ daughters who resided in the convents. The Daughters of Charity, a religious congregation with simple vows, was less ascetic, and its sisters spent more time in caring for the patients in their hospitals than in reciting their divine office.

Every religious order— but not all congregations—followed a book of divine offices or a pattern of prayer that would occupy their many hours in the convent. Each of these books differed according to the particular rules of the order and would be revised and reprinted over time. However, there was a general order of the divine office—attributed to St. Benedict— which is outlined in a simplified form below. The first section of the book of divine hours consisted of Matins, which occurred somewhere around 2:00 am and consisted of two or three nocturns. The Nocturns were portions of the Matins that included Psalms, Bible readings, readings from the Church fathers, excerpts from the vita of Saints, blessings, or songs. Next, Lauds occurred around 5 am,

121 Most Benedictines by this time had received a dispensation from Rome to delay this ceremony until dawn.
the exact time varied with the seasons. Lauds included Psalms 66, 50, 146, 150, hymns, litanies, prayers, and readings from the epistles. *Prime* at 6 a.m., *Terce* at 9 a.m., *Sext* at noon, and *None* at 3 p.m. were all called the “little hours” and consisted of a short verse, a hymn, variable psalms, a brief lesson, and a litany. They were the shortest of the “hours” of the divine office. *Vespers* was the Evening Prayer around 6 p.m. and consisted of five psalms, a reading, a responsory, a hymn, a canticle, a litany, and dismissal. The final official hour of prayer was *Compline*. This included Psalms 4, 90, and 133, a hymn, a brief lesson, and a blessing. Throughout the day, most of the work inside a contemplative order was completed in absolute silence to allow for continuous prayer and contemplation. Every thought, action, and moment belonged to God.

After the Council of Trent, this order and format of the divine office was standardized, but in practice, religious orders developed variations on this format.

The Divine Office from the royal house of Saint Louis in Saint Cyr from 1754, just a few decades before the Revolution, offer a good example. The prayers, benedictions, lessons, and responses were always in Latin, but the accompanying instructions were written in French. There were nearly 200 pages of prayers for different times of days or different religious holidays. Not only each individual day, but the entire year was patterned by a liturgy of feast days and religious celebrations. Each day would start in the middle of the night with *matins*, which for this order was “office of the Holy

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122 Originally the evening prayers had four Psalms but by the fifth century this was revised to be only four.
124 The Breviary itself can be over a thousand pages, so orders would issue books with only the exceptions to the normal Roman Breviary. This source I am using here is one such case. *Offices divins, BnFà l'usage des dames et demoiselles de la maison royale de Saint Louis à Saint Cyr* (Impr. De Glissey : Paris, 1754) *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, 8-Z LE SENNE-8200, http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb36827059b, 1.
Virgin.” ¹²⁵ This prayer was usually one of the longest and altered according to the season. For example at the Septuagesima (or the eighth-Sundays before Easter), after the Compline (the last prayers the night before), the nuns were to substitute the “Alleluia” for “Laus tibi Dómine, Rex ætérnae glóriæ,” which means “praise thee O King Eternal Glory,” because the Alleluia or the rising from the dead had not yet been accomplished.¹²⁶ During Advent, in lieu of the final Antiphon, a brief chanted piece framing the psalm, the nuns would say “Angelus Dómini,” which meant “the angel of the Lord,” and referred to the Angel Gabriel who visited Mary.¹²⁷ During the feast of the Annunciation, additional Te Deums and hymns would be sung.¹²⁸ In another place during the office of the Holy Virgin, there was a note that the following three Psalms and their antiphons were only to be said on Sunday, Monday, and Thursday.¹²⁹ Other Psalms, however, would be sung on Tuesday and Friday, and another set would be said on Wednesday and Saturday.¹³⁰ These patterns of prayer created habits that transformed the nuns’ sense of self and their relationship to the rest of the world.¹³¹ Their days were patterned based on communal worship and in search of sanctification. They had a clear sense of self, social position, source of morality, and purpose.

¹²⁵ « L’office de la Sainte Vierge a Matines », Offices divins, BnF, 8-Z LE SENNE-8200, 1.
¹²⁶ « A la Septuagesime, à commencer la veille à Complies, & depuis ce jour jusqu’à Pasques, au lieu de cet Állumia qui se dit au commencement » Offices divins, BnF, 8-Z LE SENNE-8200, 1.
¹²⁸ Offices divins, BnF, 8-Z LE SENNE-8200, 16.
¹²⁹ « Il est à remarquer que les trois Pseaumes suivans avec leurs Antiennes se disent le Dimanche, le Lundi & le Jeudy. » Offices divins, BnF, 8-Z LE SENNE-8200, 3.
¹³¹ Mais s’il suit immédiatement un autre Heure, ou plusieurs, l’on réserve toute cette fin pour la dernière des Heures suivantes qui se puissent dire tout de suite, à la réserve de Complies qui a sa fin particulière. »
The typical day for a Visitandine did not strictly follow this pattern laid out by St. Benedict. Since they followed the Rule of Saint Augustine, their day began at 5:30 in the morning in the winter and 5:00 in the summer when the community would perform its morning spiritual exercises (similar to Lauds), including singing the Ave Maria.\textsuperscript{132} The Visitandine would then put on her plain black habit— to match every other member of the convent— and clean her cell or otherwise ready herself for the moment all of the nuns assembled to adore the holy sacrament (the Eucharist) and pray together.\textsuperscript{133} At 6:30, they would continue to recite their prayers, starting with the first of the little hours. The nuns could then go about their various occupations in the convent until 8 a.m. when the nuns once again assembled to sing or say their offices and then hear mass. Their first meal was served at 10 a.m. in the morning. During the meal, a reader— designated weekly— read excerpts of the books of observance, or on feast days, the writings of Saint Francis de Sales, their founder.\textsuperscript{134} In other convents, there were lessons printed in the book of the Divine Office.\textsuperscript{135} Meals in the Visitation convent were more abundant and varied than might be expected, especially in comparison with other convents. They had lamb, pork, fish, eggs, milk, fruits, and vegetables.\textsuperscript{136} Occasionally, the Parisian Visitation convents would gain access to patisseries. All meals were consumed in absolute silence, with the exception of the readings. At midday, there was often the sound of the bells to call them back to prayer. The afternoon was the nuns’ only time for rest and recreation. At 2:00, the

\textsuperscript{132} Boussoulade, 	extit{Moniales et hospitalières dans la tourmente révolutionnaire}, 118.

\textsuperscript{133} Duvignacq-Glessgen, 	extit{L’Ordre de la Visitation À Paris}, 118.

\textsuperscript{134} Catta, 	extit{La Vie d’un monastère}, 114-115.


\textsuperscript{136} Duvignacq-Glessgen, 	extit{L’Ordre de la Visitation À Paris}, 118.
nuns read spiritually edifying material. Vespers was at 3:00 and lasted about two hours. The rest of the night would be occupied with prayers, meditations, the offices, and rest. At 9:30, the nuns returned to their cells and were asleep by 10. Unlike the Rule of Benedict, which required nocturns in the middle of the night, the Rule of Augustine allowed the Visitandines to sleep through the night.

Perhaps the fastest growing women’s religious organization in France on the eve of the Revolution were the Daughters of Charity (The Vincentians). Their day followed the least strict rule as they favored service over contemplation. Nevertheless, the typical day for the Daughters of Charity was long. The sisters woke up at 4:00 am, said morning prayers, celebrated mass, ate breakfast, engaged in a time of silence and professional work, examined their consciences, served the sick, taught children, said their evening prayers, and ate supper. Then, after the last rounds of surveillance of the sick, they would try to rest. In addition to caring for the sick and wounded, they performed other acts of charity. At the hospital in Dax, soldiers came to the hospital for housing while they visited the nearby springs, which had healing properties. Sometimes the sisters housed and cared for the itinerants who came to experience the healing properties of the springs. Their days were absorbed with caring for the sick, injured, poor, and needy in whatever province. They were also more likely to travel to different hospitals in France. Unlike

137 Catta, La Vie d’un monastère, 117.
138 Rules for the Daughters of Charity, Chapter IX.
139 Joseph Grateloup, a doctor and surgeon. He wrote that the soldiers came “to take a bath or take advantage of the mud, which, like the waters, has long been famous [for its healing properties]” « …prendre bains ou pour profiter des boues, qui ont ainsi que les eaux, une célébrité fort ancienne… » Joseph Grateloup, Le journal de médecin, chirurgie et pharmacie, volume 72, July 1787.
most of the other orders in France, they were not closely tied to the town where they grew up, or the town where they entered the congregation.

Although there was a great variety in routines between different orders, each had a distinct pattern that dictated the order of their day. This pattern guided their entire lives from the moment they entered until they died. Therefore, perhaps no other group enforced the same level of similarity as the nuns. They performed all labors together, sang together, ate together, dressed the same, and kept to the same schedule. This daily program of prayers, songs, and labors was essential for solidifying the identity of each of the members of the convent. In the physical act of worship and work, they reinforced their spiritual commitment. Therefore, nuns become one of the best examples of women who took on a new identity and performed identity-forming rituals daily to reinforce these new identities.

The regimented pattern of daily life and the ritualistic identity formations that characterized life in the convent made the nuns’ abrupt separation from these permanent religious identities during the Revolution traumatic for many women. The ways that nun coped with changes posed by the revolutionaries were far more diverse and offered insights into the ways that these women understood themselves and their communities at the turn of the century. This daily program of prayers, rituals, and community-living helped to transform the way these women identified themselves and related to one another. While this pattern reinforced their individual identities, it did nothing to help others form their ideas on the identity of the nun. Few people outside the convent knew what went on inside it.
2.4 Philosophes’ Critiques

Are convents so essential to the constitution of a state? Were monks and nuns instituted by Jesus Christ? Can the Church positively not do without them? What need has the Bridegroom of so many foolish virgins? And the human race of so many victims? Will they never realize the necessity for narrowing the entrance to these chasms into which future generations are going to plunge to their doom? Are all routine prayers which are said there worth as much as the penny that charity gives to the poor? Does God, who made man sociable, approve of his hiding himself away? Can God, who made man inconstant and frail, authorize such rash vows? Can these vows, which run counter to our natural inclinations, ever be properly observed except by a few abnormal creatures in whom the seeds of passion are dried up, and whom we rightly classify as freaks of nature if the state of our knowledge allowed us to understand the internal structure of man as well as we understand his external appearance?...140

--Denis Diderot, *The Nun*

To understand the way intellectuals and the major idealistic thinkers in France viewed the convents, we must explore the impact of the Enlightenment identity of the nun. Enlightenment philosophes like Voltaire railed against the institutional church. Rousseau’s *Émile* encouraged mothers to raise their children and not just send them to a convent for their education. Lastly, Diderot penned his novel, *The Nun*, which depicted the convents as prisons rife with sexual deviancy, despotic mother superiors, and sadism. One of the most significant criticisms of the identity of the nun in the Enlightenment salons was her unnatural existence outside of marriage. Celibacy was criticized as contrary to nature and cruel. As historian Mita Choudhury has written, “Men of letters began to understand the moral woman as the more natural woman devoted to being a wife and mother.” This meant that “all nuns appeared as deviant women unable to fulfill their natural vocation as wives and mothers.”141 Furthermore, Enlightenment critics believed the convent repressed women so much that their natural bodily functions,

141 Choudhury, *Convents and Nuns*, 5, 6.
including menstruation and childbirth, were disrupted. A wife and a mother used her body and allowed her body to be used in the correct manner—through the natural process of marriage, sex, childbearing, and childrearing. Any deviation from this role was a subversive perversion of a woman’s natural state and became a threat to the state. Joan Landes described women’s virtue as “linked to their idealized role within the family… Consequently, the attention a woman drew to herself could be taken to be a sign of her immorality or immodesty.”

Although Landes’s work ignored nuns, her vision of women exposes a paradox in the identity of nuns in the eighteenth century. Previously, they were the pinnacle of piety, but their practice of this piety began to be identified as immodest and immoral.

Not only were convents unnatural for health, but they were also useless to society. Voltaire, one of the most famous deist *philosophes* of the French Enlightenment, was one of the first to describe the convent as *inutile*, or useless. Had these women married and raised good French citizens instead of wasting their lives in an unnatural and repressive convent, France would reap innumerable benefits:

> There is such a useless Convent in the world, in all respects, which enjoys an income of two hundred thousand *livres* a year. Reason shows that if these two hundred thousand *livres* were given to one hundred officers, so that they would marry, there would be one hundred good citizens compensated, one hundred girls provided for, at least four hundred more people in the state after ten years, instead of fifty idlers. It shows again that these fifty idlers, returned to the Fatherland, would cultivate the land, the people would see, that there would be more Plowmen and more Soldiers.

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142 Joan B. Landes, *Visualizing the Nation: Gender, Representation, and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France*.

143 Voltaire, *La Voix de Sage et du Peuple* (Amsterdam : Le sincère, 1750), 10. « Il y a tel Couvent inutile au monde, à tous égards, qui jouit de deux cent mille livres de rentes. La raison démontre que si on donnait ces deux cent mille livres à cent Officiers, qu’on marierait, il y aurait cent bons Citoyens ré compensés, cent Filles pourvues, quatre-cent personnes au moins de plus dans 'Etat au bout de dix ans, au lieu de cinquante fainéants. Elle démontre encore que ces cinquante fainéants, rendus à la Patrie, cultiveraient la terre, la peuple voient, qu'il y aurait plus de Laboureurs et plus de Soldats. »
This passage suggested that many kinds of suffering, such as famines, labor shortages, the tragedy of unmarried women, and shortages of soldiers, could be solved if France eliminated the drain that monasteries and convents made on the labor supply and on finances. They removed able—and fertile—producers of both goods and citizens. With each generation, this shortage became more acute because the generational debt compounded.

The problems that Enlightenment thinkers and later the revolutionaries had with monasticism stemmed from their belief that religious houses were contrary to natural rights, and they were “useless” to the nation. Increasingly, religious houses, much like the aristocracy, were perceived as a drain on public resources. By the 1760s, Enlightenment critiques and economic insolvency indicated religious houses needed reform, particularly among the contemplative orders. In the Encyclopédie, an eighteenth-century attempt to catalog all of human knowledge and an example of Enlightenment thought, the philosophe Turgot argued, “the aim here is only to examine the usefulness of foundations in general in relation to the public good, or rather to show their disadvantages: may the following considerations work together with the philosophical spirit of the century, to disfavor new foundations, & to destroy a remnant of superstitious respect for the old ones!” Furthermore, the Physiocrats, a group of Enlightenment economists, came to criticize the inefficiency of Catholic charity. They wanted to make charity a purely

economic concern and not a religious one. Turgot blamed the church for swelling the number of social parasites.  

Other Enlightenment philosophes were more concerned about the near-monopoly religious orders had on education. Jean Jacques Rousseau described the role of women in education and society in Émile and La Nouvelle Héloïse. In Emile, women had one of the most critical roles in creating a free society: they were tasked with raising free individuals. Everything a mother did was of crucial concern for the republic. Rousseau argued that only when women became good wives and mothers could men become good husbands and fathers. Historian Jennifer Popiel argues that this gave women an equal role in forming the new society through their sway over their husbands and their ability to produce and raise children of the republic. Women who were identified as neither wives nor mothers could have no place in creating a new society. Nuns became subversive because they were not married and should not be educating the next generation. Moreover, children should not be educated in convents or any place outside the home. Rousseau wrote about how much he hated the idea of convents and monasteries being entrusted with educating the French children in Émile. Advocating that mothers should serve as natural nurses and the fathers as natural teachers, Rousseau

145 Forrest, The French Revolution and the Poor, 18.
148 Popiel, Rousseau’s Daughters, 47.
149 Ironically, Rousseau himself abandoned all of his children and did not practice what he taught others to follow.
criticized parents who neglected the education of their children and shamefully shipped them off to convents.¹⁵⁰ Jennifer Popiel described the bad mother as “selfish, unnatural, undisciplined and externalized, and her children and their society paid the price for her selfishness.”¹⁵¹ There remained aristocratic French families, however, who respected the education that young girls received in convents. Philosophes like Rousseau tried to dissuade families from educating their children in such institutions because of the “corrupting” influence of the nuns.

Denis Diderot, a leading figure in the French Enlightenment, was one of the strongest critics of religious life. He devoted one of his major works to what he saw as the unnatural life of Catholic nuns. Although La religieuse, or The Nun, was not published until 1796, it was written in 1780, before the Revolution, and we can use it to understand some of the critiques of monasticism that were circulating in the eighteenth century. Diderot portrayed convents as creating emotional cripples and monsters, a place that bred mental illness and lesbianism.¹⁵² Diderot viewed complete enclosure, contemplative orders, and celibacy as unnatural. Perhaps the best summary of the Enlightenment attitudes towards convents was expressed by the character Monsieur Manouri in conversation with the main character, a nun named Suzanne:

A vow of poverty means binding oneself on oath to be an idler, and a thief, a vow of chastity means promising God continual breaking of the wisest and most important of His laws, a vow of obedience means giving up man’s inalienable prerogative, freedom. If one observes these vows, one is a criminal, if not, one is a perjurer. The cloistered life is that of a fanatic or a hypocrite.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Rousseau, Emile, 16.
¹⁵¹ Popiel, Rousseau’s Daughters, 105.
¹⁵² Choudhury, Convents and Nuns, 28.
Nuns perhaps more than any other figure of the ancien régime experienced a dramatic reversal in public opinion about their place in society. The convent, which was supposed to harbor all that was good, chaste, and holy, became the very opposite for many Enlightenment thinkers.

One of the most significant issues in the convent— and one of the villains in Diderot’s novel— was the Mother Superior. Suzanne’s superior had no qualms about lying and emotionally abusing her sisters. As if physical and verbal abuse was not enough, Suzanne soon fell victim to unwanted sexual advances and seemed wholly blindsided by the Mother Superior’s advances. The very first night she was visited by her Mother Superior, Suzanne was so naïve that she did not understand what was happening. Suzanne said that the Superior came into her room while she was undressing, lavished her with praise, then proceeded to kiss her neck, shoulders, and arms before tucking her in bed, and kissing her goodnight.154 She recounted, “I did not understand quite what was happening, and neither did she. And even now, when I come to think it over, what could we have understood?”155 Later, the Mother Superior paraded Suzanne in front of the Superior’s former lover, Sister Thérèse, to spark her jealousy.156 Yet, Suzanne could not understand what made Thérèse so “unsettled, restless, touching everything needlessly, not knowing what to do with herself, looking out the window.”157 She observed Thérèse’s behavior while sitting on her Superior’s lap. Suzanne refused to acknowledge

154 Diderot, The Nun, 126.
155 Diderot, The Nun, 126.
156 The decision to name this nun Thérèse was no mistake. I believe Diderot did this intentionally to draw readers to make connections between this nun and the famous title character of the libertine novel Thérèse Philosophe, which was one of the most popular pieces of erotic literature in the eighteenth century.
157 Diderot, The Nun, 129.
the darker intentions of her Superior, who was supposed to be her spiritual guide.

Diderot’s characterized the evil Mother Superiors as someone who took advantage of her charges to exercise her sadistic pleasure.

Such exploitation and abuse led Diderot to the conclusion that the convent bred only sadness and madness. It was an endless mixture of torture, abuse, annoyance, boredom, and melancholy. Suzanne describes it as “fathomless boredom,” “wasting,” “self-consuming,” “nights troubled by groans and days bathed in tears shed for no reason,” and “fits of melancholy.” However, Suzanne had to keep these thoughts to herself or be chastised by her Mother Superior. Her sadness gave way to psychological manifestations, and this melancholy pushed her to the edge of mental stability. She talked about how the convent life had “strained [her] violent character to [the] breaking point,” how her “mind was deranged.” She began to think about suicide, as she toyed with thoughts of how high the windows were, the strength of her garters, and not eating. The only reason she gave for not taking her own life was that “apparently [humans] don’t like to be pushed out of this world.” Had her sisters showed any sign of wanting to keep her alive, she might have actually committed the act. Diderot described the convent in ways that were reminiscent of hell.

Suzanne’s thoughts, as depicted by Diderot, were amazingly naïve, which was the result of the cloistered life that arrested her mental development. When speaking about her Mother Superior: “it was some time before I began to suspect her good faith.”

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Despite the Superior forcing her into the profession—ignoring her vocal protestations—she still assumed this woman was kind and pious. When Suzanne took more than her usual allotment of paper to confession, the Superior gave Suzanne over to the other sisters in the convent. The sisters “tore off my veil and shamelessly stripped me…They threw a shift at me, took off my stockings, covered me with a sack, and took me along the passage bareheaded and barefoot. I screamed for help, but they had rung the bell to warn everybody to stay out of sight. […] By the time I reached the bottom of the stairs, my feet were bleeding and my legs bruised—my condition would have touched hearts of bronze.”163 Suzanne was then placed in what she described as a prison. Suzanne exclaimed, “what evil creatures segregated women are” and argued it is better to kill one’s “own daughter rather than imprison her in a cloister against her will.”164 Diderot portrayed convents, not as places of worship and piety for women, but as swarming with evil, violence, corruption, and sadism. This scene described the despotic and cruel Superior, the vicious dehumanized actions of the other nuns, and the way the convent doubled as a prison for unruly women.

Perhaps most problematic was the deceptive nature of convent life. The Superior’s “object [was] to hide from [young women] all the thorns of the vocation, she subjects [her] to a course of the most carefully calculated seduction.”165 Diderot’s description of a Mother Superior convincing women to join the convent as seduction was not a mistake. Historian Robert Darnton describes the seduction in this literature as “an inverted form of Christianity, and it prepared the reader to consider the proposition in

163 Diderot, The Nun, 66.
164 Diderot, The Nun, 89, 86.
reverse: Christianity was a form of seduction.”¹⁶⁶ It was not the world that seduced women from the correct and natural path, but Christianity. While certainly women were convinced through less nefarious means, Diderot believed that convents stole young women away from their natural sexual disposition and tricked them into cesspools of lesbianism.

While most people in France had not read Rousseau, Voltaire, and Diderot, their ideas became important for influencing a change in sentiment on the purpose and utility of the convents for France. The increased criticism from the philosophes, decline in recruitment, and increased economic difficulties, combined to transform the identity of the nun at the end of the eighteenth century. These factors would have an essential influence on the types of religious legislation passed once the Revolution broke out.

CHAPTER 3. 1789-1791: IDENTITY IN THE FACE OF MOUNTING LEGISLATIVE RESISTANCE

When the Estates General gathered in 1789 to solve France’s impending financial crisis, economic reform was not the only item on their agenda. The question of what future religious houses would have in the new French state came to the forefront. This chapter will discuss the early period of the Revolution roughly from 1789 to 1791. During this period, Enlightenment critiques about society manifested in new legislative initiatives. In the revolutionaries’ enthusiasm to create a new French government, Enlightenment philosophes’ ideas about maximizing utility and extending the natural rights of man became a priority. Increasingly severe legislation challenged the identity of nuns. Nuns responded by lobbying on their own behalf for the preservation of their communities, using the language of the Revolution, reaffirming their religious identities in the face of the unknown, and sorting out which parts of their identities were disposable or negotiable and which parts were essential. In this early period, religion and republicanism were not necessarily enemies. Members of female religious orders took an active role in trying to shape their position in the new France being created. Some representatives in the National Assembly and the nuns agreed that they served a useful economic, moral, and educational role in France.

3.1 1789: The Question of Religious Orders

When the Revolution first broke out, superiors of convents had no way of knowing their convents were in imminent danger of dissolution. The first big challenge to the ancien régime’s religious organization came on the night of August 4, 1789, when the French Catholic Church’s feudal rights were abolished. All the privileges that the First
Estate enjoyed were wiped away. The nuns were in a sort of middle ground: they were not considered clergy members, but their properties lost their tax-exempt status. The *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, created on August 26, 1789, affirmed religious tolerance. Although Catholicism remained the only state-supported religion, it no longer had a religious monopoly. Protestants were upset that the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* did not go far enough with the wording. At the same time, Catholics were upset to have to make any compromise with competing religions. By October of 1789, religious issues came to the forefront of debates in the National Assembly as they began to discuss the possibility of putting ecclesiastical property at the disposal of the nation. The story of a monk being held in a monastery by a *lettre de cachet*—a writ issued by the king which allowed him to imprison this man at will—horrified the representatives who believed this man was suffering from the grossest violation of his natural rights.167 Such violations were naturally at odds with the rights declared in August. Revolutionaries began discussing the practicality of seizing convent properties and discussed how pensions would be necessary to support their inhabitants.168

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167 « Un religieux, détenu depuis longtemps par lettre de cachet, offre un contrat de 200 livres de rente pour subvenir aux besoins de la patrie mais à condition que sa lettre de cachet sera révoquée.
- Une vive discussion s'élève sur cet objet : elle se termine par déclarer qu'il faut supplier le Roi de révoquer la lettre de cachet, et que l'on ne peut recevoir la pension du religieux, puisqu'il n'est pas libre.
- M. le comte de Montmorency observe qu'il ne convient pas de demander la révocation d'une seule lettre de cachet; il propose de faire une motion pour demander la révocation de toutes les lettres de cachet; il demande à l'Assemblée un moment pour faire cette motion.
- La proposition de M. le comte de Montmorency est applaudie, adoptée et ajournée jusqu'à lundi soir.
- Ainsi, reprend M. de Montmorency, la liberté du bon religieux ne sera pas longtemps suspendue, et le premier acte qu'il en fera sera sans doute pour déposer sur l'autel de la patrie le seul bien qu'il possède. Sous tous les habits, il est des veitus, surtout dans ce moment où la vertu du patriotism germe dans tous les cœurs. » *Archives Parlementaires de 1787 à 1860*, Tome IX, du 16 Septembre au 11 Novembre 1789, 388.

168 « Ainsi, en récapitulant, je crois que la nation, principalement dans une détresse générale, peut, sans injustice, 1° disposer des biens des différentes communautés religieuses qu'elle croira devoir supprimer, en assurant à chacun des religieux vivants le moyen de subsister ; 2° faire tourner à son
The question of the place religious orders would occupy in a new French society was again explicitly discussed on October 28, 1789, when two monks living on rue Saint-Honoré in Paris and a Recolette nun (of the order of Saint Francis) wrote to the Constituent Assembly claiming they had been forced to take their vows.\textsuperscript{169} The issue of forced vows had plagued the church for the past few centuries. Despite the Catholic Church’s efforts to eliminate these practices after the Reformation, as long as there was an economic benefit for families to concentrate their wealth by sending some of their children to convents, accusations of forced vocations continued to arise. In the name of liberty, the Assembly immediately abolished solemn religious vows on October 29, 1789.\textsuperscript{170} Vows, in their estimation, could never be permanent because this would but a limit on an individual’s freedom. Some representatives saw the religious convents as antithetical to a society based on natural rights. For example, Antoine Pierre Joseph Marie Barnave, a radical at this moment who would later become a Constitutional Monarchist after the King’s attempted flight to Varennes, argued:

> It is enough that the existence of the monks [and nuns] is incompatible with human rights, with the needs of society, harmful to Religion, and useless to all the profit, dès le moment actuel, toujours en suivant l'esprit général des fondateurs, le revenu de tous les bénéfices sans fonctions, qui sont vacants, et s'assurer celui de tous les autres bénéfices de même nature, qui vaqueront ; 3° réduire dans une proportion quelconque les revenus actuels des titulaires, lorsqu'ils excéderont telle ou telle somme, en se chargeant d'une partie des obligations dont ces biens ont été frappés dans le principe. »


\textsuperscript{170} M. Rousselet mentions these letters in the debates in the National Assembly. There was some debate about how many nuns wrote to the National Assembly. Gemma Betros argues that there were two nuns in a nearby convent that wrote to the assembly, however, it was actually one nun and two monks who wrote to the National Assembly in 1789. Gemma Betros, \textit{The French Revolution and the Catholic Church}, Published in History Review Issue 68 December 2010. https://www.historytoday.com/archive/french-revolution-and-catholic-church « rend compte, au nom du comité des rapports, de lettres écrites par deux religieux et une religieuse, pour demander que l'Assemblée s'explique sur l'émission des vœux ; il propose de défendre les vœux monastiques perpétuels. »
other objects to which we wanted to devote them ... (the murmurs of a part of the room interrupted the *opinionant*). I do not think I need to demonstrate the incompatibility of religious orders with human rights: it is very certain that a profession which deprives men of the rights which you have recognized is incompatible with these rights.171

There was already a small constituency that supported abolishing religious institutions entirely. However, there were some considerations that Barnave neglected to consider.

Many deputies realized that non-permanent vows would wreak havoc on the inheritance laws of France. Once a woman or man entered the convent, he or she was legally dead, meaning that they could not claim a share of their parents’ estate. A common strategy to concentrate wealth within families required younger siblings to enter service to the church. If these individuals could reemerge as heirs at any moment, this might inspire difficult legal proceedings. Therefore, revolutionaries decided on a temporary hold on taking permanent vows pending further debate. This law put a moratorium on all future novices’ ability to take solemn religious vows, which created a crisis for women who had been preparing, sometimes for years, to take their final vows and be fully integrated into their communities. Louis XVI sanctioned this decree on November 3, 1789, which was just one day after the Church’s property was placed at the disposal of the nation.172 While many novices mourned their exclusion from their full participation in the convent, we must not forget that a nun herself wrote to lobby for access to the new rights declared by the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*,


172 The Assembly voted on this November 2, but it was not promulgated until November 7.
crafted in August of 1789. From the very start, women took an active role in initiating revolutionary changes.

The arguments raised in the Assembly against freeing men and women from their permanent vows and nationalizing church property were not just practical and financial, but also moral. Confiscation of the church property, according to Viefville des Essarts, was “subversive to all principles of morality, public order, justice, and equity; it [was] especially dangerous in the present circumstance […] Gentlemen, it is necessary to let the clergy keep their property, but to supervise its administration, to regulate and determine its use.” In order to have a useful and moral France, the religious houses were necessary, at least in the view of conservatives. The government would have to monitor the finances and use of church property more closely, but completely seizing ownership and closing convents was not necessary. Despite these arguments against the nationalization of convent properties, on November 2, 1789, the Constituent Assembly passed a declaration that church property was at the disposal of the nation, including that of the convents.

173 Archives Parlementaires, Assemblée Nationale, Séance du vendredi 23 octobre 1789, 484. « Par conséquent et sous tous les rapports possibles, moraux et politiques, la proposition de déclarer la nation propriétaire des biens du clergé, ne doit pas être accueillie par le Corps législatif ; elle est subversive de tout principe de morale, d'ordre public, de justice et d'équité ; elle est surtout dangereuse dans la circonstance actuelle ; elle ferme toutes les ressources datis un moment où « tous les besoins se font sentir, aux approches d'une saison rigoureuse. Il faut, Messieurs, laisser au clergé ses biens, mais en surveiller l'administration, en régler et déterminer l'emploi; il faut taxer sa contribution présenté et future aux charges de l'Etat. Ce droit appartient à la nation ; et cette contribution doit être forte et prompte, parce que les besoins de l'Etat sont grands et pressants. On ne douté point d'après les offres généreuses du clergé et les sacrifices qu'il a déclaré être prêt à faire, de son empremissement à l'acquiter, il remplira un devoir ; la nation n'aura usé que de son droit ; sa dette sera assurée ; la religion garantie ; la confiance renaîtra ; les désastres publics cesseront; les ressources de l'Etat et des pauvres seront conservés. »

174 “Decree Confiscating Church Property,” Document Survey of the French Revolution, John Hall Stewart, ed. (New York: The Macmillian Company, 1951), 158. Originally Published in Collection des lois, décrets, ordonnances, règlements, avis du conseil d’état… de 1788 à 1830 Vol. 1, Jean B. Duvergier, ed. (Paris, 1834) : 54-55. As a country in enormous debt, the wealth acquired by the sale of these properties would be very advantageous economically.
Although the National Assembly did not seize or nationalize property at this time, it claimed ownership of this property to ensure that it served a useful public good. Viefville des Essarts argued to the National Assembly that “regrets will soon follow the confiscation of the property of the clergy. Religion, the most powerful arbiter of social order, and the surest foundation of empires, […] will weaken and soon die out; the alms will cease; the daily and inexhaustible resources which the poor found in the always abundant charities of religious houses, will be lost. It is a fact, whatever their slanderers say, that they fed more than a million unfortunates: the state will, therefore, be saddled with this new burden.”175 Viefville des Essarts’s warning proved prescient. Nationalization was not just an uncomplicated source of wealth. The types of useful service to the nation that religious organizations provided remained a powerful argument for their preservation at this early stage of the Revolution.

At first, the debates in the Assembly and new laws did not immediately change the nature of the cloisters. The nuns did their best to sequester themselves from worldly concerns. They usually continued teaching pupils, working in hospitals, or keeping to their daily rhythm of prayers and reciting the breviary. So long as they remained in their convents, they could continue their lives, unperturbed by the revolutionary changes. Therefore, despite the moratorium on solemn religious vows passed at the end of 1789,

175 Archives Parlementaires, Assemblée Nationale, Séance du vendredi 23 octobre 1789, 484. « Si on les administre, on connaît l'esprit de fiscalité, qui se glisse et s'insinue partout, et qui, malgré la plus sévère surveillance, en dévorerà la plus forte partie. Que vont devenir les grands biens des jésuites ? Quel profit en a tiré l'Etat ? Il est encore grevé de pensions, et il ne reste de la destruction de ce corps fameux, qu'une perte sensible pour la religion et l'éducation publique. Les mêmes regrets ne tarderont pas à suivre la confiscation des biens du clergé. La religion, le plus puissant lieu de l'ordre social, et le plus sûr fondement des empires, persécutée dans ses […] s'affaiblira et s'éteindra bientôt; les aumônes cesseront; les ressources journalières et inépuisables que les pauvres trouvaiennent dans les charités toujours abondantes des maisons religieuses, seront perdues. Il est de fait, quoi qu'en disent leurs calomniateurs, qu'elles nourrissaient plus d'un million de malheureux : l'Etat se trouvera donc encore grevée de cette nouvelle charge. »
there was still a recognition that religious congregations could, and should, have a place in the new France they were creating.

3.2 1790: Those Wished to Leave Their Convents

This temporary hold on new permanent vows was building to even more strict legislation in 1790, which made all previous solemn monastic vows illegal.\(^{176}\) The Assembly returned to its discussion of religious orders in December 1789, culminating in the series of decrees passed between February 13 and 15, 1790. These decrees essentially suppressed all the solemn religious vows in France. Therefore, vows were no longer permanent and binding because this would be contrary to the revolutionary goals of liberty and equality.\(^{177}\) In the Assembly, Garat l’aîné argued:

> The rights of man—will they thus be won? This is the real question. Religious Orders are the most scandalous violation of them. In the moment of fleeting fervor, a young adolescent pronounces an oath to recognize neither father nor family henceforth, never to be a spouse, never a citizen; he submits his will to the will of another, his soul to the soul of another; he renounces all liberty at an age when he could not relinquish the most modern possessions; his oath is a civil suicide.\(^{178}\)

\(^{176}\) However, popular sentiment did not follow the *philosophes’* opinions, and many members of the regular clergy and villagers were hopeful for the future of monasticism in France after Napoleon’s 18 Brumaire Coup.

\(^{177}\) It was actually first promulgated February 13, but Vérot claimed it was February 15. There was a series of laws relating to religious orders that were passed between February 13 and 15.

\(^{178}\) Garat, ARCHIVES PARLEMENTAIRES DE 1787 À 1860 PREMIÈRE SÉRIE (1789 à 1800) TOME XI DU 24 DÉCEMBRE 1789 AU 1er MARS 1790, February 13, 1790, 589. « Les droits de l’homme y gagneront-ils? Voici la véritable question. Les établissements religieux en étaient la violation la plus scandaleuse. Dans un moment de ferveur passagère, un jeune adolescent prononce le serment de ne reconnaître désormais ni père, ni famille, de n’être jamais époux, jamais citoyen ; il soumet sa volonté à la volonté d’un autre, son âme à celle d’un autre ; il renonce à toute sa liberté dans un âge où il ne pourrait se dessaisir de la propriété la plus modique ; son serment est un suicide civil. Y eut-il jamais d’époque plus déplorable pour la nature humaine, que celle où lurent consacrées toutes ces barbaries?... Voici ma profession de foi. Je jure que je n’ai jamais pu concevoir comment hommes peut aliéner ce qu’il tient de la nature, comment il pourrait attenter à la vie civile plutôt qu’à la vie naturelle.... »
Joining a monastery was equivalent to “civil suicide,” according to Garat. He, like many other committed revolutionaries, neglected to consider the practical services that the convents provided.

Still, not all members of the legislature were convinced in 1790 that religious orders needed to be suppressed. Perhaps one of the most influential figures who supported the complementarity between being a good Christian and a good Frenchman was the abbé Henri Grégoire. In response to some of the searing critiques of religious orders expressed by M. de la Rochefoucault in the National Assembly on February 12, 1790, Grégoire responded,

Worship, the sciences and agriculture demand that some religious establishments be preserved [...] Monks are, it is said, not necessary for agriculture; yes, but they are useful to it... I agree, as to education, that it is not indispensable to charge them still to contribute to it; When they have been brought up to the principles of our constitution, they may be more fit for these kinds of functions than free citizens, [or] than secular priests. With regard to the sciences, seeing what they have been, we shall see what they can be: the abbeys of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, of Sainte-Genevieve, render important services every day to letters; they are filled with distinguished scholars; [...] In all respects, it would be impolitic and dangerous to suppress ecclesiastical establishments altogether.179

Although Grégoire was referring to male monastic institutions, female institutions also performed similar important work. The decision to suppress permanent monastic vows in 1790 was not unanimous. Grégoire’s arguments, which were echoed in hundreds of

179 « Le culte, les sciences et l’agriculture demandent que quelques établissements religieux soient conservés.... Les moines ne sont, dit-on, pas nécessaire à l’agriculture ; oui, mais ils lui sont utiles... Je conviens quant à l’éducation, qu’il n’est point indispensable de les charger encore d’y concourir ; lorsqu’ils auront été élevés sans les principes de notre constitution, ils pourront être plus propres à ces sortes de fonctions que les citoyens libres, que les prêtres séculiers. Relativement aux sciences en voyant ce qu’ils ont été, on verra ce qu’ils peuvent être : les abbayes de Saint-Germain-des Prés, de Sainte-Geneviève rendent chaque jour aux lettres des services importants ; elles sont remplies de savants distingués ; on y constitue en ce moment le « Gallia Christiania », etc.... Sous tous rapports, il serait impolitique et dangereuse de supprimer en entier les établissements ecclésiastiques. » cited in Bruno, Le Sang du Carmel, 87.
letters to the National Assembly from religious institutions around the country, did not carry the majority, and religious institutions were suppressed.

These decrees stipulated that those who wished to leave the convent were free to do so. The revolutionaries’ belief that they were opening the convent doors to floods of men and women clamoring to leave ran up against the reality that many devout men and women earnestly desired to stay in their communities. Monks and nuns had the option to continue to reside together in amalgamated cloisters with other individuals from separate orders, or they could receive a pension and join the ranks of “useful” citizens. These pensions were distributed based on the type of convent, the age of the recipient, and the prior status of the community. According to the debates in the National Assembly:

There is no objection to those who prefer convent life [...]. On the declaration [of intent to remain], which they will have made, one will be able to reserve a certain number of houses of each order, where those who will engage in it will strictly follow the rule. We can even reserve some houses for religious men and women who are secularized and who, on a simple annual commitment, would like to live in community. It would only be necessary to make lower the pension of those which would be determined for the life of the community, because they would benefit from the advantage of housing and gardens, [...]. This is what makes it impossible to calculate precisely what the pensions of religious men and women will cost.181

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180 The Archives Parlementaires when discussing the practicality to seizing the land understood that a pension would need to be established. “It is necessary to proportion pensions to the wealth of orders, and to the habit which their members have contracted to live with ease. Age must also be taken into consideration. And above all, by giving back to members of the various orders that we will be forced to secularize, the freedom that citizens who cease to hold on to a corporation must enjoy, this very freedom must be respected;” ARCHIVES PARLEMENTAIRES DE 1787 A 1860 PREMIÈRE SÉRIE (1789 À 1799) TOME IX DU 16 SEPTEMBRE AU 11 NOVEMBRE 1789, ASSEMBLÉE NATIONALE, 156. « Il faut proportionner les pensions à la richesse des ordres, et à l'habitude que leurs membres ont contractée de vivre avec aisance. Il faut aussi prendre l'âge en considération. Et surtout, en rendant aux membres des différents ordres que l'on sera forcé de sécuraliser, la liberté dont doivent jouir les citoyens qui cessent de tenir à une corporation, il faut respecter cette liberté même »

181 AP, Tome IX, 157. « Il n'y a point d'inconvénient à ce que ceux qui préféreront la vie conventuelle, la continuent dans les maisons où ils soient réunis en assez grand nombre pour que l'Etat et eux profitent de l'économie dont elle est susceptible. Sur la déclaration qu'ils auront faite, on pourra réserver un certain nombre de maisons de chaque ordre, où ceux qui s'y engageront en suivront strictement la règle. On pourra même réserver aussi quelques maisons pour les religieux ou religieuses sécuralissés, qui sur un simple engagement annuel voudraient vivre en communauté. Il
Even in 1790, the first issues with secularization arose. The revolutionaries had no idea how many would wish to remain in their communities, how many would submit to being combined with other communities, and how many would leave religious life altogether. Although the revolutionaries expected many nuns to leave, they understood that not all of these women would desire to be secularized. In seizing all their properties, revenues, and wealth, the government positioned itself as the primary support for these houses and their inhabitants. The deputies had no idea exactly how much money it would take to support these aging or financially unstable congregations. While combining the houses was one solution to deal with the monks and nuns who wished to remain, it inspired strong resistance from members of diverse communities who detested being grouped with members from other communities. The revolutionaries miscalculated the problems of administering all the church property and resistance from distinct houses.

Pensions, provided to the women who left (or those who remained), were not some fixed amount but were adjusted based on location and on the rank the sister held in the convent prior to her departure. For example, in Mother Superior Vérot’s Visitandine convent, pensions were 700 livres for the choir sisters and 350 for the domestic sisters. As much as the revolutionaries may have wanted to embrace the ideal of liberty and equality, they reinforced former nuns’ identity by drawing this distinction in their pensions that separated those nuns who came with large dowries and were accepted as

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faudrait seulement rendre plus faible la pension de ceux qui se détermineraient pour la vie de communauté, tant parce qu'ils jouiraient de l'avantage du logement et des jardins, ce qui est même une des manières de les mettre en valeur pour l'Etat, qu'attendre réellement que l'on pût en communauté se procurer des jouissances égales à peu de frais. C'est ce qui rend impossible de calculer avec précision ce que coûtèront les pensions des religieux et des religieuses. »

choir nuns from those who did not. Nuns who wished to remain in their houses had to declare their intention to a municipal representative. Many convents were combined as their properties were sold off. This mixing of separate convents was not well received by those who had chosen their particular order for a reason. Combining groups also upset the relationships and hierarchies which existed in each distinct house. Their patterns of being and distinct identities were disrupted and erased by these combinations. In some instances, female and male religious houses were combined, and one nun found herself pregnant under such circumstances.183

3.3 1790: Nuns who Resisted Suppression

Religious women who were not involved in teaching or nursing and who lived in more strictly cloistered communities had less room to negotiate with the revolutionary authorities. After the abolition of permanent religious vows, municipal representatives came to thousands of religious houses to record their material and non-material property, which was now at the service of the nation, and to try to convince religious women to leave.184 They were shocked to find that few had wanted to leave. Even after government representatives had assured them of their new rights and tried to convince them to take up their new freedoms, Mother Henriette (Croissy) of the Carmelites of Compiègne responded in a verse which she asked to be read aloud saying “… and I prefer my chains/to its [the world’s] spurious freedom.”185 She did not care for the freedoms the revolutionaries offered. In response, she found more solace in strengthening her religious

183 AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, Pièce 80.
185 Bruno, Le Sang du Carmel, 92-94.
bonds. Here again, we see the tendency for women to strengthen their internal religious identities in relationship to God in the midst of tumult. Her last verse solidified this interpretation:

O beloved and precious bonds
I strengthen you each day;
All that earth can offer me
Is worthless in my eyes;
Your sarcasm, worldlings,
Compared to my joy
Is a dead giveaway:
That joy outweighs all the cares
to which your soul is prey.186

Mother Natalie of Jesus, the prioress of the Carmelites on the rue de Grenelle in Paris, speaking for all the Discalced Carmelites, wrote to the National Assembly in 1790 resisting the suppression of monastic vows using the language of the Enlightenment. Three of the prioresses in Carmelite convents in Paris added their name to her address, including Sister Marie-Louise de Gonzague, the prioress on the rue de Saint-Jacques, Sister Dorothée de Jésus, prioress of Saint-Denis, and Sister Thérèse du Saint-Esprit, prioress on the rue Chappon. In this address, which was later reprinted in Marseille, she argued:

The most complete liberty governs our vows; the most perfect equality reigns in our houses; here we know neither the rich nor the noble, and we depend only on the Law […] In the world they like to publish that monasteries contain only victims slowly consumed by regrets; but we proclaim before God that if there is on earth a true happiness, we possess it in the dimness of the sanctuary and that, if we had to choose again between the world and the cloister, there is not one of us who would not ratify with greater joy her first decision. After having solemnly declared that man is free, would you oblige us to think that we no longer are? You will think that citizens who, under the protection of the laws, voluntarily engaged

themselves in a state which is the happiness of their life, claim from all the rights, the most inviolable, when they implore you to let them die in peace [...] We would regard as the most unjust and cruel oppression the one that would trouble asylums that we have always regarded as safe and inviolable.187

This letter was powerful because it challenged the revolutionaries’ laws using their own language. The Carmelites were some of the most tightly cloistered convents in France, yet they believed that the convent offered them a greater liberty than what the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen had to offer. They challenged the revolutionaries to give them the freedom to continue to practice their religion in a way that they hoped would achieve perfect liberty and equality. This showed that women living in the convent were never completely isolated from what was going on outside their walls. Their ability to use the language of the Revolution to affirm their religious identity shows their attempt to control and negotiate their positions.

Other nuns also affirmed their religious identities and made arguments that even the contemplative life of prayer was useful to society. In an address to the National Assembly from the nuns of the Assumption, they wrote, “Quiet in the depths of our innocent retreats, we have never, Our lords, caused trouble in society, nor excited around

187 Nathalie de Jésus, Adresse à l’Assemblée Nationale de la partie des Carmélites de France de la reforme de Sainte Thérèse (Marseille : P.A. Favet, 1790). Reprinted in Bruno, Le Sang du Carmel, 97n. « Les richesse des Carmélites n’ont jamais tenté la cupidité ; leurs besoins n’importunent pas la bienfaisance ; notre fortune est cette pauvreté évangélique qui, en acquittant toutes les charges de la société, trouve encore moyen d’aider les malheureux, de secourir la patrie et nous rend partout heureuses de nos privations. La Liberté la plus entière préside à nos vœux ; l’égalité la plus parfaite règne dans nos maisons ; nous ne conoissons ici ni riches ni nobles et nous n’y dépendons que de la loi… On aime à publier dans la monde que les monastères n’enferment que des victimes lentement consumées par les regrets ; mais nous protestons devant Dieu que s’il est sur la terre une véritable félicité, nous en jouissions à l’ombre du sanctuaire et que, s’il fallait encore opter entre la siècle et le cloître, il n’est aucune de nous ne le sommes plus ? Vous penserez que des citoyennes qui, sous la protection des lois, se sont volontairement engagées dans un état qui fait la bonheur de leur vie, réclament de tous les droits, le plus inviolable, quand elles vous conjurent de les y laisser mourir en paix…. Nous regarderions comme l’oppression la plus injuste et la plus cruelle celle qui troublerait des asyles que nous avons toujours regardés comme surs et inviolables. »
us any sensation contrary to the maintenance of peace and public order. We implored Heaven for the prosperity of the state…”188 Their argument was not only that they were not enemies of the state and would never do anything to harm the prosperity of the state; they also prayed for the state. In praying for the good of France, they, likely, genuinely believed that they were doing some good service. Prayer was the most powerful weapon that they had to offer, and they gave it freely to the state. Their emphasis on their “innocent retreats” was a useful rhetorical tool. They tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to use their identity as innocent and naïve nuns to avert any suspicion that they could cause trouble for the Revolution.

3.4 The Revolution’s Vision for Marriage

The revolutionaries’ goal was never to have a group of former nuns living independently throughout France but to transform the women in the convents from what the revolutionaries saw as sexually repressed economic and social leeches on Frances’s resources into parts of productive family units. This was evident from the cartoons at the time, which depicted monks and nuns lining up and being paired off by a member of the Third Estate (See two versions of this image in Figures 3.1 and 3.2). Marriages between members of former religious houses were “good,” because after being united in their holy purpose of marriage, men and women could procreate and contribute to the French nation. The caption for the cartoon (in both versions) reads “in performing a good deed; I

At the time, Enlightenment critics believed that priests often seduced pious married women. The revolutionaries did not have a genuine concern about ensuring religious women got married, but instead, this cartoon suggests that nuns were just safeguards against wayward priests luring married women into adulterous affairs. Therefore, the revolutionaries focused their pressure on male clergy members to marry, not the nuns. Contemplative religious orders who spent their lives in prayer were not considered essential contributors to France. However, from the women’s perspective, this transition from the identity of nun to the identity of “wife” was not without emotional turmoil.

189 « En faisant ste bonne action, la je nous garantissons des cornes. »

190 For an excellent look at a real case where a spiritual advisor took advantage of a young pious woman, please see the 1731 trial between a Jesuit and Catherine Cadière. She accused her Jesuit confessor, Jean-Baptiste Girard, of seduction, heresy, abortion, and bewitchment. Mita Choudhury, The Wanton Jesuit and the Wayward Saint: A Tale of Sex, Religion, and Politics in Eighteenth-Century France (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2015).
Figure 3.1 The Third Estate marrying Monks with Nuns

While it was undoubtedly true that some nuns were forced to marry during the Revolution, many ardently desired to marry or leave their convent of their own volition.

Marriage itself also underwent substantial changes during the Revolution. Not only was it transformed into a civil ceremony instead of a religious one, but mutual love and passion became more important elements of a marriage. As one scholar has written, “marriage had previously been a contract established between a man, a woman, and God. Since God does not change, marriage could be relied upon to remain permanent, if not inviolate. Now, however, marriage could, like any other contract, be broken, almost at will.”

It was expected that each of the members of the marriage “contract” should seek

individual fulfillment and love, and if the marriage was loveless, either party could file for divorce.\textsuperscript{194} Unfortunately for the revolutionaries, most women did not clamor to escape their convents and marry, but preferred their communities within the religious houses.

There was a massive disconnect between the affinity most inhabitants of the convents had for their religious vows and cloistered living, and the perceived injustices those outside the convent identified with their way of life. This was only exacerbated by plays and popular literature, such as \textit{Les rigueurs du cloître} (1790) by Joseph Fiévée, which criticized the corruptions and unnatural practices of life in the convent.\textsuperscript{195} The Revolution was the first time that plays that were critical of the convent could be performed publicly. As mentioned above, a surprisingly low number of women took the Assembly’s offer of pensions and remission of vows.\textsuperscript{196} No historian has yet been able to calculate the exact number of women who left in 1790. We only have anecdotal data; however, we can make extrapolations from this data. For example, in the department of Auxerre, only three out of the 108 nuns living there left in 1790.\textsuperscript{197} A similar pattern occurred in the rest of France, according to historian Ruth Graham.\textsuperscript{198} There are some important anecdotal accounts of some of these women, such as Marsden’s work on

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\textsuperscript{194} Suzanne Desan, \textit{The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 49.


\textsuperscript{196} Gwénâël Murphy described one such brave individual \textit{Rose Lauray}, but even he realized the uniqueness of her case. Ruth Graham estimated that fewer than 3\% left in 1790.

\textsuperscript{197} Suzanne Desan, \textit{Reclaiming the Sacred: Lay Religion and Popular Politics in Revolutionary France} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), fn. 4, pg. 79.

Jacques-René Hébert, the journalist who gained fame as the “Père Duchêne,” whose wife was a former nun who left her convent before its official dissolution.\textsuperscript{199}

French historian Gwènaël Murphy’s *Rose Lauray* tells the story of a Poitevine nun who was one of the few who decided to take the opportunity to leave her convent in 1790.\textsuperscript{200} Most nuns who abandoned their convents at the first chance had to rely on family to make the transition to living in the secular world. Rose Lauray, however, eventually found a permanent position and a useful function after her abrupt departure from the convent by taking up the position of director of the civil hospital, formerly the Hôtel-Dieu.\textsuperscript{201} Therefore, she did similar work to what she had been doing inside of the convent. Most women who left or eventually were forced out of their convents relied on the skills and the identity they developed inside the convent. But now they engaged in these tasks as individuals instead of as members of a religious community. After months of precarity following her departure from the convent, first living in her brother-in-law’s house, then followed by years of financial uncertainty, Lauray not only found stable employment but she occupied an impressive leadership position over others in the hospital.\textsuperscript{202} She was able to embrace a leadership position that was unattainable to her in the convent.\textsuperscript{203} There was some evidence that, before she was appointed to direct the hospital, Lauray spent some time in precarity, living either in the house of her father or in

\textsuperscript{199} Kate Marsden, “Jesus was a Sans-Culotte”: Revolutionary and Religious,” paper presented at the Society for French Historical Studies (Indianapolis, IN: March 2019).

\textsuperscript{200} Gwènaël Murphy, *Rose Lauray, religieuse poitevine, 1752-1835 : féminité, religion et Révolution dans le Poitou* (La Crèche : Geste, 2002).

\textsuperscript{201} Murphy, *Rose Lauray*, 144.

\textsuperscript{202} Murphy, *Rose Lauray*, 145.

\textsuperscript{203} We know that she desired such a position of leadership because she previously tried to be elected superior and lost the election. After the election, the factionalism in the convent became unbearable for Lauray and contributed to her decision to leave.
her brother-in-law and sister’s house teaching children. Murphy cites a document in the departmental archives from July of 1792, which said, “she had retired to her family, alien to the world, she devoted herself only to the education of the young, with which she had been busy for a long time before.”204 Thus, her experience teaching in the convent was useful to life outside of it. While Lauray was certainly an exceptional case, we can see how she still used her convent experience to her advantage as she sought to escape her strictly religious identity. While most nuns wished to remain in their religious communities, Lauray’s case shows that there were some who seized this opportunity to leave and embraced new patterns of living.

In contrast to women like Rose Lauray, a far greater number of religious women in 1790 filled the National Assembly’s letterbox with justifications of their existence, verifications of their free choice in entering the convent, and evidence of their patriotic love for the French nation. These nuns warned the revolutionaries “… if [our house] were suppressed, we could not live being disunited, and we would become a large community of which most are orphans and destitute, but on the contrary, by letting us remain in place, our house is a resource for the many families of the city, an honorable asylum for their daughters who have the vocation, and moreover, we will continue to offer our vows to the Lord for the prosperity of the state, the conservation of the king and of our lords the deputies to the National Assembly.”205 Their group identity was thus sustained.

204 « …s'était retirée dans sa famille étrangère au monde, elle se dévouait uniquement a l'instruction de la jeunesse dont elle s’était longtemps occupée auparavant. »
205 « … mais si l’on nous supprimait nous ne pourrions vivres étant désunies et que deviendroit un nombreuse Communauté dont la plupart sont orphelines et sans ressources, mais au-contre en nous laissant perpétuer c’est un ressource que notre maison pour les nombreuses familles de la ville est une aziles honorable pour celle de leur filles qui en auroient la vocation de plus nous ne cesserons d’offrir nos veux au Seigneur pour la prospérité de l’état, la conservation du roy et de nos seigneurs les députtés à l’assemblée nationale. » AN D XIX 16, 278
through living, working, and praying together, which was necessary and inviolable.

Sensing the precarity of their position in France, members of religious houses were
desperate to prove their contribution to the nation. While the revolutionaries made every
effort to suppress and destroy religious life, the “problem” of religious women was not
quite so easily solved.

3.5 Teaching and Nursing During the French Revolution

However, keep the useful religious: there are some, such as those of the
congregation of Saint-Maur, of France, the mendicant orders, which rendered and
still render very great services to the Church … Let us remind each of them of
their duty; that all men become citizens, that no one forgets that he owes himself
entirely to God and to the fatherland, that an egoist is an evil being that must be
detested, if he does not want to use his talents and his means in a way useful to
society.206

- Abbé Gouttes, Speech in the National Assembly, October 13, 1789

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the suppression of convents was nothing
new in France. Therefore, the surviving convents were already well-practiced at
convincing authorities of their utility and financial viability.207 Those that were involved
in teaching and nursing or those who practiced simple vows were not suppressed by the
prerevolutionary Commission des réguliers.

Nursing and teaching orders at first were exempt from some of the more
aggressive anti-religious policies at the start of the Revolution. They also had more
leverage to bargain for their continuation because they provided essential services to their

206 Archives Parlementaires, ASSEMBLÉE NATIONALE. Séance du mardi 13 octobre 1789, 433.
« Conservez cependant les religieux utiles : il en est, tels que ceux de la congrégation de Saint-
Maur, celle de France, les ordres mendiants qui ont rendu et rendent encore de très-grands services
à l'Eglise: ils ont trop bien mérité d'elle et de la patrie pour ne pas leur rendre la justice qui leur est
due. Rappelons chacun à son devoir; que tous les hommes deviennent citoyens, que personne
n'oublie qu'il se doit tout entier à Dieu et à la patrie, qu'un égoïste est un être malfaisant qu'il faut
détester, s'il ne veut employer ses talents et ses moyens d'une manière utile à la société. »

207 Geneviève Reynes, Couvent de Femmes: La Vie des Religieuses Contemplatives dans la France des
communities, so many wrote to the National Assembly in 1790 with a coherent argument about their usefulness. Such pleas demonstrated that the nuns took an active role in lobbying for changes in the practice of the faith in convents in the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century. The changes in favor of more active orders were at least partially the result of lobbying by the female religious themselves.

These organizations often already faced declining membership and economic instability. Even before the Revolution, the government helped the convents and hospitals that were threatened with bankruptcy due to declining donations and an overall decline in zealous piety, as noted by Vovelle. In 1790, when permanent vows were abolished, the National Assembly sent representatives to all the convents in France to get an idea of the people and properties that made up these institutions. These records give a sense of how these women saw their convents fitting into the new political landscape of the Revolution, and the collision of personal religious sentiment with the political culture of the Revolution. At this early period, in 1790, nuns were actively seeking to mesh their religious vocations into the new political landscape.

The nuns who wrote to the National Assembly may not have anticipated, at this early date, that dechristianization and forcible removal from their convents were just two years away. They hoped that being financially stable or useful to their communities was enough to justify their existence. Prior to the Revolution, education had been a growing concern for the French government and the church. Louis XIV made primary education

208 Forrest, The French Revolution and the Poor, vii.
209 Much like how Xavier Marechaux in his book, Noces Revolutionnaires, found that “the priests themselves were actively engaged in the debate [over clerical celibacy].” “…les prêtres eux-mêmes sont activement engagés dans le débat.” Xavier Marechaux, Noces Révolutionnaires: Le Mariage des prêtres en France, 1789-1815 (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2017), 31.
in France compulsory until the age of fourteen (on paper, if not in practice) to force the
education of Protestant students by Catholic teachers.210 Yet, on the eve of Revolution,
only one-third to two-thirds of the population, depending on the province, were able to
read. Only 28 percent of women in France on the eve of Revolution were able to write
their names.211 Even before dissolution, the Ursulines received considerable subsidies
from the government to support their teaching.212

Figure 3.3 Blue Nun Teaching a Pupil

University Press, 1946), 412. Hardly any students stayed in school until fourteen, seeing as many
left around age eleven to begin working. Furthermore, not every child in France attended schools.
This legislation was hardly enforced and was simply targeted as an excuse to force Protestant
children to be educated by Catholic teachers.


213 Egerton Castle, ed., *The Jerningham Letters, 1780-1843: Being Excerpts from the Correspondence and
Diaries of the Honorable Lady Jerningham and of Her Daughter Lady Bedingfeld Vol. II*
(London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1896), 399.
In some ways, education was something that both the Church and the French state agreed was necessary.214 For Enlightenment thinkers, such as Choderlos de Laclos, women were everywhere slaves, but “education should be a re-conquest of liberty… she should cultivate her reason, her heart, and her spirit (wit).”215 A woman’s path out of her state of slavery and ignorance was education. A member of the National Assembly, Creuzé-Latouche, argued that nuns could repurpose their skills in teaching to be of service to the Republic. He argued:

If your position permits, you can usefully fill your days by your care and your instructions to the children of your parents, your neighbors, your friends. You can train them to work, giving them your talents; to teach them to read; and this care will be, more than ever, important and respectable; you will teach them the Declaration of the Rights of Man, so that they will be aware of these rights early and will respect them all their lives in others, and never divest themselves of them.216

Therefore, even the revolutionaries saw a connection between the useful skills nuns possessed and the work they could do for the Revolution. The nuns could be rehabilitated to teach natural rights to French children.

However, for most revolutionaries, teaching nuns were not the ideal educators.217 The education of citizens now became too important to be left to the clergy, and later, it became far too secularized to employ nuns as teachers.218 Even though teaching orders

216 « Vous pourrez, si votre position le permet, remplir utilement vos journées, par vos soins et vos instructions envers les enfans de vos parens, de vos voisins, de vos amies. Vous pourrez les former au travail, en leur donnant vos talens ; leur apprendre à lire ; et ce soin va être, plus que jamais, important et respectable ; vous leur apprendrez la déclaration des droits de l’homme, afin qu’ils se pénètrent de ces droits de bonne heure, pour les respecter toute leur vie dans les autres, et ne s’en dessaisir jamais eux-mêmes. » Creuzé-Latouche, « Lettre de M. Creuzé-Latouche », 47-8.
217 Rousseau’s *Emile* demonstrates how a child should be raised. By mothers, the natural teachers.
were reluctantly allowed to exist (at first), the Revolution “condemned [them] for poisoning the minds of the young with seditious sentiments,” as had the Ursulines of Chaumont, who used “reactionary catechisms” as readers. More radical elements later in the Revolution thought that any compromise with religion was a compromise with the aristocratic ancien régime. However, the citizens of these towns and villages often looked fondly upon their local, active, religious congregations. These nuns, therefore, leveraged their good favor within the communities to maintain their religious identities the government was trying to erode. France had neither the money nor workforce to implement a new system of education from scratch. Nuns exploited this desire from the local populations to provide education to maintain their way of life.

There were some revolutionaries who understood the problems of suppressing all the institutions that provided such a useful service to the public in teaching. However, for the most part, the revolutionaries underestimated the impact suppression would have on education and public services. As early as October of 1789, even before suppression, Malouet asked his colleagues in the National Assembly, “Can we, without being sure of the national will, generally suppress all monasteries, all religious orders, even those who are devoted to the education of the youth, to the care of the sick, and those who by useful work well-deserved by the Church and the State? Can we, politically and morally, take away all hope, all means of retirement from those of our fellow citizens whose religious principles, or prejudices or misfortunes, make them consider this asylum as a

219 McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, 557.
His argument against the nationalization of church property underlined that by taking away the means of subsistence for these organizations, it would cripple the social services that they offered to the nation.

Religious women capitalized on these points and, therefore, emphasized that the education of young or poor girls was their raison d’être. They tried to pitch their vocation as teachers as mostly secular. For example, Marie-Françoise de la Bourdonnaye, the Superior of the communauté des Écoles charitables de saint-Charles, argued that her school served “secular” ends. She reasoned, “Our community was secular, devoted to the free education of poor young girls and to the relief of the sick; we attended the public services of our parish, although we had a chapel open to the public, and the happiness of having the most holy sacrament there.” Their community lived in the convent but served those outside of it. Therefore, it was not just a religious institution, but the school and the chapel met both the public and religious needs of the community. Since both the adoration of the Holy Sacrament and the education of children were essential to the mental and spiritual growth of their community, both could serve French society. Thus, these nuns clothed their religious activities in secular terminology.

Even more traditional aristocratic convents emphasized that they turned from their original mission to emphasize their work in education. The Filles de Saint Thomas wrote that “they had the consolation “of seeing a great number of pupils [become] good

\[\text{221 « Pouvons-nous, sans être bien surs du voeu national, supprimer généralement tous les monastères, tous les ordres religieux, même ceux qui se consacrent à l'éducation de la jeunesse, aux soins des malades, et ceux qui par d'utiles travaux ont bien mérité de l'Église et de l'État ? Pouvons-nous, politiquement et moralement, ôter tout espoir, tous moyens de retraite à ceux de nos concitoyens dont les principes religieux, ou les préjugés ou les malheurs, leur font envisager cet asile comme une consolation ? » Archives Parlementaires, ASSEMBLÉE NATIONALE. Séance du mardi 13 octobre 1789, 436.}\]

Christians [and] excellent mothers and families, themselves capable of raising their children within the same principles.” Education helped prevent women from falling into “danger” and provided an important benefit to society. The congregations argued that educated women made better mothers who successfully performed their civic duty to raise children in the correct way. The problem was that the Revolution was not convinced nuns were always educating women to be able accomplish that task.

While superiors of teaching institutions undeniably appealed to their identities as teachers to insulate their communities from closure, some women were genuinely concerned about how new legislation might impact their vocation. The superior of the congregation of Notre Dame in Nemours wrote to the National Assembly on behalf of her congregation in October of 1789, just after the nationalization of their property. She operated a free school for children in their community. Her students attended the school from the age of four until just after they made their first communion, and the congregation also housed a number of other boarders, both adults and children, that they accepted from all classes and all ages. The convent funded the school with donations from the community and with the dowries from the nuns who entered the convent. Without dowries, the small fee collected from the community might prove insufficient. Furthermore, the convent’s superior added that they were the only convent in Nemours,

223 AN DXIX 16 dossier 234 pièce 5.
224 « Nous avons habituellement deux classes ouvertes, ou nous recevons des enfans depuis l’âge quatre ans, jusqu’après leur première communion, en telle nombres qu’elles le présentent ainsi que des pensionnaires, grandes, et petites ; de tout état, et de tout âge. » Archives Nationales, D XIX 16, 234.
225 « … des dons, ce font les dottes de nos religieuses qui nous ont établies » Archives Nationales (Henceforth AN), D XIX 16, 234.
and therefore, very desperate for the protection of the National Assembly against the seizure of the source of income they needed to run their schools.

Ursulines and Visitandines were some of the strongest advocates for their own preservation. They took up their pens and leveraged their identities as teachers to maintain parts of their identities as nuns. While most teaching orders took simple vows and survived this first suppression, the Ursulines and Visitandines, because they took solemn vows, were fearful for their futures. Therefore, they had to find another way to justify their existence. The Ursulines, in particular, emphasized their commitment to “public instruction” or the free education of children.226 Universal education was still a long way from fruition, but the network of religious schools brought education to poor and young children for free. Such a complicated patchwork system was not so easily replicated by the revolutionaries. Unlike the contemplative orders, which took on some boarders to be brought up in the convent, the Ursuline nuns were devoted to the far less lucrative work of educating the poor and non-noble girls in France, which made them more appealing candidates to be involved in primary education.

Their fear of dissolution was apparent when they solicited the National Assembly to vote for the preservation of their work. One Ursuline wrote, “Faithful to our engagements with God and the fatherland, there are none of us, Sir, who do not gain a glorious and true satisfaction to consecrate ourselves until the last of these moments [of our lives], to the free education of the young girls, to which we are destined by our institution’s constitution [to which they have vowed obedience]…”227 Far from being

226 AN D XIX 1, Dossier 7, 175. This particular convent was the Ursulines of Auxerre.
227 AN D XIX 1, Dossier 1, 37. « Fidèles à nos engagements avec dieu et la patrie, il n’est aucune de nous Monsieur, qui ne se fasse une gloire et un vraye satisfaction de consacrer jusqu’aux derniers de ces
miserable prisoners in oppressive convents, they emphasized the real satisfaction that they found in devoting their lives to free education. Furthermore, they felt that their “sentiments, so analogous to the views of the august National Assembly, may deserve the honor of your vote, sir, and that of the respectable committee of which you are the head and the light.”

They reinforced their argument that their mission was the same as the mission of the National Assembly. They thought the two could not only coexist, but perhaps work together in the goal of education. They asked only for the preservation of their order to continue their work. Since their permanent vows were abolished by this law, they needed this vote to continue teaching. Officially they never received permission, but unofficially they kept accepting boarders for another two years.

Similarly, the Ursuline convent in Angoulême made the argument that their education of young people fulfilled an essential public function and not just a religious one. Their convent was “specially instituted and established for the education of the very young and especially poor girls and obliged to educate them for free; the number of young people to raise is considerable. They also have a boarding school usually composed of forty or so boarders, most of whom are small children, and they neglect nothing to make themselves useful to the public …”

This care for young children, giving them a place to stay and be educated, provided an invaluable resource for the

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228 AN D XIX 1, Dossier 1, 37. « ces sentiments si analogues aux vues de l’auguste assemblée nationale peuvent nous mériter l’honneur de votre suffrage, monsieur, et celui du respectable comité dont vous êtes le chef et la lumière. Nous avons l’honneur d’être très respectueuse… »

229 AN D XIX 1, Dossier 6, 117. « La communauté des religieuses ursulines de la ville d’Angoulême est spécialement instituée et établie pour l’éducation dès la jeunesse et surtout des filles pauvres, et obligées de les instruire gratuitement le nombre des jeunes élever est considérable elles ont en outre un pensionnat composé habituellement de quarante quelques pensionnaires, dont la majeure partie sont des petits enfants et elles ne négligent rien pour se rendre utile au public et répondre à sa confiance »
public well-being. They framed their work as not only the work of God, but more importantly, performing a vital public service to the community. Convents not only helped to educate the poor, but in some cases, with orphans and foundlings, they raised children who were abandoned to their care. Nuns performed the duties of surrogate mothers. They took on the identity of “mother” to France’s children. During the Revolution, after convents were dismantled entirely, hospitals could not keep up with the triple or quadruple number of abandoned children. Only three or four out of twenty-five would survive into adulthood.\textsuperscript{230} Losing so many potential French citizens was not the revolutionaries’ intentions and was counter-productive to their goals.

As they tried to adapt to the new situation created by the Revolution, more contemplative orders tried to reorganize their convents and modernize with an eye towards education as a source of income. One Franciscan house in Aix, in their statement on the state of the convent, described the changes their convent experienced. At first, their “order had for the sole object the salvation of persons who embraced the rule of St. Clare which was then one of strict observance without any particular obligation like the education of young ladies.” However, as time wore on, “the distance from the mother house and the scarcity of resources that we have in this country” determined that the convent needed to make some changes. They began educating girls to raise income, and “they obtained a group of mitigations which dispensed them from strict observance [of the rule of St. Claire].” The sisters who lived in the convent in 1790 “have never practiced the first rule and are therefore not obliged to observe it.” Perhaps most importantly for their petition, they emphasized that “nothing obliges us to take care of the

education of young ladies,” yet they currently took on thirty boarders. Their ability to adapt to the needs of their community and to their financial situation demonstrated their belief that they could certainly meet the needs of whatever the new regime required. Here we see a convent that had initially been chartered with a set of rules that were nearly obsolete by 1790. Their primary occupation and pattern of living had already been transformed, and they hoped to weather the storm of the Revolution because of their new teaching-oriented organization. Although nothing in their constitution required them to educate young girls, they chose to do so. Therefore, they emphasized their role in educating the young girls of this town was something they chose to do on their own accord, albeit with strong economic motivations.

Unlike the Ursulines, more contemplative orders were less successful at arguing for their utility to the French republic. The Benedictines of Calais were firmly cloistered, and their constitution of 1641 “established [the convent] to raise young girls in the interior of the monastery, to give them a Christian education suitable to their birth, … it is by their favor that we procure for ourselves our revenue, which is rather mediocre.”

Even though education had become an essential part of their convent, it was focused on

231 AN D XIX 1, Dossier 1, 55. « Primo : que selon la première institution notre ordre avoit pout l’objet unique le salut des personnes qui embrassaien la règle de Ste. Claire qui étoit alors l’étroite observance sans aucune obligation particulière comme l’éducation des demoiselles. L’éloignement de la mère et le peut de ressources que nous avons dans ce pays ne nous permettant pas d’observer e maigre déterminèrent nos mères anciennes à demander des dispenses et elle obtinrent une bulle de mitigations qui les dispensa de l’étroite observance les religieuses qui existent aujourd’hui n’ont jamais pratiqué la première règle et ne sont donc point tenue à l’observer nous avons des pensionnaires mais la vue de nos mères anciennes était de procurer des sujet et rien nous oblige à nous occuper de l’éducation des jeunes demoiselles nous en avons actuellement trente… »

232 AN D XIX 1, Dossier 4, 14. Bénédictines de Calais… 1641… l’établites constitutions portant d’élever des jeunes filles dans l’intérieur du monastère pour leur donner un éducation chrétienne et convenable à leur naissance, nous nous en sommes acquittées jusqu’à maintenance nous en avons présentement le nombre de trente-cinq & est à leur faveur que nous nous procurons la subsistance notre revenu étant assez médiocre, nous vous supplions nosseigneurs de recevoir avec bonté les voeux que nous faisons pour vos personnes & les sentiments plein de respect avec lesquels nous avons l’honneur d’être… »
the raising of well-born or noble daughters. Now that all privileges and titles had been abolished, the nuns of this convent felt a great deal of uncertainty. The Benedictines knew they were in danger of closure, especially since their finances were “mediocre.” Therefore, these letters demonstrated that members of these convents worked to evade dissolution, at least temporarily, if they were willing to swear these necessary oaths and work with the revolutionaries.

In fact, under the terms of the 1790 law, teachers belonging to religious congregations were required to remain in their posts until replacements arrived. Due to difficulties in funding and organizing a national school system and without the aid of the free labor provided by religious houses, many of these women were able to remain indefinitely, particularly those who resided far from Paris. The nuns faced resistance to their work as the Revolution became more secular, but the women could rely on the communities they served to protect their function. “Their position became more difficult since tithes and foundations were suppressed. It worsened by the establishment of the ‘national school.’ Many would let themselves be chased out of their classes and continued clandestine education, parents sacrificing themselves to pay them.” The parents were not willing to give up this religious education. By November 27, 1790, religious orders in teaching had to swear the oath of loyalty to the French state. Most Ursulines refused the oath but stayed in their post until they could be replaced by lay teachers. On August 18, 1792, teaching congregations, even those that took only simple

233 Curtis, Educating the Faithful, 20, also footnote 11.
vows, were suppressed altogether. After this degree, their property was seized, and the municipality ran its own schools. All charity schools were supposed to be dissolved. Former nuns, however, continued to work in educating the young, as tutors in families that could afford their services, and in the provinces where there were no other educational alternatives, and they were protected by those who sought their services.

Thanks to the ability of some nuns to leverage their positions as teachers, there was often less zeal for the strict enforcement of the revolutionary legislation. An unofficial “blind eye” was turned by the revolutionary government, which had neither the resources nor the personnel to revamp education throughout France overnight. Teaching nuns often negotiated with the revolutionaries and sometimes gave up their religious garb or swore oaths in order to continue in their teaching function. These women’s ability to move within the confines of the Revolution demonstrated the flexibility in enforcement and their own agency in determining the path their lives would take at least during the first years of the Revolution. They did not simply wait for the Revolution to disband them; they advocated on their own behalf and tried to shape the revolutionaries’ ideas about nuns and their convents.

3.6 Nursing Orders

Like teachers, nursing sisters used the language of utility and public service to preserve their vocation against the challenges they faced from 1789 to 1791. They were well-practiced at negotiating with the religious and secular politics to maintain aspects of their personal religious calling. In adopting new patterns of living, new titles, and new

values, they presented their commitment to public charity as a service to their God and the nation. Most importantly, they leveraged their service to the sick to maintain parts of their religious identities. In performing undervalued labor that was both difficult and dangerous to their health, they were confident that their services could complement the new goals of revolutionary France.

The nuns were not the only ones who understood the value of their labor. Often the community in which they worked defended these religious institutions. According to one modern historian, “the nuns who devoted themselves to the physical care of the sick and wounded were treated with far greater respect and circumspection [than the aristocratic orders]. The nuns were not disliked by the generality of Frenchmen.” Therefore patients and their families were some of the staunchest defenders of the nursing orders. Revolutionaries understood that they needed the nuns to continue their work. In this early period, “Revolutionary authorities were at great pains not to antagonize the nursing orders, treating them, at least until the Jacobins came to power in the summer of 1793, with the greatest caution.” For example, when public officials were forced to swear the oath to liberty and equality, at first, the sisters did not have to take it. Revolutionaries feared the nuns’ resistance and anger at being asked to take a public declaration. They knew such a law would only provoke the nuns’ indignation.

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237 The nuns’ participation in the politics of the Revolution has been ignored because the church wanted to use the example of the martyrs as perfectly obedient servants to the church, but these were women who became active participants in the political culture of the Revolution.
240 However, by 1793, the nuns did eventually have to take the oath. Forrest, *The French Revolution and the Poor*, 47.
Although intent upon curtailing the inefficiencies of the convents, the revolutionary authorities had yet to come up with an alternative source of nurses.

   Historians such as Alan Forrest, who studied hospitals in the eighteenth century, described the hospitals of the time as having “little formal bureaucracy,” and only “clerical foundations.” Nursing was nearly entirely “undertaken by one of the great charitable orders like the sœurs grises.”241 The nurses of the Hôtel-Dieu in Paris argued their “dedication sprang from their holy vows, and these alone could explain the thirteen hundred years of service which their order had given to the sick, driving them to risk their own lives in times of pestilence and condemning them to long hours in fetid wards among the groans and wails of the dying.”242 They were a long-standing institution and the only real option for medical care for many of the poorest residents. The primary source of relief for the poor was the parish poor box, which, therefore, gave the parish priest much power over the poor in times of crisis.243 Monasteries and convents played a prominent role in providing aid in the pious Western parts of France. For example, in Angers, the church had a near-monopoly on poor relief.244 However, in the last half of the eighteenth century, with growing urbanization, the gap between the incidence of need and the ability of the church to provide for it grew. The church’s system of charity was not well prepared for the demographic changes of the eighteenth century.245

241 Forrest, The French Revolution and the Poor, 14.
243 Forrest, The French Revolution and the Poor, 14.
244 Forrest, The French Revolution and the Poor, 15.
245 Forrest, The French Revolution and the Poor, 15.
Therefore, in the late eighteenth century, the king and his ministers began to reform hospitals, particularly military hospitals.\textsuperscript{246} Inspectors evaluated the conditions in these facilities, and King Louis XVI signed a law requiring individual beds for each patient.\textsuperscript{247} Despite these pressures, there was no alternative to the system of labor provided by Catholic monks and nuns. While the old regime’s system of charity proved too weak to cope with the new economic pressures, the nuns were still the largest source of free labor to provide care for the sick, poor, orphaned, mentally ill, and injured.\textsuperscript{248} Nursing sisters served both the \textit{Hôtels-Dieu}, which were regional hospitals used to care for the \textit{pauvres malades}, or the “sick poor,” and the \textit{Hôpitaux Généraux}, or the general hospitals, which functioned as a catch-all, long-term shelter for orphans, the elderly, chronically ill, or the mentally ill.\textsuperscript{249} These distinctions were not always so evident in the provincial hospitals. The local poor often sought aid at the \textit{Hôpitaux Général}, while the itinerant poor looked to the \textit{Hôtel-Dieu} for food and temporary housing.\textsuperscript{250} While most of

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\item [\textsuperscript{247}] Lallemand, \textit{La Révolution et les Pauvres}, 16-17.
\item [\textsuperscript{248}] Jean Boussoulade, \textit{Moniales et Hospitalières dans la Tourmente Révolutionnaire: Les Communautés de religieuses de l’Ancien Diocèse de Paris de 1789 à 1801} (Paris: Letouzey & Ané, 1962), 55. While the Catholic historians claim that the decline of hospitals was caused by the inflation of the assignats and losing most of their property after 1789, historians of poverty and charity argued that the hospitals were already overwhelmed by the influx of poor people following the poor harvests of the 1780s-- such historians include Lallemand, \textit{La Révolution et les pauvres}. While Colin Jones, Alan Forrest, and Olwen Hufton argued that reform started before the Revolution, Olwen Hufton in \textit{The Poor of Eighteenth-century France} argued that reform would have happened with or without the political revolution of 1789.
\item [\textsuperscript{249}] The “sick poor,” were those who appeared at these charitable institutions in need of social aid more often than medical care.
\item [\textsuperscript{250}] Colin Jones, \textit{The Charitable Imperative: Hospitals and Nursing in the Ancien Regime and Revolutionary France} (New York: Routledge, 1989), 10.
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those who sought care at the Hôtel-Dieu were previously healthy, those who entered the Hôpitaux Généraux were in fragile health, and few left the hospital alive.\textsuperscript{251}

Some religious houses would have only one or two nuns to serve the entire community. In contrast, others had dozens of sisters to perform a variety of tasks that helped these institutions to function. For example, in the diocese of Auxerre, the house of the nursing sisters of the congregation of Christian Charity in Seignelay had only one sixty-three-year-old superior and two other nuns, while the Union of Christian Providence in the same diocese had thirteen sisters.\textsuperscript{252} It was increasingly popular for widows and young women to join this type of institution, where they could take only simple vows and were not required to follow the rules of the cloister.\textsuperscript{253} The goal in all the houses, whether small, large, cloistered, or un-cloistered, was to serve their communities, especially the poor and the sick. The focus of this section is on the congregations and convents, or groups who took some form of religious vows.\textsuperscript{254}

The labors performed by nursing orders were nearly as diverse as their structure. They prayed with patients, distributed medicines and other remedies, instructed the poor, gave alms, cared for orphans, and helped to feed the sick and needy. Working with (and sometimes against) the doctors’ treatments, nuns remained valued by the patients and the

\textsuperscript{251} Jones, \textit{The Charitable Imperative}, 8-12. His introduction on pages 8-12 outlines these institutions well.
\textsuperscript{252} \textit{Archives nationales}, D XIX 1, 265 and 290.
\textsuperscript{253} « La communauté de filles séculières de l’union chrétienne de la providence d’Auxerre est composée de filles et de veuves qui ne font que des voeux simples et n’observe point de clôture. » \textit{Archives nationales}, D XIX 1, 290.
\textsuperscript{254} The confraternities and their important role in caring for the sick and poor is better discussed in a chapter by Hazel Mills. The confraternities were specifically targeted in 1792, but many reappeared by 1797. She found that it was the women who were able to function as nurses without taking formal vows. Hazel Mills, “‘La Charité est une Mère’: Catholic Women and Poor Relief in France, 1690-1850,” in \textit{Charity, Philanthropy and Reform from the 1690s to 1850}, Hugh Cunningham and Joanna Innes, eds. (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 168-192.
communities in which they operated. The sisters’ roles in preparing infants for baptism, praying with, and instructing those placed in their care was an essential facet of their patients’ spiritual health that was inseparable from their physical care. They saw their work as caring for both the soul and the body. Caring for only the physical would do nothing to truly “save” the patient. Despite their tireless work in the convents performing diverse labors, they were not always the most fiscally responsible or efficient. Nuns faced resistance from local administrators, who were frustrated with the growing costs of maintaining these houses, and from doctors, who criticized the nuns’ superstitions. French hospitals were begging for reform long before the Revolution, however historian Dora Weiner found that “all efforts to reform the Hôtel-Dieu came to naught, largely because the trustees and the sisters resisted change.”255 The nuns felt prepared to handle these criticisms and adjust themselves to the new pressures from the Revolution.

Perhaps the best example of the integration of the principles of the Enlightenment with the rules of the convent was the 1790 Rules for Hospital Nuns in Lyon (Réglement des Hospitaliers de l’Œuvre des Hôpitaux et des Prisons de la Ville de Lyon). On the very first page, the organization claimed that “Since the relief of the poor and the sick is not only a work which the natural law prescribes to all men, but which our holy religion commands to all Christians in the strongest and most precise manner, all associated with the work of the Hospital should have nothing so much at heart as to apply themselves to it with all their power.”256 Therefore, the sisters’ labors were inspired by the laws of

256 « le soulagement des pauvres malades et des affligés n’étant pas seulement une œuvre que la loi naturelle prescrit à tous les hommes, mais que notre sainte religion commande à tous les Chrétiens de la manière la plus forte et la plus précise, tous les associés à l’œuvre des Hospitaliers, ne doivent avoir rien tant à cœur que de s’y appliquer de tout leur pouvoir.» Règlement des Hospitaliers de l’Œuvre des Hôpitaux et des Prisons de la ville de Lyon (Lyon, 1790)
nature and the laws of Christianity. There ought to be no contradiction between the two, as the nuns did everything they could in the service of their fellow Christians.

Interestingly, these rules made the point to emphasize that the nuns did not do this service because God needed them, but because they believed that when they served the poor and the sick, they served Jesus himself: “God does not need our goods or our services … Jesus Christ assures us that it is himself that we serve in the person of the poor and that it is to Himself that we give our goods, our sorrows and our care, when we give them to the poor.”\(^{257}\) They were, therefore, motivated by the promise of eternal life, which was written into their very rules. \(^{258}\) The revolutionaries could never supplant this motivation because they had no eternal reward to promise. While the love of France might motivate some highly patriotic women to perform duties that risked their lives for little or no pay, there was no real substitute for the promised rewards that awaited the pious women who worked in the hospitals. Service, thus, was an act of communion with God and an act of worship.

Although religious motivations were primary for the nursing sisters, the language of the Revolution also figured in their justifications for the continuation of their orders. In Autun, the Visitation convent argued their house served as one of the few places that cared for the sick in their town, and therefore, performed a useful public function. The superior wrote, “The object of our institution according to the intention of St. Francis de

\(^{257}\) “Dieu n’a pas besoin de nos biens ni de nos services, … Jésus-Christ nous assure que c’est lui-même que nous servons dans la personne des pauvres, et que c’est à lui-même que nous donnons nos biens, nos peines et nous soins, lorsque nous les donnons aux pauvres… » Règlement des Hospitaliers, 2.

\(^{258}\) « la récompense qu’il nous promet n’est rien moins que le centuple en ce monde, et la vie éternelle » Règlement des Hospitaliers, 3.
Sales, our founder, was to provide a retreat for infirm persons, of all ages, to widows and to those with a delicate [constitution], which would be an obstacle to a [rule] more austere than that of the order of the Visitation of Holy Mary. The desire to make ourselves more useful has engaged us since the establishment of this house […] This convent argued that its usefulness to society had always been a high priority. They sought to make their house and their rule amenable to the needs of those they served in the town. Visitandines (and other orders that took solemn vows) usually catered to upper-class boarders who paid for their care and residence in the convent. Before the advent of nursing homes, in the eighteenth century, nuns were the best system of charity and long-term healthcare for the terminally ill and elderly. However, the high cost of care in these institutions made such care unattainable for all but the wealthiest.

Those ineligible to be treated at the Visitandine convents because they could not afford the pension or were not “mentally healthy” enough could seek aid from nursing sisters from the order of Saint Joseph, the Sisters of Charity, or the Daughters of Wisdom. This wide variety of congregations reflected the variety of needs of care in each community. In the diocese of Angoulême, the Daughters of Wisdom, “whose institute was to treat the sick,” 260 declared they intended to provide “visits and to look after the pauvres malades in the countryside, or the poor who are sick, but are ashamed to ask for charity in the cities, to instruct the little children; several hospitals, even Royal military

259 « l’objet de notre institution selon l’intention de St. François de Sales, notre fondateur, à été de Procurer une retraite aux personnes infirmes, de toute âge aux veuves et aux complaction [complexion] faibles délicates, qui seroit un obstacle pour une reigle [regle] plus austère que n’est celle de l’ordre de le Visitation Ste. Marie. Le désir de nous rendre plus utile nous a engagé depuis l’Etablissement de cette maison a nous Devoirs a l’éducation de la jeunesse dont un nous a Confiées volontier le soin d’un assez grand nombre. » Archives Nationales, D XIX 1, 185

260 « … dont l’institut est de soigner les malades. » Archives nationales, D XIX 1, 144.
ones, have been entrusted to their care.”\textsuperscript{261} The designation of the “sick poor,” or \textit{pauvres malades} referred to the distinction between the vagabonds who Enlightenment critics claimed became dependent on the charity of these institutions and the “deserving” poor. The “sick poor” were too poor to afford care when they got sick, but not necessarily indigent. Of the two Daughters of Wisdom houses in the diocese of Angoulême, the Vars house had only had two members, and their house in the city of Angoulême had only three. Despite the dwindling members of their houses, their letters argued they were essential for serving their communities in diverse ways. They argued that many of the people they served were too proud to seek help in the cities, so their institutions filled an important gap in care. Although the government closed contemplative orders with only two or three members in the eighteenth century, the sisters believed that their utility should protect them from the same fate in 1790.

The Hôtel-Dieu in Limoges, however, was staffed by only five nuns of the order of Saint Martha. This hospital focused on serving the sick poor, but their duties did not end there.\textsuperscript{262} For congregations and lay, sisters, their duties included, “to take care of the sick who are admitted to the Hôtel-Dieu of that city; and the poor who are in the city; finally, to teach the girls of the city to read and to write, all for free.”\textsuperscript{263} Through this network of hospitals of varying sizes, the cities and the surrounding towns created a delicate web of care for a diverse group of poor, sick, and orphaned inhabitants. This web

\textsuperscript{261} “pour visites et soigner les pauvres malades dans la compagnie, les pauvres malades honteux dans les villes, instruire les petits enfans, plusieurs hôpitaux même militaire du Royaume son confies à leurs soins.” \textit{Archives nationales}, D XIX 1, 145.

\textsuperscript{262} \textit{Archives nationales}, D XIX 1, 132.

\textsuperscript{263} “…leur fonctions à Saint Fargeau sont de prendre soin des malades qui sont admis à l’hôtel dieu de cette ville ; et des pauvres qui sont dans la ville ; enfin d’apprendre à lire et écrire aux filles de la ville le toute gratuitement.” And \textit{Archives nationales}, D XIX 1, 283.
of care provided the basis of the letter-writers’ utility argument. Because this system
developed over centuries, there was no easy way to change it. Services and structures
varied widely based on the individual needs of the community.

Women who served in the hospitals but might not be associated with a larger
order fell under the name of nursing sisters or hospitalières, which was the more general
term for hospital workers. For example, a hospital in Rochefoucauld was established “for
the relief of suffering and unhappiness of humanity. This hospital was founded in 1684
[...] In 1710, four places were established for Paupers, daughters of incurable families
[established in perpetuity…]”264 In addition to serving the sick, these women educated
young girls and maintained the orders’ financial viability. Their institution was
maintained partly through the dowries of the sisters who entered their profession. And
their loyalty was to the bishop of Angoulême.265 Other nursing sisters, such as those in
Auxerre, however, were members of the Congregation of Christian Charity, or
congrégation de la charité chrétienne, and their object was the “care for the pauvres
malades and the instruction of the young children.”266 The Hôtel-Dieu in Charité-sur-
Loire in Auxerre was also staffed by religious women not associated with a distinct
congregation or set of vows.267 Therefore, these diverse communities organized in such a

264 “L’objet de leur institution est seulement etably pour le soulagement de l’humanité souffrante et
malheureuse. Cet hôpital a été fondé en 1684 … En 1710 a fondé quatre places pour des pauvres,
filles des familles incurables à perpétuité. » Archives nationales, D XIX 1, 132.
265 « … cet Hospital ce soutient partes dots des sœurs qui après leurs décès en donnent la moitié aux
pauvres et l’autre pour leur entretiens cette congrégation dépend de Monseigneur l’évêque
d’Angoulême… » Archives nationales, D XIX 1, 132.
266 « L’objet de leur institution est le soin des malades et l’instruction de la jeunesse. » Archives
nationales, D XIX 1, 265.
267 Archives nationales, D XIX 1, 276. And Archives nationales, D XIX 1, 283. « Si nous ne craignons pas
Monseigneur de vous Être importunes, nous prendrons la Liberté de vous faire quelques
observations sont état actuel de notre maison, mais ne voulais pas vous être à charge dans un
temps où tous vos moments sont précieux ; »
way as to fill the needs of their specific communities. The entire network of charity and nursing was rapidly shifting, yet the varying structures of these organizations and their overlapping care of the poor, sick, and vulnerable showed a willingness to adapt to the needs of the community and the government’s jurisdiction long before the Revolution.

To further illustrate the diversity of religious women who served in these charitable functions, we know that some nursing sisters had formal congregations, while others were only linked to the specific house or hospital in which they served. The Union of Christian Providence, *union chrétienne de la Providence*, which served the diocese of Auxerre, took neither permanent vows nor did they have a permanent house. They were a secular, religious community that took simple vows and were not cloistered. Their ability to go to the sick and needy meant they did not need to maintain an independent hospital building or raise money for several other expenses associated with running a hospital. These women still adopted religious names upon entering the community, such as “sister saint Francis,” but this community had the freedom to go anywhere in the diocese to help serve those who needed care.

Even the explanation of their purpose was much more flexible than most religious congregations at this time:

> The purpose of their institute and their occupation is the care of the poor in the hospitals who are entrusted to them, to instruct the youth, […], to give remedies to the people who do not have the means of being treated by the doctors, and finally to procure for the poor all the help of which they are capable, and to go to all the places of the diocese where the bishop, their Superior, judges appropriate to send them[...]

268 « La communauté des filles séculières de l’union chrétienne de la providence d’Auxerre est composée des filles et de veuves qui ne font que des vœux simples et n’observe point de cloître. » *Archives nationales*, D XIX 1, 236.

269 *Archives nationales*, D XIX 1, 236.

270 « Le but de leur institut et leur occupation est la soignes les pauvres dans les hôpitaux lors que l’on veut bien les en charges, d’instruire la jeunesse, de soignes, penser les maux, donner des remèdes aux personnes qui n’ont pas le moyen des se faire traites par les médecins, et enfin de procurer aux pauvres tout les secours dont elles son capables, et d’aller dans tous les endroits du diocèse ou
The existence of such flexible and devoted congregations of women was nearly impossible for any secular or republican organization to replicate. This web of care, precisely because it was complicated, decentralized, and motivated by the promise of salvation, proved impossible to secularize or replace overnight.

In Arles, another community defended its existence by offering free services in nursing, a pharmacy, and support for seasonal workers. Because of the ebb and flow of needs, this community was served by nursing sisters in two hospitals. The first community served the hôpital de Beaucaire with twelve choir sisters and one converse sister.271 The second community of nursing sisters in Arles worked at the hôpital d’Arles and focused on serving the sick poor.272 They promised to “serve, for free, day and night, the poor patients who are in large numbers, especially during the summer.”273 In addition to freely offering their labor, they provided remedies and staffed the pharmacy for all who needed aid, regardless of their social rank, financial situation, or physical condition. In arguing for their utility and service to the common good, the superior made an economic argument about the hundreds of Louis (roughly worth 24 livres) that they had saved the municipality by their care for poor itinerant workers.274 It was likely that this

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271 Choir nuns were typically from the upper class, had servants and were eligible for leadership positions in the convent. Converse sisters were from poorer families, did most of the labor in the convent, and were not eligible for leadership roles.

272 Archives nationales, D XIX, 1, 166.

273 « … nous servons gratuitement le jour et la nuit les pauvres malades qui sont en assez grand nombre particulièrement pendant l’été. » Archives nationales, D XIX 1, 171.

274 « De plus et pour nous conformer à nos constitutions deux Religieuses d’entre nous Régissent gratuitement aussi la pharmacie de l’hôpital elles composent et administrent les remèdes et nous pouvons assurer que cette administration gratuite jointe à l’avantage de tirer tous les remèdes de la pharmacie des pauvres, épargne à la municipalité plus de cent louis le linge des malades et généralement tout ce qui tient à leur service est confié à nos soins. » Archives nationales, D XIX 1, 171.
community received a large number of itinerant workers in the summer because of its warm climate and easy access to the Mediterranean Sea. Therefore, instead of being a drain on the localities where they worked, the nurses were, in fact, saving the municipality money, which brings us to the question of the value of these women’s labor. Despite how difficult and dangerous their work was, the municipalities and government agencies consistently undervalued the economic worth of these women working for free. Although the economic value of their congregations was not the main subject of their arguments, they occasionally made it clear that their work had tangible financial benefits. If we consider that this Arles congregations worked “day and night” for no pay, their labors alone saved the municipality a fortune.

The same Arles congregation also argued that one of the most critical services they provided was the assurance that patients would die “in holiness.” They argued, “We help them to die in holiness, according to the spirit of our rule which prescribes that we should not stop being with them when they are in danger [of dying without salvation], and this is a point very faithfully observed among us.” Religious women had a duty to alleviate the patients’ spiritual and physical needs by helping the sick pass from this life. The public well-being required both spiritual and physical care in eighteenth-century France, and the nuns provided both. This was, of course, exactly why the revolutionaries wanted to secularize the system—they did not see a link between spiritual and physical care.

275 « Nous les aidons à mourir saintement, selon l’esprit de notre Règle qui nous prescrit de ne pas cesser d’être auprès deux quand ils sont en danger et c’est un point très fidèlement observé chez nous. » Archives nationales, D XIX 1, 171.
In serving the sick in this way, the women guaranteed their own salvation. This link between service to the poor as serving Jesus himself was established by Saint Vincent de Paul, who said that when the Daughters of Charity left their prayers to serve the sick, they were “leaving God for God.” 276 Enlightenment critiques of charity argued that the “terrestrial fate of the recipient [was] of lesser account than the salvation of the giver.” 277 For both parties, the nuns' focus was on salvation. While the patient might have preferred a physical cure over spiritual salvation, the nuns had a priority to ensure that if they could not physically save the patients, they could at least save their souls. The nun’s selfless giving helped ensure her own salvation, while she also had a duty to aid in the salvation of her patients. Complaints about the inefficiencies of Catholic charities were likely valid, but it was the personal matters of salvation—for both patient and charity workers—that took precedence over the purely temporal goal of alleviating poverty and illness.

Perhaps the most famous congregation of lay sisters who staffed the various hospitals in France were the Daughters of Charity, founded by Saint Vincent de Paul. First appearing in the seventeenth century, they became one of the fastest-growing lay congregations because they took simple vows, which were renewed annually, and their community focused on service above contemplation. 278 These congregations were closely

278 Colin Jones argued that there were many reasons for their expansion in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. First, there was a decline in the incidence of the plague which although still a risky profession, made nursing less dangerous. Second, he argued that the organization, leadership, and character of the Daughters of Charity produced a reputation which allowed them to recruit able members who provided some of the highest level of nursing care. Finally, these women steered clear of controversy with the church by only swearing simple vows and avoiding the Jansenist controversy of the seventeenth century. Jones, The Charitable Imperative, 104-113.
associated with their founder, and in Angers, the order was called the order of Saint Vincent de Paul on the census record.\textsuperscript{279} They successfully avoided the cloister through their ability to appease religious and secular authorities. They called their members “sisters,” not nuns; they resided in “houses,” and not convents; and called their organization a “congregation” and not a religious order to avoid the complications that cloistered orders had to follow. They served their communities in a way that appealed to their sense of Christian charity and appeased the religious and secular politics of the era.

Like the Daughters of Charity, another fast-growing major congregation that leveraged their case for their utility were members of the Sisters of Saint Joseph. This congregation emerged in the seventeenth century, took simple vows, and at first, did not even wear habits. While most contemplative orders followed some iteration of the Rule of Benedict, the nursing sisters preferred the Rule of Saint Augustine because it did not demand enclosure. Their institute in Angers began in 1644, when women who tried to push the limits placed on religious women faced intense resistance from a church that was uncomfortable with more flexible vows. So, despite their labors, which brought them in contact with all sorts of people from outside their congregation, they were still bound by a rule and semi-permanent vows. At Moulins, they wrote that their order ought to be “always useful to suffering humanity.”\textsuperscript{280} Therefore, criticism from Enlightenment thinkers like Turgot, who argued religious houses were “useless,” could not apply to active orders. They devoted their lives to the suffering citizens of Christendom.

\textsuperscript{279} Archives nationales, D XIX 1. I say mistakenly, because there was a group of Ladies of Charity which were an outgrowth of Vincent de Paul, but this congregation listed their name as the Daughters of Charity, but their name was mislabeled in the accompanying chart.

\textsuperscript{280} « toujours utiles à l’humanité souffrante, » Archives nationales, D XIX 1.
Another Enlightenment critique of religious orders was the fact that they were celibate, and therefore, unable to fulfill their natural reproductive identity as mothers. In addition to caring for the sick and elderly, however, nuns were also in charge of caring for orphans and running foundling hospitals. The order of Saint Augustine, in the Hôtel-Dieu de la Magdelene of Auxerre, only had twenty-seven women to care for more than two-hundred and fifty abandoned children or *enfants trouvés*. This institution was so old and well-established in their community that the author of this letter claimed: “We do not know the time of the founding of the Hôtel-Dieu of the Magdalene of Auxerre, but we have documents concerning this house that are more than 540 years old.” This institution had become essential for the care of children and had been around long enough that Auxerre had no idea how to function without it. However, religious orders’ and congregations’ role in caring for hundreds of abandoned children whose own mothers had shirked their obligations for republican motherhood, challenged Enlightenment critiques of their celibacy. Nuns may not have conceived many French children, but they certainly raised them, which revolutionaries believed was a duty well-suited to their sex.

In addition to caring for hundreds of children, the hospital also had sixty-three beds, which were continuously filled. Most of these beds were occupied by two or more sick or injured people. When the need outstripped even this number, there was an additional overflow house for the sick. Therefore, one could easily imagine there were

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281 *Archives nationales*, D XIX 1, 262.
282 “on ne connait pas l’Epoque de la fondation de l’Hôtel-Dieu de la Magdeleine d’Auxerre mais nous avons des monumens de cette maison qui remontent a plus de 540 ans.” *Archives nationales*, D XIX 1, 262.
283 “Il y a soixante-trois lits, toujours remplir, très souvent doubles, quelque fois Encore [?] ; la presse oblige alors recourais a des chambres et des lits d’Emprult [name?] maisons fait trouver également tous les secours.” *Archives nationales*, D XIX 1, 262.
150 or 200 sick or injured in addition to the 250 children placed in their care. Despite the enormous number of charges, only fifteen Augustinians and two novices comprised the central labor force of this house. While there were undoubtedly doctors and other laborers who were not members of this religious order, the bulk of the daily responsibility fell to the religious women.284

The order described its loyalties and perhaps its obedience at the end of their letter describing their operations: “We live under the rule of St. Augustine, under the control of the Bishop, under his administration and that of the municipal officers, first and principal administrators, and four quarter-term administrators, a canon, a presidential officer, a lawyer, and an agent.”285 This excerpt demonstrated that although their first loyalty and perhaps their identity belonged to their religious order, they were obedient to a complicated mix of religious and secular leaders. The mother superior ended her letter, “We are with the deepest respect, and the most earnest confidence in your zeal for the help of the pauvres malades that only hope for public compassion.”286

It was their utility that these nuns believed served as both a rebuttal to the Enlightenment and revolutionary era critiques and their religious calling. Using the pleas of complementarity with the Revolution, the nuns inserted themselves into the political debates to carve out a place for their continued existence. They came prepared to make

284 « La maison est en Bon air, en commod, terü[ ?] dans la plus grande propreté, les malades visités d’une fois par son par les médecins et les chirurgiens, les pausâmes, les opérations, la pharmacie, et les aliments y sont administrés comme dans les Bonnes maisons Bourgeoises. » Archives nationales, D XIX 1, 261.

285 « Nous vivons sous la règle de St. Augustin, sous la dépendance de Monseigneur l’Evêque, sous son administration de celle de M. M. les officiers Municipaux, première et principaux administrateurs, et de quatre administrateurs quartenaires, un chanoine, un officier de présidial, un avocat, et un Négociant. » Archives nationales, D XIX 1, 261.

286 « Nous sommes avec le plus profond respect, et la plus vive confiance dans votre zèle pour le secours des malades pauvres qui n’Espérons qu’en la compassions publique. » Archives nationales, D XIX 1, 261.
arguments for their compatibility with revolutionary goals. Furthermore, in 1790, before the schism caused by the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, there was a widespread belief that a reformed Catholic Church could coexist peacefully with the new institutions created by the Revolution. In revisiting the presumed incompatibility of rational Enlightenment thought and religion, a different path of Revolution could have existed, one that was both religious and revolutionary. By 1791, however, the revolutionaries were beginning to believe that the nuns could not serve two masters.

Despite the flexibility shown by the nursing orders like the Daughters of Charity, the Sisters of Saint Joseph, and other congregations, most religious houses were still dissolved in 1792, and a few sisters were even killed for refusing to give up their posts.\textsuperscript{287} By 1792, it was evident that the revolutionaries intended to move away from the ecclesiastical system of relief to a more organized secular social welfare state. However, this proved to be difficult as the government failed to provide the necessary funds consistently, the need for medical care outstripped the available labor pool, and the priority to establish such a robust system of social welfare became less critical in the face of war. Faced with this situation, the revolutionaries stopped selling hospital properties and, in some cases, reclaimed them. Often, they turned a blind eye to those nuns who resumed their vocations.\textsuperscript{288}

During the Revolution, nuns’ personal beliefs about God and their religious calling became politicized. However, the nuns and sisters who wrote to the National


\textsuperscript{288} My favorite group were a couple sisters of the order of Saint Joseph who traveled to towns pretending to be lace workers but, in reality, they were providing medical care to the towns which sheltered them. Olwen Hufton, \textit{Women and the Limits of Citizenship} (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 75.
Assembly in 1790 seemed aware of the critiques against their institutions and were determined to use their personal religious vocation to prove they performed a useful function to society and were economically viable. Hospital workers were always working within a web of both secular and religious authorities, which trained them to negotiate their religious duties to accommodate France’s public needs. Although in the short run, most hospitals and religious congregations dissolved between 1792 and 1794, by 1801, these were the first institutions to be brought back under Napoleon.
CHAPTER 4. IDENTITY AFTER 1791, THE CIVIL CONSTITUTION AND A GROWING DIVIDE

In the summer of 1790, the National Assembly created the Constitutional Church by “rationalizing” church organization and administration.²⁸⁹ This legislation struck a blow to the Gallican church and French Catholics. This document redrew the borders of dioceses to correspond to secular départements, elevated the French state above the authority of the Pope, and made the clergy public servants of France. At first, some of the clergy, like the Abbé Grégoire, cheered this legislation as instituting positive and necessary reform. This legislation became more problematic when it was reinforced by the requirement of a clerical oath to the principles of liberty and equality, which was instituted in November of 1790.²⁹⁰ In fact, all public servants were required to take this oath to uphold the principles of liberty and equality. This created a fracture between those priests who saw no inherent contradiction between the Revolution and their earnest religious beliefs and who, therefore, took the oath, called the constitutional clergy, and those non-juring or refractory clergy, who refused it. Pope Pius VI’s papal bull, Charitas, denounced the Civil Constitution of the Clergy in April of 1791, but by April, the Civil Constitution had been in place for nearly a year. In the meantime, thousands of parish

²⁸⁹ “The Civil Constitution of the Clergy,” Document Survey of the French Revolution, John Hall Stewart, ed. (New York: The Macmillian Company, 1951), 168. Originally Published in Collection des lois, décrets, ordonnances, règlements, avis du conseil d’état… de 1788 à 1830 Vol. 1, Jean B. Duvergier, ed. (Paris, 1834): 100. The clerical oath split the clergy in two. The diocesan organization was replaced by a departmental church organization and priest were chosen by vote rather than appointment. The Constitutional clergy, led by abbé Henri Grégoire, were a group of clergy members who pledged their allegiance to the French state and not the Pope, while those who refused to swear the oath were forced to emigrate.

²⁹⁰ Timothy Tackett, Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France: The Ecclesiastical Oath of 1791 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), xv. “The central concern of the present study is a single ‘event’ of sorts: the loyalty oath to the French constitution imposed on all parish clergymen during a few brief weeks at the beginning of 1791. As such, it is a contribution to the rehabilitation of the event—or, at any rate, of a certain variety of event—as a legitimate subject of historical inquiry. For the oath of 1791 was undoubtedly a critical turning point not only in the French Revolution but in modern French history as well.”
priests had already taken the oath and had to recant, or else be declared illegitimate by the Catholic Church. At this point, the earlier hope for the complementarity between religion and the Revolution was no longer possible.

In this situation, nuns found it increasingly difficult to maneuver with the same agility that they had enjoyed earlier in the Revolution. April of 1791 marked a crucial turning point in their history. While the previous chapter argued that the nuns were able to negotiate their identities and sometimes even adopt the language of the revolutionaries to argue for their preservation, things became more difficult as the oath became a litmus test of loyalty to the Republic. Religious women had to bend to the new Constitutional Clergy and cooperate with the Revolution or be branded as counterrevolutionaries or fanatics. The stakes became greater for resisters, and the nuns had to adopt new strategies as they faced new dangers for resisting. There was also a growing politicization of everyday rituals and behavior outside the convents. The most loyal revolutionaries sported the tricolor cockades, dropped all titles besides *citoyen(ne)*, and publicly celebrated revolutionary changes. Those who reacted coldly to the changes became suspect and accused of being counterrevolutionaries. The Easter holiday exacerbated these tensions because all good Catholics had to go to confession and take communion, something many of them only did once a year. They had to choose whether to go to a constitutional priest or insist on having refractory clergy perform these sacraments.291 April of 1791, therefore, marked a critical break between religion and Revolution.

291 The king’s attempt to attend services with a refractory priest set off a crisis. Another issue was the National Assembly’s attempt to let “refractory” clergy hold alternative services, which led to riots in Paris.
4.1 1791-1792: Persecution Intensifies

Despite the original promises from the National Assembly that women who desired to remain would be able to live out the rest of their days in their convent, circumstances had changed by the late spring of 1791. In April 1791, “the sisters of a Parisian religious congregation were attacked by crowds of women who accused them of teaching ‘false principles’ to children and plotting counter-revolution with refractory priests.”292 Public resistance to the nuns as enemies of the Revolution turned violent. In Lyon, Mother Vérot’s Visitation convent paid for their refusal to cooperate with the Constitutional church “by listening to brigands hired by the municipality throw rocks at our door for several hours.”293 The root of these attacks was in the nuns’ reluctance to accept the revolutionary changes. Religious houses all over France illegally sheltered the refractory clergy. Most nuns did not accept the constitutional clergy and preferred to receive their sacraments from clergy who did not take the oath. In 1791 and 1792, persecution of refractory clergy and any group that allied with them became increasingly severe throughout France. While some of this persecution was led by the government, there were also ordinary men and women who turned against the nuns.

Perhaps the most public attacks and persecutions from this period were the public beatings of nuns for hearing masses from refractory priests and attending sermons where the priests compared the Revolution to Hell.294 Women were subjected to beatings for wearing their habits, teaching refractory catechisms, receiving the sacraments, and

sheltering clergy. Most Parisians worried that rebellious priests and nuns would undermine the reforms of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy.\textsuperscript{295} The market women wanted to give the nuns a “lesson” they would remember for the next time they wanted to aid refractory clergy. While historian Katie Jarvis has studied the actions of the market women to challenge the notion that citizenship was masculine and mass violence was the result of feminine disorder, I would like to emphasize how the nuns might have interpreted these acts as a sort of martyrdom.\textsuperscript{296} Their embrace of suffering was not merely passive victimhood, but a public opportunity to perform their faith.

\textsuperscript{295} Jarvis, “‘Patriotic Discipline’,” 20.

\textsuperscript{296} These engravings followed a pattern of pornographic literature which had grown in the previous century. Numerous scholars have investigated the history and the rise of libertine and pornographic images related to nuns. My focus is less on the pornographic and voyeuristic character of these incidents but in trying to understand these incidents and how they affected the nuns across France. Lynn Hunt, “Pornography and the French Revolution,” in \textit{The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800}, ed. Lynn Hunt (New York: Zone Books, 1993).
In cartoons from 1791 and 1792, nuns who resisted the Revolution were exposed for their faith and resistance. In this parody of the habit ceremony, the artist poked fun at the Christian worship of martyrs and the practice of flagellation. The object of worship was the illuminated rear of a choir nun as she was beaten by patriotic women, and by one of the converse sisters. The white bonnets of the kneeling nun and the nun wielding the stick in the background indicated the divide between those nuns who performed useful

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297 *Une religieuse qu'on fouette* [estampe], 1792. Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Estampes et photographie, RESERVE QB-370 (20)-FT 4.
work in cooking, cleaning, and serving the convent, and those nuns who were teaching children refractory catechisms or firmly cloistered. The flower crown being placed on her rear by some unnamed heavenly figure, clearly mocked ceremonial dress that a nun wore to make a profession. In mocking the moment when a woman took her vows, the artist may have been trying to mock the idea of a religious calling as nothing more than a farce.

These beatings were undoubtedly about the religious habits, but the drawing of the man with a small spyglass directed at the nun’s exposed bottom indicated the level of voyeurism and exploitation involved. This was intended to punish them both physically, exploit them sexually, and thoroughly embarrass them into submission to the new order. Accounts of public humiliations of nuns appeared all over France. Moreover, these cartoons desacralized the nuns’ most important religious symbols. Lastly, this cartoon indicated that the most effective disciplinarians in these cartoons were enthusiastic and patriotic women. In this cartoon, in particular, the converse sisters joined the lay woman in their patriotic discipline.

In the following two cartoons, the powerful group of women who ran the market stalls in Paris are shown chastising nuns for their resistance. Nuns who had traditionally educated the nobility’s daughters in their convent were now portrayed as needing their own correction and revolutionary education. The word “discipline,” which was used to describe their beatings, had a corrective or educational connotation. It was also the official term for religious penitential flagellation, including what nuns (and monks) were rumored to do to themselves or each other, and not only for holy purposes. These market

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298 Jarvis, “‘Patriotic Discipline,’” 35. Jarvis claimed, when analyzing a similar cartoon that this was St. Benoit-Joseph Labre coming down from heaven. She was mistaken when she claimed that he was sainted two years earlier. All the Catholic records point to an 1881 canonization. Furthermore, she claimed that he was a flagellant, and I could not find other evidence supporting this claim.
women were trying to “rehabilitate” the nuns into productive citizens. In April 1791, “Several women hunted down nuns in their convents who, according to them, deserved the whip. They were the sisters of Saint Roch, Saint Sulpice, Saint Nicolas des Champs, the Madeleine of the Ville l'Évêque, Saint Marguerite, Saint Paul, the Trinitarians of La Roquette and many others.” The pretext for these acts of violence was because these nuns refused the oath or insisted on turning to refractory priests for their religious salvation.299 In sum, there were about twenty accounts of “patriotic discipline” of the nuns by the market women and the mamans citoyennes.300

In the Annales patriotiques et littéraires de la France, et affaires politiques de l'Europe, the patriotic yet violent perpetrators were described as mamans citoyennes. These women took matters into their own hands, literally and figuratively, when the nuns rejected the new principles of the Constitutional Church in their catechisms. In their report about the violent attacks on the teaching congregation called the Ladies of Providence or “Gray Sisters” on April 7, 1791, these mamans citoyennes played an important role:

The Gray Sisters, known as the Ladies of Providence of Saint Roch, entered into a coalition with the little Jesuits known as the Frères Ignorantins. The Gray Sisters, fertilized by the little Jesuits, had given birth to a little catechism for the use of the children of the parish. This little catechism contained in questions and answers the

300 François- Louis Bruel, Un siècle d'histoire de France par l'estampe, 1770-1871, Collection De Vinck, Inventaire analytique, Paris, BNF, 1914, tome 2, 549.
briefs of J.F. Maury, the so-called pastoral letters of Nicodème Juigné, and other piously incendiary maxims of our former lords the now-deceased bishops and cardinals. The poor little patriots [students] of both sexes who were made to swallow all these drugs had indigestions of conscience. The mamans citoyennes noticed this and asked that a constitutional priest be responsible for presiding over the catechism of the Gray Sisters. The parish priest wanted to install a civic catechism instruction in the Providence of Saint Roch but the Gray Sisters closed their doors. The law and the National Guard made them open the doors. The Gray Sisters shouted insults and aimed their nails at the eyes of the patriotic priest. Then the mamans citoyennes came running armed with rods. The Gray Sisters’ skirts were pulled up. By the Frères Ignorantins? No, but by the mamans citoyennes who whipped… Who? the behinds of the Gray Sisters. And, indeed, who could find anything wrong with that.

301 Jean-Sifrein Maury was the leading Catholic spokesman in the National Assembly (1789-91). He was forced to emigrate for his resistance to the Constitutional Church in October 1791.
302 Nicodème Juigné was the former archbishop of Paris who was a refugee in Chambéry and a vocal opponent of the Constitutional Church.
303 « Les sœurs grises, dites Dames de la Providence de Saint Roch étoient entrées en coalition avec les petits jésuites dits frères ignorantins. Les sœurs grises fécondées par les petits jésuites avoient accouché d’un petit catéchisme à l’usage des enfans de la paroisse. Ce petit catéchisme contenoit en demandes et réponses les brefs de J.F. Maury les lettres dites pastorales de Nicodème Juigné et autres maximes pieusement incendiaires de nos ci devant seigneurs les évêques et cardinaux défunts. Les pauvres petits et petites patriotes à qui on faisoit avaler toutes ces drogues en ont eu des indisgestions de conscience les mamans citoyennes s’en sont aperçues et ont demandé qu’un prêtre constitutionnel fût chargé de présider au catéchisme des sœurs grises. Le curé a voulu installer à la Providence de Saint Roch le catéchiste citoyen les sœurs grises ont fermé leurs portes la loi et la garde nationale ont fait ouvrir les portes. Les sœurs grises ont dit des injures et jeté leurs ongles aux yeux du prêtre patriote. Alors les mamans citoyennes sont accourues armées de verges Les sœurs grises ont été troussées. Par les frères ignorantins ?... Non, mais par les mamans citoyennes qui ont fouetté Qui ?... Le derrière des sœurs grises. Eh mais oui da peut on trouver du mal à ça ? » Annales patriotiques et littéraires de la France, et affaires politiques de l’Europe, Volume 2, April 7, 1791, 1262.
Good “citizen mothers” taking the responsibility of correcting the nuns’ behavior emphasized gendered assumptions about the proper role of women. From the nuns’ perspective, their lives were increasingly threatened by the expansion of these revolutionary principles. Furthermore, this excerpt demonstrated that the nuns were identified as resisters by their real or imagined associations with famous refractories and enemies of the French church.
An engraving entitled “Discipline patriotique” depicted women attacking a lone nun in the street. The only discernible indication of the place of the attack was the sign "CAFFE MICHELIEU."
above the coffee shop reading “caffé Richelieu.” Coffeeshops in the eighteenth century were centers of Enlightenment discussions. The coffeeshops on the Rue Richelieu were some of the most robust. It was no accident that these attacks were staged outside of locations where the ideals of liberty and equality were first discussed as natural rights. While men looked on approvingly of the attack, it was only women who held the switches. This work in re-educating the citizens to embrace the principles of the Revolution was left to patriotic women.

Figure 4.3 Patriotic Discipline or Corrected Fanaticism

305 « La Discipline patriotique, ou le fanatisme corrigée, époque arrivée dans la semaine de la passion 1791, par les dames de la halle : d'après un relevé exacte, il s'est trouvé 621 fesses de fouettées ; total 310 culs et demie, attendu que la tresorière des Miramionnes n'avait qu'une seule fesse »
In the more elaborate cartoon, “La Discipline patriotique, ou le fanatisme corrigée,” the market women smile as they wield their bundles of sticks used to attack the nuns. Their corrective discipline of the nuns is performed joyfully, and the men in the background applaud their actions. A translation of the text above tells us a great deal about how women who resisted the Revolution were treated. It reads, “Patriotic Discipline, or fanaticism punished, occurred during Passion Week of 1791, by the ladies of the Market: according to an exact statement, there were 621 buttocks whipped; a total 310 and a half asses, since the treasurer of the Miramionnes had only one buttock.”

Miramiones were young women who, without making any vows, devoted themselves to the education of young people and were named after Madame de Miramion, a pious and charitable widow. Since they were not firmly cloistered, they were allowed to move freely in the market. The location of the attack, at la Halle, the public market, was also significant. Since women were primarily responsible for buying and preparing food, the nuns were rebuked by other women in this public and female-dominated space. Their beatings were an act of patriotism because it “punished fanaticism.” The humorous irony of the cartoon was that this group of un-vowed religious women who specialized in


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teaching were now receiving a patriotic education at the hands of the women in the market. At a time when women could not cast votes to make their voices heard, the market women found other means of expressing their support or dissatisfaction with the laws. Later, in 1793, these very same market women attacked female revolutionary activists with whom they began to disagree. Therefore, *mamans citoyens*, or citizen mothers, used their gender position and natural women’s work in disciplining children, or in this case, nuns, to spark political changes in revolutionary France.

It was notable that the second engraving showed a more aggressive attack. It depicted, not a lone nun that the market women ran into in the street, but an entire convent that was hunted down. This convent was in the middle of celebrating the Passion, which was a period during Lent, right before Easter, when the religious women would remember the death and suffering of Jesus Christ. No doubt, the revolutionaries and the women who carried out this attack saw this as fanaticism and superstition. The timing of the attack is important to note because it was carried out just before the Catholics’ most important holiday.

Therefore, after April of 1791, the division between religion and the Revolution became clearer. Instead of being targeted through legal procedures to which they could respond with petitions, nuns were now targets of physical violence from regular citizens, and their only recourse was either to flee into private life or to accept a form of martyrdom. Public opinion turned against the nuns in places like Paris. These attacks occurred before the habit was officially barred. Therefore, the performance of their religious identities was not only limited by legislation, but from the inhabitants of France. The nuns in this section faced increasing restrictions on the daily practice of their
religious identity. As they slowly shed their physical performance of their identities, they had to learn to adjust their practice of faith to new conditions.

4.2 De la Bourdonnaye and the Constitutional Church

These attacks were motivated by the nuns' resistance to the Constitutional Church. One of the most important places where the nuns leveraged their religious identities to reject the Revolution was in their rejection of the constitutional clergy. Many nuns and superiors of convents throughout France rejected the new clergy placed over them. The revolutionaries suddenly faced pockets of resistance led by the local curé or parish priest, but also the nuns. While Timothy Tackett’s *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France: The Ecclesiastical Oath of 1791*, studied the impact of the refractory clergy on their communities, we must also look at the nuns as leaders in the resistance to the revolutionary changes.\(^{308}\) Their combined resistance had a significant impact far beyond their individual convent walls. French Catholics looked to their priests and their religious convents to determine which clergy were orthodox.

For example, on November 30, 1791, the superior of écoles charitables de Saint-Charles de Paris in Nantes, Marie-Francoise de la Bourdonnaye, wrote to the Pope about the status of her convent and her concerns about the challenges it was facing from the new constitutional clergy. She began her letter by saying, “Most Holy Father, we are torn from our retirement, dispersed” by the legislation that had nationalized and combined her convent.\(^{309}\) Trouble for de la Bourdonnaye escalated with the arrival of a constitutional

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clergyman who was appointed as their priest and confessor. She recounted her conflict with this new priest:

The time when an intruder priest was installed was when we stopped going to the parish services. This man eagerly comes, a few days after his installation, to tell me that I have to recognize him as my pastor: I answer him and that I recognize only the pastor who was given to me by the Church, and that I will never recognize any other. He tells me that he will force me to recognize him in this capacity; that he will denounce me at the [revolutionary] club: I replied that I only feared God. He added that my firmness was a fanaticism inspired by the refractory priests. I replied that my firmness was inspired by the invariable principles which I had drawn from the instruction of my catechism; that having had the happiness of being born in the bosom of the Catholic Church, I hoped, with the grace of God, to have the privilege of dying there. This man withdrew furiously and said to me. You will repent. I said to him then: I have already told you that I fear only God, and I hope, aided by His help, that I will prove it to you.310

This “intruder priest” was one who had sworn all the necessary oaths to the Revolution required of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy.

De la Bourdonnaye, the Superior of the communauté des Écoles charitables de saint-Charles, did everything in her power to resist the priest appointed by the Constitutional Church and to undermine his authority. She stopped going to the parish services; she did not recognize him as her pastor and refused obedience to any of his commands. Her conduct would have a meaningful impact on public opinion on the

310 Theiner, Documents inédits aux affaires religieuse de la France, 1790 à 1800, 339. « Le moment de l'installation d'un curé intrus fut celui où nous passâmes de nous rendre aux offices de la paroisse. Cet homme vient avec empressement, peu de jours après son installation, me dire que j'aie à le reconnaître pour mon curé : je lui réponds que je ne connais pour pasteur que celui qui m'a été donné par l'église ; que je n'en connaîtrai jamais d'autre. Il me dit qu'il me forcerà à le reconnaître en cette qualité ; qu'il me dénoncera au club : je lui répondis que je ne craignais que Dieu. Il ajouta que ma fermeté était un fanatisme inspiré par les prêtres réfractaires je lui répondis que ma fermeté était inspirée par les principes invariables que j'avais puisés dans l'instruction de mon catéchisme ; qu'ayant eu le bonheur de naître dans le sein de l'Église catholique, j'espérais, avec la grâce de Dieu, avoir celui d'y mourir. Cet homme se retira d'un air furieux, et me dit : Vous vous en repentirez. Je lui dis alors : Je vous ai déjà dit que je ne craignais que Dieu, et j'espère, aidée de son secours, que Je vous le prouverai. Dès le soir de ce même jour, ce prêtre va, me dénoncer au club des brigands; il y fait prendre et signer l'arrêté de me poursuivre par toutes voies de fait. »
Constitutional Church. When vowed religious women put up such strong resistance to these new clergy members, their example inspired resistance from others. By choosing which authorities they would obey and recognize as legitimate, the nuns took on an important public leadership role as arbiters for the legitimacy of the clergy. As we will see later in this chapter, the Nantes nuns were not unique in taking up a more public-facing role in the absence of legitimate authorities. The nuns of the communauté des Écoles charitables de Saint-Charles were no longer able to be both useful servants to the French state and good Catholics. Therefore, they not only leveraged their identity as teachers, their presence or absence at the installation ceremony of the constitutional clergy members placed over them was a way of asserting themselves within the Catholic community.

Marie-Francoise de la Bourdonnaye suffered some consequences for her resistance. Her flagrant public resistance made any future in Nantes untenable because it sparked violence from those ardent revolutionaries who supported the new regime:

From the evening of that same day, this priest went to denounce me at the brigands’ club; he had the order taken there and signed to prosecute me by all possible means. Barely three days had passed when he seized the opportunity. Barely three days have passed since he seized the opportunity of the Rogation procession; he directs it, against the custom of all times, towards our chapel; he is preceded and followed by a multitude of brigands armed with rifles, stones, rods; we hear multiple cries: Open your chapel, ring your bell. I refuse both: the cries redouble, the axes are distributed in the different streets that surrounded our community; they climb the walls of the garden. My faithful companions and I, withdrawn into a room and prostrate at the feet of the crucifix, await death; we offer our lives to God; we dedicate ourselves to the Blessed Virgin, and ask her for her mighty help to remain faithful […] We remain, Most Holy Father, three whole days in the midst of the soldiers who guard us inside our house, and of brigands who surrounded it on the outside, and demanded either for our dispersion or the oath.311

311 Theiner, Documents inédits aux affaires religieuse de la France, 1790 à 1800, 339-40. « Dès le soir de ce même jour, ce prêtre va, me dénoncer au club des brigands; il y fait prendre et signer l'arrêté de me poursuivre par toutes voies de fait. Trois jours à peine se sont écoulés qu'il saisit l'occasion de
De la Bourdonnaye’s community, therefore, had two choices: they could leave and disperse, or they could swear the oath and remain for the time being. This marked a cataclysmic crisis in identity. Was it more important to resist the revolutionaries’ attempts to make them swear an oath of allegiance that broke their vows of obedience or for them to preserve their congregation? The circumstances of the Revolution may have limited their choices, but ultimately the nuns retained the agency to preserve or discard parts of their identity and to negotiate in a narrowing space for these maneuvers. The outside world violently forced itself over the convent walls, which were designed to keep the world out of their religious retreat, and the nuns contemplated how to proceed in a way that would still ensure their salvation, but could also best protect their vocation.

Interestingly, not all of the members of the community agreed with de la Bourdonnaye’s decision to resist. One of her sisters “abandoned her faith” and attended the services of this constitutional clergy member. De la Bourdonnaye wrote, “I have the pain of seeing one of my daughters betray her faith. She brings the intruder curate into our chapel and attends the prayers he does there.” Then, according to de la Bourdonnaye, this betrayal was compounded when this rebellious sister opened the “door of the sacristy accompanied by fusiliers and covered with his priestly clothes, he ordered a new attack, that they take me to his feet and that I recognize him as my parish priest and that I attend...”
his procession.”312 This violent attack was assisted by one of her own. This episode reminds us that not all of the nuns were unified in their resistance to the new constitutional changes. The constitutional clergy’s insistence that they be recognized by religious women underlies the important public function the nuns’ acceptance of the clergy had on their communities. These nuns’ actions went a long way to recognizing or rejecting the authority of the Constitutional Church.

Marie-Francoise de la Bourdonnaye made the decision, at this point, to disperse the convent. To preserve the integrity of her community and their distinct identity, she and the other nuns could no longer remain under such dangerous conditions. De la Bourdonnaye described her decision in her letter to the Pope:

We are no longer Victims, Most Holy Father, any other path to take in such a violent crisis, …than flight, and our dispersion. It was in vain that I asked, however, if it was possible for me to retire, with those of my companions whom by their age and their little fortune were reduced to the last necessity, in some houses of the city: I was told that it was necessary to leave as soon as possible. It was in the middle of the night that I was forced to seek my safety far away.313

Without resources to flee, most of her fellow sisters sacrificed even the minimal comforts offered by the convent. De la Bourdonnaye had to leave without her sisters. At this early stage, she compared their sacrifice, giving up their home, to martyrdom: “My faithful

312 Theiner, Documents inédits aux affaires religieuse de la France, 1790 à 1800, 340. « J’ai la douleur de voir une de mes filles trahir sa foi elle fait entrer dans notre chapelle le curé intrus assiste aux prières qu’il y fait lesquelles il interrompt pour s’insinuer dans notre jardin par une porte de la sacristie accompagné de fusiliers et revêtu de ses habits sacerdotaux là il commande une nouvelle attaque pour qu’on m’amène à ses pieds et que je le reconnaisse pour mon curé que j’assiste à sa procession. »

313 Theiner, Documents inédits aux affaires religieuse de la France, 1790 à 1800, 340. « Nous ne victimes plus alors, Très-Saint Père, d’autre parti à prendre dans une crise si violente, et vu surtout l'impossibilité de nous procurer plus longtemps le secours plus que équivoque de la force publique, que la fuite et notre dispersion. Ce fut en vain que je sollicite cependant qu’il me fût possible de me retirer, avec celles de mes compagnes que leur âge et leur peu de fortune réduisaient à la dernière nécessité, dans quelques maisons de la ville: on me répondit qu’il fallait la quitter au plus tôt. C’est au milieu de la nuit que j’ai été forcée de chercher au loin ma sûreté. »
companions, for the most part, have had, Most Holy Father, the glory of a kind of martyrdom; when they left our common asylum, they saw no means of subsistence except by the help of Providence; they bear [or endure] this state with heroic courage.” She was leading her sisters down a path of glory and heroism that she hoped would result in an eternal reward. In a strange twist of irony, the Revolution forced the women to shed their physical markers of identity—the convent, the habit, even the community itself—to maintain their religious integrity. As the women shed the performative aspects of their identity as “nuns,” they retained an internal assurance of their relationship with their God. Their community was not one that was united by earthly forces but had a heavenly connection, which they believed tied them more strongly together than any of their earthy rituals could. They lost every external marker of their shared community identification, but de la Bourdonnaye still believed the community existed.

Despite not currently living with the members of her convent, de la Bourdonnaye showed that she still considered herself responsible for her community since she petitioned Pope Pius VI on their behalf. Her community no longer physically existed except in the identity that its members maintained. The end of her letter asked the Pope, “to grant us an indulgence for the first Friday of each month in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, of which we cannot sufficiently recognize, … and that this indulgence, Most Holy Father, extends throughout the course of the trials by which Providence keeps us dispersed, until the day when we will finally have the happiness of finding ourselves

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314 Theiner, Documents inédits aux affaires religieuse de la France, 1790 à 1800, 340. « Mes fidèles compagnes pour la plupart ont eu, Très-Saint-Père, la gloire d'une sorte de martyre; elles n'ont vu, en quittant notre asile commun, aucun : moyen de subsister que par le secours de la Providence; elles soutiennent cet état avec un courage héroïque. »
united in community in our holy house.” She still considered herself responsible for the spiritual well-being of the sisters in the convent. An indulgence would be necessary for their community if they no longer were able to recite their daily office. This letter also indicated that she looked forward to the day when she would be united with the sisters once again in their holy house. While it was most likely that she meant that she hoped for the end of persecution so that her sisters could reunify, this also may have implied that they could be reunited in God’s holy house, or heaven.

Although there were physical and secular forces that forced the nuns towards dispersal, the nuns did not interpret events in this way. De la Bourdonnaye continued to believe that God was sovereign over the misfortunes her convent suffered: “We can no longer meet except by the ardor of your wishes and the eager desire to see the day come when the Lord will deign, in his mercy, to cast a favorable glance on France, and to restore, on the ruins which surround us on all sides, these happy retreats in which our days passed in the midst of innocence or penance and peace.” She maintained a quiet confidence that her Lord would restore the community, that this dispersal would be temporary, and that God brought about these calamities for a purpose. Again, religious identity provided a source of stability and a lens through which they could interpret trials. This religious order had no idea, in 1791, how long this dispersal would last, but they seemed to hope this was just a temporary trial that would end shortly. For nuns, the future

315 Theiner, Documents inédits aux affaires religieuse de la France, 1790 à 1800, 342.
316 Theiner, Documents inédits aux affaires religieuse de la France, 1790 à 1800, 340. « Nous ne pouvons plus nous réunir que par l'ardeur de vos vœux et le désir si empressé de voir arriver le jour où le Seigneur daignera, dans sa miséricorde, jeter un regard favorable sur la France, et rétablir, sur les ruines dont nous sommes environnés de toutes parts, ces retraites heureuses dans lesquelles nos jours s'écoutaient au sein de l'innocence ou de la pénitence et de la paix. »
of their convent on earth was increasingly uncertain. Their future in heaven was more certain.

4.3 Suppression of the Teaching Orders

Although most teaching or nursing congregations, which only took simple vows, had survived the first round of suppression, the law of April 1791 required that all public school teachers to swear the oath to the constitution.\(^{317}\) As shown by the earlier episode of the public discipline of the Sisters of Providence at Saint-Roch, teaching the correct catechism became a matter of great importance. When teaching orders taught from refractories’ sermons and with inflammatory catechisms, the patriotism of French children suffered. Franciscan historian Sister Marguerite Kernel argues that by the end of 1791, “Very quickly, the Revolution deviated from its initial good intentions. Not only were the former ‘nuns’ excluded from the national schools, but their activity was impregnated with the reproach of affiliation with the refractory clergy and with hatred of the religion which they continued to teach to the detriment of the republican spirit.”\(^ {318}\) The revolutionaries, with a good reason for their suspicion, were unable to fully accept the role of nuns as teachers because the church and the monarchy had been so closely

\(^{317}\) Timothy Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France: The Ecclesiastical Oath of 1791* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). Much like the clerical oath required of Parish priests which set off a crisis of conscience throughout the French countryside, this oath required women to place their loyalty to the France above their religious loyalties.

aligned, and their projects in reforming education required a break with the past. This forced the issue of loyalties, and many nuns were unable to sacrifice their religious loyalty and substitute it with state authorities. By mid-1791, nuns who resisted the oath were rapidly removed from their positions, sometimes without replacements. Jean-Martin Moyë, the Founder of the Sisters of Providence, also sought refuge for himself and his congregation after the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. He, along with “Rose Méthains, Anne François and many other sisters,” took refuge in Trèves in the principality of Nassau (now Trier, in modern-day Germany). The city was filled with émigrés, including many non-juring priests:

What became of the Sisters gathered at Trier? Moyë placed them: it was a question of ensuring their perseverance, of allowing them to live and of continuing, if possible, their charitable work. He sent some to French families as teachers. Several cared for the sick and wounded at Saint John Hospital. Others found asylum with the “French nuns” that is to say, a community of Sisters of Our Lady of St. Peter Fourrier.

As in the case of many new or just financially insecure convents, the nuns could not all relocate together. Therefore, they separated, living with friends and family in houses, hospitals, and other asylums.

319 When resistance broke out in the Vendée, the counterrevolutionaries called themselves the Catholic and Royal army. There was an undeniable link between the convents and the king which made nuns the target of suspicion.


321 “Que devinrent els Sœurs rassemblées à Trèves ? Moyë les plaça : il s’agissait à la fois d’assurer leur persévérance, de leur permettre de vivre et de continuer si possible leur ouvre de charité. Il en envoya dans de familles françaises comme institutrices. Plusieurs soignèrent des malades et des blessés à l’hôpital Saint-Jean. D’autres trouvèrent un asile chez les « Welschnonnen, » c’est-à-dire une communauté de Sœurs de Notre-Dame de Saint-Pierre-Fourrier. » This French order’s house established in Trier in 1715. Kernel, D’Insécurité, 89.
Eventually, the revolutionaries completely suppressed the catechism, or the religious curriculum that most nuns taught, on December 12, 1792.\textsuperscript{322} Even those who had sworn the oath in 1791 were often unable to continue in their teaching function by 1792. For example, “Marguerite Le Cler and Françoise Gadiot received, by decree of the department on April 19, 1792 the authorization ‘to hold the schools of young girls of the city,’ after having taken the civic oath in the hands of the mayor and in the presence of the municipal body.” This exception was short-lived. Less than a year later, the municipality suspended the ‘official’ activities of many teaching nuns.\textsuperscript{323} Officially, “the sisters who had remained in France, therefore, gradually suspended their activity as teachers.”\textsuperscript{324} However, we know that many nuns continued to teach clandestinely as a source of income. By 1792, it was clear that not even oaths of loyalty could reassure the revolutionaries of the nuns’ loyalties. Revolutionaries had to make sure teachers were sufficiently patriotic, so they closed religious schools run by nuns. The new regime then turned its attention to attracting new teachers by offering larger salaries. By the time of the Terror, when “the candidates were to be examined on a questionnaire emanating from the Committee of Public Instruction to show patriotism,” the authorities tried “to win them over to new ideas by raising their precarious material position, and they were given

\textsuperscript{322} Kernel, \textit{D’Insécurité}, 89.
\textsuperscript{323} “Marguerite Le Cler et Françoise Gadiot reçurent, par arrêté du département du 19 avril 1792, l’autorisation « de tenir les écoles de jeunes filles de la ville », après avoir prêté le serment civique entre les mains du maire et en présence du corps municipal. C’est une exception sans doute. Cette condition aura suspendu, du moins pour le temps, les activités « officielles » de beaucoup. Elle se sont défaits des détails vestimentaires qui risquaient de les gêner dans un apostolat qui allait se poursuivre dans la totale ou la semi-clandestine.” Kernel, \textit{D’Insécurité}, 90
\textsuperscript{324} “Les sœurs qui étaient restées en France ont donc suspendu progressivement leur activité d’institutrices.” Kernel, \textit{D’Insécurité}, 91.
a fixed salary."

The suppression of religious schools marked an end of the viability of cooperation between revolutionary and religious goals.

It became increasingly more difficult for nuns to maintain their religious associations. In this chapter and the next, we will explore nuns who survived the period of most severe anti-religious legislation and popular anti-religious resistance. Teaching orders, which were suppressed in 1791 for not taking the oath, faced increasing resistance because of their ability to shape the minds of their students. Some religious women found life in France no longer sustainable and were able to flee. The mother superior of the Visitation convent in Lyon relied on her shared identity as a Catholic and a Visitandine to relocate her entire congregation to a new country. In using case studies like the Visitation convent in Lyon, we can gain a greater insight into the increasingly dire circumstances religious women faced during the Revolution and their ability to negotiate their position in these crises.

4.4 Marie-Jéronyme Vérot: A Case Study

To show how religious women adjusted to the increased pressure to abandon their religious practices, I will use two first-hand accounts written by nuns as examples of how nuns negotiated the increasingly difficult positions in which they found themselves. The first is the Visitation convent at Bellecour in Lyon. This account is based on a very long letter written by mother superior Marie-Jéronyme Vérot from May 15, 1794, to show how her community was able to maintain its collective identity under very difficult circumstances.

[325 « Si les candidats devaient être examinés sur un questionnaire émanant du Comité de l’instruction publique et faire preuve de patriotisme, on essaye de les gagner aux idées nouvelles en relevant leur position matérielle précaire on leur alloua un traitement fixe. La loi de 7 brumaire de l’An II (art. 1) fixa le minimum à 1200 livres. L’instituteur devenait indépendant. » Kernel, D’Insécurité, 89.]
circumstances. The second, which will appear in the next chapter, is the example of Gabrielle Gauchat, a Visitandine who weathered the Revolution in France after her convent was dissolved. In the midst of social upheaval, the most devoted religious women anchored their sense of self in their relationship with God to answer their questions of purpose and meaning. Her convent was one of the larger convents in Lyon at the start of the Revolution. Located in France’s second-largest city, this convent had a prestigious reputation in the surrounding area for their excellent teaching of young aristocratic girls. Vérot’s motivation for writing was to reassure the Catholic world that the sisters had been able to safeguard the convent’s most valuable relic, the heart of Saint Francis De Sales. Since her letter was written in 1794, reflecting on the early period of the Revolution, she had had time to frame her narrative and take into account the increasing challenges posed to her religious organization as the Revolution became more hostile to religion.

Vérot’s first-hand account had a unique spiritual purpose as well. In a nineteenth-century collection which printed documents relating to the revolutionary episode, this concern was clear:

The community of Bellecour [one of three Visitation convents in Lyon], driven from its cloister, did not abandon a treasure which is considered to be the most precious of its possessions. Through a thousand difficulties and a thousand dangers, this community was able to wrest the holy relic from the violence and deceit of the tyrants who had resolved to seize it. At first, refugees in Mantua, [these nuns] had to leave this city at the approach of the armies of the French Republic. It was only after a long and painful journey, after having undergone the most terrible trials, that the daughters of Saint Francis de Sales finally found, for them and their dear treasure, a safe haven in the city of Venice. The account of

326 The other important account from this order during this time was published by the Academy of St. Francis de Sales which collected documents verifying the whereabouts of the relic. Académie salésienne, Mémoires & documents publiés par l'Académie salésienne (Annecy, 1884). Available on Gallica http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb41066906v.
this heroic transfer is contained in a few letters written by the Superiors of the Exiled Community. 327

Vérot’s account served as a source of encouragement to nineteenth-century Catholics. There were a select group of women whose heroic resistance to the Revolution became a source of spiritual encouragement and adoration for Catholics after the Revolution. In her account, Vérot valued her religious identity and the shared communal identity of her sisters as essential to their existence.

Despite the problems with the various accounts of this congregation from Visitandine sources, which were focused on the state of the relic more than the state of the nuns, Vérot’s letter is interesting because she wrote at a time when very few first-hand accounts from vowed religious women were compiled. Furthermore, she explained the unique position and resources the convent was able to use to leave France and re-establish itself in Mantua and then Venice. While most convents found the obstacles to relocation insurmountable, Vérot’s convent was able to leverage their skills as teachers, offer the holy relic as an instrument of worship, and rely on a network of Visitandine nuns and Catholic defenders to help facilitate relocation. The relic motivated them to make an effort that other communities might not have undertaken. Additionally, since

327 « La communauté de Bellecour, chassée de son cloître, n'abandonna point un trésor qu'elle considérait comme le plus précieux de ses biens. A. travers mille difficultés et mille dangers, elle sut arracher la sainte relique à la violence et à la fourberie des tyrans qui avaient résolu de s'en emparer. Réfugiée d'abord à Mantoue, elle dut quitter cette ville à l'approche des armées de la République française. Ce ne fut qu'après un long et pénible voyage, après avoir subi les plus terribles épreuves, que les filles de saint François de Sales trouvèrent enfin, pour elles et leur cher dépôt, un asile sûr dans la ville de Venise. Le récit de cette héroïque translation est contenu dans quelques lettres écrites par les Supérieures de la Communauté exilée. » Académie salésienne, Mémoires & documents publiés par l'Académie salésienne (Annecy, 1884), 2. Available on Gallica http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb41066906v.
Lyon was not too far from the border, they had less distance to travel than many other convents.

Vérot’s Visitation convent was one of the founding convents of this order, and therefore, was widely respected among others in the same order. However, their status among Visitation convents did not make the convent completely immune to the new pressures and standards being placed on religious orders even before 1791. To preserve the institution and to respond to the Enlightenment complaints about their utility, Vérot said that her convent, “readily gave money to our country in the hope that these offerings could put a stop to the storm that was already rumbling about.”

This donation in 1789 suggests the Visitation convent in Lyon supplied a “don patriotique,” or a patriotic donation. This donation to the country suggests that the Visitation convent hoped to buy some protection. Vérot saw their identity as Visitation nuns as perhaps complementary with the goals of the Revolution.

The nuns’ goal in giving money was to sustain the nation, but more so, to preserve the Visitation convent community. After they ran out of money, they gave silver vessels and would have “gladly made greater sacrifices if, by doing so, we could have contributed to the preservation of our Institute.” From this early period, the communal identity and the preservation of the order was Vérot’s first priority. Moreover, not all nuns were unsuspecting victims of the coming turmoil of the Revolution. Many were fully aware of the dangers lurking on the horizon and were actively taking steps to stave off their dissolution before the Revolution began. As the growing turmoil reverberated

into the convent, Vérot took steps to preserve not only the sisters’ identity as Catholics, but she believed their identity as members of this prestigious convent put them in a unique position and status that she would not readily vacate. In signing her letters, she often put “the first Visitation Convent in Lyon,” to indicate their status. She sought to use her resources to insulate her convent from the turmoil outside the convent.

In November of 1789, shortly after the ecclesiastical property was declared to be at the disposal of the nation and all religious vows were suspended, the Bellecour Visitation convent in Lyon sent a petition to the National Assembly to advocate for their preservation. They ended this petition by claiming, “death would be a thousand times sweeter to us than departure from our blessed cloister.” This petition was joined with petitions from other Visitandine convents in Lyon and many others throughout France. Vérot’s religious identity was tied to their cloister and their community. The cloister was an essential physical barrier that separated the convent from earthly concerns and thus preserved their identity as set apart from the secular world. Once a woman passed through to the other side of the convent grate, she often did not leave it, even in death. Vérot further claimed “practically all religious institutes” resisted these new laws. Although it was not true that all nuns resisted the revolutionary changes, Lyon, in particular, was devoutly Catholic, and the order of the Visitation was one of the strongest in France. From Vérot’s perspective, it may have appeared that most of the convents were

330 AN, D XIX 4, Lyon, 18.
331 The full text of this petition was printed in Duvignacq-Glessgen’s history or the Parisian Visitation convent which was one of the three convents that joined Vérot in writing. Marie-Ange Duvignacq-Glessgen, L’ordre de la Visitation à Paris aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles (Paris : Editions du Cerf, 1994) Appendix VI.
332 Vérot, “The Letter,” 47.
on the same page in resisting the abolition of solemn vows. At the very least, she felt it was her duty to preserve as much unity in their identity as possible. Her supplications, however, fell on deaf ears.

Vérot’s convent was subject to the 1790 census and inspection by representatives of the National Assembly. The revolutionaries assumed that the religious women would be leaving “in droves.” Vérot claimed that the revolutionaries used “all kinds of tricks, insinuations, threats, and calumnies” to get the nuns to leave, and they assumed that the only reason they had not yet left was because “they had not been informed of their right to leave.” Vérot’s community was as fervent or perhaps more attached to their way of life when it was put under siege. While Vérot thought these visits were a scheme to trick nuns into leaving, the revolutionaries had concerns that nuns were still held against their will in the convents. Vérot, however, was certain of her convent’s sense of community and did not doubt they would all affirm their vocation.

Figure 4.4 Records of Vérot’s Visitation Convent in Lyon
Sœur Joseph Gabrielle de Montville, âgée de 28 ans
Sœur Anne Marie Césaire, âgée de 39 ans
Sœur Catherine Olympe de Notre-Dame, âgée de 39 ans
Sœur Marie Léonce, âgée de 31 ans
Sœur Marie Thérèse de Fontaine, âgée de 29 ans
Sœur Marie Philomène, âgée de 19 ans
Sœur Élisabeth de la Fermonde, âgée de 19 ans
Sœur Marie-Anne Émilienne-Dalpayrat, âgée de 39 ans
Sœur Marie Joseph de Condit et Villot, âgée de 38 ans
Sœur Thérèse de Salis-Dalpayrat, âgée de 39 ans
Sœur Catherine Martinie Lauteluze, âgée de 39 ans
Sœur Marie Madeleine Stengs, âgée de 38 ans
Sœur Émilie Julie Abad, âgée de 37 ans
Sœur Catherine Cornelle de Barraud, âgée de 37 ans
Sœur Marie-Joseph de Landemarque, âgée de 38 ans
Sœur Marie de Condit Robin, âgée de 28 ans
Sœur Marie-Anne Petitot Buache, âgée de 38 ans
Sœur Louis Aimée de Navaire, âgée de 38 ans
Sœur Élisabeth de Delonceau, âgée de 37 ans
Sœur Marie Émilienne de Bouquet, âgée de 37 ans
Sœur Marie-Marguerite de Jennings, âgée de 36 ans
Sœur Catherine Elizabeth Verme, âgée de 37 ans
Sœur Marie Sophie Gobel, âgée de 37 ans
Sœur Marie Sophie Feichter Jannier, âgée de 21 ans
This survey marked an unprecedented intrusion into the convent. For the Visitation convent in Lyon, the experience of having the revolutionaries in the convent was incredibly jarring. As Vérot recalled, government officials read the decree aloud and called on each sister individually to “declare her intention to return to the world.”

Ironically, this worked as almost a reverse vow ceremony, but one in which each woman was invited to announce her renunciation of the promises she had made to the Church and of her earlier abandonment of what were now defined as the natural rights of man. Vérot,

336 After these visits in 1790, lists of the inhabitants and possessions of every convent were sent to both the National Assembly and the parish. AN, D XIX 4, Lyon, Visitation de Ste. Marie.

who was responsible for the souls of each of the women placed under her care, was
certain that none of her sisters would “fall into the trap” because she “knew them too
well for that.”338 A close relationship with a mother superior or the other members of the
convent might encourage members of religious communities, like this one, to have
solidarity in their religious identity. Putting aside the internal rivalries that existed inside
the convent, they did not want to disappoint their mother superior or break from the ranks
of their companions.

Vérot, therefore, celebrated the fact that all the women affirmed, “without
hesitation that they preferred death a thousand times more than the cruel liberty offered to
them.”339 They believed that the liberty that the Assembly offered to them would tear
them from their solitary and contemplative relationship with God. In the document which
appeared in the National Archives from April 1790, Vérot recognized “…the decree
which exempts us from the obligation to leave our retreat. We are still hoping that things
will look better before God, or give us the freedom to receive [new recruits] to continue
the knowledge which we have been applying for almost two centuries. God grant
consideration to our sweet labors for the happiness of France, for the glory of religion, for
the maintenance of our holy State, and for the consolation of those who work with zeal to
restore public affairs.”340 It was, therefore, no liberty at all from their religious point of
view. Natural rights, when forced upon individuals with other priorities, were

340 « Reconnaissances le décret qui nous exempte de l’obligation de sortir de nos retraites. Nous espérons
toujours que les choses mieux examiner devant Dieu, ou nous rendre la liberté de recevoir des
sujets pour continuer les connes ouvres auxquelles nous sommes appliqués depuis près de deux
siècles. Dieu veuille examen nos doux pour le bienheur de la France, pour la gloire de la religion,
pour de maintenien de notre St. Etat, et pour la Consolation d’eux qui travaillies avec tout de zèle au
rétablissement de la chose publique. » AN, D XIX 4, Lyon, Visitation de Ste. Marie
contradictory and violated the very rights they were trying to grant. She pleaded for their continuation because of the work that they had provided France for over two centuries.

The pensions for the nuns were also set for all those nuns wishing to remain in the house. For example, in Vérot’s Visitandine convent, pensions were 700 livres for the choir sisters and 350 livres for the domestic sisters. This was the first step in dismantling the convents, even if the nuns did not know it at the time.

4.5 The Visitation Convent’s Unique Position

There are very few convents that had the resources and ability to relocate during the Revolution. Vérot’s account is unique because it helps explain how she was able to move her entire religious house. There were several factors including the Visitation Convent’s reputation as good teachers, the international networks of both Visitandines and Catholics on whom she relied for her escape, the importance of the relic of Francis De Sales, and Vérot’s bold, proactive stance to ensure her convent’s survival during the Revolution. Not every convent benefitted from this constellation of factors that were necessary to make the relocation of a convent possible.

Like other teaching orders mentioned in the previous chapter, Vérot’s convent leveraged their work in teaching to preserve their religious community in a new location. In Lyon, they taught aristocratic daughters and, Vérot explained that the only reason that her sisters were invited to Mantua was because delegates sent by Emperor Leopold II of Austria praised “the conduct and talents of several ladies who had been raised by our sisters of Modena and Milan, [so that] these gentlemen had acquired high esteem for the

education received in our monasteries.” The delegates lobbied to have the Lyonnais nuns open a boarding school for the daughters of the nobility.

Additionally, Vérot also had the support of a vast network of Catholics in Lyon because the convent had been teaching the daughters of powerful families. She relied on this network to help her escape France with the relic. To prevent the revolutionaries from finding it, she “entrusted it to the care of the mother of one of our pupils, a woman whose prudence, discretion, and piety [she] knew well.” This relic was the most prized possession of their convent, and perhaps of the entire Lyonnais Catholic community. The fact that Vérot was able to entrust such an important relic to this woman showed her faith in the Catholic Church in Lyon and her deep belief that things in France would settle down, and her conviction that it would one day be safe to retrieve it. It was this network of supporters and pious Catholics, which helped to encourage and sustain the displaced nuns in their trials. Vérot’s strong Catholic identity allowed her to call on Catholic support outside France to help facilitate their move. Religious women were uniquely positioned because they had networks of communities across Europe. Some women found solace in being a part of a universal church that had existed for a millennium and across various nations. Vérot, in particular, relied on the network of Visitandine convents to provide both physical and spiritual support. Over and over again, she talked about what a gift it was to have the support of Mère Isabelle de Sales, and what a blow it was to her when that correspondence had to stop in 1792.

343 Vérot, “The Letter,” 73.
345 Vérot, “The Letter,” 68.
Fosières was the Superior of the Visitation convent in Vienna, who asked Emperor Leopold II on Vérot’s behalf if Austria could support another community in Mantua. It was her petitioning which cleared the way for Vérot’s move. This support from another member of her convent steeled her resolve to continue to seek relocation.

Vérot, too had benefactors whose names she did not feel safe including in her manuscript. She mentioned that there was a merchant who took letters to Mère Isabelle de Sales and “at various times rendered [them] great services,” but she could not “name him for fear of compromising his life.” This very well may have been the same nameless merchant she described later who “knew all the possible routes and the places where troops were stationed, as well as the best and cheapest way of making sure our belongings would reach Mantua.” This merchant was one of the most critical people in ensuring the success of the mission, according to Vérot. Later, when Vérot went into hiding, she regretted not being able “to name the illustrious family that gave me asylum.” These details demonstrated the dangers men and women faced by even offering aid to these nuns. These benefactors were largely motivated by their shared identity as Catholics. Therefore, it was these Catholic connections and a shared Catholic identity that made Vérot’s convent’s preparations for escape possible.

Vérot’s community’s identification with their religious and spiritual family more than their birth family became essential for their ability to escape. If her sisters had been more tied to their families and affairs in Lyon, the move would have been more difficult.

349 Vérot, “The Letter,” 71. She did mention that the name of this family “is written in the book of life, as it had been for centuries in the annals of the French monarchy.” Vérot, “The Letter,” 72.
When the time came for her and her convent to relocate, she decided, “to avoid renewed and pointless arguments from our relatives, we said we were going on a simple outing in the country. Only one person in each family, someone capable of keeping a secret, was told the truth and would disclose it when the time was right.”\textsuperscript{350} Even relatives could not be trusted during the Revolution. Although she talked to countless spiritual advisors before making the journey, Vérot and her sisters did not say goodbye to their families. As for Vérot, who did not have family members on whom to rely, she found her family in God. In the convent, the nuns called each other “sisters,” the abbess was the “mother,” and the priests were called “father.” As the Revolution politically began to reshape family relationships, religious men and women relied more strongly on their religious ties rather than those with their relatives.

4.6 Vérot and The Constitutional Church

After the passing of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy in the summer of 1790, civil servants, which religious men and women now were, would have to be elected by their constituents in an attempt to democratize the Church. This decree included the superiors of convents. Vérot, who was the superior of her convent before the Revolution, would have to face these elections in January of 1791 when representatives came to the convent once again. The municipal councils in Lyon and Paris had taken a more hostile turn regarding religion. Jean-Marie Roland de la Platière, who later would become a leader of the Girondins, but at the moment was a local official in Lyon, was assigned to supervise the elections in Vérot’s convent.\textsuperscript{351} He interrogated each of the sisters in the

\textsuperscript{350} Vérot, “The Letter,” 85.

\textsuperscript{351} Roland was the husband of Madame Roland, who hosted salons in Lyon and Paris, which entertained conversations about some of the most famous Enlightenment philosophes and later the shining lights of the Revolution.
convent in hopes of convincing some of them to leave, but the nuns “welcomed this opportunity to [bear] witness to the holiness and ineffable joy of our vocation.” 352 Roland was disappointed to see the comradery and shared identity of the nuns in this convent. In fact, every single ballot except Vérot’s bore her name, and Roland did not even finish reading the ballots because he was bored with the repetition. 353 He was hoping to find the type of divisions and turmoil in the convent that were rumored to exist.

Roland believed he had found just such a disgruntled nun in Sister Marie-Anne Seraphique, who was a very ill and sickly nun. When asked by Roland if she was happy in the convent, she said yes but that “‘there is one person with whom I am not happy.’” 354 Vérot noted that Roland “was certain of obtaining the evidence [against Vérot] that he was seeking.” 355 He assumed that the person with whom she was upset was Vérot. However, Sister Seraphique responded that it was herself because she has “been a nun for sixty-two years and [she] still [didn’t] love God as [she wished].” 356 The acts of veneration, shared identity, and devotion shocked the revolutionaries, who did not expect to see such a robust and faithful community, at least according to Vérot.

Although the Bellecour Visitation convent had avoided the first hurdles of the Revolution, they were not naïve enough to assume that after the election, they would be able to live in peace. They took their most reliable course of action against dissolution; they began to pray. They received communion and began reciting the rosary daily “that

[they] might find a peaceful refuge somewhere.”357 For women who believed strongly in a God who had power and sovereignty over affairs, it would be more useful to appeal to God rather than to make another appeal to an increasingly hostile legislative assembly. These collective prayers also affirmed the nuns’ determination to stay united, even in the face of adversity. Their shared identity was important and worth protecting, even if they had to abandon their country and language. They would be sustained by their shared rituals.

The existence of religious houses who refused to swear the oath to liberty and equality, refused to disband, and supported the refractory priests only widened the rift in the church. The constitutional clergy “were extremely unhappy at being thus abandoned” by all the devout Catholics flocking to the convents to receive their sacraments from the refractors.358 The nuns themselves proved steadfast in their resistance to the constitutional clergy. Actively opposing the Revolution by choosing which of its changes they found complementary to their faith, their religious beliefs became politicized.

Events moved quickly from bad to worse. Although the Visitation convent of Lyon had the offer to relocate to Mantua, Italy (which at the time was under the control of Austria), it would take some time to make all the necessary arrangements. In the meantime, Vérot described the rapid succession of “evil events” in France:

Our land titles had already been seized; our property was being sold; the canons had been evicted from their churches; the public recitation of the Office was suppressed; priests were being thrown in prison, and the infamous Civil Constitution of the Clergy, which our Holy Father the Pope had called a ‘heap of heresy,’ was about to be imposed. We could foresee the terrible moment when the election of a constitutional bishop would bring about a total schism in Lyons.359

It was becoming increasingly urgent with every passing day to move quickly on relocation. The divisions with the constitutional clergy were becoming starker. Vérot thought that French Catholics had provoked “celestial anger,” and this explained the turmoil they were experiencing. Therefore, her convent practiced devotions, pious exercises, and mortifications such as fasting and penances to help atone for France’s sins.360 Nuns, who believed that their God was sovereign over the violence convulsing in France, understood it as a divine judgment against France. Vérot and other convents throughout France threw themselves into penance. The performance of their faith was their way of helping to solve the political and economic crisis in France.

With increasing hostility mounting, Vérot wrote to the archbishop of Lyon on March 18, 1791, to describe not only her fear that her convent would soon be out of “spiritual resources,” but also asking his consent for her convent to leave for Mantua. The archbishop denied this request and asked her to stay until the last possible moment.361 The nuns, who had sworn an oath of obedience, were unable to move without the bishop’s approval. When the Constitutional Bishop, who replaced the refractory archbishop in Lyon, arrived, things did not get any easier. The “schism” that emerged between the refractory and the constitutional clergy made vows of obedience and identification with the church more complicated. In identifying firmly with Rome and the refractories, Vérot decided that she had to stand up to constitutional clergy, who wanted to borrow vestments for a religious ceremony. She refused all communication and

361 Vérot, “The Letter,” 58
association with the Constitutional Church. When the representatives of the constitutional clergy came to her convent to take the vestments for the ceremony by force, the nuns were saved from resorting to violence by a citizen who blocked the door to the sacristy. They had to balance their identity as obedient sisters, with their new identity as resisters, and soon, counterrevolutionaries.

Usually, the nuns in Vérot’s convent prepared an altar for the feast of Corpus Christi. This year, with the closing of their chapel, they felt “no obligation to contribute in any way to the solemnity of the schismatics’ celebration, so we refused to build them an altar or furnish them with the materials in constructing one, or even to give them what they needed to light candles.” By calling the constitutional clergy “schismatics,” Vérot accused them of having broken away from the Catholic Church and implied that their rituals were invalid. One of the worst things one Catholic can say about another is that they are “schismatic.” The Visitation convent’s refusal to participate in this Church festival was a powerful form of resistance. We do not usually think about women who swore vows of obedience as important leaders in resistance movements; however, their convents became not only geographic centers of resistance but also ideological centers as well. Their pious resistance, in many cases, emboldened others to resist the changes to the church. Vérot argued the contradiction between the efforts “to close the churches attached to religious houses,” and “the law of religious tolerance which the National Assembly claimed was one of the most beautiful fruits of the Revolution.”

women were astute in sometimes using the language of the Revolution to carve out spaces of existence, criticize the revolutionary policy, and to reform and internalize their new identities. Vérot’s convent, like the refractory clergy, helped solidify resistance to the Constitutional Church. It was not just the priests who the laity looked to for guidance; sometimes, nuns set counter-revolutionary examples.366

As we have seen earlier, refractory priests who did not swear the oath were in danger of imprisonment or persecution. Those who could not emigrate or those who felt a moral duty to continue to provide services to their congregation often sought refuge in religious houses. Vérot describes how

…our church, like those of other religious communities in the city, became the refuge of the priests in the diocese who, under fire, were chased from their parishes. Many loyal Catholics came to find their legitimate pastors. And people from the outlying districts traveled great distances in order to receive the sacraments. We even had to have confessionals built at this time to respond to the needs of the devout faithful.367

Some convents thus became centers of resistance to the new Constitutional Church, and by extension, the Revolution. The role that these convents and their inhabitants played in organizing counter-revolutionary resistance should not be minimized. Vérot’s convent brought people from all over Lyon and its surrounding villages together for their religious practice. This represented a considerable departure from the practice of the ancien régime, since convents were not typically sites of public Catholic worship.

For a time, Vérot’s convent of the Visitation was fortunate enough to have a confessor who was willing to dress as a gardener and sneak into the convent to give them

encouragement and to perform the sacraments. He risked life and limb to continue to provide spiritual services to the sisters who needed him more than ever. However, by the fall of 1792, the Revolution entered the early stages of the Reign of Terror. Vérot recounted that “the Jacobins had just ordered the massacre of priests in Paris, and a few days later, the same edict was carried out in Lyon against the priests who were in prison there.” Unfortunately, the prison where the priests were being held was located across the street from their monastery, which meant the sisters heard the “howling of the executioners.” The Visitandines were so terrorized that they begged Père Jaumar, their confessor, to leave them. He planned to meet them in Mantua if they were ever able to leave their convent in Lyon and make the journey to establish their new convent.

In her account, Vérot explained the difficulty and the importance of receiving the sacraments from a priest who had not sworn the clerical oath. At first, over forty refractory clergy came to their convent for shelter and to provide religious services. By 1792, any association with refractories was criminalized. So, “At the risk of their lives… saintly priests who lived in hidden cellars and attics—and dressed in all kinds of disguises—could once in a while bring us the grace of the sacraments.” Nuns often played a role in sheltering and hiding clergy despite the danger. The gendered assumptions about women—that they were naïve and harmless—was adopted by priests to avoid detection. The performance of this gender identity became a strategy for both men and women to escape the persecution during the Revolution. Thus, huddled in their apartments, the nuns could occasionally celebrate “the sacred mysteries,” “But the

dangers for the priests and for the people who received them became so great that we were forced to do without Mass, especially on Sundays and Holy days. Several of our sisters went months without being able to attend Mass.”

This was unacceptable for devout Catholics who relied on the sacraments to assure them of their salvation.

Despite the dire state of the convent, Vérot’s nuns had to remain there almost two more years before they were finally able to make their escape in the Spring of 1793. During this time, twelve of the nuns died. All the while, Vérot claimed, “the devotion of the faithful increased in proportion to the difficulties they had to endure.”

The Assembly may have forced the chapel doors closed, but the number of boarders in their convent school increased, the confessionals were in “constant use,” and forty-one priests provided frequent communion and masses. Such earnest devotion and the sheer numbers of people who were gathering at the convent forced the “département to order that the doors of [their] church be unsealed” on November 11, 1792, just in time for the Feast of Our Lady’s Presentation. The nuns' ability to convince the government to reopen a sealed off church demonstrated the instrumental role these convents could play in galvanizing anti-revolutionary sentiment. Their steadfast resistance became a rallying point for devout Catholics. Although this reopening of the church was short-lived and it was closed once again after Passion Sunday, it was a notable success of their efforts to resist the antireligious legislation of the Revolution. Therefore, as the nuns maintained

372 Vérot, “The Letter,” 63. She did not mention the cause of death except Soeur Marie-Anne Séraphique Mareron who died of natural causes.
374 Vérot, “The Letter,” 64.
375 Vérot, “The Letter,” 64.
their religious faith, they took on a public role as organizers of resistance, which was a considerable reshaping of their identity for cloistered women. They adjusted themselves to the crisis by taking a more public-facing stance than would ever have been allowed before the Revolution.

4.7 Obstacles to Emigrating

Under such potent threats of persecution and divisions within the church, like de la Bourdonnaye, Vérot found it too difficult to live together in France. Unfortunately, emigration became increasingly more difficult for these women. Large numbers of non-juring priests were forced to emigrate in 1791 and 1792 if they considered their loyalty to the international structure of the Church more important than that to the French nation. Since nuns were, at first, excused from the public requirement to take the oath, they did not face the same pressure to leave. By the time that the oath became mandatory in 1792, laws regarding passports and emigration had become much stricter. Therefore, most


“Decree that orders the arrest of Suspect People. Of 17 September 1793. The National Convention, having heard the report of its legislative committee on the method of bringing into effect its decree of last 12 August, decrees the following:

Art. I. Immediately after publication of this decree, all suspect people who are to be found on the territory of the Republic, and who are still in freedom, will be put under arrest.

II. Considered as suspect people are:
1° Those who, either by their conduct, or their relations, or by their words or writings, have shown themselves to be partisans of tyranny or of federalism, and enemies of freedom;
2° Those who cannot justify, in the manner prescribed by the decree of last 21 March, their means of existence and the acquittal of their civic duties;
3° Those to whom have been denied certificates of good citizenship;
4° Public officials who have been suspended or discharged from their functions by the National Convention or its commissioners and have not been reinstated, notably those who have been or ought to be discharged under the law of last 14 August;
5° Those former nobles, with their husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, son or daughters, brothers or sisters, and agents of émigrés, who have not consistently demonstrated their commitment to the Revolution;
nuns missed the window of time in which they could emigrate. As seen in the cartoons reproduced below, nearly all the public disdain for emigrating clergy was directed at men. While there were certainly women present, none of them are visibly wearing a habit since the focus of the pressure to leave was on the male clergy. The cartoon features the refractory clergy and the aristocrats fleeing France with their money to join forces with counterrevolutionary forces outside of France. It implies that the “promised land,” presided over by the Pope in his headpiece, was, in fact, Hell. The boatman, dressed as a Jacobin with a liberty cap, took the fleeing clergy across the river, a parallel to the river Styx.

6° Those who have emigrated during the interval between 1 July 1789 and the publication of the law of 8 April 1792, even if they have returned to France within the time prescribed by that law, or earlier.
While many of these cloistered convents had abandon their convents as individuals and were forced to rely upon family and friends for housing and protection, they sometimes sent out letters to try to relocate their entire congregation to new countries. The problems in carrying out such a difficult task were many. First, they had to obtain the permissions of the church and the governments of the countries in which they sought to relocate. Without the help of existing orders or clergy members friendly to their cause, it would be tough for these women to carry out the logistics of the relocation of their convents. Second, they would have to obtain passports, documentation, and

permissions from the French government, or risk the consequences if they got caught without them. Sometimes they even faced internal resistance both from French clergy members who did not think emigration was necessary yet, and those sisters who could not complete the journey. Third, they had to find a new location quickly; they were under a very severe time constraint. If the convent was not proactive in searching for a new location, they would lose the small window to leave. By 1792, when all nuns were finally forced to leave their convents, it was too late to obtain the necessary passports. Finally, the entire journey was incredibly dangerous and taxing on the religious orders themselves and everyone who assisted them. The Visitation convent in Lyon was lucky enough to navigate the dangers and challenges of relocation.

During Lent of 1792, the Visitation convent endured persecution, which pushed them further towards emigration; “right in front of the door to the sanctuary, troops of brigands would scourge Catholic women.” Arrangements for Vérot’s convent’s move were coming along but were far from complete. Meanwhile France, “was already like a huge prison; only those emissaries from the Assembly who were going outside France to infiltrate neighboring nations were permitted to leave.”

Vérot’s convent also faced internal opposition from their spiritual advisors and the Bishop. Father Courbon, their spiritual advisor, “hoped against all hope that [the Visitation monastery] would stay; he like[d] to think that [they] would survive the storm that was raging around us.” For less prescient superiors, a supplication from one of her spiritual advisors might be enough to dissuade an organization against relocation. This

hesitation from Courbon was doubled by the Archbishop of Lyon, who asked the sisters
to stay “as long as possible in our monastery,” because he had so much affection for the
order.382 This put the women of the Visitation in a tough situation. They had sworn vows
of obedience to these very authorities. Vérot wrote to Mère Isabelle de Sales De Fosières
for advice on how to “deal tactfully” with this obstacle, “yet in a manner that would be in
accord with the obedience we owe our archbishop.”383 Shortly after this conversation, the
archbishop was replaced by a constitutional bishop, whom Vérot felt no obligation to
obey. The nuns’ identity committed them to obedience to male authority figures in the
church; this decision to act against the wishes of these authorities demonstrated the
necessity of re-evaluating their identities during these difficult times. Vérot’s
assertiveness and ability to stand up for her convent in the face of male authorities
emerged during the Revolution. Her example showed that nuns were not passive in the
face of revolutionary changes.

It was not just the male spiritual advisors, but sometimes even the communities in
which they served that resisted the relocation of the convent. In Lyon, many inhabitants
wanted the Visitation convent to stay and “continue [their] work of education which was
so appreciated by the people of Lyons.”384 Resistance also came from family members of
nuns who were upset about the decisions taken by the mother superior, specifically Vérot.
One particularly old and infirm nun was not able to take the journey to Mantua. When her
niece heard that her aunt was being left behind, she went to “vent her rage upon the
sisters.” She went so far as to threaten to “denounce the sisters to the municipality ... This

terrible scene lasted three hours. Hardly was it over when a deputy from the municipality arrived with an order for our young extern to come at once to the city hall.”385

Unfortunately, as soon as she appeared at the city hall, she was thrown into La Charbonnier, a prison.386 Another nun from the convent was prevented from taking the journey, not because of her physical health but because her mother deterred her from going by threatening to denounce all of them to the municipality.387 The decision to leave thus necessitated the renegotiation of many aspects of the nuns’ identity. They had to leave parts of their community behind, resist the recommendation of male authorities, and leave the physical location of the convent, which had been their asylum since taking their vows.

4.8 Dissolution and The Journey to Mantua

The decree of August 18, 1792 abolished the remaining convents in France.388 Every convent in France was slated for closure by September of 1792. Some were given a few months to make arrangements, and hospital workers were ordered to stay in their posts, but most of the convents closed their doors and were removed by December of 1792. Vérot described the expulsion of the nuns from her convent in detail:

We were ordered to turn in the keys on the 30th [of September 1792]… Movers picked from all the scum of the populace, were hired to seize, first of all, all furnishings used for divine worship. These men were like boisterous drunkards, gloating over finally having the opportunity to give full vent to their sacrilegious rage […] Each child left us in tears when her parents came to take her home. The wound in our hearts was reopened.389

Students and boarders in the convent were also suddenly ripped from their routines and forced to return to their homes and their families. Vérot struggled with the prospect of separation. Despite “relatives and friends” advising them to “leave the monastery before the date” set by the municipality, she did not want to separate at all.\textsuperscript{390} Plans for relocation had not been finalized by the time of dissolution. Therefore, nuns relied on family and friends to house them until arrangements were finalized.

Vérot saw nothing but barbarism, cruelty, impiety, and greed in the municipal and state actors who raided her convent. Representatives of the government seized cash-boxes full of letters and valuable papers and were disappointed with the contents.\textsuperscript{391} However, there was one item Vérot refused to leave behind: the relic of Saint Francis de Sales. Vérot was astute enough to omit the golden reliquary from the inventories of their furnishings, and the officials did not think to claim it despite its well-known public appearances.\textsuperscript{392} All was well until a local constitutional curé “stirred up the agitation,” by addressing a formal request for the relic to the municipal council.\textsuperscript{393} Vérot used her community’s status as women and nuns in order to get away with lying. In order to save their most precious possession, they had to carry out a rather elaborate ruse on the municipality. Vérot decided to give up the elaborate golden reliquary, which had been a gift of the king, but to remove the saint’s heart. Then a silver reliquary was crafted to house the real relic. She arranged a get-away carriage, which helped her sister disappear

\textsuperscript{390} Vérot, “The Letter,” 66.
\textsuperscript{391} Vérot, “The Letter,” 74.
\textsuperscript{392} Vérot, “The Letter,” 71. It was often exposed to the public for veneration. Therefore, it was no secret that the Visitation convent had this relic.
\textsuperscript{393} Vérot, “The Letter,” 71.
before the treasure could be opened and their plot discovered.\textsuperscript{394} This was an incredibly dangerous and deceitful plot. Perhaps one of the reasons the nuns were successful was because the municipality thought they were too naïve and obedient to carry out such a well-organized deceit. At many other points throughout their journey, they also had to lie or bend the truth to survive. These women used their identity as naïve and honest nuns to get away with actions that would have been unfathomable for nuns in normal times.

After the municipality became aware that Vérot had tried to conceal the relic of Saint Francis de Sales, she was accused of being a “thief of ‘national property’ worthy of imprisonment.”\textsuperscript{395} Vérot was warned about this charge and was able to go into hiding with a family, whose name she did not give in her account because she wished to protect their safety.\textsuperscript{396} Furthermore, the revolutionaries appeared at the door to the convent and demanded her hosts turn over relic and Vérot, but both were safely hidden. For the last few months that she remained in France, she had to do so in hiding while making surreptitious travel arrangements.

Final plans for relocation were nearly finished when there was a change in leadership in Austria.\textsuperscript{397} By October 4, 1792, the Emperor François II, who had succeeded Leopold in March of that year, finished making all the arrangements for their convent and issued passports for the nuns to travel.\textsuperscript{398} Vérot, however, faced a crisis of

\textsuperscript{394} Vérot, “The Letter,” 73.
\textsuperscript{395} Vérot, “The Letter,” 71
\textsuperscript{396} Vérot, “The Letter,” 69.
\textsuperscript{397} Not only did Emperor Leopold welcome these women into his country, but he also invested much of his time and money in establishing the convent. He set up an endowment for the convent, found an old Ursuline convent for them to use, and paid to have the building repaired and furnished. He also put a trusted advisor in charge of overseeing the project. This enthusiasm and financial commitment to the relocation of the Visitandine convent was very fortunate, and other convents would not have such generous benefactors. Vérot, “The Letter,” 62.
\textsuperscript{398} Vérot, “The Letter,” 70.
identity with her convent sisters when she finally got the plan and the means to make the journey to Mantua in 1793. Despite the deaths of many sisters from the convent during the Revolution, there were still forty-seven sisters, and the decree for the emperor only allowed the foundation to have thirty-one. Of course, all of the nuns of the Visitandine convent wanted to make the journey, even “the oldest and most infirm sisters… took courage and were convinced that they were strong enough to endure the long, laborious trip ahead.” 399 Vérot, unwilling to sacrifice their communal identity, asked to extend the number to thirty-seven. Her request was granted, but it took a considerable amount of courage to risk the success of the other thirty-one sisters for whom they had passports for the sake of adding an additional six.

The Visitation nuns of Lyon finally made their escape in February 1793, just after the death of the king. 400 Just before he was executed on January 21, 1793, Vérot described that in Lyon, “scheming regicides would coerce passers-by to sign petitions for the death sentence of the innocent monarch… Crime and death were everywhere.” 401 This event hardened her convent’s resolve. If France had so forgotten the morality that they were willing to kill their king, she felt the time to leave had arrived. The death of King Louis seemed to free Vérot from any lingering identification with France.

They faced many perils and practical difficulties in relocating their convent. Although they planned to arrive in Mantua in three groups, they had to subdivide their convent further “to get out of France without stirring up trouble with evil men who were

399 Vérot, “The Letter,” 82.
400 Vérot, “The Letter”.
401 Vérot, “The Letter,” 81
watching our every move.”402 Groups of women traveling alone would have raised suspicion at this time. Women simply did not travel without their husbands or chaperones. Although their gender certainly offered obstacles to reaching Mantua, Vérot also leveraged their identity as nuns and as women to evade detection. They had no carriage and had to rely on “God alone” for protection. Luckily for Vérot and her companions, her “confidence was not in vain.” A route that would have been dangerous for anyone who looked even remotely aristocratic or anyone traveling without proper passports was completed without difficulty.403 They attributed the secret to their success to the fact that they “invoked the heavenly court to watch over [them].”404

Not all the groups were able to move so easily without the necessary municipal passports for short travel. One group of Vérot’s convent was nearly foiled in their plan in Nantua, France, when they were surrounded by national guardsmen who suspected them of being nuns. The innkeeper vouched for them and quickly moved them out of danger.405 Every time they passed national guardsmen or checkpoints, they faced imprisonment or death for their attempt to flee. Especially for older and sick nuns, it was perilous to travel long distances. In fact, one Visitandine, Louise-Antoinette, only made it to Milan before falling ill, and she only rejoined the convent later.406 Another sister, Catherine-Constance, fell ill and was left at Arona.407 The third group had to leave behind Catherine-Aimée Durand because she was sick enough that they “feared for her life.”408

By 1794, when Vérot penned her letter, three of the original convent in Lyon had passed and did not make it to Mantua because of the long and dangerous journey. Some of the nuns from Vérot’s convent were also injured on the way. At some point in their journey, their carriage tipped over, and the nuns who had been traveling on it, arrived “one with a broken arm, the other with a broken foot” that needed “at least three weeks rest before attempting to cross Simplon.” Despite these obvious dangers, Vérot still considered their relocation as an act of providence, and therefore, she believed they experienced “a greater success” than she dared to hope.

Vérot and her companions also shed their external habits and adopted secular dress when they traveled from Lyon to Mantua. Since the habit had been banned since April 1792, they would have to make the voyage without the most obvious marker of their religious identity. Vérot made it clear that the true mark of a nun was not her clothing. When they passed through villages and met peasants, they returned their greeting of ‘Bonjour, citoyens!’, but “those who looked at [them] closely said, ‘They are nuns.’ Nevertheless, [they] were never insulted.” There was something about their manner, way of speaking, and whole demeanor that would betray their spiritual vocation. They did not need the external dress to maintain their identity as nuns. Everyone who looked close enough would know.

When Vérot and her companions reached the Visitandine convent in Arona (across the border into Milanese territory), they saw sisters from their order in their habits for the first time since habits were abolished in France. Vérot wrote, “the very sight of

410 Vérot, “The Letter,” 120.
411 Vérot, “The Letter,” 86.
out habit—which we were still not allowed to wear—consoled us and softened the bitter memory of the destruction of the monastic orders in France.” ¹⁴¹² Although they had not yet donned their own habits again, there was a comfort in the familiar identity of the Visitandine habit. The clothes were a reminder of their religious identity. At Milan, they were able to stay a few days under the hospitality of Mère Marie-Eugénie. When they realized that their habits, which they had tried to send to Milan separately, had not arrived, Vérot and her sisters “decided [they] would go ahead and make [them]selves new habits. All the sisters wanted to help with this project, and in forty-eight hours [they] were finished.” ¹⁴¹³ On Palm Sunday, 1793, they finally had the “inexpressible consolation of wearing [their] holy habit.” ¹⁴¹⁴ To these women, the habit, far from being a tool of oppression, was an object of comfort, shared identity, and nostalgia. It linked sisters from across Europe and over the centuries together in one shared identity. Vérot’s convent associated the wearing of the habit as the uniform of their duties and privileges as God’s spouse. When the last group of nuns to leave Lyon arrived in Arona, Vérot described them changing “into their habits in holy haste, very honored to be clothed once again in the livery of their Divine Spouse.” ¹⁴¹⁵ The habit was more than just a piece of clothing. It was a visible sign of their Holy marriage to God and a physical marker of their identity.

In order to accomplish their escape, Vérot and her sisters had to make many departures from their convent identities. They broke laws and deceived guards. This made them both sinners and criminals, identities that they had not intended to adopt when

they took their vows. Lying broke one of the central tenets of the Christian faith, the eighth commandment.416 In one instance, Vérot and one of her companions feigned desperate illness, and the others pretended to be on their way to consult a famous doctor in Geneva.417 This level of deception was perhaps not suspected from nuns who tried to avoid bearing false witness against their neighbors. They sometimes had to adopt, at least temporarily, positions and identities that were false in order to be able to practice as they desired. Learning how to be good liars was perhaps not a skill they anticipated acquiring when they first entered the convent.

While the women faced many dangers, in some ways, their identity as women offered them protection. When they were questioned, their guides had only to say, “They are only women,” in order to receive safe passage in Geneva.418 When caught without passports, they used this gender bias to evade guards saying, “Do we need passports just to go on a little excursion in the country? We’re only women.” Because women were excluded from politics and generally obedient, men erroneously assumed they were not threatening, which helped them to escape.419

One other important aspect of deciding to move was the opportunity that it gave these women to travel, meet new people, and interact with a public outside of the convent on a scale that would have been impossible prior to this religious persecution. Vérot’s group went on a journey that few women, let alone nuns, got to experience in their lifetime. They traveled hundreds of miles, talked with peasants, met with the Austrian

416 “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” Exodus 20: 16 ESV
nobility, met with religious leaders, and established connections with religious men and women from all over southern Europe. Necessity forced them to enter the world that was closed to them before the Revolution. This changed their perspective on the world. Where Vérot might once have shied away from the pomp and circumstance which accompanied her arrival in Mantua, it seemed that she quite enjoyed the attention from the crowds.420

Their entire journey was dotted with meetings with religious men and women. Vérot mentioned numerous benefactors who were sympathetic to their plight. They were fortunate to have so many people who were loyal to them and supported their mission. Although everyone thought they were crazy for even attempting to leave, the Visitation convent in Lyon was eventually able to accomplish such a feat. Even in Italy, however, they were not out of danger. They were told:

… that we de luded ourselves if we thought we were going to be able to escape the horrors of the French Revolution which would soon be extending its powers into Italy, in which case we would be worse off than we were in our own country where our relatives and friends could at least help us meet our basic needs. In a foreign land, we would be lacking in everything and would again have to flee.421

This proved to be prescient advice. Although Vérot did not know it at the time she wrote her letter, the newly established convent would suffer the very fate their friends in France had warned about; they would be overrun by the French army. However, at the time, they could think of no worse suffering than to watch their convent be sold off bit by bit, to see their king executed, and their places of worship destroyed.

Vérot, too, rejected the freedom offered to her convent in Lyon and believed true freedom was found in devotion to religious vows. Vérot had not accepted the Revolution’s attempts to make her loyal to the nation above all else and felt positively joyful to be leaving France behind. When they had finally left Veroix, France, Vérot realized that “after three years of captivity, [they] had left France for good.” She relished in the “freedom” of “living in a Catholic country, re-establishing a monastery, and observing our beloved Visitandine way of life again.” 422 The irony was not lost on her that it was in a Protestant country, specifically Lausanne, Switzerland, where she was able to hear mass and receive the spiritual services their confessor had once provided for the first time in several years. 423 She felt most free when constrained by her vows. In France, the country of liberty and tolerance, she felt the most enchain
ed.

When they first arrived at their new convent, Vérot had to wait for some of the arrangements to be completed and for the rest of her community to arrive. It was only after the second group arrived after Easter in 1793 that the house resumed their usual observances and regular monastic form. 424 On May 1, 1793, Vérot declared that the “great work of [their] foundation in Mantua was completed.” 425 Nevertheless, settling back into their routines and prayers after a year of turmoil was not simple. The nuns tried to “rekindle the fervor in [their] hearts” with a retreat for about a week at the beginning of May. 426 The next big obstacle was a practical one rather than a spiritual one. These nuns had to learn Italian or find some way to overcome the language barrier. Père

422 Vérot, “The Letter,” 89.
Jaumar, their confessor, was able to learn Italian quickly and acted as an interpreter.\textsuperscript{427} With his help and that of a local Jesuit, the women began learning Italian. The final obstacle to establishing the foundation in the first month was getting the local aristocracy to send their daughters as boarders. There was a count who sent three daughters in the very first month of their foundation, before any of the nuns could speak a word of Italian.\textsuperscript{428} By 1794, however, the boarders stood only at five; as the students worked on French, their teachers worked on their Italian.\textsuperscript{429} Despite religious devotion they shared with their new Italian neighbors, it was not easy to transition to a new country with a new language. This was not the end of their travels, which we will discuss in a later chapter.

\section*{4.9 Conclusion:}

Life became very difficult for former nuns after the spring of 1791. They faced increasing challenges as they sought to maintain aspects of their identity and defend themselves from legal and physical attacks. The ways in which they responded to these challenges shows that they nevertheless were able to exercise a certain amount of agency, even in the new circumstances created by the increasing radicalization of the Revolution. Even those institutions which had been isolated from severe religious changes earlier in the Revolution, including the nursing and teaching orders, faced more pressure to conform to the revolutionary patriotism or suffer the consequences.

The story of the Visitandine convent in Lyon provides a case study of how nuns first expressed open opposition to the Revolution’s religious policies and then fled the country in order to maintain their identities. Although this is just one example of many, it

\textsuperscript{427} Vérot, “The Letter,” 128.  
\textsuperscript{428} Vérot, “The Letter,” 128.  
\textsuperscript{429} Vérot, “The Letter,” 128.
showed that Vérot and her sisters were willing to abandon France, leave their cloister, and shed their habits, in order to maintain their collective religious life. To do so, however, they had had to behave in ways they could never have imagined when they took their vows.
CHAPTER 5. GABRIELLE GAUCHAT DURING THE REIGN OF TERROR

Most nuns during the Reign of Terror (1792-1794) were unable to leave and relocate their entire convent. For many women, after the dissolution of convents, they had no choice but to return to their families to survive. Gabrielle Gauchat, however, learned how to practice her faith internally and as an individual in isolation from the larger church structure and other members of her Visitation convent. Maintaining an individual religious retreat after dissolution, like Gauchat, was more common than the example of Verot’s community entirely picking up and emigrating. Living outside of the formal structure of the church exposed religious women to new worldly experiences and temptations, which encouraged them to find ways to commune directly with God without the formal church structure. Gauchat practiced sacrificial devotion through her suffering that would never have been necessary without the Revolution. While we cannot be sure how many nuns in France kept to their vows as firmly as Gauchat, her example provides a window into the suffering the nuns experienced after dissolution and the ways they negotiated their position to adjust to the new circumstances.

Gabrielle Gauchat, whose diary is the longest and most personal record we have during the Reign of Terror from a nun, offers a case study for understanding the personal and emotional decisions she faced during the Revolution regarding her vows and her faith. She was born in Saint-Domingue (current-day Haiti) in 1755. She joined the Visitandine convent in the priory of St-Gengoux in Saône-et-Loire (at the encouragement

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430 Gabrielle Gauchat confirmed this in her diary entry on her June 8, 1793 when she wrote “La plus grand partie de nos sœurs dans leurs familles: nous restons douze à Langres.” Most secondary sources claimed that these women returned to their villages and their families but there are very few first-hand accounts of what they did there. A few Caprara letters mention staying with family members after the dissolution.
of an uncle who was a priest and canon at the Cathedral in Langres) when she was only ten years old.\textsuperscript{431} Langres was also the birthplace of Denis Diderot, the Enlightenment philosophe and author of \textit{The Nun}. Therefore, Diderot may have drawn material for the novel based on Gauchat’s convent in Langres. Before 1789, the diocese of Langres was rich in monastic orders and had a relatively robust Catholic congregation. However, because the bishop of Langres refused to swear the oath to liberty and equality, the doors of the Cathedral were closed January 20, 1791. Therefore, the \textit{Civil Constitution} proved to be the first blow to Gauchat’s diocese. In the Spring of 1791, the revolutionaries deported the refractory clergy of Langres, including the bishop and M. Giradon, Gabrielle Gauchat’s confessor. In July 1791, chapels and convents which did not adhere to the \textit{Civil Constitution of the Clergy} or swear the oath to the constitution closed. In September of 1792, with the final decree from the Legislative Assembly, the Visitation nuns in Langres were expelled from their convent, and Gauchat began her diary.

Her diary demonstrates that she was impressively well-read, not only the Bible and the lives of the saints but in popular literature as well. She was particularly interested in the poetry of Sir Edward Young, whose collection of poems called \textit{Night-Thoughts} was translated into French and came into Gauchat’s possession. Additionally, she possessed a vast collection of Jansenist works, which may have also influenced the way that she interacted with God.\textsuperscript{432} Jansenists were more amenable than Catholics to communicating with God directly. Lastly she possessed the writing of many of her heroes of the faith including the works of St. Brigitte, St; Catherine of Siena, St. Theresa,

\textsuperscript{432} Godard, « Introduction », XI.
Madeleine de Pazzi, St. Jeanne de Chantal (one of the founders of the Visitation), and Marguerite-Marie Alacoque (a Visitandine nun who saw the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Burgundy). These stories helped to inspire and sustain Gauchat. She often identified herself with some biblical character as a source of encouragement. Since Gauchat lived in the convent from the age of ten, she had a long experience of convent practices on which to draw.

Unlike Vérot, whose letter was written in 1794 after most of the events had transpired, Gauchat allegedly wrote as the events were taking place. Her diary, which served as a confession of her interior life from September 29, 1792, to the 29th of June 1795, is addressed to a confessor whom she calls dear brother. However, we only have the version printed in the nineteenth century and not the original, handwritten manuscript. We do not know how heavy an editorial hand the first printers had over the original manuscript, and no one knows the fate of the original manuscript. Religious women’s writings were often meant for confessional purposes and, therefore, heavily scrutinized by their male authorities. So, we must consider the layers of scrutiny this journal endured before it was printed. However, this does not mean we should throw the source out entirely. In it, Gauchat claims, “having confessed to you without any other desire or intention to open my heart to you, but only in order to be able to take communion, I was obliged to tell you that I had vowed not to make any willful misconduct, so that you

433 Godard, « Introduction », XIV.
434 It sounds like the brother to which she referred was the abbé Girardon. Godard, “Introduction,” XVI.
435 Perhaps in the future I could spend a few months trying to track it down, but for this project, I am confined to relying on the printed version, despite its problems.
would know what my fault was.”436 The diary gives us a rare glimpse at the interior life of a woman who survived the turmoil of the Revolution. She wanted to render an accurate accounting of her interior life. The purpose of this journal informs its contents and shapes the story.437 Although indeed written for a confessor and following a particular rubric, there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of her religious belief and that Gauchat’s Journal provides a valuable, perhaps unique, window into the emotional impact of the Revolution. Her diary must be read in the context of its audience to understand why she wrote so extensively about her amorous relationship with God or the turmoil of her soul.

The diary began in September of 1792 because that is the date when she and her sisters were officially expelled from their convent. It was also around this same time that she learned of the death of a sister and a nephew in Saint-Domingue, where much of her family still lived.438 It was natural that, in this period of turmoil and isolation, she used the diary as an outlet to express the grief, frustration, joy, and struggle.

Diaries of a profoundly religious and counterrevolutionary nature were kept at great danger to those who wrote them. Gabrielle Gauchat explains that her diary was “indeed, unconstitutional in its entirety; there is enough to guillotine me twenty times, if one could die twenty times. Despite this genuine danger, it is not possible for me to decide to burn it.”439 This sentence demonstrates that she understood the danger and even

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436 « M’étant confessée a vous sans aucun désir ni intention de vous ouvrir mon cœur, mais seulement afin de pouvoir communier, je fus obligée de vous dire que j’avais fait le vœu de ne faire aucune faute volontaire, afin que vous connussiez quelle était ma faute. » Gauchat, Journal, 86.
437 Philippe Lejeaune, On Diary.
438 Godard, « Introduction, » XX.
439 « Il est à la vérité, inconstitutionnel en son entier ; il y a de quoi me faire guillotiner vingt fois, si l’on pouvait mourir vingt fois. Malgré ce danger est très réel, il ne m’est pas possible de me décider à le bruler. » Gauchat, Journal, 73.
the illegality of keeping such a religious document. For nuns who had built their entire adult lives on the obedience to the authorities placed over them, to so brazenly defy the laws was a significant departure from their stance of submission to the authorities placed over them. Therefore, Gauchat’s diary is a rare and valuable example of one nun who solidified her religious identity even as she sacrificed the performative elements of her particular religious order. She used her religious faith to help anchor her happiness and faith in something that the revolutionaries could not legislate out of existence.

5.1 On Religious Habits: Prohibitions on Religious Dress in 1792

Perhaps the most visible and clear indicator of that a woman was a member of a particular religious community was her dress—as discussed in the previous chapter. In Appendix 2, there is a series of engravings from 1787 to 1789 of different religious communities in Europe, showing how nuns were immediately recognized as members of a specific community based on their habit. Even her rank, as a novice, converse sister, or choir sister, was evident from the dress she wore. Therefore, even though some of these engravings are from convents outside of France, we can still use them to give an idea of how members of the different types of convents might have dressed. Gauchat’s diary describes the dilemma she faced when she was asked to give up the habit. Although she saw it as a blow to her practice of their identity, it could not erase Gauchat’s internal religious sentiment. Habits established a distinct externally discernible practice of identity before the Revolution, but Gauchat explains how she rationalized with the abolition of her habit.440

In the convent, because everything was held in common, no one had personal clothing. All clothes were kept in one linen room, handed out by day, cleaned at night, and returned to the correct place, organized by size. Publicly wearing the habit had been banned by April of 1792, and wearing religious garb in public could result in beatings as early as the Spring of 1791, as we saw in the previous chapter. After April 6, 1792, there should be no distinct identifiers of a religious vocation; in fact, there soon would be no such thing as a religious vocation, officially. It took Gauchat half a year to come to terms with this decree. Only after consulting with her superior and confessor was she able to give up her habit. On November 8, Gauchat dealt with the questions facing her and her sisters regarding their religious habits. She wrote about this decision in this way:

... she [another nun in her order] thought it was fitting that we should give up our religious clothes. I was already internally decided; I saw clearly that it was not necessary for outer garments to deprive me of the graces which should have clothed my soul, and that, since our ecclesiastics threatened us with abandonment, we must yield. Self-esteem and attachment to my own will were still opposed to it and had joined the very legitimate love of our religious clothes.

Therefore, for Gauchat, she could sacrifice her outer clothing because she was clothed in an internal grace. Abandoning the habit proved to be an uncharacteristic concession from a woman who consistently sought to resist every effort to transform her patterns of life.

441 Most convents held all goods in common but there were always exceptions. Not all orders worked this way—in many cases, individual nuns were responsible for purchasing and maintaining their habits using the income from their dowries.
443 Godard, “Introduction,” XVI
444 Gauchat, *Journal*, 31. « elle jugea à propos que nous quittassions nos habits religieux. J’y étais déjà intérieurement décidée ; je voyais bien qu’il ne fallait pas pour des vêtements extérieurs me priver des grâces qui devaient revêtir mon âme, et que puis-que nos ecclésiastiques nous menaçaient de l’abandon, il fallait céder. L’amour-propre et l’attachement à ma propre volonté s’y opposaient encore et s’étaient joints à l’amour très légitime de nos habits religieux. »
She framed her attachment to the religious habit as something she would have to 
sacrifice, but not because of the revolutionaries’ ordinances. She argued that she had to 
sacrifice it because she wore it for her own personal pride and a source of self-esteem, 
but not the will of God, nor an indicator of her internal religious sentiment.445 Leaving 
behind her religious garb was the first of many personal sacrifices Gauchat made to 
further cultivate her spiritual state during the Revolution.

As the Revolution wore on, Gauchat further expressed the difference between her 
external appearance and her internal love and steadfast faith. She wrestled with the 
difference between “exterior clothes” and the clothing of her soul.446 Although her body 
would succumb to the pressures and anxiety of life, she felt this external expression did 
not match her internal faith in God. She separated her body from her soul, the earthly 
from the heavenly, and the physical from the metaphysical as a coping mechanism 
throughout her diary. While her flesh may fail, her soul, strengthened by God, would not. 
Therefore, she could cast off her habit or other physical trappings of her life in the 
convent as long as she kept her spiritual anchor.

5.2 The Terror: Maintaining Gauchat’s Religious Identity

After being forced from her original convent, Gauchat chose to live together with 
another sister from her convent named Constance in the hospital house of M. Caumien. 
For women like Gauchat, who had no family on whom they could rely, they found it 
difficult to find one place to settle. Often women had no other home and no other options 
but to rely on the generosity of friends or devout Catholics. In cultivating a productive

445 Gauchat, Journal, 32.
446 « …Des vêtements extérieurs, me priver des grâces qui devaient revêtir mon âme…. » Gauchat, 
spiritual retreat with Constance, Gauchat argued that she “persevered” in maintaining their habits of life as in the cloister, by avoiding going out for any reason. No longer bound by any Church authority, these women held themselves accountable by creating their own cloisters. Gauchat claimed that they continued to “... lead the religious life almost entirely, and thanks to God, [they] keep the love and the spirit of our [religious] state.” They did not keep up this state because they had any hope they might return to their “dear monastery.” They submitted themselves to the posture of submission.

Despite the bleak prospects for religious women at the start of the Terror, these women felt the grace of God, providing them with tranquility and happiness.

Perhaps more difficult than reciting the breviary and creating a spiritual retreat was the insurmountable challenge of finding priests to administer the sacraments. Gauchat claimed that in the convent, she would hear 15 to 20 masses per day in her old job assisting the Sacristan. However, during the Terror, it became deathly dangerous to hear mass or for priests to say masses. Therefore, this oasis of spiritual contemplation was not always easy to maintain during the Revolution. For all Catholics, but particularly for religious women, receiving the sacraments was central to maintain a tranquil state of

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447 « Nous persévérions dans la plus étroit clôture, nous ne sortons point absolument. » Gauchat, *Journal*, 43.
448 « …Nous menons la vie religieuse Presque en entier; et grâce à Dieu, nous conservons l’amour et l’esprit de notre état. » Ibid.
449 “ Pour le moment, nous ne voyons jour a rien n’ayant aucun espoir bien fondé de rentrer dans notre cher monastère, nous en sommes toujours à la soumission, à l’abandon ;” Ibid.
450 Gauchat, *Journal*, 44.
451 « Mon office de sacristine que j’ai continué de faire [faire ?] ne m’a pas été un sujet de distraction. J’étais occupée à servir et à entendre quinze et quelquefois vingt messes par jour. Mon emploi ne me rapprochait que de Dieu, parce que j’évitais tout discours et toute rencontre. J’étais à l’église dans ces saints exercices depuis cinq heures jusqu’à midi, et cela, presque tous les jours. Pendant la plus grande partie de ce temps d’épreuves si les messes étaient interrompues par les événements et les ordres qui venaient, je n’en passais guère moins de temps à l’église. » Gauchat, *Journal*, 89. Also mentioned in the introduction that she attended 15-20 masses a day. Godard, “Introduction,” x.
their souls. Communion was an essential and symbolic moment for certain nuns who described intense emotions in preparation and after receiving the sacrament. Because mass included the celebration of communion, nuns were supposed to attend mass at least once a week, but preferably once a day. Since October 1, 1792, until just over a year later, Gabrielle Gauchat had counted 30 masses, but she had only received communion twelve times.\textsuperscript{452} It was incredible that she was able to receive communion twelve times at all, considering that most priests had either left the country or left the profession. Deportations of priests accelerated in 1792, and by March 13 of 1793, any priest who was sentenced to deportation and remained in France could face trial and execution.\textsuperscript{453} Finding a priest willing to provide the sacraments was incredibly difficult under such measures. Through prayer, contemplation, recitation of her divine offices, and intermittent masses and confessions, Gauchat distracted herself from the horrors around her and fixed herself on the concerns of heaven. Therefore, in solidifying her religious belief and her identity in an unchangeable God, she was able to withstand the first months after dissolution successfully.

5.2.1 On Suffering and Joy 1792

Gauchat and her companions would have to wrestle with their permanent identity as nuns, and the lack of any support for keeping these vows. Without their communities, their discipline, and their schedules, each woman would have to work much harder to maintain the same pattern of life that she promised to keep. In one distinct instance from the beginning of Gauchat’s diary, she explained that she would not abandon her vows.

\textsuperscript{452} Gauchat, \textit{Journal}, 48.
\textsuperscript{453} Aston, \textit{Religion and Revolution in France}, 184.
She wrote, “I finally offer you all my religious duties. No, I have lost nothing in exchange: everything is precious, great, salutary, profitable, in this new order of things.”\textsuperscript{454} Her vows did not just disappear because the government invalidated them. She suggested that they remained profitable for her salvation, particularly because of the temptation of the new order. Despite receiving the dispensation from her confessor (based on the uncertainty of the future and the danger of the times), she felt that her vows were necessary to keep her from infidelities and other voluntary sins:

On leaving my monastery, I had been discharged from the vow of obedience made to the confessor [...] The uncertainty of relief for the future had compelled him to release me from these vows, however, seeing that my mind was so calm and capable of helping me, and, moreover, recognizing how much this wish to do no voluntary sin was useful to me and even necessary to ward off all infidelities, I asked permission to renew it.\textsuperscript{455}

She further claimed that she “could no longer live… in the infidelity” caused by living outside of her vows.\textsuperscript{456} Therefore, retaking her vows was not merely a sign a defiance to the Revolution, or strictly counter-revolutionary, but a reaffirmation of her identity, which was founded upon loyalty to the designs of heaven. She ended this section by arguing “… the Bridegroom is jealous, and I am also for him; so that there is no rest for me except in an inviolable fidelity to follow all the celestial movements and to give

\textsuperscript{454} « Je vous offre enfin tous mes devoirs religieux. Non, je n’ai rien perdu au change : tout est précieux, grand, salutaire, profitable, dans ce nouvel ordre de choses. » Gauchat, \textit{Journal}, 186.
\textsuperscript{455} « En sortant de mon monastère l’on m’avait déchargée du vœu d’obéissance fait au confesseur, et du vœu de ne faire aucun fait au volontaire. L’incertitude de secours pour l’avenir avait obligé à me relever de ces vœux : cependant me voyant l’esprit si calme et pouvant avoir de secours, et d’ailleurs reconnaissant combien ce vœu de ne faire aucune faute volontaire m’était utile et même nécessaire pour écarter toutes les infidélités, j’ai demandé permission de le renouveler. » Gauchat, \textit{Journal}, 43.
\textsuperscript{456} « Je ne puis plus vivre, mon cher frère dans l’infidélité… » Gauchat, \textit{Journal}, 44.
myself without limits to the divine operation.”457 She gave herself to God entirely, without any reservation or compromise with the Revolution. Her identity relied directly on Jesus, her bridegroom. The liberty provided by the revolutionaries in abolishing solemn vows was a “fatal” liberty, it was not the freedom offered by God. Only by giving herself to Jesus could Gauchat be free of the pervasive temptation of sin. For Gauchat and other nuns like her, the liberty offered by the Revolution was not the way to be truly free from sin and death.

Gauchat felt the need to express that religious life was the only real source of happiness, joy, freedom, desire, and pleasure. Contrary to the Revolutionaries’ idea that the nun was unhappily and unwillingly imprisoned in the convent, Gauchat explained how very far from the truth that was. She argued that the cross of suffering was “very amicable, very desirable; poverty as a real wealth; I say that loneliness is the center of my heart, that prayer is the cure for all my ills, that nothing really displeases me…”458 She found spiritual wealth in her vows of poverty. Her soul felt a sort of healing and wholeness in saying her prayers and true happiness in the face of adversity. For every evil that the world threw at her, she found “nothing comparable to being alone with my God.”459 Every time she received the sacraments or was able to confess her sins became so much more precious to her. Her entries showed a different mood when she had benefitted from communion or mass said by a priest. During these first few months,

457 « …l’Epoux est jaloux, et je la suis aussi pour lui; de sorte qu’il n’y a plus de repos pour moi que dans une inviolable fidélité à suivre tous les mouvements célestes et me livrer sans bornes a l’opération divine. »
458 « …très-amiable, très-désirable ; la pauvreté comme une véritable richesse; je dis que la solitude est le centre de mon cœur, que la prière est la remède tous mes maux, que les riens me déplaisent souverainement; que je n’aime plus que la solide et ce qui a rapport à ce grand terme où nous tendons tous… » Gauchat, Journal, 60.
459 Gauchat, Journal, 60. « …je ne trouve toujours rien de comparable à être seule avec mon Dieu. »
Gauchat was able to keep a posture of joy in all circumstances. Perhaps more importantly, she was still able to receive the sacraments and, therefore, be occasionally spiritually fed.

5.2.2 On the Oath

In addition to losing their homes, these women also lost the wealth of their convents and their ability to live without working. Acknowledging that women who left the convent would need some money to survive, the Assembly offered a pension for any nun willing to leave. When nuns were finally forced out of their convents, they were able to collect the pension only if they had sworn the oath to liberty and equality. Therefore, the oath disqualified the refractory clergy and many nuns who stood behind their refractory priests. As the Revolution wore on into 1793, punishment was not just that these refractories lost an income; they were also subject to imprisonment or deportation.460 Those who were able to collect the pension argued it was insufficient to live on and often unpaid. Gauchat, and other former religious women like her, found collecting this money humiliating. Earlier, she described, on December 31, 1792, the tithes, which had once been a 10% tax that went directly to the church as “stolen” by “marauders,” whom she now had to visit to collect her humiliating “alms.”461 She did not find any joy in the control of money, unlike some of the other nuns we will discuss in the next chapter. Instead, she found her “true treasure in poverty.”462 This constant concern about money made her aware of her earthly troubles. As she attempted to build her life in

460 Gauchat, Journal, 182. « les ?le punitions sont la perte de la pension, la prison ou l’exportation. Les menaces sont grandes. »
a way that her body, mind, and soul belonged only to the heavenly realm, financial concerns remained a constant obstacle tethering her anxieties to the present.

For Gauchat, the only oaths she was interested in taking were oaths of loyalty to God alone. She prayed, “You have come, my God, to receive my oaths and forbid me to swear to others but to you.”463 She instead used the request from the revolutionaries as an opportunity to affirm her true loyalties: “I swear, my Savior, to follow you everywhere with an intrepid and inviolable fidelity. This is constantly the only oath I want to make.”464 God was a jealous God who did not care to share Gauchat’s heart with patriotic sentiments; she believed she had no choice but to refuse the oath.

Although religious women faced less severe consequences than parish priests, their refusal to swear the oath subjected them to suspicion and persecution:

I am asked for the oath: I am pressed. Your friends, your holy ministers, did it. Your holy wives [nuns and religious women], who fear only to displease you, have done it. Respectable prelates did it. My particular authorities advise me and blame me highly if I refuse it. All the holy troop of your disciples, in a word, the little and holy Church which surrounds me, all that see true and fervent lovers of the holy religion all present to me, ask me to make this oath, or by their examples, or by their advice given on all sides. There is nothing outside that does not bring me to it, and that does not tell me that I will be guilty of refusing to do so.465

463 Gauchat, Journal, 136. « Vous êtes venu, mon Dieu, pour recevoir mes serments et me défendre de jurer à d’autres qu’à vous.»
464 Gauchat, Journal, 182. « Je fais serment mon Sauveur, de vous suivre partout avec une intrépide et inviolable fidélité. Voilà constamment l’unique serment que je veuille faire. »
465 « On me demande le serment : on me presse. Vos amis, vos saints ministres l’ont fait. Vos saintes épouses, qui ne craignent que de vous déplaire, l’ont fait. De respectable pontifes l’ont fait. Mes autorités particulières me le conseillent et me blâment hautement si je le refuse. Toute la sainte troupe de vos disciples, en un mot la petite et sainte Église qui m’environne, tout ce que vois de vrais et de fervents amateurs de la sainte religion tous me présent, me sollicitent de faire ce serment, ou par leurs exemples ou par leurs avis donnés de tous cotes. Il n’est rien à l’extérieur qui ne m’y porte et qui ne me dise que je me rendrai coupable de m’y refuser. » Gauchat, Journal, 123.

196
She felt surrounded by authorities of both the Church and the French government pressuring her to take the oath, which she has so far refused. She later said, “My heart repels the oath, and shudders at the mere thought of lending it” because she associated the oath as evil and of “Lucifer.”466 Nothing can change her mind that this oath was an abandonment of God’s will and, therefore, a sinful transgression.

More positively, she refused the oath as an expression of her love and devotion to God. Gauchat explained, “No, I will not take the oath. It is the delicacy of my love for God to the unlimited confidence in total abandonment to the supreme will that I make this sacrifice: to do it one should die: die to nature; To die to the use of my inner faculties, to die to every interior support, to die to any internal and external support.”467 Not taking the oath was a litmus test of faith and confidence for Gauchat. She did not make this choice based on reason (or her “inner faculties”) nor based on “nature.” She had to ignore the pressures besieging her on all sides, both internal and external. The only support she needed was the assurance of her God. Thus, her refusal became an act of worship that strengthened her relationship with God. She wrote, “by refusing this oath; I sink into the bosom of my mother, the Church; I claim to follow its purest and most perfect intentions.”468 She described herself as the victim of her purity of faith. Her conscience could not allow any compromise and, therefore, she willingly opened herself up to suffering.469

466 « Mon cœur repousse le serment, et frémit à la seule pensée de le prêter. » Gauchat, Journal, 124, 125.
467 « Non, je ne ferai pas le serment. C’est la délicatesse de mon amour pour Dieux à la confiance sans borne à un total abandon à la volonté suprême que je fais ce sacrifice : pour le faire il faut mourir : mourir à la nature ; Mourir à l’usage de mes facultés intérieures, mourir à tout appui intérieurs mourir à tout appui intérieurs et extérieures. » Gauchat, Journal, 127.
468 « Par le refus de ce serment, je m’enfonce dans le sein de ma bonne mère l’Église; je prétends suivre ses intentions le plus pures et le plus parfaites. » Gauchat, Journal, 128.
469 Gauchat, Journal, 128.
Since Gauchat felt so strongly about not taking the clerical oath, it begs the question of what she felt about those who had taken the oath. Perhaps fearful of alienating those who had always been in places of power over her, she claimed she “did not disapprove of the holy persons who have taken the oath, they have kept all my esteem.” Therefore, Gauchat’s ability to resist the oath was a manifestation of God’s will alive in her. Instead of boasting of the deepness of her own faith, she “will give back, oh my Jesus, acts of eternal grace” to those who swore the oath. Later, in one of her long reflections on the graciousness of God, she reinforced this stance that she could not swear the oath because of her special relationship with God, but she, again, did not blame others for doing so. Since God came to her, she could not deny him. She owed him loyalty as a spouse and could not share any oaths to Him with the Revolution.

There was an economic factor to Gauchat’s decision. Since she rejected the oath, she could not receive the pension. As demonstrated above, she hated collecting the pension anyway. This section showed an apparent excitement about the opportunity to sacrifice to show devotion to God. She wrote, “O oath refused, source of so much happiness, you will make my happiness forever.” Instead of mourning in her poverty, she rejoiced in the blessing it would be to truly build her treasure in heaven, to have everything stripped away, but her faith and devotion to God. She claimed new heights of happiness in her destitution.

470 « Je ne désapprouve point les saintes personnes qui l’ont fait, je leur conserve toute mon estime. » Gauchat, Journal, 128.
472 Gauchat, Journal, 136. « Vous êtes venu, mon Dieu, pour recevoir mes serments et me défendre de jurer à d’autres qu’à vous.»
473 « O serment refusé, source de tant de bonheur, tu feras à jamais ma félicité, … » Gauchat, Journal, 139.
After the excitement of Christmas 1793 had died down, Gauchat once again returned to the question of taking the oath to be able to collect her pension. She said, “I am still offered by the municipality to take my oath to have a pension. Yes, my God, I take an oath, but it’s to you, and I constantly renounce any other.” She gave her reason once again that “God’s will” was sufficient enough for her to refuse the oath again. Upon refusing the oath again, she recognized she was acting as an enemy of the laws. This new identity, as an enemy of the law, was one she took on willingly and joyfully.

Despite her status as a refractory, she still occasionally had to present herself to the municipality. Naturally, she was refused her pension because she refused to swear the oath. However, in an act which she described as God’s provision, “an unknown person” gave her 50 francs, which reaffirmed her conviction that she must never take the oath to collect her pension. Gauchat decided that she would not worry about her temporal sustenance, but only the will of God, which will assuredly provide for all her needs. Therefore, the oath was an opportunity for Gauchat to affirm her religious identity in the face of Revolution and any suffering as a result of her refusal she welcomed gladly.

5.2.3 On the Death of the King on January 21, 1793

Louis XVI’s death marked the point of no return for the Revolution. Since the Catholic Church had always aligned itself so closely with the King, this event was a blow

474 « Il m’est encore offert à la municipalité de prêter mon serment pour avoir une pension. Oui mon Dieu, je prête serment, mais c’est à vous et je renonce constamment à toute autre. » Gauchat, Journal, 158
475 Gauchat, Journal, 159. « je vois seulement que c’est votre volonté, et c’est assez, pour ne m’y pas refuser. »
476 « Par le refus du serment, je me présente comme réfractaire et ennemie des lois. »
477 « Je me rends à la municipalité pour demander ma pension, on exige le serment : je le refuse et me retire sans rien avoir. Je trouve au sortir de la une personne inconnue, un billet de 50 francs. Presse de laisser faire pour moi des démarches, j’y consens, bien résolue de refuser constamment le serment, s’il est nécessaire pour toucher ma pension. » Gauchat, Journal, 171-2.
for all religious men and women still residing in France. Louis XVI’s execution marked
the end of the more liberal phase of the Revolution and indicated that the next year might
take a more violent turn. However, Gabrielle Gauchat waited two weeks before penning
her reaction to this shocking event:

I found this one [tragedy] more powerful than all others, and my soul was so
absorbed, that my own misfortune seemed to be eclipsed, or at least I could
consider it without experiencing the fatal sensations which have so long
tormented me.
After that all the impressions of terror and horror have been effaced; faith alone
has taken over; I was no longer susceptible to pity or sensibility; my troubles,
those of the whole universe, have appeared to me only as dreams.478

Perhaps the gravity of the situation had prevented her from processing this occasion until
later. She seemed changed by it. Her suffering and the suffering of the whole universes
had to fade. She seemed to distance herself from the reality in which she was living and
looked to heaven to reframe her grief. She used her faith and her religious identity as a
way to distance herself from the horrors of reality.

5.2.4 Spring 1793

On February 10, 1793, after several months of intermittent communion, isolation
from others in her order, and suffering the persecutions of the Revolution, Gauchat began
to doubt the state of her soul. This next period in her diary shows extreme sadness and
hopelessness interspersed with shame at betraying such spiritual weakness. The death of
the French King was undoubtedly a blow to her conception of herself and perhaps even
her relationship with France itself. As things began to look increasingly more dire for

478 « J’ai trouvé celle-ci fort au-dessus de toute autre, et mon âme en a été tellement absorbée, que mon
propre malheur a paru éclipser, ou que de moins j’ai pu l’envisager sans éprouver les funestes
sensations qui m’ont si longtemps tourmentée. Ensuite, toutes les impressions de terreur et
d’horreur se sont effacées ; la foi seul a pris l’empire ; je n’ai plus été susceptible de douleur ni de
sensibilité; mes maux, ceux de l’univers entier ne m’ont plus paru que comme des songes. »
France, the radical dechristianization of the Year II challenged Gauchat’s commitment to faith.

Her previously inexhaustible faithful joy and reliance on God alone for her protection wavered. She “no longer could give a fair idea of the state of her soul.”\(^{479}\) Furthermore, she felt she was “nothing but an instrument in [God’s] hands.” For the first time in her diary, Gauchat doubted her salvation because of her “innumerable sins, the horrible theater.”\(^{480}\) Her sleep was interrupted because she tosses and turns with thoughts of heaven and hell.\(^{481}\) She seemed, on the one hand, hyper-spiritually aware, but on another, absolutely tormented by the state of her salvation. For many devout nuns living outside of their convent, the Revolution was a time of spiritual torment even for those that never suffered any physical harm. Gauchat best described the combination of suffering as a mix of horror, guilt, boredom, and sadness. She writes in detail in the middle of her entry on February 10:

> I wanted to be horrified at the horrors of today; I wanted compassion for so many souls lost, to tear me away from tears; I wanted the memory of so many sacrileges to leave me no rest, at last, I sought pain and l’ennui, I prayed, asked for the diversity of dispositions that seemed to me to arise from all the objects that faith presented to me, there was nothing to do.\(^{482}\)

\(^{479}\) « … je crois encore très assurément ne pouvoir vous donner une juste idée de l’état de mon âme. » Gauchat, *Journal*, 51.

\(^{480}\) « … je ne suis plus qu’un instrument dans ses mains…. Le souvenir de mes innombrables pêches, le théâtre horrible… » Gauchat, *Journal*, 51.

\(^{481}\) Gauchat, *Journal*, 52. « J’envisage tout l’ensemble des temps et de l’éternité, les mystères, les vertus, le ciel, l’enfer ; tout m’est présent d’un regard universel et non distinct, non pas à l’oraison seulement, mais en tout temps. »

\(^{482}\) « Je voulais être saisie d’horreur en voyant les horreurs actuelles ; je voulais que la compassion pour tant d’âmes qui se perdent, m’arrachât des larmes ; je voulais que le souvenir de tant de sacrilèges ne me laissât aucun repos, enfin j’ai cherché à la douleur et à l’ennui, j’ai prié, sollicité pour obtenir la diversité des dispositions qui me semblaient devoir naître de tous les objets qui me présentaient la foi, il n’y a rien eu à faire. » Later, she makes this more clear when she writes « Je m’exerce a la mortification intérieure et extérieure en toute que je puis ; je donne beaucoup de temps a la prière. » Gauchat, *Journal*, 52-3.
She clearly felt tormented by the Revolution and sought to exercise these horrors through asceticism and her spiritual practices, yet these were insufficient. She wanted to remember all the torments, yet they were terrifying her. Despite her practice of virtue, the mortification (both interior and exterior) of sin, her soul remained restless. The loss of the convent identity left her questioning. She wanted to be different than she was. She wanted to be horrified at the violence and was ashamed that she was not.

Gauchat felt the menace of the Terror particularly strongly around religious holidays. In her entry from February 23, 1793, shortly after the beginning of Lent, she described her disquiet: “Finally, the redoubling of the persecution against our holy priests, in this time approaching Easter, suspends masses and communions, and puts us, at every moment, in danger of not having them ever again.” During this time of preparation for Easter, Gauchat could not find a priest to say mass or administer communion, let alone hear her confession. As noted earlier, when she could easily access confession and communion, her entries were full of praise and thanksgiving to a merciful God. However, when danger made receiving the sacraments impossible, her entries oscillated between extreme joy and extreme sadness at the state of religion. This period of depression and adjustment in the Spring of 1793 marked a low point in her diary. Gauchat learned to maintain her faith and courage in the face of resistance and outside of the church. The discouragement she felt at not receiving the sacraments was displaced or lessened as she adjusted to new spiritual practices.

483 « Enfin, le redoublement de la persécution contre nos saints prêtres, dans ce temps qui approche de Pâques, suspend les messes et les communions, et nous met à chaque instant en danger de ne plus rien avoir. »
By the end of February 1793, she had “lost all hope of returning” to the convent. However, despite Gauchat’s emotional turmoil, insecurities, and doubts about the path that God had planned for her, she was comforted that God loved her, and ”that sufficed.” During the times of tribulation, Gauchat relied on the fact that everything could be stripped away except her God. During Lent, at the end of February of 1793, she wrote, “it seems to me that the love for my God is the strongest, or better said, the only link that attaches me powerfully to virtue.” This wording was particularly important because the revolutionaries assumed that the convent was a chain or a yoke on the nuns’ liberties. However, in this instance, Gauchat describes her love of God as a chain that acted as an anchor, or a positive tether to the life she so desperately sought to live.

Gauchat took a powerful image that Enlightenment philosophes had used to describe life in the convent and turned it entirely around to symbolize a lifesaver. She went on to express divine love as “my motive, my [stimulus], my strength, and the only nourishment for all my strength.” Everything that she did was motivated by God’s love, and without the chains of love, she would fall away from virtue. Chains restrain, but for Gauchat, the chains were the only thing saving her from ruin.

By the end of summer in 1793, Gauchat had found her anchor to life and consistency in the face of uncertainty. She would rely on God alone to combat her feelings of sadness and hopelessness. When she was asked for the oath in February of

484 « J’ai perdu tout-à-fait l’espérance d’y rentre ; il ne me reste pas la moindre idée de ce que Dieu veut faire de moi ; tout ce que je sais, c’est que je suis l’objet de son amour, cela me suffit. » Gauchat, Journal, 57.

485 « Maintenant, mon cher père, il me paraît que l’amour pour mon Dieu est la plus forte, ou pour mieux dire, l’unique chaine qui m’attache puissamment à la vertu … » Gauchat, Journal, 58.

486 See the final chapter on married nuns.

1793 to receive a pension, she refused. However, this was the last time she mentioned the oath. As time wore on, Gauchat was actually disappointed that she was not punished for rejecting the oath. In fact, it seemed that her disobedience to the laws was largely forgotten. She mentioned in her diary repeatedly that she was ready and well-fortified to resist the revolutionaries’ entreaties to swear the oath. If she was confident that God would provide, she could confidently refuse the revolutionary authorities. Her disappointment in not being so severely punished meant that she did not enjoy the fruits and spiritual maturity that suffering for the Gospels’ sake could bring to her soul. From the Spring of 1793 on, she would rely only on God. In circumventing the church in experiencing religious emotion, she was able to avoid the sadness and fear she had felt during Lent of 1793.

5.2.5 Late Spring and Summer 1793

Gauchat fell into a routine during the late Spring and summer of 1793, and she came to terms with her situation. However, she increasingly found her religious way of life at odds with life in France. She found her very way of speaking in danger during the Spring of 1793. She kept her faith secret out of fear of persecution. During the Revolution, the language transformed. Gauchat refused to address others as citizens or to incorporate a universal language of human rights. She did, however, consider these new changes deeply during her many hours spent in contemplation. She found that one impassioned speech on her religious sentiment could give her away for speaking “Christianly and religiously.” She, however, does not want to speak “humanly” because

488 « Je n’ai pas jusqu’ici supporté l’effort des tribulations : les suites de refus du serment qui me semblaient devoir être le creuset des plus terribles afflictions, paraissent céder la place à l’oubli que l’on fait du moi. » Gauchat, Journal, 205.
she identified as a “citizen of heaven.” Her identity remained unwaveringly tethered to her God. Furthermore, Gauchat rejected the language of nature and natural law that the Revolution had so fully adopted. She argued, “In speaking the language of nature, one becomes all natural and terrestrial; I hope that by speaking the language of the saints and by conforming my feelings to my words, I will become all heavenly.” She resisted conforming herself to the language of the Revolution because Gauchat feared the overall effect on her identity. She recognized that she was without aid from anyone, save for the grace of God, which was enough to sustain her. She learned to reject the earthly markers and practice of identity entirely because everything she needed was found in her heavenly God.

Gauchat’s short-lived happiness at being able to reconstruct a shadow of her former life in the convent quickly dissipated as the Reign of Terror intensified in the spring and summer of 1793. On April 23, 1793, the secret masses and communion could no longer continue. Based on more stringent anti-Catholic legislation, nearly all the priests had been executed, emigrated, or went into hiding. As Gauchat explained, “the storm was too strong.” When she wrote this entry, it had been a week, April 16, since the last time a priest came to hear her confession, and she had not heard mass since Holy Saturday, the day before Easter. Things would not improve in her May 6th entry. The

489 Gauchat, Journal, 59. « … je ne veux plus dire humainement parlant, mais bien, chrétientement et religieusement parlant. D’après ce principe, je parle sans façon comme citoyenne du ciel. »
490 « En, parlent le langage de la nature, on devient tout naturel et terrestre ; j’espère qu’en parlent le langage des saintes et en conformant mes sentiments a mes paroles, je deviendrai toute céleste. Je suis bien logée pour suivre ce nouveau plan. M… tient non seulement la conduite d’une saint, mais il en a encore le langage : son exemple n’a peu contribué à m’encourager dans mon dessein. » Gauchat, Journal, 61.
491 « nous sommes sans secours quelconque ; mais la miséricorde de Dieu qui nous accompagne sans cesse nous suffit. » Gauchat Journal, 75.
Revolutionaries had passed another law that banned two or more former nuns from living together.\textsuperscript{492} Therefore, she left her companion Constance, in search of a new spiritual retreat.

Gauchat, like many nuns trying to maintain their vows outside of the convent, was almost obsessively concerned over the state of her soul. If we consider how large the threat of death loomed during this period, it was essential for her always to have a spotless conscience. When Gauchat was lucky to find a priest to say mass and hear confession occasionally, the names of the brave priests were wiped from the record. On May 7, 1793, to protect the identities of the priests who served, she effaced their names from her manuscript.\textsuperscript{493} This practice of protecting the identities of those who helped the convents had been an important practice for these nuns. They were used to erasing the priests’ identifying information in their records, dressing up their priests in disguises, and helping them to change their identities during the Revolution.

In another example, a laywoman in Lyon, named Charlotte, was thrown in prison for hosting a mass at her house.\textsuperscript{494} Although she never revealed the whereabouts of the priest who performed the mass, when her captors seized her belongings, they found an image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus that had been given to her by a nun in the Visitandine convent in Lyon. This nun was imprisoned for merely giving this woman a devotional object.\textsuperscript{495} These persecutions in the late spring and summer of 1793 highlighted the danger for religious men and women.

\textsuperscript{492} Gauchat, \textit{Journal}, 74.
\textsuperscript{493} Godard, “Introduction,” XXIII.
\textsuperscript{494} Vérot, “The Letter,” 114.
\textsuperscript{495} Vérot, “The Letter,” 114.
In the midst of this danger, Gauchat gave a short summary of her ascetic lifestyle in her makeshift convent in June of 1793. She sought a more ascetic lifestyle than would have been required of her in the convent:

I get up at four o'clock; I never take anything but at dinner: it consists of a bowl of milk and a little cheese, which gets me to eight o'clock; then I take some bread and some dessert, so that I have the advantage of perpetual fast; I only drink water. This life pleases me infinitely, always, austerity was my attraction, and I am glad to offer God these little sacrifices. We continue, my companion and myself, not to go out at all but for indispensable reasons, which is very rare.496

Gauchat took joy in depriving herself of the earthly pleasures. She sustained herself on as little as possible because she wanted her nourishment to come from God. The increase in her fasting was an attempt to reinforce the aspects of her identity that she could control. She had to sacrifice much of her pattern of living, because of the necessity of circumstance; however, fasting was something she still could control.

For much of her diary, Gauchat worked hard to ignore the chaos happening around her by focusing solely on the state of her soul. In June of 1793, she wrote, “It was probably impossible to cast a fair eye on the state of my soul. My exterior denoted only weakness, sadness, and boredom. Everything announced in me the violence of a too human attachment, and whose break threw all my faculties into disorder and anguish. However, it was nothing but an analogue of my intimate dispositions.”497 Later, on June

496 « Je me lève à quatre heures ; je ne prends jamais rien qu’au diner : i consiste dans une écuelle de lait et un peu de fromage ce qui me conduit jusqu’à huit heures ; alors je prends un peu de pain et du dessert ; de sort que j’ai l’avantage d’un jeune perpétuel ; je ne bois que de l’eau. Cette vie me plait infiniment, toujours l’austérité fut mon attrait, et je suis bien aise d’offrir à Dieu ces petits sacrifices. Nous préservons, ma compagne et moi, à ne point sortir en tout que pour des raisons indispensables ; ce qui est bien rare.» Gauchat, Journal, 100.

497 « Il était sans doute impossible de jeter sur l’état de mon âme un regard juste. Mon extérieur ne dénotait que faiblesses, que tristesse et ennui. Tout annonçait dans moi la violence d’un attachement trop humain et dont la rupture jetait le désordre et l’angoisse dans toute mes facultés. Cependant il n’était rien de mon analogue- à mes intimes dispositions. Dieu voulait que mon corps succombât et que l’impuissance de rien voir et de rien entendre, qui pût me retracer l’idée de
29, 1793, Gauchat again evaluated the state of her soul with good news to report. In this entry, she described, “The situation of my soul is always surprising: not a cloud, not a moment of boredom or sorrow, not a desire, not a moment of fear. I'm swimming in a river of peace.”\footnote{Gauchat, \textit{Journal}, 97.} Her constant oscillation between lamentation and joy, worry and peace, suffering, and comfort helps readers to imagine the turmoil that was going on around her to inspire such turmoil in her soul. Her introspection and diligence in constantly evaluating her soul was, after all, the point of keeping this diary. It demonstrates how the Revolution impacted the internal and mental states of the inhabitants of convents. Perhaps no other source gives us such a detailed recollection of a nun’s shifting emotions.

As she contemplated her suffering, she understood that the Revolution certainly did offer her “liberty,” but a liberty to spend her time drawing closer to God. She wrote in June of 1793 that “never in [her] life had [she] had more freedom to rise to God than at this time when my mind seemed almost absorbed in the things of the earth. My whole days were spent in profound prayers, or in a silence which yielded only to prayer; because I was always united to God.”\footnote{Gauchat, \textit{Journal}, 89-90.} She explained the tension between the Revolution’s dechristianizing impulse and its promise of liberty. If one were free to do whatever he or she desired, should not Gauchat be free to use her new liberty in ceaseless devotion? Her long periods of contemplation led her to contemplate the logic of the Revolution; however, her faith only became stronger.
After all the convents were dissolved, the Revolutionaries made quick work of repurposing many of the buildings—particularly in Paris but also in Langres—to be used as prisons and storehouses. Adding insult to injury, after Gauchat’s sisters were expelled from the convent, it was converted into a hay repository.\footnote{Godard, « Introduction, » XXX.} Vérot’s convent and its attached church were turned into a military warehouse filled with barrels of vinegar.\footnote{Vérot, “The Letter,” 66.} Many other convents were converted into temporary prisons, such as the famous Carmelite convent in Paris. This ignited both sadness, anger, and a more profound need for spiritual services. In fact, Josephine, Napoleon’s future wife, was imprisoned in one such former convent. This repurposing of ecclesiastical property for the housing of prisoners was particularly irksome to religious women like Gauchat. There were interesting parallels between the way these prisoners were treated and the nuns. The Enlightenment philosophes and many of the revolutionaries considered the convents prisons for young women, and now they made that a reality. While the convents were prepared for use, the prisoners had to report daily to the municipality. Similarly, the nuns had to report to the municipality to receive their pension.\footnote{« On prépare maintenant les tours, les communautés religieuses, et tous les endroits propres à servir de prison. L’on fait, dit-on, la liste de tous ceux qui doivent remplir ces endroits. En attendant ces derniers emprisonnements, on a fait une fameuse liste de tout ce qu’ils appellent suspects. M… est à la tête. Ils doivent tous les jours se présenter à la municipalité. Cette cérémonie est le noviciat de la prison. Les prisonniers de la manufacture sont les plus à plaindre ; ils sont guettés, viellés, gardés et visités comme des criminels : je ne peux vous tout dire. Quant aux femmes, on ne cesse aussi de parler de leur emprisonnement, surtout des religieuses. Dernièrement l’on vint nous dire de plusieurs parts, que nous devions être enfermées toutes à la Visitation, c’est-à-dire les membres de quatre communautés religieuses.» Gauchat, Journal, 77.} It was likely that the municipalities required these visits so that former nuns could be monitored by receiving this money. Gauchat also mentioned rumors that the revolutionaries might require former

\footnote{500 Godard, « Introduction, » XXX.}
\footnote{501 Vérot, “The Letter,” 66.}
\footnote{502 « On prépare maintenant les tours, les communautés religieuses, et tous les endroits propres à servir de prison. L’on fait, dit-on, la liste de tous ceux qui doivent remplir ces endroits. En attendant ces derniers emprisonnements, on a fait une fameuse liste de tout ce qu’ils appellent suspects. M… est à la tête. Ils doivent tous les jours se présenter à la municipalité. Cette cérémonie est le noviciat de la prison. Les prisonniers de la manufacture sont les plus à plaindre ; ils sont guettés, viellés, gardés et visités comme des criminels : je ne peux vous tout dire. Quant aux femmes, on ne cesse aussi de parler de leur emprisonnement, surtout des religieuses. Dernièrement l’on vint nous dire de plusieurs parts, que nous devions être enfermées toutes à la Visitation, c’est-à-dire les membres de quatre communautés religieuses.» Gauchat, Journal, 77.}
nuns to combine with four other communities at the former Visitation convent. They had become so sure these rumors would come to pass that they prepared for it every day.\(^{503}\)

Comparing her situation to that of Job, who suffered every kind of pain and loss without knowing God’s plan, she understood she could not give up her faith.\(^{504}\) All of the suffering and misfortune that the Revolutionaries heaped on her, she saw as ways that deepened her “intimate union with God, without vain compassion for [herself], nor for anyone.”\(^{505}\) The more she was persecuted and the more acutely she felt fear, the more she repeated this mantra of happiness in persecution and suffering. Gauchat’s diary, therefore, abhorred every part of the Revolutionary identity. She took the language and the ideas of the Revolution seriously enough to reject them one by one. While in the previous chapters, we saw nuns who believed the revolutionary ideology was not necessarily at odds with their mission as teachers and nurses, Gauchat found every part of the Revolutionary ideology at odds with her identity as a *citoyenne* of heaven.

5.2.6 On Serving Her Heavenly Family: New Community in Isolation

In May of 1793, Gauchat had to leave Constance and relocate to the house of M. Petit-Jean.\(^{506}\) She did not reunite with her companion until July 1, 1794. Throughout her time in isolation, Gabrielle Gauchat found new methods of constructing her identity. Her new community was with her heavenly family. As she lost the last remaining member of her former convent, she was genuinely reliant only on God to meet her spiritual needs.

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504 Gauchat, *Journal*, 78.

505 Gauchat, *Journal*, 79. « les moyens de ma plus intime union avec Dieu, sans compassion vaine sur moi, ni sur personne. »

506 Godard, « Introduction, » XXXII.
She turned to God and other heroes of the faith, whom she knew about from her long education in the convent, to sustain her.

Gabrielle Gauchat, and many former nuns like her, could not consider marriage a viable option because their religious vows entered them into a marriage to God. Therefore, their identification as the Brides of Christ, or calling God their heavenly spouse, meant these women felt they were disqualified from the identity of wives or mothers that the revolutionaries desired from former religious women. As we will see in later chapters, not all women felt this way, but for Gauchat, Vérot, and many others, their vows betrothed them only to God. Celibacy was the result of their divine unions with God. Gauchat often referred to God in her diary as her “céleste époux.”507 Her identification of God as “my God, my father, my spouse, my all,” may seem complicated and perhaps incestuous by earthly standards.508 But it fits perfectly well with her understanding of the Trinity: Jesus as her spouse, God the Father as, of course, father, and the Holy Spirit as what fills her soul. Gauchat did not hold herself to worldly standards. God consumed all her heart and all her occupations. He fulfilled all the longings of a spouse and provided a stronger love than a father.509

The juxtaposition of spouse, master, and father reflect the gendered assumptions as well as the religious hierarchy at the time. Much like God was a part of the trinity, these three facets of his male authority manifested in Gauchat’s diary. She often called out to God as both Master and Spouse; “my dear Master, without your perfumes, without

508 Gauchat, Journal, 98. «… Et là envisage mon Dieu, mon père, mon époux, mon tout. »
509 Gauchat, Journal, 98.
your consolations; you, Bloody Spouse, crucified Bridegroom, Missing Bridegroom. Oh, pure love! love of my God, chaste and unmixed love, I give to you and consecrate to you forever my heart.”\textsuperscript{510} She demonstrated that the love she had for God was both “chaste” or untainted by the physical carnality of sex, and unmixed with other emotions. This was a holier love than just the lust or the desires a wife might have for her husband. However, even God, as her spouse, was described as jealous.\textsuperscript{511} In Christian and Jewish theology (God is described as jealous in the Hebrew Bible—Deuteronomy and elsewhere) this is not a negative emotion—it meant that God would act to protect Gauchat from being led astray. God was faithful to Gauchat and also expects her to be faithful in return.

This holy marriage had implications for both parties. It meant that not only was God Gauchat’s husband, but she was, thus, his bride. With this, Gauchat recognized her own limitations as a heavenly bride to a perfect God. Gauchat wrote to God, “you have come in your love for your miserable bride, to console her with your heavenly favors and to ask her for her heart and all her being, with that sweet and strong power that always makes itself victorious.”\textsuperscript{512} Her feelings of unworthiness towards God were only magnified by the intimacy and sacrificial love he displayed for her in the special relationship she shared with him as a nun. Therefore, there were rights that men and women enjoy following their union in marriage, but there are also duties. Gauchat owed

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\textsuperscript{510} « Vous, mon chère Maitre, sans vos parfums, sans vos consolations ; vous, Époux sanglant, Époux crucifiant, Époux absent. O pur amour ! amour de mon Dieu, amour chaste et sans mélange, je vous livre et vous consacre pour jamais mon cœur. » Gauchat, \textit{Journal}, 164.
\textsuperscript{511} Gauchat, \textit{Journal}, 170. « Oh mon adorable Maitre, Époux jaloux… »
\textsuperscript{512} Gauchat, \textit{Journal}, 137-8. « …vous êtes venu dans votre amour pour votre miserable épouse, afin de la consoler de vos célestes faveurs et de lui la demander son cœur et tout son être, avec ce doux et fort empire qui se rend toujours vainqueur. »
\end{flushright}
God her fidelity and praise, but in return, she could receive the privilege of having a special relationship with Him.

God was both her spouse but also her father. Gauchat’s description of God as her Father manifested itself when she talked about the future and the way that God had sovereignty over all that would come to pass. She believed that she was “like a child in tutelage.” And she wrote, “I see my estate held in safety, but I receive nothing but what I need. If a child governed his estate, he would lose it in wild expenses, and when it would be necessary to make large purchases, he would have nothing left.” She let God “guard her treasure,” keep her heart in his hands, and provide for all her needs. For, even if the future made Gauchat “shudder,” she knew it was not on her own efforts that she succeeded or failed. She was being raised into spiritual maturity by her Father, who cared for all her necessities, like a guardian.

In addition to her prayers to the Holy Father and her Bridegroom, Gauchat also often offered prayers to the holy Mother, Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Although she offered prayers much less often to the Holy Mother, these prayers were part of a Catholic doctrine of intercession. However, the title of “Mother” was applied to the abbess of the convent. The idea was that just as Mary was an example for all women in her purity and submissive service to the Father, so too, must the leader of the convent be an example of perfect submission and holiness. Gauchat herself admitted that the Lord had

513 Gauchat, Journal, 137-8. « L’avenir me fait frémir… Je suis comme un enfant en tutelle ; je vois mon bien en sureté, mais je ne jouis que de mon nécessaire. Si un enfant régissait son bien, il le perdait en folles dépenses, et lorsqu’il faudrait faire de gros achats nécessaires, il n’aurait plus rien. »
514 Gauchat, Journal, 142.
515 Mary, according to Catholic theology, was the only human to be born without the stain of original sin in order to prepare her body to carry the son of God.
given her “good mothers,” because she had been provided with all her physical needs.\(^{516}\)

The final example of a mother figure in Gauchat’s diary was the church itself, which she described as her mother: “union with the Holy Church, my mother.”\(^{517}\) In the Church as her mother, a common title for the Church from devout Catholics, perhaps she hoped that she would once again be welcomed into her mother’s bosom.

The last group of heavenly family that appeared in her diary was the intercession from the entire litany of saints. These were men and women who lived nearly perfect lives, and God blessed them with miracles, and then the church honored them with sainthood. Catholics turned to these models of Catholic behavior, who were now with Him in heaven, to intercede with God on their behalf. Patron Saints helped with specific needs, so, Catholics often prayed to different saints for different reasons. Therefore, Gauchat prayed to Saint Francis of Assisi because he abandoned everything for the sake of the Gospel. Just as St. Francis, who came from a moderately wealthy family, had to give up all the comforts of food, money, clothes, and housing to spread the good news, so too, Gauchat felt called to make sacrifices for her God.\(^{518}\) In other sections, she mentioned Saint Louis, the patron saint of France, as an example to imitate. She turned to saints in times of struggle because they were “Great saints, perfect lovers, and imitators of my Savior.” She could ask them to provide “from God all the grace and some

\(^{516}\) Gauchat, *Journal*, 142. « Me voici bien logée, bien nourrie, bien pourvue… Vous me donnez des bonnes mères, de charitables pourvoyeuses… »

\(^{517}\) « Dans mon union avec la sainte Eglise, ma mère, j’ai joui des précieux avantages que j’aurais puisé dans la jouissance de ses pieuses pompes. » Gauchat, *Journal*, 214.

\(^{518}\) Gauchat, *Journal*, 178. « Vous me verriez comme un autre saint François d’Assise, tout abandonner pour avoir cette perle évangélique : vêtements, séjour, lit nourriture, tout porterait l’empreinte de la misère et le sceau de l’indigence. »
participation in your sublime dispositions; I give up everything I can ...”

She looked to the example of Madeleine, or Mary Magdalene—who in the Middle Ages was conflated with the prostitute who anointed Jesus’s feet—to help her love Jesus more fully, even as a sinner. In the Early Modern period, Mary Magdalene’s reputation as a penitent sinner was emphasized, especially in paintings. Still reeling from her guilt about a sin she had committed a few days before, Gauchat perhaps identified as the penitent sinner falling at the mercy of God. She asks to be taken away from the sinful Babylon that is earthly France, so that she might no longer breath the air polluted by sin. Saints, like those listed above and many others, acted as both models of correct behavior and as active intercessors for Gauchat’s prayers to God.

5.3 Fall and Winter of 1793: New Practices as Persecution Turns into Execution

As Gauchat moved into her second year after the dissolution of her convent, she maintained many of the same postures towards her faith. After the dissolution, Gauchat was no longer able to identify with the other women of her convent; instead, she had to find her self-identification in some other place. While the revolutionaries might have hoped to transform these *sœurs* into *citoyennes*, Gauchat found herself identifying more strongly with celestial things. Her citizenship was with God in heaven, and no amount of

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519 « Grands saints, parfait amants et imitateurs de mon Saveur, obtenez-moi du Dieu de toutes mi cordes quelque participation à vos sublimes dispositions ; que j’abandonne tout ce que je pourrai… »


521 She referred to an “apostasy” that she committed on Pentecost and her previous two entries were on repentance from that great sin. Although she is unclear what exactly she did that she considered apostasy, she was incredibly moved by the example of forgiveness that Jesus offered Mary Magdalene.

522 Gauchat, Journal, 231-2. « Tirez-moi, Seigneur, de cette Babylone prostituée ; que je ne respire plus cet air infect de crimes ! »
earthly pressures could separate her from that. In one instance, she compared her earthly existence to the dove sent out by Noah after the flood, like the dove, she had no place to dwell and had to return to her heavenly master: “Oh! What joy I had to find, like the dove coming out of the ark, nowhere on the earth to rest my foot! Everything seemed to me in a universal deluge for me, and my contentment was to be in the happy need to go back to heaven to find the rest that the whole earth refused me.” Nowhere in revolutionary France could she find rest and satisfaction except in the prayerful contemplation of God. She could not return to family, since most of them lived in Saint-Domingue, where the Revolution on the island would prove even more deadly. She was cast adrift in the world with nowhere to go but to trust in her God. God provided her ark, her safe refuge.

Gauchat’s diary, in general, describes her experience outside of the convent as a time of great suffering and joy. Suffering often led her to feel a sort of joy—so long as she was suffering to fulfill God’s will. She also found that a doubling of a new kind of suffering often led to a lessening of a different sort of suffering. After living outside of the convent for some time, Gauchat reflected on the blessing that her existence outside the convent had been:

My Savior, I present to you a particular offering, the homage of the narrow cloister, where I would have been condemned to fulfill the vow of my holy state. You allow this punishment to be acute: I have never had so much taste, so much attraction that I now have the for pleasure of the fresh air, the promenade, the orchards and gardens, the woods, the voyages.524

523 « Oh! Que j’avais de joie de ne trouver, comme la colombe sortant de l’arche, rien sur la terre où reposer la pied ! Tout m’y paraissait dans un déluge universel pour moi et mon contentement était d’être dans l’heureuse nécessité de remonter jusqu’au ciel pour y trouver le repos que la terre entière me refusait. » Gauchat, Journal, 96.
She was not blind to some of the pleasures that freedom from the convent gave to her. There were acute sufferings, and her diary was filled with laments, but it seemed she was growing into a new identity outside of the convent. She further explained that “in this suffering, I give you thanks.”

Although there were many things she lost with the dissolution of her convent, she also gained some freedoms. Even if she would not have chosen this life outside of the convent, she could not help but give thanks for the joy she gained in being able to move more freely outside of the walls of her cloister.

However, as she became more isolated from the church hierarchy, her practice of the faith became more individualized even if she claimed to be a defender of the Roman Catholic Church. Even in the most severe period of persecution, Gauchat remained loyal to the church in Rome. Nuns had to create identities without the trappings and symbolic physical manifestations that had been dissolved.

This dissertation began with the identity-forming rituals that were daily performed in the convent; by this point, nearly all of these physical manifestations had been dissolved. It was incredibly unpopular and dangerous to follow the rules and traditions of a church that had been driven out of France. However, she believed that she had no choice because God Himself “testified to my zeal for the one, Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church ...”

Despite the Pope’s delay in denouncing the oath to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and the rift between the Constitutional clergy and the refractory clergy, Gauchat remained loyal to the Vatican even in its absence from France. In identifying with Rome, she could also justify her disobedience to the Revolution:

525 Gauchat, *Journal*, 186. « dans cette souffrance ; je vous en rends grâce »
Yes, despite suspicions, reproaches, scandals, I am more than ever a daughter of the church. I am neither to Paul nor to Apollo; I am to Jesus. If the voice of the great pontiff assembles with his colleagues, if the Church speaks and approves the oath, then I would do it at that moment in my heart; but if this holy Church does not tolerate it, out of pity for her feeble children, weak as I am, I will rely on my Savior, and I will not profit by tolerance.527

Here, Gauchat, in the same breath, reaffirms her commitment to the Catholic Church, yet lightly criticized its absence in her dire time of need. In the absence of the Church’s presence in France, however, Gauchat had to develop a relationship directly with Christ. This paragraph brilliantly captured the situation nuns wrestled with negotiating during the Revolution. They could: 1) be loyal to a system which had been effectively dissolved, 2) succumb to the pressures of the Revolution, or 3) try to negotiate a position which could allow them re-entry into a Church they were not confident would or ever could return. Gauchat tried to be loyal to a system that was absent by relying on God to sustain her. But, at the same time, she realized that her direct path to communication with her Savior did not need to be mediated by the official church hierarchy and structure. It was this practice of worship outside of the church—a practice she entered unwillingly—that unwittingly transformed her relationship to both the Church and the Revolution.

In the convent, Gauchat, was always under the authority of male confessors and the larger church hierarchy. During the Revolution, it became much more difficult to find these male church authorities from whom she could receive communion or make confessions. Like Vérot and her convent, Gauchat struggled to receive the sacraments as

527 Gauchat, Journal, 185. « Oui, malgré les soupçons, es reproches, les scandaless pris, je suis plus que jamais fille de l’église. Je ne suis ni à Paul, ni à Appolon, je suis à Jésus. Si la voix du grand pontife assemble avec sa collègue si l’Eglise parle veut et approuve le serment, alors je le fais dès ce moment dans mon cœur ; mais si cette sainte Eglise ne fait tolérer par pitié pour ses faibles enfants, toute faible que je suis, je m’appuierai sur mon Sauveur, et je ne profiterai pas de la tolérance. »
often as she wanted. She also dealt with the reality that many of the priests had sworn the oath to the Constitution. In one entry, we see her anxiety about meeting with a priest who she hoped would continue to support her refusal to take the oath: “Before going to confession and communion the next day, I consulted God and meditated by myself on the eve of this happy day, to find out what I would do, if the person I was going to see, and who until then, had praised and supported me in my refusal, had changed his mind and advised me to take the oath.” She noted that the priest listened to her resolution never to take the oath and “then, this minister of the Lord, who had only pretended to test me and to inquire how far my resolution would go, moved and pleased with my feelings, hastened to satisfy me fully.” Gauchat interpreted this interaction as a test of her faith and commitment to God; it revealed an interesting tension between the authority of God and the authority of his earthly ministers. When the two disagreed, it put women like Gauchat in the awkward position of trying to decide whether she would disobey her spiritual advisors in the name of God. Instead of waiting on her male advisors to decide how she should proceed, she began to side-step these men and commune with her God directly. This experience changed the way Gauchat interacted with the faith. The Revolution complicated Gauchat’s relationship with the Church and her male spiritual advisors. On the one hand, she was still fiercely loyal to the Church; on the other, she had to find new ways to practice her faith in the absence of the Catholic Church’s institutional

528 « Devant aller le lendemain me confesser et communier, j’ai consulté Dieu et médité en moi-même la veille de cet heureux jour, pour savoir ce que je ferais, si la personne que j’allais voir et qui jusque-là m’avait louée et appuyée dans mon refus, venait à changer d’avis et à me conseiller de prêter le serment. » Gauchat, Journal, 187.

529 « Alors ce ministe du Seigneur qui n’avait prétendu qu’à me faire une épreuve et sonder jusqu’où irait ma résolution, attendri et content de mes sentiments, se hâta de me satisfaire pleinement. » Gauchat, Journal, 188.
structure. This practice of the Catholic faith as individuals and groups outside of the institutional structure transformed some former nuns’ relationships with God and reframed their practice of the faith into something which could be done without such male oversight.

5.3.1 Maintaining the Liturgical Calendar in Fall 1793 and Winter 1793-4

Gauchat carefully observed Lent and Easter, but she also was careful to maintain the lesser liturgical holidays and to reject the Revolution’s new holidays. She remembered other important and minor religious celebrations such as “day of the nativity” on September 8, 1793, or on October 3, 1793, she remembered to acknowledge the Feast of Saint Agnes.⁵³⁰ Although her entries from the days before Christmas of 1793 were much shorter than her entries around Easter of that year, she described her complete and total ecstasy on Christmas eve: “…it is for the adorable Child Jesus, for he alone conceives where I am. I am lost in happiness.”⁵³¹ Despite the turmoil and persecution occurring in Langres, she continued to structure her life around the liturgical calendar. For former nuns, but also the Catholic population at large, during the Revolution, it became difficult to reorient their patterns of life without these religious holidays.

Shortly after Christmas of 1793, perhaps reflecting on the one-year anniversary of the execution of King Louis XVI, Gauchat addressed her prayers to her “King.” She entirely repudiated the Revolution’s attempts to make her a republican, saying, “Oh my King, in no way do I want to be republican. I ceaselessly exclaim: Long live my King! Extend more and more your domain, invade everything, my senses and my powers, my

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body and my soul, that everything is up to you and that I am a vassal of your love: that I breathe only to immolate myself at every moment. Your love, or death.”532 This last sentence directly challenged the common phrase of the Terror “Liberty or Death.” She unambiguously rejected the liberty the Revolution had to offer, and instead, embraced God’s love as the only thing she was willing to fight and die to gain. Gauchat was able to get over the death of the king because she owed her allegiance to her heavenly King. She spoke of the “special protection of her King,” particularly when facing persecution.533 In February of 1794, she again appealed to her eternal King in heaven. She hoped to win the heart of this “king” by approaching Him with the gift of her loyalty and refusal to swear the oath to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy.534 Gauchat’s heaven-focused ideology allowed her to shift from identifying as a subject of King Louis XVI to a subject in God’s Kingdom. God’s authority could not be so easily overthrown.

5.3.2 Critiques of the Revolution: Fall and Winter 1793-1794

Gauchat well-understood the principles of the Revolution and came up with her critiques. The more that the Revolution invaded her pattern of being, the harder she fought to shut out the outside world. She argued that the exaltation of? God’s will and God’s sovereignty granted her rights and freedoms the Revolution could not offer:

My heaven on earth is in the operation of this adorable and unconstrained [Divine] will: 1st on the creature as creator; 2nd on his child by baptism, as his

532 Gauchat, Journal, 157. « Oh mon Roi, en aucune genre je ne veux être républicaine. Sans cesse je m’écrie : Vive mon Roi ! Etendez de plus en plus votre domaine, envahissez tout : que me sens et mes puissances, que mon corps et mon âme, que tout relève de vous et soit vassal de votre amour : que je ne respire que pour m’immoler a chaque instant. Votre amour, ou la mort. »

533 « la protection spéciale de mon Roi. » Gauchat, Journal, 177.

534 « je ne vois pas de moyen plus puissant pour approcher du trône de mon roi et gagner son cœur, que de lui presenter les suites et les engagements du refus du serment. » Gauchat, Journal, 189-90
redeemer and father; 3rd as wife of the husband by the profession of vows; 4th on an object of tender election. And it is me who has all these rights!535

First, Gauchat argued she had rights from being created by God and in His image. Gauchat believed she was endowed with certain rights because the first humans were charged with care over the rest of the creation.536 She further understood that through baptism, she inherited the rights due to her status as God’s child. This included a share of a heavenly inheritance, which meant she needed nothing of this world’s riches. Her special relationship with God, however, did not stop there. Because she had taken the veil, she now enjoyed the rights and duties as the spouse of God. She enjoyed a special intimacy that not all Catholics were granted— only those women who took their solemn vows. Finally, she enjoyed the rights to heaven by the doctrine of election,537 or God’s sacred choosing of Gauchat for salvation. These rights, for Gauchat, offered much more than the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen could ever offer.

Attempting to defend God and the church, she expressed ill-will toward the revolutionaries. In an uncharacteristically severe entry, she not only rejected the “Rights of Man,” but seemed to cheer on the Revolutionaries killing themselves. She argued, “Let them fight, let them die, these guilty Republicans, since they wish it, to support the priests of the Rights of Man [supporters of the Revolution]. Alas! I pity them for their error. For me, my glory is to live, to suffer, and to die, if it is necessary, to sanctify the

535 « Mon ciel sur la terre est dans l’opération de cette adorable volonté sans contrainte : 1° sur la créature comme créateur ; 2° sur son enfant par e baptême, comme son rédempteur et père ; 3° sur son épouse comme époux par la profession religieuse ; 4° sur un objet de tendre élection. Et c’est moi qui ai tous ces droits ! » Gauchat Journal, 116.
536 Genesis 2:15, ESV “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.”
537 Election in this instance referred to the doctrine by which God predestines certain people for salvation, called the “elect.”
rights of my God. I leave the constitution to these frantic ones, I chose the Gospel, and I stand under the banner of my Redeemer Jesus crucified.”538 She rejected the tricolor because the only banner of her loyalties was the flag of the victorious Jesus. She was willing to sacrifice all to preserve God and his rights. However, she later seemed to feel shame and guilt that her zeal led her to have hate in her heart.

After months of her own form of cloistered living, she considered writing her thanks to God for obliging her to leave her monastery. She had experienced a different sort of spiritual connection to God outside of her convent. She reflected on the balance between the losses and gains she has made since leaving her monastery:

... Do I find myself obliged to thank you as a great favor for taking me out of my holy monastery?... It was, however, an asylum of holiness. The means of salvation were abundant, the attendance of the sacraments, almost daily. Masses, spiritual exercises, examples, I lacked nothing, it seems to me, to arrive at the perfection of my divine love; and I was so convinced of the excess of my happiness and the greatness of heavenly favors in this fortunate haven, that at the time of my release, this conviction threw me, for a few moments, into the error of believing that nothing was able to replace and compensate for the losses I was making. However, I am obliged to confess that not only have I lost nothing, but that I have gained much: it is not only by the opportunity to practice great virtues which could not, it seems to me, encounter in the cloister, but even for the perfection of my vows, of the whole of my holy state.539

538 « Qu’ils s’embattent, qu’ils meurent ces coupables républicaines, puisqu’ils le veulent, pour soutenir les prêtres des droits de l’homme... Hélas ! Je les plains dans leur erreur. Pour moi, ma gloire est de vivre, de souffrir, et de mourir, s’il le faut pour sauver les droits de mon Dieu. Je laisse à ce frénétique la constitution, je choisi l’Evangile, et je me range sous l’étendard de mon Rédempteur Jésus crucifié. » Gauchat, Journal, 198.

539 « ... puisque je me trouve obligée de vous remercier comme d’une grande faveur de m’avoir fait sortir de mon saint monastère ? C’était cependant un asile de sainteté. Les moyens de salut y étaient abondants, la fréquentation des sacrements, presque journalière. Messes, exercice, exemples, il n’y manquaient rien, ce me semble pour arriver à la perfection de mon divin amour ; et j’étais si convaincue de l’excès de mon bonheur et de la grandeur des faveurs célestes dans cet asile fortuné, que lors de ma sortie cette conviction m’a jetée, quelques instants, dans l’erreur de croire que rien n’était capable de remplacer et de compenser les pertes que je faisais. Cependant je suis obligée d’avouer que non-seulement je n’ai rien perdu, mais que j’ai beaucoup gagné : ce n’est pas seulement par l’occasion de pratiquer des grandes vertus qui ne pouvaient, ce me semble, se rencontrer dans le cloître, mais même pour la perfection de mes vœux, de tout l’ensemble de mon saint état. » Gauchat, Journal, 207.
In the convent, she was not tempted as she has been in the past few months. In the temptation to break her vows of obedience, chastity, and poverty, it meant more that she resisted. God eventually was able to use her time outside of the convent to refine the state of her soul better, eradicate sin, and perfect her obedience to vows in the face of extreme adversity.

Gauchat found solace in identifying herself with the Israelites. Much like the Israelites, she saw herself as one of God’s chosen, but yet, she suffered an isolating exile. If her ultimate goal was the sanctification of her soul and refining her body, mind, and soul to emulate Christ better, this period of suffering and persecution was an opportunity to practice her faith in ways that would have been unimaginable in the convent. “O religious life! Perfect state! I did not know what your duties and privileges were; I am learning in the Babylon of the world. Yes, more religious than ever, I devote myself to cloister practices, and if I have the happiness to return to the ark, my stay in the world will have served me the most perfect novitiate.”540 She mentioned Babylon, referred to a city full of sinful people that tried to reach God by building a tower to him. France for Gauchat was like this city of sin, yet she felt that God was with her in exile.541

She continued to associate her situation to the Babylonian exile throughout her diary. In one example, she compared the destruction of religious items to the actions of King Belshazzar, sometimes called Balthasar. In the book of Daniel, this Babylonian king took the holy vases and vessels from the Jewish temple and used them for a special feast.

540 « O vie religieuse ! État parfait ! J’ignorais l’entendue de vos devoirs et de vos privilèges ; j’apprends dans la Babylone du monde. Oui plus religieuse que jamais, je me consacre aux pratiques du cloître, et si j’ai le bonheur de retourner dans l’arche, mon séjour dans le monde m’aura servi du plus parfait noviciat. » Gauchat, Journal, 208. This perhaps builds on her earlier reference to the fact that she felt like the dove Noah sent out for an olive branch.

541 Genesis 11, ESV.
God was upset with the Belshazzar’s lack of respect for Holy items and threatened the imminent end of his kingdom.\(^{542}\) This Bible story might have given Gauchat hope that God would put an end to the profane treatment of holy objects during the Revolution.\(^{543}\) Either way, she could rest on her identity as chosen by God, just like the Israelites. Just like he saved them from their Babylonian Exile, she too would eventually be allowed to return to the Holy Land. In identifying with suffering and with the heroes of the Old Testament, Gauchat was able to handle their suffering better. Gauchat used the stories of Noah or the Israelites to help inform and reassure her situation.

The harder the persecution, the harder Gauchat resisted it. In an undated entry from November or December of 1793, she rejected most strongly the entire ideology and project of the Revolution:

> Ah! the kindly duty of not taking the fatal oath! what a sweet pleasure for me! Infamous Republic, accumulate your crimes as you please I am neither a citizen nor your accomplice, I do not want equality, I want to be dominated, I want all the ranks that are in the right order. I do not want freedom; I want everything to be under the yoke of Jesus Christ and enslaved to the laws of the gospel. I do not want the supposed rights of man: his right is to submit to the Supreme Being and to humble himself before His Majesty, confessing that he is before him only a vile nothingness, redeemed from hell. I do not want a constitution that overthrows

\(^{542}\) Daniel 5: 2-6, 24-28, ESV. Belshazzar, when he tasted the wine, commanded that the vessels of gold and of silver that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem be brought, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. Then they brought in the golden vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. Immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, opposite the lampstand. And the king saw the hand as it wrote. Then the king's color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together. […]

Then from his presence the hand was sent, and this writing was inscribed. And this is the writing that was inscribed: Mene, Tekel, and Parsin. This is the interpretation of the matter: Mene, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; Tekel, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; Peres, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”

\(^{543}\) « Si Balthazar a reçu un si foudroyant arrêt pour la profanation des vases qui n’étaient que l’ombre de la sainteté des nôtres, que doivent attendre ces milliers de Balthazars modernes, qui ont osé nos seulement profaner les objets de notre vénération, mais encore détruire de milliers de temples, vous en chasser indignement. » Gauchat, *Journal*, 228.
religion. If I had power, I would use it to enlighten my brethren, to open their eyes and show them the injustice and atrocity of these new laws. I am ready to die, but also to annihilate, if I could, this unjust code, to raise altars to the Lord, to restore the religious orders, to have the adorable sacrament honored in a thousand ways, and, in a word, for the glory of my God and the eternal salvation of the country: for a single one of its inhabitants, for his true happiness, yes I would give my blood. These are my oaths.544

The power of her sentiment and the strength of her convictions bled out in every line of this “oath.” Although the Revolution tried to bestow on former nuns the rights and duties of citizens of the French republic, she rejected them. She did not want equality because she felt she was not equal to Jesus and felt it was just for Him to rule over her and the rest of the earth. As for freedom, she did not want the freedom the Revolution offered. She thrived by following the laws of the Bible and the rule of Jesus. The only rights she believed that humans possessed were their rights to humble themselves before God.

Lastly, she rejected all the changes the Revolution brought to the practice of the Church, most importantly, the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. In fact, even labeling her as the “enemy of the law” was not an abhorrent title for her because she considered the laws enemies of her God and the methods of destruction of her holy religion.545 There was nothing she would not give, including her life, for the salvation of even just one of

544 « AH ! l’aimable devoir que celui de ne pas faire le fatal serment ! quelle douce jouissance pour moi ! République infâme, accumule tes crimes tant qu’il te plaira je ne suis ni citoyenne, ni ta complice, je ne veux point d’égalité, je veux être dominée, je veux tous les rangs qui sont dans l’ordre de droit. Je ne veux point de liberté, je veux que tout soit sous le joug de Jésus-Christ et asservi aux lois de l’évangile. Je ne veux point des droits prétendus de l’homme : son droit est de se soumettre à l’Être-suprême et de s’humilier devant Sa Majesté, en confessant qu’il n’est devant lui qu’un vil néant, racheté de l’enfer. Je ne veux point d’une constitution qui renverse la religion. Si j’ai du pouvoir, je l’emploierai pour éclairer mes frères, pour dessiller les yeux et leur montrer l’injustice et l’atrocité de ces nouvelles lois. Je suis prête a mourir, mais pour anéantir, si je le pouvais, ce code inique, pour élever des autels au Seigneur pour rétablir les ordres religieux, pour faite honorer en mille manières l’adorable sacrement, et en un mot pour la gloire de mon Dieu et la salut éternel de la patrie : pour un seul de ses habitants, pour son véritable bonheur, oui je donnerais mon sang. Voilà mes serments. » Gauchat, Journal, 140.

545 « J’aime à être punis comme ennemie des lois puisque ces lois sont enemies de mon Dieu. Oui qu’il regarde mon mépris pour ce code inique ; c’est ma gloire de mépriser de détester les moyens de destruction contre ma sainte religion » Gauchat, Journal, 191-2.
France’s inhabitants. While she had expressed these sentiments in isolation throughout her diary, this entry most clearly stated her total repudiation of any changes wrought by the Revolution.

5.3.3 On Death and Violence During the Revolution

While many nuns had families who supported them during the Revolution, Gauchat did not because her family was in Saint-Domingue. For example, during the Revolution, Gauchat lost her sister and nephew in Haiti. Not only could she not rely on a sister to give her housing or aid, but she had to wrestle with the loss of close family members.546 She described this sadness as an “assault” on her peace and tranquility. France was in a “delirium of her impiety,” and Gauchat watched in horror at all of the atrocities.547 Later she described France as a nation that had become “barbaric and pagan” and worse than “Sodom and Gomorrah.”548 Gauchat’s observation of violence drove her closer to God. While the rest of France was jeopardizing their salvation, she wanted to set herself apart.

By September of 1793, Gauchat described Langres as “always in a violent situation.”549 Persecutions of religious women began to increase. She said this about the revolutionary violence:

It imprisons, It makes suspicious, It denounces, etc. About 300 women are forced under the title of suspects to report to the municipality every day. Old age, infirmity, nothing touches them. As for we other nuns, we were first confined to our homes, as were a large number of the ladies; then they have just publicly announced to the beat of drums that we were free until the 22nd of this month, the

546 Gauchat, _Journal_, 87.
547 « La France, dans le délire de son impiété, vous était alors présente, comme le phénomène de toutes les atrocités,… » Gauchat, _Journal_, 229.
548 « …cette nation devenue et barbare et païenne, qui ne respectant ni ses souverains, ni son Dieu, se trouve chargée de plus de crimes et d’infamies, que ne furent jamais Sodome et Gomorrhe ? Louis et Antoinette Demandent des larmes. » Gauchat, _Journal_, 273.
549 « La ville est toujours dans une situation violente. » Gauchat, _Journal_, 107.
day when they would deliberate on our fate. Here is the moment. What will they do with us? This we do not know perfectly, but they toy with deliberations as we are the talk of the world.550

There was obvious uncertainty about what the future would hold for Gauchat and her other former religious women in Langres. Despite these trying times and the constant threat of imprisonment or worse, Gauchat still did not give an inch in her faith. In fact, she ended this letter by pointing out the bitter irony that the convents were dissolved to give these former nuns liberty, however now they were locking them up. Gauchat proudly wrote she was “Free from a freedom unknown to our inhuman legislators; I make fun of all their instructions.”551 Her freedom did not come from thedictates of the representative on mission; it came from God. She had a freedom that she believed they would never know.

For Visitandines like Gauchat, prison was no punishment at all. In fact, she could think of no greater honor than to go to prison for her love of Christ. She wrote in her journal, “Now the name of prison creates in me the sweetest sensation. What would it be like for me to be put in prison? Oh! Good fortune! I would share the fate of your holy confessors; I would walk in your footsteps, Husband, bound with chains for my love.”552

550 « On emprisonne, on rend suspect, on dénonce, etc. Environ 300 femmes sont obligées, sous le titre de suspectes de se présenter tous les jours a la municipalité. La vieillesse, l’infirmité, rien ne les touche. Quant a nous autres religieuses, on nous avait d’abord consignées chez nous, ainsi qu’un grand nombre des dames ; puis l’on vient de publier à son de caisse que nous étions libres jusqu’au 22 de ce mois, jour ou l’on délibérerait sur notre sort. Voilà le moment actuel. Que feront-ils de nous ? C’est ce que nous ignorons parfaitement ; mais tandis que jouet de tant délibérations, nous sommes la fable du monde, je vais avec tout le plaisir possible, m’entretenir paisiblement avec vous. » Gauchat, Journal, 107.

551 « Libre d’une liberté inconnue à nos inhumains législateurs, je me moque de toutes leurs consignes ... » Gauchat, Journal, 109.

552 « Maintenant le nom de prison fait dans moi la plus douce sensation. Quoi il serait possible que je fusse mise en prison ? Oh ! La bonne fortune ! Je partagerais le sort de vos saints confesseurs, je marcherais sur vos traces, Époux chargé des chaines pour mon amour. » Gauchat, Journal, 144.
In going to prison, not only would she be able to enjoy the solitude that would allow for greater prayerful contemplation, but she could practice an even more severe form of asceticism.

When discussing death in her diary, she seemed to express Paul’s sentiments about dying described in Romans 6. Gauchat has already “died” to this world, the world of sin. She now was “living” for God and his will. Thereby death and martyrdom could not take away anything she had not already freely surrendered to God in hopes of eternal salvation.553 For example, when she wrote, “I am faithful to give up everything, to die to everything, God will make me all ineffable and excellent;” she was not talking about a literal death, but a spiritual transformation.554 She was “dying” to the sins and pleasures of this life on earth, and dying to the rules and obligations of the Revolution in order to more fully embrace her religious convictions. If she already considered herself “dead” to the world, there was nothing the Revolution could threaten to take.

Although Gauchat was not called to the path of the martyrs, in the next chapter, we will talk more fully about those who were. Those who were guillotined often felt called to martyrdom by God and enthusiastically took up the identity of “martyr” as a

\[\text{553 Roman 6:1-11. ESV “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So, you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”}\]

\[\text{554 « Je suis fidèle à renoncer à tout, à mourir à tout, Dieu me rendra tout d’une manière ineffable et excellente… » Gauchat, Journal, 177.}\]
great honor. While Gauchat was sometimes horrified by the violence, she was not so affected by suffering because of her identity in her close relationship with God.

5.4 1794: The Height of Persecution and the Aftermath

While Vérot was able to escape the Terror before the official end, Gauchat remained in France throughout the entirety and even after the worst of the Terror. She got to see the full manifestation of the most radical phases. For many nuns, emigrating during the Terror was simply not an option. They had neither the funds nor the support to leave. In fact, Gauchat in 1794 tried to make a move to Bannes, and her difficulty in moving inside France demonstrated some of the difficulties former nuns faced to travel anywhere. It was nearly impossible for entire convents to pick up and move, and it was also difficult for women to travel alone without resources. In January of 1794, Gauchat went to the municipality—which was extremely dangerous because she refused to swear the oaths to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and to liberty and equality. She had no designs of emigrating, but she intended to move about 7.1 km (4.4 miles) east of Langres to Bannes. She needed a passport to travel even just 4 miles outside of town. Persecutions of religious personnel increased in 1794, which prompted her to compare her situation to the “road to Calvary,” or the route Jesus took to his crucifixion. She took this path willingly, and in joyful anticipation of all the trials she suffered along the way.

She chose Bannes for her sojourn because she believed she could live there as a solitary penitent. According to Gauchat, despite its proximity to Langres, Bannes

555 Gauchat, Journal, 159.
556 “tout semble m’annoncer la route du Calvaire, c’est ce que je vois de plus clair. » « Immobile dans mon bonheur et ma paix je ne sors de ce calme profond que pour tressaillir de joie dans l’attente des épreuves auxquelles j’espère être exposée ; j’en vois de bien des sortes, mais je ne répugne à aucunes. » Gauchat, Journal, 160.
557 Gauchat, Journal, 161. « Je choisi Bannes pour mon séjour, pour y vivre en solitaire pénitente. »
continued to be loyal to the church and was charged with being “fanatical.” Since Gauchat was well-known for being “opposed in all things to the new laws and the new regime,” Bannes sounded like a better place for her to weather the storm of the Revolution. However, presenting herself to the municipality to gain the necessary paperwork would do nothing but provoke the Revolution’s anger against her. She knowingly provoked it in order to follow “God’s will”: “I expect everything, the arrest, the seclusion ... the refusal of passport ... maybe, on the contrary, the banishment from the city and the order to leave at the earliest, maybe to fix my stay in some very revolutionary village.” She felt called out of her peaceful serenity to attempt this voyage. The women who were refractories had also been living without a pension, so many lacked the financial means to make such a journey possible. If Gauchat could not even travel four or five miles at this time without great danger, there was a very slim chance of emigrating for former nuns between 1793 and 1794. After her request was denied, Gauchat experienced a great deal of anxiety about where to go next because Bannes was “where the Divine Bridegroom was waiting for me.” For Gauchat, her home, her security was wherever God was waiting for her.

During Easter of 1794, she had been experiencing religious life outside of the convent for over a year, and she found herself, much like in the previous year, reflecting

559 “Je m’attends à tout, l’arrestation, la réclusion... le refus de passe-port... peut-être au contraire le bannissement de la ville et l’ordre de sortir au plus tôt, peut-être encore de fixer mon séjour dans quelque village bien révolutionnaire.”
560 As suspected, her request was denied. Gauchat, Journal, 165.
561 “Je cherche un asile, Je le fais avec inquiétude, avec des attaches, des désirs, des craintes, etc. C’est la où divin Epoux m’attendait.” Gauchat, Journal, 166.
on the “the beauty of the cross.” Her entries from Holy Week were so much shorter, but contained many of the same sentiments as the previous year. One noticeable difference was that in 1793 she was extremely concerned with finding a priest so she could receive her sacraments and make a confession before Easter. Her joy was very much contingent upon a visit from a priest. This year, her entry did not contain a single mention of receiving communion, confessing, or hearing mass. She said that she passed Holy Week in the “most profound solitude.” However, she took Holy Week as an opportunity to recognize her “union with the Holy Church.” She knew that all over the world, Catholics were preparing this same week to celebrate the death and resurrection of their savior, and therefore, she felt a connection to something bigger.

On Pentecost of 1794 (June 8), a day in the Catholic Calendar that celebrated when the Holy Spirit came to guide the Apostles, Gauchat felt increased anxiety about her sins on this day. While she never directly stated what exactly she did on this “day of apostasy,” she described some severe transgression:

Day of apostasy, or to put it better, a horrible night that should never have existed. But I cannot. Everything is in an intimate and profound darkness. But everything is infinity. O infinity of the graces of my God! It is in this abyss that I lose myself. Only that I say that I would like to be brought to the courts to loudly confess my faith. My God, I ask you this grace[...]

563 Gauchat, Journal, 214. « J’ai passé ma semaine sainte dans la plus profonde et salutaire solitude, abîmée dans les mystères sacrés que l’Église célèbre dans saint temps, toute remplie des sentiments qu’ils inspirent quand en les médite avec profondeur. »
564 « Dans mon union avec la sainte Eglise, ma mère, j’ai joui des précieux avantages que j’aurais puisé dans la jouissance de ses pieuses pompes. » Gauchat, Journal, 214.
Her unhappiness and abhorrence of her “apostasy” was only heightened by the knowledge that she committed such a terrible sin on such an important religious holiday.\(^{566}\) Luckily she was able to confess and receive communion on June 13, just five days later; she indicated this with a C. C. in her diary.\(^{567}\) After making her confession, she was filled with happiness and described feelings of being made new and being a beneficiary of God’s ocean of grace.\(^{568}\) This was quickly followed by the adoration of the Holy Sacrament for an octave, or eight days.\(^{569}\) She called these eight days her “honorable amend” for her actions on Pentecost.\(^{570}\) Committing any act of apostasy on a religious holiday made it all the more abhorrent to her. Her continued awareness of religious holidays and attempts to continue to observe them reinforced her commitment to maintaining as much of her religious identity as possible. Had she given over to the revolutionary calendar, it might have disrupted much in her patterns of living.

The fall of Robespierre came swiftly in Thermidor, or July of 1794. Although Gauchat had hoped for a long time for the end of the Terror, her diary entries did not spend a great deal of time rejoicing in the change. In fact, when she finally left the Soubert house at the end of July 1794, which had been her refuge these many months, she was reunited with Constance, a nun from her convent at Miss Thévenot’s house.\(^{571}\) She

\(^{566}\) I suspect that revolutionaries must have accosted her in some way in the night and demanded her oath. She would have no way to know she was a month away from the end of the Terror and the fall of Robespierre in July of 1794.

\(^{567}\) Gauchat, *Journal*, 224.


\(^{569}\) Catholics will sometimes have a period of eucharistic adoration where the real presence of Jesus, present in communion through transubstantiation, is believed to reside in the monstrance, where a consecrated wafer is displayed.


\(^{571}\) I do not know who Thévenot was but I assume it was someone friendly to Gauchat and her religious order. Gauchat, *Journal*, 234.
then did not write again until September of 1794, which was months after Robespierre fell. As the Reign of Terror gave way to the Thermidorian Reaction in the Fall of 1794, and eventually the Directory, Gauchat’s diary entries became much less frequent. Despite the end of radical dechristianization, the laws remained intact, and therefore, the fall of Robespierre did not change much for those who were fearful of practicing their religion.

In September of 1794, Gauchat was able to collect a pension even though she refused the oath. She continued to resist collecting her pension at first. When she finally did present herself to the municipality, not only was she able to start collecting her pension, but she was able to collect her back pension that had built up over the past year or so. She reflected on her decision to resist the oath and felt affirmed that her loyalty was rewarded not just monetarily, but in the fact that she was spared from severe punishment for not swearing the oath. She would have gladly have continued in poverty and without the pension, but considered it a unique mercy that God had given her such a reward.

By December 4, 1794, Gauchat not only did not fear punishment or endure the same kind of suffering as she had during the Terror, she possessed a “certificate of

572 « Ayant été assure que le serment n’était plus exigé, je ne suis présentée pour avoir mon certificat et toucher ma pension. » Gauchat, Journal, 235.

573 « D’ailleurs je savais que mon opinion sur les serment était universellement connue et ouvertement punie par la soustraction de ma pension, depuis le serment demandé et refusé. J’ai donc reçu tous les arrières de ma pension sans discussion, et sans que l’on m’aït rien demandé sur le serment. » Gauchat, Journal, 236.

574 « J’avoue à la gloire de la miséricorde de mon Dieu, que toute pénétrée de son amour et du désir unique de lui plaire, j’aurais été ravie de joie, si au lieu de me remettre dans mes droits on m’eut privée de ma liberté et puni sévèrement pour mon refus de serment. » Gauchat, Journal, 236.
civicism” and was no longer considered a counter-revolutionary.\textsuperscript{575} Her diary ended shortly afterward.

5.5 Conclusion

She decided to end her diary in 1795 because of the February 20, 1795 decree, which permitted the exercise of Catholicism in private homes and under the surveillance of authorities. Finally, on June 29, 1795, the cathedral of Langres, Saint-Mammès, which had been the “Temple of the Eternal,” was returned to the Catholic Church, and Gauchat did not feel the same need to keep such a good account of her internal state. However, her commitment to her faith, and resistance to the revolutionaries remained a constant feature. Gauchat’s personal diary provided a window into the way that she identified herself in the height of religious persecution. The harder that the revolutionary torment raged outside her spiritual oasis, the harder she resisted it. Contemplation of Heaven became a sort of psychological reprieve. She escaped the sadness, fear, and horror of the Revolution by focusing on God, his saints, and the scriptures. Gauchat offers one of the strongest cases of a woman who turned to religion in the face of uncertainty about the future.\textsuperscript{576}

The Reign of Terror and the Thermidorian Reaction crystallized the decisions these women made regarding their religious identities in the first few years of the Revolution. During this period, many of the nuns who would emigrate had already left; those who wished to stay learned to adapt, and those who had decided to sacrifice their

\begin{footnotes}
\item[575] « J’ai un certificat de civisme qui dit que je n’ai point manifesté d’opinion contraire à la Révolution. » Gauchat, \textit{Journal}, 238.
\item[576] As I revise this conclusion, I cannot help but feel a sort of camaraderie with Gauchat. As Americans practice social distancing in March 2020, I find myself trying to reestablish my patterns of living. It remains inadvisable to leave my house for any reason.
\end{footnotes}
religious life took on new identities. While not all nuns felt the same way as Vérot and Gauchat, their accounts demonstrate how their religious identities offered comfort, assurance, and a steady anchor in the turmoil of the Revolution. Their identity with God and their fellow Catholics informed the reactions they had to each new law. Religious identity could provide an anchor in the face of persecution.
CHAPTER 6. WITNESSES OF THE FAITH: UNDERSTANDING DEATH AND MARTYRDOM

Despite the near-daily deluge of men and women who went to the guillotine during the Spring of 1794, most nuns did not face such severe punishment.\(^{577}\) In fact, the inflated role of religious martyrs in the popular imagination obscures the fact that only a small number of religious women faced the guillotine during the Reign of Terror for resisting the revolutionaries’ efforts to disband them.\(^{578}\) The small number of women who died for the Revolution’s laws and ordinances is due, in part, to the reluctance of revolutionaries to execute nuns who were often beloved members of their community and had a respected role in the ancien régime. “Martyrs” had to work quite hard to stoke the revolutionaries’ opposition. Quiet and private religious practice was not enough for them to be condemned. The identity of martyr was not one that was forced upon the nuns, but an identity they had an active role in adopting. Although women lacked many of the political freedoms of men, they found more subtle, but no less powerful ways to make their voices heard.

This chapter demonstrates that suffering martyrdom was a process of identity formation. The nuns themselves had a hand in ensuring their new identity would come to fruition, and their “crimes” demonstrated the inseparable nature of religion and politics for the nuns. While the revolutionaries called these women “fanatics,” “counterrevolutionaries,” or “enemies of the republic,” the church called them “heroes” and “martyrs.” Sociologists have argued that in times of uncertainty, men and women

\(^{577}\) [See Appendix] (I am working on a list of martyred nuns and a count, will revise once I have the final number)

\(^{578}\) A note on the memory: Nineteenth century accounts of martyrdom were popularized to facilitate a resurgence of Catholic sentiment. This popular memory continued until Poulenc’s Dialogue de Carmélites, the 1950s opera about the death of the Carmelite nuns, argued these nuns were perfect victims of the Revolution’s violence.
look to religion as a source of stability.\textsuperscript{579} I argue the identity of martyrdom was one that offered stability and certainty. They could draw upon the example of the Early Church martyrs for both strength and direction. By accepting the call to martyrdom and interpreting their current persecution as something that had precedent, they linked their fates to their faith in the salvation of saints and the martyrs. While the nuns believed their identity was chosen by God, they still had to take action to provoke the revolutionaries' fear and anger. The intersection of the community’s actions and their relationship to their God meant that the nuns would have to take actions that ensured their execution, even after they felt the “call” to martyrdom.\textsuperscript{580} Therefore, they lived in the tension of, on the one hand, having no choice in “God’s calling,” but then, having to make choices that would carry out God’s plan.

Since the nuns’ beliefs about themselves rested on an eternal and unchanging God, an inner certainty quieted their external anxieties. While it was common to reaffirm their religious identities in their convents, a small group of nuns took up an identity that rarely existed in the West since the end of Christian persecution under the Roman empire.\textsuperscript{581} Catholic nuns were well-acquainted with stories about early martyrs. The Matins often included readings about the martyrs on particular saints’ feast days. Depending on the convent, women participated in daily lessons and reading on the persecutions of the early Christian era and the saints who persisted in their faith. For

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\textsuperscript{580} This tension between divine sovereignty and free will may reflect the tensions over Jansenism during the Revolutionary era. Dale Van Kley, \textit{The Religious Origins of the French Revolution} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).
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\textsuperscript{581} While there are individual martyrs throughout the middle ages, there was no real state-sponsored martyrdom on the scale of the French Revolution. These women saw themselves as persecuted like the early church.
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women specifically, martyrdom was one of the few paths to heroic Christianity in the early church. Women had been gradually excluded from leadership roles in the early Christian Church, so martyrdom remained one of the only ways to play a prominent role as a “witness” to the faith. Nuns viewed martyrdom with respect and honor. In fact, in a hymn from 1792, written by the mother prioress of the Carmelites of Compiègne, she wrote about following in the footsteps of the martyrs even before widespread executions had arrived in France:

Let’s arm ourselves with courage
Like brave soldiers
The great king who hires us
Has braved many fights.
How many heroes follow Him:
There are thousands of them
In their footsteps, let’s fly fast
To share their Laurels

This prioress showed that martyrdom was a brave and heroic path for her nuns. They hoped to be called to follow in the footsteps of the early church to share in the “laurels” or honors. The Visitandine nun whose diary shaped much of the previous chapter, Gabrielle Gauchat, also showed the connection between the early church martyrs and those who died during the Revolution. She wrote that those who suffered death during the Reign of Terror had the same tranquility in their interrogations, happiness, piety, and

582 The *Rule of Benedict* indicated that nuns would read about Saints before compline. They did daily readings on the early church Martyrs. Saint Benedict, *The Rule of Benedict*, Chapters 38, 42, and 73.

583 « Armons-nous donc de courage
Comme de braves soldats
Le grand roi qui nous engage
A bravé bien des combats.
Que de héros à sa suite :
On les compte par milliers
Sur leurs pas volons bien vite
unquenchable faith as the early church martyrs.\footnote{Gauchat, \textit{Journal}, 85.} Gauchat's diary illustrates a belief that women who resisted the revolutionaries to the point of death were worthy of respect on par with the respect given to the Diocletian Martyrs at the beginning of the fourth century.

Abbé Aimé Guillon's four-volume \textit{Les Martyrs de la foi pendant la Révolution Française, ou Martyrologe des pontifes, prêtres, religieux, religieuses, laïcs, de l’un et l’autre sexe qui périrent alors pour la foi}, was the first attempt, in 1821, to catalog all of the men and women who died for their faith during the Revolution. He, too, argued that the events in France were comparable to the persecutions of the early church. He lists many of the early martyrs to explain why Catholics continued to honor their sacrifices.\footnote{Guillon, \textit{Les Martyrs de la foi}, Vol 1, 6-9.}

It was not just the martyrs who identified with the ancient church, but Guillon himself compared the revolutionaries to the early church persecutors. He called the revolutionaries “imitators of Diocletian and Domitian.” \footnote{« Imitateurs de ces préfets de Dioclétian et de Domitien, » Guillon, \textit{Les Martyrs de la foi}, Vol 1, xxv. He makes further comparisons on page 15.} Emperor Diocletian set off the largest, bloodiest, and last significant persecution of Christians from 303-312, and Domitian sparked the first persecution between 89-96. Guillon compared himself to Maruthas, the bishop of Mesopotamia, who faithfully recorded the martyrdoms in Persia at the end of the fourth century.\footnote{Guillon, \textit{Les Martyrs de la foi}, Vol 1, xxvi.}

He noted many similarities between the two periods of persecution:

1. That the persecution in France occurred in the three different phases under which it occurred successively, had the character of the three main persecutions which gave the Church so many Martyrs in the first centuries; 2 that all those who suffered and died for the cause of religion, in any way whatsoever under one or the other of these three phases of the French persecution, can have, in the eyes of
the Church, the same glory as the heroic and holy victims of one or the other of
the three great persecutions of the primitive Church.588

The initial persecutions were followed by a second wave. He further compared the Ninth
of Thermidor, which ended the bloodshed for a time, to the toleration of emperor
Julian.589 For Guillon, the men and women who died during this period of persecution
were holy saints, worthy of remembrance and worship. By the 1820s, when he recorded
this impressive four-volume collection, the Bourbon Monarchy was on a quest to inspire
and re-catholicize France, and the stories of the martyrs were crucial for inspiring faith.

Dying for one’s faith was the ultimate expression of a religious woman’s
confidence in Christian salvation. The nuns’ posture towards martyrdom was influenced
by their belief that death was not something to be feared. Members of religious
communities prepared their entire lives to pass from this world and fully reunite with
their God. Gabrielle Gauchat, who had spent her existence in prayerful contemplation and
eagerly awaited union with God, thought that death was cause for much excitement and
celebration. Death was “the last stage in the triumphant union with God.”590 Although the
Christian should look eagerly for death and the subsequent resurrection to eternal life, he
or she must not hasten its arrival. Gauchat, and I suspect many others like her, however,

588 « 1. Que la persécution en France, dans les trois phases différentes sous lesquelles elles s’est produite
successivement, a eu le caractère des trois principales persécutions qui donnèrent à l’Eglise tant de
Martyrs dans les premiers siècles ; 2 que tous ceux qui ont souffert et sont mort pour la cause de la
religion, de quelque manière que ce soit sous l’une ou l’autre de ces trois phases de la persécution
française, puissent seuls avoir, aux yeux de l’Eglise, la même gloire que les héroïques et saintes
victimes de l’une ou de l’autre des trois grandes persécutions de la primitive Eglise » Guillon, Les
Martyrs de la foi, Vol 1, 23.

589 Guillon, Les Martyrs de la foi, Vol 1, 30.
590 Cited in Duvignacq-Glessgen, L’Ordre de la Visitation À Paris,123. Originally G. Baudet-Drillat,
« Regard à d’une congrégation féminine » in J. Delumeau (dir.), Un chemin d’histoire (Paris :
1982), 227.
had submitted herself “to death, but was very happy to live...”\textsuperscript{591} In this period of persecution, she believed God was performing valuable work in sanctification, a work that required her to be alive. She found great joy in suffering for her faith and felt that God called her to a life of persecution, but He was not yet calling her to be reunited with Him in death.

In other words, martyrdom was a vocation that a woman had to be called to by God. Yet, the nuns understood that they had considerable responsibility for ensuring their fate. Once she heard the call, each woman would have to accept or reject it as an act of free will. Gauchat went so far as to say, “I do not yet feel the desire to be a martyr, but I would be glad to go to jail, to be booed, and to be scorned for the name of Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{592} She explained in her diary that when she wrote to her spiritual advisor, she did not feel the call to martyrdom. She said, “I believe, my dear brother, that I will not have the honor of dying a martyr, since I always hope to see you again.”\textsuperscript{593} Martyrdom would have been an exceptional honor for any woman of the faith; in fact, Gauchat called those who died “happy victims.”\textsuperscript{594} However, she was a bit disappointed that she was not called to such a noble path. Similarly, Jeanne Anne Redon, an ex-nun, wrote in 1803, “not all men are called to the martyr’s crown.”\textsuperscript{595} Those who did not die for their faith were not weaker or lesser Christians who could not bear the cross of martyrdom, but they simply

\textsuperscript{591} Gauchat, \textit{Journal}, 82. « Je suis soumise à la mort, et très contente de vivre. C’est maintenant qu’il fait bon vivre, puisque la moisson est si belle. »

\textsuperscript{592} Gauchat, \textit{Journal}, 82. « Je ne me sens pas encore le désir du martyr ; mais je serais bien aise d’aller en prison, d’avoir des huées et d’être bafouée pour le nom de Jésus-Christ. »

\textsuperscript{593} Gauchat, \textit{Journal}, 82. « Je crois, mon cher frère, que je n’aurai pas l’honneur de mourir martyr, puisque j’espère toujours vous revoir, que je travaille pour vous avec tant de zèle, et que le bon Dieu ne veut pas que je brûle ni que interrompe cet écrit si dangereux dans ce circonstances. »

\textsuperscript{594} « Ces heureuses victimes » Gauchat, \textit{Journal}, 84.

\textsuperscript{595} AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, pièce 71. « Ce couple malheureux avoue à votre éminence qu’il aurait du tout souffrir même la mort plutôt que de se séparer de l’église : mais tous les hommes ne sont pas appelés à la couronne du martyr »

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were not called to this role. They, therefore, did not need to stoke the revolutionaries’ anger against them. Very few of the nuns who disobeyed France’s laws were actually guillotined for it. The optics of guillotining nuns were still a bit too much for most citizens of France to stomach. Those nuns who were guillotined for their faith had to be particularly brazen in their defiance of the new laws to force the issue.

The Catholic Church developed a strict outline for bestowing on men and women the title of martyr, which was applied to determine which individuals “counted” as religious martyrs. Abbé Aimé Guillon’s explains these criteria in *Les Martyrs de la foi pendant la Révolution Française*. First, the church authorities had to decide whether the victim died for her religious belief or because of her political activity. Guillon opined, “the cause of the death of some, who declare themselves also royalists, seems mixed, that is to say, both political and religious: but if it seemed such: if even it was in fact respectively in the political view of the persecutors, it was not so in the relationship of this very notorious hatred which a philosophical impiety inspired them against religion.” Therefore, for Guillon, even if the cause of their condemnation was political for the persecutors, he privileged the intention of the victim:

> In all times, the persecutors of the Church have been known to use the artifice of justifying, by alleged state crimes, death sentences against those who actually perished for their Faith: and the Church, justly understanding the real cause of

596 In the appendix there is a list of all the religious women that he notes, but Rutan’s omission indicated that there were likely other victims that he overlooked.

597 “Nous conviendrons tout au plus qu’au premier aspect, la cause de la mort de quelques-uns, qui se déclarent aussi royalistes, semble mixte, c’est-à-dire tout ensemble politique et religieuse : mais si elle parut telle : si même elle le fut en effet respectivement aux vue politiques des persécuteurs, elle ne l’étoit point sous la rapport de cette haine bien noire du qu’une philosophique impieté leur inspirait contre la religion.” Aimé Guillon, *Les Martyrs de la foi pendant la Révolution Française, ou Martyrologe des pontifes prêtres, religieux, religieuses, laïcs, de l’un et l’autre sexe qui périrent alors pour la foi* (Paris, 1821), Vol. 1, xv.

598 There were examples that he cited of people who died for purely political purposes and therefore he excluded from his list of Martyrs.
their death, placed them immediately on its altars, rushing to recover for them the honor that this infernal trickery had taken away.\textsuperscript{599}

Therefore, we can understand that one of the purposes of Guillon’s book is to make a case for recognizing these victims as martyrs. Condemnation for violating state laws did not disqualify or obscure the victim’s actual cause of death, which was, according to Guillon, religiously motivated.

While it was impossible to untangle the strands of which actions were religious and which were political, we must remember that the Revolution politicized regular habits and events. Like those men and women who committed heroic suicides during the Revolution, we can understand the nuns' bodies as “political symbols.” They may not have been able to vote, but their deaths rippled across the countryside and inspired others. Therefore, the nuns did have a proclivity to “transform suffering, death, and biological life events… into events of universal moral and spiritual significance,” but they were not the only ones to do so.\textsuperscript{600} Dorinda Outram has argued that a concern for \textit{gravitas} and theatricality is visible among the group suicides and heroic suicides of the Robespierists and the Prairial “martyrs.”\textsuperscript{601} Like these men who took their own lives to create the illusion of solidarity and to connect with the heroic figures of classical antiquity, the nuns saw their deaths as having a spiritual significance. Accepting martyrdom was a way of showing unity, not only with their God but with other members of their community, and

\textsuperscript{599} « Dans tous le temps, les persécuteurs de l’Eglise ont connu l’artifice de motiver, par de prétendus crimes d’Etat, les sentences de mort contre ceux qu’ils ne faisoient périr en effet que pour leur Foi : et l’Eglise, juste appréciatrice de la véritable cause de leur mort, ne les en plaçoit pas moins aussitôt sur ses autels, empressée qu’elle étoit de leur faire recouvrer l’honneur que cette infernale supercherie leur avoit enlevé. » Guillon, \textit{Les Martyrs de la foi}, Vol 1, xvi.


\textsuperscript{601} Outram, \textit{The Body and the French Revolution}, 96.
the public spectacle of the guillotine ensured there would be some level of performativity in their executions.

Women, like these male political actors, also evinced concern to shape narratives about their deaths with tools like their behavior and clothing. Caroline Weber in *Queen of Fashion: What Marie Antionette Wore to the Revolution*, demonstrated how patterns of dress could make powerful political statements. Therefore, the nuns understood how vital what they wore would be for the optics of their death. Marie-Antoinette was permitted to mourn for her husband, the King, even though this was forbidden in the rest of France. She exploited the space allowed for a grieving widow to make a royalist political statement. She even began sleeping in her mourning clothes so that if they woke her up to be executed, she would be able to be dressed for her public appearance.602 Furthermore, when describing her counterrevolutionary crimes, her accusers cited a number of anecdotes about her dress and accessories as evidence of her guilt.603 Like the nuns whose habits became evidence of their counter-revolutionary guilt, Marie Antoinette’s mourning robes became an externalized mark of her criminality.604 Clothing could be, and often was, political during the Revolution. Women in eighteenth-century France could not vote, they could not attend assemblies, but they always found ways to make their voices heard. Nuns were no exception. Under such circumstances, we must look at martyrdom as undeniably political even as Guillon lays out criteria for its religious recognition.

Guillon found many women eligible for the identity of martyrs. His first chapter explains the six conditions laid out by Pope Benedict XIV in the middle of the eighteenth century, just before the Revolution, which qualified a person as a martyr. He or she must have died:

1. Because persecutors couldn't make him betray his faith; or
2. Because he did not want to lend himself to an act by which he would have let believe that he was violating his faith; or
3. Because he refused to do something forbidden by the dictates of his religion; or
4. Because he did not want to condescend to a required declaration which, although indifferent on other occasions, could not, due to the circumstances of the moment, be reconciled with the righteousness of the Faith; or
5. Because he refused an action which, at other times would not have had an adverse effect, but in these circumstances would have damaged religion; or
6. Finally, because he did some religious act, without being restrained by an unjust law […] 605

Therefore, this chapter will follow these guidelines when discussing martyrs. According to the church and many loyal Catholics at the time, these women were martyrs and not criminals.

The women who went to the guillotine were Visitandines, Carmelites, hospitalières, Bernardines, Sacramentines, Daughters of Charity, and Ursulines. In doing so, these women found both unity with God and peace in their certainty of death. Nuns’ identities before the Revolution, I argue, helped shape their path to the guillotine. The identity of martyr proved capacious enough to embrace a range of religious women, stretching from the cloistered Carmelites of Compiègne, to women engaged in teaching

605 « 1. Parce qu’on n’a pu lui faire trahir sa foi. ; ou 2. Parce qu’il n’a pas voulu se prêter à un acte par lequel il aurait laissé croire qu’il manquait à sa foi ; ou 3. Parce qu’il a refusé de faire une chose défendue par les préceptes de sa religion ; ou 4. Parce qu’il n’a pas voulu condescendre à un déclaration exigée qui, bien qu’indifférente en d’autres occasions, ne pouvait, à raison des circonstances du moment, se concilier avec la droiture de la Foi ; ou 5. Parce qu’il a refusé une action qui, en d’autres temps sans mauvais effet aurait porté dans celui-là quelque préjudice à la religion ; ou 6. Enfin, parce qu’il a fait un acte religieux quelconque, sans être retenu par un injuste loi qui le défendait. » Guillon, Les Martyrs de la foi, Vol 1, 49-53.
like the Ursulines of Orange, and even to women with active vocations like Marguerite Rutan, a Daughter of Charity. Their deaths were both political and religious. Perhaps most important, their deaths were both the result of an acceptance of divine sovereignty and a form of active resistance against the revolutionaries. Martyrdom was thus both a calling and a responsibility that each woman would have to choose to answer.

6.1 Carmelites of Compiègne

No discussion of the victims of the Revolution would be complete without including the famous Carmelites of Compiègne, sixteen of whom were guillotined at la Place de la Nation in Paris on July 17, 1794. This was just ten days before the fall of Robespierre and the end of the Reign of Terror. Although their story has been told in plays, operas, films, novels, and monographs, I hope to put these women back into their historical context by recognizing their agency and identity formation. They achieved mythological status in nineteenth- and twentieth-century memory, particularly thanks to Pope Leo XIII, who declared the nuns Venerable, the first step towards canonization, in 1902. Just four years later, Pope Pius X beatified the nuns. However, they are still awaiting Sainthood, which did not materialize on the 200-year anniversary of their death in 1994, as many had hoped. However, their story captured the spotlight in the twentieth century. In 1931, the German convert to Catholicism, Baroness Gertrud von Le Fort, published a novella, Die Letzte am Schafott, which was in 1933 translated into English as The Song at the Scaffold.\textsuperscript{606} French Catholic playwright Georges Bernanos quickly adapted von le Fort’s novel for the stage; his script was published posthumously as

Dialogues des Carmélites in 1949. François Poulenc adapted Bernanos’s play into an opera, which was first performed in Paris in 1957. This opera has received widespread fame and acclaim and has been staged at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City for the past few years. However, these pieces are, after all, literature and contain many fictional elements. Blanche la Force, the protagonist, was an invented character. The historical account of martyrdom was nothing more than a backdrop for a fictional story. However, these fictions have shaped the popular imagination of not just the Carmelite martyrs but the whole narrative of martyrdom in the French Revolution.

Much of the research on these nuns has been conducted by Catholic scholars who have been strong advocates for Carmelite sainthood. Perhaps the most useful French history is Father Bruno de Jésus-Marie’s Le Sang du Carmel, published in 1954. Father Bruno was a scholar of the Carmelite order in France and devoted nearly 20 years of research to his book on the Carmelites. It contains excerpts from important documents such as Marie de l’Incarnation’s manuscripts and the official documents preserved in the French National Archives. Marie was a member of the Carmelites of Compiègne who was not present at the time of the arrest, and therefore, escaped martyrdom. Decades later, she wrote her account of their martyrdom based on her own recollections and

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contemporary sources. Bruno also studied at Stanbrook Abbey in England, where manuscripts from seventeen Benedictines, who were imprisoned with the Carmelite martyrs, preserved written accounts of the Carmelites’ imprisonment. William Bush, an Orthodox Christian and Professor Emeritus of Literature at the University of Western Ontario has written an English account of the Carmelite martyrs, *To Quell the Terror: The True Story of the Carmelite Martyrs of Compiègne*, and also published a critical edition of Marie de l’Incarnation’s account, *La relation de martyre des seize Carmélites de Compiègne*. The final Catholic scholar who has written on these nuns was Newkirk Terrye, a member of the order of discalced Carmelites, who wrote *The Mantle of Elijah: The Martyrs of Compiègne as Prophets of the Modern Age*, which lauded these nuns as Catholic prophets. The problem with these accounts is the absolute devotion and emotion these men feel for the nuns. Father Bruno dwelt on Mother Thérèse de Saint Augustin’s reactions so much that he imagined himself in her place. These Catholic scholars were also very devoted to shepherding the Carmelites’ path to sainthood. In trying to uncover the miraculous and other-worldly piety of the Carmelite martyrs, their accounts read more like hagiography than history. Bruno and his work at Stanbrook Abbey was the center for the beatification of these women in 1906.

This chapter hopes to demythologize these women, place them in the historical context in which they lived, and to demonstrate that their martyrdom should not be understood as a part of a widespread massacre of Catholic religious women. While Bush

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emphasized that “thousands of Christians perished” during the Revolution, he neglects to mention the fact that only a small fraction of the 25,000 to 30,000 nuns in France actually faced death.\textsuperscript{615} In fact, men were persecuted much more often than women during this period.\textsuperscript{616} After the Carmelites were called to martyrdom, they had to make deliberate efforts to attain that goal. In understanding their path to martyrdom as a path to a new identity and the solidification of their identity in God, we can better understand the choices they made and the Revolutionaries’ decision under Robespierre to seek execution for these nuns.

The Carmelites of Compiègne were a tightly cloistered order 90 kilometers northeast of Paris. On August 4\textsuperscript{th} and 5\textsuperscript{th} of 1790, the National Assembly sent a representative to the convent to begin creating an inventory of the people and material possessions. Directors interviewed each nun separately to make sure she was aware of her new right to leave the convent if she so wished.\textsuperscript{617} None of the Carmelites of chose to leave. Every nun, other than the illiterate lay sisters, signed her name, and affirmed her intent to live and die in the cloister. By 1790, when this account was received, their house had twenty members. Two were externs, three were lay sisters, and the remaining nuns were choir sisters.\textsuperscript{618} (see Figure 4.1) Unlike many of the nuns discussed in the previous chapter who took the opportunity to describe the purpose and object of their house to show how amenable they were to the Revolution, the Carmelites took this moment to

\textsuperscript{615} Bush, \textit{To Quell the Terror}, 2.

\textsuperscript{616} In the September 1792 massacres, priests who had not fled France were imprisoned. As fear grew that France was losing the war because there were enemies on the inside, riots broke out. Mobs stormed the prisons and executed the “traitors” inside. Men also were responsible for marrying or leaving. It was the man who was held more responsible for swaying the weaker sex.

\textsuperscript{617} Bush, \textit{To Quell the Terror}, 83.

\textsuperscript{618} AN, D XIX, 8, 127.
reassert their commitment to the cloistered religious life. Thérèse de Saint Augustine, or Lidoine, one of the choir nuns, wrote, “The immediate end of the Institutes of Carmel is to solicit perpetually before God the exaltation of the Church, the preservation of the King, the prosperity of the State, the conversion of heretics and sinners: prayer, retreat (from the world) and silence and all the other religious exercises practiced with fervor, are the means used by those who dedicate themselves to God in this order. Our house contains twenty nuns, all perfectly happy in their holy state…” The Carmelites of Compiègne thus affirmed a very traditional understanding of their value to France, one in keeping with the penitential mission of their order. As a firmly cloistered order, any contribution to the world would have to be made from within the convent walls. In reaffirming their commitment to the monarchy and their spiritual rigor, they demonstrated a reluctance to alter their practice of the faith or to embrace a utilitarian understanding of the role of religious women in French society. The Carmelites of Compiègne, at this early stage, had no desire to sacrifice any part of their religious identity. The nuns did not, however, indicate that they did not want to be servants to a secular France; in fact, they affirmed their conviction that their commitment to the Catholic faith and their shared identity as Carmelites served a spiritual purpose that benefitted the kingdom.

619 Her seculars name is Lidoine. Their criminal records will record only their secular names, from this point forward I will be using her secular name for concision and consistency.

Maintaining this commitment to their unadulterated religious life became increasingly difficult. On October 16, 1790, all the nuns in France were issued a pension since they could no longer collect donations and because their property had been nationalized. They were also informed that by January of 1791 they would have to have a free election of their mother superior that would be supervised by a municipal officer. The Carmelites unanimously re-elected their Mother Superior, Mother Thérèse Lidoine. Mother Croissy, the prioress, although very ill, was elected the bursar, thereby maintaining her status.\textsuperscript{621} However, they still could not collect their pensions until they had submitted a full accounting of their property to the government officials. They only received their first payment in August 1791, which meant an entire year had passed without the convent having any source of income. This income was short-lived because their pensions were again under threat when, in November of 1791, the National Assembly decided that the nuns would have to swear the oath to the state and accept the constitutional clergy in order to receive their pensions, a law which Louis XVI later vetoed in December.\textsuperscript{622} (This veto led to the King being labeled as a tyrant by the revolutionaries. Combined with the impact of his earlier attempt to flee June 20, 1791, faith in the monarchy was shattered.)

Trouble for the Carmelites intensified on April 6, 1792, when they were no longer permitted to appear in public wearing their religious habits. In another blow, this decree was passed on Good Friday, as the nuns were preparing for their most important religious holiday, Easter. Easter of 1792 was the last religious holiday that the Carmelite nuns of

\textsuperscript{621} Bush, \textit{To Quell the Terror}, 86.
\textsuperscript{622} Bush, \textit{To Quell the Terror}, 87.
Compiègne would celebrate in their convent. At this Easter Mass, Mother Lidoine presented the sisters with her suggestion that they had been called to “follow the lamb” and sacrifice their lives as a propitiation for French sins.623 Drawing a parallel to the sacrifice Jesus endured on the cross for their salvation, she believed her convent could offer themselves as martyrs to save France from this suffering. It was during this period that Marie de l’Incarnation claimed the mother prioress composed a hymn foretelling her expected fate. We have no certainty that this hymn was composed by the mother prioress, or that it was actually composed in April of 1792, even though Marie de l’Incarnation argued that it was, so we should consider the dating with some skepticism. We do know that the Carmelites took actions, as early as 1792, to resist the Revolution’s efforts to disband them, to follow in the footsteps of martyrs, and to eventually be united with God in heaven.

Down here our lot
Is the cross and adversity;
But we earn as recompense
a happy eternity:
Still exiled from heaven
We throw sighs at it:
And our consoled souls
Taste her divine pleasures

Oh! Zion, the holy city
When will come the moment
To experience in your enclosure
Heavenly enchantment?
Too desirable existence
Alas! To get to You
We must constantly
Work, love, suffer

Let’s arm ourselves with courage
Like brave soldiers
The great king who hires us
Has braved many fights.
How many heroes follow Him:
There are thousands of them
In their footsteps, let's fly fast
To share their laurels

« Ici-bas notre partage
Est la croix, l’adversité ;
Mais elles nous sont le gage
D’une heureuse éternité :
Du ciel encore exilées
Nous y lançons de soupirs :
Et nos âmes consolées

623 Bush, To Quell the Terror, 88. While Bush sees this instance as the fulfillment of a dream-like prophecy from the turn of the seventeenth into the eighteenth century, I am not convinced that the nuns quite saw themselves this way. I do not see evidence from their hand that they were fulfilling the prophecy this early. After the fact, Marie de L’Incarnation certainly emphasized their religious calling to martyrdom but this may have been a post-execution connection.
On August 5, 1792, the National Assembly ordered all the convents in France to close and mandated an inspection of their inventories from the two previous years. The mother superior reacted to the final suppression of her convent by composing some verses to send to the representative who gave the fatal decree. Writing poetry seems to have been one of the Carmelites' favorite ways to express their commitment and religious sentiment. The first two stanzas express her indignation:

How false are the judgments
That the world holds of us!
Its deep ignorance
Blames our commitments:
Everything it honors
Is only pure vanity:
It really has nothing
But the sorrows it devours

I despise its pride,
I am honored by its hatred;
And I prefer my chain
To its false freedom.
Day of an eternal feast
Forever solemn day,
When in dedicating myself to Carmel
I was conquered by God!

Il n’a de réalité
Que les chargrins qu’il dévore

Je mépris sa fierté,
Je m’honore de sa haine ;
Et je préfère ma chaine
À sa fausse liberté.
Jour d’une éternelle fête
Jour à jamais solonnel,
Où me vouant au carmel
De Dieu je fus la conquête ! »

625 Marie de L’Incarnation, *La Relation du Martyre*,
Manuscrit I, 101.
Here we see that the mother superior resented the ignorance and the vanity with which the revolutionaries dissolved the convents. The Carmelites were not helpless victims, but it was only through their religious vocation that they found comfort, salvation, and a “freedom” from sin. She seemed to understand the revolutionaries' intention to give them freedom, but she called this freedom a false one. She preferred the freedom from sin that was offered only through religious life. She welcomed the hatred during this life, because she has already been won by God for eternal salvation.

All of the furnishings and possessions of the Carmelites were seized on September 12. Their final departure from the convent occurred two days later, because the nuns were delayed by the necessity of finding housing and civilian clothes on such short notice. In fact, they even petitioned the government on September 18 for funds to procure civilian clothing since all of their possessions had been confiscated.

From September 14, 1792 (the date of their departure from the convent) to June 22, 1794 (the date of their arrests), these women tried to maintain as much of their religious life as possible despite being barred from their convent. They resided in four separate groups or associations (see Table 6.1) that lived together in a smaller version of their monastic lifestyle. However, the departure of their chaplain was a major setback for maintaining their previous way of life. Three months after their expulsion, the refractory clergyman who had been performing their daily masses was denounced and deported.

626 Bush, To Quell the Terror, 89.
627 Bush, To Quell the Terror, 98.
Maintaining relationships with refractory clergy proved dangerous and earned them the label of enemies of the people. By the beginning of 1793, they still had not received any clothes to be able to leave their apartments, and they lost the comfort they had once found in hearing the mass and maintaining their religious patterns. In the twenty-two months of exile, two died, and three of their number were saved from martyrdom and escaped. One of the nuns preserved from martyrdom was Marie de l’Incarnation, whose narrative is one of the best sources we possess of the Carmelites’ last years.

Table 6.1 Division of Nuns into Four Groups After Dissolution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Widow Saiget’s House*</th>
<th>Monsieur de la Valée</th>
<th>Inn #1 (later combined with Inn #2)</th>
<th>Inn#2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother Lidoine</td>
<td>Subprioress Brideau</td>
<td>Choir, Croissy (dying)</td>
<td>Choir, Trezel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choir, Thouret</td>
<td>Extern, Soiron</td>
<td>Infirmarian, Pelras</td>
<td>Lay sister, Roussel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choir, Piedcourt</td>
<td>Choir, Hanisser</td>
<td>Lay sister, Vérolot</td>
<td>Choir, Jordain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choir, Brard</td>
<td>Choir, Crétiens de Neuville</td>
<td>Novice, Meunier</td>
<td>Choir, Legros</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippe, or Marie de l’Incarnation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Two lay sisters, Dufour and Soiron, served all four houses but slept with Widow Saiget

Shortly after their expulsion, Mother Thérèse de Saint-Augustin (Lidoine) asked the nuns to reaffirm their vows and to consecrate their lives as victims of the Revolution.629 As soon as they were expelled from their convent, their mother superior cleared the way for a new vocation: martyrdom. We know that by Christmas of 1792,

Lidoine, the Mother Superior, composed a hymn, with a second stanza that ended with the phrases, “Here I sacrifice my own views and desires. In your heart, I want to be enclosed. For your love’s sake, I accept martyrdom.”\textsuperscript{630} Just a month after losing the enclosure of their cloister, Lidoine turned to her spiritual identity in Christ to give her community comfort. The loss of their convent did not matter if they were not long for this world and were longing for their eternal home in heaven. If the intended goal of her convent was not clear enough, the third stanza helps illuminate her feelings towards martyrdom before they were even arrested, and nearly two years before they would be martyred:

\begin{quote}
Ah! My hopes are founded on death
For I die of being unable to die.
And Hasten Lord, hasten my deliverance!
Cut these bonds, fulfill my longing!
Immolate your victim as you will!
Your divine blows are sacred to me!
If I die beneath your hand, it is my happiness.
To my heart, your demands are but an attraction!\textsuperscript{631}
\end{quote}

Lidoine’s verses suggest that the nuns had begun to interpret their experiences during the Revolution as religious persecution that called them to respond as the early Christians had. Their call to martyrdom paralleled their call to their first vocation. Just as certain women must be called to the cloister by God for a holy and set apart life, these women

\textsuperscript{630} This hymn was found in 1985 among the possessions of Philippe (Marie de l’Incarnation). It is believed to have been written by Lidoine for Christmas of 1792. Cited in William Bush, \textit{J’accepte el martyre: la spiritualité mystique de Madame Lidoine} (Compiègne: Carmel of Compiègne, 1991). And Translated into English by Terrye Newkirk. Terrye Newkirk, \textit{The Mantle of Elijah: The Martyrs of Compiègne: As Prophets of the Modern Age} (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies Publications, 1995), 44.

\textsuperscript{631} Lidoine, “Christmas Hymn by Sr. Teresa of St. Augustine,” translated in Newkirk, \textit{The Mantle of Elijah}, 44.
were called to the honorable title of martyr. Furthermore, they could feel a vocation without having any attraction to it. So, if even God called them to die as a martyr, this did not imply they desired death. Indeed, some of the sisters were fearful or resistant to the call, but every single one of them dutifully lined up before the guillotine— singing hymns and praying— when the time came for their final sacrifice. Mother Lidoine longed for death because it was a deliverance from suffering. Therefore, as for the other martyrs in this chapter, death could be a kindness. It offered a certainty for the future when many others had none.

Yet, despite their clear religious calling, the Carmelites still took actions to pursue martyrdom. They had to choose to be martyrs. When the mother superior was asked by the two septuagenarians, “with fear and sadness,” whether she thought they would be guillotined, she responded, “My sisters… I do not know the fate that awaits us; but I hope that God will give us grace to make the sacrifice of our lives, I do not pretend to make any of you obligated to complete this act of consecration [when they dedicated their lives to martyrdom] and do not believe that I am, in the least, scandalized or saddened to see you refuse to do so.”632 This claim that the mother superior would not fault her sisters for refusing to take up their call to martyrdom tells us a great deal about their own agency to resist their “calling.” The morning after this exchange, both women apologized for their weakness and reaffirmed their readiness to take the act of consecration.

632 « Je ne sais le sort qui nous attend ; mais quoique j’espère que Dieu nous donnerait grâce pour lui faire le sacrifice de notre vie, je ne prétends pas faire une obligation à aucune des vous de réciter cet acte et ne croyez pas que je sois le moins du monde mal édifiée ou peinée de vous voir vous refuser à le faire. » Marie de l’Incarnation, La Relation du Martyre, Manuscrit I, 82.
One such moment of fear and resistance was recorded in 1793 by Marie de L’Incarnation. When asked about the future of the convent in light of the dark prognostication about martyrdom, the mother superior responded to one of the novices, “‘Death, my dear child? … Ah! What a grace it would be for me if Heaven ever found me worthy of shedding my blood for the cause of our holy religion. Is there anything in the world that we can desire more happily than dying in the bosom of God?’”633 To make the point more clearly, Marie de l’Incarnation ended the paragraph by saying, “The day of her martyrdom was indeed for her a day of triumph and glory.”634 The Carmelites were, therefore, preparing to be martyred for years. Carmelites embraced suffering as an opportunity to emulate the suffering of Christ. Historian Caroline Walker Bynum has argued that in the late Medieval period, women were more likely than men to use “their ordinary experiences (of powerlessness, of service and nurturing, of disease, etc.) […] And both men and women saw female saints as models of suffering and inner spirituality, male saints as models of action.”635 Stories of the Carmelite martyrdom, thus, followed the established narrative of the female model of sainthood that emphasized everyday practices of piety and sacrifice. By identifying as martyrs, they transformed their deaths from acts of counter-revolution or resistance into acts of glorious and courageous

633 « La mort, ma chère enfant ? … Ah ! quelle grâce ce serait pour moi si le Ciel me trouvait jamais digne de répandre mon sang pour la cause de notre sainte religion. Est-il rien au monde que nous puissions envier de plus heureux que de mourir dans le sein de Dieu ? » Marie de L’Incarnation, La Relation du Martyre, Manuscrit I, 104.

634 « Le jour de son martyr fut en effet pour elle un jour de triomphe et de gloire. » Marie de L’Incarnation, La Relation du Martyre, Manuscrit I, 105.

sacrifice. “Martyr” was an identity they actively pursued for years before their final death sentence. The stories later told about them emphasized their powerlessness, but the reality involved much more activity than was appropriate for female saints.

To fully understand the Carmelites of Compiègne, we must analyze the crime for which they were executed. Since the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen assured religious toleration and the free practice of religion, the nuns certainly could not be executed for practicing their religion without the revolutionaries grossly violating their foundational principles. The public prosecutor Antoine Quentin Fouquier-Tinville recorded that they were officially charged with conspiring against the Republic. Marie de l’Incarnation reported that the charges “accused them of holding nocturnal meetings, of being in correspondence with the emigrants, including the famous sectarian Théot, who called herself the mother of God; and of having concealed the mantles of the crown.” Of these specific accusations, we can be sure that nearly all of them were true, with perhaps the exception of the accusation about Théot. The Carmelites certainly met in the night to say the divine office. We know they were in correspondence with émigré priests, and we also know they had a close connection to the crown because of their close relationship with Louis XV’s daughter, Marie Louise, who escaped from Versailles and

637 Cathérine Théot, the so-called “mother of God,” gathered a small circle of followers around her in Paris and was accused of being involved with the counterrevolution. Jeremy Popkin, A New World Begins: The History of the French Revolution (New York: Basic Books, 2019), 409.
638 « Le procès-verbal les accusa de tenir des conciliabules nocturnes, d’être en correspondance avec les émigrés, et avec cette trop fameuse sectaire Théot qui se faisait appeler la mère de Dieu ; d’avoir recelé les manteaux de la couronne. » Marie de l’ Incarnation, La Relation du Martyre, Manuscrit I.
was determined to join the Carmelites. While her first choice was to join the Carmelites of Compiègne, she found her way to the Carmelites of Saint-Denis because her father explicitly forbade her from entering the convent at Compiègne. The Compiègne Carmelites nonetheless benefitted enormously from royal patronage when Marie Louise entered the congregation at Saint-Denis. The convent possessed numerous tokens from the monarch and letters from the former princess at the time of their arrest. The connection between the convent and the monarchy was no secret but came to be interpreted as anti-Republican conspiracy by public officials.

While these nuns considered themselves servants of France, we must consider whether their religious belief was political. Were they serving God’s Kingdom or the French Republic? In fact, their 1792 act of consecration suggested that they would offer their lives as a holocaust, or sacrifice, to God “so that peace may be restored to church and state.” They felt that their lives were committed to serving both. This raises broader questions about the relationship between religion and state. Was the practice of religion able to be separated from political loyalties during the Revolution? State and religion had been completely intertwined under the monarchy. In the Vendée, the counterrevolutionaries called themselves the “Catholic and Royal Army.” The French King was called “His Most Christian Majesty” in official publications. Louis XIV had

639 Bush, *To Quell the Terror*, 29-30
640 Bush, *To Quell the Terror*, 38. It was in fact Marie Louise who directed Marie Madeleine Claudine Lidoine to the Carmelites of Compiègne. Therefore, Bush goes so far as to call her the “true mother of the martyrdom of Compiègne.”
established that in France, there was “One King, One Faith, One Law.”643 Was there such a thing as a Republican Christianity? Can you have a Republic that ruled with divine authority? Or was Christianity itself a monarchical religion with “one king” or “one Lord?” By the time of the Reign of Terror, Christianity had become incompatible with the revolutionary principles of liberty and equality. So, much like the monarchy, the Catholic Church hierarchy had to be brought under French Revolutionary control. Earlier attempts to preserve the monarchy as a constitutional monarchy had failed; therefore, attempts to compromise with religion also had to be abandoned. By September of 1793, payments to the constitutional clergy and bishops were cut off. Religion was political in 1794, and perhaps always is.

Complicating this strict division between politics and religion was the curious account of Sister Marie Henriette Antoinette’s dialogue with the public prosecutor, Fouquier Tinville, when she appeared before the tribunal. She did not quite understand the charges that they were traitors and counterrevolutionaries and asked for a clarification. It was then that Fouquier Tinville said: “Since you want to know, learn that it is because of your attachment to your religion and to the king.”644 So even the revolutionaries knew that they were executing these women for their faith and their politics. This was indeed a gift for the nuns, because it affirmed that they were dying for their faith. Sister Marie Henriette Antoinette then joyfully turned to her sisters and said,


644 “Puisque tu veux le savoir, apprends que c’est à cause de ton attachement à ton religion et au roi.” Marie de L’Incarnation, La Relation du Martyre, Manuscrit I, 95.
“My dear mother and my sisters: Let us congratulate ourselves, let us rejoice in the joy of the Lord that we will die for the cause of our holy religion, our faith, and our confidence in the holy Catholic and Roman Church.”

They could die happily knowing that they were martyrs, not rebels, traitors, counter-revolutionaries, spies, or criminals. To the revolutionaries, they remained ultimately political criminals and enemies of the Revolution, but the nuns understood themselves as witnesses of the faith.

While it was true that these women refused to swear oaths to liberty and equality, they were certainly not the only nuns to refuse. As seen in the previous chapter, Gabrielle Gauchat refused the oath as well, but she was not executed. Therefore, these nuns had to perform some additional counter-revolutionary activities. In the official accusation drawn up by the committee, there was plenty of evidence of “conspiring against the Revolution” to be used against the Carmelites. When the revolutionary authorities raided their dwellings, they found “the portrait of [Louis] Capet,” which was the name they gave to Louis XVI to strip him of any titles before he was executed. The nuns also had other documents from the executed king, which the Public Prosecutor described as “fanatical and childish objects.”

They also found the sacred heart of the Vendée, a symbol used by the counter-revolutionaries. This counter-revolutionary symbol betrayed their loyalties to the king and their religion. Lastly, they found correspondence from foreign priests or religious leaders who supported the revolution, providing evidence of their political and religious affiliations.

645 « Ma chère mère et mes sœurs : Félicitons-nous, réjouissons-nous dans la joie du Seigneur de ce que nous mourrons pour la cause de notre sainte religion, notre foi, notre confiance en la sainte Église catholique et romain… » Marie de L’Incarnation, La Relation du Martyre, Manuscrit I, 95.

646 Bruno, Le Sang du Carmel, 434-435.
priests who had emigrated, which meant that these women were writing to religious people outside of France.647

One of the most damning pieces of evidence was a fourteen-stanza hymn found with the nuns called the “Canticle to the Sacred Heart of Jesus,” which was later cited in the trial. The thirteenth stanza was the one with the most important pieces of evidence of counterrevolutionary sentiment: “I see the wicked grow pale./France will regain its peace./ Its King will be free and its people happy.”648 The revolutionaries, undoubtedly, would have interpreted the “wicked growing pale” as a threat against them. This verse indicates that the enemies of the monarch, or the republican government that imprisoned the king, would someday pay for their revolutionary actions. While the revolutionaries might have also hoped for peace in France, they could not stomach any option for peace that included going back to the despotic and superstitious tyranny of the French monarchy. By 1794, when the Carmelites were arrested, the King was dead, the Convention had taken France to the limits of republicanism, and these words were considered proof of a plot against the French Republic.

From the beginning of her manuscripts about the Carmelites’ martyrdom, Marie de l’Incarnation was careful to emphasize that the call to martyrdom came through the dreams and visions of Mother Thérèse de Saint Augustin, or Lidoine. By highlighting the mystic experiences granted to their leader, Marie sought to insulate the Carmelites from charges they acted for self-aggrandizement and to portray their deaths as a sacrifice, or

648 AN, W 421, Dossier 956, 100.
holocaust, intended for the benefit of both the Church and France. Marie described the nuns’ martyrdom as “The community offering [a holocaust for] the cessation of the evils which were desolating the church and our unhappy kingdom.”649 Their final act on this earth would be one for both the church and the kingdom. It would serve as both a political and a religious act. Any attempt to isolate their identities in a purely political or purely religious understanding would deny them their own voice, which continually asserted that they served both God and the kingdom. This was how they could be called both counterrevolutionaries and martyrs.

On July 13, 1794, the Carmelite nuns received their judgment: they would be executed on the seventeenth of July after spending the next four nights in the Conciergerie, the same prison which held Marie-Antionette before her execution. Marie de l’Incarnation’s description of their final verdict merits quoting at length. She wrote that the final judgment charged that

1) They had hidden in their monastery weapons for the émigrés. 2) That they put over the holy sacrament [the Eucharist], when they exposed it, a pavilion [Umbraculum] which had the form of a royal symbol [possibly the fleur de lis] 3) That they engaged in correspondence with émigrés and that they gave them money; and that having declared them enemies of the people by conspiring against its sovereignty by maintaining communication with the enemies of the Republic, by conspiring within France, preserving liberticidal writings (that is to say religious or monarchical), calling them fanatics, etc., pronouncing against them the death sentence ... that they all heard with joy painted on their faces ...


650 « 1) Qu’elles avaient caché dans leur monastère des armes pour les émigrés. 2) Qu’elles mettaient au saint sacrement, lorsqu’elles le faisaient exposer, un pavillon qui avait la forme d’un manteau royal. 3) Qu’elles avaient des correspondances avec les émigrés et qu’elles leur faisaient passer de l’argent ; et que s’étant déclarées les ennemies du peuple en conspirant contre sa souveraineté en entretenant des intelligences avec les ennemis de la République, en conspirant dans l’intérieur de France, en conservant des écrits liberticides (c’est-à-dire religieux ou monarchiques), les traitant...”
First, Marie wrote that the Compiègne Carmelites were accused of harboring arms to be used by the émigrés. None of the official documentation carried this charge. We know that the community had symbols of the Vendée uprising, but none of the government documentation says the nuns were harboring weapons. It would also have been unlikely for religious women to have weapons in their residence because it was barred by the rules of their religion. Perhaps Marie included this detail to argue the accusations against the nuns were exaggerated and to thereby suggest the judgment had been illegitimate. The goal of Marie de l’Incarnation’s manuscripts was to paint a picture of these nuns as victims of revolutionary cruelty and excess, but also as sinless and worthy of sainthood. Therefore, it would be better press for them to have died for false charges than if they were justly punished for actions that were bound to be interpreted as counter-revolutionary in the context of the time. Second, we would be remiss not to notice that despite not being present, Marie was confident that all the nuns reacted with “joy on their faces” when the pronouncement was read. This again may have been a strategy employed to help perpetuate the reputation of these martyrs happily receiving news that they had achieved their new vocation: martyrdom.

Marie also included details about the mother superior’s public and verbal response to each of the accusations, despite not being present for the proceedings. While in the courtroom, Lidoine had a response to each of the charges against her convent. To

\[\text{de fanatiques, etc., prononçant contre elles sentence de mort… qu’elles entendirent toutes avec la joie peinte sur leur visage.} \]


the charge that they hid weapons to aid the émigrés in their monastery, the Mother Superior held up the crucifix she wore around her neck and said: “There they are, she said to them, the only weapons we have ever had in our house, and it will not be proven that we have ever had others.”\textsuperscript{652} To the charge that she exposed the sacrament with the \textit{umbraculum} bearing the royal symbol, she said, “its shape had nothing that was not common to the ornaments of this type of object: it is far from having anything to do with the conspiracy, and I don’t know anyone who seriously wants to make it a crime.”\textsuperscript{653} She further defended herself against the charge that they were in correspondence with the émigrés and that she passed them money, by saying the letters in question were to her deported chaplain, and “if this correspondence is a crime in your eyes, this crime concerns only me. It cannot be the crime of my community to whom the rule forbids all correspondence, even with the closest relatives, without the permission of the superior. So, if you need a victim, here it is: I am the only one you should punish. My sisters are innocent.”\textsuperscript{654} In offering a rebuttal to the political charges against them, Lidoine wanted stake their claim to martyrdom more firmly. She took all the blame for this charge, perhaps hoping that she could die to spare her sisters. However, she was also the one who

\textsuperscript{652} «Voilà, leur dit-elle, les seules armes que nous ayons jamais eues dans notre maison, et l’on ne prouvera point que nous ayons jamais eues d’autres. » Marie de L’Incarnation, \textit{La Relation du Martyre}, Manuscrit I, 88.

\textsuperscript{653} « Sa forme n’avait rien qui ne fût commun aux ornements de cette espèce : il est bien loin d’avoir aucun rapport avec le projet de conspiration dans lequel on veut nous impliquer à cause de ce pavillon ; et je ne connais pas qu’on veuille sérieusement nous en faire un crime. » Marie de L’Incarnation, \textit{La Relation du Martyre}, Manuscrit I, 88.

\textsuperscript{654} « si cette correspondance est un crime à vos yeux, ce crime ne regarde que moi. Il ne peut être le crime de ma communauté à qui la règle défend toute correspondance, même avec les plus proches parents, sans la permission de la supérieure. Si donc il vous faut une victime, la voici : c’est moi seule que vous devez frapper. Mes sœurs dont innocentes. » Marie de L’Incarnation, \textit{La Relation du Martyre}, Manuscrit I, 89.
claimed that God had ordained for the entire community to die together. This again indicated the interplay between God’s sovereignty over their destiny and their own agency in acting according to their own will.

Complementing the “joy” on their faces as their fate was read, Marie de l’Incarnation further elaborated on the sisters’ demeanor when ascending to their fate. She wrote, “They went up there singing out-loud the Miserere, which they sang in its entirety, the Salve Regina, then arrived at the foot of the scaffold, after they had sung the Veni Creator and the Te Deum…” 655 From this point on, Marie does not include many of the details about the execution besides remarking on a request by the mother prioress: “the mother prioress asked for the grace to be sacrificed last in order to be able to encourage her daughters to renew to God the sacrifice of their life, and to die with joy.” 656 Her account of martyrdom maintained some level of theatricality and performance, but there was very likely a real emotion and concern for the Carmelite nuns that she was responsible for guiding into heaven. We must not forget that Marie was not present for their execution, and her diary entry from this section was based on secondhand accounts.

Marie also emphasized that dying together on the scaffold repaired the integrity of the Compiègne Carmelite community. During the period of uncertainty and turmoil since

655 « Elles y montèrent en entonnant à haute voix la Misère, qu’elles chantèrent en entier, le Salve Regina, puis arrivées au pied de l’échafaud, après qu’elles eurent chanté le Veni Creator et le Te Deum,… » Marie de L’Incarnation, La Relation du Martyre, Manuscrit I, 92.

656 « … la mère prieure demanda en grâce de n’être immolées que la dernière afin de pouvoir encourager ses filles à renouveler Dieu le sacrifice de leur vie, et à mourir avec joie. » Marie de L’Incarnation, La Relation du Martyre, Manuscrit I, 92.
the community’s expulsion from their house, the sisters were separated from each other and from their confessors, and therefore, from the patterns of living which they had accustomed themselves. If the goal of monastic living was to assure one’s relationship with their God and their salvation, then martyrdom was a shortcut to union with God. Through martyrdom, the sisters sought to be reunited with each other and, more importantly, with their God. This was evident in their continual assertions about martyrdom: “Our mothers asked, Would heaven reserve the glory of martyrdom for us? ... What! ... All in one day! ... Oh! what happiness if we could find ourselves all together!”657 All three of the lay sisters were martyred, ten out of the fifteen choir sisters became martyrs, three were “destined” not to be martyred, and two died before 1794.658 Martyrdom, for the Carmelites, was a great privilege. They hoped to be united in death, despite their physical dispersal.

Marie’s goal in writing her manuscripts was always to achieve sainthood for her sisters. In building the case for martyrdom, she took great pains to explain or refute challenges to her sisters’ spotless record. Therefore, we must not see the several problems with Marie de l’Incarnation’s account as invalidating the story, but as important plot points in the narrative of martyrdom she needed to construct. She recorded her memory of the events of the Terror nearly forty years after the event occurred. Furthermore, she

658 Bush, *To Quell the Terror*, 84.
was over seventy years old at the time. Memories recorded under the extreme stress and trauma of the Revolution would be difficult to recall accurately.659

The first inconsistency in Marie de l’Incarnation’s account was her insistence that her sisters were tricked by the mayor of Compiègne into signing the oath to liberty and equality months after the convent had been disbanded.660 When Marie de l’Incarnation returned to Compiègne after their martyrdom, one of the first things that she did was to set right the name of her sisters as good Catholics who would never have agreed to the oath. She did this by renouncing her claim to a pension, and then appearing before the municipal officer saying,

My virtuous and holy companions who have had the happiness of expiating with their blood the stain of the oath. It’s good to say, however, that you had the signature extorted from them. I, whom Heaven has not deemed worthy of being associated with their glorious death, if I have been withdrawn from the justice of men, I will not be so from the justice of God. I, therefore, come before Heaven and earth to retract the said oath of Liberty-Equality, as entirely contrary or opposed to the principles of our Mother, the Holy Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman Church. I, therefore, request that my withdrawal be entered in your registers and that an act not be issued.661

659 Pierre Nora, « Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire, » Representations 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter Memory (1989), 7-24. Although the focus of this paper is not on the memory of the Carmelite Martyrs, it is important for us to understand how memories work and how historians can and should use memories.
660 Marie de L’Incarnation, Manuscrit II, 180. And Manuscrit III, 200-201.
661 « Mes vertueuses et saintes compagnes qui one eu le bonheur d’expier par leur sang la tache du serment. Qu’il est bon cependant de dire que vous leur aviez extorqué la signature. Moi que le Ciel n’a pas jugée digne d’être associée à leur glorieuse mort, si j’ai été soustraite à la justice des hommes, je ne le serai pas à la justice de Dieu. Je viens donc à la face de Ciel et de la terre rétracter le dit serment de Liberté-Égalité, comme entièrement contraire ou opposé aux principes de notre Mère, la sainte Église catholique, apostolique et romaine. Je demande en conséquence que ma rétraction soit inscrite sur vos registres, et qu’acte n’en soit délivré. »
Marie wanted to eliminate her own association with the oath, reassert the nuns’ untarnished names by claiming that they would never sign the oath. She was one of the first to work to establish the new identity of martyr for the nuns in Compiègne. In reality, the revolutionaries did not have the nuns sign a blank piece of paper as Marie professed; the evidence reprinted in Father Bruno’s book affirms that the paper already had the oath written on it before the sisters signed it. It was also signed just five days after the dissolution, on September 19, 1792, and not months later, as she insisted.

Marie de l’Incarnation often talks about one house, to refer to the four dwelling places situated in various sections of Compiègne.\textsuperscript{662} It could also mean that she still believed they were one monastic house despite the circumstances of dissolution. She also confused the number of apartments that the congregation was divided into after dissolution.\textsuperscript{663} This may have been because the number of houses was in flux, especially after the departure of the nuns who escaped the Terror and the departure of Marie de l’Incarnation. Her account, nonetheless, remains the best source that we have for understanding these martyrs from their own perspective. She gives intimate details about life in the Carmelite convent and traveled to Compiègne after the Revolution to construct her narrative. In combining the official documents of the Carmelites’ martyrdom with her account, we can gain a picture of these nuns despite the problems with her narrative.

The Carmelites of Compiègne remain the most famous martyrs of the French Revolution; their dramatization in novels, plays, and operas has added to their fame and

\textsuperscript{663} Perhaps this is a reference to the fact that the four houses were consolidated into three after the departure of Philippe, Jordain, and Legros. Marie de L’Incarnation \textit{La relation du martyre} [finish]
mythology. The real women who went to the guillotine were, in some ways, more complicated than Blanche La Force, the main character in Poulenc’s *Dialogue des Carmelites*. Marie’s account makes a clear effort to tell the story of the Carmelites’ deaths in keeping with a martyrological tradition that acquired renewed meaning in the revolutionary era. She argued that in reasserting their identification with each other as sisters and strengthening their relationship with God, they found a sort of peace and unity in their future. They had a confidence that death was their escape from the Revolution, and the best chance they had to be united with God. They undoubtedly broke laws and resisted the revolutionaries’ efforts to disband them, but in doing so, they were following the rules of their order. Their resistance to the Revolution was motivated by their alleged obedience to a higher law. In deepening their religious identity, they hoped for the honorable identity of martyr and perhaps their final reunion with their maker. The picture below, from 1905, shows the Carmelites going to the guillotine in their religious habits while singing their religious songs. They performed their religious identities and followed the pattern of the early church martyrs. This image of nuns courageously resisting the revolutionaries’ efforts permeated the culture and helped to solidify their status before the novels or operas about their martyrdom.
6.2 Ursulines of Orange

How beneficent are those who have just condemned us! Our father and mother gave us only a life full of bitterness, a perishable life, and now our judges give us in return an eternal life, a life free from pain and sorrows, a delightful life!665

- Julie-Dorothée-Madeleine Justamont, Martyred in Orange


665 « ‘Qu’ils sont bienfaisans ceux qui viennent de nous condamner ! Nos père et mère ne nous ont donné qu’une vie pleine d’amertumes, une vie périsable ; et voilà que nos juges nous procurent en échange une vie éternelle, une vie exempte des peines et des chagrins, une vie délicieuse !’ » Guillon, Les Martyrs de la foi, Vol. 3, 379.
Perhaps less well known than the Carmelites of Compiègne, the Ursulines of Orange died just a few days before. Their story, although not the subject of novels, plays, and operas, was nonetheless very similar to that of the Carmelites. The Ursuline nuns who were arrested in 1794 did not give up their religious duties based on the requirements of the revolutionaries. Unlike the Carmelites, the Ursulines of Orange were not able to go to the guillotine together. They were executed over a few days. The majority of these nuns were from the Ursulines from Boulène (Bollène) just north of Orange in the South of France. However, after the dissolution of convents began, some of the houses were combined. Therefore, the Ursulines shared their experience of imprisonment and martyrdom with other local nuns, including a large number of Sacramentine, Bernardine, and Benedictine nuns. The convent of the Saint-Sacrament was also in Boulène. This title of martyrdom was used not only to unite their own convent as the Carmelites had done, but also to unite women from different convents in their new shared identity.

The story of these nuns, although similar to that of the Carmelites of Compiègne, differs in a few crucial ways. First, in the absence of plays, operas, and literature, there is less mythology with which historians have to compete. Second, while the Carmelites were an older, more contemplative order, the Ursulines had a more active role in teaching young girls as outlined in an earlier chapter. Therefore, they often had a closer relationship with their community. Third, instead of being isolated themselves after

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666 In the account of their Martyrdom it is recorded as Boulène, but the more common spelling is Bollène. I have used the spelling the Guillon uses.
dissolution, the Ursulines of Orange were combined with other houses, and therefore, were part of a larger community of nuns. While still trying to maintain their religious identity in the face of crisis, the convents adjusted their posture towards the outside world after dissolution. The Ursuline Convent, in this instance, did not look inward for sustenance after dissolution, but sought to broaden its identity and to embrace other sisters who were not part of their community and not always Ursulines. Unlike earlier in the Revolution, when the Ursuline convents tried to maintain their order by arguing for its public utility, at this stage of the Revolution, we see there was little possibility of compromise with the revolutionaries. The nuns’ utility did not matter if they were “counterrevolutionaries” or “fanatics.”

One of the oldest records of martyrs of the French Revolution is the four-volume, two-thousand-page series published by abbé Aimé Guillon in 1821. Guillon was born in Lyon on March 21, 1758 and died February 12, 1842. He was a French priest and man of letters who earned his doctorate in theology in 1780 and was ordained in 1782. After 1816 he became the curator of the Mazarine library, which allowed him to research and write such an in-depth history of the religious martyrs of the Revolution.\(^{667}\) Although this is not a contemporary source, Guillon used official documents. However, we must, nonetheless, approach the direct quotes with some level of suspicion. It was unlikely Guillon correctly recorded direct quotes because he does not always cite his sources, and it is unlikely that he remembered conversations exactly decades later. I will use these conversations to capture the sentiment of those speaking, more than the exact words these

\(^{667}\) The Mazarin Library is the oldest public library in France and is attached to the Institut de France.
women may have uttered. The basic background information and the circumstances of these nuns’ martyrdom remains reliable based on cross-references with the D XIX census documents.668

Guillon’s purpose in writing was to revive heroes of Catholicism, and to rewrite the story of the Revolution as ultimately a period of tyranny that was eventually defeated by Catholic devotion. His first volume is primarily devoted to comparing the persecution of the early church with the period of persecution between 1792 and 1794. According to Guillon, religious women were convicted of two main crimes: first, refusing to swear oaths to liberty and equality, and second, being counterrevolutionaries or fanatics. For example, the first two women to be executed from the Boulène convent were Marie-Anne Guilhermier (Sister Mélanie) and Marie-Anne de Rocher (Sister Agnes). It was significant to Guillon that these women, like their sisters, did not renounce their profession: “When the cloisters were abolished in 1791, Sister Guilhermier wanted no more than her companions to renounce her profession; and she began to live with them in community, in the practice of their holy rule.”669 They refused to swear any oaths of allegiance to liberty and equality and were condemned to death and executed (July 9, 1794). Gaillard lived with her sisters, practicing their vows illegally from the time of dissolution through their arrest in combined housing with other nuns. Consistent refusal

668 Due to monetary and time constraints, I did not do original archival research in the department archives. In the future I would like to supplement this section with more original research from the local archives.

669 « Quand les cloîtres furent abolis en 1791, la sœur Guilhermier ne voulut pas plus que ses compagnes renoncer à sa profession ; et elle se mit à vivre avec elles en communauté, dans la pratique de leur sainte règle. Elle y persévérerait comme ses sœurs avec une inviolable constance, lorsqu’au commencement du printemps de 1794 le proconsul Maignet les fit arrêter. » Guillon, Les Martyrs de la foi, Vol. 3, 258.
to submit to anticlerical revolutionary decrees constituted evidence of saintly conduct for Guillon.

It is noteworthy, therefore, that Guillon depicts sister Rocher taking a different path to the guillotine. She “thought she should, in spite of her love for monastic life, come to give care to her father, who was very old, and who, by the excellence of his Christian virtues, could only revive the holy dispositions of his daughter.”670 Therefore, she did not reside with her sisters in the cloister. When the department turned violent against religious men and women in 1794, Rocher “feared being kidnapped herself by the agents of the persecutors, and of being unable to continue her services to her octogenarian father.”671 They briefly considered finding an asylum to avoid the persecution when, according to Guillon, her father said, “My daughter… It would be easy for you to hide; but beforehand, examine carefully, before God, if, in doing so, you would not dismiss any designs that he may have on you, in the event that he intended you to be one of the victims who must appease his anger.” 672 He alluded to the biblical story of Mordecai, who pleaded with Esther to appear before the impulsive and somewhat violent king Ahashuerus to protect the Jews, despite the danger that it could pose to her life. The father allegedly quoted Mordechai saying, “It is not for you that you are on the throne,

670 « Après le abolition des cloitres, elle crut devoir, malgré son amour pour la vie monastique, venir rendre des soins à son père, très-âgé, et qui, par l’excellence de ses vertus chrétiennes, ne pouvait que ranimer les saintes dispositions de sa fille. » Guillon, Les Martyrs de la foi, Vol. 4, 502.
672 « … Il vous seroit facile de vous cacher ; mais auparavant, examinez bien, devant Dieu, si, par là, vous ne crouz écarterez pas des desseins adorables qu’il peut avoir sur vous, dans le cas où il vous aurioit destinée à être une des victimes qui doivent apaiser sa colère. » Guillon, Les Martyrs de la foi, Vol. 4, 502.
but for the salvation of the people.”673 Undoubtedly affected by these words and likely with Esther’s words echoing in her heart: “if I perish, I perish,” Rocher continued to frequent the chapel and wear her religious habit.674 She did not flee nor seek asylum, although her story clearly states that that was an option. Again, we see that religious calling was one aspect of martyrdom, but then the nuns themselves had to take actions that would spark the revolutionaries’ anger against them.

For these crimes, she was arrested at her father’s house and reunited with her religious sisters in prison. By this time, she was confident of her calling to martyrdom and knew her fate even before she appeared before the judges. She said to her sisters, “It will be tomorrow that I will have the honor of being condemned; I recommend myself to your prayers, and I beg you to forgive me for the bad examples that you have sometimes received from me, through my lukewarmness and my negligence.”675 Rocher’s story demonstrates the real choice that she had. She stood at a crossroads between going into hiding with her elderly and sick father or embracing martyrdom. She took up the identity of martyrdom wholeheartedly, but then, she had to take action to ensure that she would be guillotined. The “calling” to martyrdom was insufficient, and she had to embrace her new identity and work hard to achieve it.

673 « comme Mardochée disoit à Esther : Ce n’est pas pour vous que vous êtes sur le trône, mais pour le salut du people. » Guillon, Les Martyrs de la foi, Vol. 4, 503.
674 Esther 4:16 ESV, and « Elle continua de fréquenter les oratoires où elle avoit coutume de se rendre pour remplir ses devoirs religieux. » Guillon, Les Martyrs de la foi, Vol. 4, 503.
675 « Ce sera demain que j’aurais le honneur d’être condamnée ; je me recommande à vos prières, et je vous prie de me pardonner les mauvais exemples que vous avez quelquesfois reçu de moi, par ma tiédeur et ma négligence » Guillon, Les Martyrs de la foi, Vol. 4, 503.
The next Ursulines to make their way to the guillotine were Marie-Gertrude d’Alauzier (Sister Sophie) and Sylvie Agnès de Romillon (Sister Agnès de Jésus), who died just one day (July 10) after Rocher and Guilhemier. The nuns continued in their religious duties even after being arrested. In fact, they were even more fervent in their piety. To help us understand how d’Alauzier understood her death, Guillon claimed she had a sort of revelation. On July 5th, 1794, right after being sentenced to death, she wrote, “I am in a kind of ecstasy, and outside of myself, because I have the intimate persuasion that tomorrow I will see my God, and that I will die.” Unfortunately, Guillon does not tell us where he found these lines she wrote, so we may view their existence with some suspicion. The point of this entry was Guillon’s insistence that her joy was found in knowing she would be reunited with God. Similarly, Sylvie Agnès de Romillon was so impatient for martyrdom that she volunteered herself to appear before the tribunal every day. When the moment of death finally arrived, de Romillon allegedly kissed the guillotine. Guillon emphasized that the women embraced this new identity with “the courage of the ancient martyrs.”

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676 « Dans cet état de captivité, la sœur d’Alauzier continuait avec ses sœurs, a pratique des règles religieuses, et se préparoit comme elles au martyr, par les actes et les sentimens de la plus fervent piété. » Abbé Aimé Guillon, Les Martyrs de la foi Volume 2, Page 56.

677 « Je suis dans une espèce d’extase, et comme hors de moi-même, parce que j’ai la persuasion intime que la demain je verrai mon Dieu, et que je mourrai. » Guillon, Les Martyrs de la foi, Volume 2, 57.

678 « Elle etoit si impatiente du martyr, que, chaque jour, au moment où l’on venoit appeler quelque religieuse pour la faire comparoite devant la féroce tribunal, elle s’offroit elle-même, sans être nominée. » Guillon, Les Martyrs de la foi, Volume 4, 516.

679 Guillon, Les Martyrs de la foi, Volume 4, 516.

680 Guillon, Les Martyrs de la foi, Volume 4, 516. « Elle alla au supplice avec le courage des anciens Martyrs »
who rejected the new secular and civic identities that were offered to them and looked to the example of the older identity of martyr to find peace and to make sense of the chaos.

On July 11, 1794, Marguerite Albarède (Sister Saint Sophie), died alongside three other Sacramentine nuns (Nuns of the Blessed Sacrament). She, however, was not a part of the Ursulines of Boulène, like many of the other martyrs of Orange. She initially belonged to the Ursuline convent of Pont-Saint-Esprit. When her convent was dissolved in 1791, she joined the nuns in Orange in making a pious retreat to maintain her vows. It was common to combine the houses of those who wished to remain in their profession. Like the others, she was condemned as a fanatic and a counter-revolutionary. Her story was significant for the ways that the common identity as martyr transcended the traditional markers between members of specific convents or orders.

Guillon acknowledges that family ties helped bind the Ursulines during the upheaval of the Revolution. On July 12, Jeanne de Romillon (Sister Saint-Bernard), biological sister of Sylvie Agnès de Romillon, took her trip up the scaffold. She was a member of the Boulène Ursuline convent and remained with her sisters after their convent was dissolved in 1791 and combined with other houses. She seemed to have been one of the leaders and most ardent proponents of sacrificing her life to restore France to peace. Upon hearing her sister's condemnation read with Alauzier’s name and not her own, Guillon writes that she proclaimed, “‘What!’ she said suddenly to her sister, in a loud voice, and before the judges; ‘what! my sister, you are going to martyrdom

without me! What will I do on earth, in this exile where you leave me?’”  

Her sister, moved by Jeanne’s pain, replied “’Do not lose heart, my good sister; your sacrifice will not be long delayed.’”  

This interaction between biological and religious sisters showed the way that worldly identities were not always left at the door of the cloister. Because the convent had accommodated women related by blood, worldly, and religious identities intersected in tangible ways. It was clear that the Romillon sisters felt an affinity for each other and expected their merciful God to take them together to martyrdom. In this moment of crisis, these deeper biological bonds showed themselves; however, we will see that Jeanne Romillon was obedient to her prayers and that her God ultimately had other plans for her. 

According to Guillon, Jeanne Romillon had been praying for fourteen years to die consecrated to the Holy Virgin; therefore, God had reserved for her to die later, on the Feast of Our lady of Mount Carmel. Convicted of refusing to swear the oath to Liberty and Equality, she went to the guillotine. She cried out, “’Oh, what happiness! I'll be in heaven soon! I cannot contain the joy I feel’”  

In Guillon’s telling of the story, despite Jeanne Romillion’s moment of weakness in seeing her sister die and feeling abandoned in exile on earth, she ultimately found her identity in dying for Mary, and found peace in trusting God’s providence. In these challenging times, it was useful to see suffering as a

682 “Quoi donc ! dit-elle subitement à sa sœur, d'une voix haute, et devant les juges ; quoi donc ! ma sœur, vous allez au martyre sans moi ! Que ferai-je sur la terre, dans cet exile où vous me laissez ? » Guillon, Les Martyrs de la foi, Vol. 4, 515. 

683 “Ne perdez pas courage, ma bonne sœur ; votre sacrifice ne sera pas longtemps différé. » Guillon, Les Martyrs de la foi, Vol. 4, 515. 

684 “Oh quel bonheur ! Je Serai bientôt dans le ciel ! il m’est impossible de contenir la joie que j’en ressens » Guillon, Les Martyrs de la foi, Vol. 4, 515.
tool for God’s providence. Nuns used their identity and relationship with God to understand the suffering and chaos that threatened to overwhelm them.

The next day, July 13, six nuns met their end: Marie-Anastasie de Roquard, Marie-Anne Lambert, Marie-Anne Depeyre, Elisabeth Verchière, Thérèse-Marie Faurie, and Anne-Andrée Minutte. Perhaps the most significant of these women was Roquard, who was the superior of the Ursulines of Boulène. Guillon emphasized the example she provided for the other sisters while in their exile. Because of her leadership position, she needed to maintain a posture of honor and respect. According to Guillon, “God allowed her to come [before the committee] with as much dignity as if she were going to fulfill one of the most important functions of her office; for she appeared, assisted by three other nuns and two lay sisters, who were to be judged and condemned with her.”

Despite being identified as counterrevolutionaries, and therefore, criminals, the mother superior retained the status of leadership, surrounded by sisters, both Ursuline and Sacramentine nuns. Here we see that there was a transcendence of their identification as sisters and martyrs that minimized their identification with their particular order. They were now linked by a new common vocation: martyrdom.

The last of this group of martyrs that I will discuss are those of the Justamont family. Eléonore de Justamont was born in Boulène on June 1, 1766. However, she did

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685 Guillon lists her name as Rocard instead of Roquard; therefore, when searching for her in the 1821 account, you must look under her misspelled name. In the version on Gallica, there is a handwritten correction in the margin.

686 « Dieu permit qu’elle y vînt avec autant de dignité que si elle alloit remplir une des plus importantes fonctions de sa charge ; car elle comparut, assistée de trois autres religieuses et deux sœurs converses, qui doivent être jugées et condamnées avec elle. » Guillon, Les Martyrs de la foi, Vol. 4, 485.
not join the Ursulines, but the convent of Saint Catherine in Avignon (just over 30 miles south of Boulène and once home of the papacy). Her sister, Julie-Dorothée-Madeleine de Justamont, also joined this convent in Avignon. When their convent was dissolved, they joined other members of the family who were part of the Ursulines of Boulène. Although not a part of the original congregation, “this nun [Eléonore], in her captivity, more and more prepared with her companions, to make pleasing to God the death that she was going to suffer for Him.”\textsuperscript{687} Julie-Dorothée-Madeleine, much like Romillon, had prayed that she would die on a day consecrated to Mary, and therefore, they were both able to find solace that they died on the Church holiday celebrating Our Lady of Mount Carmel. There was a common link between these women and the holy virgin Mother. They could find peace in their deaths because of their shared adoration of Mary. Julie-Dorothée-Madeleine also gave us some insight into how she identified those who condemned her and who had agency over her life. As stated in the quotation that stands as an epigraph for this section, Guillon claimed that she said, “How beneficent are those who have just condemned us! Our father and mother gave us only a life full of bitterness, a perishable life, and now our judges give us in return an eternal life, a life free from pain and sorrows, a delightful life!”\textsuperscript{688} While her earthly parents could provide nothing but a life of suffering, in these times of turmoil, she had the assurance of a heavenly home and a

\textsuperscript{687} « cette religieuse, dans sa captivité se disposa de plus en plus avec ses compagnes, à rendre agréable à Dieu la mort qu’elle alloit souffrir pour lui. » Guillon, \textit{Les Martyrs de la foi}, Vol. 3, 378.

\textsuperscript{688} « 'Qu’ils sont bienfaisans ceux qui viennent de nous condamner ! Nos père et mère ne nous ont donné qu’une vie pleine d’amertumes, une vie périssable ; et voilà que nos juges nous procurent en échange une vie éternelle, une vie exempte des peines et des chagrins, une vie délicieuse !' » Guillon, \textit{Les Martyrs de la foi}, Vol. 3, 379.
heavenly father. The revolutionaries and their guillotine were simply her path to eternal life.

The Ursulines of Orange, like the Carmelites, took actions that ensured their martyrdom. Unlike the Carmelites, however, instead of looking inward and becoming more insular in their religious community, they found a commonality among sisters from other convents in the area. When they went to the guillotine, they were composed of Ursulines, Bernardines, Benedictines, and Sacramentines, who together embraced the collective identity of martyrs. They also were not able to go to the guillotine together wearing their religious habit, but were condemned individually. Each of their condemnations contained a variation of the same crimes, and each had a slightly different charge. Therefore, their guilt was more focused on the individual rather than the community. All the Carmelites were included in one condemnation, while each of the nuns executed in Orange was condemned individually. Nevertheless, they found a shared unity in their identity as martyrs. They still returned to this religious identity as a way of gaining certainty in a period of uncertainty, took up the ancient identity of a martyr to gain a position of honor, but in doing so, they allowed other nuns to share in their common identity.

6.3 Sister Marguerite Rutan

In addition to the firmly cloistered martyred Carmelites of Compiégne and the martyrs of Orange, there were also un-cloistered hospital workers who faced the guillotine. Earlier in the Revolution, nursing orders had been spared dissolution because of their utility to the French public. However, their usefulness was not enough to spare
these women from the guillotine if they felt the martyr’s call. Marguerite Rutan was an early martyr of the Revolution and was not condemned with other members of her convent or congregation but faced the guillotine alone. Her identity as a Daughter of Charity led her to relate differently to other members of her congregation than traditional convents, gave her a more public role, and allowed her to interact more directly with laypeople. While there was less emphasis on Rutan’s calling to martyrdom than we saw in the dreams and signs expressed by the Carmelites and the Ursulines, she nonetheless had to take rather serious steps to ensure her martyrdom. In her correspondence, political associations, attempted escape, and resistance to the Civil Constitution, she broke revolutionary laws and shattered the public trust in her labors.

Marguerite Rutan was a hospital worker based in Dax very near the border with Spain. By 1793, France was at war with Spain; so, there were plenty of wounded soldiers requiring their care. L’Hôpital de Dax Saint Eutrope was already a large hospital, but with the massive influx of soldiers, the government was taking a greater interest in how the hospital was organized and who was in charge.689 The hospital was near some hot springs which were believed to have healing properties, so people came from all over France to receive care there.690


690 Interestingly, a thermal hospital still exists in Dax to care for various illnesses which may benefit from the natural hot springs. [https://www.ch-dax.fr/Presentation/Les-differents-sites/Saint-Eutrope-Hopital-thermal](https://www.ch-dax.fr/Presentation/Les-differents-sites/Saint-Eutrope-Hopital-thermal)
Rutan was born in the Dax area on April 23, 1737, to an aristocratic family. From a very early age, she felt the call to the religious vocation. When she was leaving adolescence, she knew “she ha[d] only one pressing desire: to enter the Daughters of Charity, of St. Vincent de Paul, called, at the time, the gray nuns.” On her twentieth birthday, April 23, 1757, she entered the Novitiate of the mother house in Paris of les Filles de la Charité (Daughters of Charity). The Daughters of Charity, who took only simple vows that they renewed annually, were a newer congregation of sisters that devoted themselves to service rather than contemplation. They were generally well-regarded by the communities they served and were not affected by the first pieces of legislation suppressing religious orders.

Considering that orders like the Daughters of Charity usually enjoyed the esteem of their communities and provided vital services to them, the story of Rutan’s journey to martyrdom reveals how the space in the new French polity for religious women narrowed over time. It also shows, again, how martyrdom demanded a religious woman’s active choice to pursue this new identity. As fears of counterrevolution intensified, even a religious woman performing a vital role as a hospital administrator, like Rutan, could be seen as an acute “threat to the moral and political fibre of France.”

691 April 23 happens to be a very good day to have a birthday. I, too, was born on April 23, just a few hundred years later. Renouard, *Marguerite de la Force*, 25.


694 Forrest, *The French Revolution and the Poor*, 44.
Rutan’s visible acts of resistance to Revolutionary laws brought her under the scrutiny of Revolutionary authorities.

Due to the unique structure of the Daughters of Charity, Rutan did not enter one house and stay there, but moved around to meet the needs of various communities. Marguerite was sent to several houses in Toulouse (1757), Brest (1771), Fontainbleau (1773), Blangy-sur-Bresle (?), Troyes (1779) and she described each of these placements as “short and hard.” Eventually, she arrived at Dax, where she spent fourteen years. Although the work remained difficult and unpleasant, she was at least able to settle and develop relationships with her sisters there. At the time of the Revolution, she was the Superior. In this role, she supervised many women and sometimes supervised men, performing a number of administrative tasks in addition to serving the sick. The hospital was run by only six nuns: Marguerite Nonique, Jeanna Chanu, Félicité Raux, Maguerite Bonnette, Anne-Sophie Charpentier, and Josèphe Devienne. Rutan’s position allowed her to have a leadership role over others, but also brought her into close contact with lay patients.

As mentioned in previous sections on the Daughters of Charity, Rutan’s experience in religious life differed from the other women discussed in this chapter because of her mobility and because she had daily contact with males and other laypeople. She had neither spent most of her adult life in the same four walls of the cloister nor in one particular city. She was more acquainted with the world because she

regularly served the poor, sick, and travelers. She was familiar with France because she moved around and worked in various cities. She also supervised and performed a leadership role from which most women at the time were barred. She was perhaps more “worldly” than most French women because of her vocation, not in spite of it.

When the Revolution broke out, like others in her position as a hospital worker, Rutan initially accommodated herself to the new rules. After the suppression of religious habits (1792), Marguerite decided to submit to the Assembly’s disposition, but determined that under no circumstances would she abandon her service to the poor.697 While she may not have liked all of the changes, Renouard argued, she was “concerned only with the good of the sick and the wounded. Sister Marguerite accommodated herself to the situation.”698 This cooperation was complicated by the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and the clerical oath, which was required for clergy members to receive the pension. The split between constitutional clergy, who took the oath, and refractory clergy who refused to swear the oath and accommodate the demands of the Revolution, led to the replacement of the refractory bishop in Dax with the Constitutional Bishop, Jean-Baptiste Pierre Saurine.

Resistance to the new bishop sparked the first conflict between Rutan and her superiors. Rutan decided “not to attend the services of the Cathedral and to stay away

697 Renouard, Marguerite de la Force, 64.
698 « Avec son intelligence et sa perspicacité mises au service des pauvres et préoccupée uniquement du bien des malades et des blessés, sœur Marguerite s’accommode de la situation. » Renouard, Marguerite de la Force, 50.
from the [juring] priests.” Her loyalty to the nonjuring clergy created a conflict between Rutan and the new bishop. Her absence from his appointment ceremony did not go unnoticed. In her first meeting with the Bishop, she engaged in a theological discussion with him, but the “dialogue turned short.” Although we may never know the exact nature of the discussion, the relationship between Rutan, superior of the hospital, and Mgr. Saurine was sour from the start, due, in no small part, to the resistance Rutan showed to his appointment.

For the time being, Saurine left the refractory clergy in place, so receiving the sacraments from a priest who had not taken the oath was possible. It became essential for nuns to receive sacraments from nonjuring clergy because those sacraments administered by the constitutional church had been declared invalid by the papacy. Rutan continued to receive the sacraments from l’abbé Lacouture, but at the end of May 1792, Larraburu, a constitutional priest, replaced him. Tensions began immediately between Rutan and the constitutional chaplain when she and her sisters did not attend his installation ceremony on June 2, 1792. In not attending the installation of their new confessor, Rutan would have irked the revolutionaries, and by encouraging the resistance of her fellow nuns, Rutan’s action became all the more dangerous. Her identity as superior

699 « Certes elle décide de ne pas assister aux offices de la Cathédrale et de se tenir loin des prêtres jureurs, mais quand cet évêque d’État vouent visiter l’Hôpital, elle ouvre mis en place par l’évêque canonique Petite malice dont elle n’a pas du se priver. » Renouard, Marguerite de la Force, 50.

700 Renouard, Marguerite de la Force, 50.

701 After the pope issued his denunciation of the Civil Constitution and the reaffirmation of the Papal superiority in his encyclical, Charitas, in 1791, there were many who originally took the oath who recanted. https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius06/p6charit.htm

702 Renouard, Marguerite de la Force, 50.

703 Renouard, Marguerite de la Force, 57.
placed her in a position of power and influence over her sisters and patients. From the standpoint of revolutionary authorities, her counterrevolutionary sentiment and position of authority led her to corrupt others.

When the constitutional bishop, Mgr. Saurine, became the administrator of the hospital in 1791, he “strongly defended the maintenance of the sisters when the populace themselves demanded their departure.”\textsuperscript{704} Arguing that Saurine was a usurper, Rutan was felt no obligation to show obedience to him. Therefore, Marguerite decided to flee with her sisters.\textsuperscript{705} Since she was responsible for all the women in the hospital and their salvation, she thought the right way to continue her duties was to seek the best course for their salvation. On the night of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} and 4\textsuperscript{th} of June 1793, she and her sisters took their possessions to the homes of their friends. Unfortunately, they were seen preparing for escape and denounced. The news around Dax was that the sisters were accused of fleeing and theft of the convent property (which, as of 1789, was the government’s property).\textsuperscript{706} Perhaps more alarming, these preparations implied an intent to abandon their public duties to the sick in the hospital. The revolutionary representatives feared that the soldiers would be left without medical care. Rutan might have seen her situation as incredibly complicated. Although she owed a duty to her patients, she also was responsible for the salvation of her sisters. This was a huge responsibility that she did not take lightly.

\textsuperscript{704} « …défend énergiquement le maintien des sœurs quand des habitants réclament leur départ. » Renouard, Marguerite de la Force, 67.

\textsuperscript{705} Renouard, Marguerite de la Force, 67.

\textsuperscript{706} « …les sœurs veulent fuir en dérobant le bien des pauvres. En effet les milieux révolutionnaires s’agacent et accusent les sœurs de fuite et vol. » Renouard, Marguerite de la Force, 68.
The municipality saw things slightly differently, however. The municipality of Dax issued this report on the events of the night of the 3rd and 4th of June:

You know that they were caught removing several objects enclosed in bags and bales, and taking them out of the hospital by the back door. Without giving myself up to all the indignation that such conduct must produce in the soul of a citizen, friend of order and of the institutions devoted to the relief of the unfortunate, I will not hide from you that these thefts were the prerequisite of a flight, perhaps nocturnal, on the part of these girls and from which would have resulted in the abandonment of a house in which even at that very moment, there were numerous suffering and dying [patients]. The designs that these unmarried women manifested by this doubtless guilty conduct must call all our solicitude on the external and internal administration of this hospice dedicated to the relief of suffering humanity. The girls arrested in this house are still in this house, but will they stay there long? We cannot believe it.707

The Municipality saw women fleeing from their post without being formally relieved of their duties as nothing less than an act of counterrevolution. Abandoning the sick and the dying, endangering the soldiers of the Republic, and stealing away in the dead of night was evidence enough of criminal conduct. They could no longer be trusted to perform their duties to the republic and its soldiers.

On July 2, 1793, Noël Batbedat and his secretary, Dubroca, inspected the hospital room by room. They interrogated all the sisters and the sick. The sick all responded positively to the interrogation; “All of them assured the Commissioner that they were

707 « Vous savez qu’elles ont été surprises enlevant plusieurs objets renfermés dans des sacs et ballots, et les faisant sortir de l’hôpital par une porte dérobée. Sans me livrer à toute l’indignation que doit produire une telle conduite dans l’âme d’une citoyen ami de l’ordre et des institutions consacrées au soulagement des malheureux je ne vous cacherai pas que ces enlèvements étaient le préalable d’une fuite, peut-être nocturne, de la part de ces filles et de là serait résulté l’abandon d’une maison où peut-être dans ces moments, il existait des malheureux mourants et d’autres agonisants. Les desseins qu’ont manifestés ces filles par cette conduite sans doute coupable, doivent appeler toute notre sollicitude sur l’administration extérieur et intérieure de cet hospice consacré au soulagement de l’humanité souffrante ces filles arrêtées dans cette maison sont encore dans cette maison, mais y resteront-elles longtemps ? C’est ce que nous ne devons point croire. » Archives municipales de Dax, BB 43 F 69 r. Renouard, Marguerite de la Force, 69.
very well looked after, treated with a lot of sweetness and humanity and very well-nourished and medicated.”\(^{708}\) Despite the attempted escape, the women were still performing their duties to the best of their ability. Sister Rutan, during this period, entered a brief moment of reconciliation with the constitutional clergy. She signed a brief document attesting her reconciliation with the constitutional chaplain and the bishop. In return, they decided, “we are unanimously of the opinion that the said Sisters be retained, that the interest of the poor requires it.”\(^{709}\) Revolutionary administrators still had no alternative source for the services the Sisters of Charity provided, so for the time being, Dax needed them, even if they could not be trusted. Rutan, still responsible for the safety and well-being of the order, must have felt the only way forward was to appease the revolutionaries.

But fears of counterrevolution soon made the compromise untenable. After the Terror began, suspicion of Catholicism and religious men and women increased throughout France. News of the September Massacres in Paris and the bloodshed a bit closer in Bordeaux would have reached Rutan. In Paris, three Daughters of Charity were beaten for wearing their habits, and later died from their mistreatment.\(^{710}\) Their service to the poor was not enough to insulate them from violence or persecution. The uncomfortable situation in Dax, where Rutan and her companions resisted the mandate to

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\(^{708}\) « Toutes nous ont assuré précise le commissaire qu’elles étaient très bien soignées, traitées avec beaucoup de douceur et d’humanité et très bien nourries et médicamentées. » Archives de l'Hôpital E 86. Renouard, Marguerite de la Force, 70.

\(^{709}\) “nous sommes unanimement d’avis que les dites, Sœurs soient conservées, que l’intérêt des pauvres le nécessite…” Archives de l'Hôpital E 5 F 43, cited in Renouard, Marguerite de la Force, 71.

\(^{710}\) First cited in Pierre Costa, 42-43. Renouard, Marguerite de la Force, 64.
swear the oath to liberty and equality, but remained in their positions in the hospital, was only complicated by the intensification of violence in 1792 and 1793.\textsuperscript{711} The sisters had to give up their habit and their name. They now were called the Women of Charity and adopted the “coiffe de Bayonne,” or just the normal dress for the laity.\textsuperscript{712}

These accommodations proved insufficient as the Terror intensified. The first investigation denouncing Rutan appeared at the end of 1793. On Christmas Eve, December 24, 1793, or the 4\textsuperscript{th} of Nivôse year II of the Republic, Rutan was denounced and later arrested:

\begin{quote}
… The deputation came to denounce Madame Rutan, superior of the charitable hospice of this commune of Dax, as having, by her actions contrary to civic duty[incivisme], sought to corrupt and inhibit the revolutionary and republican spirit of the soldiers who went to this hospital to be treated, as being recognized as a notorious aristocrat since the beginning of the Revolution, as being, in a word, unworthy of fulfilling the human and beneficent functions which one owes to free men worthy in all respects of public recognition, [and] given the little confidence which she enjoys among the sans-culottes in the commune…\textsuperscript{713}
\end{quote}

Later, another denunciation announced that she would be arrested immediately and taken to a holding prison in the former Carmelite convent:

\begin{quote}
The committee considered the well-founded denunciation against Sister Rutan, who has long been recognized as uncivic and contrary to the principles of the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{711} Renouard, Marguerite de la Force, 88.
\textsuperscript{712} Renouard, Marguerite de la Force, 91.
\textsuperscript{713} “…laquelle députation est venue dénoncer Madame Rutan, supérieure de l’hospice de bienfaisance de cette commune de Dax, comme ayant, par son incivisme, cherché corrompre et à ralentir l’esprit révolutionnaire et républicain des militaires qui allaient dans cet hôpital s’y faire soigner, comme étant notoirement reconnue aristocrate depuis le commencement de la Révolution, comme étant, en un mot, indigne de remplir les fonctions humaines et bienfaisantes que l’on doit envers les hommes libres, dignes à tous égards de la reconnaissance publiques, vu le peu de confiance dont elle jouit parmi les sans-culottes de la ville commune ;
Archives départementales L 783 F 22 et archives de Hôpital B 12, cited in Renouard, Marguerite de la Force, 93-94.
Revolution and [has been] denounced [...] by the voice of the people. The Committee orders that Sister Rutan be immediately transferred to the Carmelite Prison to remain there until otherwise ordered by the said Committee, and decrees that two of its members will immediately proceed to the cell of the Superior Rutan and affix the seals on the papers, effects or other correspondences [...]714

This emphasis on Rutan shirking civic duty helps us to understand that public utility, which had previously ensured the protection of the Sisters of Charity, was now a weapon used to denounce hospital nuns. Since those women taking care of the sick in the hospitals performed such an essential duty to the republic, suspicions about their loyalty could even arise from a high death rate in the hospitals. Rutan had undermined public trust through a failed attempt to escape; thus, her leadership of the hospital became a source of concern. Every death provoked suspicion about the level of care the patients received. Furthermore, the denunciations identified Rutan as an aristocrat, even if women who entered the convent became ineligible to receive inheritances and often took vows of poverty. Although for Daughters of Charity, these vows were only annual, Rutan showed no indication that she planned to abandon her post to return to an aristocratic lifestyle. However, her status of birth remained suspect. Nevertheless, these denunciations emphasized that because of her background, and past behavior, Rutan could not be trusted with such essential labor. She also allegedly undermined the revolutionary commitment to the soldiers. The problem remained, however, about what to do with a

714 « Le comité prenant en considération la dénonciation justement fondée contre la sœur Rutan reconnue depuis longtemps comme incivique et contraire aux principes de la révolution et dénoncée… par la voix du peuple. Le Comité arrête que la sœur Rutan sera sur le champ transférée dans la maison de réclusion des Carmes pour y demeurer jusqu’à ce qu’il en soit autrement ordonné par ledit comité, que deux de ses membres se transporteront sur le champ dans la cellule de la Supérieure Rutan et y apposèrent les scellés sur les papiers, effets ou autres correspondances… » Archives Départementales L 783 F 22 et archives l’Hôpital B 12. Cited in Renouard, Marguerite de la Force, 24.
nun who had lost public confidence. She might be a traitor, an aristocrat, and unworthy of public trust, but she was also an essential administrator of a large hospital.

Officials interrogated Rutan on January 15, 1794. The Director of the District then wrote to the Committee of Public Safety about her saying, “The execution of revolutionary laws, citizens, being entrusted to you, with us only the overseers, we send you the evidence against the woman Rutan so that you may take the necessary follow-up to this procedure; your zeal and your love for the public good assure that the decisions you make will comply in all points with the laws whose execution is entrusted to you. Greetings and fraternity.”715 We do not have a transcript of the interview, but we know that Rutan’s fate was likely already decided. She was an enemy of the public good who could no longer be trusted with the labors as important as hospital care.

News likely reached Rutan of the nuns who had been executed in Angers on February 1, 1794. Two Daughters of Charity, Marie Anne Vaillot and Odile Baumgarten, who worked in the town hospital, were executed for not swearing the oath. In response to her interrogator, Vacheron, Vaillot claimed this was the end of her sacrifices to the Revolution. She said, “I have made the sacrifice of leaving my parents when very young to serve the poor; I have made the sacrifice of leaving aside my religious habit to wear the clothes you see me in. I have even made the sacrifice of accepting to wear this tricolor

715 « L’exécution des lois révolutionnaires, citoyens, vous étant confiée n’en étant que les surveillants, nous vous renvoyons les pièces contre la dame Rutan pour que vous donniez la suite nécessaire à cette procédure ; votre zèle et votre amour pour la chose publique assurent l’administration que vous vous conformez en tous les points aux lois dont l’exécution vous est confiée. Salut et fraternité. » Registre de correspondance du Directoire du District L 170 F 5 v n 1701, cited in Renouard, Marguerite de la Force, 97.
cockade…,” but she would not sacrifice the oath.\textsuperscript{716} As Vaillot and Baumgarten awaited the firing squad, they were offered one last chance to recant. Instead, they claimed, “not only do we not want to pronounce the oath, we do not want it to be said that we have pronounced it… We prefer to die.”\textsuperscript{717} Violence against counterrevolutionary forces was accelerating. In this atmosphere, the guillotine arrived in Dax on February 27, 1794. The Spring of 1794 was the height of the executions, and Rutan’s fate hurtled towards execution with remarkable speed.

Some Catholic biographers claim that the accusations against Rutan were false.\textsuperscript{718} However, there was no doubt that Rutan was born of aristocratic parents, resisted the revolutionaries’ efforts regarding the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, and that she likely attempted to flee her post. The only accusation for which officials lacked good evidence was that she was not adequately caring for her patients, and therefore, worked against the goals of the Revolution. On March 1, 1794, based on the lobbying of the people and on further denunciation of Rutan and her Daughters of Charity, the Committee of Public Safety officially announced their condemnation:

\begin{quote}
According to the multiple complaints by citizens arising from all over, that the above Sisters of Charity currently assigned to the hospital of the city of Dax, have demonstrated in their conduct, their words, and their actions the most stinking aristocracy, the most dangerous fanaticism, and the most shameful superstition.\textsuperscript{719}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{717} Bannon, \textit{Refractory Men, Fanatical Women}, 117.

\textsuperscript{718} Even some more academic accounts seem to assume that these accusations had no merit. See Bannon, \textit{Refractory Men, Fanatical Women}, 117.

\textsuperscript{719} « D’après les plaintes multiples que les citoyens font éclater de toutes parts contre les ci-devant Sœurs de Charité, actuellement attachées à l’hôpital de la ville de Dax, qui manifestent dans leur conduite, leurs propos, et leurs actions l’aristocratie la plus puante le fanatisme le plus dangereux, la superstition la plus honteuse. » 1 March 1794, Archives départementales L 451 n 1052, f 29 v. Cited in Renouard, \textit{Marguerite de la Force}, 100-102.
Accordingly, the Daughters of Charity were relieved of their duties in the hospital and arrested. In the document, we see that Rutan was excluded from these articles:

Art. 1 - The above Sisters of Charity currently serving the hospital of Dax, with the exception of the citizen Marguerite, are dismissed; they will be arrested on the spot. Commissioners appointed by the supervisory committee will examine their papers and effects and will set aside anything that seems suspicious to them.

Art. 2 - The above-mentioned Sisters dismissed by this decree will be replaced by the citizens whose names follow: Colly, of Dax; Paulette Lareillet, of Habas; Lareillet Cadette, of Habas; Castaignet, of Dax; Jeanne Giron of Dax.

Art. 3 - These citizens will be under the supervision of the district administration, which will ensure, with its ordinary care, that they fulfill the functions entrusted to them with accuracy and vigilance.

Art. 4 - This decree will be printed, published, displayed sent to the departments, and the army […]

They were dismissed and replaced by other women who could be more trusted. However, Rutan would face even more severe scrutiny than her other sisters.

Officials formally proposed Rutan’s name for the guillotine on March 28 1794. In the letter, representatives from Paris laid out the case against her. Rutan was accused of using “every means possible to corrupt the brave defenders of the fatherland who are sick in the hospital.”

720 Art. 1er – Les ci-devant Sœurs de la Charité desservant actuellement l’hôpital de Dax à l’exception de la citoyenne Marguerite, sont destituées ; elles seront sur-le-champ, mises en état d’arrestation. Des commissaires nommés par le comité de surveillance examineront leurs papiers et effets et metteront à part toute ce qui leur paraîtra suspect.

Art. 2 – Les ci-devant Sœurs destituées par le présent arrêté seront remplacées par les citoyennes dont les noms suivent : Colly, de Dax ; Paulette Lareillet, de Habas ; Lareillet cadette, de Habas ; Castaignet, de Dax ; Jeanne Giron de Dax.

Art. 3 – Ces citoyennes seront sous l’inspection de l’administration du district, qui veillera, avec sa sollicitude ordinaire à ce qu’elles remplissent avec exactitude et vigilance les fonctions qui leur sont confiées.

Art. 4 – Le présent arrêté sera imprimé, publié, affiché envoyé aux départements et à l’armée. […] 1 March 1794, Archives départementales L 451 n 1052, f 29 v. Cited in Renouard, Marguerite de la Force, 100-102.

721 « Emploie tous les moyens pour corrompre les braves défenseurs de la patrie qui sont malades à l’hôpital et qu’elle est d’ailleurs incivique. » Archives départementales de Landes L 783 f 52 v.
He was a soldier who was at the hospital under her care. Bouniol charged that “All the Sisters were coquettish aristocrats who debauch soldiers, who preach to them to join the Vendée, who make the soldiers dance and sing devilish songs and give them money.”\textsuperscript{722} While this language is undoubtedly charged with malice and polarizing verbiage, there was probably a grain of truth in these accusations. The charges of sexual misbehavior—they were coquettes who debauched the soldiers—were most likely exaggerated and designed to undermine their religious status. There was no doubt that these women likely sang the hymns and prayed with the soldiers, and most nursing sisters were likely mostly from aristocratic families. We may never know whether the sisters were sending money to the counterrevolutionaries, but their attachment to the refractory clergy and initial resistance to the Revolution would at least make this a possibility. However, after their failed attempt to leave, the sisters were watched much more closely. It would have been incredibly challenging to sneak money out of the hospital under such conditions.

Rutan was also accused of corresponding with the Austrian royal family and possession of counterrevolutionary letters and pamphlets. The generally high death rate at hospitals means that she was undoubtedly a suspicious threat to the future of the republic.\textsuperscript{723} We should note, however, that Pierre Coste, who wrote the first biography of Rutan in 1908, casts some doubt that her correspondence with royal counter-revolutionaries was real. Her condemnation reveals the name of her correspondent as

\textsuperscript{722} « Toutes les Sœurs étaient des coquines d’aristocrates, débauchant les soldats, qu’elles les prêchent pour aller dans la Vendée, qu’elles les font danser et chanter des chansons diaboliques et leur donnent de l’argent. » Archives départementales de Landes L 783 f 52 v.

\textsuperscript{723} Weiner, \textit{Citizen Patient}. 

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Louis-Géris de Lorraine. However, in all of the genealogies from that time, no one with that name exists from the Lorraine House or the Austrian Royal family.724

From the revolutionaries’ perspective, 1792-1794 was a period of crisis. France was at war, both internally and externally, and revolutionaries saw resistance to their ideas closing in from all sides. The letters and religious pamphlets that were seized upon Rutan’s arrest were alarming. Combined with testimony from Bouniol, and the flight attempt, Rutan did not appear innocent.725 While the hagiographical Catholic narrative has always emphasized the false accusations and unsubstantiated evidence of her alleged crimes, Rutan did break various revolutionary laws. It might have been easier to accept the exaggerated or false claims with the real because of the real threat of war and espionage. Her attempted escape was suspicious. She knew that in consorting with counterrevolutionaries, particularly their old confessor who was a refractory, that she might be risking her life. Therefore, we must understand her martyrdom in the context of the ways Rutan knowingly resisted Revolutionary demands and ideology. Her public absence from the constitutional bishop’s installations was perhaps the most threatening act of public defiance. Rutan exercised a highly visible public role but was unafraid to make her resistance public. Like the other women discussed in this chapter, this was not a woman who quietly sought to continue her worship. Rutan took actions that made her a

724 Pierre Coste, Une victime de la Révolution : sœur Marguerite Rutan, fille de la charité (Paris: Société Saint Augustin, 1908), 118. Communing with the Austrian royalty was tantamount to treason because France was at war with Austria. I, however, like Coste, find it unlikely that she was communicating directly with members of the Austrian Royal family. Therefore, the charges against her were likely exaggerated or trumped-up, but with some basis in reality.

725 The papers seized included books on piety, prayer sheets, litanies of the Sacred Heart, and other necessary prayer books typical for a convent. Renouard, Marguerite de la Force, 113.
threat to the Revolution’s success. The identity of martyr was not one that she passively accepted; it was one she actively courted.

Rutan appeared before the revolutionary tribunal on April 9, accompanied by l’abbé Jean Eutrope Lannelongue, who was accused of being a vagabond and of “fanaticism and a counterrevolutionary spirit.” Both were condemned to death on April 16. Just before her death, Rutan, like the others, was given another chance to take the oath to liberty and equality, which she again refused. Most biographers of Rutan note that her execution with the priest signified a sort of symbolic “republican marriage.” This phrase mocked the revolutionaries’ earlier attempts to transform former monks and nuns into productive family units producing citizens for the republic. Rutan was executed in public at Place Poyanne and—according to historian Pierre Coste—was buried on land from M. Dompnier, which became a cemetery in 1791.

Rutan’s martyrdom included both similarities to the Carmelites and Ursulines, but more so, Rutan’s martyrdom was unique. First, she was executed individually and not with the other members of her order. One reason for this was that there was a looser and more mobile structure for the Daughters of Charity. Rutan could only have been the Superior of these women for a maximum of fifteen years. There was not the inseparable character of the Carmelites because this particular group of nuns moved around a great

726 The official condemnation included many of the same accusations outlined above, which I will not repeat but the original document can be found at the Archives départementales de Basses-Pyrénées L 338 F 32.
727 Renouard, Marguerite de la Force, 117. Loth, Saint Vincent de Paul Et Sa Mission Sociale, 382.
728 The cemetery was later transferred to another location at the corner of rue Chanzy and Boulevard Carnot in Dax. Her remains are still unrecovered. Renouard, Marguerite de la Force, 122.
deal. Second, unlike in 1790, when nursing sisters leveraged their skills and labor to maintain part of their religious identities, we see that this defense had its limits. Rutan’s religious identity put her at odds and perhaps even corrupted her service to tending the soldiers placed in her care. Lastly, although she was executed months before the other two groups of nuns (Carmelites and Ursuline), she has received far less attention, at least, until recently. Pierre Coste, a historian who devoted his life to the study of the Daughters of Charity, wrote the very first biography in 1908 (just after the Carmelites of Compiègne were beatified). However, it took until 2011 for Marguerite Rutan to be beatified. Furthermore, Guillon’s 1821 four-volume accounts of martyrs omitted Rutan. I speculate that Guillon was aware of her death and did not include her because she did not fit his requirements outlined for martyrdom outlined at the beginning of this chapter. After her community’s failed attempt to flee, they did bend to the will of the revolutionaries. She became more amenable to the changes, and Guillon may have viewed her as just an unlucky victim but certainly not a martyr.

6.4 Conclusion

In looking at martyrdom as an identity that each woman had to adopt, rather than a punishment that she could not escape, we refocus the action to give these women their agency. They found certainty and assurance in their call to the profession, and during the Revolution, many women felt comfort in martyrdom. They would not have to fear for the future because their salvation was thus decided: they would die to appease God’s wrath.

against France, be immediately accepted in heaven for their sacrifice, and, therefore, achieve the one goal on which their entire religious life had focused. Furthermore, we see how a particular group of women, in the uncertainty of Revolution, did not seek to create a brand-new identity but instead looked to an identity of an earlier period of turmoil. They could look back to the martyrs that they read about, the saints that they sang and prayed to, and the heroes of their faith to provide an example for their emulation. The women in this chapter were not the one-dimensional characters often captured by their Catholic biographers, but they were a unique group of individuals trying to navigate the trials of the Revolution and the challenges to their religious identity.
CHAPTER 7. SURVIVING THE DIRECTORY PERIOD

7.1 From Thermidor to the Concordat of 1801

After the Reign of Terror, or the most intense period of religious persecution, the relationship between the Catholic Church and the French Government, the Directory, thawed to a stalemate. Hostility to Catholicism remained, but lawmakers were preoccupied with the wars on the continent and maintaining a stable government. The Directory promised freedom of private religious worship and the separation of church and state. The new revolutionary cult practiced during the Directory, Théophilanthropie, espoused the dogmas of the cult of the Supreme Being and the immortality of the soul, and rejected the concept of original sin.730 Théophilanthropie was a fusion between Enlightenment thought and civic, religious traditions from the Robespierists.731 While men and women were no longer actively persecuted for their religious faith, Catholicism was still a long way from returning to France. It was practiced underground, in small communities, and often without legitimate clergy members to lead religious ceremonies.732

This left the former nuns in a precarious situation. They could not reassemble convents, open churches, or restore the liturgical calendar to pattern their lives. Every nun in France began to live with a new normal, one in which they would have to find the

731 The religious celebrations occurred every tenth day, or on the décadi of the new French revolutionary calendar. These celebrations of victory, liberty or equality, however, never captured the souls of the French citizens.
732 For more information on the “white masses” during the Directory, see Suzanne Desan’s Reclaiming the Sacred.
means to support themselves and decide which practices of the faith were the most important. This period was crucial for reforming vowed religious women’s identities through the daily practice of living. This chapter will explore the Directory period, roughly from 1795-1799, as an essential period for rebuilding the daily ritual and performativity of identity. The nuns who survived the Terror had to adjust to new living conditions. Some women, like Gabrielle Gauchat, struggled to find somewhere permanent to live and practice the faith. Other women left France and settled in other parts of Europe, like Vérot’s Visitandines and former members of Gauchat’s community. Most nuns accepted a pension from the government, but others inherited money from relatives, opened businesses, and earned incomes as laborers. In adjusting themselves to the new conditions created by the Revolution, these women slowly began practicing new identity-forming practices. In trying to survive and support themselves, they broke their vows of poverty and created new lives outside of their convents, even as they still identified with Catholicism. They learned to maintain their Catholic identities under new circumstances.

7.2 Gauchat During the Directory

Another complication for convents under the Directory and the Empire was that many nuns had died, emigrated, aged, or fallen ill in the intervening years of the Revolution. Former convents lacked the resources to rebuild anything without an influx of young congregants and financial support, which seemed improbable at a time when the government still maintained a cool relationship with religious congregations, which were still illegal. Furthermore, money from Rome would have been impossible to obtain under
the precepts of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. Therefore, even though religious women had survived the period of severe persecution during 1794, they were not in a position to return to their former practice of religious life. They adjusted themselves to the new situation. Godard, the author of the introduction to Gauchat’s diary, explains that Gauchat had ardently wished for her superior to restore the Visitatio convent. He recognized, however, that “weakened by age and suffering, this venerable superior was not in a position to deploy the energy and activity necessary for the accomplishment of such a project. The future, moreover, was far from reassuring their minds.”733 Even for those who wanted to return to a convent, such a move was impossible in most cases. There was much uncertainty about the future.

The end of the Reign of Terror was not the end of Gauchat’s troubles. Perhaps more troubling for devout Catholics in need of receiving the sacraments, was the fact that many of the priests were still in exile. Gauchat traveled more in the immediate aftermath of the Terror than at any other point because she was desperately searching for a place where she could maintain her vows and participate in the sacraments. At first, she was unable to find such a place. She discussed the experience of leaving her refuge during the Terror as leaving the Ark after the great flood described in the Bible:734 “Finally fixed by absolute orders, and having renounced all projects of change, I fled, not only the outside world, but even that of my cloister: and despite the connections that the sensitivity of my

733 « Mais affaiblie par l’âge et les souffrances, cette vénérable supérieure n’était pas en état de déployer l’énergie et l’activité nécessaires à l’accomplissement d’un tel projet. L’avenir d’ailleurs était loin de rassurer les esprits.» Godard, “Introduction,” in Gauchat’s Journal, XVLII-III.
734 Genesis 6:9-8 :22. In this account the Lord flooded the earth, but he saved Noah, his family, and a male and female of every species to repopulate the earth.
heart, had made me contract to remain inside…. Coming out of the Holy Ark and remaining in the world, this attraction seemed to take on for me the appearance of a new world. What steps!” 735 She had to move around a great deal between 1794 and 1801. She spent some time in Langres, and after six months, she moved to the Franche-Comté with the family of Madame de Pusy and her eleven children.736 In helping to care for these eleven children, Gauchat was able to use some of the skills she acquired in the convent to support herself outside of it. She learned to practice her faith in very different circumstances and use her skills developed in the convent to survive in the world.

Even with the easing of religious tensions, there was no place to practice her faith the way she had in the convent. If reforming the convent was still prohibited by law and impossible to achieve, Gauchat had to find some other way to survive. Gauchat spent the longest time after the cessation of mass executions working at a hospital house with her companion, Constance.737 As mentioned before, the hospitals were in dire need of skilled workers, and nuns were often readily accepted. Prior to the Revolution, the Visitation convents often provided long-term nursing care to noblewomen who could pay for these services. Gauchat and Constance relied on this experience in their months working in the hospital.


736 Godard, “Introduction,” XI.

737 Godard, “Introduction,” XXII.
Gauchat’s experiences during the Directory affirm some of Suzanne Desan’s arguments about the role of women during this period. For both the laity and religious women, the Directory offered challenges and opportunities for leadership, since clergymen were sparse. Women like Gauchat took up labors and leadership roles they had never occupied before. For example, “In the meantime, the works of charity occupied her. She watched the sick; she assisted the dying, and, substituting as much as possible for the mission of the proscribed priest, she softened for them the terrible passage from this time and place to eternity.” She was able to perform tasks typically reserved for priests because there was no one else to perform them. Through it all, she referred to God as her pilot, who would direct her path. She had no spiritual advisors, and therefore, turned directly to God without an intercessor to direct her journey. She did not need a convent or an organization to create her asylum of virtue for herself; the Reign of Terror taught her that. However, she did perform duties to help the dying pass on to the next life that had never been a part of the nuns' vocation before.

Later in the Directory period, Gauchat worried that religion, which generally could help the pain caused by death, could not fully alleviate the mark of sin that the

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738 Suzanne Desan, *Reclaiming the Sacred: Lay Religion and Popular Politics in Revolutionary France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990). In studying the religious revival in Yonne during the directory, Desan found that lay women gained new leadership positions.


death of King Louis XVI and Queen Marie-Antoinette had caused. She worried about the long-term future and character of France:

Religion itself, which ordinarily dries tears, still leaves nature in tears over the fate of Louis and Antoinette. But what will religion inspire after the appalling misfortune of these millions of regicides and deicides, whose souls abandoned to the fury of the passions have fallen from the state of grace into the depths of crime and drag their lives in the mire of vice? 

Gauchat wondered whether many of the citizens in France had gone too far down the path of sin to be able to find their way back to God. The lack of earnest reaction by the citizens appalled her. She argued, “…this nation, which has become barbarous and pagan, and which respects neither its sovereigns nor its God, is charged with more crimes and infamies than Sodom and Gomorrah ever were. Louis and Antoinette deserve tears. But they do not cry.” She recognized that killing the King was a watershed moment, from which the revolutionaries could make no return. Even years later, she found herself musing whether France could ever pull itself away from the sinful path it had taken. It shows how low an opinion Gauchat had of those who had turned from Catholicism.

Abbé Godard, who wrote the introduction to Gauchat’s diary, explains the decisions other sisters from the Visitation convent took as soon as the Reign of Terror
abated. They had tough choices to make about what to do and where to go to continue to keep their vows in such unexpected circumstances. Just removing the imminent threat of death or persecution did not immediately change the entire system of convents, which had existed before the start of the Revolution:

At the first glimmers of peace, in 1795, the inhabitants of Bar-sur-Aube recalled their hospitalières. Sister Eugenie set out to return to this town; she was heartbroken by the recent death of Madame de Sollier [a sister in the convent]. Passing Langres, the hospitalière visited her friend who was at the home of M. de Tricornot, where she was diligently watching over the bed of a sick friend of the house, Father Réguise, a former missionary to America. This interview tightened more closely the bonds of affection that united them. Their letters, however, were rare afterwards, because both cherished solitude. 745

Even amid such uncertainty, communities of women religious cared for each other and male clergy members. Sister Eugenie’s example showed that she offered her nursing care to the missionary and even strengthened the unity found in religion without any oversight from the Church. Religious identity was a source of stability and connected religious women across France throughout the crisis.

Gauchat also mentioned the fate of some of the other nuns from her order. They joined new convents, suffered banishment, or emigrated to live with family outside of France. She said, “Three sisters were at the Visitation convent of Langres. A fourth had taken the veil of the Annonciades: banished by the Revolution, she went to join one of

745 « Aux premières lueurs de la paix, en 1795, les habitants de bar -sur aube redemandèrent leurs hospitalières. Sœur Eugenie se mit en route pour retourner en cette villes ; elle avait le cœur brisé par le mort toute récent de Madame de Sollier. En passant à Langres, l’hospitalière visita son amie qui était alors chez M. de Tricornot, où elle veillait assidûment au lit d’un malade, ami de la maison, M. l’abbé Réguise, ancien missionnaire d’Amérique. Cette entrevue resserra plus étroitement les liens d’amitié qui les unissaient. Leurs lettres cependant furent assez rares dans la suite, parce que l’une et l’autre chérissaient la solitude. » Godard, “Introduction,” XLI.
her brothers in America” in 1796.746 The amount of travel and emigration would have been unimaginable for women who had taken vows to spend the rest of their lives in their specific local convent. The Revolution created circumstances in which the nuns had limited choices but could take up identities that they had never imagined for themselves, such as the identity of a traveler.

Godard’s account continues by explaining where Gabrielle Gauchat and her Sister Eugenie ended up after the turmoil. While Eugenie joined the Poor Clares, an active order with much more flexible vows, Gauchat took the opposite path. Her decision after the Revolution was unique. Few women chose to join more strict convents after dissolution:

The fragments that remain to us only teach us that this pronounced taste for distance from the sounds of the world that directed Sister Eugenie towards the order of the Poor Clares, as it led Sister Gabrielle [Gauchat] towards the Trappists. The first wanted to go to Salins [near Bensaçon], where the Poor Clares wanted to meet; but we don't know if she actually went there.747 Traveling to find new congregations was still difficult and dangerous to accomplish.

Eventually, Gauchat was able to have a more permanent solution after the Concordat, as she joined an unrecognized Trappist convent in Troyes. Godard argues that she had always desired a convent with such a strict rule: “Madame Gauchat turned her vows toward the strictest order she had always desired, and she prepared to seize the favorable

746 Godard, “Introduction,” XI. « Trois sœurs étaient à la Visitation de Langres. Une quatrième avait pris le voile chez les Annonciades : bannie par la Révolution, elle alla rejoindre un de ses frères en Amérique. »

747 « Les fragments qui nous en restent nous apprennent seulement que ce gout prononcé pour l’éloignement des bruits de la terre dirigeait la sœur Eugenie vers l’ordre des Clarisses, comme il entraînait la sœur Gabrielle vers la Trappe. La première avait le désir de se rendre à Salins, où les Clarisses voulaient se réunir ; mais nous ignorons si elle s’y rendit en effet. La suite de sa correspondes nous manque. » Godard, “Introduction,” XLI.
moment to satisfy them.” Her example is unusual because most women sought more flexible rules or sought to be relieved of their vows entirely. It reminds us that the individual experiences of the nuns were not all the same, and Gauchat sought to reaffirm her religious identity more tightly after this period of turmoil. Her old Visitandine convent did not survive the Revolution, and its members could not easily reassemble. Gauchat’s faith, however, remained more vigorous than ever, even as she engaged in travel and work that would have been impossible for her before the Revolution. At the first opportunity, she took the chance to join a firmly cloistered community and resume a contemplative life.

Gauchat’s community of Visitandines was only one of the hundreds that were disbanded by the Revolution and never regrouped. Although not all of its members left religious life, there were only a handful that joined a similar community after dissolution. Many of her sisters did not appear in her diary after dissolution, and we have no information about where they ended up. The few we do know about joined more active orders or another Visitation convent. Gauchat was the only one that sought a stricter rule

748 « Madame Gauchat tourna ses vœux du côté de l’ordre le plus sévère qu’elle avait toujours désiré, et elle se prépara à saisir le moment favorable pour les satisfaire. » Godard, “Introduction,” XVLIII.

749 Even after Catholicism returned to France in 1801 and the papal legate began to bring wayward nuns back into the faith, Gauchat still struggled with her identity in any earthly community. She had learned to only rely on her relationship with God. She eventually settled in a Trappist convent. The Trappists in Troyes seemed to be able to reunite even if they were still officially unrecognized, while Gauchat’s convent had dispersed too widely to be reassembled. The Trappists kept even more tightly to their religious vows than the Visitation. Therefore, for Gauchat, who seems to be the exception to the rule, the experience of Revolution drove her to more inflexible vows rather than more flexible ones. « Mes fâcheux incidents ont commencé à Troyes…. J’ai eu l’esprit de perdre de la vue tout mon onde, et de me trouver seule au milieu de Troyes. » Gauchat, Journal, 276.

750 Unfortunately for Gauchat, this new convent did not readily accept her. The sisters were unkind to her and made her transition difficult. She hated the new convent but had become accustomed to suffering and lived the rest of her days unhappily in the new community.
after dissolution. For nearly all the nuns in her journal, the community identity with the Catholic faith created a network that they relied on throughout the Directory period. Furthermore, this religious identity sustained them even as the practice of their faith had to be a bit more flexible in continually changing circumstances.

7.3 Vérot After Emigrating

When we left Vérot’s Visitandines, they had successfully escaped from France in the period of greatest persecution. They risked their lives to smuggle out the holy relics of Saint Francis de Sales. Unfortunately, they did not have the long and happy future they hoped to enjoy in Mantua. During the Directory, a young general, Napoleon Bonaparte, turned the tide of the war in Italy. French armies expanded, took new areas, and imposed French revolutionary laws, including dissolving the convents. Religious communities that had relocated had to move again, and the scope of those affected by the religious policies grew. Those that had left France during the Terror, as émigés, remained in exile.

Mère Marie-Jéronyme Vérot died in 1795, about a year after writing her long letter chronicling her convent’s arduous relocation. She was sick at the time of the voyage and perhaps weakened by the strain of the relocation. Her biological sister, Mère Claude-Séraphique Vérot, took over as mother superior. Under Claude-Séraphique’s leadership, her fellow sisters once again came under the control of the French revolutionaries when Napoleon’s army seized the city of Mantua in 1796. The community first took refuge in Gurek (modern-day Southern Poland); then, just nine
months later, they relocated to Krummau in Bohemia. Their confessor Père Jaumar died during this period. They fled a third time to Wittingen (modern-day Germany). There, five more sisters died in two weeks “because of the tiring journey, the uncertain future, the bad air in the country, and all the other difficulties they were experiencing.” The fragmented remnants of this convent would carry out their days in exile until the turn of the century. Desperate for any kind of protection or stability, Mère Claude-Séraphique Vérot wrote to their longtime friend and protector, Sœur Isabelle de Sales de Fosière of the Visitandine monastery in Vienna, to ask her to allow the convent “to live in a little corner of your monastery.” She promised to “pay room and board, etc., for I can’t carry on without your help, dearest Sister.” She ended her letter in more obvious desperation: “Take care of them, I beg you…” Perhaps because of the internal anguish she was suffering or divine providence, this letter was the last one she ever wrote. The next day she had a stroke, and three days later, on February 25, 1801, she passed away. The members of communities who were fortunate enough to emigrate did not have a comfortable life.

After five years of living on the run, experiencing death, and constantly vulnerable to relocation, Vérot’s Visitation convent, which had once resided in Lyon,

751 P. N. Josserand, Année Sainte des religieuses de la Visitation Sainte-Marie, vol. 11, Footnote 1, (Lyon, 1870), 265-266. As quoted in Péronne-Marie Thibert, ed. And trans., I Leave You My Heart: A Visitandine Chronicle of the French Revolution, Mère Marie-Jéronyme Vérot’s Letter of 15 May 1794 (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph’s University Press, 2000), 139. This spelling of Krumeau was the one used in the book even though it is the German spelling. This is the modern city of Krumlov, better known as Český Krumlov. The website of the current nunnery says they were in Klagenfurt before Vienna.

752 Thibert, I Leave You My Heart, 140.
753 Thibert, I Leave You My Heart, 141.
754 Thibert, I Leave You My Heart, 141.
finally found rest in Venice. They were finally able to put together a semi-permanent foundation in the nineteenth century with their much-reduced numbers.\textsuperscript{755} Their journey during the Directory was equally as harrowing as the one from Lyon to Mantua during the Terror.\textsuperscript{756} Although they may have escaped the Reign of Terror in France, their suffering extended from 1793 until 1801. In exploring the long and arduous journey of Visitation convent, one can see how convents with fewer members, fewer resources, and fewer resolve disappeared during the Revolution. The Visitation convent of Lyon proved to be an exceptional case of perseverance. Their existence in Venice was a testament to the network of Visitation convents and connections they maintained to sisters throughout the continent. Their shared religious identity helped facilitate unity and their final relocation.

7.4 Nursing Orders

During the Terror, many of the nursing and teaching nuns continued to serve in their posts in whatever capacity they could. Even after being expelled, they took up their labors as lay citizens, wearing whatever clothing the Revolution required or saying whatever oaths the subsequent governments deemed necessary. In some instances, the departments or local governments were so desperate for their labor that they waived requirements of the oath or the ban on wearing the religious habit.

\textsuperscript{755} In the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the nuns, with their precious relic of the heart of St. Francis de Sales, moved to nearby Treviso, where they are today.

\textsuperscript{756} Thibert, \textit{I Leave You My Heart}, 142. The convent was able to remain in Venice until 1912 when it was transferred to Treviso. It stands in Treviso today.
For example, three Sœurs Grises, or Daughters of Charity in Beaune, took up their positions again in hospitals almost immediately after their imprisonment. After the end of the Terror, they were able to obtain pensions much more easily and continue to serve. The lay citoyennes who had taken over while the Daughters of Charity were in prison were seldom as dedicated. So, by 1798, many of those who had ignored the Revolution’s directives were slowly restored to their posts. In towns like Beaune, which desperately needed their services, the sisters who had been on the brink of execution in 1794 were brought back to their labors. Even though they still refused to take the oath, and had been incarcerated for their resistance, their local administrators now turned a blind eye to their continued vocational activities. They were in such desperate need of experienced nurses that the nuns were whisked straight to the town hospital. Most women did not hold grudges against these injustices and saw returning to their vocation at their one source of stability. They looked forward to re-establishing their identity as “nursing sisters” after being labeled, for a time, as criminals.

One meaningful change that occurred just two weeks before the fall of Robespierre and the changing of governments was the brief experiment with state-owned hospitals. State ownership had been the goal of hospital reform based on the ideas of the Enlightenment and the physiocrats. The Law of July 11, 1794 transferred all hospital property to the state. This law, however, also meant that the state inherited maintenance

757 Forrest, The French Revolution and the Poor, 65
759 Physiocrats were Eighteenth century French Economists who believed in free trade and the natural order of social institutions. They often criticized the inefficiencies of hospitals.
problems, staffing issues, and debt. Instead of solving the inefficiencies and the problems with teaching and hospital care in France, it ended up being only a brief experiment in the challenges of state ownership. Within two years, by October 7, 1796, the Directory abandoned this project and returned all unsold property to the hospitals to resume a more traditional organizational structure under the leadership of hospital officials.\(^{760}\) This brief moment of state-organized hospital care did not fail because it was ineffective; it failed because there were too many changes happening contemporaneously. Previously, municipal authorities organized hospitals such as the Hôtel-Dieu in Paris. The problem with centralizing the administration of all hospitals was that the French government had so many other concerns that it was impossible to maintain the total commitment to reform that was necessary.

The real victims of the Directory period were the poor, sick, old, and orphaned whom the French government simply did not have the labor and resources to support. Between 1796 and 1800, the hospitals constantly appealed for aid from the government. Revenues in the hospitals had fallen to only ten percent of their pre-revolutionary incomes. The French government allowed hospitals to re-establish the *octrois*, or a tax on goods entering a city, to help offset the enormous costs of care.\(^{761}\) By the mid-point of the Revolution, things only got worse. Between 1795-1800 the charitable structure for the *enfants trouvés* was on the verge of a total collapse.\(^{762}\) Country nurses abandoned their charges and complained about pay, and 95 percent of the *enfants trouvés* died, according

\(^{761}\) McCloy, *Government Assistance in Eighteenth-Century France*, 204.
\(^{762}\) Forrest, *The French Revolution and the Poor*, 131.
to 1797 records (and records indicated that only 3-4 percent lived beyond several years). In Marseilles during the Year X (1801-1802), the death rate for the foundlings was 95 percent.

Furthermore, the number of beggars exploded. One report from July 1, 1796 suggested that there were 500,000 beggars in France; in 1800, another report estimated there were still 300,000, which exceeded all the pre-revolutionary levels by hundreds of thousands, according to historians. The disruption of the Terror was nearly impossible to overcome during the few short years of the Directory. The hospitals in France had been suffering from financial and labor shortages even before the Revolution. The Revolution pushed this health concern into a full-blown crisis. We may never know the number who died because of the lack of adequate care given the medicine of the time. While the former nuns were quick to take up their positions as soon as they could, they were unable to overcome some of the financial and organizational challenges posed by the several-year disruption of the Reign of Terror and the brief experiment in state ownership.

7.5 Negotiating their circumstances during the Directory

Understanding how women who were not nurses survived the Directory period was a bit more complicated. It was clear that many returned to their towns and relied on the help of their families to survive. However, few records record the movements of such women. Perhaps the best sources historians have for understanding the daily lives of

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763 McCloy, Government Assistance in Eighteenth-Century France, 274. Dora Weiner’s Citizen Patient also cites unprecedented numbers of beggars. Although we will never be able to have an exact number, most historians agree that the number of people requiring charity increased during the Revolution.
former nuns during this period are the Caprara documents. When the Catholic Church returned to France, religious men and women wrote to the papal legate, Cardinal Caprara, between 1802 and 1808 asking for dispensations of their vows, blessings for their marriages, or permission to rebuild their convents. Some of these letters are more detailed than others about their activities during the Revolution. 1,135 of these letters were written by nuns who asked for forgiveness for their activities during the Revolution; thus, they are an important source for historians to gain insight into what the nuns did.\textsuperscript{764}

After Napoleon and Pope Pius VII agreed on the Concordat in 1801, which allowed the Catholic Church to return to France after nearly a decade, both secular and religious authorities wrestled with the consequences of the Revolution on the French Church. The conflict between Catholic and secular authorities did not disappear overnight. Through their experience after the dissolution of their convents during the Revolution, members of religious order crafted new identities. Through the choices they made in the Catholic Church’s absence—such as marrying, working in nursing, teaching, sewing, baking, and other labors—former nuns took on new roles and responsibilities that were impossible without the Revolution. The Catholic Church that returned to France had to adapt to the changes of the Revolution, and the nuns played a role in determining the process of returning religious faith to France.

During the Revolution, it was challenging to keep religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, or even to just consistently recite the daily prayers (the breviary) when outside of the support of the convent. One of the most common requests from both

\textsuperscript{764} Bordas, \textit{Le Légation du Cardinal Caprara}.  

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male and female members of religious communities was for a dispensation of their vow of poverty. During the Revolution, former nuns often found themselves controlling wealth, which was a violation of their vow. Convents had always engaged in the economy through loans, producing goods for sale, and, most importantly, the commodification of prayers. The rule, however, required for personal wealth, often in the form of dowries (which paid for a woman’s sustenance particularly in contemplative orders) to be transformed into corporate wealth upon entering the convent. The institution of the Catholic Church had a hierarchy of supervisors who oversaw the administration of convent finances. When the revolutionaries dissolved the convents as the organizational broker for these economic exchanges, individual nuns found themselves forced to engage in the economy as individuals for the first time.

765 I found 445 different religious women asking to be relieved of their vow of poverty. I will explain how women broke this vow in a variety of ways. While supplications were written in both French and Latin, those written in the French vernacular were often much more interesting and personal because they were often written by the supplicant’s own hand. Women, generally, were less educated than men and their letters contain language, spelling, and syntax errors and rarely contain any mention of the requisite religious texts. This was true even among nuns.

766 For masses to be said, the priest (and perhaps attendants) had to be paid, and over time, with inflation, the required number of masses cost more than the income from the endowment, forcing convents to draw from other funds until they could get legal dispensation from the required number. Joann McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millenia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 113., 113. Particularly in the New World the convents provided much needed loans. Lavrin, “Religious Life of Mexican Women in XVIII Century Mexico” (PhD Dissertation: Harvard University, 1963), 1. Payments for masses and prayers for the dead often constituted most of a contemplative order’s income.

767 Here it might be helpful to draw a distinction between congregations (those who took simple vows) and religious orders (those that took solemn vows). For those entering religious orders, they were required to bring a dowry. Most allowed dispensations in special cases or a waiver could be granted for a trained teacher to offer her training and skills in lieu of a dowry. The exception was always the teaching congregations: they entered without dowries and at the convent’s expense, but their lives consisted mainly of menial labor. There was no individual property in the convent, and most did not even own personal clothing. All clothing was handed out and returned daily. Suzanne Campbell-Jones, *In Habit: A Study of Working Nuns* (Pantheon Books: New York, 1978), 72.
While Rafe Blaufarb has argued that this transformation of property destroyed the *ancien régime*, laid the foundation for the new constitutional order, and crystallized modern thinking about politics, he does not explore how these changes affected individual ex-nuns. This individual ownership of money, control of properties, rents, lending, and even business ventures was a remarkable shift towards financial independence for these women. Despite engaging in new economic ventures outside of the convent, these women still maintained a communal Catholic identity. For example, they only worked in activities that they had previously done inside the convent. Former sisters in the convent were able to leverage their skills developed inside the convent to help them survive outside of it. Their economic actions were an extension of their work in the convent communities, but now individual women had a level of agency over their financial choices that they had not had before. Solidarity in the convent identity shifted to a more individualized understanding of property ownership. Former nuns gained individual control of money, through pensions, inheritances, and various business endeavors. However, they had to prove to Caprara that they did not seek any money for their own benefit during the Revolution; thus, motivation became an essential element in their letters to the cardinal. Women continued to give alms to the needy and lend money, and they performed the same labors as in their religious communities. Even if all their economic activity was in service to others, individual ownership and control of money transformed the way that formerly cloistered women behaved and identified themselves.

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outside of the convent. Their experience—engaging in the economy as individuals—manifested in a growing sense of self and a reluctance to give up this level of individual economic agency.

Prior to the Revolution, convents had to support themselves through work, even if they had incomes from endowments and dowries. Members of many cloistered communities worked as gardeners, weavers, caretakers, healers, and cooks. With the post-Reformation reform movements, active religious orders took up more visible service in health or education.769 They had acquired land, along with their endowments, which they now developed to support their economic endeavors. They also learned skills in the convent at a time when not everyone had access to basic education, such as reading, writing, music, painting, printing, sculpting, woodworking, dressmaking, and embroidery. Everyone in the community had their own tasks and worked hard to meet one another’s material and spiritual needs. However, this had all been done communally and under the supervision and control of the Church.770 Without the Church’s oversight, these women now had to act as individuals and for individual benefit. After the Revolution, 445 women wrote to Caprara specifically to ask for a dispensation of their vow of poverty.771

The most common way for former nuns to control money as individuals was through receiving a pension. After the revolutionaries banned all solemn religious vows,

770 Kilroy, Coming to an Edge, 11.
771 Bordas, Légation en France du cardinal Caprara.
consolidated religious houses, and finally dissolved the convents, the National Assembly offered a meager, erratically paid pension to former nuns. Pensions were not enough for a woman to live on without some other sort of aid. Previously, convents provided for their inhabitants’ basic necessities. Julie-Francoise LeSage, a Brigittine, took the pension very reluctantly, according to her 1804 petition to the papal legate. The necessity of caring for a sister who was “continuously sick” “forced” her to take the pension she did not want.772

The curé, Le Roy, who wrote on LeSage’s behalf, emphasized her selfless action in caring for her sick sister as a way to offset her transgression in accepting a source of income. However, not all women who took the pension did so under such reluctant circumstances. Others grew accustomed to the independence and autonomy offered by the Revolution and the pension. Additionally, this experience in handling their own finances was not something they quickly forgot.

A second way women began to control money was through inheritances. One of the most critical changes to nuns’ relationships with money was the fact that these women were no longer legally dead and could claim an equal share of their inheritance with their siblings. In the eighteenth century, women sometimes took the veil so that their family could concentrate their wealth on their most eligible daughter. Therefore, the reemergence of potential inheritors could severely change the family’s economic position. These inheritance laws also created problems for the church, which returned to France in 1801, after the Concordat was signed. The papal legate dictated that women

772 AF IV 1898, Dossier 6, Pièce 102. « Julia Françoise LeSage religieuse Brigittine désireroit [amllé ??] être relevée des vou [voeux ] de pauvreté … et 2. Pour pouvoir aider plus facilement une sœur infirme et continuellement malade. »
who sought to receive their inheritance or collect rents on their inherited property could not take any money for themselves. Instead, they had to use any money they acquired for the benefit of the church. To be granted a dispensation, these nuns would have to convince the papal legate that receiving their inheritance would not violate their vows of poverty, since their money would contribute to a useful religious endeavor. These women had to negotiate their position in a way to satisfy the civil laws, which allowed them to claim their inheritance, but also their religious vows of poverty. To be welcomed back into the church, they could not take these inheritances for themselves but only to perform a useful religious function.

One common way to navigate these rules was to give money to benefit another family member. For example, Adelaïde Pallu, a Carmelite from Poitiers, wanted a suspension of her vow of poverty so that she could give her inheritance to her nephews. The priest who wrote on her behalf was quick to add that “she is very determined not to take any advantage for herself, although she is very poor.” 773 She wanted to seize the economic opportunities offered to her by the Revolution to perform typical acts of charity better and care for her extended family. Like Pallu, Radagonde Le Clerc sought to inherit and be able to control her inheritance on behalf of a favorite family member. She asked for “permission to dispose of some funds in favor of a sister who, since the frightful

773 AF IV 1900, Dossier 1, Pièce 9. « Je supplie votre Eminence de suspendre l’obligation du voeu de pauvreté en faveur de la S’Adelaïde Pallu, Religieuse professe des Carmélites de Poitiers, dans le dessein d’entrer dans le Succession de son Père et de se porter pues héritiers et uniquement pour sauver un peu des neveux lesquels sans cela seraient réduits à la pauvreté. Elle est très déterminée a n’ose tirer aucune avantage pour elle-même, encore qu’elle soit très pauvre. »
moment that ripped [her] from [her] house, was all my consolation.” After her father’s
death, she grew accustomed to receiving her share of the inheritance, which she gave to
her sister to show her gratitude and affection. In seeking reconciliation with the Catholic
Church, Le Clerc did not want to give up this new privilege to dispose of her funds to
benefit her sister. Showing gratitude (financially) to her caregiver was only possible
through the new revolutionary legislation.

Some of these inheritance cases became more complicated as the petitioners
sought to negotiate civil and canon law. In at least one instance, Margueritte Sophie
Badeau asked to retroactively claim an inheritance in view of the changes to French
inheritance laws and her own economic instability. Badeau, aged forty-two, a professed
member of the Visitation Convent in the diocese of Autun, requested to:

    take a domain that produces about seven hundred francs in rent, which by right of
    morte main returned to the power of the lord of the place, when she entered
    religion… and that since the dissolution of the religious houses, the so-called
    Margueritte Sophie Badeau has not been able to subsist on any other resource
    than the modest pension of fifty francs, and the fees which she earned from the
    education of some young girls. It has been five months since a serious illness
    made it impossible for her to instruct the children, and the enforced rest that she is
    now reduced to the help of charitable souls. Legal experts consulted believe that
    according to the current laws of France, Margueritte Sophie Badeau can take
    possession of her property. She hopes that your Eminence takes into consideration
    the facts contained in the present application, and begs you to discharge her
    conscience, to grant her the waiver of her vow of poverty…

774 AF IV 1900, Dossier 1, pièce 15. « elle trouvant dans la triste […] d’hériter par la mort de mon père ;
je veux demander Monseigneur, un indult qui me donna la facilité de percevoir la part qui me sera
adjugés, et la que je pourrai hériter par la suite, la permission des disposer de quelques fonds en
faveur d’une sœur qui depuis la moment affreuse qui m’a arraché de ma maison à Été toute ma
consolation ».

775 AF IV 1900, Dossier 1, Piece 24. « Vous Expose Margueritte Sophie Badeau âgée de quarante-deux
ans, religieuse professe du monastère de la Visitation Ste. Marie de Charolles au diocèse d’Autun
qu’étant dans le monde elle prendrait un domaine d’environ Sept cents francs de rente, qui par droit
de main morte est rentre au pouvoir de seigneur de lieu, lorsqu’elle entra été religion. Celui-ci
outre une dote consistant en un contrat de deux cent vingt-cinq livres de rente, assura à sa
Taking advantage of the rights offered by the Revolution allowed Badeau to provide for
her own sustenance rather than rely on the charity of others. In order to settle these
affairs, Badeau must also “discuss [these matters] in the civil courts if necessary.” The
issue was that she had not yet absolutely established her right to this property and would
have to fight in the civil courts to see if she could claim her share. She was just trying to
control these rents so she would not have to rely on other people for sustenance. The
papal legate seemed inclined to grant this request, perhaps because he anticipated the
steep legal path she had ahead of her.776 She wanted to control property as a way of
supporting herself, which was a significant shift from the communal identity of the
convents. This letter showed the long-lasting implications and confusion surrounding the
changes to inheritance laws in France and Badeau’s desire to maintain an independent
existence that was not reliant on anyone else.

For some devout women, it was inheritances that made the contemplative life still
possible. The major difference was that, instead of joining contemplative communities of
sisters, these women lived independently and engaged in a contemplative religious life on

776 The handwriting is incredibly sloppy and written in Latin, but it seems like he granted this request.
This meant that he considered her self-sustenance as not a violation of her vow of poverty.
their own. For example, Marie Péronne Morand asked to be relieved of her vows of poverty because she wanted to use her money to devote herself to contemplative prayer—just as she intended by taking her vows. She argued the papal dispensation for her vows was “important for her … to arrange for herself an existence free from the worries and anxieties of the world, and to reduce her to the contemplative life she had embraced by her entry into Religion. As a result, she humbly resorts to your Eminence to grant her any dispensations and authorizations, which he deems necessary…” 777 She recognized that although the Revolution granted her the right to inherit, enjoyment of these rights conflicted with her vows of poverty.778 The argument – that she wanted to control money to stay out of the economy as much as possible – seems paradoxical, but was true for many women who wrote to the papal legate. The letter asked whether self-sustenance was a legitimate religious purpose, and if so, suggested that women could accept inheritances to keep their vows in private. Morand’s letter showed it was not so much that the activities these women engaged in that changed, but the fact that these nuns were handling money on their own that impacted their sense of self.

777 AF IV 1900, Dossier 1, Piece 25. « Marie-Péronne Morand habituées à Chambère ancienne Savoye. Département du Mont-Blanc, Expose humblement qu’elle est née à Chambère de première septembre 1737. Et qu’en 1757 elle a fait profession religieuse à Grenoble, ancienne Province de la Dauphine, chez les Dames de Montfleury ordre de Saint Dominique.
…. mais il lui importe de prévenir des procès et de se ménager une existence qui débarrassée des soucis et des inquiétudes du monde la ramène autant qu’il sera possible, à la vie contemplative qu’elle avait embrassée par son entrée en Religion.
En conséquence, Elle recourt humblement qu’il plaise à votre Eminence. Lui accorder toutes dispenses et autorisations qui peuvent lui être nécessaires … »

778 AF IV 1900, Dossier 1, Piece 25. « Les lois rendues depuis la révolution, ont non seulement dissous et Supprimés les ordres religieux en France ; mais elles ont encore voulu attribuer aux Profès la jouissance des droits civils, même ceux de successibilité l’exercice de ces décrits, dans bien des consciences, se trouve en opposition avec les vœux qu’elles sont faits … »
Some former nuns went so far as to ask to control that money even after their
death, by making wills. However, even wills had to use the funds for a useful religious
purpose. Therefore, when women wrote to the papal legate asking for permission to make
a will, they emphasized that wills benefitted the church in some way or another. A typical
request to be able to make a will sounded much like this one written on behalf of Marie-
Rose Debrejeas: “the petitioner asks to be authorized to dispose, by will or otherwise, of
the rights she has to the said succession, which she cannot do without an exemption.”
Her combined pension and recent inheritance from the death of her mother meant she
would likely have a sizeable amount on money to set aside in her will. These letters
were short, straightforward, and rarely written in the nuns’ own hand.

However, one of the most informative letters on the decision-making processes of
nuns who sought to make wills was the letter written on behalf of Charlotte Vissec de
Ganges, a former abbess of the Cistercian order. She acquired an inheritance “of
approximately six thousand livres of net income, by the death of her brother.”
She split
this inheritance with a sister who was also a former abbess. Therefore, Vissec de Ganges
decided:

779 AF IV 1900, Dossier 1, pièce 90. « … l’exposante demande ci être autoriser à disposer par testament
ou autrement des droits quelle ci a la dit succession laquelle disposition elle ne peut faire sans une
dispense l’exposante proteste de son entière obéissance aux supérieurs ecclésiastiques et de son
profond respect… »

780 AF IV 1900, Dossier 1, pièce 90. « Vous expose que d’après les lois civiles de l’état, elle a droit a la
succession de sa mère décédée en l’année 1801, ce qui d’après la même loi, la prévue du modique
traitement que la gouvernement paye aux religieuses de France… »

781 AF IV 1900, Dossier 1, Piece 93. « Charlotte Vissec de Ganges cy-devant abbesse de l’ordre Cîteaux, a
Alais, département de Gard, a l’honneur de représenter à votre Éminence qu’ayant en un
succession d’environ sixe mille livres de revenu net, par la mort de son frère, elle desireroit
pouvoir disposer par testament de ce que la loi civile laisse à sa disposition, c’est-à-dire de la
moitié de cette succession… »

328
...she will not leave [the inheritance] to this sister, which she may dispose of by law, because she thinks that it is enough for a nun to have half of the succession of their brother and still half of the portion of the supplicant, which the law gives her. This sister is elderly, very infirm, and unable to manage a considerable sum… If your Eminence grants to the supplicant the grace she asks him, she undertakes to entrust a person, worthy of her confidence, before her death, a considerable sum for the establishment of a seminary or any other useful work to the religion.782

The letter writer demonstrated that Vissec de Ganges considered her other options but decided the best use of her money was to leave it to be useful to the church. She, therefore, still had some agency over the individual who would control the money after her death to ensure it would be used for a seminary. The fact that these women chose to write to the papal legate to maintain this right to control their inheritance highlighted the existence of wealth that former nuns controlled and the agency they had over their wealth, albeit within Church constraints.

Furthermore, there were examples of nuns who lent out their money without the intention of taking any interest. While convents had lent money to individuals outside of their communities for centuries, now we have instances of individual nuns lending their money. Old Testament verses such as a passage in Deuteronomy, which reads, “You shall not charge interest on loans to your brother, interest on money, interest on food, interest on anything that is lent for interest,” prohibited loaning money at interest.783 Early modern nuns felt that the usury that men could get away with was “particularly dangerous to them.”784 Therefore, they were wary of handling any money that had been tainted by

782 AF IV 1900, Dossier 1, Piece 93.
783 Deuteronomy 23:19 ESV. The Fifth Lateran Council in 1517 changed the previous prohibitions on usury. The ideas about what counted as usury changed to only condemn exorbitant interest.
784 McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, 283.
interest or usury. However, not every congregation felt this way. By the eighteenth century, many convents had become prominent lenders, particularly in the New World, where few other institutions could perform that function.\textsuperscript{785}

In a letter written in her own hand, on August 22, 1802, a Benedictine nun, Sister Dezerville, asked for an exemption from her vow of poverty because she “lent with the intention of not taking any interest.”\textsuperscript{786} However, despite this best intention, when the loan remained unpaid, Dezerville charged some unspecified amount. This was a departure from the convent practice of limiting public economic involvement, particularly concerning the temptations of usury. The difference for Sister Dezerville was that she was acting as an individual when she lent money, which meant she now had to submit herself before the papal legate to await his decision on the matter.

Some nuns, when they found themselves without resources, accessed money through the sale of their possessions. Private property had always been a subversive element in the convent, so much so that Leander of Seville once called it “adultery against the common life.”\textsuperscript{787} The inhabitants of the convent were ideally supposed to repress all ownership instincts. (In practice, the wealthier nuns often had cupboards of possessions.)\textsuperscript{788} Sister Huart, and her companion Marie Anne Gabrielle, appealed to the

\textsuperscript{785} Lavrin, \textit{Brides of Christ: Conventual Life in Colonial Mexico}.

\textsuperscript{786} AF IV 1900, Dossier 1, Piece 18. « N’ayant pas été instruite jusqu’à présent des démarches qu’il fallait faire aux pères de votre Eminence pour obtenir les dispenses relatives au veux de pauvreté. J’ai prêté avec l’intention de ne point prendre intérêts si je n’en n’ai pas besoin je vous demande Monseigneur de pouvoir se placer à fond perdu et d’hériter se ces sirconstences mi obligent et de disposer de mes effets

\textsuperscript{787} McNamara, \textit{Sisters in Arms}, 113.

\textsuperscript{788} In one account from Cistercian nuns in Weinhausen, each nun’s dowry was locked in a chest and she could access it at any time “for it was her property. Thus, they thought they lived in common
papal legate to ask permission for whichever of them died first to sell her property to the other, to prevent the deceased nun’s family from claiming it. In order to do so, they needed to be excused from their vows of poverty.\textsuperscript{789} Although this was a short letter, Huart wrote it in her own hand. They had survived the past decade by supporting one another, and they hoped to continue to do so after the other died. Her desire to make amends with the church likely stemmed from the ailing condition of her companion.

Marie Anne Gabrielle, her partner in this sale, “could no longer write,” and they both feared “in case of death” that they needed to be forgiven by the papal legate to be assured of their salvation.\textsuperscript{790} Their rationale for selling off their property was to avoid troubling their families with their sustenance. Like those women who sought to inherit, Marie-Anne Gabrielle and Huart argued that they sold off “small effects,” not for greedy self-indulgence, but only for some useful work of the church.

Lastly, former nuns engaged in the economy by taking up employment. Even this employment focused on continuing the services their religious communities previously provided. Any large convent “came close to supplying its needs by the handiwork of its members.”\textsuperscript{791} When individual nuns faced economic difficulties, they relied on the skills

\textsuperscript{789} AF IV 1900, Dossier 1, Pièce 14. « Me trouvons avec une sœur converse de ma maison, le grand vicaire à qui je me suis adresse ma dis que nous pouvions nous faire une vente mutuelle de nos petits effets, a fin de n’être poins inquiétée par nos famille, »

\textsuperscript{790} AF IV 1900, Dossier 1, Piece 14. « en cas de mort je vois que je ne le devais pas sans votre indult je vous le demande, Monseigneur, pour elle et pour moi (parce qu’elle ne fait poins écrire, es que je suis sortie de ma maison avec le titre de prieure) ainsi que la permission de placer un peu d’argent à fond perdu réversible. J’ai l’honneur d’être Monseigneur avec un profond respect de votre éminence…. »

\textsuperscript{791} McNamara, \textit{Sisters in Arms}, 115.
and daily labors that they knew well from their convents. The majority of those who received an income through working were nurses, teachers, or caregivers. The Sisters of Saint Joseph du Puy were forced to separate after dissolution and took up the title “les filles à carreau” or daughters of the lace pillow. They began to make their living officially as lace makers, but unofficially, they offered their services as nurses to the villages which sheltered them and were in desperate need of medical care.\textsuperscript{792} Here their economic engagement in lace-making was both practical and a means to justify their presence in the towns. It was a useful cover under which they could conduct their primary nursing services.

In several articles and urban legend, two nuns who had to leave their convents were said to have opened a bakery and invented the modern recipe for the French macaron. Almonds, one of the main ingredients in macarons, were “good for the girls who do not eat meat,” such as nuns who often fasted.\textsuperscript{793} Clèmence Boulouque argued this was the reason convents were known for producing macarons. In his book, \textit{Au pays des Macarons}, he repeated the familiar legend, that Marguerite Gaillot and Marie-Elisabeth Morlot, converse sisters, took refuge at the home of a doctor by the name Gormand after the dissolution of convents.\textsuperscript{794} Since they had honed their culinary skills in making

\textsuperscript{792} Olwen Hufton, \textit{Women and the Limits of Citizenship}, 75. Also these sisters are mentioned in the history of the Revolution by A. Bois, \textit{Les Soeurs de Saint Joseph}. Lace-making became a dangerous profession and basically disappeared during the Revolution after women lace-makers were stoned to death in 1790. Hufton, \textit{Women and the Limits of Citizenship}, 92.

\textsuperscript{793} Clèmence Boulouque, \textit{Au Pays des Macarons} (Paris : Mercure de France, 2005), 33.

\textsuperscript{794} I find the name Gormand highly speculative, but alas, this is the name provided. (Gormand sounds much like Gourmand)
macarons in the convent, they began a successful macaron business as early as 1793.\textsuperscript{795} While most of this story seems shrouded in half-truth intended to sell macarons to tourists in the nineteenth century, Marguerite Gaillot, (called Margeurite Le Blanc based on the white dress of converse sisters) and Elisabeth Morlot were real nuns, both of whom appeared in the 1790 census on the state of the convents in the National Archives.\textsuperscript{796} The only academic source to mention these nuns argued, “in Nancy and Saint-Emilion, nuns endeavored successfully to transform their recipes into commodities to support themselves. A pair of ‘Macaron Sisters’ began to operate a successful business from the home of a local doctor in Nancy…” \textsuperscript{797} Whether these women were the famous creators of the French macaron or not, we do know that it was not uncommon for nuns to take the skills they developed in the convent to the secular world.

The nuns, forced out of the convent and into the world, faced one of the most seductive of worldly temptations, the control of money. In their individual control of pensions and inheritances, they departed from a convent identity, which strongly discouraged any personal possession. Yet, they often gained and used their money in the same way their convents had for hundreds of years. While the nuns’ involvement in the economy was nothing new, it was their status as individuals with agency over varying amounts of money that altered their self-identification. Although the Revolution forced

\textsuperscript{795} Their now famous house still produces macarons under a heavily guarded recipe, if you believe the myth. Boulouque, \textit{Au Pays des Macaron}, 34.
\textsuperscript{796} D XIX 06, Dossier 96.
\textsuperscript{797} Allegedly, the archives from Saint-Emillion indicate that a woman named Boutin ensured her survival by trading her macaron recipe for guarantees of food, clothing, and lodging around 1820. Cindy Meyers, “The Macaron and Madame Blanchez,” \textit{Gastronomica} 9, No. 2 (Spring 2009): 14-18.
economic independence on the nuns, this practice of engaging in the economy as individuals increased their sense of self and individual identity rather than their communal identities.

7.6 Economic Independence and A Different Catholicism

In addition to these petitions containing evidence of the new financial independence of nuns, this economic flexibility potentially posed a challenge to the traditions and authority of the Catholic Church, which was trying to return to France. In writing their letters at the start of the re-establishment of the Church in France, religious women influenced the Catholicism that returned and made it look different than the one that left. After First Consul Napoleon Bonaparte and Pope Pius VII agreed on the Concordat in 1801, which allowed the Catholic Church to return to France after nearly a decade, both secular and religious authorities wrestled with the consequences of the Revolution for the French Church. In their letters to Cardinal Caprara, the papal legate appointed to France, the former nuns lobbied on their own behalf to shape the type of Catholicism that returned to France. Through the choices they made in the Catholic Church’s absence—such as marrying, working in nursing, teaching, sewing, baking, and other labors—former nuns took on new roles and responsibilities that had a long-term impact on nineteenth-century religious communities in France. The Catholic Church that returned to France had to adapt to the changes of the Revolution. The Church allowed women who took permanent vows of poverty to inherit, make wills, maintain individual wealth and possessions, and control property. Letters written by the nuns and their representatives played a role in the early process of returning religious faith to France.
In focusing on the challenges these women faced during the Revolution, they created complications for a church in the process of returning. The papacy, the state, and the nuns negotiated a new relationship primarily due to the agency of the nuns themselves. Former nuns sought to remain Catholic, but also to take advantage of the new liberties offered by the Revolution. Many wanted to bend the rules relating to the permanence of vows, the level of economic involvement religious women could have, and the type of work required for women religious. Former nuns who worked, inherited money, and survived the religious turmoil with their faith intact, were, then, active participants in the process of returning Catholicism to France. They advocated to keep some of the economic agency that they had acquired during the Revolution, and that would have been impossible without the new civil laws. In doing so, they would be breaking their solemn religious vows. Nuns who lobbied on their own behalf to maintain some small part or control of their property played in important rule in solidifying the changes to inheritance and property created by the revolutionaries.

This practice of working and controlling money transformed their relationship with the economy and inspired them to lobby for changes to the administration of women’s religious orders to allow them greater financial flexibility. Most nuns during the Revolution simply hoped to be able to support themselves outside of the convent when their institutions were dissolved. Marie Benoîte Martin, a former Carmelite nun from Dijon, described her experience as a matter of survival. Because she had no other means of survival except to accept work, and because of her health, she was unable to recite the
divine office, and she could no longer fulfill her obligations. Most of these women were forced by the circumstances of the Revolution to take on a new kind of financial independence. When the Catholic Church returned, many continued to maintain these new economic habits even as they reasserted their Catholic identities.

In another example of a nun who simply wished to continue to survive these uncertain times, Jeanne Nicole Bonard asked that she be allowed to accept donations from her parents and friends, or to keep and hold property. She did not have any particular property in mind when she wrote to the legate. Writing to the papal legate, her advocate explained that “she has made a solemn vow of Poverty, and that she cannot own any property without a formal and legitimate dispensation, she begs His Holiness to grant an exemption to her in order to be able to make a legal claim on and to possess goods of whatever kind.” Bonard asked the church to recognize and accept the changes wrought by the Revolution. The writer also asked for the cardinal to excuse the rest of her vows and duties of religious life as well, but the vow of poverty was the only one explicitly mentioned. Her example, like many other women who wrote to the papal legate, shows

798 « ... prend la liberté de vous exposer, que forcée, par les circonstances, de quitter son convent, et réduite à se procurer par son travail, de quoi subsister, la foiblesse de sa santé la met hors d’ état de pouvoir continuer à remplir les différens exercices de sa règle, ni même de reciter le grand office, malgré le désir qu’elles auroit de s’ acquitter au moins de cette dernière obligation ; elle supplie donc instamment votre Sainteté de la dispenser. » AN, AF IV 1902 Dossier 4, pièce 130.

799 « Mais comme elle a fait vœu solomnel de Pauvreté, et qu’ elle ne peut posséder aucune Propriété sans une dispense formelle et légitime, elle supplie Sa Sainteté de la luy accorder à l’ effet de pouvoir requérir et posséder les biens de quelque genre que ce soin qui lui sont arrivés ou qui pourroient lui arriver par la suite ; de se servir de ces biens et des fruits qui en proviennent ou proviendront pour sa subsistance et ses usages légitimes, de disposer des uns et des autres, ou Manuellement ou pour donation entre les vifs ou même par acte testamentaire en faveur, soit des pauvres soit de ses Parents ou amis conformément aux à règles de la Charité de la reconnaissance et de la sagesse, et elle ne cessera de former des vœux pour la prospérité de jours prétieux de sa sainteté… » AN, AF IV 1902, Dossier 4, pièce 49.
the former nuns, who wished to remain Catholics, did not or could no longer return to religious life, and sought to play a larger role in the economy even after the church returned.

In many examples, women who broke their vows of poverty and wished to be relieved of their religious duties maintained a strong religious identity. Anne Bailletet, a Carmelite nun and her patron, offered a compelling case. They both remained committed to their religious identity and their duties as sisters in Christ, but under a new economic organization. In this letter, she asked for the papal legate,

to allow me to take advantage of the charitable liberality of a pious nun who, in order to assure me the necessary maintenance forever, wishes to make in my favor an investment of money, of which I will have the annual rent of two hundred livres, to dispense for this occasion of my vow of poverty, by allowing me to accept this gift, to enjoy it, and to be able to dispose of it and pass it on after me, according to the donor's intention to people consecrated to God.800

Although she did not give the name of the pious nun who offered to support her financially, we can guess that it was likely a nun who had inherited wealth during the Revolution. Anne Bailletet asked to receive and control this rent to maintain her vow of poverty, even though receiving such a sum was a violation of that vow. This petition showed both an ardent desire to support and participate in religious life, but outside of the formal church structure. The church had no choice but to recognize these new financial arrangements that were outside of their control.

800 « de me permettre de profiter de la charitable libéralité d’une pieuse religieuse qui pour m’assurer à jamais le nécessaire entretien désire faire en ma faveur un placement d’argent, dont il me reviendra la rente annuelle de deux cent livres de me dispenser pour cette occasion de mon vœu de pauvreté, en me permettant d’accepter ce don, d’en jouir, et d’en pouvoir disposer et les faire passer après moi selon l’intention de la donatrice à des personnes consacrées à Dieu. » Archives nationales, AFIV 1902, Dossier 2, pièce 54.
Perhaps more importantly, the Revolution provided the circumstances under which the un-named pious nun was able to contrive such an arrangement. The pious nun’s offer to support Bailletet circumvented the traditional sources of income (donation and dowries). She set up a system that allowed for Bailletet to observe as many of her religious duties as possible, but without any oversight or control by male clergy members. Religious women developed their own economic ties that were created by their vocation. Because they could no longer look for help from the institutional church, nor to the government to provide a pension, expelled nuns learned to rely on a network of religious relationships they had crafted themselves. Despite still using wealth for religious purposes, they wanted to have a say about where their money was going. They chose to support their fellow nuns, to rebuild convents, and to recruit nieces for the profession. Until the return of the Catholic Church, these two nuns had escaped church oversight of their finances and the patriarchal and familial concerns over money. They found a way to practice their faith without both, at least, until the return of formal Catholic institutions, and they needed the papal legate’s permission to continue in this unorthodox organization.

Similarly, we see a continuation of this communal religious identity even while embracing new freedoms offered by the Revolution when groups of nuns submitted requests for a dispensation of their vows of poverty together. For example, the Franciscan Recollectine sisters Albertine Joseph Poulet, Celestine Courtin, Natalie Bronchin, and Thérèse Bronchin submitted a letter together, in which, “They very humbly beg your eminence to grant them permission to be able to enjoy the benefit of the civil law relating
to succession by will or otherwise.”

The Recollectine nuns argued after being chased from their monastery; they wished to benefit from the revolutionary changes, especially after these changes took so much from them. They pleaded for the church to recognize their legal right to possess property that would break their religious vows.

Likewise, two Parisian Ursulines from the rue Saint Jacques, Jeanne Françoise Lefebvre and Marie Françoise Henriette Labucherie, asked the legate, “to allow them to receive the inheritance, or donations which could arrive to them, to possess their money, and to dispose of their funds while alive or by wills. All under the obedience and dependence of their legitimate superiors.”

Asking to receive inheritances was nothing less than a repudiation of the central vow of religious life, the vow of poverty. At the same time, the Ursulines affirmed their vow of obedience to their superiors. Furthermore, these Ursulines signed with both their secular names and their religious names that they took when they entered the convent (Sister Saint Ursule and Sister St. Marguerite, respectively). Their letters showed a commitment to their religious identities, even as they lobbied for changes in the way that they practiced their identities. In submitting their requests together, we see that the identification with members of their convents remained strong even a decade after dissolution. Their example showed that not all their vows were

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801 « Elles suppliant très humblement votre éminence de leur accorder la permission de pouvoir jouir de la bénéfice de la loi civile relative aux successions par testament ou autrement. » Archives nationales, AF IV 1902 Dossier 4, pièce 85.

802 « …de leur permettre de recevoir les héritages, ou donations qui pourroient leur arriver, placer leur argent, et disposer de leurs fonds entre vifs ou par testaments. Le tout sous l’obéissance et dépendance de leurs supérieurs légitimes. » Archives nationales, AF IV 1902 Dossier 4, pièce 114.

803 Archives nationales, AF IV 1902 Dossier 4, pièce 114.
abandoned. They were willing to dispense with the vows of poverty but not their vows of obedience to their superiors.

Another group of nuns, who still identified as nuns (not as ex-nuns) and included their religious names, submitted a letter asking for a reprieve from several of their vows, including the vow of poverty. What is interesting about this petition is that these women still identified themselves as nuns and called themselves by their religious names (in addition to their secular names). Marie François Champion de Nansouty, or Sister Sainte Sophie, the superior of their Ursuline community in Semur along with two of her sisters, Luce-Elisabeth de Dio de Momperrous and Suzanne de Dio de Momperrous submitted their request for the dispensation of their vows. Both Dio de Momperrous sisters were advanced in age (aged sixty-nine and sixty-three, respectively), but their Superior was eighty-six years old. The three nuns lived together, “as a result of a small estate inherited by Mother Saint Sophie, which gives her a little more comfort, which is absolutely necessary for her to heal more, still contributes to the well-being of her friends and companions, the Dio de Momperrous sisters, who live with her, and who by their continual care prolong her existence.”

Even a decade after the dissolution, the eighty-six-year-old mother superior was looking after her sisters financially, and they cared for her physical needs. They recreated a little convent of their own that existed outside of the control of the Catholic infrastructure. They pieced together a “modest” living after

804 « En conséquence étant survenu une petite succession, à la mère Ste. Sophie qui en lui procurent un peu plus d’aisance qui lui est absolument nécessaire pour se soigner d’avantage ; contribueront encore au bien être de sa amis et compagnes les sœurs de Momperrous, qui vivent avec elle, et qui par leurs soins continuelle prolongent son existence. » AN, AF IV 1902, Dossier 4, pièce 127.
“having lost all their fortunes as a result of events which forced the supplicants to leave their community.” 805 There was a strengthening of the religious identities even as they embraced the opportunities of the Revolution. Even after the mother superior died, she wished to be able to provide for her companions who weathered this storm with her. Their convent identity was recreated between themselves, but outside of the Catholic institutions.

During the Revolution, the conflict between religious and civil law was a constant source of inner turmoil for women religious. This did not cease to be the case with the Concordat. Marie Joseph Gertrude Broquare, a Benedictine from Besançon, wrote on the 23rd of March 1803, recognizing “the impossibility of fulfilling the vow of poverty exactly; she wished to be able to give proofs of her attachment and of her recognition to her parents, friends, and servants, and begs your Eminence to authorize her to take advantage in [good] conscience of the freedom to dispose and make a will which is granted to her by civil law.” 806 She ended her letter saying that she lifted her prayers to heaven for the papacy and the preservation of all good Catholics. 807 Therefore, at the same time, as she sought to break her solemn vows, she still considered herself a part of the larger Catholic church. In the same breath as asking the church to bend to the

805 “le traitement que lui fait l’état étant des plus modique ses parents lui offrent quelques secours ; mais si elle jouissance de se trouvent sans ressources, ayant perdu toutes leurs fortunes par suite de événements qui ont forces les suppliantes à quitter leur communauté » AN, AF IV 1902, Dossier 4, pièce 127.
806 « l’impossibilité de remplir exactement le vœu de pauvreté ; elle désire pouvoir donner des preuves a son attachement et de sa reconnaissance à son parents, amis, et domestiques, et supplie votre Eminence de l’autoriser a profiter en conscience de la liberté de disposer et tester qui lui est accorder par la loi civile. » AN, AF IV 1902, Dossier 4, Piece 110-111.
807 AN, AF IV 1902, Dossier 4, Piece 110-111.
Revolution, she asked for its preservation. These paradoxical juxtapositions help illuminate the complications of the Revolution for those closest to it.

Questions regarding inheritances were particularly difficult for women who no longer had convents on which to rely. An inheritance could ensure that she was able to afford to live and maintain the rest of her vows, even if such control of money was forbidden by vows of poverty. For example, Marie Elizabeth d’Albene, a former nun from Avignon, wrote to Caprara because “a substantial collateral succession in,” could be hers after she received “…word of a dead uncle from her paternal side who died without offspring: but that having made a vow of poverty she could not be declared the heiress without obtaining a dispensation from your eminence…”808 These new revolutionary laws regarding inheritance allowed former nuns to inherit and control large sums of property. She was adamant that inheritance rights were “granted to her by the laws of the state, to dispose of freely in the most useful way.”809 This conflict between her legal right to inherit and her solemn vow to refuse all wealth and individual property put her and the papal legate in a tricky situation. France still had not legally recognized the return of convents. Without the buildings and organizations to support such vows, was it in the church’s best interest to deprive these women of a livelihood? In many cases, the papal

808 « qu’une succession en digne collatérale, vient de lui échoir, parole mort, d’une oncle des côté paternel décédé sans progéniture : mais qu’ayant fait voue de pauvreté elle ne point été faire déclarer héritière etans( ?) en avoir obtenu la dispence a Votre Eminence,… » AN, AF IV 1902, Dossier 4, pièce 123.

809 “que lui accorde les loix de l’Etat, et me disposer librement de la manière la plus utile. » AN, AF IV 1902, Dossier 4, pièce 123.
legate granted dispenses from such vows. These women lobbying for their individual control of property forced the Catholic Church to relieve them of their vows.

Adding to the complications of inheritances, many of the nuns seeking a reprieve from their religious duties suffered from poor health. Those nuns who survived the Revolution suffered dangerous conditions, poor nutrition, or imprisonment during the revolutionary decade, which often accelerated their decline in health. This made their salvation all the more urgent, at the same time as it made keeping their vows all the more difficult. I want to return to Mother Superior Sainte Sophie, who lived with the two Ursuline sisters. They asked to be excused from abstaining from meat on Fridays during Lent and recitation of the breviary, especially since Mother Sainte Sophie was blind in one eye. 810 This dispensation was typical for nuns in frail health and easily obtained from a Mother Superior. Without the existence of convents, this dispensation was much more difficult to obtain. Mother Sainte Sophie’s health made her request to the papal legate more urgent. She and her companions were advanced in age and suffering so much that maintaining their vows and their daily prayers would have been impossible. In preparing for death, Mother Sainte Sophie had to establish a continuation of care and support for her two remaining sisters, but her request ended with a request for the “apostolic benediction.” 811 Therefore, she was also preparing her soul for the next life. It was the

810 AN, AF IV 1902, Dossier 4, pièce 127. I was a bit confused by her fourth request, “encore de maladie, ou d’infirmites, les exposent demandent la permission de faire gras les jours d’abstinences, et d’être dispensées de dire leurs bréviaires ; la mère Ste. Sophie n’y virant plus que d’un œil, qui se trouve trop (foirent ?) très faible. »

811 AN, AF IV 1902, Dossier 4, pièce 127.
dual concerns of financial stability and salvation, which motivated these women in poor health to settle these affairs as soon as possible.

Jacquete-Catherine Thibaut, a former nun from Our Lady of Refuge in Dijon, solicited a reprieve from her vow of poverty because of health reasons. She wrote to the papal legate, saying that her “forced stay in the world, as well as the ill health she enjoys, no longer allows her to be able to observe the statutes of her order or to keep the vow of poverty.” Therefore, it was not just a desire to maintain a level of financial independence that motivated women to request a reprieve of their vow of poverty; often, there was a physical necessity that demanded the change. In the convent, if one of the elderly sisters fell ill, other sisters were willing to dutifully care for her until she was better or had passed on to the next life. Without such a network to support themselves in old age, former nuns would need to rely on donations and sacrificial care from friends.

Thibaut made four requests to the papal legate; her fourth asked, “To dispense the vow of poverty, allowing her to accept, inherit, possess, enjoy, sell, deal, give, and make a will.” At this stage of the Revolution, former nuns, particularly those in poor health, felt a need to mend their relationship with the Catholic Church because many still believed it possessed a monopoly on salvation. At the same time, their poor health made maintaining their vows even more difficult.

812 « séjour force dans le monde, aussi bien que le mauvaise santé dont elle jouit ne lui permettre plus de pouvoir observer les statuts de son ordre nu de garder le vœu de pauvreté. » AN, AF IV 1902, Dossier 4, pièce 128.

813 « De la dispenser du vœu de pauvreté, en lui permettant d’accepter, hériter, posséder, jouir, vendre, traiter, donner, et tester. » AN, AF IV 1902, Dossier 4, pièce 128.
The church had to weigh the desire to ensure these women’s salvation with its interest in re-establishing authority in France. The Catholic Church needed to win people back to the faith. Napoleon had only brought the church back as the religion of the majority of French citizens instead of the official religion.⁸¹⁴ Therefore, the Catholic Church had an interest in reasserting its authority in whatever way it could. Yet it could not afford to alienate the French men and women who had broken vows during the Revolution. In the end, the Church had to compromise with the Revolution. There was no returning to the ancien régime. The Revolution had created too many complications for that.

Women lobbying on their own behalf to enjoy the benefits of the new laws of the Revolution required the Church to make some concessions to the French Revolution. The women who at one time pledged their obedience to the Catholic hierarchy, now posed a challenge to it. They had set up systems of existence and methods of financial independence that did not require the oversight of men, either religious or secular. The nineteenth century experienced a growth in active religious orders, while firmly cloistered nuns who took solemn vows never recovered from Revolution. These active orders allowed for greater financial flexibility. While Napoleon’s policies that favored the active religious orders likely played a role, the women who wrote to the legate to shape their futures have been under-recognized in this history. Furthermore, this embrace of the opportunities offered by the Revolution does not imply that they abandoned their

religious identification. The women in this chapter often strengthened their ties to other members of their convents and their religious identity. These women were still Catholic and strongly devoted to their faith. However, they sought new ways to practice that faith based on the circumstances of the Revolution. Historians studying the changes to the nineteenth-century women’s religious orders and the changes in practice of nineteenth-century Catholicism must consider the activities of the nuns themselves in the immediate aftermath of Revolution to understand this process.
CHAPTER 8. MARRIED IDENTITIES IN THE CAPRARA DOCUMENTS

Returning Catholicism to France was not as simple as signing a Concordat. The problems created by the nearly decade-long turmoil in France led to a Catholic Church weakened by wars, economic hardship, and a personnel shortage. The Catholic Church also had to decide what to do with all of the nuns who had broken their vows. As discussed in the previous chapter, the nuns who had broken their vows of poverty had become accustomed to a new economic and social identity. Even those who wished to return to the convent sometimes asked for more freedoms concerning individual finances. Similarly, married former nuns did not want to return to religious life, and often could not do so. They sought a new Catholic identity as part of the laity. These nuns who married during the Revolution redefined what it meant to be a good Catholic. They left their monastic communities, but never abandoned their desire to participate in their Catholic community.

Most of the nuns who were forced out of their convents did not find husbands as the revolutionaries may have wanted. Xavier Marechaux and Ruth Graham agree that only about four percent of vowed religious women, compared to the much higher percentage of monks, married during the Revolution.815 The religious women who did

815 Marechaux argues that before the Revolution, there were about 60,000 regular clergy. Of those, there were only about 37,000 female religious. Langlois argued that only about 500 nuns got married (roughly 1.35% compared to 6-7% of the male clergy). Therefore, very few of these women took a path towards marriage. We have letters from around 300 of these nuns in the Caprara documents. Xavier Marechaux, Noces Révolutionnaires: Le mariage des prêtres en France, 1789-1815 (Paris : Vendémiaire, 2017), 17. Claude Langlois, Le Catholicisme au Féminin : Les Congrégations Française à Supérieure Général au XIXe Siècle, (Paris : Cerf, 1984), 8. Kate Marsden, “Married Nuns in the French Revolution,” PhD, Dissertation University of California Irvine, 2015, 8.
marry were either more open to the possibility, or perhaps, faced extraordinary economic pressures to marry. Former nuns who married and then wrote to Cardinal Caprara between 1802 and 1808 were a self-selecting group who wanted to retain their Catholic identity but had taken on new identities as wives and mothers. Because they wanted to remain married and did not want to return to religious life, they needed a dispensation of their religious vows and permission to retake their marriage vows in the presence of a legitimate clergy member (not a Constitutional priest). Some of those women, who may have left their convents only under force, slowly grew to accept their new circumstances and were very reluctant to, or could no longer, return to a life in the convent. In fact, by adapting themselves to life outside the convent, they helped solidify some of the reforms suggested by the Revolution, even if they did so unwittingly. They adapted to unforeseen circumstances by adopting identities that were unimaginable for them in 1789.

The married former nuns discussed in this chapter follow a traditional pattern. Their petitions have elements reinforcing Enlightenment stereotypes of the convent but integrating their own personal experience. They use the language of force and supposed naïveté to minimize their culpability, and therefore, adjust their stories to have the best chance of being approved by the papal legate. Their new identities as married women also carried new complications. Married women, in the eyes of the church, were no longer naïve and obedient nuns. They were less trustworthy, and their sexual awakening signaled an equal intellectual awakening. They were no longer pure but suspect. Ironically, although they sought to leave their religious life, they still were tied to the Church’s bureaucracy. These married former-nuns would have to solicit letters from
members of the Catholic hierarchy to plead their case. They still required their voice to be heard through male intercessors.

Former religious women who married and wished to remain so after the Catholic Church returned to France were instrumental in solidifying the enduring impact of the Revolution. While Marsden has looked at this phenomenon as a sexual revolution, the dissolution of convents also changed the identity of nuns, women, and Catholics. Married nuns did not or could not return to their convents after they had lived a secular married life. Reluctantly at first, some nuns adopted the revolutionaries’ ideas about what their lives should look like. This is not to say that this identity adoption was always voluntary or entirely heartfelt. However, the existence of children, the bonds of marriage, and the daily lived experience of married ex-nuns created a lasting revolutionary change in the social fabric of France.

In their letters to Caprara, ex-nuns helped to transform the church and religious institutions through their new preference for simple vows over permanent religious vows. While the married nuns helped usher in changes towards more flexible vows, the nineteenth century also experienced a revival of celibate religious life. Even women who were not formally nuns sometimes took vows of celibacy to become closer to God.816 This means that Kathryn Marsden’s claim that the Revolution ushered in a sexual revolution proved fleeting or perhaps did not tell the whole story of why these women took up these new identities as wives. My focus on the more extensive process of identity

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816 Guillon’s book on martyrs contains examples of women who took vows of celibacy that were not nuns and were guillotined for their faith. There was always a connection between piety and celibacy.
transformation during the Revolution contextualizes these women who married in the broader context of survival during the Revolution. Their pleas to the papal legate, although intended to de-emphasize their agency and so minimize their culpability, proved their marriages were partially a choice based on their limited options. Even having the option to leave the convent, marry, and have children inspired changes in what it meant to be a useful, religious servant for France and the Church.

Brides of Christ, furthermore, transformed into mothers who performed a “useful” service to France’s religious and political goals. Lastly, these nuns contributed to the emergence of a more individualized practice of Catholicism outside of the official church hierarchy. By the time of the Concordat, many of these women had become accustomed to living lives as wives, mothers, workers, and citoyennes. In preserving their faith under duress, they had learned to practice as members of the laity within their individual families, rather than within their religious congregations. When Caprara came to France to help reconcile these nuns with the Catholic Church, many women ardently desired to be brought back into the “bosom of the church,” but very few desired to return to the cloistered life. 

They saw their new pattern of life— as wives— as complementary to their earnest religious beliefs. Therefore, their daily participation in the life of the republic not only informed their internal identities and shifted the way they thought about themselves, but also helped to ensure that the French Revolution was not just a passing event, but an enduring cultural, social, economic, and religious shift. While there were

817 The phrase « sein d’église » occurs over and over in the letters. It seems to be a phrasing that many scribes and curés use to describe reconciliation. It was also a common phrase dating back to the medieval church.
certainly important temporal concerns about the legitimacy of their children and their public standing in their communities, the nuns who wrote to Caprara wished to be declared legitimate in the eyes of the Church. They knew they needed a papal dispensation to wipe away their sins and ensure their salvation and the salvation of their children. While their marriages were already legally recognized by the state, they needed the church’s blessing to affirm their eternal standing.

Women were willing to stretch or alter the truth to attain reconciliation with the Church. They knew what they needed to say to receive the papal dispensation. For this reason, the bulk of the letters include the phrase “unhappily married” or emphasized the force applied by the Reign of Terror to entice them into these marriages. They rarely admitted that marriage might have been something they made a choice about. Our petition writers depicted their marriages in ways to achieve their desired ends, deploying what Natalie Zemon Davis, in her study of sixteenth-century petitions to religious courts, calls “fictions.” Davis’s book *Fiction in the Archives* helps illuminate how petition-writers (in this case, to secular authorities instead of religious ones) would alter their tales to make it fit a format that would help get their petitions granted. The stories they tell are just as useful to historians as the real “facts” of their lives. We can learn about the bureaucracy and values of the papal legate from the way they craft their stories, the exaggerations, or emphases they make. Therefore, the women who may have actively sought a married life would have deemphasized this problematic fact in their petition or also emphasized their unfitness for the vocation as a rhetorical strategy.

Many women did not write at all to the papal legate, either because they had
moved on from their religious life or because they had died. It was undoubtedly true that a large, unidentified number of women had died or emigrated. There were certainly some who were still in France, but had some level of indifference to reconciliation. Some women and men sought to live married lives with or without the official papal dispensation of their vows. Marsden, whose work is the most in-depth study of married nuns to date, found “449 women religious who married, of whom three hundred eighty-one wrote to 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.” While there were some women who married and fell out of the official religious record, we must accept the selection bias of our sources. Therefore, those who completely abandoned their vows and perhaps even their religion, would not show up in these archives. Some married nuns fell into this category, which makes it extremely difficult to gain a complete sense of those women who took up this new revolutionary identity.

Former nuns who chose to marry, therefore, made a profound statement about their individual rights and satisfaction that did not adhere to canon law. The fact that any of these nuns married at all is significant since it was the overwhelming minority. Most chose not to take this path after dissolution, perhaps due to their age, or their continued commitment to their vows. While their actual motivations during the revolutionary decade are more difficult to discern, we do know the way they positioned their identities

for the papal legate. The petitions written by married nuns demonstrated a desire to uphold the Catholic faith even as they entered new territory as wives. They often mixed the Revolutionary language with their heartfelt religious pleas to gain forgiveness. By emphasizing the youthful naïveté of their decisions to enter the convent, they accused a family member or spiritual advisor of forcing them into a vocation. Finally, they limited their own culpability in claiming that the Revolution forced them to embrace their new roles as wives.

8.1 Catholic Reconciliation and Revolutionary Identity.

The majority of letters written by married nuns asking for their marriages to be rehabilitated and their religious vows annulled were from women still devoted to the Catholic faith. It may seem obvious, but in writing to the papal legate, they indicated their loyalty to the church as the means through which they would attain salvation despite having abandoned the vocation that had led them to enter religious orders. Even though these men and women who wrote to Caprara were still (in most cases) devoted Catholics, the nature of their relationship with the church had changed, and they adopted new identities influenced by the Revolution. Their continued Catholicism did not disqualify them from adopting new identities. Many of these petitioners may have had more practical motives for writing. Some hoped that their children would be recognized as legitimate by the Catholic Church. Others desired for their marriages to be recognized. But all were concerned about their salvation after they had broken their religious vows.

The married former nuns needed to show genuine regret and acknowledge their guilt in order to have their marriages recognized. The papal legate, in his responses,
frequently commented on their repentance in their letters. Before their marriages could be recognized, they first needed a dispensation of their vows and forgiveness for breaking them. Those who did not argue that they were forced into their convent or that their vows were invalid needed a special dispensation from the pope to be released from these religious vows. Next, they needed to receive a special nuptial blessing or a remarriage in the church in front of a legitimate nonjuring clergy member. During the Revolution, nearly all these marriages were conducted as civil ceremonies, which were not recognized by the Church. Occasionally a couple might have been able to marry in front of a constitutional priest in addition to the civil ceremony, but this was also rare and not generally accepted. Asking for forgiveness and reconciliation with the Catholic Church did not detract from the role these women played in solidifying the Revolution through their shifting self-identification. They could regret the circumstances of their marriage without regretting their new identities as wives.

A letter written by Marie-Claire Marquand and her husband was typical of those written in an effort to gain forgiveness and to be welcomed back into the church. These women expressed a real sense of regret at breaking their ties with the church, even if they were unapologetic about being married. Their letters, of course, had to demonstrate some sense of remorse to be considered by the papal legate. Marquand wrote,

We recognize and confess that we have failed God and the church by satisfying this union, we humbly ask for forgiveness, and to those we have scandalized, we promise, by means of God’s mercy and the indulgence of his sovereign holiness the Pope, to do our utmost to repair the scandal which we have caused, [and] to live in conjugal charity[..].

820 « Nous reconnaissons et confinons que nous avons manqués à dieu et à l’église en contentant cet union nous lui en demandes humblement pardon, ainsi qu’à ceux que nous avons scandaliser nous
A sincere Catholic faith was evident from Marquand’s plea. This Catholic devotion survived the tumult of the Revolution. However, unlike most of the unions, which had been contracted hastily or without a religious representative, the couple immediately went, on the very same day, to a constitutional clergy member to have their union blessed. Despite marrying at the height of the Terror and when pressure was at its apogee, they were still concerned about the religious acceptability of their union. This proved that from the start of their union, they intended their marriage to endure and be acceptable in the eyes of God. This decision demonstrated, in one sense, a willingness to break Marie-Claire’s vow of chastity under pressure from the Revolution, but also a commitment to maintaining their Catholic faith under new circumstances. Since they had no idea what was in store for the religious future of France, they put their faith in the authority of the constitutional priest. We know this was not a marriage contracted under the necessity of mutual protection, because they “satisfied the union” and lived in “conjugal” charity, which likely indicated this was a consummated marriage. They were living as husband and wife and performing the ultimate act of union: sex. They intended for this to be a permanent and God-honoring union (or at least were describing it as such to the papal legate).

promettons, moyennant la proue de dieu et l’indulgence de sa sainteté souverain pontife, de faire nos possible pour réparer le scandal que nous avons cause de vivre dans la charité conjugale …. »
AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, pièce 11.

821 AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, pièce 11. « Nous avons contracter mariage ensemble pas acte civil date du 8 Ventôse an deux de la république ; répondant u 27 février 1793 ensuite nous avons reçu la Bénédiction Nuptiale le même jour par un prêtre constitutionnel. Le tout en vertu d’une permission par écrit de l’évêque constitutionnel du département de la Haute-Saône par lieu adressée au prêtre qui nous administra la Bénédiction nuptiale. »
Many women lived a relatively mundane existence with a partner during the years of the Revolution and seemed to enjoy the opportunities offered to them by the Revolution. For example, Marie Anne Burly de la Gaste married Nicholas Marchal, a former regular priest, and lived a relatively peaceful married life despite the turmoil of the Revolution. What strikes one about la Gaste’s letter is the admission that they cohabitated for eight and a half years and were only “separated by death.” And now, a few months after her husband’s death, she wants to return to the church. Although she was no longer married, she still wanted “la vie laïque.”\footnote{AF IV 1898, dossier 6, piece 16.} In this case, their marriage may have been the product of pressure from the Terror, but the inclusion of the detail that they cohabitated paired with her desire for the secular life after her husband’s death indicates her daily practice of living in the world had slowly eroded her convent identity, and she now sought to live in the world. This mundane daily existence did much to reorient these women’s practice of the faith.

8.2 Adopting the Language of the Enlightenment and the Revolution

Language itself was transformed during the French Revolution as noble titles were outlawed, and the title of “citizen” became the universal title for men in a free and equal society.\footnote{It was more highly debated whether women would be included in the rights and duties of “citoyennes.” Olwen Hufton, Women and the Limits of Citizenship, 12.} In letters written to Caprara, occasionally, revolutionary ideas, phrases, and identities manifested themselves in the words the women use to describe their situation. Ex-nuns who used words like liberty, internalized Enlightenment conceptions of the convent, or described the world through the revolutionaries’ point of view proved
revolutionary ideas had permeated all the rungs of society, including these women’s identification of self.

Common examples of subtle ways that a former nun identified with the Revolution was by using her secular name in her signature and using the revolutionary calendar for dating the letter.\(^\text{824}\) It is also possible that, whether or not she identified with the Revolution, she thought that since she had violated her vows, she was no longer entitled to use her religious name. These are just small parts of every letter, but they show basic ways these ex-nuns preserved and solidified the changes wrought by the Revolution through their everyday performance of their identities. Although most nuns used the Gregorian calendar when writing to the papal legate, women who wrote to the papal legate using the revolutionary calendar showed how far they had internalized this change. Until 1805, the revolutionary calendar was still officially used, but those wishing to ingratiate themselves with the church chose to adopt the Church’s calendar. For the women who used both dates in their letters, it was important which date they used first. Marie-Anne Coinchelin was one nun who used the Revolutionary calendar for the date and signed with a secular name. This indicated she had, at some level, severed herself from her religious identity as a member of the order of the Annunciation. By 1804, when she was writing to Caprara, there were many who had begun to abandon the Revolutionary calendar, but not Coinchelin.\(^\text{825}\) While in isolation,

\(^{824}\) Although the Revolutionary calendar was still the official calendar until 1805, many other nuns had reverted back to the pre-revolutionary calendar in their letters. Therefore, it should be noted that she kept with the Revolutionary calendar when writing to the church authorities who did not use the Revolutionary calendar for internal affairs.

\(^{825}\) AF IV 1908, Dossier 2, pièces 192.
each of these small details seems unremarkable, together, they show her embrace of the ideology and identity of the Revolution.826

One of the best examples of a former nun who genuinely wished to marry and fully embraced a newly available identity as a wife was Clementine Leclerc, who obstinately refused to write to the papal legate on her own behalf. Instead, her local parish priest wrote on behalf of the couple “to remove the scandal in [his] parish.”827 Since both Leclerc and her husband Joseph Diverchy belonged to his parish, he wished to solicit aid on their behalf. He presented Leclerc as a woman who “seded by the miseries of the time, was married civilly.”828 While this parish priest (named Deserveur) was confident that she was deceived or seduced into this wayward path, Leclerc herself disagreed. She would not listen to her priest’s and several other emissaries’ efforts to convince her she was eternally damned. The priest described her obstinacy:

She has been urged several times by several emissaries to separate from her supposed spouse; Since it has pleased Divine Providence to entrust me with the care of the souls of this parish, I have employed all the means which the Holy Spirit has inspired in me to convince her of her state of eternal damnation; but the obstinacy, the attachment to this man, and a reasonably honest fortune, retain her in this unhappy position. She said that she had married in good faith, that she had five years to claim [she married] against her wishes, having been only four years a nun, she had profited by the liberty which the French Revolution gave her.829

826 It should be noted that Marie-Anne Coinchelin signed the letter but did not write it herself; it was written on her behalf.
827 AF IV 1904, dossier 3, pièce 132 « …et ôter le scandale dans ma paroisse »
828 AF IV 1904, dossier 3, pièce 132 « …séduite par les misères du temps s’est mariée civilement… »
829 AF IV 1904, dossier 5, pièce 132 « Elle a été professée différentes fois par plusieurs missionnaires de se séparer de son prétendu époux ; depuis qu’il a plu à la divine providence me charger du soin des âmes de cette paroisse, j’ai employé tous les moyens que l’esprit saint m’a inspiré pour la convaincre de son état de damnation éternelle ; mais l’obstination, l’attachement à cet homme, et une fortune assez honnête le retiennent dans cette position si malheureuse : Disait qu’elle s’était mariée de bonne foi qu’elle avait cinq ans pour reclamer contre ses vœux que n’ayait été que quatre ans religieuse, elle avait profité de la liberté que lui donnait la Révolution française. »
This ex-nun made it clear that she had married of her own volition, wished to remain married, and had no intention of writing to the papal legate begging for forgiveness. The parish priest himself recognized that she had a verifiable “attachment to this man.” Therefore, she was indicating the change in identity after her marriage. She did not see this turmoil as unfortunate, but instead, it allowed her to leave the convent and start a life that she was not willing to surrender without a fight. Perhaps more importantly, she described the Revolution as granting her the liberty to contract such a union, and it freed her from the restrictions on religious life. Her use of the word “liberty” indicated the way that the Revolution had infiltrated her language and ideas about her own identity. She was thankful to the Revolution for the opportunities it provided for her and was indifferent to repairing her relationship with the institutional church.

Resolved to accepting that Clementine Leclerc and her husband intended to stay together, the poor curé begged the legate to dispense with their vows and allow them to remarry with his “nuptial blessing.” This arrangement was agreeable to Leclerc and would satisfactorily fulfill Deserveur’s duty to his parishioners.\textsuperscript{830} Despite the supplicants’ near-total lack of repentance, the curé was still confident that the legate would grant the dispensation because he had granted it to others in the neighboring parishes, and there was a compelling church interest in repairing the scandal and saving

\textsuperscript{830} AF IV 1904, dossier 3, pièce 132 « Pour le Salut de des deux personnes et ôter le scandale dans ma paroisse, je n’ai d’autre ressource de recourir à votre autorité afin qu’il vous plaise de suspendre les vœux avec injonction de ne pouvoir convoler d’autre (veu?) en cas de viduité, ce qu’elle accepte bien volonté et m’autoriser à leur donner la Bénédiction nuptiale, après qu’ils sont reçu le remis prérequis avec de dignes dispositions. » In exchange for the dispensation from her monastic vows, if she became a widow, she could not re-enter a convent.
their souls. We do not know if this disregard for the church’s forgiveness indicated that the couple had lost their faith entirely, but at the very least, it indicated they did not turn to the church and her representatives to repair their relationship with God. Leclerc did not want the priest to interfere, or that she had not asked him to do so. She preferred to live her life outside of the dictates of male spiritual advice.

Clementine Leclerc’s petition was a unique instance when a woman not only seemed relatively disinterested in the Church’s official dispensation but also the curé did not tell little fictions in order to make the dispensation more likely to be granted. This woman directly told the priest that she “took advantage of the liberty offered by the French Revolution.” Her life had been irreversibly altered by the course of the Revolution. And now, she had been a “wife” longer than she had been a “nun.” Her self-identification had been entirely transformed. In doing so, it forced the church to legitimize and make permanent the changes wrought by the Revolution or risk losing souls. Women like Leclerc were not typically the standard-bearers of the Revolution in previous histories, but perhaps they should be presented as the quieter, bottom-up harbingers of revolutionary change. Her story also forces historians to confront the question of whether there may have been more married nuns like Leclerc: women who never wrote to the papal legate for dispensation, and who did not have such an eager local curé who intervened on their behalf.

831 AF IV 1904, dossier 3, pièce 132. « Ce qui me détermine à vous solliciter cette dispense c’est que votre éminence a déjà en la Bonté de l’accorder a d’autre de mon voisinage »

832 Davis, Fiction in the Archives. Many of the women use the language of force to gain dispensation for their transgressions to remove some of the guilt from their shoulders. This is a unique instance when a woman not only seemed relatively disinterested in the Church’s official dispensation but also the curé did not tell little fictions in order to make the dispensation more likely.
Many nuns had become convinced by the Enlightenment arguments against celibacy as unnatural and “inutile.” Augustine-Amélie Masson, a former Annunciation nun who married a priest, was a woman who was convinced by the Enlightenment rhetoric surrounding sex. Although forced out of her convent and forced to live far from her family in a destitute position, she was convinced to marry a priest after being told she had “made vows against the laws of nature.”\footnote{AF IV 1901, Dossier 11, pièce 84. « et malgré les remous d’une conscience timorée jeune loi moi à la (sin ?) persuader que j’avois fait des vœux contre nature. »} She was convinced by the Revolution’s rhetoric that celibacy was against natural law and through marriage was able to embrace her identity as a mother and a sexual being.

In using the same words as the revolutionaries, formerly religious women showed that they had internalized Enlightenment ideas about the utility and problems with convent life. The permanence of the changes brought about by the Revolution was not solely dictated from above but something that was preserved in the language and culture from below. Normalizing the language of the revolutionary decade by using it in their everyday life to describe themselves ensured its permanence.

8.3 Age and Identity in Marriage

In addition to some women adopting the language of the Revolution in their letters, there was also a tendency for former nuns to identify themselves as youthful and naïve in their letters to justify having taken religious vows for which they were not well-suited. While this was characteristic of eighteenth-century literature as well, the reality remains that the age of these women had a great deal to do with the identity they adopted.
Women beyond childbearing years could not suddenly become Republican mothers. There was a natural and biological reason that being young at the time of their confession of vows and at the start of the Revolution increased the likelihood that women who were expelled from their convent would get married. A considerable percentage of nuns who married or voluntarily left their convent before being forced out were young women who had been in the convent for just a few years. Clementine Leclerc, mentioned above, argued that she had now been married for longer than she had been a nun.\textsuperscript{834} When France suddenly convulsed into turmoil, women who had recently taken vows, or were still novices, had only identified themselves with this particular community for a few months or years. These young women, therefore, were much more likely to marry. Those who eventually lived with and embraced their new “state” as they often referred to it, were daily reinforcing their new identities through the most mundane of tasks. Becoming a wife involved a whole new set of daily tasks, routines, and new authority figures to obey. Slowly, time eroded the older identification as members of particular religious orders. By the time the rift with the Catholic Church was on the mend, these women had spent more time outside the convent than in it. It is not hard to understand why they identified more with their new selves first introduced to them through the Revolution. Therefore, emphasizing their “youthfulness” was both a reference to reality but also a rhetorical strategy that ex-nuns could employ to increase the likelihood of their petitions being granted.

By July of 1802, when she wrote to the legate, Anne Maréchal claimed the

\textsuperscript{834} AF IV 1904, dossier 3, pièce 132.
convent had always been uncomfortable for her. By calling herself naïve when she first entered the convent, she endorsed many of the ideas which the revolutionaries had held about nuns being too naïve and being duped by spiritual advisors. Maréchal opened her letter by describing herself as “having been put very young and without any experience into a convent of nuns.” Ever since the eighteenth century, the archetypal nun was portrayed as naïve and gullible. The example of Suzanne, in Diderot’s *La Religieuse*, became the literary model for most writers depicting nuns in the convent. Like Suzanne, Maréchal did, in fact, take her vows at a young age, but no earlier than most. Maréchal began her novitiate at eighteen and took her solemn vows at nineteen, but claimed she was still not fully aware of what life in the convent would be like. While there may have been some truth to this statement, it was unlikely that she remained unaware of the strict rules of the convent after living there for a year. It is important to remember that these nuns, and sometimes the men who wrote their letters for them, knew which deviations could be forgiven and which could not. They attempted to craft their stories with an eye towards achieving the desired result. Therefore, it was essential for Maréchal to emphasize her unpreparedness for religious life and her dissatisfaction with convent life before the dissolution to make her abandonment of the habit appear more

835 AF IV 1897, Dossier 1, Pièces 62, page 1. « Je fus mise très jeune sans aucune expérience dans un couvent des religieuses »

836 AF IV 1897, Dossier 1, Pièces 62, page 1. « …étant d’un caractère doux et confiance il ne fut pas difficile à m’y déterminer, je commençai donc mon noviciat à l’âge dix-huit ans et fis mes vœux solennels à dix-neuf ans ; quoique je n’en connues guerre. »

palatable to the papal legate.838

With youthfulness came a certain innocence and inexperience that these women often emphasized to their advantage. Upon leaving the convent, Maréchal had “no relative or true friend on whom to rely,” and for this reason, she fell into “the most imminent danger of seduction.”839 Women, whom the revolutionaries saw as the weaker sex, were thus easy prey for sexual seductions. Her letter suggested that it had been better for her to be married than to fall into sexual sin, a sin she seemed naturally inclined to fall into based on the rest of her letter. Unsurprisingly, life as an independent woman was extremely difficult for women in eighteenth-century France. Without a support system provided by relatives, single women were very vulnerable, not just economically, but their reputation and status were often reliant on their virginal status.

Augustine-Josèphe de Biseau, a nun in the congregation of Our Lady of Notre Dame, exemplified the way that gender, youth, and naïveté intersected in the pre-Revolution identity of a nun: “The petitioner was then twenty-one years old, too young to dare to express her repugnance, and too weak to resist the wishes of her mother for whom she had respect beyond bounds.”840 In this one sentence, Biseau is described as young, weak, obedient to her mother, and not able to express her opposition to taking vows.

Women were considered feebleler than men both in mind and body. Nuns, even more so.

838 Although the monacation rites were designed to ascertain that the vows were voluntary, everybody knew that there was coercion involved at times. So there was always the possibility that the vows could have been forced, but the high number of nuns who mentioned being forced into their vows makes me think that there was a rhetorical benefit to claiming this in their petitions.

839 AF IV 1897, Dossier 1, Pièce 62, page 3.
840 AF IV 1902, dossier 4, pièces 113. « La remontante était alors âgée de vingt et un ans trop jeune en conséquence pour oser exprimer sa répugnance, et trop faible pour résister aux volontés de sa mère pour qu’elle ait d’ailleurs un respect sans bornes. »
than women in general, were supposed to be the epitome of feminine virtue, and therefore, were supposed to represent the extreme of humility and obedience. Biseau’s letter writer emphasized her weakness, but she could hardly have negotiated her position during the Revolution, married, and reconstituted her identity on her own if she genuinely was as weak as she professed. She, like many others, may have only adopted this identity to gain her desired ends. She, like others, de-emphasized her own agency in negotiating her identity during the Revolution.

Conversely, older nuns were much less likely to marry; and if they did, it was typically a fake marriage between a nun and priest where the parties lived as “brothers and sisters.” This was because they were beyond childbearing age, and therefore faced far less pressure to marry and produce children than younger nuns or monks in general. It was also the case that the older these women were, the longer they were likely to have been living in the convent. They spent decades, instead of months, dressing a particular way, patterning their lives around their daily prayers, and identifying themselves with a particular religious order. Therefore, it was harder for them to conceptualize themselves as anything other than a nun. The nuns who spent most of their lives patterned by the prayers of the convent were much more likely to try to preserve as much of that lifestyle as they could salvage in the Revolution.841 It was also true that the older a nun was at the time of dissolution, the less chance that she would survive the Revolution to write to

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841 As demonstrated in previous chapters, nuns often took up the professions and skills they had learned in the convent, lived following some semblance of their vows
Caprara. Therefore, we might not know of their stories because they did not have the chance to reconcile with the Church before death.

Regardless of actual age, the supposed innocence of nuns put them in a class of unmarried women that kept them in an extended infantile position. Unmarried women were often not considered fully independent adults because they were expected to be supervised by their fathers until they could procure a husband. For much of this period and even into the twentieth century, a woman only became a full woman when she had children.\(^842\) It was evident, however, that nuns exploited this presumed youthful innocence in their letters to assuage their guilt. Their petitions were more believable when these young naïve women used this narrative to gain sympathy from the administrators in charge of their eternal futures.

8.4 Claiming Forced Religious Vows

To disobey your parents is to disobey God himself, who placed them above us.

-Blanchard, Félix et Pauline (1794) Cited in Pasco\(^843\)

As shown by Kathryn Marsden and Xavier Marechaux in their recent books on married nuns and married priests respectively, the dismissive assumption that most of the religious men and women who married were required to do so under extreme pressure no longer satisfactorily explains the actions of men and women who wished to remain married after the Concordat. Ironically, the incidence of forced marriages between nuns

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and former male clergy members would have been directly contrary to the earlier religious legislation defending the rights to liberty, equality, choice, and individual love. Both men and women who married after being expelled from their convents had agency over the choice to marry; however, they usually overemphasized external pressures to enter the convent or to get married. This was an effective way to minimize their personal culpability for taking vows. It was true, however, that those who were forced into their vocation to begin with, were also more willing to be married when the opportunity arrived. Without discounting the pressure applied by the Terror, there was also a more profound sexual and social change happening regarding families and gender relations that we must consider.

It was common for women who sought forgiveness from the church— but not a return to their vows— to emphasize that they had no affinity for the vocation when they took their vows. Many took the lead from the Enlightenment and Revolutionary literature to pinpoint the source of their misfortune as villainous parents who forced them into a religious life.844 While there were various sources of this pressure, many of these women who married insisted that their decision to enter the convent had not been their own, and that their family or spiritual advisors had pressured them into taking vows for financial and social reasons. At the very least, it seemed their petitions stood a better chance of being granted if they could argue that they had never actually been called to the vocation.

844 There was a common theme in the prerevolutionary literature about nuns that they were forced into their convents by family members. The fathers and mothers were particularly effective villains in La Nouvelle Héloïse, La Religieuse, Manan Lescaut, Adélaïde de Meran, Ismaël et Christine, Lettres du Marquis de Roselle Par Madame ***, L’amour égoïste, and others.
Ex-nuns in this category were women who were “forced” into convents, but they often also described themselves as “forced” into marriages. The language of force showed both an internalization of the external identity provided by the revolutionaries, and a rhetorical strategy to distance themselves from the responsibility for their choices.

Usually, these women, in their accounts, emphasized that they made their inclination to remain outside the convent clear before ever entering. For instance, Louise Catherine Merle, forty-eight years old, who had joined an Ursuline convent in Avignon, wrote to Caprara in October of 1803, claiming that she had shared “her sentiments with her parents,” that she “would like to live in the world and not in the convent.”845 Her parents ignored her requests, which caused a rupture in their relations. After the dissolution of the convent, Merle could not return to her parents during the Terror because they were “fugitives”—émigrés, most likely—or perhaps prisoners.846 It was no surprise that she quickly sought a marriage upon entering the secular world. Her writing showed the kind of matter-of-fact pressure that women like Merle would never have been able to escape had it not been for the opportunity of the Revolution.

Jeanne-Marie d'Authier du Saint-Sauveur, a former nun from Fontevrault, however, never even got a chance to share her unfitness for the religious life with her parents. She lamented that her future was decided from birth, even though she had a predilection for marriage since she was a child. She was forced against her free will to

845 AF IV 1898, dossier 5, pièce 55. «… elle eut souvent manifeste ses sentimens a ses parens de vouloir vivre dans le monde et non dans le cloitre. »
846 AF IV 1898, dossier 6, pièce 55. « ses parents étant sous fugitifs ou dans les maisons se réclotions, et ne trouve aucune.»
enter the convent at Fontevrault. It was not uncommon for girls to be destined for convents since birth. Some women who joined such aristocratic convents were given the title of “coadjutrice” which would indicate the expectation for her to inherit a prominent place in the convent from an aunt or another family member, and these children would begin living in the convent at extremely young ages. They would be raised and educated in a convent with very little choice in the matter. The church did become more careful to avoid forced professions after the Reformation era criticisms from Protestants, but this does not mean the practice disappeared entirely. The commission de secours, which began in 1727 and finished its work in 1788, was charged with examining these convents for their viability and finances and was also hoping to eliminate the prevalence of forced professions. To cut down on these forced professions, the commission slated about two hundred and fifty of these aristocratic convents to close based on their failing finances and inutility in 1766. There were still women who like d’Authier who had no choice in their vocation. However, their ability to separate themselves from their family’s desires showed a shift in orientation towards individuality and the idea of individual rights instead of a devotion to tradition and submission to the path in life decided for them by spiritual advisors and parents (and not God).

In addition to the young age of her commitment to the convent, Maréchal,

847 AF IV 1898, Dossier 6, pièce 134. « …et force d’y prononcer des vœux que mon Cœur a toujours désavoué. »
848 Reynes, Couvent des Femmes, 23. One story claimed that a baby of only one month was destined to join the convent and therefore, was raised there.
850 Reynes, Couvent Des Femmes, 16-17. Marechaux, Noces Révolutionnaires, 17.
mentioned earlier, emphasized her family situation, which made the convent the only option for her despite her reluctance to take the veil. Maréchal claimed to be from a formerly noble family that was also very poor.\textsuperscript{851} Many noble families, falling on difficult economic times like those experienced in the decade before Revolution, did everything possible to avoid forfeiting their privileges by working. This often meant that the least eligible daughters for marriage were sent to a convent to save the family’s respectability and the cost of a dowry. Therefore, her family likely could not afford an adequate dowry, which was why her parents were “strongly committed” to her becoming a nun. However, she “did not feel any vocation,” and therefore, took the veil very reluctantly.\textsuperscript{852} She had no other resources on which to rely and used the language of obedience to her parents’ wishes as justification for her later desire to leave. Anne Maréchal also described her marriage as one she entered into reluctantly, or at the very least, she felt compelled to describe it that way to the papal legate. Eventually, she came to embrace her identity as a wife and as a mother of three children. Maréchal was not alone in feeling this way. Maréchal used descriptions of force and pressure to take her religious vows in very similar ways to her description of pressure to take the marriage vow as well. In some ways, these women who had to live within the constraints of obedience, found new ways to manipulate their position through obedience to new arbiters of the orthodox.\textsuperscript{853} She wanted to distance herself from blame for contracting a

\textsuperscript{851} AF IV 1897, Dossier 1, Pieces 62, page 1. « …extraite d’une famille d’ancienne noblesse, mais très peu riche, du duché de Savoye diocèse de Maurienne, »

\textsuperscript{852} AF IV 1897, Dossier 1, Pièces 62, pages 1 and 2. « …je fus fortement engagée par mes parents a y rester comme religieuses » « je ne m’y sentis aucune vocation »

\textsuperscript{853} AF IV 1897, dossier 1, Pièce 62,
marriage against her religious vows. However, we must keep in mind that most ex-nuns did not marry. Therefore, Maréchal’s description of “force” must be evaluated with some degree of skepticism.

Augustine-Josèphe de Biseau, who was mentioned earlier, was also seeking secularization to marry. As a nun in the congregation of Our Lady of Notre Dame in Mons (which was in Belgium, where convents were dissolved after the French armies overran the territory in the late fall of 1795), she emphasized that she never felt a vocation and merely “yielded” to the desires of others:

She had never had a pronounced vocation for the cloister, yielding nevertheless to the solicitations of the late Madame, her Mother, in the interest of the establishment of her family, at the head of which the premature death of her husband had left [the mother] to make [Biseau] embrace the religious state, she entered and professed in the Congregation of the Daughters of Our Lady at Mons on March 30, 1784.854

In this short excerpt, we see that she used the same language of pressure to describe her late mother’s insistence that she take the vow despite feeling no vocation. Her widowed mother found sending her daughter to the convent to be the most convenient method of assuring the survival of her family. Furthermore, it was likely that at 21, Biseau had more understanding and control over the situation than she indicated in her letter. Yet, it was convenient to downplay her own decision-making and adopt the convenient identity of force and victimhood to gain the dispense of vows. She described her years in the

854 AF IV 1902, dossier 4, pièces 113. « Elle n'eut jamais eu une vocation prononcée pour la cloitre, cédant néanmoins aux sollicitations de feue Madame Sa Mère dans les vues pour l'établissement de sa famille, à la tête de laquelle la mort prématurée de son mari l'avoir laissée etoient de lui faire embrasser l'état religieux, elle est entrée et a professé dans la Congrégation des filles de Notre Dame à Mons le trente Mars 1784. »

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convent as “thorny and hard” since she had no desire to be there.855 She elicits feelings of pity for a woman in a vocation for which she had no calling.

While claims of forced vows show up repeatedly in the Caprara documents among women who sought to live outside the convent, historians must consider the context in which these women made these claims.856 Why did these women, who allegedly were forced into their profession, remain for so long in a lifestyle they detested? There are two possibilities to consider. First, there is the possibility that these women over-emphasized the role their family and their spiritual advisors played in encouraging or forcing them into the convent. It is probable that the decision had been mutual or even the novitiate’s decision, but the eighteenth-century narrative of the noble family imprisoning their daughters in convents was a popular stereotype of nuns at the time. Furthermore, the petitioner hoped that by evoking pity and the church’s official stance against forced vows, they would achieve reconciliation and secularization. Nonetheless, formerly voluntary vow-takers might not have understood the promises they made until after they made them. Upon taking the vows, perhaps their enthusiasm for the profession cooled. By identifying themselves as victims of circumstance, they had better chances of obtaining the secularization they sought.

Some women, however, tell truly chilling stories of force, including violence

855 AF IV 1902, Dossier 4, pièce 113. « Pendant cinq ans qu’elle resta dans cette congrégation réunie a ses compagnes ses principes de religion, ceux d’honnêteté dont elle étoit et est encore pénétrée l’exemple des pieuses filles auxquelles elle se trouvoit associée la soutinrent dans cette épreuve et l’aidèrent à Supporter ce que cet état avoit d’épineux et de dur pour une vocation si peu décidée que la sienne. »

856 See very similar language of force from her mother in AF IV 1902, dossier 4, 113. Augustine Josèphe Biseau.
against them by their own family, that almost certainly were not just “fictions in the archive.” One such woman who had married and then asked for her vows to be nullified, Madeleine-Joséphine Courtois, was a former Benedictine nun. In her petition, there are three letters from the same priest and many others who wrote on her behalf. In sum, there are about fifteen items, more than in most petitions to Caprara. The reason for the bulkiness was the scandal of her marriage. In the summary of the dossier, a priest claimed that Courtois “entered a convent and issued her vows only out of fear, and by a very grave fear equivalent to violence.” Elsewhere, Courtois tells the story of her father in her own words; “in my youth, I had a relationship with a person who won my heart, and I promised to marry [him]; I made this commitment without my father knowing; after being informed, my father was furious with me…. Her father would not consent to the marriage and wanted her to marry another. She refused, and he locked her away for days. Finally, he decided to send her to a convent. Although the supplicant never tells us exactly why her father was so opposed to the union, she makes clear that she was terribly afraid of his rage, which encouraged her to take her religious vows. She explained that this fear of her father was the reason why she never

857 AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, pièce 134. « Madame Rubina née Courtois religieuse à Cavaillon à d’abbaye de st. Benedict en 1789, mariée quelqu’un après de suppression des couvents, maladroit sans obligation ... bénir son mariage par l’église »
858 AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, pièce 133. « Il paroit constant que la Suppliante n’est entrée dans un couvent et n’a émis fer vœux que par crainte, et par une crainte très grave équivalente à la violence. »
859 AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, pièce 141. « je contractai dans ma jeunesse de liaisons avec une personne qui gagna mon cœur et que je m’engagerai à épouser ; je pris cet engagement à l’insçu de mon père qui en ayant été instruit entra dans une si grande fureur contre moi, »
860 Although there were often many reasons for a father to oppose a child’s marriage, more often than not it had to do with dowries and social status. I suspect that this would not have been a socially ascendant match. Pasco, Revolutionary Love, 60. Desan, The Family on Trial.
approached a notary to nullify her vows while her father lived.\footnote{AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, pièce 141. « Dans ces circonstances, je préférai le dernier parti qui etoit le seul qui mit la vie de la personne à qui je m’étois attachée et même celle de mon père en sureté. Je refusai, quoique vivement pressée, de faire par devant Notaire les protestation ordinaires, crainte que cet acte venant à être connu avant la mort de mon père, ne nous attirât de plus grand malheur. M’abandonnant à mon sort, âgée de vingt ans, je fis profession dans un couvent de l’ordre de St. Benoit a Cavailler, ou j’ai passé plus de dix ans. »} Her obstinacy to the wishes of her father betrayed a revolutionary position, one that valued her own passion and love instead of merely submitting to the wishes of her parents

The timing of the Revolution could not have been better for Courtois. Her understanding of the state of her religious vows offers an interesting take on her identity after the influence of the Revolution. Courtois explains,

\begin{quote}
The French Revolution, having forced me to leave, I found myself engaged in the middle of the world, without the support my father who had died a few months before my release, and the one that was supposed to be my husband no longer existing, I was left on my own. Seeing myself thus alone and being persuaded that my vows were void before God, I engaged in the state of marriage.\footnote{La Révolution française m’ayant forcée de sortir, je me trouvai engagée du milieu du monde, sans appui mon père etoit mort peu de mois avant ma sortie, celui qui arroit du être mon époux n’existant plus, j’étois abandonnée à moi-même. Me voyant ainsi seule et étant persuadés que mes voeux étoient nuls devant Dieu, je me suis engagée dans l’état du mariage.}
\end{quote}

All of the obstacles to her life outside the convent had disappeared during the first few years of the Revolution, yet her lover, too, had disappeared. It was a cruel irony: she was finally liberated from the convent only to find herself without resources. However, the most interesting part of this story was her understanding that her vows were void before God.\footnote{In the testimony of a fellow nun in the convent, Courtois claims that the Bishop of Caivaillon “refused to sign her vows” so there is some debate whether her pronounced vocation was every formally legal. This may have been why Courtois believed her vows were void before God, but in her letter, she does not make this claim. She merely claims that she told everyone who would listen that her vows were merely for her own safety and for the safety of her beloved would-be fiancé. AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, pièce 146.} In this sentence, she said something quite radical that would not have
been possible without a decade of religious uncertainty in France. Courtois did not ask for the church to intercede on her behalf to nullify her vows; she felt God directly had already excused her of these religious vows and that they had never been valid in the first place. The existence of a personal God that believers could interact with directly, not through the traditional church channels, was a Rousseauian idea, but which later helped characterize nineteenth-century Catholicism.864 These individualistic religious expressions of the nineteenth century, as shown in the miracle cults and individual spiritualists, were in tension with the church, which sought to re-Christianize and reassert control over France.865

Furthermore, there is a slight difference in her request that is not merely semantics. Instead of asking for a special dispensation for her vows to legitimize her marriage, she was asking for a retroactive nullification of her religious vows. The priest writing on her behalf struggled with the nature of her request. “If it were a dispensation to legitimize the marriage already contracted, I would not have hesitated to decide in the affirmative: But as the suppliant asks for a declaration of nullity of the Profession, I must observe that the procedure and the evidence of coaction866 were not sufficient

864 Carol E. Harrison, Romantic Catholics: France's Postrevolutionary Generation in Search of a Modern Faith (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014). Additionally, Thomas Kselman’s book indicates that a revival of miracle cults and death celebrations developed as a result of this new spirituality in France. These individual religious expressions were in tension with the church which sought to re-Christianize and reassert control over France. Missionaries came in and the Bourbon King supported these efforts to spread Catholicism in the wake of Revolution.


866 Coaction comes from the Latin word coactio which means to force. This seems to be canon law language surrounding the procedures for relieving a woman of her vows.
…Therefore, she was not asking for forgiveness for breaking her vows, for these had already been invalid, in her opinion. She was seeking the recognition of the nullity of her profession, so that her religious life was entirely erased from the record. In order to do so, there would have to have been clear proof of her coercion. This was why her case was more challenging to decide. A recognition of her marriage would have been easy, but she was claiming her vows were non-binding at the time she contracted her marriage, and therefore, she did not need forgiveness for breaking them.

Although Courtois recognized “that I should not have embraced this state of marriage without having had the Church pronounce the nullity of my vow,” the fact remains that at the time of her marriage she felt her vows were already excused despite never officially asking the church itself. Despite contracting a marriage without an official dispensation, Courtois was still a devout Catholic. She was not trying to do anything which would jeopardize her salvation. In her letter, she used tender words to describe her relationship with the church “that [she] always looked upon as my true mother and mistress.” Additionally, this was a woman who herself wrote to the legate three times asking for a quick reply to her petition, and also asked the local curé to write three times, which indicated how very strongly she desired to maintain her Catholic

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867 AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, pièce 146 « S’il ne l’agissait d’une dispense pour légitimer le mariage déjà contracté, je échasse serois [a eue ? illegible] décider pour l’affirmative : Mais comme la Suppliant demande une déclarations de nullité de la Profession, je dois observer que la procédure et les preuves de coaction ne née paroissent point assez complettes ete canoniques pour affaite en j’ay eu eut de cette importance. »

868 AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, pièce 145. « Reconnoissant aujourd’hui que je n’aurois par du embrasser cet état sans avoir fait prononcer la nullité par l’Eglise, je me jette à vos pieds, »

869 AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, pièce 146. « De l’église que je toujours regardée comme ma véritable mère et maitresse »
practice and be absolved of any culpability for marrying before gaining papal
dispensation of her vows. 870 She identified strongly as a Catholic, but she was no longer
comfortable identifying as a nun. She found much more solace in her identity as a wife.
Her individualized approach to religion and the church were indicative of a significant
shift in thought and self-identification. She was convinced that God did not recognize
her religious vows and approved of her marriage.

Another woman who was “forced” into the convent by her parents and family
discord was Marie-Magdelaine Regnars. However, in this instance, it was an evil
stepmother figure who forced her into the Visitandine convent in Saumur, a town in
Poitou.871 She became entangled in legal proceedings, which resulted in the loss of her
fortune. She was forced to come up with some other ways of making a living, or she
would be forced to enter the convent.872 She made her vows in January of 1789, which
meant that in a year, permanent religious vows would be outlawed. After being forced
out of her convent, she harbored some hopes that “her father, who had partly changed
his mind about the convent, already had reason to see [Regnars] again, and to have her
in the house.” These hopes, however, were dashed when she learned “if he saw the
paternal house approached [by Regnars], he would behave with violence.”873 Now

870 AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, 134-155. The letters that Magdelaine-Josephine Courtois wrote herself are
littered with spelling errors and poor penmanship which sometimes make them difficult to read. In
one instance one of her letters was transcribed by someone to make it more legible. (pièces 141
and 146)
871 AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, pièce 184. « Epouvante bien des mauvais traitements de la part d’une belle-
mère, elle pris [le] parti de se relier à la communauté de la visitation de la ville de Saumur. »
872 AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, pièce 184. « …que d’apprendre au autre pour gagner sa vie, ou de se faire
religieuse »
873 AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, piece 184 « Son père en partie revenu sur le qui caieunoit( ??) la religion,
témoigna quelque déjà de revoir la fille et de la posséder dans la maison … que si elle voit aborder
la maison paternelle, ils bien puisseroit avec violence »
destitute, Regnars claimed economic and social circumstances forced her into marriage as a result of the strained relationship with her family. Soon after this debacle at her parent’s house, “[Jean Delaveau, an ex-friar … came to propose to her two days later, without having ever seen her before. Without any love, a civil contract was made.”874 A strained family relationship often made going back to a pre-religious identity impossible, even if the woman might have desired it. Women who were forced into convents had fewer alternatives when their convents closed because they could not rely on help from their families. Without a family support system, such women were much more likely to adopt the new identities offered by the Revolution through marriage.875

Despite the language of force, we must not forget the ability of these women to make choices within the constraints of their circumstances. Many women were pushed into the convent, but they always had some agency. After she was orphaned by the death of her mother at age eleven, Joséphine Outhier was pressured into the convent by a confessor and her aunt.876 Her aunt and uncle were able to take control of her inheritance and force her into the convent. Despite these unfortunate circumstances, she emphasized “the steps [she] took before the Revolution at home with the priest of Poligny to work for [her] freedom” because she was plagued by “a constant dislike for religious life since a young age.” In marriage, she found someone to “inspire [her] with

874 AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, pièce 184. « Deux jours après le frère de Cramiez … lui proposer de … a elle et deux jours après ; sans l’avoir jamais vu auparavant, sans au ’aucun aime ait précédé se contrat civil fut fait.
875 « Seulement repentant elle est bien dans la réputation de dédommager par les bons exemples la régularité de sa conduite, ses soins a élever chrétiennement » AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, pièce 184. Cardinal Caprara ruled in her favor. AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, pièce 186.
876 AF IV 1904, Dossier 4, pièce 1. « Les sollicitations pressantes de tante et de confesseur…. Orpheline de mère à l’âge de onze »
the desire.”877 Furthermore, in the interest of preserving her “liberty [she] consent[ed] to enter into a society of hospitalières.” Throughout her letter, she emphasized the language of force, but she made choices to mitigate her situation. Her decision to join the hospital nuns, who took only simple vows, was the result of her desire to maintain some of her freedom, to not be cloistered, and to maintain contact with the world outside the convent. She was working on setting herself up for a future of freedom. Her use of the word “liberty,” as demonstrated in the previous section, shows that she was predisposed to embrace the ideology of the Revolution and more easily became a wife and mother.

Although many of these women claimed that their parents forced them into the convent, this does not mean that the legate always believed them. Antoinette Dumas lost her mother at a young age, and her father, whose disposition was “difficult and severe,” placed her in the convent for her education. Despite making it clear a number of times that she was not the best fit for the religious life, she took vows without ever feeling the vocation.878 However, the Bishop, who wrote at the end of Dumas’s letter, noted, “nothing proved to me that the taking of vows was not free.”879 Therefore, the supplicants were not always successful at convincing the legate that their vows were

877  AF IV 1904, Dossier 4, pièce 1. « Troublée depuis longtemps par les remèdes de sa conscience et les désirant par les voies de la religion suppléer humblement votre éminence de rendre la nullité de sa vie les raisons d’une si juste demande sont :
1. Un dégout constant par la vie religieuse depuis une jeunesse analgrx (?) les plus singuliers que les plus personnes ont fris par m’inspirer le désir
2. Les démarches que j’ai faites avant la révolution chez elle le curé de Proligny pour travailler pour obtenir ma liberté »
878  AF IV 1904, Dossier 4, Pièce 58. « .. qu’Antionete Dumas eût la malheurs de perdu sa mère des son bas âge ; que son père, homme dur et sévère la mit dans un couvent pour y former son éducation »
879  AF IV 1904, Dossier 4, pièce 58. « Rien ne me l’émission des vœux n’ait pas été libre »
forced. Having difficult parents was not enough to constitute force.\textsuperscript{880}

This language of force in these letters signifies a couple of several things. First, it reflects on the most significant criticism of convents in the eighteenth century, the claim which argued that forced vocations infringed on these women’s natural rights to liberty, and thus permanent vows were antithetical to the new society the Revolution created. And second, those women who identified themselves as victims would often use the language of “force” to avoid culpability for their decisions. They created or exaggerated narratives of coercion to give their petitions a better chance of being granted. They could use this strategy to get their religious vows annulled and to gain a blessing for their marriages. The second point is that these women may not have been entirely willing vow-takers, but they also did not live in a context where they thought there was not any other option. Once their families made it clear that they were expected to take vows, resistance would have been futile. For example, although Maréchal remained “quiet for six years without complaining about the community,” we should not assume that her professed unfitness for the profession was pure fiction. It was only during the Revolution that the option of a life outside the convent became possible.\textsuperscript{881} Without the Revolution, Maréchal might have just resigned herself to the convent. There is the possibility that she had been content for six years and exaggerated her discontent in her letter. It would be unfair to say the lack of complaint equated to

\textsuperscript{880} Even today, we are struggling with ideas about consent. I could not help but see parallels to our changing notions of what sexual consent looks like and the difficulty in the papal legates determining the line between force and encouragement to take perpetual vows.

\textsuperscript{881} AF IV 1897, Dossier 1, Pièces 62, page 2. « je demeuray six ans tranquile, sans me plaindre contentant la communauté, et sans penser a en jamais sortit jusqu’au moment, »
contentment; however, we must also acknowledge that Maréchal had an interest in exaggerating her discontent.

8.5 Distrust of Married Nuns

While most of this chapter discusses women who adopted some of the external identities being espoused by the revolutionaries, the massive exodus of women from the convent was not without its challenges. In adopting new identities as wives, they also were forced to adjust to new prejudices. The Church viewed more worldly women who did not keep their vows with suspicion. Their word and testimony could not be trusted. Nuns went from being viewed as Holy Virgins to dangerous temptresses after their marriages. Women who went out into the world, married, worked, and otherwise engaged in a more secular existence transformed from naïve into knowledgeable and untrustworthy. As they embraced new identities as wives, they paid the price in their standing before the church. They exchanged their naïveté and innocence for the worldliness of marriage and sexual awakening, and thus opened themselves up to suspicions. They were no longer emblematic of virginal piety of Mary, but seductresses descended from Eve.

The most consistent indication of the clergy’s perceived mistrust of women is found in the letters that priests wrote to accompany the petitions. Much like the Catholic religion as a whole, which operated through the intercessions of Mary or the saints to

882 In the book of Genesis, Eve took fruit from the tree of knowledge and gave some of that fruit to Adam. Eve as a seductress stemmed from the idea that Eve “tricked” Adam into eating the fruit. After eating it, they became aware that they were naked. Similarly, by entering the world, the nuns gained “knowledge” but were similarly corrupted. Genesis 3:1-24 ESV.
bring prayers to God, the church also operated on a system of intercessions by those with more power on behalf of the less powerful. Women who had left their religious lives forfeited the minuscule position of prestige they had in the church through their commitment to live a chaste and holy life. Religious women were sometimes idealized in their hagiographies as nearly sinless, pure, and holy. Without the veil, they lost this one rhetorical strategy through which they could gain some power in spiritual matters. In losing their virginity, or otherwise becoming sexually enlightened through marriage, their reputation swung to the other side of the dichotomy. Married women, in particular, would ask a bishop or a priest to write on their behalf to validate the truthfulness and the earnestness of their petition. While it was not rare for men to also solicit intercessions, women’s petitions and particularly married women’s petitions were accompanied by an intercessor’s letter in the majority of cases. There was a much higher frequency of clergy petitioning on behalf of women than men. If the letter was not accompanied by an affirmation by a male clergy member or preferably a bishop, the papal legate would be sure to ask for one.

It was not uncommon for the legate to ask for a letter written by the local bishop to attest to the sincerity of the request. Most of the women obliged without contesting. However, at least one man was offended and had a position of power, which allowed him

884 Even women who were not asking for the preservation of their marriage had to have the bishop sign their letter and had other curés write on their behalf. Such was the case of AF IV 1905, Dossier 4, piece 47.
885 Most of married women had a male cleric sign a quick attestation at the end of their letter or wrote an accompanying letter.
to push back against these suspicions. When one couple, Marie-Anne Aucapitaine, a former nun, and Nicolas Guerillot, a former priest, were asked for such a letter, Guerillot responded rather indignantly, “What, can the bishop attest that I am a priest, that I am married, that I am repentant of this fault against the discipline of the Church?”

It is hard to believe that any woman would have had the same audacity and gotten away with challenging the papal legate’s request. It is for this reason that women needed these accompanying letters and verifications. Men had the power to refuse or challenge this request, where women did not. The petition was still granted despite Guerillot’s exasperation. Women had no power with which to leverage or avoid requests for intercessors to vouch for them.

Since two of Marie-Joseph Thérèse Toulet’s husbands died, she felt it necessary to submit another letter from a priest verifying the truth of her claims about the conditions under which she married. In addition to telling us a great deal about the weight (or lack thereof) of a woman’s testimony and petitions in the eyes of the church, male spiritual advisors still played essential roles in these women’s lives even after they had married, took on new identities, and lived very different lives. They were still reliant on male clergy members to defend and validate their claims, seeing that male authority was still an essential part of the structure of the Church, which was built on apostolic succession and obedience to authority. Even in trying to extract herself from the religious life, she remained nonetheless tied to its structure and reliant on male authorities.

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886 “Que peut certifier sur l’évêque que je suis Prêtres que je suis mariée que je suis repentent de cette faute contre la discipline de l’Église ? AN AF IV 1904 Dossier 3, pièces 273-277.

887 AF IV 1898, dossier 6, pièce 178.
These accompanying letters testifying on behalf of the petitioner do more than just restate the supplicant’s claims; they demonstrate the pervasive influence of members of the clergy on those who wished to leave the monastic life. In some ways, a nun’s identity as subservient to the supervision of the Church hierarchy was a difficult status to shed. For example, a bishop or vicar would often note his opinion on the petitioner’s case. Scribbled at the end of Antoinette Dumas’s letter to the papal legate, the bishop noted, “nothing proves to me that the taking of vows was not free,” undermining her attempt to show that her vows were invalid from the start and obstructing her attempt at reconciliation.888

The Revolution opened new opportunities and new identities for these women, but it also opened them to new criticisms and enduring obstacles. Throughout these letters, the clergy demonstrate a consistent identification of women in the world as “dangerous.” The bishop of Lyon writing to the papal legate requesting a dispensation for Marie Delphine Rebiere, confided that Rebiere’s “frequent inconsistencies made her look dangerous.”889 There was a new danger to these women identifying themselves as women and citizens outside the religious vocation. It revived the fundamental dichotomy that trapped unmarried women for centuries between the stereotypes of the holy virgin and the evil temptress. Women who had left their orders and seemed to manipulate their circumstances were perceived with suspicion and were often regarded as “dangerous.” Suspicion of the motives was at least in part tied to their sexuality. Priests, too, were

888 AF IV 1904, Dossier 4, pièce 58. « Rien ne me l’émission des vœux n’ait pas été libre »
889 AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, pièce 102 « Ses fréquentes incohérences la firent regarder comme dangereuse »
regarded with suspicion upon marrying, from both lay and religious Frenchmen. However, there were gendered differences between the suspicion of men and women. Perhaps the biggest danger of all was the fact that women might be more aware of their position in the world and be able to more effectively negotiate their position. Rebiere’s story was most dangerous because she manipulated her story to hope for a dispensation.

Ironically, even these male clergy members writing on behalf of the petitioners, in some instances, went to great lengths to play their part in solidifying the permanence of the changes brought about by the Revolution. One vicar of the parish of St. Quentin named Labitte testified on behalf of Marie-Joseph-Suzanne Lantoine, who was asking for her marriage to be recognized. He argued to Caprara, “I beg your eminence to grant the dispensation requested by the petition, and the indulgence of the sovereign pontiff is a proof that His Holiness has employed the means to restore the Catholic religion in France… He argued that in granting the requests of the petitioners, he could help to restore religion to France. The local priests knew these couples and the laity in their congregations, and therefore, they had more clout and a sufficient understanding of their specific situations. Many couples turned to their local priest to write on their behalf, not always because they could not write themselves, but because of the weight their local priests’ letters might carry with the papal legate. These priests understood the specifics of these women’s situations more deeply than the pope’s delegates could hope to gather

890 See Marechaux’s *Noces Revolutionnaire*.  
891 AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, pièce 28. « Je prie votre éminence de vouloir bien accorder et me faire adresser la dispense demandée par la supplique cy-jointe l’indulgence de souverain pontife est une preuve que sa sainteté a emploie {ton} les moyens pour rétablir la religion catholique en France… »
from a few brief letters. Recognizing his central role in returning Catholicism to France, Caprara granted the dispensation of Lantoine’s marriage vows, given that she had validated her marriage in front of a priest.\footnote{AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, pièce 29.} A priest who was sympathetic to the situation of a member of his congregation would often go to great lengths to help his congregant, even if the situation was irregular. The legate who was invested with some of the powers of the papacy itself could have a significant influence in resolving these irregular situations.

8.6 Conclusion

Not all revolutionary changes were brought about through direct military action or legislation. For some of the changes wrought by the Revolution to endure, they had to become a part of the fabric of daily life. Nuns who married, had children, left the convent voluntarily, adopted the language of the Revolution, or otherwise lived the lives the revolutionaries imagined for them, did much to solidify the Revolution’s reform of the Church. It was the daily practice of reforming their identities, which did more to bring about the new society idealized in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment literature.

Therefore, the permanent changes to the social, political, cultural, and religious fabric of France were not just legislated from the top down but lived through the experience of people at the bottom. In abandoning their vocations for new roles as part of the laity, serving God under a new vocation and set of vows, they both adapted their identities to the circumstance of the Revolution while maintaining their religious faith.

While this chapter only includes one small segment of women who came to
internalize the changes brought about by the Revolution—the nuns who married and later sought recognition of the marriage and reconciliation with the Church—the project of the Revolution was often accomplished through the most basic of daily tasks. This chapter outlines the typical pattern of former nuns women who had married. Although a minority, their existence marked a striking shift in identity. It showed an unwitting transformation to embracing parts of the revolutionaries’ hopes for former religious women. The nuns’ eventual embrace of the new circumstances created by the Revolution and their adoption of new personal identities helped solidify these changes. Without women undertaking this long, sometimes painful process of identity transformation, these Revolutionary changes could never have taken root as they did. It was these deep inroads into the personal and daily life of French men and women that made the changes of the Revolution so permanent. Catholics had a great deal to do with the staying power of the revolutionary changes, even if their contributions were not always voluntary.

The legate Caprara did not have many alternatives, but in granting forgiveness and recognizing the marriages of the women who wrote to him, he helped make some of the changes in identity wrought by the Revolution permanent. Religious women who married had agency over the course their lives would take and, therefore, had a role in shaping the religious future of France. Although the Caprara Legation might have wanted to quickly clean up the mess left behind in the wake of the Revolution and return as soon as possible to the status quo before the Revolution, this was easier said than done. Marriages contracted during the Revolution under exceptional circumstances offer just one of these many complications. The existence of women who had married, had
children, and wished to practice as a part of the laity made that goal impossible.

The women discussed in this chapter demonstrated the typical pattern of nuns who took an unusual path after dissolution and got married. However, some married nuns presented more complicated cases to the papal legate. They may not have easily fit into the patterns outlined above and often caused the papal legate a great deal of consternation when he was deciding their cases. However, the complication of their cases shows how difficult it was to turn back the revolutionary decade and return to ancien régime Catholicism. The next chapter explores these atypical cases of marriage presented to the legate.
CHAPTER 9. MORE COMPLICATED CASES OF MARRIAGE

This unfortunate couple confesses to your eminence that they would suffer even death rather than separate from the church: but not all men are called to the martyr's crown.

- Jeanne Anne Redon, Ex-nun, 1803

9.1 Introduction

After the Revolution, the only members of religious communities who were immortalized were the martyrs and women who courageously resisted the revolutionaries’ efforts by dying for their identities as nuns. However, not all former nuns felt victimized by the religious legislation, or as Redon put it, not all men were called to the martyr’s crown. Some women seized the opportunity to voluntarily leave their convent for the first time and marry. While the number who married remained very low (only about 2.5 to 4%), there were some exceptional cases of marriage, remarriage, and a mixing of a marital identity with their Catholic faith that deserve closer inspection. The Revolution helped solidify new ideas about an individual’s relationship to the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church. The revolutionary decade created

893 AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, pièce 71. « Ce couple malheureux avoue avoue à votre éminence qu’il aurait du tout souffrir même la mort plutôt que de se séparer de l’église : mais tous les hommes ne sont pas appelés à la couronne du martyr »

894 Francis Poulenc, Dialogues des Carmélites, 1956. This 1956 opera popularized the story of the Carmelite Martyrs of Compiegne who dies rather than give up their religious life.

895 Xavier Marechaux puts this number closer to 2.5% of the total number of nuns before the Revolution, while others including Kate Marsden argue this number was close to 4% based on numerous ways to calculate the number of nuns before the Revolution, the different ways of accounting for the number after the Revolution, and the creative ways to extrapolate to fill the gaps in the data. Regardless of the number, 2.5 or 4 percent still remains an overwhelmingly small percentage. Marsden, however used more departmental data to find it was more common than the Caprara documents may indicate. Xavier Marechaux, Noces Révolutionnaires: Le mariage des prêtres en France, 1789-1815 (Paris : Vendémiaire, 2017), 104. Kate Marsden, “Married Nuns in the French Revolution: The Sexual Revolution of the 1790s,” (PhD Dissertation, University of California Irvine, 2014), xi.
conflicting arbiters of orthodoxy, and extended tolerance for religious minorities. Unique cases of former nuns’ marriages which produced children, ex-nuns who married multiple times (or after the 1801 Concordat), and those who left the convent voluntarily (before they were forced to do so) all helped to solidify the enduring impact of the Revolution. Women religious put the Vatican in an awkward position of trying to bring reconciliation in unique circumstances, and their decisions shaped the church in France for decades. The new identities adopted by these ex-nuns cemented the changes to family and religion brought by Revolution and changed the character of nineteenth-century French Catholicism to be more individualistic, active, and emotional.

9.2 Renegotiating their Relationship with Traditional Catholic Laws

In addition to adopting the language of the Revolution as outlined in the previous chapter, these nuns often demonstrated their break from their convent identities through renegotiating their commitment to – and relationship with – traditional Catholic customs and canon laws. Many women reoriented their relationship with the Catholic Church by no longer looking to Rome as the sole source of guidance and loyalty. Although still identifying as Catholic, the women in this section had a new definition of what it meant to be a Catholic in nineteenth-century France. While they may never have wholly replaced the institutional church as the source of orthodoxy, in the absence of a single clear voice to tell them what the right course of action was, women had to negotiate their positions to appease different authorities.

As with the previous chapter, we must remember that these women were asking for their petitions to be granted. Although their stories were a bit more complicated,
they nonetheless shaped their narratives to fit into an established pattern that might encourage the papal legate to grant their requests. However, they would have to lay out all their transgressions if they wanted to be forgiven. They would just have to frame these sins in a way that limited their culpability and demonstrated a genuine sense of regret. Some were more successful than others.

Some women helped demonstrate their appeasement with the Revolution by listening to advice outside of the Vatican about what to do in 1793 and 1794. This was a significant shift from the previous millennia of Christian tradition. One particular nun, Ann Maréchal, explained a variety of reasons and pressures which encouraged her to marry, which help to show how the Revolution has changed her self-identification:

I resisted [marriage] for some time, and finally won over by bad advice, pressed by various embarrassments, believing that I was making a decision that would shelter me from persecutions, slander, and misery; I let myself be persuaded. Moreover, that life in the circumstances in which I found myself, it was the opinion of people who I supposed to understand orthodoxy that I consult for myself; I married in front of the civil authority, Citizen Francoise Puges of the municipality of Darvillars diocese of Chambery, a layman.896

Anne Maréchal’s description of why she got married shows the influence of the opinions of others who determined social and religious orthodoxy as impacting her decision to marry. With the church split between juring and non-juring clergy, she found herself won over by others’ advice, which she now described as “bad.” Persuaded by the new arbiters of right and wrong, she felt her most virtuous course of action was to marry. In the

896 AF IV 1897, dossier 1, Pièce 62, page 2-3. « J’y resistai quelques temps, et finalement gagnée par des mauvais conseils pressés par différents embarras croyant prendre un parti qui me mettrons à l’abris des persécutions, de La calomnie et de la misère ; je m’étais laissée persuader. D’ailleurs que vie les circonstances dans lesquelles je me trouvais, c’était l’avis de gens éclaires en orthodoxes qu’on me supposai avoir consulté pour moy ; j’ay épouse par devant l’autorité civil, le Citoyen Francoise Puges de la commune Darvillars diocèse de Chambéry de condition laïque »
absence of papal guidance, Maréchal found herself bending to the revolutionary identity being thrust upon her at the time. She defended her decision to marry as obedience to the orthodoxy she had been persuaded to believe. The decade of revolutionary turmoil in the church left France without a clear voice to look to for obedience, and many began to make decisions on their own or based on advice from sources outside the Church.

Another shift caused by the Revolution was a slow march towards toleration of religious minorities in France. Since the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century first brought pockets of Huguenots within its borders, France had always struggled between limited tolerance and persecution of its Protestant minority. With the advent of the Revolution, Protestants were granted rights as citizens that they had never enjoyed before. Tolerance was an idea inherited from Voltaire and other Enlightenment thinkers.\(^897\) Former nuns who married across religious lines internalized this new climate of tolerance and no longer identified Protestants as “other.” Certainly, marriages between Protestants and Catholics had occurred before the Revolution, but it was particularly significant when nuns and other women religious married Protestants, because former nuns would have well understood the Catholic position on marriage outside the church. These ideologically mixed marriages showed a willingness not only to identify themselves as wives, but more importantly, to not identify Protestants as outsiders or damned. Although I do not have space to expand on all of these marriages to Protestants, I found three in the Caprara Legation that can serve as examples. There were a few other Catholic women who married Protestants, but they were not formerly

\(^897\) Voltaire, \textit{A Treatise on Tolerance}, 1763.
nuns as far as I can tell. In addition to Outhier, who is discussed at length below, there were two other examples. First, Marie-Anne-Josèphe Berghorn married the Lutheran Charles Springsfeld, of Aix-la-Chapelle. Second, Carolina de Steinen, a Benedictine nun from Cologne, married a Protestant after the Concordat had been signed. De Steinen’s story is a bit more complicated because she married after the Concordat and because she was from Cologne, in modern-day Germany.

The best example of these Protestant-Catholic unions in France was, Joséphine Outhier, a hospital nun in Poligny, who civilly married a French Protestant, Frédéric Juillerat, in 1796. The fact that she married in 1796, which was not a particularly intense period of persecution or pressure to marry, indicates a higher level of mutual attraction and suggested this marriage was not forced for political purposes (there would always be financial pressure for women to marry). In the eyes of the papal authorities, not only did she marry civilly, she married a Protestant, a non-Catholic, which added another obstacle to her request for the nuptial blessing. She argued that her husband wanted to “meet all her needs,” and the church should bless it and welcome her back into the sacraments. The fact that ex-nuns—who were so entrenched in their specific religious association and educated in the canon laws—were willing to marry

898 AN, AF IV 1900, Dossier 3, pièce 34.
899 AN, AF IV 1895, Dossier 2, pièces 78-91. AF IV 1906, Dossier 1, pièces 365-370. AF IV 1892, 23e cahier, p. 9 ; 26e cahier, p. 86 ; 27e cahier, p. 41.
900 AN, AF IV 1904, Dossier 4, Pièce 1.
901 AF IV 1904, Dossier 4, Pièce 1. « … annulant mes vœux et un rendant à l’Etat séculier autorise moi à demander la bénéédiction nuptiale au prêtre qui se désigné par Lecoz archevêque de Besançon et à participer aux Sacrements de l’Eglise en vivant avec un mari qui veut bien subvenir à tous mes besoins »
Protestants showed a major shift in identifying themselves, and in identifying Protestants as no longer “other.” In keeping with his policy of recognizing marriages, so long as their vows were reaffirmed in the church, Caprara respond by granting the requested indulgence, which perhaps shows a church shifting in the wake of the Revolution to recognize that Protestantism might not be the biggest threat to their existence. Their goal was to peacefully restore Catholicism after Revolutionary turmoil and not to revive the centuries-old debates over Protestantism. Furthermore, institutional changes made the Catholic church more tolerant of these marriages. The Concordat forced the Catholic Church to recognize the legal status of Protestantism (and Judaism) in France. This meant that Protestants should have the same rights to marry and participate in public life. Napoleon would not have tolerated an obstinate papal legate who refused to recognize mixed marriages. The Catholic church needed to acknowledge the existence of civil marriages and could no longer claim exclusive rights to marry men and women in France.

In one letter, just signed Niel, an ex-nun sought absolution and remission of sins after marrying during the tumult of the Revolution under Robespierre. Despite

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902 Indeed, the husband, if he was receiving communion, was now no longer an outsiders. Since marriage in the church required taking communion, doing so was very nearly conversion. So, the husband was now merely an ex-Protestant.

903 AF IV 1904, Dossier 4, Pièce 2.

904 Similarly, one of the central demands of Jewish rabbis in 1806 was to gain recognition of such mixed marriages. Napoleon presented the question of civil mixed marriages to the Great Sanhedrin. Neither Napoleon nor the rabbis ever proposed or accepted the idea of religious mixed marriages. The question was one of citizenship: previously, Jews had very limited legal rights. Now, under the new ideas of laicite, they were to be full citizens under civil law, including the right to a civil marriage.

905 AF IV 1897, dossier 2, pièce 111. « l’absolution et rémission des pèches de frayeur. » « Sous le règne de l’infâme Robespierre et a l’instant de la terreur la plus cruelle, »
recognizing the “sinfulness” of her action at the time, she did not regret it because she lived in a “fear of death” before her marriage. Furthermore, she argued it was only because of this marriage that she had a “happy future to relate” to Caprara. The use of the adjective happy to describe her future may have just been a hopeful attempt to have her marriage recognized, but I find it remarkable because many women (and men) often emphasized that they were “unhappily married.” She grew into her revolutionary identity and described the future she looked forward to as happy. The sentence could just have easily omitted the adjective “happy” to say that it was only because of this marriage she had a future to expose. She was not unaware of the sin she was committing at the time but had weighed it against the severity of the circumstances. She took a contextual approach to canon law and to the rules of her religious order in the face of extreme circumstances provoked by the Revolution. For the nuns in this section, tradition had to bend a little in trying to make the best of the impossible situation in which they found themselves.

9.3 Understanding Vows as Non-permanent

While the language of force was an easy strategy for limiting culpability, which could help their petitions to be granted, not all nuns were willing to use this rhetorical strategy. Perhaps some of the best examples of women who identified themselves with

906 AF IV 1897, dossier 2, pièce 111. « mariage devant l’officier public » « Le malheur commence de la désolation christianisme vous ayant fait bien contrer pour le première fois de notre vie cette dame. Et moi, nous avons le même jour par la crainte de la mort, pris la partie que je viens d’avenir l’heureux de vous exposer. »

907 Marechaux noticed a similar pattern and referred to « le thème du mauvais mariage. » Marechaux, _Noces Revolutionnaires_, 101.
the Revolution were the ones who made explicit their understanding that the making and breaking of religious vows should always be a matter of choice. They took responsibility for their decisions as individuals.

One of the most interesting petitions to the papal legate was written by a woman who did not adopt the language of force to describe why she took her vows. Marie-Claire Marquand argued that she “was not forced in any way to take [her] religious vows. I was free from the wishes of my parents.” However, had she known then how difficult it would be to keep her vows, she never would have taken her them.908 Now that religion had returned to France, she clearly held religion very close to her heart, but she also did not find her religious vows to be compatible with her post-Revolution life. Therefore, one of the most enduring impacts of the Revolution was the identity as members of religious communities as non-permanent. In fact, in the nineteenth century, Napoleon was much more willing to recognize religious orders that only required simple vows.909 This preference for non-permanent religious vows began before the Revolution and was only accelerated afterward. Furthermore, it was not just a top-down change; these letters help to prove that there was a grassroots, bottom-up change in beliefs about the permanence of religious vows. No matter how earnestly they may have felt about their vocation at the

908 AF IV 1904, dossier 3, pièce 11. « Moi Morquand déclare que je ne suis été forcée d’aucune manière à faire mes vœux de religion ; j’étais libre de mes volontés envers mes parens ; sependant sy j’avais seu qu’un jour je dusse être regrettée dans la foule, pour être obligée de me procurer subsidence pas le travail de mes mains j’avoir été bien éloignée de les faire, J’aurois bien prévu qu’il me seroit été difficile de les effectues. »

time they took the veil, as circumstances changed, former nuns argued they should be relieved of their vows and permitted to maintain new identities.

The church, through the power invested in Caprara, agreed with Marquand, and expanded the circumstances under which a woman could be relieved of her religious vows. Their marriage would be validated, and their religious vows (for both Marquand and her husband) were relieved. The Revolution, therefore, marks a break with tradition. Since the Reformation, nuns who were forced into their vows could petition to be relieved of them. Forced vows were never considered binding. However, for the first time, there was a massive exodus of nuns who had not been forced into the religious life but had changed their minds after a period of crisis. The advent of the Revolution meant that the church was left with very few options but to repair the lasting changes as best as they could. Since there was no state institution that felt the need to coerce nuns back into the convent, the church would have to come to terms with including former nuns among its lay congregants. Even the category of “ex-nun” had never existed in large numbers before.910

Furthermore, not all nuns who wished to be relieved of their vows and to adopt the identity of a mother and wife had actually managed to find a husband during the Revolution. The next group of former nuns who sought to be relieved of their vows and to marry after the Concordat. In hopes of preparing for an exit from their vows, they also hoped to find some future husband without the risk of excommunication. In claiming that they had been forced into their vows by their family and their youthful naïveté at the

910 AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, pièce 11
time, they took the habit. Now, in the nineteenth century at least, they claimed that they sought to pursue a new calling as a wife.

Jeanne-Marguerite-Félicité Beuquet, a sister of l’Enfant-Jésus in Reims, asked to be relieved of her vows of chastity, not because she had contracted a hasty marriage, but because she sought married life in 1804. This shows that the decision to marry was not one of necessity but of choice, a new self-fashioning of identity. During the Revolution, she left France for Switzerland during the “troubles” and got to know a “wise and virtuous man,” and together, they “resolved to marry.”911 In addition to this vow of chastity, she would henceforth find her religious vows incompatible with her soon-to-be-married identity. Making a list, she found the vow of poverty “no longer practicable,” and the vow of obedience void because she “no longer had any superiors” in her convent. Therefore, in her mind, her vows were already impractical and void.

Marriage vows, however, would initiate her into a new vow of obedience, submission, and loyalty to her husband. Since Napoleon’s Civil Code brought back this language of obedience, which the Revolution tried to dispose of with more flexible rules for divorce and women’s rights, Beuquet sought a marriage that was both God-honoring and her new permanent vocation. It was a completely new self-identification with the creation of a new family unit. Marriage involved a unique set of vows with new patriarchal hierarchies. Wives were not quite emancipated women during the Napoleonic empire. In a way, this letter reminds readers that the Revolution was a process of identity

911 AF IV 1903, Dossier 7, pièce 46. « Elle sorts de France et se restes un (suisse?) pendant nos troubles euant fait les connoissance d’un homme vertueux et sage…. Ils résolument de se marier ensemble. »
replacement and fusion. She was replacing one identity—set of rules, vows, and patterns of life—with another.

Women who took the habit were expected to have a religious calling or vocation before they took up this identity. Therefore, if a woman desired to be married and abandon her vows, it would be difficult to argue that God had called her to this life. Maria Magdalena Haag, a young nun who had only taken her vows six years before the Revolution broke out (1783), asked for her vows to be relieved so that she could marry.912 She had not married yet, but intended to do so. In her letter, she stressed that she took the vows even though she felt no vocation. However, her petition to abandon her vows was just a few months too late. Now that Napoleon and the Pope agreed on the Concordat, marriages would not be forgiven recognized if they were contracted after 1801.913 The external forces which allowed the church to grant extenuating circumstances to many women during the Revolution no longer existed. The Catholic Church, which since the Reformation had been trying to limit the occurrence of forced habits, would never agree that a habit should be forced upon a woman who had not explicitly been called by God.914 Haag’s understanding that she could leave her religious estate at any time after the Revolution demonstrated a growing preference for non-permanent vows.

912 AF IV 1896, dossier 2, pièces 117-119.
913 Now that marriage was a civil ceremony, the religious ceremony had no legal bearing on the marriage. However, the religious ceremony would have a great deal of importance for the man or woman’s standing in the church. Therefore, those marriages that were conducted after 1801 without prior dispensation from the Papal Legate could endanger the souls of the petitioner. The Legate was not inclined to grant such petitions.
914 Since the Council of Trent, the existence of forced religious vows was one of the areas of criticism the Catholic Church suffered by their Protestant adversaries. In general, the Church began making efforts to ensure that members of the clergy really felt a vocation.
Women could still choose to join an older, fully-cloistered order, but the state would no longer enforce the woman’s vows, even if the Catholic Church still expected her vows to be permanent. Now individuals could decide at any moment to change the groups with which they identified without suffering secular legal consequences, even if the religious consequences remained.

Equally fascinating was Biseau’s explanation of why she chose the daughters of Notre Dame. Arguing that she hoped to be able to exit the convent at a later date, “the remonstrant had chosen the congregation of the Daughters of Our Lady because if she would return, in the future, to her obedience to her mother, she would be free to leave the state of religion, and permitted to solicit the ecclesiastical authority to be relieved of the simple vows which she was about to take.”915 Simple vows were private vows that were not elevated by the church to the level “solemn vows,” which were permanent and had to be made public during a specific ceremony. They were much more common after the Revolution than after the Catholic Reformation.916 After the death of her mother, her last tie to the parents who encouraged her to enter the convent broke. Furthermore, the French Revolutionary Army arrived in Belgium, and changed the political and social climate for Biseau. After suffering for five years in the convent,

…with the desires […] of becoming a good mother of a family, she did not have to remain a celibate woman, contrary to her inclination, but that she must seek in

915 AF IV 1902, Dossier 4, pièce 113. « … la remontrant avoit elle choisit la congrégation des filles de Notre Dame parce qu’il lui etoit comme que si elle se repertoit à l’avenir de son obéissance envers la Dame sa mère il lui seroit libre de quitter l’état de religion, et permis de solliciter de l’autorité ecclésiastique d’être relevée des vœux simples qu’elle alloit emmètre. »

916 Barbara Diefendorf, From Penitence to Charity. 219-20. As Diefendorf has argued, it is important to see religious orders as a continuum between the most cloistered contemplative orders to open and active religious orders. There were not just two types, but orders typically occupied a space between these two extremes. Ibid., 137.
marriage the purity of sentiments of the honesty of hearts and of the religious faith with which she is so strongly attached, and in which, she hoped to live and die.917

Her unfitness for the convent stemmed from her natural desire to become a good wife and mother. This woman saw marriage as the only way to honestly live out God’s calling for her. This woman did not see any tension between becoming a mother and maintaining her relationship with God. For most of the women who wrote to Caprara in the years after the Concordat, they insisted on continuing both their religious faith and their new identities they adopted during the Revolution. Just as the revolutionaries valued motherhood over celibacy as the ultimate place of virtue for women, some began to reflect these changes in their own lives.918

Furthermore, Christina Witting, on August 18, 1803, also wrote to the papal legate because she had met a man, fell in love, and wished to marry him, but was not able to do so before the Concordat. Therefore, laicization was not automatic, but had to be approved through church procedures. If some women who married during the Revolution could continue to live with their husbands and had their marriages recognized, and thus, their children declared legitimate, she hoped to be extended the same courtesy. Like the women discussed above, she now understood her vows as something that could be broken when her sentiments and calling changed. Since she had taken her vows when she was

917 AF IV 1902, Dossier 4, pièce 113. « …tout l’avec qu’avec les désirs et les sentiments de devenir une bonne Mère de famille elle ne devoit pas laisse se vertu un célibat contraire[ ?] à son inclination, mais qu’elle devoit chercher dans le mariage l’asile de la pureté de sentiments de l’honnêteté de cœurs et de la foi religieuse auxelle elle est si fortement attachée et dans lesquelles elle espère vivre et mourir. »

very young and sought the approval of the pope first, before marrying, the papal legate granted her request.\textsuperscript{919} It was important to recognize that following the correct channels and showing obedience to the papal legate could go a long way toward achieving the desired result. Had Witting married first, and then asked for forgiveness, she would likely have been denied. However, in practicing patience and waiting for the official ruling, she was able to be relieved of her vows.

One of the fascinating indicators of women who took advantage of the new revolutionary identities offered to them were the women who left the convents before they were forced to do so. Many of the revolutionaries had a vision of the convent based on the Enlightenment assumption that convents were prisons. In the spirit of liberty, they passed laws against permanent religious vows because they assumed that upon opening the convent doors, women would storm out. While that mostly was not the case, there were women who did accept this opportunity to leave the convent. I argue that these women, in many ways, identified with this language of force and imprisonment. As genuine victims of their families’ strategies to concentrate their wealth, these women had very little voice in the matter. The women who left before they were forced out of their convent, in many ways, identified with the Enlightenment vision. Their lived experience during the Revolution demonstrated that there was never one identity to which all these women would conform.

Although rare, there were a few women who left the convents before being forced to do so. Marie Borie made it a point in her letter to emphasize that “she left the

\textsuperscript{919} AF IV 1895, dossier 2, pièces 96-7.
Monastery before being constrained to do so by the laws.”920 This small detail probably did not have to be included in her short two-page letter, but the fact that she did include it showed it was important for her story. She was probably also reasonably confident that this small admission would not bar her from receiving a “dispensation of her vows, and the authorization to choose a director who can absolve her of her faults and rehabilitate her marriage.”921 The ability to leave the convent of their own volition was something new. The eagerness with which a minority of women left the convent was also reflected in their willingness to take on new identities, such as those as wives and mothers.

Although her letter was much longer than Borie’s, a former Annunciation nun’s letter also made sure to include details of her departure from the convent, but she went further to describe the longing with which she embraced this opportunity: “the revolution which broke the sacred barriers, gave me the greatest pleasure in the world for which I sighed. This world soon seduced my heart with little difficulty, and it was easy to win me over.”922 She embraced the world almost as a lover. In fact, she soon found her marital passion. More importantly, her willingness to leave the convent was parallel to her enthusiasm for embracing the new revolutionary identity in marriage.

Jeanne-Anne Redon’s story also indicates that she was one of the Revolution’s early beneficiaries of legislation against religious vows. But, as the Revolution changed

920 AF IV 1904, Dossier 4, pièce 87. « elle sortir de son Monastère avant même d’y être contrainte par les lois. »
921 AF IV 1904, Dossier 4, pièce 87.
922 « la révolution qui rompit les barrières sacrés, me fit le plus grand plaisir le monde pour lequel je soupirais M’enchant. Ce monde séduit bientôt mon cœur peut difficile, et facile à gagner… » AF IV 1904, Dossier 4, pièce 97.
into its more radical phases, she also became a victim of the pressures of the Terror. In fact, “as soon as the civil law opened the convents, without waiting for force, [Redon] came out of it.” Redon was one of the rare women who seized this opportunity and left the convent to seek a new life outside the cloister. However, her parents ensured that life outside the convent would be untenable. Although she left the “oppression” of the convent, her parents worked against her efforts to fit into this new society by becoming a teacher and fulfilling the vital role of educating young citizens. In her petition, she claimed:

That after having passed through suffering for about thirty years, she thought she could get out of [the convent], when the national will opened her doors.
That this step was against the will of her parents, she had anger against them that they sought to starve her in the world, preventing her from making a living through public education and they did to her all kinds of bad treatments, unable to kill her in the cloister by languor and rage.

It was very likely that her exit from the convent, combined with the new inheritance laws, stoked her parents’ fear that Redon would make a claim on the family property. While the majority of nuns had family on whom to rely when they left the convent, Redon’s family wanted nothing to do with her. They had hoped, in sending her to the convent, that they had abandoned all financial and emotional responsibility for Redon. The Law of Nivôse, Year II, or January 1794, dictated that nine-tenths of a person’s estate would be strictly

923 AF IV 1905, Dossier 3, 70-3. « Dés que loi civile ouvrit les couvents sans attendre la force, elle en sortit retirée dans une petite maison que luy prefoit sa mère… »
924 AF IV 1905, Dossier 3, 70. « elle vivoit du produit de l’éducation qu’elle donnoit quelque jeunes voyant alors sans ressource , elle j’abandonna a celle, que s’offrit et menacoit étant lui-même pour suivi, comme fanaticque, par des membres du comité de surveillance, qui faisant trembler tous les habitants du Agen »
925 AF IV 1905, Dossier 3, 71.
divided equally among the offspring; therefore, Redon would have a right to claim her inheritance. After leaving her convent, she was without the protection of her family home and without a way to make a living. At the height of the Terror, almost the same day of Robespierre’s death, she married a Constitutional bishop to survive. Her husband, too, seemed to sign on to the Revolution’s agenda by swearing an oath to the Civil Constitution and living as a Constitutional bishop. This couple proved that some women took the opportunity offered to them to leave and embraced freedom despite its difficulties. Life outside the convent for many nuns was not easy.

Redon’s marriage began as a union for mutual convenience and safety. It was painful and tumultuous, yet eventually, they decided to stay together for the rest of their days. At first, they intended to live as “brother and sister,” but for some unstated reasons, they both agreed to something more:

Entrapped by the Terror, which hovered over France [...] I took the first person, with whom I was presented and to whom this painful situation impelled the same sentiments, [...] and at the age of 50, did not have any children; as brother and sister they had kept [the marriage] for a few months, afterward they abandoned [the marriage] for about two years, but they have been back [together]for six years, they have allowed it ever since and are in the determination to [honor the marriage] until the end of their life. 927

926 Loi de Nivôse, AN II. Ironically by making her life so miserable they made claiming her inheritance more desirable.

927 AF IV 1905, Dossier 3, 70. « personne, que je presenta et à laquelle sa pénible situation impiroit les mêmes sentiments, et cette union je contracta a une heure après minuit le 14 thermidor an 2 de la république avant qu'on [ut connoitre à Agen la mort de Robespierre arrivée a Paris le 10 et que de 50 ans n’ont point eu des enfans ; ils etoint Agés tous les deux comme frère et sœur l’ont conservée quelques mois l’ont ensuite abandonnée pendant environ deux ans ; mais ils sont revenue depuis six ans ils y ont permisse depuis et sont dans la résolution d’y permeter jusque à la fin de leur vies »
We can only speculate about the cause of their change of heart.\textsuperscript{928} Perhaps they had grown into their new identities. The only clue for their continued association as husband and wife was their shared work in education: “They still painfully gain a living today by educating some young people whom they raise with care in the principles of religion. Their separation would deprive them of this unique income.”\textsuperscript{929} We might also speculate that in their advancing age, they missed the Catholic community they once enjoyed and found companionship in each other. It seems that a shared interest in education would fit into both the French state’s vision for a productive citizen as well as the Catholic Church’s nineteenth-century vision for Catholicizing France.

Their letters also show the internalization of a separation of church and state interests in this couple’s identity. Their letter gave an elevated respect for the civil law over canon law. This couple argued, “The civil law gives them the freedom to remain in this state. They expect from your holiness the means to make their salvation there, to approach the sacraments, and to repair the scandal.”\textsuperscript{930} Therefore, they seemed to prioritize the civil law, which recognized their marriage as a civil ceremony rather than a

\textsuperscript{928} Her husband at this point was quite old, in his sixties. He had been serving the church for many years. I wonder if Redon, wishing to live outside the convent but still remain in the church’s good graces sought this marriage as an escape. Perhaps, she was relying on her husband’s death to eventually free her of both her religious and her marriage vows. Nothing in her letter directly confirms this suspicion, but it was quite common for men and women to conduct loveless marriages with spouses on their deathbed to satisfy the Revolution’s insistence on marriage, all the while knowing the marriage will not be a lifetime sentence.

\textsuperscript{929} AF IV 1905, Dossier 3, 70. « Ils subsistent péniblement aujourd'hui en instruisant quelque jeune gens qu'ils élèvent avec soin dans les principes de la religion leur séparation les priveroit de cette unique resource »

\textsuperscript{930} AF IV 1905, Dossier 3, 70. « La loi civile leur laisse la liberté de rester dans cet état ils attendent de votre sainteté les moyens d'y faire leur salut, d'approcher des sacrements et de réparer le scandale. Incréments repentants de toutes les fautes qu'ils ont exposées à votre sainteté ils la supplient d'autoriser la réhabilitation de leur mariage, qui ne leur laisse aujourd'hui que des peines ils demander et d'en obtenir sa bénédiction. »
religious sacrament. Jeanne Anne Redon embraced the early freedoms provided by the Revolution. Later, however, she felt forced into a marriage she never wanted. Yet she eventually accepted the changes wrought by the Revolution and her identity as a wife, despite the trials this marriage had brought.

Much like Redon, Claudine-Françoise Fumey was another woman who took a very winding path during the Revolution after voluntarily leaving her convent. Claiming to be forced into her vows by a violent and seemingly sadistic uncle, she, like Redon, claimed to never feel any vocation in her heart. Nearly every woman who left the convent before being forced to officially leave by the government claimed that her vows were forced, thereby affirming the Revolution’s suspicions, and hoping to win over the papal legate. She played up the identity of the nun as a prisoner, victim, and damsel in need of liberation. We will return to Fumey in the next section, but for now, it was clear that she was one of the nuns who voluntarily left the convent and claimed the convent was a place of great unhappiness for her.

9.4 Premarital Pregnancies

While pregnancy occasionally happened in the convent, it was never without great scandal to a community of women who were supposed to be celibate. During the Revolution, despite the many changes to family and sexual practices, many still expected a pregnant woman to hastily contract a marriage to preserve her reputation.

931 AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, Pièce 80. « Que forcée et violente par feu son oncle chapelain de Siam sous la puissance duquel elle etoit tombu a la mort de son père, elle entra en 1776 dans le couvent des clarisses reforme par la St. Colette en la ville de Salins et que l’année survivante elle fit dans la même maison une profession que son cœur désavouoit. »
Therefore, pregnancy itself was often a motivating factor in contracting marriages, particularly after the 1793-1794 period, when the pressure to marry was at its highest.932 In fact, fifteen nuns wrote to Caprara that pregnancy was the main reason for their marriages.933 While again, these cases were the minority of married nuns, because of the multiple layers of complications and competing interests, their impact remains important.

Returning once again to Fumey, further evidence of her unfitness for the convent and natural inclination toward marriage emerged. Whether she embraced a new Revolutionary sexual ethic, as described in detail by Kathryn Marsden, or not, we know that she engaged in an affair with a man from her town out of wedlock.934 She found herself without resources. So, after catching the attention of Charles Joseph Pery, through their mutual “weakness,” their liaison produced a son.935 This event signified a change in identity and attitude. She viewed chastity as antithetical to her personal constitution, and

932 For example, Charlotte Bardet had two children out of wedlock before she accepted the marriage proposal of a man of “good birth” with whose child she was pregnant. AF IV 1906, Dossier 1, 227.
934 Kate Marsden, “Married Nuns in the French Revolution: The Sexual Revolution of the 1790s,” PhD Dissertation, University of California Irvine. Marsden described in these letters of married nuns a change in attitudes towards clerical celibacy, marriage and sex. She argues the French revolution ushered in a new sexual Revolution.
935 AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, Pièce 80. « Cependant se voyant engage dans un etat que n’auroit pas du etre le sien elle en rempli les devoirs le plus exactement qu’il lui a été possible jusqu’à l’époque ou la Révolution française ouvrit les cloitres. Rejettée au milieu d’un monde qu’elle n’avoit quitte qu’a regret, sans asile comme sœurs Resource et sans guide, elle fait trop flattie{z} de la liberté qu’elle venoit de recouvrée ayant eu l’occasion de voir Charles Joseph Pery de Siam aussi du diocèse de Besançon elle eut le malheur de lui plaire et d’avoir pour lui de faiblesses desquelles il résulta la naissance d’un fils. Je lui témoigna pour lors l’envie de donner un état à cet enfant et lui propose le mariage tourmentée par ses remords elle cherche a tranquilliser sa conscience en proposant le cas où elle se trouoit au Citoyen Moyse Evêque Constitutionnel du Jara. Cet évêque aux lumières duquel elle croyoit pouvoir »
thus, no longer felt bound to her vows. Not only did she willingly leave her convent and abandon her vow of poverty, but now she broke her vow of chastity. Furthermore, any sex outside of marriage, for nuns or the laity, was considered sinful. So this liaison with a man from her village would carry with it the stain of shame and judgment. This was not the same kind of forced marriage between a monk and a nun that was contracted for mutual safety that later developed into a loving union. This was an illicit affair, and one sure to cause a swell of gossip in their small town.

With the aid of a constitutional bishop, they arranged two priests to quickly and discreetly marry her to her lover and thus cover up for her “weakness” for Mr. Pery. She married both civilly and ecclesiastically in the presence of a constitutional priest.936 Her pregnancy certainly made her decision to marry not entirely motivated by her own desire, but out of concern for her would-be bastard child. However, her decisions from that point forward reflected her desire to live as a mother and a wife. They lived in alleged “conjugal happiness” with two out of their three children surviving. In fact, separation now seemed impossible because, in living together, they fully embraced their new identities as a family:

Even a momentary separation would be impossible, or at least it would be difficult to the point of being insurmountable, either because of the care required by her children, or because of Pery's important business. He is charged with the handling of a considerable chain of forges, he usually has more than twenty workers and domestics to feed and the supplicant is the only one to be at the head of this business in the numerous absences that Pery’s trade requires; and finally, because the latter does not wish to consent that the supplicant work for the

936 AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, pièce 80. “…, lui fit écrire par son Vicaire Episcopat Répecand qu’elle pouvoit se marier et délégua deux prêtres pour lui donner la bénéédiction nuptiale. L’envie de donner un état a son enfant et cette décision la déterminèrent à épouser le dit Charles Joseph Pery tant à la manière civile qu’a la manière prétendu ecclésiastique au mois d’accourt 1794... »
rehabilitation of the marriage, except on the sole condition that the thing will have no publicity, and that a required separation would be for him a sufficient reason for never consenting to it.937

While the Church might have wanted the couple to wait on their decision before continuing in their marital habits, this would be an economic impossibility for most couples. Even being briefly separated until their marriage vows could be reaffirmed was a non-starter for Mr. Pery. Fumey had become an integral part of her husband’s business and running his household. Her husband would never submit to the separation, which revealed a great deal about Fumey’s importance for the domestic economy. Perhaps most importantly, we can see her husband’s concern for the public nature of reaffirming their vows and having to momentarily separate, which was something he was not willing to consider. He did not want the public spectacle, or perhaps any more gossip about the marriage. Fumey’s life mimicked some of the Revolution’s ideas about sexuality, nuns, and motherhood. She left the convent, married, and fully integrated herself in the world outside the convent. She was performing her new identity as a republican mother and a useful citizen.

Thérèse Goubert was another former nun who became a mother before she took the identity of wife. Alexandre Carez, a capuchin monk, and Goubert, a converse nun from the order of Saint-Lazare, confessed to the papal legate that they “had the

937 AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, pièce 80. « Une Séparation même momentanée seroit impossible, on du moins elle offroit des difficultés pourquoi insurmontables soit à cause des soins que demandent ses enfants, soit à cause de grandes affaires de Pery. Il est changé de la manutention d’un train de forges considérable, il a habituellement plus de vingt tant ouvriers que domestique à nourrir et la suppliante est le seule pour être à la tête de ce train dans les nombreuse absences que la commerce de Pery exige ; soit enfin parce que celui-ci ne veut consentir que la suppliante travaille à la réhabilitation du mariage qu’a la seule condition que la chose n’aura aucun éclat et qu’un séparation demandée seroit pour lui une raison suffisante pour ny consentir jamais. »
misfortune to forget themselves to the point of having to maintain a criminal commerce which was only discovered by the pregnancy of the so-called Thérèse Goubert.”

While in the process of closing down convents, revolutionaries often consolidated members of those houses who did not have anywhere to go or did not want to leave together. Since Goubert and Carez were housed together, pregnancy did not seem so surprising, but we must remember that these were two individuals who had previously taken vows of chastity. They themselves admitted that they had “forgotten themselves,” which seems that they forgot their former identities as a monk and a nun and embraced not only each other but a new sexual ethic. Unfortunately, this liaison created the biological necessity— for Goubert, at least—to adopt the new identity of mother. Their letter betrays a near-total departure from their former identities. Although filled with remorse now, and with four children total, their new identities as parents and spouses took priority over their obligations to their religious orders. As remorseful as their letter sounded, the husband and wife later had three additional children beyond the first, which indicated a continued sexual relationship even after the pregnancy forced their hand in marriage. These pregnancies out of wedlock that resulted in marriages all showed women negotiating with the changing circumstances in which they were placed and slowly adopting aspects of the Revolution in their daily lives and self-identity.

938 AF IV 1904, Dossier 4, Piece 51. « Après leur expulsion de leur couvent ils se trouvent réunis dans une même maison ou la pitié les avoit recueillis qu’après avoir passé un assez longtemps ensemble sans occupez d’autres objets que des moyens de se soutenir mutuellement contre les tentations auxquelles leur entrée dans le monde les exposait ; ils eurent la malheur de s’oublier au point d’avoir d’entretenir entréux un commerce criminel qui ne fur découvert que par la grossesse de la dite Thérèse Goubert. »

939 As described in Marsden’s dissertation, the French Revolution can be interpreted as a sexual revolution. Marsden, Married Nuns in the French Revolution.
9.5  Nuns with Children who Want Their Marriage to be Recognized

When considering their petitions to Cardinal Caprara, the existence of children, which resulted from the unions between nuns and their lovers, created another layer of difficulties to consider concerning their status after the Revolution. While a high percentage of marriages produced no children, it may not be true that all marriages without children were unconsummated. Ruth Graham argues that only 40% of the marriages contracted by nuns produced children, but this was primarily due to the nuns’ advanced age. Meanwhile, Xavier Marechaux has found that 60% of male clerics’ marriages produced children, which might be due to the fact that males maintain fertility even at advanced ages.940 A general outline of the Pope’s policy towards reintegrating former nuns into the Catholic fold is contained in the Caprara documents, AF IV 1888. Interestingly, Pope Pius VII made no formal rule for women who had children and wanted to assume their religious functions. Perhaps this omission was because no woman would dare to ask to be readmitted to the convent after having married and birthed children.941 In fact, not a single woman of the nearly 400 petitions asked to be readmitted to the convent after marriage. Brière, a woman who was unhappily married to a former priest who had lost his faith during the course of the Revolution, wrote that she wished to return to the convent, but immediately dismissed this suggestion because


941 Even though there were often spaces in convents for widows, before the Revolution there would have been no allowances for mothers with children to enter religious life. There was no reason to suggest there would be such an instance now.
she had a child.\footnote{AF IV 1908, Dossier 11, pièce 303. Her story is one of the more complete biographies we get in the Caprara documents she explains her whole life from birth, through first communion, through the Revolution. She must write behind her husband’s back for forgiveness because her husband thought Caprara was a traitor and an imposter. Her immediate dismissal of the possibility that she could return to the convent despite being in an unhappy marriage to a man who was hostile to the Vatican, shows why the Pope did not need to say that women with children could not reenter the religious life.} Therefore, this may be why the Pope did not need to explicitly dictate a policy about whether women with children could rejoin the convent. Both the women themselves and the church representatives expected that they would stay with their husbands.\footnote{AF IV 1888, 8th Volume, folder 1-6.} Marsden noted that the fact that all the married nuns sought to remain with their children was a departure from the seventeenth-century practice when women would often abandon their children born out of wedlock to enter a convent and thereby atone for their sins.\footnote{Marsden, “Married Nuns”, 121. Barbara Diefendorf, \textit{From Penitence to Charity: Pious Women and the Catholic Reformation in Paris} (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004). Houses of convertiti (in the Italian form) continued through the 18th century. However, doing this meant admitting to having been a prostitute.} Therefore, the existence of and responsibility to their children seemed to preclude women from the opportunity to return to their lives in the convent.

Marriages, particularly consummated marriages, often created children, who ideally needed to be brought up in the Catholic faith, recognized as legitimate, and welcomed into the church for their salvation. For many women, the necessity to petition the legate was not solely for their own status in the church, but for the status and salvation of their children. Children, for better or worse, guaranteed these marriages between monks and nuns could not be absolved or forgotten with the flourish of a quill. If a former nun produced a child through a union, it was impossible for her to reassume her pre-Revolution identity or have her marriage forgotten for the very practical reason
that the church reasoned that these women would have to raise their children, as did the petitioners. Domestic labor and child-rearing were central to women’s labor during this period. Children, therefore, became hugely influential products of the Revolution. Through their existence, children bestowed upon their mothers new identities, but perhaps more importantly, new routines and responsibilities. Offspring of the Revolution-era relations of monks and nuns changed the landscape of France long after the husbands and wives themselves had passed.

By living the identity of a “mother” to a child, an ex-nun now had an additional obstacle preventing her from quietly annulling her marriage and re-entering the convent. This language of force (demonstrated earlier in the decision to enter a convent or a marriage), was also present in the existence of children. Using passive verbs allowed the petitioner to remove herself as an actor in her own story, and therefore assume culpability. Bonne Jeanne Charlotte Estard, a former choir nun of the Abbey of St. Antoine, unhappily married and with a daughter, to whom she now owed “the obligation” of raising. Furthermore, the creation of a child created “the necessity to live together.” Therefore, the decision to stay married was not her own. The language of obligation and necessity was intended to remind the papal legate of how little choice he had but to allow the marriage to be legitimized. By performing the marriage vows in

945 AF IV 1897-1891. In this series the pope corresponded with the papal legate to outline the power and the rules to which he must abide. The concordat signed in 1801 laid out a general pattern for reconciliation but as more details developed Pope Pius VII would have to make his directions and the powers of the legate clearer. One problem was the existence of children. It was determined that if a woman had children any request to retake the habit would be denied.

946 AF IV 1904, Dossier 5, pièce 21. « Qu’il est résulté une fille de cette union, que le disant de moyen presque absolu de ladite B.J.C. Estard et l’obligation d’élever l’enfant, les met dans la nécessité de vivre ensemble. »
front of the church and legitimizing the marriage, they could salvage the souls of the
couple and the innocent child. Through necessity, ex-nuns and their husbands now had
to live the daily life the revolutionaries first envisioned in the cartoons of the previous
decade.

It was common for a couple to jointly submit their petition on behalf of their
children to the papal legate if the married nun’s husband was still alive. For example,
the petition of Gertrude Magny, an Annunciation nun, and Jacques Girod, who was a
church organist, demonstrates this sort of solidarity on their children’s behalf. In their
petition, they introduced their two surviving children, aged seven and five, and
recognized that since their marriage vows were taken before the civil authority, and
since the supplicant was a nun, “according to canon law, this marriage should not have
taken place.”947 Magny now asked for a dispensation from her vows, which she
described as “necessary and convenient” and to be totally secularized.948 Although her
husband had not actually broken any religious vows to marry, in marrying a nun, he too
shared in her sins through this marriage. The creation of children brought further
complications concerning their legitimacy in the eyes of the church. Jacques Girod
petitioned on behalf of his wife and children. This marriage identity bonded two people
together in one common identity of husband and wife, where they both shared in each
other’s concern for salvation. The existence of children only helped to solidify this
identity as a permanent fixture in France.

947 Selon les loix canonique ce mariage n’aurait pas du avoir lieu …
948 “En la suppliant d’user de miséricorde envers elle et leur accorder la dispense nécessaire et convenable,
en sécurisant la Suppliante qui étant encore jeune lors de sa profession.
The first and most frequent concern for these couples was the fact that their children existed as bastards. For the nuns who married at the height of the Terror, the only available marriage contract was the civil ceremony, which would not be recognized by the church. In the eyes of the church, children produced from a couple whose union was the product of a civil ceremony were bastards. Hundreds of women, and not just former nuns, recognized this problem and hoped for their marriage to be rehabilitated for the sake of their children. For example, Charlotte Cecile was one such woman who was “dragged away from her convent by the French Revolution,” and when the pension funds dried up, she married in January of 1794. Recognizing the complications of her marriage, she asked to be relieved of her vows and allowed to contract a marriage “in the form described by the Council of Trent.” The daily recitation of the divine office “in her new state,” as a mother and a wife, was “impractical.” She recognized the only way forward was through the official recognition by the Catholic Church. This woman was obviously well-versed in church tradition, or well advised on it, because she was specifically mentioning the Council of Trent. She asked not just for

949 AF IV 1887.
950 AF IV 1902, Dossier 5, pièce 19. « Entrainée hors de son couvent par l’effort de la Révolution française, elle a eu le Malbeau de se laisser Emporter par le torrent des évacue eu la jusqu’à manquer aux obligations de l’état quelle avait embrasse : elle a contracté un Mariage civil le 31 Janvier 1794 devant la municipalité de Paris, elle a un enfant de ce mariage, et elle lâche de l’élèver dans la religion catholique, les circonstances l’out oblige d’aller s’établir à Barsuraube avec son Mari et son Enfant ; elle demeure sur la paroisse de saint Pierre rue de l’épicerie no 548… Elle supplie son éminence de lui donner part a l’indulgence miséricordieuse de l’Eglise et de lui accorder dispense de son vœux à l’effet de contracter un mariage catholique dans les former prescrites parole concile de trente, elle demande en outre, d’être dispensée de la récitation journalière de l’Office divin, que son nouvel état lui rend impraticable. »
a rehabilitation of her marriage, but for a dispensation of her vows and forgiveness for not reciting the divine office; and only then, she recognized, could she be legally remarried in the Catholic Church. The church did rehabilitate her marriage because of the compelling interest in mending this rift.951 In these instances, although the women probably did not have any intention of using their identities as mothers to solidify the Revolution, they were essentially petitioning the church asking it to bless and recognize a civil and revolutionary ceremony that was entirely at odds with the religious covenant of marriage. The church, which had a compelling interest in saving souls, had little choice but to welcome and sanctify these civil contracts for the sake of the children.

Marie-Claire Marquand, a teacher and a former Benedictine nun, married Hyacinthe Hutinet in 1793. After bearing four children, only two of which survived, she understood the need to raise her surviving children in the faith. Her third request in this letter related to the future of her two remaining children, aged six and eight, “whom we teach in the principles of the Catholic Apostolic and Roman religion, and by means of the grace of God and the indulgence of the sovereign pontiff, we hope to make them good Christians.”952 Chapter three discussed the church’s compelling interest in the education of the young as a critical aspect of reviving the Catholic Church in France. Advocating for their children and their future education was an important argument these women made to secure recognition of their marriages.

951 AF IV 1902, Dossier 5, Piece 21.
952 AF IV 1904, dossier 3, pièce 11. « nous avons eu de ce mariage quatre enfants dont deux sont morts et les deux autres vivent. L’un est âgé de huit ans et l’autre de six. Les quels nous instruisent dans les principes de la religion catholique apostolique et romaine, et moyennant la grâce de dieux et l’indulgence que souverain pontife, nous espérons en faire des biens Chrétiens »
The emphasis on the children’s education was probably something Marquand felt particularly strongly about, seeing as she used to be a teacher herself. Furthermore, Marquand argued in her fourth point:

If we were separated, we would experience an infallible indigence, so that we would be deprived of the plain duty of providing our children with the education and sustenance which we owe them, [this would be] more inhumane than the most ferocious beasts we threw ourselves at the legate’s feet. The Eternal has engraven the paternal and maternal law in our souls; it is unfortunate for us to find ourselves in such circumstances! 953

This couple demonstrates a clear fusing of the natural duties of mothers and fathers according to the Enlightenment and French revolutionary rhetoric, with the religious rhetoric to defend the persistence of this union for the preservation of the family. It seems for both religious and secular reasons; they adopted new identities. Separation and dissolving the union would bring nothing but misfortune, would deprive these children of education and sustenance, and, most importantly, would constitute the neglect of natural law and the duties that mothers owed to their children.

Much like Marquand, Thierry, an Annunciation nun who contracted a marriage during the Revolution, had two surviving children, on whose behalf she petitioned the legate. She was determined to raise them with devotion to the Catholic faith and implored the papal legate to have “pity on [her] sad situation and [her] child,” and to

953 « les difficultés qui se remontreroient pour notre séparation sont que nous ne sommes point fortunes ne jouisse na d’avenu revenue ; eu nous separeurts ( ?) nous éprouverions un indigence infaillible, ainsi nous serions prives du plaine et du devoir de procurer à nos enfants l’éducation et la subsistance que nous leur devons plus inhumains que les bêtes les plus féroce nous soulerions aux pieds. La loi paternelle et maternelle que l’éternel a gravé dans nos âmes ; qu’il est malheureux pour nous de nous trouves dans de telles circonstances ! » AF IV 1904, Dossier 3, 11.
decide in her favor. Whether she was just using her child as leverage or whether she was writing out of a sincere concern, or perhaps both, she claimed that her children were the “most cherished/dear” things in her life. Even if the church wanted her to leave her husband, she could never abandon her children. However, she pondered whether “her soul is more precious still” than both her children and her husband. This suggests, perhaps, that maybe her salvation was more important than both her children and her husband. Her letter shows a deep, unwavering attachment to her children, one she could not dream of breaking apart, but it also reminds readers of the importance of salvation to eighteenth and nineteenth-century French Catholics. For better or worse, she was now a mother, and that irreversibly changed her identity and her priorities.

Other women, in their carefully crafted petitions, made similar arguments quite articulately. Augustine-Amélie Masson, a former Annunciation nun who married a priest, presents her family as another important reason for her need to return to Catholicism. Although now widowed, she petitioned the legate:

to grant me the dispensations necessary to render legitimate, to the eyes and ecclesiastical authority and religion, the alliances which I contracted according to the civil laws. I beg you, at last, to make me free from all the measures I have incurred in regard to the discrepancies of which I confess you, to submit to what the justice of our holy Father will order and give me the faculty of returning to the communion of the faithful to raise my family as Christians.

954 AF IV 1904, Dossier 4, piece 97.
955 Her husband had actually already passed away, so her offer to leave her husband was not a reality. She had two children, « il me sont plus chère que la vie. Si l’église veux que je quitte mon marie, je ne pourront abandonner mes enfants. Cependant mon âme, mai plus chère encore,… »
956 AF IV 1901, Dossier 11, pièce 84. « m’accorder les dispenses nécessaires pour rendre légitime aux yeux et autorité ecclésiastique et de la religion l’alliances qui j’ai contracté selon les loix civiles. Je vous supplie enfin de me faire affranchir de toutes les mesures que j’ai encourues relativement aux écarts dont je vous fait l’aveu une soumettre à ce quel la justice de notre saint Père ordonnera et me donner la faculté de rentrer dans la communion des fidèles pour élever chritiennement ma famille »
Her desire to raise her children in the Christian faith was not only leverage to grant her request, but it also demonstrated how the Church was forced to reconcile and live with the long-term consequences of the revolutionary decade. In the nineteenth century, there was a huge push to educate and re-Christianize France after a decade-long absence of proper religious instruction. The Catholic Church could not afford to let any more of its children go un-educated in the faith.

For widows like Masson, it became tricky to petition to have their marriages recognized when their husbands had since passed away. This letter was written in her own hand, and you can sense her contrite heart with every word. She did not have a husband to rely on to write this petition. She did, however, mention it was his desire, and she had the backing of a local friar. Without her husband, these dispensations became much harder to obtain because their marriage vows could not be validated in a church ceremony to receive the nuptial blessing. Therefore, her widowed status made her even more vulnerable, and her children’s situation more precarious. There was no clear path to reconciling their illicit marriage.

Similarly, Elisabeth-Bernardine-Françoise Moho, a hospital nun who married Louis-Sébastien Rémi, the local curé of Ressons-le-Long (Aisne) who died in 1797, was left with children and no formal religious recognition of the marriage. Without this posthumous recognition of the marriage to a man who no longer lived, her virtue would be permanently marred, her children would be perpetual bastards, and there would be

957 AF IV 1901 Dossier 11, pièce 84.
958 AF IV 1901, Dossier 12, pièce 50.
very few men willing to associate with a woman in such a disgraceful state. While
widows have always suffered skepticism and persecution, widowed ex-nuns were
perhaps even more vulnerable to suspicion and mistreatment. In fact, Moho requested a
male clergy member, by the name of Delaloge, present her case. Although it was
possible she was not literate enough to write the letter herself, the fact remains that
having a male protector and someone willing to petition on her behalf was a powerful
tool for a very vulnerable woman. Having male clergy members in good standing
petition on the woman’s behalf added legitimacy to their pleas.

Children raised the stakes of these revolutionary marriages for both the state and
the Catholic Church, who had an interest in raising these children according to its
principles. It also was another limiting factor for the new identities of former monks and
nuns. Children made an ex-nun’s return to the convent not only unpalatable, but
impossible. Children were a permanent fixture of the French social landscape that
ensured many married nuns would adopt their new identities long after their civil
marriage contract was created.

9.6 Older Nuns who Married

It was quite common, particularly among priests who were forced to marry, to
take absurd spouses in order to appease the revolutionaries but also to make it clear to
the church that the marriage was, from the beginning, a farce. This was the case with
some nuns as well. Sometimes they would go so far as to marrying family members or

959 Other women who also were widowed with children that sought to have their marriages recognized and
their sins absolved included Carlotta Riffart AF IV 1902 2 108; AF IV 1910 5 1-3; AF IV 1891 1
21, 2, 28; AF IV 1892 28 and 24; AF IV 1894 61 59
men on their deathbed to dispense with their marriages quickly.\footnote{Claire Cage, \textit{Unnatural Frenchmen}, 140.} These sham marriages, or marriages to dying men, were strategic to prove a desire to maintain their religious vows. The Caprara documents include the cases of eight ex-nuns who contracted these unconsummated marriages, a number which was much less than monks who married.\footnote{Kate Marsden, “Married Nuns in the French Revolution,” 126. Ruth Graham, “Married Nuns Before Cardinal Caprara,” 326.} Therefore, the low percentage of these marriages that were sham marriages likely mirrored the fact that women had less pressure to be married. If they did marry, they chose to do so. For the former nuns whose husbands had died by the time of the Caprara Legation, their desire to be excused of their vows and not return to the convent, despite the vulnerable status widows held eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France, may indicate the sincerity of their break with their vows and their earnest embrace of marriage, the Revolution, and a women’s new role in France. At the very least, these women felt it was too late to go back to their previous position as nuns.

These married women were no longer looking to the Church as the only factor in their decision-making. The Revolution forced them to take on other responsibilities and identities.

However, for the few older nuns and their husbands who did marry, they were even more desperate in their pleas than others because of the danger of eternal damnation at death if they were not welcomed back into the faith. If one spouse died in a state of mortal sin without a dispensation from the church, this would have put both souls in peril. In a letter written by Thérèse Jallay, a former Ursuline nun who married in 1795, she

\[\text{\footnotetext{Claire Cage, \textit{Unnatural Frenchmen}, 140.}}\]
asked to receive the nuptial blessing before the death of her husband, who was “advanced in age” and suffering from paralysis. Therefore, these petitioners were in a race against time, with very high stakes. Jallay’s petition, although unique, does show that although most nuns who were advanced in age did not marry, there were some older women and men that married despite facing less pressure to do so. When they did marry, we have some evidence that they did so more willingly than their male counterparts.

9.7 Nuns Who Remarried

While many women and former nuns did marry under duress during the Terror, the archives document a handful of women who not only chose to marry once, but twice. This indicated a desire to embrace a new identity as a wife. It was quite unlikely that a woman was forced to marry twice if she had no individual desire to identify herself as a wife or a mother. Marie-Joseph Thérèse Toulet, a former nun from Flanders (which had been conquered by France), contracted the “civil bonds” of marriage three times. Now freed by the death of all her husbands, she spent her last two years of life in remorse and tears. Formerly from the convent Saint-Julien, part of the order of Saint Francis, she showed no desire to return. She sought only “the pardon of her iniquities, to be relieved of the censures she has incurred, and to be embraced by the all-powerful grace of her God; she will henceforth be able to repair her heart, walk in the paths of justice, and bless the paternal hand which will have contributed to his happiness.”

962 AF IV 1904, dossier 4, pièce 81.
963 AF IV 1898, dossier 6, pièce 178. « ...trois fois elle a contracté les liens civils du mariage. Veuve et libre par la mort de ceux à qui elle s’étoit … elle passe sa vie depuis deux ans dans la remords et les larmes et cependant ce n’est que depuis quelque mois qu’elle pris la généreuse résolution de recourir au dieu Maitre et confiant à votre éminence le pouvoir de lier et de votre compassant
While it was likely that she felt pressure from the revolutionaries to get married once, the likelihood that the revolutionaries forced all three of her marriages was extremely low. There were undoubtedly financial reasons to marry and remarry, but her letters make no mention of the existence of children that might have made her financial situation more precarious. Her letter does indicate that she but hoped to live a secularized life after being relieved of her iniquities. After she had lived most of the past decade as a wife, she had no intention of returning to convent life, even if she could.964 Since all her marriages were contracted civilly and not officially recognized by the church, they were invalid. Therefore, her multiple marriages required multiple absolutions before she could enjoy a restored status within the church again.

Perhaps more indicative of a nun who totally embraced the new freedoms and identities offered to her through motherhood and the Revolution was the example offered by Marie-Anne Coinchelin, formerly a nun in the order of the Annunciation, who married in the year II of the republic, at the height of the Terror. She married a regular capuchin priest, François Mahu.965 While this first marriage might have been a hasty attempt to avoid persecution, it did produce two children who died at a young age, clearly indicating that the marriage had been consummated.966 Coinchelin and Mahu

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964 Perhaps she considered the possibility of a fourth marriage, but unfortunately, we cannot be sure from the letter that she ever found one. Her letter does not contain any language of unhappiness that many other women used to describe their marriages. She seemed to have at the very least accustomed herself to married life.

965 AF IV 1899, dossier 9, pièce 70.

966 AF IV 1908, Dossier 2, pièces 192.
took advantage of the Revolution’s accessibility of divorce and divided her union nine years later.\textsuperscript{967} She boldly asked to be excused of her iniquities, welcomed back into the church community, and relieved of her vows, and she went so far as to ask permission to remarry.\textsuperscript{968} Despite her marriage, divorce, and desire to remarry, she remained committed to the faith. Even with a small pension, she had to get a job to support herself, and perhaps she found life as a wife and mother more amicable than as a working single widow. She tried to emphasize the hard times and disgrace she had fallen upon to endear herself to the papal legate and to demonstrate the necessity for her to remarry to support herself. Financial pressures would always be an important element in a woman’s decision to marry, but this woman’s embrace of marriage and divorce, and her desire to be remarried would stretch the limits of Caprara’s forgiveness. Divorce would never be recognized by the church. Annulments could sometimes be granted if the marriage was unconsummated or there were extenuating circumstances, but these were rare and had to be granted by the pope. Her embrace of this new Revolutionary practice indicated and embraced a new sexual ethic. She boldly embraced the revolutionaries’ offer to marry, but also their extension of divorce. Although these flexible divorce laws were short-lived, Coinchelin’s example shows that some religious women had no qualms about taking advantage of these new laws.

\textsuperscript{967} I should be clear that although divorce was more accessible, it was not commonly admired or looked kindly upon. In her letter, Coinchelin found herself “plunged… into the disgrace… misfortune… and popular contempt.” “Ensuite, qu’elle le trouve plongée dans la ténèbres de l’Enmey, dans les disgrâces de l’infortune et dans le Mépris populaire.” AF IV 1908, Dossier 2, pièces 192.

\textsuperscript{968} AF IV 1908, Dossier 2, pièces 192
9.8 Nuns Who Married after Aug 15, 1801

Although there were many couples who had married long after the period of intense persecution during the Reign of Terror, the church accepted their marriage and forgave their transgressions, so long as it occurred before the signing of the Concordat. For couples like Marie Delanoue and her husband, a priest, who married under the directory period in 1795—decidedly past the highest pressure to marry, they usually were able to have their vows nullified and to be remarried in the church.969 However, there was a small group of nuns who wrote to Cardinal Caprara to have their vows annulled and to have a special dispensation for their marriages after the official cut-off date of August 15, 1801. This was problematic because now that the church had returned to France, there was no reason why these women should now abandon their vows. Knowing the improbability of Caprara granting their requests, there was often a considerable amount of pleading from ex-nuns and their husbands to the papal legate. Their earnest desire to have their marriages recognized, or to have their vows annulled so that they could marry at a later point, underlined how transformed these women were by the French Revolution. They no longer identified as part of a convent, but instead, they fully embraced a life as a wife. These letters, written with a strong suspicion that they would not be granted, show how devoted these couples were to their new identities, but also their Catholic faith.

969 AF IV 1897, Dossier 1, pièce 35.
Caroline Steinen, a Benedictine who married in 1803, long after the 1801 final cut-off date, was denied her request to have her marriage recognized.970 Her husband, Claude François, a former capuchin monk, spoke on her behalf. Recognizing the difficulty of his request, he begs for “grace.”971 Despite the women who had seized a new status outside of the church, it was still necessary to have men of authority speak on their behalf. Steinen’s decision to marry was not one of force or necessity but of agency. Unfortunately for Steinen, the church could not accept such flagrant disregard for church policy. They both lived in an uneasy status, officially cut off from the Church’s monopoly on salvation. Tragically, they believed themselves to be cut off from eternal life.

Like Steinen, Maria Cunegondis married after the church had returned (after August 15, 1801). In a joint letter with her husband, she, too, asked for their marriage to be recognized. After the tumult of the Revolution, they were married in a civil ceremony with an “incompetent” priest in attendance. The fact that the priest was only “in attendance” and not the principal officiant shows a shift in the power to grant marriages. The power to marry in a civil ceremony was invested in the state’s representative. The priest’s role as a bystander reflected the reduced role the church had played in their marriage. While it was incredible enough to see regular citizens look to the French state to legitimize marriage, it was another thing entirely to see former monks and nuns allowing their marriages to be civil instead of religious. Marrying after

970 AF IV 1895 dossier 2, pièces 78-9.
971 AF IV 1895, dossier 2, pièce 82.
the Catholic Church had been restored showed a strong belief that the French state had permanently erased their solemn vows. This preference for the civil authority may have been a practical concern. France was suffering a relative dearth of priests because so many had died and emigrated during the Revolution. Patient and devout couples could travel to find a legitimate clergyman to perform the sacrament. It was significant that Cunegondis and her husband did not put forth the extra effort to find a legitimate cleric. However, they obviously were still concerned about religion, their salvation, and church recognition of their marriage because they invited a priest and wrote to the papal legate, despite knowing their request would be denied. Their loyalties and their beliefs had been undeniably altered by the Revolution. This case presents a puzzling conflict that highlighted the tension between marriage being a civil ceremony or a religious sacrament.

Another couple who had married after the August 15, 1801 date not only sought dispensation, but demonstrated they had internalized parts of the Revolution. The husband, Jacobus Whalen, a former Cistercian monk himself, spoke for himself and his wife. He asked for them both to be relieved of their permanent religious vows, which are described as “chains.” As discussed earlier, this language indicated that the couple internalized some of the revolutionaries’ criticisms of the monasteries. His wife, a nun, although not the one writing the letter, affixed her scribbled signature at the end. While there would be no way to gauge her level of assent, holdover ideas about the convent and vows functioning as prisons still permeated the language about the convent.

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972 AF IV 1895, dossier 2, pièces 56-8.
Their letter, along with the others described in this section, demonstrate that there were some couples who valued their marriage and love above official church recognition. Perhaps they had not yet heard the details of the Concordat, but for many, they chose to ask for forgiveness rather than permission. Prior to the Revolution, there was no recognition of marriage outside of the church. Their commitment to their new identities jeopardized their eternal salvation. Without the recognition of their marriage, they were living in sin, and therefore, destined for damnation. The fact that they still went along with these marriages shows a strong identification with the Revolution.

9.9 Conclusion

For most nuns who married, their contributions to the enduring impact of the Revolution were probably entirely unwitting and unwilling; pulled from them by the problematic situations in which they found themselves. However, for the women discussed in this chapter, their choices seemed to more solidly place their stock and their futures with the Revolution. Although these marriages were exceptional and rare, they offer interesting challenges to both the church and the principles of the Revolution. The existence of children provided a generational legacy of the Revolution. Marrying multiple times and after the Catholic church had returned demonstrated a commitment to maintaining their identities as wives. Finally, those nuns who seized the opportunity to leave their convents before they were officially dissolved proved an early commitment to embracing the freedoms the revolution had to offer. These marriage cases indicate that women from the bottom of society took an active role in reshaping the religious future of
France and preserving the changes wrought by the Revolution. They were not passive bystanders but shaped the future for themselves and their family units.
I would like to end this dissertation on religious women during the French Revolution with how I discovered the topic: with an editorial in a Catholic newspaper called *L’Ange Gabriel*, in 1799. My interest in the fate of women forced from their homes was piqued by *L’Ange Gabriel’s* outrage at the revolutionaries’ treatment of nuns. In the *Variétés* section, the anonymous editor argued that after dechristianization, the nuns were “left abandoned, without consolation, without clothes, and without bread.” He argued that the government “should compensate the nuns for all the sacrifices that they have made; for leaving their father’s house; for the goods they abandoned to their relatives.” Nuns surrendered any legal rights to their families’ inheritance upon entering the convent. When the revolutionaries closed their convents, the nuns had few financial resources on which to rely. *L’Ange Gabriel* argued that the government owed them compensation for these losses and their suffering. According to *L’Ange Gabriel*, the most piteous victims of the Revolution were the honest, innocent, and pious nuns. In the time since, historians, novelists, playwrights, and musicians have taken this narrative of

973 Named after Gabriel, the angel of the Annunciation, *L’Ange Gabriel*, the most outspoken pro-Catholic newspaper in the first two months of Napoleon’s Consulate, brought good news to French Catholics hopeful that the new regime would return to the country’s traditional faith. In its editorials, the paper argued that Catholicism would restore morals, bring peace to France, and console individuals for the suffering caused by the Revolution. Because it was banned after just over two months of existence, this paper has attracted little attention among scholars and many things remain unknown about it. The author of the editorial pieces, publishing under the pseudonym L’Ange Gabriel, has not been identified. We do not know the total number of subscriptions, but we do know one subscriber received this paper for about three months in 1799.

974 *L’Ange Gabriel : Journal Politique, Historique, Littéraire, etc.* 1 Nivôse, An VIII, December 22, 1799, 3. « elles sont délaissées, sans consolante, sans vêtements et sans pain. »

975 *L’Ange Gabriel : Journal Politique, Historique, Littéraire, etc.* 1 Nivôse, An VIII, December 22, 1799, 3. « Il faut décommander les religieuses de tous les sacrifices qu’elles ont quitté ; des biens qu’elles ont abandonnés à leurs parens.»
the nuns as passive victims at face value. Yet, the reality for those who experienced the Revolutions was much more complicated.

Stories of heroically pious nuns were central to nineteenth-century attempts to re-catholicize France under the Bourbon Restoration (1814-1830). Catholic publishers enthusiastically printed images of saints, the sacred heart, and religious women who had perished as martyrs. Diaries, advertisements, and editorials were printed so other Catholics could read about examples of unwavering faith. The Jesuit Order was restored and took an active role in educating mostly elite men both in France and abroad. Women formed congregations of teaching orders that resumed teaching children the catechism. The Society for the Propagation of the Faith and other religious organizations formed to re-energize the faith. However, in this process of rewriting the story of the Revolution to emphasize the resiliency of Catholicism, those nuns who were not models of Christian piety during the turmoil of the Revolution were erased. Religious orders that returned wrote their own histories that minimized their transgressions and


978 For example, Gauchat’s *Journal* was printed and distributed during this period.

979 There was a dire need for teachers, and many women also participated in this project. However, it should be noted that the Catholic Church never regained its near monopoly on education that it had before the Revolution. J. Burnichon, *La Compagnie de Jésus en France: Histoire d’un siècle, 1814-1914*, 4 vols.(Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne, 1914-22).
emphasized their commitment to their community. Each wanted to show how its members heroically sacrificed for the faith and did not break their vows, even in the turbulence of the Revolution. They wanted to write the story of the turmoil as one in which religious women were helpless victims of a tyrannical government. Any broken vows or blasphemous oaths were excused because of the force of violence or omitted entirely in individual convents’ histories. Those communities that never reformed were forgotten, and those that re-emerged in the nineteenth century worked to reframe this period as a victory for God. However, as this dissertation has shown, the majority of nuns were not the martyrs and other helpless victims who made heroic sacrifices for their God and the good of Catholics everywhere. Focusing on these stories obscured the more complicated picture of Catholic women of faith during the Revolution. There were hundreds of nuns during the Revolution who did not fit the narrative of passive victims but who were also not martyrs.

The most famous martyred Catholic nun of the revolutionary period, Blanche de la Force, the fictional lead character of the Dialogues des Carmelites, was a twentieth-century creation. The character of Blanche was invented by a German author, Gertrud


von Le Fort, as she watched the rise of the Nazis in the 1930s. Eventually, von Le Fort was chased out of Germany for refusing to promote Nazi ideology in her works. Although based on the true story of the Carmelites of Compiègne, von Le Fort’s vision of Blanche’s interior life was created and imagined in the context of twentieth-century Germany’s historical crisis. The Carmelites in the book bravely went to the scaffold rather than sign an oath. Blanche de la Force was naïve and very fearful when she first entered the convent, but resolute and brave when she faced the guillotine. The character’s strong identification with her convent in the face of crisis resonated with a country facing its own crisis of national identity. Von Le Fort was a convert to Catholicism. The story of the Carmelites may have appealed to her because she may have seen herself as Blanche, with an unshakeable faith and strong resistance to the tyranny of a government seeking to force its ideas on the population. The narrator captured the fear and uncertainty felt in twentieth-century Germany as similar to what might have been felt by the Carmelites in the eighteenth century: “Yet. In the novel; Blanche le Force argued, “yet, fear is a great emotion. Not one of us was sufficiently afraid. Society should be afraid. A nation should know fear. Governments should tremble. Indeed, to tremble is to be strong.” The story of the nuns who survived the French Revolution was largely forgotten or used in later historical contexts for specific political, social, or religious reasons. Therefore, the goal of


This dissertation is to see the nuns as they saw themselves and in their own historical context.

Most nuns of the revolutionary era were not Blanche la Force, and their stories were more complicated. Marie Marguerite Françoise Hébert, a former Sister of Providence, in the Parisian Couvent de la Conception, gives a less well-known story. She was defrocked, expelled from her convent, and later married the famous revolutionary journalist Jacques René Hébert, the “Père Duchêne,” in February 1792.\footnote{Kate Marsden, “‘Jesus was a Sans-Culotte’: Revolutionary and Religious,” paper presented at the Society for French Historical Studies (Indianapolis, IN: March 2019).} Citoyenne Marie Marguerite Françoise Hébert, who was at one time a staunch Catholic, and perhaps remained so, if we can make an inference from the fact that a picture of the last supper that hung in their home, thus married one of the most vociferous advocates of dechristianization.\footnote{Hébert was the author of Père Duschesne, which was a Jacobin periodical during the Revolution. A denunciation by Hébert led to the guillotine. He was also one of the loudest supporters of dechristianization. This is what makes their marriage all the more unlikely.} In meeting her death on the guillotine two years later, she died as a Catholic martyr, but as a believer in the revolutionary faith and loyal wife.\footnote{She and Lucile Desmoulins were accused of having tried to rescue their husbands.} Marie Marguerite Françoise Hébert did not fit the narrative of nuns as passive victims of the Revolution that the Jesuit missionaries and other ardent nineteenth-century Catholics later attempted to tell. Hébert’s story reminds us that the nuns who lived and died during the Revolution lived complicated and sometimes unexpected lives.

Retelling the history of the nuns in a way that is neither hagiographical nor intended to serve political or religious purposes, does not mean denying the reality of
their true Catholic faith. The nuns described in this dissertation, although they often had to abandon some of the vows they had taken and embrace elements of the new revolutionary ideology, never wholly abandoned their Catholic identity. How they negotiated this tension deserves more attention. We must also avoid letting the episode of radical dechristianization lead us into assuming that revolutionaries and Catholics were diametrically opposed throughout the Revolution. Initially, many religious men and women embraced some religious reforms, offered their religious services to the nation, and imagined a world where one be both French and Catholic.

The nuns who feature in this study were not just passive symbols of piety to emulate. They were fallible, conflicted, wavering, and yet often skillful navigators around the obstacles that they faced during the revolutionary decade. Making, breaking, and renegotiating the essential parts of their identities during the Revolution, the nuns took an active role in determining what they wanted their lives to look like after the dissolution of the convents. For women whose attention was believed to be otherworldly, they did not shy away from writing on their own behalf to preserve their communities to demonstrate their utility to both church and state, to change their position as the circumstances evolved, and to take advantage of some of the benefits of the new laws. As long as they could, they sought to live in the world around them, while also remaining anchored to the hope of eventual salvation in another world.

Belief in an eternal God who was omniscient and omnipotent provided embattled religious women with a source of stability during the Revolution. By maintaining their faith, they solidified their identities as citizens of heaven and children of God. The chief
end of the religious life is eternal life in heaven. In reaffirming their religious identity with God, they made it clear that the kingdom of their ultimate loyalty was not on this earth and, therefore, could not be reached by revolutionary legislation. The promise of salvation shaped much of their choices. Salvation was the goal that superseded every other value for devout Christians. Heavenly rewards motivated women to continue to teach and serve in hospitals despite the challenges they faced. It inspired their resistance to the constitutional clergy. And it was their belief in Catholicism that made forgiveness from the papal legate necessary for them. With eternal life on the line, there were no higher stakes for the nuns. This concern for salvation permeated every moment of the Revolution for the nuns. The return of the church brought a return of Catholic authorities that these former nuns had become well-practiced at ignoring in their absence. They had to now renegotiate their eternal standing in a way that satisfied these revived institutional authorities and their own changed practice of the faith.

However, in writing to the legate for various dispensations, these former nuns posed a challenge to the authority of the church and its permanence. The church had been absent for nearly a decade. While the women who petitioned Cardinal Caprara remained undeniably Catholic, they had learned how to practice Catholicism through different channels now that they wished to become laywomen. In gaining financial independence, marrying, or otherwise living outside of the convent, former nuns’ reliance on the power structure of the church had been broken. They lobbied for the impermanence of their religious vows, dispensations, and forgiveness for their various transgressions in breaking their vows. The women who, at one time, pledged their obedience to the Catholic
hierarchy, now posed a challenge to its authority. Former nuns’ letters to Pope Pius VII’s legate, Cardinal Caprara (1802-1808) convinced the papacy to make some concessions to the changes wrought by the Revolution. These women had embraced a way of life that did not require the financial oversight of men, either religious or secular. As Catholicism returned to France, many of the nuns who had abandoned their formerly cloistered life wished to continue in their new patterns of existence. The Church had no choice but to acquiesce in most situations. The Church learned to compromise with the changes of the Revolution, due largely to Napoleon, but also, in part to the letters written by the nuns themselves.

Firmly cloistered nuns who took solemn vows never completely recovered from the Revolution, while the nineteenth century experienced a growth in active religious orders engaged in education and charitable activities.987 During the Revolution and especially after the Concordat of 1801, religious orders reformed themselves, with or without permission. By April 1801, the Minister of Police, Joseph Fouche, “identified 460 nuns living in seventy-seven different houses” in Paris before they received any permission to do so.988 Napoleon’s decree of 3 Messidor, year XII (June 22, 1804) required all authorized and unauthorized communities to submit their statutes and rules to the Conseil d’Etat for approval or be dissolved.989 To be authorized, the community

987 This was partially because they did not have official recognition by the government during much of Napoleon’s reign.
989 AN, F/19/6256, « Projet de décret sur les Associations religieuses ». The F/19 Series includes numerous documents relating to those orders which were authorized and those that were not. The
would need to submit to surveillance and oversight by the government authorities. Some communities, particularly the teaching orders were given provisional permission to continue regionally by Jean-Etienne Portalis, the head of the ecclesiastical affairs in France. Women who rejoined authorized convents, were no longer legally dead to the world but were supervised by government authorities and subject to France’s new laws regarding properties.

The Ursulines, the Visitandines, and the Dames de Saint Maur, and other teaching orders, were all authorized in the spring of 1806. An 1807 imperial decree allowed nuns in Aix-en-Provence to return, undisturbed, to their former lifestyle and reside in the convent. One of the reasons this study ends in 1808. By then, Napoleon had allowed those orders that he approved to be recognized officially, given that they served a useful public function in nursing. While there were undoubtedly convents that existed and rebuilt without official permission or recognition, these organizations remained in a permanent state of precarity. At least one Visitation convent in Paris, after the fall of Robespierre, said the divine office and celebrated mass in the Visitation churches at rue du Bac and du Faubourg-Saint-Jacques. Although they were not able to officially rejoin their convents until May 1, 1806, they had reformed their communities with the remnant government knew hundreds of orders had reformed themselves with money they acquired without government permission.

990 Langlois, *Catholicisme au Féminin*, 115.
992 F/19/6247, « Rapport général sur toutes les associations de dames charitables existantes actuellement dans l'Empire »
of women who survived the revolutionary turmoil.\textsuperscript{994} However, it was clear that not all convents were as fortunate as this convent. Since these communities were not officially recognized, we can assume some limited prayers and gatherings were happening all over France, even without official permission or the support of the Catholic Church. Napoleon valued centralization and devalued tradition in his effort to revive communities, therefore the nuns themselves sometimes resisted.\textsuperscript{995} For example, Napoleon wanted to join all of the Sisters of Charity together in one unified rule, but the sisters rejected this. This delayed their official recognition until November 8, 1809. The story of the revival of religious orders was a complicated and patchwork as its dissolution.

While Napoleon’s policies favoring the active religious orders that performed useful services certainly played a role, the women who lobbied on their own behalf have been under-recognized in this history. For example, Sister Eugénie, a member of Gabrielle Gauchat’s Visitation convent, joined the Poor Clares after the Revolution, rather than a cloistered order.\textsuperscript{996} Others joined small communities of hospitalières or hospital workers as a way to preserve their sense of a community in a way that was more acceptable to the new regime.

\textsuperscript{995} Betros, “NAPOLEON AND THE REVIVAL OF FEMALE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN PARIS,” 193.
\textsuperscript{996} “Les fragments qui nous en restent nous apprennent seulement que ce gout prononcé pour l’éloignement des bruits de la terre dirigeait la sœur Eugenie vers l’ordre des Clarisses, comme il entrainait la sœur Gabrielle vers la Trappe. La première avait le désir de se rendre à Salins, ou les Clarisses voulaient se réunir ; mais nous ignorons si elle s’y rendit en effet. La suite de sa corresponde nous manque. » Godard, “Introduction,” XLI.
This embrace of the opportunities post-revolutionary society offered them does not imply that these women abandoned their religious identification. They often found ways to maintain ties to other members of their orders and to their religious identity. These women were still Catholic and strongly devoted to their faith. They, however, sought new ways to practice that faith based on the circumstances of the Revolution.

Women’s religious orders in France in 1808 had only 12,300 members, many practicing surreptitiously. Yet by the 1870s, they had over 135,000. This number was about four or five times the ancien régime’s memberships in religious orders. Nationally these communities grew to 49.4 out of 10,000 women and only 9.8 out of 10,000 for men. This meant that women had overtaken men in numbers and as a proportion of the population that were involved as secular or regular clergy. Catholicism became dominated by pious women, both in the laity and in these new active religious orders which sought to do good in the world. These women joined active congregations that were primarily devoted to teaching, nursing, and charity services; the purely contemplative and cloistered orders declined. While Napoleon’s preference for active religious orders or the desperate need for Catholic instruction in the nineteenth century might explain some of these changes, historians must recognize the role of the nuns themselves in shaping the new character and landscape of Catholicism in France.

Working from the bottom of the power structures of Church and society, religious women accelerated changes that had been in process for centuries. The Visitandines, when they first began in the seventeenth century, desired to be uncloistered, active, and bound only by simple vows, but neither the bishops in France nor the pope was willing to grant women the same concessions as the male Jesuits. New congregations in the nineteenth-century embraced flexibility in their organization that was unachievable before the Revolution. The new identity of the nun was active, always in service to the world, such as the worker as pictured below with one of the very first active orders, the Daughters of Charity.

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She was actively “serving the sick” with both “her heart and her hand,” according to the caption” in this image. The Daughters of Charity was a radical departure from cloistered
convents when they were founded in the seventeenth century, but by the nineteenth century, active religious orders were typical. Active orders, which had been successfully blocked by the Catholic Church just two centuries earlier, exploded.

Female missionaries traveled abroad in large numbers for the first time in the wake of the Revolution. Religious women revitalized the church from the ground up. Women’s interest in missions brought women into the imperial endeavor for the first time. Typically, imperial agents are imagined as male and secular. Because it appeared benevolent and uncontroversial, the nuns’ work was considered vital to the cultural construction of empire in the nineteenth century. Few laywomen had the freedoms these missionaries had to travel, negotiate with colonial agents, challenge church power, and evangelize. These innovations were camouflaged by the traditional nature of their vocation—within the framework of tradition, these women were allowed to experiment. The changes and challenges female missionaries faced were first practiced during the Revolution. Historian Sarah Curtis argues, “Women and children for the first time became the focus of missionary efforts in keeping with the emerging domestic ideology that acculturation started in the home. Feminization of missionary efforts allowed them greater freedom, as Catholic nuns had more freedom to travel alone, because they were protected by the habit.”

1001 Although Marie de l’Incarnation was a famous female missionary in Quebec in the seventeenth century, she was the exception rather than the rule. Her example inspired women like Mere Duchesne, who founded new houses in the United States after the French Revolution.


1003 Curtis, Civilizing Habits, 16.
networks and family contacts, became adept leaders, and learned to be flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances. All of these changes that Curtis notes were present in the nuns’ experience during the Revolution. They were now involved in winning converts to the faith rather than just educating the children of those who were already believers.

Historians studying the changes to the nineteenth-century women’s religious orders and the changes in practice of nineteenth-century Catholicism must consider the activities of the nuns in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution to understand this process. Their experiences outside the convent were essential for understanding this change. Although this dissertation ends in 1808 with the end of the Caprara legation and the conditional acceptance by Napoleon of some religious orders, there remains much work to be done to understand the connection of the Revolution to the nineteenth-century practice of Catholicism and the memory of the Revolution. *L’Ange Gabriel’s* moving plea, which first sparked my interest in this dissertation, tells only a small portion of the story and omits the agency of the women themselves in shaping their lives after dissolution. Historians of the nineteenth century must understand the period of the Revolution as not a time of passive victimhood for religious women, but one in which some nuns gained freedoms and the space to renegotiate their identities, advocate for changes, and perhaps reshape the course of religious congregations for the next century.
APPENDIX A. Lists of Martyred Nuns

Table A.1 List of the Carmelites of Compiègne

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious names, Sœur…</th>
<th>Secular name</th>
<th>Date of Birth</th>
<th>Date of Entrance</th>
<th>Date of Profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marthe</td>
<td>Marie Darfour</td>
<td>Oct. 1, 1742</td>
<td>Apr. 7, 1772</td>
<td>Mar. 14, 1773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Du Cœur-de-Marie</td>
<td>Marie-Antionette Hanisset</td>
<td>Jan. 18, 1742*</td>
<td>Feb. 12, 1763</td>
<td>June 12, 1764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mère Thérèse de Saint Augustin</td>
<td>Charlotte Lidoine</td>
<td>Sept. 22, 1752</td>
<td>Aug. 1773</td>
<td>May 14, 1775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mère Saint-Louis, sous-priére</td>
<td>Marie-Anne Françoise Brideau</td>
<td>Dec. 7, 1751</td>
<td>May 4, 1770</td>
<td>Sept. 3, 1771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie Henriette Antoinette</td>
<td>Pellerat (Perlas)</td>
<td>June 17, 1760</td>
<td>March 26, 1785</td>
<td>Oct. 22, 1786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint-François Xavier</td>
<td>Étiennet, Jeanne Vézotal (Verolot)</td>
<td>Jan. 12, 1764</td>
<td>Jan. 17, 1787</td>
<td>Feb. 9, 1788</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint-Ignace</td>
<td>Marie Louise Trézelle</td>
<td>Apr. 3, 1753</td>
<td>July 15, 1770</td>
<td>Dec. 12 1770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Révérende Mère</td>
<td>Henriette de Croissy</td>
<td>June 18, 1745</td>
<td>Oct. 21, 1762</td>
<td>Feb. 22, 1764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>Rosalie Crétien de Neuville</td>
<td>Dec. 30, 1741</td>
<td>June 14, 1776</td>
<td>Sept. 22, 1777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Jésus-Crucifié</td>
<td>Marie-Antionette Piedcourt</td>
<td>Dec. 8, 1715</td>
<td>Sept. 3, 1734</td>
<td>Aug. 2, 1737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De la Résurrection</td>
<td>Marie Thouret</td>
<td>Sept 1715</td>
<td>Mar. 18, 1736</td>
<td>Aug. 19, 1740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euphrasie de L'Immaculée Conception</td>
<td>Marie-Claude Cyprienne Brard</td>
<td>May 12, 1736</td>
<td>June 1756</td>
<td>Aug. 13, 1758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>du Saint Esprit</td>
<td>Antionette Roussel</td>
<td>Aug. 4, 1742</td>
<td>Aug. 25, 1767</td>
<td>Apr. 17, 1768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thérèse (extern)</td>
<td>Thérèse Soiron</td>
<td>1751</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constance (novice)</td>
<td>Marie-Jean Meunier</td>
<td>May 28, 1765</td>
<td>May 29, 1788</td>
<td>(Novice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise-Catherine (extern)</td>
<td>Soiron</td>
<td>1749</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table A.2 Full List of Nuns executed in Orange, according to Guillon

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of death (1794)</th>
<th>Secular name</th>
<th>Religious name (sœur)</th>
<th>Order</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 6</td>
<td>Suzanne-Agathe Deloye</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bénédictine</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 7</td>
<td>Marie-Suzanne de Gaillard</td>
<td>Iphigénie de Saint-Matthieu</td>
<td>Sacramentine</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 9</td>
<td>Marie-Anne de Guilhemier</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ursuline</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 9</td>
<td>Marie-Anne de Rocher</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ursuline</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 10</td>
<td>Marie-Gertrude Deripert d'Alauzier</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ursuline</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 10</td>
<td>Sylvie-Agnès de Romillon</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ursuline</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 11</td>
<td>Rosalie-Clotilde Bés</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sacramentine</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 11</td>
<td>Marie-Elisabeth Pélissier</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sacramentine</td>
<td>53</td>
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1004 Guillon lists her name as Tailliend, but was later corrected.
1005 Guillon lists her name as Cluze.
1006 Guillon lists her name as Eléanore, I am not sure why or which is her proper first name. However, there was only one Justamont that died on the 12th with Romillon, Cluse, and Talieu.
<table>
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APPENDIX B. Nuns in their Habits

Figure B1: Ordinary Dominican Habit 1007

Figure B.2 Ordinary Cistercian Habit

Figure B.3 Benedictine Choir Nun Habit


1009
Figure B.4 Capucin Choir Nun Habit

Figure B.5 Ordinary Augustinian Habit

Figure B.6 Silvestrine Choir Nun’s Habit

Figure B.7 Ordinary Clarist Habit

Figure B.8 Benedictine Habit for Profession Ceremony

Figure B.9 Habit of a Nun in the Saint Catherine Hospital in Paris

Egid Verhelst, “Eine Nonne aus dem St. Catharinen Hospital in Paris, im Chorkleide [Une religieuse de l'Hôpital sainte Catherine à Paris en habit de Choeur]” (Mannheim 1787-1790) Bibliothèque municipale de Rouen, Montbret g 2614-I pl. 82. Engraving, Available on Gallica
http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb44197120n.
Figure B.10 Another Habit for a Nun at Saint Catherine Hospital

Figure B.11 Ordinary Ursuline Habit


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1017
Figure B.12 Ceremonial Habit for a Nun of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem

Figure B.13 Penitent Habit in Paris After Reform

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