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**“NUN’S THE WORD:” RESTORING CATHOLIC FAITH AND FORMING
NATIONAL IDENTITY IN 19TH CENTURY BELGIUM.**

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“NUN’S THE WORD:” RESTORING CATHOLIC FAITH AND FORMING NATIONAL IDENTITY IN 19TH CENTURY BELGIUM.

By NATASHA ROEGIERS

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My dissertation research proposes a transdisciplinary investigation encompassing historical and literary analyses of religious biographies of nuns that contributed to and participated in the recatholicization of Belgium throughout the 19th century. Specifically, I examine the rhetorical strategies used in early 19th century Belgian biographies of founders and restorers of post-revolutionary congregations and how they were pivotal in the restoration of the Catholic faith contributing toward Belgium’s independence in 1830 and toward the political victory of Catholics in Belgium by 1884.

My literary analysis examines how the writing of religious biographies recatholicizes while acknowledging the problematic issues of control and authority in writing. This research reveals a specific Belgian religious rhetorical strategy that promoted Belgian identity as inseparable from being Catholic. As platforms to political and social agendas, the religious biographies reveal an evolution in offensive and defensive rhetorical strategies toward Enlightenment dechristianization by placing emphasis on the reader’s intellectual reasoning. As spiritual platforms, the innovative use of images and words produce a devotional text that engages the reader in his spirituality. The results of this research will then question the traditional classification of these religious texts in the genre of ‘biography’ and ponder whether they should in fact be part of Belgian literature or biographical history canons.

My historical investigation reflects upon the social and political effects of spiritual biographical writing and seeks to analyze what the lives of nuns indicate about the revolutionary, post-revolutionary, and independent period in Belgium from 1789-1933. Specifically, it will reveal how and why congregations flourished following their suppression during the revolution; what changes were implicated in the re-foundation of some pre-revolutionary congregations; what new visions of newly founded post-revolutionary congregations helped redefine the Catholic Church's mission; and lastly why religious *women* rather than the traditional biographical figure of clergy members became the new muse for Catholic restoration.

In my dissertation I argue that religious biographies were not only used as weapons to counteract the anti-catholic agendas, but also served to incite nationalistic ideals under very discreet, unsuspecting titles such as, The Life of Julie Billiart, Founder of the Institute of Notre-Dame of Namur.

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DEDICATION

À mon très cher grand-père, Charles Henri Roegiers (1911-2007) qui me disait souvent

“Vouloir...c’est pouvoir.”

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CHAPTER 1

“NUN’S THE WORD:” RESTORING CATHOLIC FAITH AND FORMING NATIONAL IDENTITY IN 19TH CENTURY BELGIUM.

I. INTRODUCTION

My dissertation research proposes a transdisciplinary investigation encompassing historical and literary analyses of religious biographies of nuns that contributed to the recatholicization of Belgium throughout the 19th century. Written by ecclesiastic authority, these 19th century Belgian religious biographies contain spiritual guidance and authority from the nun herself, directed either to a specific religious congregation or to the laity. The term I have chosen, *recatholicizing*, implies that the readers of the spiritual biographies were mostly Catholic. Therefore, the purpose of these texts was not meant to convert but instead to strengthen the losing faith. Specifically, I examine the rhetorical strategies used in 19th century Belgian biographies of founders and restorers of post-revolutionary congregations. The results will demonstrate how the religious biographies were pivotal in the restoration of the Catholic faith which contributed toward the political victory of a Belgian Catholic government by 1884, less than 100 years after Revolutionary dechristianization.

My research, funded by the Belgian American Educational Foundation (2005-2006), consisted of locating and analyzing printed editions of French speaking religious biographies published in Belgium between 1722-1933 as well as republications of hagiographies (See *Table 1.1 p. 25*) conserved in convents, seminaries, monasteries, University libraries and religious book fairs in the following locations: the University of Liège, the Seminary of Liège, the University of Louvain, the Royal Library of Brussels, the KADOC Research Library in Leuven, the Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur, the Benedictines of Liège, the Dames de L’Instruction Chrétienne of Liège, the Filles de

la Croix of Liège, and the Abbey of Maredsous. With the exceptions of pre-revolutionary hagiographies and a few well known 19th century biographies, the majority of the biographies required tedious searching among rows of poorly catalogued books in basements and attics. For those biographies located in convents and abbeys, their retrieval was not an easy feat. Several religious institutions were reluctant to open their archives to researchers, afraid that documents would be stolen or that their vocation would be ridiculed. Several attempts of demonstrative respect combined with much dialogue in order to build a trusting relationship, were necessary before their archives and libraries were made available. The outcome led to an innovative project that entailed a gamma of books that had never been studied. Initially, this project began as a continuation to Nicole Pellegrin's historical work on "representation" and the fictionalization of history within 17th century French religious autobiographies, with the thought of including a similar analysis of Belgian 19th religious autobiographies. However, once in Belgium, the discoveries of Belgian biographies in religious institutions were puzzling at first. This is because French religious institutions, historically and politically intermingled with Belgium, had a proliferation of the opposite genre—religious autobiographies. Closer examination revealed a religious rhetorical strategy specific to Belgian congregations.

The analysis of these biographies, specifically those published after 1801,¹ following the French revolutionary period, is innovative on several levels. First, to date, all published work on Belgian nuns have remained purely historical investigations following either the progression of great 17th century Catholic reform among religious congregations, evident in Marie-Elisabeth Henneau's 20 years of research at the University of Liège or Paul Wynant's research at the University of Namur on the expansion of 19th century teaching congregations. No published historical study² has been

¹ Several 18th century biographies will also be referenced in order to trace continuing themes as well as rupture from the previous century.

² Sylvie Boulvain, assistant and doctorate student at the University of Liège in Modern History is preparing a thesis on the family networks linked to religious communities in the diocese of Liège. Her study covers the revolutionary period and studies how these liens affect the nun's relationship with society and what the consequences of these relationships have on her religious, intellectual, social, economical and political life.

done on the effects of the revolution on Belgian congregations and no literary study has been done on the abundant biographies of nuns of the 19th century. One of the goals of this research on these biographies will be to reveal the effects of the Revolution upon the founders and restorers of religious congregations. Specifically, it will reveal how and why congregations flourished following their suppression during the Revolution; what changes were implicated in the re-foundation of some pre-revolutionary congregations; what new visions of newly founded post-revolutionary congregations helped redefine the Catholic Church's mission; why religious *women* rather than the traditional biographical figure of clergy members became the new muse for Catholic restoration and lastly how the recatholicizing efforts of nuns permeated not only within religious circles, but also within social and political circles.

The body of scholarship I wish to specifically build upon is Marie-Elisabeth Henneau's historical research of Belgian religious congregations of the Liège region. In a paper entitled "La Femme et le Cloître à L'Époque Moderne" presented at a Femmes Enseignement Recherche (FER) conference in Lille in June 2003, she demonstrated that the cloister is a place of intrigue pertinent to the emergence of the feminine conscience. Her historical research has allowed nuns to be included in feminist studies and has provided scholarly work on these women in contrast to the vast studies undertaken in the past on their masculine counterparts. I wish to include the religious biographies of nuns in this feminist dialogue by demonstrating that the biographical genre became the safe haven where their voice could be heard as well as a place where they exercised their spiritual authority without menace. This project has had scholars opine that the biographical texts of Belgian nuns have "nothing new to say," "that their content and knowledge thereof can be determined by just reading their title," and "are not texts to be studied in a literary manner." This stems from much criticism of religious women portrayed in many literary works as naïve and as victims of forced vocations without free will. I seek to counter these arguments by showing indeed that these texts develop unique rhetorical strategies revealing much intellectual and artistic freedom. These biographies will reveal that their role was one of personal initiative as well as testimonials of religious

women's hopes, failures and aspirations amidst the limitations placed upon their sex. I will argue that these biographies have a place in our literature as they contributed to the augmentation of women biographical writers in the late 19th century.

The title of my dissertation project, "Nun's the Word," refers to the survival and redirection of the 19th century Catholic Church being vested in religious feminine hands. Comprised of different meanings "Nun's the Word," encompasses the different assertions of recatholicization strategies presented in this dissertation research. It refers foremost to a conspicuous intent to participate in the recatholicization of Belgium, through the glorification of medieval and Counter-Reform nun saints and the sanctification of 19th century nuns, in an effort to validate them as mouthpieces for the Catholic Church. The nun as the visible icon of authority to transmit the *Word*, represents a change from past visible and overt glorification of clergy. This mouthpiece though, is silent in her own way, hear *mum's the word*, as specific rhetorical strategies were developed in order not to circumvent clerical authority, but actually reinstate its authority by her representation. Her religious apostolic vocation, requiring moments of *silence* and meditation, brought the *Word* to the people with her presence in society specifically transforming generations of youth through Catholic education. As a result of the nuns' contribution in charitable works, the figure of the "bonne soeur" was quickly promoted and empowered by the laity. A text by Abbé Jauffret's 1801 Des services que les femmes peuvent rendre à la religion demonstrated the rising influence and importance of women. He edified the roles of women specifically in their role of education. Outside the home, religious women were the only personnel available and qualified for teaching. In her 'visible' societal role, the nun's model for society and 'saintly' feminine initiative was reinforced in the religious biographies. The biographies will present founders and restorers of congregations as the new muse for Catholic revival and the propagators of the faith.³ Consequently, this research will demonstrate how the text reinforced the dissemination of the *Word*—privileging her words as inspired from God. Her virtuous silenced self,

³ Cholvy, Gérard. "L'émergence d'un laïcat Catholique: le premier 19^e siècle." Deux mille ans d'histoire de l'Église. Bilans et perspectives historiographiques. J. Pirotte et E. Louchez (dir). Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique. (Vol. 95/3 juillet-sept. 2000) 278.

imposed by the virtue of humility, becomes heard as her words through biographical texts are transmitted to future generations of nuns, school children, and parishioners. This transmission will be evident by examining the specific audiences that were targeted for the readership of editions published. The first version, most often written by women religious in manuscript form, was directed to the religious congregation in order to preserve the memory of the nun. Next, the first published edition, edited by a priest, with specific interest in promoting his Order, and published by a Catholic publishing house, was distributed to the students and parents of the congregation's school, in order to legitimize and strengthen the presence of the Congregation. Then, subsequent publications targeted a general Catholic public, enhancing a distinct reputation. Lastly, this research will examine how the "visibility" of religious nuns in disseminated biographies promoted the Church's visibility in society.

This dissertation will demonstrate how the rhetorical strategies of silence affected the format of the text and the 'first glance' aim of the religious biography in order to fly discreetly under the radar from liberal and anticlerical opponents in its promotion of a union between Catholic religious loyalty and Belgian national identity. The goal was to establish Catholic influence soon after Revolutionary dechristianization, such that, being Catholic becoming inseparable with being Belgian. In fact, unlike any European state in the 19th century, Belgian politics revolved around the role of the Catholic Church in society so much so, that Catholicism became the "soul of the partisan sentiment."⁴ Consequently, recatholicization will advance a specific Catholic Belgian identity through the figure of a religious "héroïne," defined nonetheless by clerical authors.

"Nun's the Word" also refers to how the silent reading of the text effectuated conversion that resulted in active Catholic engagement. This research will analyze the new 19th century concept of an entwined relation between representation (image) and text (word). In the past, devotional images (small images of nuns, clergy, saints, angels, Christ or the Virgin Mary) included in religious biographies, were self-sufficient in that all its meaning could be derived from the image itself.

⁴ Vincent Viaene. Belgium and the Holy See. From Gregory XVI to Pius IX (1831-1858). Catholic revival, society and politics in 19th century Belgium. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001) 25.

Breaking new ground, the 19th century religious biography with its images, develop into a devotional text. That is to say, that it ‘develops’ meaning as the reading progresses within the text. In essence, this research will show how these texts prepare the reading for a pious act, a strategy used to recatholicize the reader that ultimately engages the reader in an active spirituality. As a result, the 19th century witnesses an evolution of the nun’s image from rich symbolism to increased variance in representations resulting in more austere representations that required supplemented reading for meaning; reflecting perhaps a mistrust of ‘free’ interpretation. More importantly, the 19th century religious biographical ‘book’ was the bridge between the sacred devotions of the Church and the lay devotions of the people. Since in most cases the nuns had not yet been officially recognized, the book formalized popular devotion in harmony with devotions established by the institutional Church.⁵

My methodology will consist of examining how the writing of religious biographies recatholicizes—by what rhetoric? With what images or illustrations? To which specific literature is it responsive and or imitates? The biographical writing reflects a rhetoric of femininity. This feminine rhetoric involves an analysis of her self-depreciatory remarks, irony, authoritative yet familiar language, humility, contradictions, and unacknowledged motives concealed behind conscious goals.⁶ In order to analyze the rhetorical strategies in the spiritual biographies, certain elements must be analyzed. For example: the composition of the text elucidates that rhetorical persuasion is not only relegated to the text itself but is included in frontispiece images, illustrations, and seals of approvals. Additionally, prefaces have a rhetoric of authority and each edition is directed to a specific audience. The authorial involvement interacts with the reader by relating specific beliefs, raising doubts, and augmenting his credibility with the reader. I will analyze how the author himself pronounces himself as the authority as well as a witness. I will also demonstrate how his objectivity changes as the text

⁵ Rosemary Muir Wright. Sacred Distance: Representing the Virgin. (Manchester UP: New York, 2006) 11.

⁶ Alison Weber. Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity. (Princeton: Princeton U. P., 1990).

proceeds by specifying on the strengthening of his faith during the process of writing the biography; in the hopes that his writing will affect his reader in the same manner.

The years after the French Revolution of 1789 until Belgium's independence in 1830 reflect a tumultuous time for religious congregations. This period of transition, encompassing the destruction of centuries' old religious institutions and five different governments, was characterized by contradictions: espoused equality yet diminished rights of women; revolt against the authority and intolerance of the Church yet persecution and oppression against those who wanted to practice their faith freely. Specifically, welcomed exiled philosophers of France contributed greatly to the dechristianization of dioceses, long defined by its ecclesiastic dominance. Yet, despite the turmoil, the Catholic Church redefined its vision and as a result these years were a nesting ground for the great spiritual reform that flourished after the signing of the Concordat in 1801 with religious women as the principal actors. It was inevitable for Catholics to find in the Enlightenment philosophers the "boucs émissaires" towards the threat to the peace of humanity and responsible for all literature deemed dangerous to the soul.⁷ The growing dechristianization pushed the Church to pursue a defensive and offensive rhetoric in all of its forms. The religious biographies, therefore, became platforms for the political and social agendas of the 19th century.

In Belgium during the 19th century the predominant political question after the revolution was how "to reconcile order with liberty and liberty with equality."⁸ The biographies offer the "true enlightenment" to this problem and promote the adherence to the Church's authority as the ordering agent with the notion that liberty could only be enjoyed if it were subject to rules. Of course, this meant that the Church could not remain complacent in its response. The biggest problem faced by the Catholic Church just before the turn of the 19th century was its lack of effective response to Enlightenment ideas and its lack of adapting to the changing intellectual environment. Any complacency in the past was absolved by a tremendous reorganization in the transmission of

⁷ Jean-Pierre Massaut, Marie-Elisabeth Henneau, et Étienne Hélin. Liège Histoire d'une Église. (T.4. Strasbourg: Éditions du Signe, 1993).

⁸ Viaene 25.

Catholic knowledge. In other words the 19th century recatholicization movement represented a Church responding to the changing needs in society. The changing needs in society obliged more emphasis on one's own understanding of the Catholic faith so that the concept of adhering to the Catholic "religion" did not define oneself but rather the evolving understanding of one's interior faith. The religious biographies posit the notion that faith and reason were inseparable.

Having been immersed in a positivist culture, the biographical authors emphasized a scientific methodology in their preparation for the texts, involving great attention to detailed documental research, evaluation of fallibility, separating truth from doubt, and extracting all that was real in order to present a type of "Histoire" rather than a "Vie." Furthermore, inspired by the Romantic movement, the authors of the religious biographies evoke a nostalgic glance of the medieval glory of the Church and enriched it with a sense of national pride recalling specifically Belgium's history in great detail. In doing so, the authors depart once again from the writing of "Vie" by adjoining literature with patriotism in creating a unification of values and morals that reflect singly the Belgian spirit—including quotes of Rousseau, Chateaubriand, Hugo, and the likes. The historical research combined with the arousal of deep nationalistic sentiment towards a new nation provokes questions as to whether the religious biographies and republished hagiographies can be classified in the genre of Belgian literature or Belgian histories.

The classification of these religious texts is complicated further by their format. I question whether they are true biographies in the sense that, they recount in narrative form, the life of a person. Although 'biographical' on its surface, a closer look reveals that the texts are not completely biographical but contain autobiographical elements. As a result, the 19th century Belgian biographies represented an intermediary genre. The biographer, a clergy member, hiding behind the supposed 'narrative,' structures the text consisting primarily of autobiographical quotes (most several pages in length) he chooses from manuscripts. The use of such quotations is excessive and not typical of traditional biographical writing. Quotes are followed by brief explanations from the author in order to elucidate the hidden meanings in the founder's spiritual experiences and perhaps prevent the

reader from drawing potentially harmful conclusions. The biographical portion appears to function as a 'protective veil' in an effort to protect and respond to the negative image of the nun so ridiculed during the 18th century by writers and philosophers. The negative image, as in the case of Denis Diderot's 1780 novel La Religieuse, stemmed from much satire from 17th century autobiographical quotes misappropriated and used out of context. 18th and 19th century literature has portrayed convent life as the space where all the turpitudes and the passions of the heart were played. For example in La Religieuse, abandoned nuns long for their lovers, some are kidnapped, and perverse superiors seduce or martyr innocent novices. Additionally, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's 1762 Émile promotes the idea that convents develop "all the wrongdoings of women" and Bernardin de St. Pierre's Oeuvres Posthumes, his 1777 Discourse on the Education of Women accuses monastic education to be "one of the greatest misfortunes of which the weakness of families has afflicted society." Ecclesiastic authority was aware of these portrayals and sought to diminish this reference material in order to quell the negative image. Unlike the 17th century, a period of great Catholic reform, during which autobiographical texts written by nuns were published, the biographical format of the 19th century ensured that the writing of religious women was controlled by directing the writing to a certain conclusion. The masculine authority, or the author, explained any potentially controversial issues and legitimized the voice of the nun. This research will demonstrate how this religious biographical writing was effective while acknowledging the problematic issues of control in regards to authority in writing. The presentation of autobiographical discourse in the spiritual biographies is problematic, revealing a biographical project that refuses to be labeled as an autobiography: Hence, is it 'a novel that dare not speak its name?' In other words, do the authors avoid an autobiographical project in favor of the appearance of a biographical one?

A conflict arises between the notion of control in the biographical writing and the encouragement of seeking one's own understanding in the autobiographical writing. I will examine whether this conflict is resolved and if the relationship between the founder and the priest was a wanted one. For example, Julie Billiart, founder of the Soeurs de Notre Dame in Namur is quoted in

her biography: “Je me suis rappelée que l’on m’a toujours reproché de me laisser juger sans jamais me défendre. C’est ici le cas de faire connaître la vérité avec toute la sincérité possible [...]”⁹ I question whether Julie’s desire to defend herself is one the author collaborated to support or whether it was simply a ruse to elevate himself. In order for Julie Billiart to be as sincere as possible, she must have felt some protection, knowing the history of branded heretics. The balancing act of her autobiographical conviction persuades by speaking from her heart while the authority of the priest persuades by legitimizing her. Jeanne Ponton, author of *La Religieuse dans la littérature française*, states that religious women became too easy a target for ridicule since they were cut off from the outside world and they did not have the means to defend themselves. Taking into account that it was easier to ridicule the Church by using its own followers’ words, religious leaders took a different approach. In order to combat the negative image, spiritual biographies had to have a masculine authority as the author who explained any potentially controversial issues. Dissimilar to typical biographies, both founder and biographer (priest) appear to work in a partnership for the salvation of souls.

This research does not rest only on classifying these texts into a biographical or autobiographical project. It also ponders whether the biographies of 19th century religious women, that is to say ‘projects of sanctification,’ could also be classified as Belgian hagiographies. Containing hagiographical elements, these texts edify the ‘saint in waiting’ with similar rhetoric. This is so, because the rhetorical success depended upon reliance of texts that served as models of inspiration; i.e., references that make up a tradition that move the audience to a stronger faith. Relying upon secondary literature, it was necessary to examine the republications of hagiographies that served as models for the biographies of 19th century new congregations. These models, some mentioned in the 19th century biographies, will serve to demonstrate the evolution of the image of religious women in Belgian society and their pivotal role in the recatholicizing of Belgium. Hagiographies were pivotal

⁹ V. S.J Baesten. *Vie de la Mère Julie Billiart. Fondatrice de L’Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur 1751-1816*. (Tournai, Bruxelles: Casterman, 1881) 157.

in formalizing the recatholicization movement, specifically as resources to strengthen particular devotions; i.e. popularize a feast day; edify and defend the rights of a sanctuary; promote Church sacraments; or support enterprises of canonization. Once a cult was in place, the given saint was given a blessing from the Church to begin pilgrimages to the lieu of saintly influence; i.e. birthplace, foundation of convent, miracle occurrence.¹⁰ Although the religious biographies attempt to model after the hagiographic genre, I will demonstrate the departure from hagiographic conventions in nuanced writing that was represented in a more profane style compared to their models. I will illustrate the new ideals for religious women that were incorporated to fit the needs of the community. A delicate balance was maintained in order to edify the founder. Too much realism or not enough hagiographical elements would not achieve recognition, specifically that of sainthood. These results will reveal new changes implemented in religious life, religious writing and the Belgian Catholic visions for the 19th century.

Although the ecclesiastical writers developed rhetorical strategies of authority in their writing, they had to find strategies to allow their voice be heard in a discreet manner so as not to alarm governmental censure during the occupation of the French (1789-1814) and Dutch (1814-1830) or anticlerical attention (during the 19th century). Circumventing the silence imposed upon them, both priests and nuns worked in a collaborative effort to create an unsuspecting genre of writing that targeted their parishes and dioceses. The contrasting ideas of authority, control and circumvention in religious biographies are a result of the revolution that rendered both women and the Church powerless far from public life and its exercise of power. Discreetly, but forcefully, the biographies of nuns renewed vigor within the Church by revealing a new vision of being visible witnesses of the gospel, no longer separated from the world.

This dissertation will investigate the new recatholicizing visions the Church promoted as well as the changes that occurred in religious life in the 19th century. Unlike previous centuries of

¹⁰ For example, notable publications are from the Société Bollandistes in Belgium. See René Aigrain. L'Hagiographie. Ses sources- Ses méthodes- Son histoire. Reproduction inchangée de l'édition originale de 1953. Avec un complément bibliographique par R. Godding. (Bruxelles, Société des Bollandistes, 2000).

cloistered religious life, new congregations such as the Soeurs de Notre Dame de Namur (1807) arose and vowed no class distinction and simplified their religious habits. Unlike their 17th century counterparts during the Counter-Reformation, most of these women did not come from aristocracy but instead from poor or mediocre backgrounds. During a time when equal rights were pronounced and privileges of the noble classes eliminated, the non-hierarchical background related more with the ‘common’ person. Thereby, creating a shift in the writing style to a simpler vocabulary—providing easier access to the texts to the less educated. The focus turned toward the individual, now more responsible than ever, for transmitting the faith. Influenced by missionary movements, they desired to deepen the knowledge of the faith of the peasants by helping them seek deeper reflection and spiritual understanding. And so, the Catholic vision redefined itself by encouraging more confidence in human reasoning and the active engagement of individual reading of religious texts. Furthermore, the past monastic view of ‘separation of the world’ was no longer a concept lived by new congregations because the view of society changed from a place distant from God to a place that needed to be ministered, recognizing Jesus in the suffering. The nuns’ success arises from the new concept of living among the peasants, who knew them and listened to them. The representation of this contact in religious biographical writing will only reaffirm the recatholicizing process.

The success, however, all depended upon rhetorical persuasion of both the nun and her priest. Centuries of Catholic rhetorical traditions, beginning with Saint Augustine’s rhetoric of persuasion, developed into powerful teaching tools for religious writers. Spiritual biographers relied on rhetoric to persuade their readers of their interpretation of the mysteriously hidden and only partially understood meanings in religious’ experiences. In order for rhetorical persuasion to take hold in the spiritual biographies, the ‘Truth’ must first either be known or revealed. The speaker does not seek to prove but to proclaim the ‘Truth,’ based upon authority and grace. The reader either believes or does not believe. The speaker, however, is concerned with the degree of his readers’ belief. Consequently, rhetorical persuasion in this instance, does not seek to persuade via the message itself but rather in the way the message is energetically proclaimed. If salvation is the goal,

then the speaker must be successful in his teaching of the ‘Truth.’¹¹ Following the Augustinian model of rhetoric to move by emotion and not by reason, the speaker’s goal was to incite passion, emotion and devotion in his reader in order to strengthen his faith.

The biographies of the new muse for Church restoration, replacing the once exemplary biographies of clergy members, were revolutionary in their crucial role in expanding the new visions of Catholicism in Belgium. Rebutting anti-monastic criticism, the biographies reveal that the founders and restorers of congregations, faced many challenges in a male dominated society. Considered as perpetual minors, they faced adversity head on while fighting against the scientific definitions of women’s physiology as fragile and facing threats of closure if they did not prove their utility to society. They acted as models of inspiration and encouragement for future sisters confronted by the hostilities of the world. The new face, the new figure of salvation, the new muse for Catholicism became the nun. Her words and her ‘image’ helped form a national identity and build a national edifice through Catholic unity since as Jean-Louis Ormières would say “la littérature est le couronnement de tout édifice national.”¹²

While all biographies were projects of sanctification on their surface, Belgian religious biographies explicitly married politics with religion and religion with national identity. The Catholic vision of recatholicization entailed a nationalistic defense for its long standing institutions. In L’Église des Révolutions, Daniel-Rops makes an analysis, using Spain as an example, that spiritual renaissance in conquered or threatened nations had political implications, specifically in the guarding of a nation’s independence.¹³ The same occurs in Italy with Father Diesbach’s groups *Amicizia cristianai* providing resistance against Napoleon’s regime. In Belgium, the spiritual renaissance was codified in religious biographies and the success of these texts helped breed Belgian nationalism.

¹¹ George Kennedy. Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times. (Chapel Hill: The U of North Carolina P., 1980).

¹² Jean-Louis Ormières. Politique et religion en France. (Bruxelles: Éditions Complexe, 2002) 16.

¹³ See Daniel-Rops (Henri Petiot) L’Église des Révolutions. (Paris: Fayard, 1960) 181 footnote #64.

The continuing instability of foreign dominance became a fertile environment for biographers to use surging ideas of nationalism in their prefaces to rally even more support. The quest for beatification of these nuns in the preface, influenced the goal of recatholicizing cities within Belgium because if successful, the event solidified the identity of a city in establishing a heroine. For example, Julie Billiart allowed the people of Namur¹⁴ to identify with her and therefore affect political decisions by providing financial support to her congregation. In turn, the ongoing presence of the congregation provided constant reminders of the Catholic faith, through their hand in education and administering to the poor, the sick, and the elderly. Once a city reclaimed its identity to that of pre-foreign control (before 1789), nationalistic references were combined with these saintly deaths in the biographies. This will be a crucial strategy by clerical authors for their participation in recatholicization during the tumultuous history of Belgium in the first half of 19th century while seeking independence from France, Austria and later Holland. Furthermore, the departure from France's proliferation of spiritual autobiographical writing in the 19th century, a country historically and politically intermingled with the principality of Liège, suggests a concerted effort to be distinguished from its neighbor, further supporting the beginnings of nationalistic difference through these texts. Some publishing houses went as far as refusing to publish biographies of French natives even if they had founded congregations in Belgium.¹⁵ Instead, the next Belgian sister in authority was considered the founder. It is my belief that the writing of the life of a religious founder did not openly pose a threat against the rival ideas of the revolutionaries much like apologetic literature. With no censure these texts proliferated. In my dissertation I argue that religious biographies were not only used as weapons to repair the Revolutionary dechristianization and to counteract the anti-catholic literature, but also serve

¹⁴ See V. S.J Baesten. Vie de la Mère Julie Billiart. Fondatrice de L'Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur 1751-1816. (Tournai, Bruxelles: Casterman, 1881).

¹⁵ Madame Barat was refused recognition for her part to found the congregation *Les Dames de L'Instruction Chrétienne* because of her French nationality. See M. L'Abbé Baunard. Histoire de Madame Barat: Fondatrice de la Société du Sacré Coeur de Jésus 1779-1865. (Tome 1. Paris: Librairie Poussielgue Frères, 1876).

to incite nationalistic ideals under very discreet, unsuspecting titles such as, The Life of Julie Billiat,
Founder of the Institute of Notre-Dame of Namur.

II. CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Following the introduction in Chapter 1, a table is presented outlining all the Belgian biographies studied in this research beginning with the year 1722 and spanning into 1933. Next, the historical context in which these texts situate provides the framework in order to understand the rhetorical nuances at play in religious biographical writing of the 19th century.

Chapter 2 examines the early 19th century type of biographical writing which rests on an impregnated hagiographical tradition. For the purpose of eliminating confusion from religious biographies discussed in later chapters, they are termed “hagiographies” because they recount the lives of saints already canonized in the Church. Although, hagiographical in format, the writing substance innovated the genre in that it responded to the philosophical, political and scientific debates of the early to mid 19th century. Furthermore, the protagonist is no longer a saint divinely chosen at birth and distinct from the rest of humanity. Rather, divine will was manifested upon the saint through all her life struggles. The saintly status is thus accorded by the perseverance during these ‘tests’ and the entailed work while relying on her faith in God. By using examples from the saints’ life, the authors sermonize on the search of the poor “in spirit” and encourage their readers to materialize their faith into good works, primarily by religious education. Thus, the recatholicization plan was put into place: “Par le zèle que vous devez avoir pour leur salut, ne devriez-vous pas par vos libéralités éloigner la misère qui les pousse au crime, empêcher leur damnation?¹⁶ [...] Quant à certains mendiants, oisifs et robustes, la meilleur aumône est de leur procurer l’instruction et l’occupation; élever de pauvres enfants vagabonds et abandonnés [...]”¹⁷

Additionally, published in Belgium, the hagiographies promote the Belgian “beguine” who symbolized specific Belgian virtues. Born of Belgian soil, the beguines represented a feminized

¹⁶ La Vie de Sainte Aléna-Religion, vierge et martyre, patronne de Vorst ou forêt près de Bruxelles. (La Société Nationale: Bruxelles, 1838) 32.

¹⁷ La Vie de Sainte Aléna 44.

movement of “mulieres religiosae,”¹⁸ holy women, in order to “reawaken an old ideal of monasticism”¹⁹ and transpire pious examples. Although the “hagiographies” of the 19th century are republished (reedited) versions from medieval and renaissance texts, they are innovative in that the writing serves to extinguish from the *legends* they had previously represented. Rather, influenced by scientific methodology, attention to documented research and veracity of sources presented an erudite historically anchored work. Furthermore, the new hagiographical genre was influenced by the spirit of romanticism in its glorification of lost medieval environment, symbolizing the golden age of Catholicism. This resurrection of a past was also confluent in resurrecting what was uniquely Belgian, attaching loyal national sentiment to religious heritage. Authors also resurrected the lives of these semi-autonomous women, known to have influenced popular piety amongst the people, in order to support the endeavors of emerging apostolic women in the 19th century.

Unique to the 19th century Belgian hagiographies is the endorsement that sainthood is attainable by all those abiding to Catholic teachings. The saints serve as examples in that their actions display simplicity, moderation and will. Sainthood did not result in martyrdom. In fact critics such as Chanoine Leclercq underlined this distinction while emphasizing the veracity of content was an important aspect of the 19th century hagiographic genre: “[...] les auteurs modernes transforment l’histoire, parce qu’ils ne comprennent pas que Marguerite puisse être vénérée comme martyre, si elle est simplement victime d’un assassinat quelconque.”²⁰

The 19th century hagiographical genre includes rhetoric that responds to atheistic philosophy by revealing the existence of God with a reasoned philosophy of spiritual enlightenment. The writers accuse these philosophers as an entity, without referring to specific names, for bringing darkness on the minds of the people, criticizing that the problems of men arise from not knowing God. The

¹⁸ Filles du silence. Moniales en Belgique et Luxembourg, du Moyen-Âge à nos jours. (Bastogne: Musée en Piconrue, 1998) 22-23.

¹⁹ Filles du silence 23.

²⁰ Chanoine Jacques Leclercq. Saints de Belgique. (Bruxelles: Éditions de la Cité Chrétienne, 1942) 92.

consequence is a “man in ruins” due to his lack of faith. As an offensive tactic, the texts place emphasis on the Sacrament of the Eucharist, which brings the faithful to a deeper relationship with God.²¹ Additionally, God reveals Himself in nature and the writers emphasize His existence in the recognizable Belgian landscapes and Belgian symbols of faith. Furthermore, reactive to the criticism of religious life, the authors in publishing the lives of religious women, devote attention to a deliberated vocation that was as honorable as it was virtuous. Hence, the theme of “reparation” pertained not only to the spiritual meditation but also to the writing; in other words, repairing misconceptions of “perverse” religious.²² In this effort, the Church recognized religious women as the principal transmitters of faith.

Rhetorical strategies were employed to maintain an authoritative voice in order to create a politic of conversion. In other words, rhetorical strategies of authority were polished in the details of documentation and enhanced by a rhetoric of sympathy in order to fully impel their readers in their conversion stories. The mediation of clergy was necessary in order to promote clergy in an environment where men still retained power. However, these religious biographies display a collaborative relationship between the nun as subject and the clergy responsible for directing her representation.

Chapter 3 examines how shifting models of piety contributed to an effective recatholicization campaign. The analysis of biographical prefaces discloses trends in pious examples revealing the deficiencies the Church harbored within. For example the publishing of biographies of contemplative religious women seemed to correlate with their reestablishment in society after 1830, as a consequence of their suppression, after which laws were favorable to them. In other words,

²¹ This concept of this deeper relationship with God in the Eucharistic Sacrament can be elaborated more profoundly in theological terms but due to the required detail, it will not be discussed in this thesis.

²² The satiric tone towards monasticism is not new to the 19th century but it continued to infiltrate conceptions of religious life: In the Middle Ages: Erasme, Villon and Rabelais; in the 17th century: Vénus dans le cloître, in the 18th century Voltaire, Robert Challe (Les Illustres Françaises), Marivaux (La Vie de Marianne), Le portier des chartreux and Diderot (La religieuse). [Reference: Filles du Silence p. 48] Nuns were represented as prisoners with no vocation with their superiors as the holders of abusive power whom promoted perverse behavior behind the convent walls. See also Jeanne Ponton La religieuse dans la littérature française. Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1969.

specific examples of piety responded to an insufficiency that needed to be fulfilled in society. The study of these prefaces was an initial step to decoding the rhetorical strategies discussed in the subsequent chapter 4. Deciphering “between the lines” gave way to the author’s intentions elucidating even to what was not said. Specifically, the premise of these *‘lives of nuns’* revealed a subtle attempt to restore the image of clerical figures. This subtlety evolved from including adulation of clerical figures at the end of prefaces, then later moving to the beginning of a preface, rising to be defined as “instrumental” in foundation to culminating as the “premier fondateur.” In the spirit of romantic philosophy, the monk was viewed as the “symbole du civilisateur” which perpetuated the feeling that they were crucial to the order of Belgian society.²³ Prefaces also betrayed that women’s writing were controlled—referring to reediting of autobiographical manuscripts. Lastly, prefaces became forums of denunciation of revolutionary dechristianization.

Hagiographies and biographies of 17th century reformers of religious Orders typified the biographical writing of the first half of the 19th century. The second half of the 19th century was represented by the biographies of 19th century founders of congregations and of nuns belonging to newly established 19th century congregations. While the hagiographies present medieval Belgian characters in line with the surging romantic movement, nostalgic of a glorious past, religious biographies of reformers and founders, on the other hand, embodied the present hoping to give the image of an institutionalized ordered Church. Yet, the latter could not do without the former since repeated themes and comparisons from past religious writing linked together and continued the process of religious representation.

The needs of the Church changed throughout the century. At first the medieval saint, most often a type of beguine and characterized as a “pieuse fille” was introduced at a time when the numbers of these women diminished considerably after the 18th century—with a decline of more than half of its members between 1631 and 1828. From the 94 beguinages that originated, only 20

²³ *Filles du Silence* 274.

remained in 1856 mostly due to competing religious vocations.²⁴ The interest then shifted to the reformer and founder, portrayed as “heroines,” during which a battle for the security of Church and nation was great. Then when the battle waned, the appearance in the “Vies,” of the “la bonne soeur” in all her simplicity, submissiveness, and humility, during a time when clerical authority or masculine Catholicism was in power. The term “religieuse” representing pre-revolutionary term did not bode well with the new changes and the new term “modèle congréganiste” seemed instead to efface the individual and look towards a cause and a model of virtue.

Chapter 4 examines in detail the rhetorical strategies revealed in the 1881 biography of Julie Billiart,²⁵ founder of the Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur. Julie Billiart was one of the most popular and successful superiors of a religious congregation in Belgium. As a teacher, she advocated specifically for the educational formation of the future generation. At the time of publication, her biography incorporated that generation which she taught, now all adults, during a time when a war on religious education had become vitriolic from the liberal opposition.

The author, Father Baesten, in his attempt to solidify authority within the Church, sought to promote the clergy and protect the image of the nun. The writing and publication of the biography exhibited collaboration and concessions of both religious men and women in order to gain favorable advertisement and provide examples to the general public. In other words, the obedience of Julie to her confessor represented a smaller version of the obedience of Belgian citizens to the Magisterium of the Church.

In his resistance to dechristianization, Father Baesten’s biographical writing served to protest and to describe the struggles people faced in maintaining their faith. His rhetoric of solidarity embraced those who died in that struggle during the Revolution and sought continued defense so that their deaths may not have been in vain. His rhetoric displayed influences of famous

²⁴ Richard B. Woodward. “A Lost World Made by Women”. New York Times (July 13, 2008).

²⁵ Baesten.

rhetoreticians, such as Saint Augustine and Bossuet, as well as the infusement of the romantic spirit. He focused on the emotional appeal of a nostalgic past in order to garner the preservation of the Catholic faith.

The rhetorical role of author affirms to protect the image of the nun in a controlled manner. The text denounces those who participated in tarnishing her reputation, even other clergy members. The text functions as a documented approval of saintly status giving voice to silent virtues such as humility. This documentation permits a certain authority of speech from Julie Billiard all in keeping within specific hagiographic conventions, i.e. biographic topoi that erase her femininity.

This chapter also acts as an example to the significant changes that occurred in religious life in the 19th century, specifically in responding to the need of public ministry. Nominations changed from “The Order of [...]” to “Society of [...]” or to “Institution of [...].” Overall, she advocated for the flexibility in religious life. Julie Billiard maintained that each convent she founded would instill their individual manner of management circumstantial to the needs of the area. She challenged clerical oversight and demanded more independence. This reasoning stemmed from religious institutions no longer owning its property collectively. She eliminated class distinctions, entering dowries, and selective admissions. Rather, it was more important to have an army of numbers than elite individuals. With this change came an erasure of one’s individuality and attention to exterior appearances. She tore away at cultural boundaries, encouraging her sisters to speak the dialect in the city of establishment. Revisions in religious affairs of government and appearance cultivated changes to spirituality, placing emphasis on serving the other. This contact with the less distinct in society engendered a personalization of faith relying no longer on mystical experiences from God, but rather placing complete trust in Him. Witnessing true suffering on the streets cultivated a spirituality of suffering which propagated sacrifice and reparation. Unlike centuries past, which encouraged bodily mortification, the expiation of sins was accomplished by an interior mortification.

Finally, the definition of these texts as ‘biographies’ is called into question. These types of religious texts can neither be defined entirely as biographies nor autobiographies due to the mixture

of both genres within the text. Rather, the texts represent an impreciseness that situate them into an intermediary genre; a sort of *'bioautographies'* perhaps? The strategy of controlled writing appearing to be “écrite par elle-même” sought to perpetuate a life in the present in its true form while confessing nothing.

Chapter 5 examines how the project of sanctification was aided by the use of images inserted in the religious biographies: “Il se procura un grand nombre d’images de la sainte Martyre; il les répandit dans la ville [...] en peu de temps, tous les coeurs s’enflamment, la dévotion s’établit.”²⁶ The images had a purpose in enhancing the representation of identifying characteristics of religious piety. Specifically, the identity of the nun was constructed and presented in a manner to enhance the overall goal of the sanctification.

The project of sanctification evolved over time depending on what deficiencies the Catholic Church needed to promote. “The history of any image cannot be understood if one merely traces the internal changes of its form or pays attention only to the external influences. The image as much referred to other images by its form as it adapted to cultural and religious patterns of behaviour in its function.”²⁷ Adapting to a changing societal environment, the Church was pro-active in providing imagery that responded to the spiritual needs of its faithful. This adapting response is what distinguishes the 18th century Belgian Catholic Church to that of the 19th century. For example, the early 19th century biographical imagery promoted the “Mère abbesse,” heroic in her virtues and stance for change, which correlated much with the post-revolutionary environment that needed “héroïes” to mother a society gone astray. Then, came images of the nun as an educator, poised in a stern, rigid and authoritative manner, during which the cause of Catholic education was strongly promoted and solicited teachers. Later, more realistic natural portrayals of nuns arose resulting from the campaign of a more personalized faith erasing all notions of theatricality and idealism. The

²⁶ Abbé H. J. Prevost. Histoire Nouvelle de Sainte Philomène et de son Culte, racontée à ses élèves. (Bruxelles: Société Belge de Librairie, 1887) 64.

²⁷ H. Belting. The Image and its Public in the Middle Ages. (New York: A.D. Caratzas, 1990) 3.

progressive development of personalized faith is evident in the evolution of imagery from ‘saint’ to ‘religious founder’ to ‘simple nun’. The ‘saint’ was inapproachable in imitation due to her divine status. Rather, new models of piety, religious women, represent an erasure of distance vis à vis former models of piety advancing the notion that these examples of piety could be imitated by the faithful. For example: “Si nous voulons être de bons et véritables chrétiens, il faut que nous soyons des Saints, ou que du moins nous tendions sérieusement à la sainteté”²⁸ or “[...] la vie de la mère Félicité, constituent la perfection, la sainteté exigée de tous [...] en exposant ses actions et ses sentiments, et que vous proposez à l’imitation, non seulement des gens du monde [...] mais aussi des personnes religieuses [...]”²⁹

Furthermore, political pressure of the societal “utility” of religious women permeated through religious imagery particularly for contemplative women who had to adapt to include public service in their vocational duties. Apostolic imagery was quick to capitalize on this social change and did so by abasing any sort of distinctions, so much so, as to capitalize on the nobleness of the lack of distinctions. The biography of Mère Félicité is one such example. Born in Verviers she had been placed with the Benedictines in Liège as a child. The Benedictines, requiring a dowry upon entrance to religious life, had internal class distinctions that distinguished between the position of “Soeur converse,” reserved for the less noble and less educated as opposed to “Dame Benedictine” reserved for the elite and educated. The “Soeur converse” generally attended to the more menial manual labor of convent life whereas the “Dames” were in charge of education and governmental aspects of convent life. The biographer of Mère Félicité subtly places emphasis on the Benedictine class distinction when describing her boarding experience with them: “[...] c’est qu’aucune religieuse ne paraissait avoir produit sur elle plus d’impression qu’une simple soeur converse, du nom de

²⁸ Abbé N.-J. Cornet. Vie et opuscules spirituels de la Vénérable Mère Jeanne de Jésus. Réformatrice du Tiers-Ordre de saint François, et Fondatrice des Pénitentes-Récollectines de Limbourg, d’après le R. P. Mars, recollect, et les archives de l’ancien couvent de Dolhain-Limbourg. (Casterman: Tournai, 1861) 279.

²⁹ R. P. Alexandre de la Compagnie de Jésus Pruvost. Vie de la R.M. (Révérende Mère) Marie-Félicité de Saint Joseph (Jeanne-Marguerite Bouhon) première supérieure des soeurs de Saint Joseph au Beauregard à Liège. (Deuxième Edition. Casterman: Tournai, 1871) v-vi.

Françoise, qui y faisait les fonctions de portiere.”³⁰ The post-revolutionary environment was such that noble hierarchy in religious life was no longer an attractive recruiting strategy. In past centuries, young women desired the placement in a contemplative convent because it ensured security for their future and provided some independence. Mere Félicité’s refusal to enter the Benedictine convent and joining the Soeurs de Saint-Joseph instead, was a strong statement representing the changes occurring in society. Additionally, far from idyllic hagiographic imagery, the author inserts a portrait of Mère Marie-Félicité on her deathbed further enhancing her humbleness as well as distance from traditional contemplative imagery.

The reintroduction of contemplative nuns and the innovation of apostolic work aided the reinstallation of clerical figures. Once the clergy had reestablished its authority, the face of heroic or teaching nuns diminished and clerical figures seem to take the spotlight while nuns bowed in submission. As a result, nuns promoted as objects of veneration, shifted to the imagery of nuns venerating specific devotions. This outcome of devotions, for example to the Holy Eucharist, germinated meditations of suffering. Perhaps a century of reflection upon revolutionary trauma and rapid industrialization exploiting thousands of laborers fueled the religious imagery on suffering. Interestingly, the focus on the devotion of the Infant Jesus took place during a time when children had been heavily exploited as the mine labor. The Church in its devotion highlights the innocence of the “child” as something that needed to be preserved and consequently labor laws were set to ban children under 14 from working. Catholic philosophy focused its attention to turning the individual embracement of faith into active understanding, a concept heavily promoted in the devotions to the Sacred Heart.

Chapter 6 summarizes and concludes the research work and posits new directions for future research. Specifically, this chapter examines a new definition for the religious biographies, presenting arguments that they should be included in the canons of history as well as literature and not only labeled as hagiographies. This research places value on these unknown texts in the hopes that there

³⁰ Pruvost 6.

will be recognition to the conservation of these influential texts which impacted Belgian society during the 19th century and early 20th century.

III TABLE OF BELGIAN RELIGIOUS BIOGRAPHIES 1722-1933

The table below refers to religious biographies *published* in Belgium. There are a few exceptions³¹ but they remain Belgian in their representation. Although the majority of the women represented is Belgian or established Belgian foundations, the table emphasizes the locale of publication along with signs of success and targeted regions. The analysis of this data concludes that particular messages were promoted by the Catholic Church, based on the devotions promoted by the individual saint/nun. In other words, the questions posed throughout this research included: “Why this nun?” and “what does this biography have in common with all the other biographies?”

This chart is incomplete however, and serves as a starting point for further research. Under the heading “Belgian foundations,” most of the entries list only one city. This, however, does not represent the entirety of Belgian foundations for each specific Order or Congregation. For example the Soeurs de Namur, did not only establish themselves in Namur, but in many other cities throughout Belgium. This concept necessitates further research in Belgian libraries in order to present a complete representation of all its foundations. Furthermore, an addendum table could provide a more accurate representation as to which saints/nuns were most often republished.

³¹ Two famous Belgian nuns published in Paris, Sainte Julie Billiard and Mère Saint Joseph, had already been published in Belgium. Also, two biographies of founders of Belgian convents published in Lille, Clarisse Françoise Vanderhaeghen and Benedictine Florence de Werquineoul.

Table 1.1 BELGIAN RELIGIOUS BIOGRAPHIES 1722-1933

<u>Publication date</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Bibliographic reference</u>	<u>Life</u>	<u>Founder</u>	<u>Congregation</u>	<u>City of Belgian Foundation</u>	<u>Place of publication</u>	<u>Publisher</u>	<u>Images</u>
1722	Sainte Wivina	De Griek, Emanuel. <u>Het Leven ende Mirakelen van de H. Wivina, eerste abdisse en fondaterse der edele en vermaerde Abdy van Grooten Bygaerden</u> . Griek: Brussels, 1722.	12th century	F	Bénédictine	Brussels	Grand-Bigard (Bruxelles)	Emanuel de Griek	I
1787	Sainte Lutgarde	<u>Histoire abrégée de la vie de Sainte Lutgarde, religieuse de l'Ordre de Cîteau, en grande vénération de à Aywiers en Brabant; monastère de son Ordre</u> . Stevens: Bruxelles, 1787.	1182-1246	Ø	Cisterciennes	Aywiers	Bruxelles	Stevens	I
1789	Mère Françoise Vanderhaeghen	<u>Abrégée de la Vie de la Vénérable Mère Françoise Vanderhaeghen, première abbesse et fondatrice du couvent de l'Immaculée Conception de Notre-Dames, des religieuses Clarisses de Tournai</u> . E.J. Henry: Lille, 1789.	1582-1648	F	Clarisses	Tournai	Lille	E.J. Henry	Ø
1822	Sainte Marie de Nivelles	<u>Vie de la Bienheureuse Marie d'Oignies écrite en latin par le Cardinal Vitry</u> . E. H. J. Plon: Nivelles, 1822.	1177-1213	F	Béguine	Oignies	Nivelles	E.H.J. Plon	Ø
1835	Sainte Philomène	B., M. J. F. <u>Vie et miracles de Sainte Philomène, vierge et martyre, surnommée la Thaumaturge du 19eme siècle</u> . Troisième Édition. Vanderborcht: Bruxelles, 1835.	Early Christian martyr	Ø	Ø	Ø	Bruxelles	Vanderborcht	Ø

<u>Publication date</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Bibliographic reference</u>	<u>Life</u>	<u>Founder</u>	<u>Congregation</u>	<u>City of Belgian Foundation</u>	<u>Place of publication</u>	<u>Publisher</u>	<u>Images</u>
1838	Sainte Aléna	La Vie de Sainte Aléna-Religion, vierge et martyre, patronne de Vorst ou forêt près de Bruxelles. In Bibliothèque Religieuse et Nationale. La Société Nationale: Bruxelles, 1838.	7th century	Ø	Ø	Patron of Vorst	Bruxelles	La Société Nationale	I
1841	Madame Bourtonbourt	Wilmet, M. Ch. Vie de Madame Bourtonbourt. Fondatrice des Soeurs de la Charité à Namur écrite par son confesseur le R.P. Bonaventure de Luxembourg, capucin, et publiée avec la notice biographique de ce père et celle de Mgr. Strickland, évêque de Namur. Lagauche: Namur, 1841.	17th century	F	Soeurs de la Charité Namur	Namur	Namur	Lagauche	Ø
1844	Marie D'Oyenbrugge AND Madame Marie Joséphine de Clotz de Kukum	Léon Herckenrode de St. Trond, S.J.. Vie de la Comtesse Marie d'Oyenbrugge dites de Duras, première supérieure du couvent de Berlaymont à Bruxelles, précédé d'une notice sur Marguerite Comtesse de Berlaymont, née Comtesse de Lalaing, fondatrice dudit couvent. Première Edition. Vanderborcht: Bruxelles, 1844.	16th-17th century	F AND R	Chanoinesses Régulières	Bruxelles	Bruxelles	Vanderborcht	AI (4)
1846	Bienheureuse Mère de Chantal	Marsollier, Abbé M.. Vie de la Bienheureuse Mère de Chantal, fondatrice et première religieuse, et première supérieure de l'Ordre de la Visitation de Sainte Marie. J. Casterman: Tournai, 1846.	1572-1641	F	L'Ordre de la Visitation de Sainte Marie	French nun Belgium ▲	Tournai	Casterman	Ø
1846	Sainte Julienne	Noûe, Arsène. Vie de Sainte Julienne de Retinne. Publication faite au profit de l'Eglise qu'on élève en l'honneur de cette sainte au lieu de sa naissance. Liège: H. Dessain, 1846.	1193-1258	S	Premonstratensian Order, later a recluse	Liège	Liège	H. Dessain	I, AI (4)

<u>Publication date</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Bibliographic reference</u>	<u>Life</u>	<u>Founder</u>	<u>Congregation</u>	<u>City of Belgian Foundation</u>	<u>Place of publication</u>	<u>Publisher</u>	<u>Images</u>
1846	Sainte Julienne	Bertholet, R. P. <u>Histoire de l'Institution de la Fête Dieu avec les Vies des Bienheureuses Julienne et Ève qui en furent les premières promulgatrices, suivie de l'abrégé historique de l'Institution des illustres confréries de l'Adoration perpétuelle de l'auguste Sacrement des autels, et surtout de celle érigée dans l'église de Saint Martin à Liège en 1765.</u> Troisième Édition. Liège: Félix-Oudart, 1846.	1193-1258	S	Premonstratensian Order, later a recluse	Liège	Liège	Félix-Oudart	I, AI (16)
1846	Sainte Julienne et Sainte Ève	Bertholet, Félix R.P. <u>Vies de Sainte Julienne et de la Bienheureuse Ève, ou Histoire de l'Institution de la Fête Dieu.</u> Liège: Lardinois; Duvivier-Sterpin, 1846.	12th-13th century	S, and recluse	Premonstratensian Order, both recluses	Liège	Liège	Lardinois; Duvivier-Sterpin	I, AI (4)
1846	Florence de Werquinoeul	Abbé Parenty. Chanoine d'Arras. <u>Histoire de Florence de Werquinoeul première abesse de la Paix de Notre Dame, à Douai, et Institutrice de la Réforme de l'Ordre de Saint-Benoît dans le Nord de la France et en Belgique.</u> L.Lefort: Lille, 1846	1559-1638	F	Bénédictines	Liège, Namur, Bruges, Mons,	Lille	L.Lefort	I
1848	Sainte Catherine de Sienne	Émilie Chavin de Malan. <u>Vie de Sainte Catherine de Sienne.</u> J. Casterman: Tournai, 1848.	1347-1380	Ø	Dominicaine	<i>Italian nun</i> Belgium ▲	Tournai	Casterman	I (2)
1849	Victorine	<u>Notice sur la vie de Victorine.</u> 4 ^o Edition. Dessain: Liège, 1849.	1814-1830	*	Ø	<i>from Liège</i>	Liège	H. Dessain	Ø
1851	Sainte Cécile	<u>Guéranger, Dom Prosper, R. P. Histoire de Sainte Cécile, vierge romaine et martyre.</u> J. Casterman et Fils: Tournai, 1851.	early Christian martyr--3rd century?	Ø	Ø	Ø	Tournai	Casterman	I (2)

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1851	Vénérable Marguerite-Marie	Abbé Boulangé. <u>Vie et révélations de la Vénérable Marguerite-Marie, religieuse de la Visitation, morte en odeur de la sainteté à Paray-le-Monial en 1690.</u> D'après la deuxième édition, revue et augmentée. J. Casterman et Fils: Tournai, 1851.	1647-1690	Ø	L'Ordre de la Visitation	<i>French nun</i> Belgium ▲	Tournai	Casterman	AI (1)
1856	Mlle d'Épernon	Madame Froment. <u>Vie de Mlle D'Épernon, Religieuse Carmélite.</u> Casterman et Fils: Tournai, 1856.	?-1701	Ø	Carmélite	<i>French nun</i> Belgium ▲	Tournai	Casterman	Ø
1861	Vénérable Jeanne de Jésus	Cornet, l'abbé N.-J.. <u>Vie et opuscules spirituels de la Vénérable Mère Jeanne de Jésus. Réformatrice du Tiers-Ordre de Saint François, et Fondatrice des Pénitentes-Récollectines de Limbourg, d'après le R. P. Mars, recollect, et les archives de l'ancien couvent de Dolhain-Limbourg.</u> Casterman: Tournai, 1861.	17th century	F	Pénitentes Récollectines	Limbourg	Tournai	Casterman	I (2)
1862	Mère Julie Billiat	<u>Vie de la Révérende Mère Julie, fondatrice et première supérieure des Soeurs de Notre Dame de Namur. Comprenant l'histoire des premières années de cette Congrégation.</u> Casterman: Tournai, 1862.	1751-1816	F	Soeurs de Notre-Dame	Namur	Tournai	Casterman	Ø
1863	Marie Eustelle	<u>Recueil des Écrits de Marie Eustelle née à Saint Palais des Saintes le 19 juin 1814 morte le 20 juin 1842.</u> Nouvelle Edition: Tome Premier. Librairie Catholique de Perisse Frères. Regis Ruffet et Ce: Bruxelles, 1863.	1814-1842	*	Ø	Ø <i>French example of piety</i> (La Rochelle)	Bruxelles	Regis Ruffet et Cie	I

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1866	Mère Julie Billart	<u>Vie de la Révérende Mère Julie, fondatrice et première supérieure des Soeurs de Notre Dame de Namur.</u> Casterman: Paris, 1866.	1751-1816	F	Soeurs de Notre Dame	Namur	Paris	Casterman	Ø
1866	Pénitentes Récollectines (Jeanne de Jésus)	Abbé Cornet N.J.. <u>Notices Historique sur l'Ancienne Congrégation des Pénitentes -Récollectines de Limbourg et sur quelques religieuses qui s'y sont sanctifiées.</u> Victor Devaux et C ^{ie} : Bruxelles, 1866.	? - 1648	F	Pénitentes Récollectines	Limbourg, Liège, Louvain	Bruxelles	Victor Devaux et Cie	I
1867	Bienheureuse Marie des Anges	Labis, Ch.. <u>Vie et opuscules de la Bienheureuse Marie des Anges de l'Ordre des Carmélites dechaussées.</u> Nouvelle Edition, revue et considérablement augmentée. Casterman: Tournai, 1867.	1661-1717	F	Carmélites dechaussée	<i>Italian nun</i> Belgium ▲	Tournai	Casterman	I
1867	Vénérable Marie de Jésus d'Agréda	R. P. Séraphin. <u>Précis historique de la vie de la Vénérable Mère Abesse Marie de Jesus d'Agréda, religieuse Conceptioniste affiliée à l'Ordre de Saint-François.</u> Vandenbrouck: Tournai, 1867.	1602-1665	F	Conceptioniste (Congregation of the Immaculate Conception)	Nivelles	Tournai	Vandenbrouck	I
1868	Sainte Gertrude	<u>Souvenir de la Jubilé de Sainte Gertrude (1868). La Vie et les miracles de Sainte Gertrude, abbesse. Patronne et protectrice de Nivelles.</u> Auguste Despret: Nivelles, 1868	626-659	S	Bénédictine	Nivelles	Nivelles	Auguste Despret	AI (2)
1868	Sainte Marie d'Oignies	<u>Vie de la Bienheureuse Marie d'Oignies traduite du latin du Cardinal De Vitry avec un supplément de Thomas Cantimpré Chanoine Régulier de Saint-Augustin.</u> V. Devaux: Bruxelles, 1868.	1177-1213	F	Béguine	Nivelles	Bruxelles	V. Devaux	Ø

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1870	Jeanne de Chézard de Matel	Ernest Hello. <u>Oeuvres Choiesies de Jeanne de Chézard de Matel</u> . Goemaere: Bruxelles, 1870.	1596-1670	F	L'Ordre du Verbe Incarné du Saint Sacrement	<i>French nun</i> Belgium ▲	Bruxelles	Goemaere	Ø
1871	Mère Marie-Félicité de Saint Joseph	R. P. Alexandre Pruvost de la Compagnie de Jésus. <u>Vie de la R.M. (Révérende Mère) Marie-Félicité de Saint Joseph (Jeanne-Marguerite Bouhon), première supérieure des sœurs de Saint Joseph au Beaugard à Liège</u> . Deuxième Edition. Casterman: Tournai, 1871	1802-1865	S, F	Soeurs de Saint Joseph	Liège	Tournai	Casterman	I
1871	Vénérable Anna-Maria Taigi	R. P. Calixte. <u>La Vénérable Anna-Maria Taigi et la servante de Dieu Elisabeth Canori-Mora, Tertiaires Trinitaires avec une notice sur le Tiers-Ordre de la Très-Sainte Trinité</u> . H. Goemaere, 1871.	1769-1837	Ø	Tiers-Ordre de la Très-Sainte Trinité (Tertiaires Trinitaires)	<i>Italian nun</i> Belgium ▲	Bruxelles	H. Goemaere	Ø
1872	Mère Marie-Félicité de Saint-Joseph	Pruvost, R. P. Alexandre de la Compagnie de Jésus. <u>Vie de la R.M. (Révérende Mère) Marie-Félicité de Saint Joseph (Jeanne-Marguerite Bouhon), première supérieure des sœurs de Saint Joseph au Beaugard à Liège</u> . Deuxième Edition. M. Collée: Tongres, 1872.	1802-1865	S, F	Soeurs de Saint Joseph	Liège	Tongres	M. Collée	I
1873	Sainte Marguerite du Saint Sacrement	Mgr. Fliche. <u>Vie de la Vénérable Soeur Marguerite du Saint Sacrement, religieuse Carmélite, promotrice dans ces derniers temps de la dévotion à Jésus Enfant</u> . Casterman: Tournai, 1873	1619-1648	Ø	Carmélite	<i>French nun</i> Belgium ▲	Tournai	Casterman	I

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1873	Mère Marie de L'Incarnation	Richaudeau. <u>Vie de la Révérende Mère Marie de L'Incarnation, Ursuline, née Marie Guyard, première supérieure du monastère des Ursulines de Québec.</u> Casterman: Tournai, 1873.	1599-1672	S	Ursuline	Québec	Tournai	Casterman	I
1874	Mère Anne de Jésus	Bertholo-Ignace de Sainte-Anne, R. P.. <u>Anne de Jésus et les Constitutions des Carmélites Déchaussées du mémoire historique et justificatif tendant à démontrer que la servante de Dieu Anne de Jésus et restée constamment fidèle à l'esprit du Carmel réformé par Sainte Thérèse.</u> Alfred Froment: Bruxelles, 1874.	1545	F	Carmélite	Bruxelles	Bruxelles	Alfred Froment	Ø
1875	Sainte Angèle Merici	Beetemé, l'abbé G.. <u>Sainte Angèle Mérici. Fondatrice des Ursulines. Sa vie, ses vertus, son institut.</u> Ad. Mertens: Bruxelles, 1875	1474-1540	F	Ursulines	<i>Italian nun</i> Belgium ▲	Bruxelles	Ad. Mertens	I
1876	Mère Anne de Jésus	R. P. Bertholo-Ignace de Sainte-Anne. <u>Vie de la Mère Anne de Jésus, co-adjutrice de Sainte Thérèse dans l'oeuvre de Sainte Thérèse dans l'oeuvre de la réforme du Carmel et Fondatrice de l'Ordre en France et en Belgique.</u> H. Dessain: Malines, 1876.	1545	F	Carmélite	Bruxelles	Malines	H. Dessain	Ø
1877	Vénérable Anna-Maria Taigi	Calixte, R. P.. <u>Vie de la Vénérable Anna-Maria Taigi Romaine (1769-1837) Membre du Tiers-Ordre de la Très-Sainte Trinité; Sa vie intime, ses vertus héroïques, ses dons surnaturels, ses prédictions, ses miracles, d'après les documents authentiques du procès de béatification.</u> Quatrième Edition, considérablement augmentée. H. Casterman: Tournai, 1877.	1769-1837	Ø	Tiers-Ordre de la Très-Sainte Trinité	<i>Italian nun</i> Belgium ▲	Tournai	Casterman	I

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1877	Louise Lateau	Biographie de Louise Lateau, la stigmatisée de Bois-d'Haine, d'après les documents authentiques de Henri Van Looy. Troisième Edition, améliorée et augmentée. H. Casterman: Tournai, 1877.	1850-1883	Ø	Tertiaire de Saint François	near Tournai	Tournai	Casterman	I
1879	Mère Julie Billiat	Vie de la Mère Julie Billiat, fondatrice de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur 1751-1816 par un Père de la Compagnie de Jésus. J. Albanel: Bruxelles; Balon: Namur, 1879	1751-1816	F	Soeurs de Notre Dame	Namur	Bruxelles, Namur	Albanel, Balon	I
1881	Mère Julie Billiat	Vie de la Mère Julie Billiat. Fondatrice de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur. 1751-1816. Par un Père de la Compagnie de Jésus. Deuxième Édition. Casterman: Bruxelles, Tournai, 1881.	1751-1861	F	Soeurs de Notre Dame	Namur	Bruxelles, Tournai	Casterman	I
1881	Mère Marie Madeleine	Abbé V. Postel. Vie de la Mère Marie Madeleine (Julie Postel), fondatrice et première supérieure des Soeurs de la Miséricorde des Écoles Chrétiennes. Desclée, de Brouwer et Cie: Bruges, 1881.	1756-1846	F	Soeurs des Écoles Chrétiennes de la Misericorde	Clermont	Bruges	Desclée, de Brouwer	Ø
1882	Mère Alix le Clerk	A Gandellet. La vie de la Mère Alix le Clerk, Fondatrice, première Mère et religieuse de l'Ordre et de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame. Chanoinesses Régulières de Saint-Augustin. Polleunis, Ceuterick, et Lefébure: Bruxelles, 1882	1576-1622	F	Chanoinesses Régulières de Saint Augustin	French nun Belgium ▲	Bruxelles	Polleunis, Ceuterick et Lefébure	I

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1883	Mère Julie Billiard	B. Charlier. <u>Notice biographique sur la servante de Dieu Julie Billiard, Fondatrice de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur.</u> Wesmael-Charlier: Namur, 1883.	1751-1816	F	Soeurs de Notre Dame	Namur	Namur	Wesmael-Charlier	Ø
1884	Sainte Julienne	Berlière, A. <u>Vie de Sainte Julienne de Mont-Cornillon.</u> Paul Godenne: Namur, 1884	1193-1258	S	Premonstratensian Order, later a recluse	Liège	Namur	Paul Godenne	Ø
1885	Bienheureuse Christine du Christ	I.V.S., O.P.. <u>Une Fleur Cachée. La Bienheureuse Christine du Christ, Religieuse du Monastère de Rhetirs de l'Ordre des Prémontrés.</u> Douxfils: Namur, 1885.	1269-1292	Ø	L'Ordre de Prémontré	<i>German nun</i> Belgium ▲	Namur	Douxfils	Ø
1886	Soeur Marie Gonzaga	Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame, à Namur. <u>Vie de la Soeur Marie Gonzaga dans le monde Victorine-Françoise-Antoinette-Marie Baronne de Loë décédée à Cincinnati, le 6 mars 1884.</u> Deuxième Edition. Paul Godenne: Namur, 1886.	1826-1884	Ø	Soeurs de Notre Dame	Namur	Namur	Paul Godenne	I
1886	Soeur Marie AND Soeur Louise	Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame à Namur. <u>Vie de la Révérende Soeur Marie dans le monde Mlle Marie-Victorine-Eugénie Borgnet suivie d'une notice biographique sur la Soeur Louise des Sacrés-Coeurs dans le monde Hélène-Marie-Françoise baronne de Coppin de Falaen.</u> Imprimerie Paul Godenne: Namur, 1886.	1813-1867 AND 1843-1871	S and Ø	Soeurs de Notre Dame	Namur	Namur	Paul Godenne	Ø
1886	Bienheureuse Bronislava	I.V.S., O.P.. <u>Une Patronne contre la Chloéa. Vie de la Bienheureuse Bronislava, religieuse de l'Ordre de Prémontré.</u> Douxfils: Namur, 1886.	13th century	Ø	L'Ordre de Prémontré	<i>Polish nun</i> Belgium ▲	Namur	Douxfils	Ø

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1887	Mère Marie-Thérèse Haze	Théophile De Ville. <u>Histoire de la Mère Marie-Thérèse. Fondatrice de la Congrégation des Filles de la Croix, de Liège.</u> H. Dessain: Liège, 1887.	1792-1876	F	Filles de la Croix	Liège	Liège	H. Dessain	I
1887	Sainte Philomène	Prevost, l'Abbé H. J. <u>Histoire Nouvelle de Sainte Philomène et de son Culte, racontée à ses élèves.</u> Société Belge de Librairie: Bruxelles, 1887.	Early Christian martyr	Ø	Ø	Ø	Bruxelles	Société Belge de Librairie	?
1888	Mère Marie-Dominique	<u>Vie de la Mère Marie-Dominique dans le monde Julie Berlamont. Abbessse des Pauvres-Clares-Colettines de Bruges suivi de ses lettres et de notices sur les couvents qu'elle a fondés et sur la vie de la Mère Marie-Bernardine dans le monde Rose Liebaert.</u> Vandenberghe-Denaux: Bruges, 1888.	1799-1871	F	Pauvres-Clares-Colettines	Bruges	Bruges	Vandenberghe-Denaux	Ø
1889	Mère Gertrude	Bailly, Rèv. Père. <u>Mère Gertrude Fondatrice des Soeurs de l'Institut de L'Enfant Jésus.</u> Nouvelle Édition. Mechlinia, 1889.	1801-1866	F	Soeurs de l'Institut de l'Enfant Jésus	Nivelles, Brugelette	Mechliniae	Kuyt-Otto?	I, AI (11)
1889	Mère Thérèse de Jesus (Alix le Clerk)	Congrégation de Notre Dame. <u>Alix Le Clerk dite en religion Mère Thérèse de Jésus. Fondatrice de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame de l'Ordre de Saint Augustin.</u> Tome I et II. H. Dessain: Liège, 1889.	1576-1622	F	Chanoinesses Regulieres de Saint Augustin	<i>French nun</i> Belgium ▲	Liège	H. Dessain	Ø
1889	Bienheureuse Oda	I.V.S., O.P.. <u>Vie de la Bienheureuse Oda de l'Ordre de Prémontré d'après Philippe Harveng, Abbé de Bonne Espérance.</u> Namur: Doufils, 1889.	?-1158	S	L'Ordre de Prémontré	Brabant	Namur	Doufils	Ø

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1890	Mère Julie	Henri P Saintrain. <u>Notice sur la vie et les vertus de la Révérende Mère Julie, abbesse des Pauvres-Clares de Tournai 1810-1882.</u> Desclée, de Brouwer et C ^{ie} : Tournai, 1890.	1810-1882	F	Pauvres-Clares	Tournai	Tournai	Desclée, de Brouwer	Ø
s.d. 1892?	Sainte Marie de Nivelles	Rayée, Abbé Th. <u>Vie de Sainte Marie de Nivelles dites Oignies.</u> Nivelles: Ch. Guignarde, s.d.	1177-1213	F	Béguine	Oignies	Nivelles	Ch. Guignard	AI (18)
1892	Sainte Christine	Giron, A. <u>Sainte Christine l'Admirable de Saint Trond.</u> Traduit du flamand du R. P. Henckens. G. Moreau-Schouberechts: Saint Trond, 1892.	1150-1224	Ø	Convent of Saint Catherine	Saint-Trond	Saint Trond	G. Moreau-Schouberechts	I
1893	Mère Marie-Josephine Céline de Saint François	<u>Notice sur la Vie de la Réverende Mère Marie-Josephe-Céline de Saint Francois dans le monde Clotilde Ortega, Abbessse et Fondatrice des Clarisses-Colettines d'Enghien 1830-1890.</u> Desclée, de Brouwer et C ^{ie} : Tournai, 1893.	1830-1890	F	Clarisses-Colettines d'Enghien	Enghien	Tournai	Desclée, de Brouwer	Ø
1895	Bienheureuse Mère Julie Billiat	P. Ch Clair. <u>La Bienheureuse Mère Julie Billiat. Fondatrice et Première Supérieure Générale de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur.</u> Arthur Savaète: Paris, 1895.	1751-1816	F	Soeurs de Notre Dame	Namur	Paris	Arthur Savaète	I
1895	Mère Marie Claire de Jésus	Soeurs de Sainte Marie. <u>Vie de la Réverende Mère Marie Claire de Jésus. Co-fondatrice et deuxième Supérieure Générale de l'Institut des Soeurs de Sainte Marie.</u> Paul Godenne: Namur, 1895.	1811-1870	CF	Soeurs de Sainte Marie	Mons, Liège, Namur, Bruxelles,	Namur	Paul Godenne	I

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1896	Bienheureuse Mère Julie Billiart	P. Ch Clair. <u>La Bienheureuse Mère Julie Billiart. Fondatrice et Première Supérieure Générale de L'Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur.</u> Troisième Edition. Arthur Savaète: Paris, 1896.	1751-1816	F	Soeurs de Notre Dame	Namur	Paris	Arthur Savaète	I
1897	Mère Fanny de l'Eucharistie	<u>La Révérende Mère Fanny de L'Eucharistie (Madame Fanny Kestre) Fondatrice de l'Institut des Dames de Sainte Julienne dites Apostolines du Très Saint Sacrement.</u> Société Belge de Librairie: Bruxelles, 1897.	1824-1882	F	Institut des Dames de Sainte Julienne	Namur, Bruxelles, Anvers	Bruxelles	Société Belge de Librairie	I, AI (4)
1898	Cisterciennes	H. Nimal, Rédemptoriste. <u>Fleurs Cisterciennes en Belgique.</u> H. Dessain: Liège, 1898.	Middle Ages	Ø	Cisterciennes	Belgium ▲	Liège	H. Dessain	AI (5)
1902	Sainte Ève	Joseff, l'Abbé. <u>Vie de Sainte Ève, recluse de Saint Martin à Liège.</u> Liège: DeMarteau, 1902.	12th-13th century	Ø	recluse	Liège	Liège	DeMarteau	CI, AI (5)
1906	Bienheureuse Mère Julie Billiart	P. Ch Clair. <u>La Bienheureuse Mère Julie Billiart. Fondatrice et Première Supérieure Générale de L'Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur.</u> Troisième Edition. Arthur Savaète: Paris 1906.	1751-1816	F	Soeurs de Notre Dame	Namur	Paris	Arthur Savaète	I
1906	Bienheureuse Mère Julie Billiart	Réjalot, Dom Thierry O.S.B. <u>La Bienheureuse Julie Billiart (1751-1816).</u> Picard-Balon: Namur, 1906.	1751-1816	F	Soeurs de Notre Dame	Namur	Namur	Picard-Balon	I, AI (12)
1912	Mère Marie de Jesus	<u>Vie Abrégée de la Mère Marie de Jésus. Emilie d'Oultremont, Baronne d'Hooghyvoorst 1818-1878. Fondatrice de la Société de Marie Réparatrice.</u> Casterman: Tournai, Paris, 1912.	1818-1878	F	Société de Marie Réparatrice	Ø	Tournai, Paris	Casterman	I

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1920	Mère Saint-Joseph	Soeurs de Notre Dame de Namur. <u>Histoire de la Vénérée Mère Saint Joseph née Marie-Louise-Françoise Blin de Bourdon Demoiselle de Gézaincourt 1756-1838. Cofondatrice et deuxième supérieure générale de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre Dame de Namur.</u> L.Téchy-Tomme: Marchienne-au-Pont, 1920.	1756-1838	CF	Soeurs de Notre Dame	Namur	Marchenne-au-Pont	L. Téchy-Tomme	I, AI (30)
1924	Vénérable Mère Marie-Thérèse Haze	Humblot, Louis S.J. <u>La Vénérable Mère Marie-Thérèse Haze, fondatrice de la Congrégation des Filles de la Croix de Liège.</u> Liège: H. Dessain, 1924.	1792-1876	F	Filles de la Croix	Liège	Liège	H. Dessain	I, AI (13)
1924	Sainte Julienne and Sainte Ève	De Sainte Julienne, Clothilde. <u>Histoire d'un glorieux passé, Sainte Julienne de Cornillon, Sainte Ève de Saint Martin et la Fête-Dieu.</u> Action Catholique: Bruxelles, 1924	12th-13th century	S and recluse	Premonstratensian Order, both recluses	Liège	Bruxelles	Action Catholique	I, AI (16)
1925	Mère Marie-Stanislas Deprez	Visitation Sainte Marie. <u>Mère Marie-Stanislas Deprez de la Visitation Sainte-Marie de Celles.</u> D. Samain: Anderlues, 1925.	1818-1849	S	Visitation Sainte Marie	Celles	Anderlues	D. Samain	I, AI (5)
1932	Mère Marie-Ange du Sacre-Coeur de Jesus	<u>Vie de la Mère Marie-Ange du Sacré-Coeur de Jésus. Abbessse du Monastère des Conceptionnistes de Jambes Fondatrice du Monastère de Bastogne.</u> 1931	1850-1923	F	Conceptionnistes	Bastogne, Jambes	Jambes-lez-Namur	Monastere des Religieuses Conceptionnistes	I, AI (7)
1933	Mère Agathe Verhelle	<u>La Révérende Mère Agathe Verhelle. Restauratrice de la communauté de Dooresele et Fondatrice de l'Institut des Religieuses de l'Instruction Chrétienne 1786-1838.</u> Dessain: Liège, 1933.	1786-1838	R, F	Institut des Religieuses de l'Instruction Chrétienne	Liège	Liège	H. Dessain	Ø

KEY

I= FRONTISPIECE PORTRAIT

CI= COLORED IMAGES

AI = ADDITIONAL IMAGES OF CONVENTS, LOCALS, RELIGIOUS PERSONS, OR NUN HERSELF (total # of images)

Ø = NONE

F= FOUNDER

Belgium ▲= ORDER ESTABLISHED BELGIAN FOUNDATIONS

CF = CO-FOUNDER

S= SUPERIOR

R = RESTORER

* = NOT A NUN

s.d. = NO DATE

IV. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

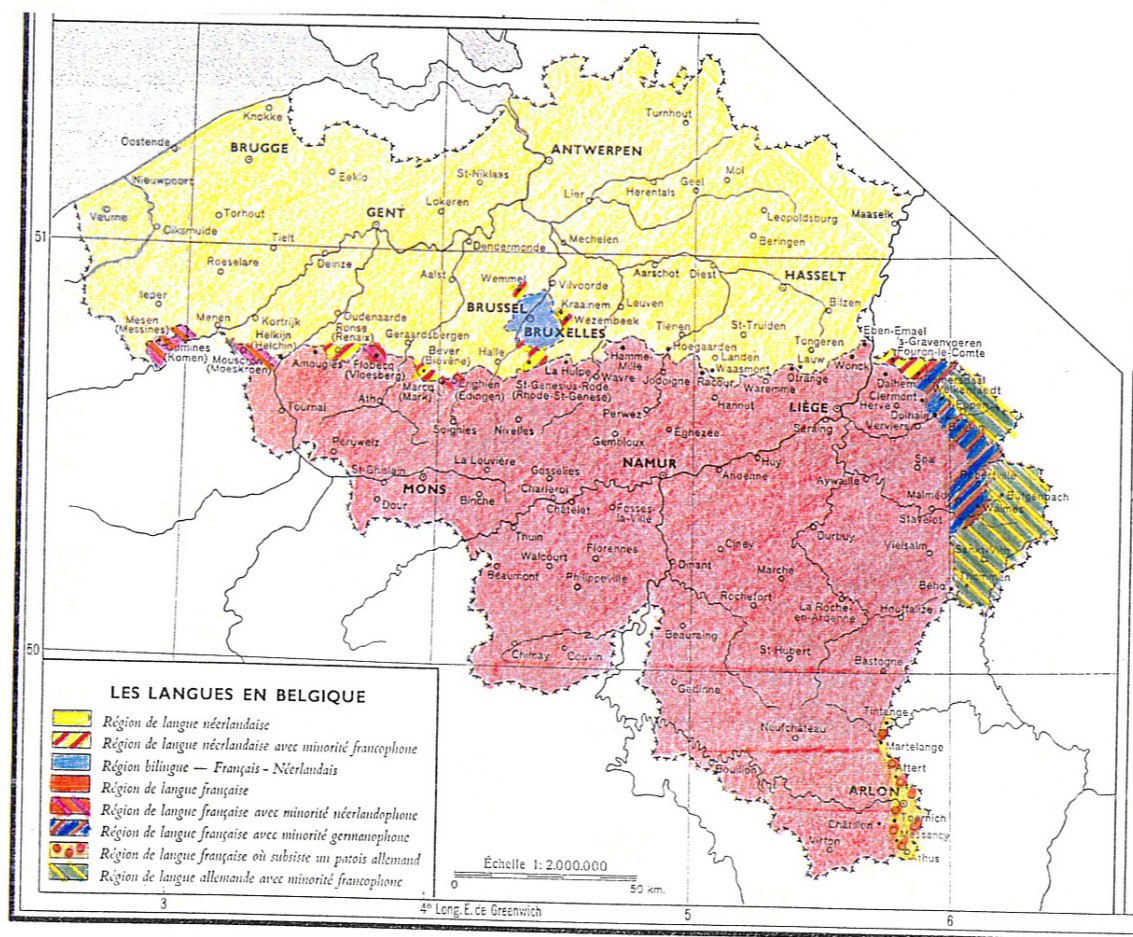


Figure 1.1 Map of Belgium showing linguistic divisions.³²

A. Liège: An example of great recatholicization efforts

The biographical writing of religious women reflected the historical events of the medieval and renaissance often making associations with the political events of the 19th century. The Liège diocese embedded in a rich Catholic culture and history is representative of great recatholicization efforts by its religious men and women in the 19th century. Since this research began in Liège and many biographies analyzed are representative of congregations residing within the boundaries of the

³² Archives of the Seminary of Liège.

Liège diocese, it seemed a natural place to begin in order to present the Belgian religious history of the 19th century.

1. 10th century-1789: A Catholic principality

The Liège diocese, located in the southeastern part of Belgium, is unique because it was the only independent principality which had been continuously ruled by prince-bishops from the 10th century up until 1789. It is a diocese that has a history of civilization, sanctification, rupture, tension, and crisis with religious ideas influencing the life of society and defining its institutions and its laws. The prince-bishop, who was elected by the Emperor or King and given considerable land, was responsible for incarnating the alliance between the Church and the State. The pre-revolutionary principality encompassed more than half of present day Belgium. Below, two maps of the Liège diocese (*Figures 1.2 and 1.3*) demonstrate the drastic change in boundaries after the Liège Revolution of 1789.



Figure 1.2 Map of the Liège diocese 1559-1789.³³

³³ <http://www.fabrice-muller.be/liege/histoire/diocese.html>

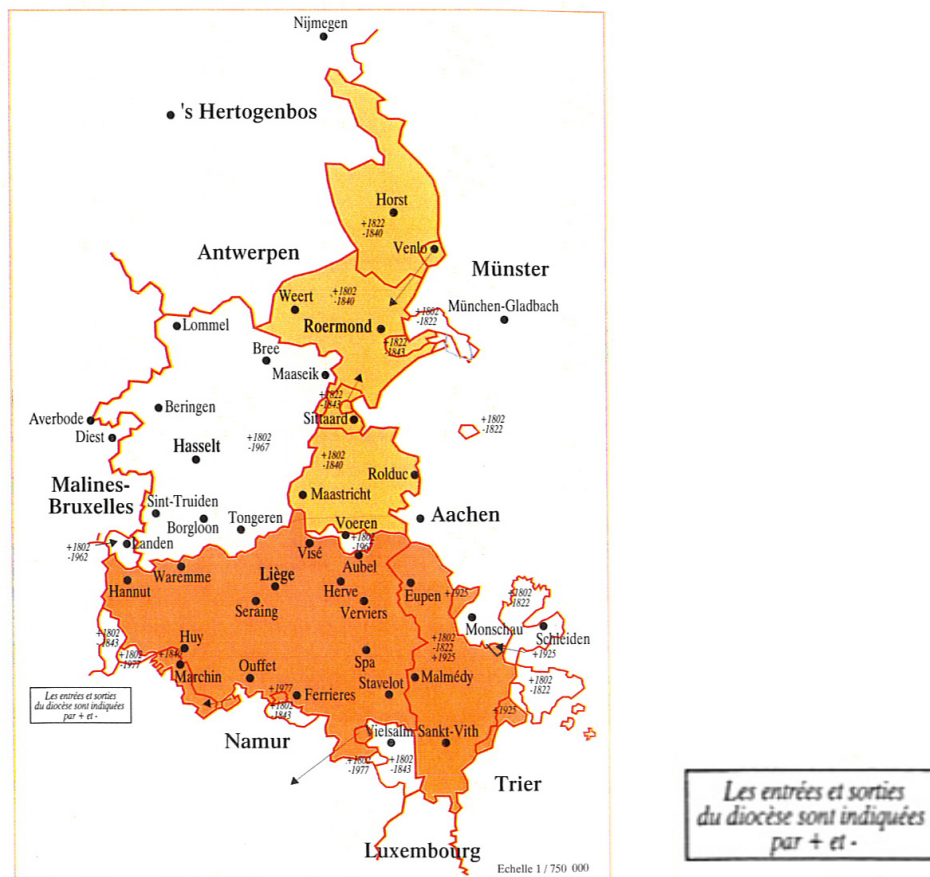


Figure 1.3 Map of the Liège diocese post-Revolution of 1789.³⁴

By the mid 19th century, all that remained of the Liège diocese comprised the territory in dark orange. Although this research focuses on 19th century foundations, the inclusion of *Figure 1.2* represents the significant loss of control due to the divisions of this once powerful principality into multiple dioceses, implemented by Emperor Napoleon beginning in 1801. This map also is important in understanding that some restorations of 16th century convents during the 19th century, retraced their roots through meticulous historical research by religious women historians.³⁵ Previous diocesan geo-

³⁴ Massaut.

³⁵ See M.-E. Henneau, "Femmes en quête de rôles dans l'histoire du salut: biographies de religieuses et religieuses biographes," in Sylvie Steinberg et Jean-Claude Arnould eds., *Les femmes et l'écriture de l'histoire, 1400-1800*. (Rouen: Publications des universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2008) 219-231.

politics interplayed in the restorative aspects, and were inserted in the nationalistic rhetoric of the 19th century such as in Abbé Parenty's Histoire de Florence de Werquinoeul première abbesse de la Paix de Notre Dame, à Douai, et Institutrice de la Réforme de l'Ordre de Saint-Benoît dans le Nord de la France et en Belgique published in 1846. The life of Florence de Werquineoul (1559-1638) was used as a reinforcement to the post-revolutionary restoration of the Liège Benedictine convent: "Il y a toujours profit, meme au point de vue purement historique, à lire une vie qui s'est écoulée à une époque où la contrée que nous habitons, agitée par divers parties religieux et politiques, luttait avec courage contre les doctrines nouvelles de la réforme, pour y maintenir le catholicisme."³⁶ The words of "courage" and "luttait" arise from the disastrous elimination of many Benedictine convents as a result of the revolutionary religious suppression. Out of the 63 Benedictine convents existing in Belgium before the Revolution, only 10 resurrected in the 19th century, with Liège convent being the only one from the Liège diocese.³⁷ The culture and history of the convent remained impregnated in the biographies of restoration. Additionally, the republished medieval hagiographies representing women from the "pays de Liège,"³⁸ such as Sainte Julienne de Cornillon, Sainte Eve, Sainte Marie d'Oignies, Sainte Christine l'Admirable, Sainte Yvette de Huy, and Sainte Lutgarde were deeply rooted in a return to a 'glorious Catholic past' which glorified a certain bastion of Catholic control of greater geographic impregnation.

³⁶ Parenty, Abbé. Chanoine d'Arras. Histoire de Florence de Werquinoeul première abbesse de la Paix de Notre Dame, à Douai, et Institutrice de la Réforme de l'Ordre de Saint-Benoît dans le Nord de la France et en Belgique. (L.Lefort: Lille, 1846) avant-propos.

³⁷ See table in Filles du silence. Moniales en Belgique et Luxembourg, du Moyen-Âge à nos jours. (Bastogne: Musée en Piconrue, 1998) 140-149.

³⁸ H. Nimal. Vie de quelques-unes de nos grandes Saintes au pays de Liège. (Liège: H. Dessain, 1897).

2. 18th century

The city of Liège, known as the Athens of the North in the Middle Ages³⁹ and the “Carrefour de l’Europe” in the 18th century⁴⁰ was a place where many philosophical ideas brewed and illicit books made their entry. The 18th century prince bishop Velbruck (1772-1784) encouraged the creation of societies, exhibitions and concerts with clergy, poets, journalists, intellectuals, and publishers. Opposing the thousands of pious books of healing saints and saintly women, a surge of secularization of books with diverse interests on both natural and profane history aimed to popularize knowledge with new readers in mind. New ideas circulated in cafés, salons, theatre, dispersed by way of pamphlets, periodicals, opera, “paskeyes” (local satirical songs).⁴¹ It was also a city representative of many freedoms not granted in neighboring countries. Having existed independently, the diocese enjoyed a less repressive environment.⁴² Additionally, its geographic location only fostered the dissemination of anti-catholic ideals. With the support of the prince-bishop, its proximity to Holland, Germany, England and France opened the flood gates for other publisher’s enlightenment ideas with the likes of subscriptions to the Journal encyclopédique introduced illegally by Pierre Rousseau in the mid 18th century.

In the 18th century, the biggest problem faced by the Belgian Catholic Church, was its lack of effective response to the enlightenment ideas and its lack of adapting to the changing intellectual environment. The ecclesiastic principality of Liège was slow to reform due to the resistance and obstacles presented by the privileges of the prince-bishops, along with the primary and secondary clergy. The most sought out positions of nobility in Europe, these clergymen were much more interested in worldly affairs than that of the spiritual. Yet their power in affairs concerning political

³⁹ Bruno De Moulin and Jean-Louis Kupper. Histoire de la principauté de Liège: De l’an mille à la Révolution. (Toulouse: Editions Privat, 2002) 228.

⁴⁰ De Moulin 201.

⁴¹ Massaut.

⁴² It becomes a land of asylum for persecuted religious from other countries after Belgium’s independence in 1830.

conflicts, spiritual matters, justice and administration made the resistance to any type of reform even within the Church very difficult. They promoted lavish restoration of cathedrals and monasteries while hunger, unemployment and increasing poverty prevailed in the streets. As a result, the large prosperous monasteries and convents were looked upon with disdain and the people began to see this relation with the hierarchy of the Church.⁴³ Towards the end of 18th century, animosity grew against the gargantuan wealth and “uselessness” of religious contemplative orders. The disorganization, wealth, and ignorance resulted in diminishing social clerical prestige which inherently began to affect the prestige of the Church.

3. Liège Revolution of 1789 and French control

The political tension of royal and religious hierarchal control combined with economic tensions of increasing poverty and closely watched French revolutionary events influence Liège's Revolution in August 1789. The city of Liège became the motor for the principles of freedom throughout Belgium.⁴⁴ The revolutionary spirit spread across Belgium with a demand to abolish privileges of the noble and religious class. The rights of man and citizen became even more radical than their French counterpart citing that “all sovereignty resided essentially in the people and not in the nation; that every citizen is free in his thoughts and opinions; and the citizens demanded that inviolable and sacred property rights be abolished.”⁴⁵ The Liège Revolution prompted prince-bishop Constantin-François de Hoensbroeck (1784-1792) to flee from Liège as well as his ecclesiastic dignitaries. Between 1789-1790 hostility mounted against the clergy but was limited to local manifestations. The situation was deeply aggravated with the invasion of French troops in the fall of 1792. The following year, all churches were closed, and many were used as stables for the French

⁴³ Massaut, 31.

⁴⁴ Later, the Liègeois revolution will undoubtedly be the prototype for independence of Belgium in 1830 (DeMoulin 228).

⁴⁵ De Moulin

army. By 1794, the Liège principality was no longer independent and all its citizens west of the Rhine were under French law. By 1795, the ecclesiastic legal power was completely destroyed and religious orders were suppressed while at the same time, stripping the Church's wealth. Furthermore, French Republic laws were hostile to the Church's faithful; persecuting believers by forbidding them to practice religion freely. September 1796 marked the closure of all convents except those that involved teaching and nursing the sick. By December 1796, religious men and women were forbidden to wear religious garments, and the laity was forbidden to participate in religious festivals or in pilgrimages. On January 1797, Napoleon declares in his "serment civique" that all clergy must submit to the laws of the Republic, profess hatred for the King and recognize the sovereignty of people. Those priests that accepted retained their function as "ministers of the cult." Those that resisted were imprisoned and or deported to places like Guyane. With the closure of all religious institutions, the new religion became patriotism as liberty symbols were implanted throughout the cities of Belgium.⁴⁶

However the tides quickly changed against Napoleon and revolutionary ideals. The wealth repossessed from the Catholic Church was not used to benefit the Belgian people. Symbols of Belgian pride were destroyed; such as the Liège Cathedral of Saint Lambert to the small rural chapels. French army soldiers pillaged the cities confiscating horses, cows, ammunition, and food as well as books, manuscripts, art, paintings, statues, and tombs. Farmers refused to enter the cities without encountering the risk of merchandise being taken. As a result, many urban people died of starvation. Persecution doubled in the fall of 1798 when peasants revolted against conscription and were massacred by the French army. Furthermore, out of 7500 ecclesiastic declared guilty-- 500 had been deported to islands or imprisoned, many of whom were village priests cherished by the peasants. The Belgian people could not accept the destruction by the Republic's army and as "citizens of the French Republic" soon began to view the Church not as a tyrant but as a victim. A resistance followed, born out of initiatives deriving from religious women, peasants and clergy. Nine out of ten

⁴⁶ Massaut

priests were hidden, mass was celebrated in hiding, church bells were concealed so they would not be melted by the French army, schools reopened in secret and priests called openly to the faithful to fight against the French tyranny. Despite the prohibition, Liège Bishop Zaepffel (1794-1802) fueled the resistance by allowing auxiliary chapels to be open to the faithful. He resisted Napoleon's political aspects of an "imperial catechism" and supported his priests in refusing to be indoctrinated. Zaepffel encouraged new secret French congregations—such as the Filles du Sacré Coeur de Marie, the Filles de la Charité, the influential and successful Dames du Sacré Coeur (1800) by Mère Sainte Sophie Barat, and the Pauvres Filles de la Miséricorde (1807) by Julie Postel. However, the strongest resistance to the dechristianization came from religious women. While clergymen were exiled or suppressed and churches were closed, nuns promoted the Catholic faith by continuing prohibited activities of teaching catechism as for example Anne-Marie Rivier in 1792. They distributed the Holy Eucharist as Marie-Madeleine (Julie) Postel and others hid priests.⁴⁷ Others continued religious life regardless of the prohibition as the Benedictines of Liège, the Carmélites of Potay, or the Clarisses of Liège.⁴⁸ To ensure their survival, they adapted by establishing schools. The Fructidorian religious politics knew little success because the traditions of the Catholic Church were too deeply rooted for Napoleon to dismiss. The forced exile of the clergy resulted in a great new vision of the Church that contributed to a mobile priesthood. In 1795, priests and nuns alike began a missionary endeavor by evangelizing as far as the countryside in order to strengthen its faithful⁴⁹ and their collaborative efforts began.

The deception of the Revolution--the attempt to erase 18 centuries of tradition, replacing Catholicism with a cult of Nature and Reason, the replacement of the veneration of saints with

⁴⁷ Gérard Cholvy. "L'émergence d'un laïcat Catholique: le premier 19^e siècle." Deux mille ans d'histoire de l'Église. Bilans et perspectives historiographiques. J. Pirotte et E. Louchez (dir). Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique. (Vol. 95/3 juillet-sept. 2000) 277.

⁴⁸ Paul Wynants. "Les religieuses de vie active en Belgique et aux Pays-Bas, 19^e – 20^e siècles." Deux mille ans d'histoire de l'Église. Bilans et perspectives historiographiques. J. Pirotte et E. Louchez (dir). Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique. (Vol. 95/3 juillet-sept. 2000) 61.

⁴⁹ Daniel-Rops. L'Église des Révolutions. (Paris: Fayard, 1960) 92-93. (pseudonym of Henry Petiot; 1901-1965).

revolutionary heroes, the progressive moral decadence, the murdering of religious, women and children, and unleashed hatred and depravity,⁵⁰ convinced Catholics that it was a revolt of man against God.⁵¹ Recatholicization biographical rhetoric will emphasize on the rebellion against God's natural laws, with men replacing them by human laws. The bourgeois class, once supporters of Voltaire, return to be instrumental in the foundations of new religious congregations in the 19th century. One such congregation, the successful Congregation du Sacré Coeur (or Dames du Sacré Coeur) founded by Madeleine Sophie Barat, recruited girls for their school from bourgeois and noble families. Their education placed emphasis on a solid philosophical⁵² and catechistical education in order to defend themselves in a masculine world, notably dechristianized.⁵³

Faced with a crisis, Napoleon saw that the social order had to be mitigated with religion. It was in his interest to conciliate the Church with his government. Inversely, Pope Pius VII (1800-1823) sought conciliation with Napoleon in order to regain power, authority, and influence among Europe's Catholics. The Concordat of 1801 was an attempt to regulate this relation between Church and government that the revolution had shattered. In it, the French Republic recognized the Catholic religion as the religion of its citizens and abandoned the idea of creating a new national religion under civil codes. In turn, the Pope recognized the French republic. The Emperor's goal was not to rechristianate France but to use its power for his power. In Liège, the effects began to take place almost immediately. The diocese of Liège was divided up and reorganized. Throughout Belgium, new bishops were elected, papal authority--a threat to Napoleon's centralization--was reduced, the superiority of civil law over religious law was affirmed, and the seizure of Church property by the State was confirmed. In compromise, clerics were paid by the State and

⁵⁰ H.W. Coker III. Triumph. The Power and the Glory of the Catholic Church. (Forum, Prima Publishing: California, 2001) 346-347.

⁵¹ Daniel-Rops, 236.

⁵² Socially, they instilled the compassion in bourgeois circles to attend to the needs of the poor.

⁵³ M. L'Abbé Baunard. Histoire de Madame Barat: Fondatrice de la Société du Sacré Coeur de Jésus 1779-1865. (Tome 1. Paris: Librairie Poussielgue Frères, 1876).

congregations were restored. The signing of the Concordat was a new beginning for the Catholic Church. The new vitality was felt as new seminaries opened, insisting on spiritual formation, piety, and devotion.⁵⁴

Even after the signing of the Concordat, however, Napoleon, did not get the pacification of the Belgian clergy as he had had in France, due in part that he was overcome with a land with 3 linguistic communities and traditions.⁵⁵ The general Vicar of Namur was leading the opposition. In many parishes, priests refused to acknowledge the French victories. Clandestine organizations began to form especially among bishops. Napoleon's proposed Organic Articles partly in place to diminish the Pope's authority mounted the resistance of the Pope's loyal supporters across Europe. Writers loyal to the Pope only strengthened the ultramontanists. Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821) was one such writer. An enthusiastic believer in the principle of authority, which the Revolution tried to destroy, he defended it everywhere in his works: in the State by extolling the monarchy, in the Church by exalting the privileges of the papacy, in the world by glorifying the rights and conduct of God. His most renowned work Du Pape 1818, develops a theocratic society by supporting the Pope, the representative of God on earth, as the supreme ruler. He promotes the Pope as the symbol of civilization, the supreme guide and judge, the conservationist of arts and sciences, the protector of freedoms.⁵⁶ More importantly all new congregations were devoted to the Pope and became the best agents of ultramontanism.⁵⁷ Loyalty to the Pope unified and strengthened the Church's position in Belgium.

At the beginning the 19th century, as a result of the destructive forces of the Revolution, the Belgian Catholic Church for the first time in history was faced with a crisis that did not come from

⁵⁴ Daniel-Rops, 174.

⁵⁵ French, Flemish and German.

⁵⁶ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09554a.htm>

⁵⁷ Daniel-Rops, 898.

within, but instead was threatened and contested by the revolutionary idea of liberalism.⁵⁸ It shook all societal structures; promoting economic endeavors without moral or religious turpitudes; advocating the freedom of individualism within the constraints of the law; permitting political freedom or religious neutrality. The many faces of liberalism threatened centuries of Catholic traditions, values and morals. However, the Church did not rest silent. Rather, it rose out of the ashes of the Revolution and became the master of morality in Belgium. To the economic liberalism, it responded with a social doctrine Rerum Novarum under Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903; appointed nuncio to Brussels in 1843 prior to becoming Pope), condemning all that impoverished and corrupted humanity and in turn valorized artisans and agriculture. Combating individualism, it celebrated the family upon which society forms and proposed a defined hierarchal structure for communities. To political liberalism, absent the utopic ideal of having all citizens under the sovereignty of the Pope, the Church pushed for respect towards their laws, judged to be superior to human law. To the intellectual and spiritual liberalism, the Church focused on its eternal Catholic Truths, evident by new dogmas of the Immaculate Conception (1854) and the pontifical infallibility (1870) in matters of doctrine and morals. Combating anti-religious rationalism, the Church focused on arming the clergy with rational theology and philosophy of the likes of Saint Thomas Aquinas.

In order to influence the political, economic and religious outcomes in their favor, the Church had to implement a restoration and a renewal. The restoration involved restoring suppressed Catholic traditions and monastic orders. To ensure a proper restoration Pope Pius IX (1846-1878) established a congregational body to oversee orders, to centralize and establish new reforms. Twenty years later, Pius IX published an encyclical Ubi primum detailing rules and regulation for religious orders.⁵⁹ The renewal involved a reform in its clergy. As “gold is purified by fire,” the suffering

⁵⁸ Étienne Fouilloux. “Intransigence catholique et <<monde moderne>> (19e – 20e siècles).” Paper presented during the Journée du centenaire in the Revue d'Histoire ecclésiastique. (Louvain-la-Neuve, 17 novembre 2000) 71-86.

⁵⁹ Anne-Dolorès Marcélis. “Femmes Cloitrées des Temps Contemporains. 1000 pages d’histoire de Carmélites et de Clarisses en Namurois.” (Vol. I-III. Diss.; Catholic University of Louvain, Department of History 2004) 557.

incurred by the Revolution, resulted in a Church that desired to become holy at all its levels. After the suppression of the Jesuits, the prominent defenders of the Catholic orthodoxy—who were also known as the “porte-plume du Pape,”⁶⁰ the goal was to armor the clergy with formal education in order to combat the evolving 19th century anticlerics. Bishop Zaepffel (1794-1802) believed that in formalizing the education of priests he would unite and strengthen the clergy. The restoration concentrated heavily on legitimizing the authority of the clergy in an effort to bring back the faithful, distanced from the revolution. As a result, seminaries were established pushing for exegesis and historical research.

Despite the restoration of religious orders and a reform of the clergy, the Church had to offer a visibility outside of its religious edifices. This visibility took place in the revitalization of parishes. The organization of parishes was a significant factor to the restoration, continuing the ritualistic traditions of pilgrimages, processions and festivals. For example, resisting the dechristianization process, parishes refused to give their birth, marriage, or death registers to the State, took charge of catechistical education and formed scout groups. Within parishes, pious movements arose such as devotions to the Sacred Heart of Mary and Jesus as well as parish festivals that honored its particular saint. It was in these customs that the traditional faith persisted.⁶¹ In order to be vigilant over the parishes, Liège Bishop Zaepffel recruited priests from the poor and instructed his priests to have direct contact with the faithful. Apostolate organizations were created such as La Société des Bonnes Oeuvres⁶² and Unions Chrétiennes to unite the young and strengthen their faith: “L’action apostolique du clergé et des congrégations religieuses allait en effet pendant plusieurs décennies s’exercer en collaboration étroite avec le gouvernement et les parlementaires

⁶⁰ Daniel-Rops, 271.

⁶¹ Claude Langlois. L’Église dans la rue. Les cérémonies extérieures du culte en France au XIX^e siècle, sous la direction de Paul D’Hollander. (Limoges: Pulim, 2001).

⁶² Gérard Cholvy Histoire des organisations et mouvements chrétiens de jeunesse en France (XIX^e-XX^e siècle). (Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 1999). 281.

catholiques, considérés de plus en plus comme une extension de l'Église...sur le terrain politique.”⁶³

It is at this time that the rapid expansion of parish youth fellowships seduced the young into a catholic socialism.⁶⁴

4. French defeat, Dutch control and Belgian independence

After the defeat of the French in 1814, part of Belgium was under Prussian control with the Liège diocese incorporated into the Netherlands under Guillaume I of Orange. Under the Dutch occupation, French speaking religious orders were granted more freedom and were divided into categories of service, teaching and prayer. But like the French, the Dutch underestimated the catholic roots of the Belgian people and their sympathy for village priests. Not trusting the Dutch protestant liberal king, Belgian Catholics and liberals, in a rare form of unity, unite to revolt on the night the opera “La Muette de Portici” performs recounting the 1647 Napolitain revolt against the Spanish. Waging on the support of Great Britain, Austria and France, independence was declared in August 1830 and Leopold I became the constitutional monarchy in power. Article 20 in the Belgian constitution of 1831 was very favorable towards religious congregations stating in that “Les Belges ont le droit de s’associer; ce droit ne peut être soumis à aucune mesure preventive.”⁶⁵ However, new congregations still faced financial restrictions with owning land and needed official recognition to establish a convent. This developed into big debates among Catholics as they argued that religious personnel, subjected to civil law, had the right to possess property as other citizens. Tricky negotiations ensued as founders of congregations had to be savvy enough to establish themselves as small businesses and persuade benefactors to donate their inheritance in the form of a foundation.

⁶³ Roger Aubert, Georges Sion, Carlo Bronne, et al. 150 ans de vie des Églises. (Bruxelles: Legrain Paul 1980), 29.

⁶⁴ Cholvy.

⁶⁵ Wynants, Les religieuses 63-64.

One solution was to write contracts called “tontines”⁶⁶ in order to divide their property between several people with added clauses forbidding any inheritance from family members.⁶⁷

B. Catholic restoration in Belgium

Restoration continued under Liège Bishop Corneille Van Bommel (1829-1852). His thoughts in his Exposé des vrais principes sur l'instruction primaire et secondaire, considérée dans ses rapports avec la religion (Liège 1839 and 1840)⁶⁸ defended religious education in order to diminish the ignorance of people. He restored the Catholic University of Louvain. He pushed for better formation of priests and accentuated the importance on their role to teach the faithful, especially during Sunday sermons. He had a direct role in reorganizing the Episcopal hierarchy of the Church in Belgium, insisting on regular meetings--of the diocesan synod, a practice going back to 13th century. He was in charge of erecting a catholic press to combat “mauvaises lectures,” as in “La Gazette de Liège.” He submitted himself under the pope, and to the dismay of liberals, reinforced relations between Church and State citing that “le gouvernement doit tout mettre en oeuvre en faveur des catholiques parce que ce sont eux qui font la nationalité belge.”⁶⁹ Bishop Théodore Alexis Montpellier (1852-1879) continues Bommel’s mission concentrating on teaching the laity. He restored pilgrimages permitting more contact with diocesans. Also loyal to the pope, he supports Pius IX proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854. He returned to roman rituals of liturgy and combined them with homilies condemning liberalist politics.

⁶⁶ A tontine is a type of investment plan in which the participants each own a portion. Upon the death of a participant, their share is redistributed among the remaining participants.

⁶⁷ The Carmelites of Charleroi lost all property due to a battle of inheritance and trust in late 19th century.

⁶⁸ Massaut, IV:9

⁶⁹ Massaut IV:9

By 1850, religious congregations in Liège increased ten fold compared with the start of the century.⁷⁰ The salvation of the Church rested in *woman* and with it came the feminization of piety. The significance of women as the principal transmitters of the faith is evident in the following quote by monsignor Bouvier, in Pierre Jean Corneille Debreyne's 1868 Essai de théologie morale considérée dans ses rapports avec la physiologie et la médecine:⁷¹

“Que l'on y fasse une sérieuse attention; qu'on ne s'aliène pas la femme par d'imprudentes rigueurs; la chose est d'une immense gravité. La génération naissante est entre les mains de la femme, l'avenir est à elle [...]. Si la femme nous échappe – le nous vise ses lecteurs prêtres -, avec elle tout peut disparaître et s'abîmer dans le gouffre de l'athéisme, croyance, morale et toute notre civilisation, parce que dès lors il n'y aura plus de principes de morale, plus de frein religieux, que dis-je! Peut-être plus de baptême. [...] Et alors le mal sera consommé et sans remède.”

This feminization of piety was also evident in numerous paintings throughout the 19th century displaying the increase use of Virgins, of Jeanne d'Arcs and Magdelenes. The immediate contact of woman with the Body of Christ depicted in paintings such as in La Descente de Croix by Chassériau, in Communion mystique de sainte Catherine of Bénouville, in Vierge à l'Hostie by Ingres, and in Mater Dolorosa of Flandrin⁷² reveals the influence of religious women's contact with the suffering. Books portrayed feminized angels. Specifically, the biographies of founders of new congregations depict this feminization in the names of congregations taking the word “Mary.” Congregations under her protection, consecrated days of the year to her and built sanctuaries for her. She was the model for sweetness, humility and obedience. Pelletier says “cette voix féminine qui, en la personne de Marie, se donne pour interlocuteurs et enseigne des humbles, représente certainement une forte protestation contre la dureté d'une société de sensibilité et de projets très masculins.”⁷³ 18th century

⁷⁰ See André Thion. “Les religieuses en Belgique du XVIIIe au XXe siècle approche statistique.” Revue d'Histoire Religieuse du Brabant Wallon. (T.1 1987 Quatrième Trimestre n 4. 1976).

⁷¹ Pierre Jean Corneille Debreyne. Essai sur la théologie morale, considérée dans ses rapports avec la physiologie et la médecine. Ouvrage spécialement destiné au clergé. 5^e édition, revue, corrigée et notablement augmentée in-12. Paris: Librairie Poussielgue Frères, rue Cassette, 27, 1868.

⁷² Jacques LeGoff and René Rémond. Histoire de la France religieuse. (Éditions du Seuil: Paris, 2001) 286.

⁷³ Anne-Marie Pelletier. Le christianisme et les femmes. Vingt siècles d'histoire. (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2001) 154.

Marian texts were republished in massive quantities such as the 18 editions of Jesuit Dionisi's Il mese di Maria, Alphonse de Liguori's Glorie di Marie or Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort's Traité de la vraie devotion à la Sainte Vierge.⁷⁴ The dogma of the Immaculate Conception proclaimed in 1854 by Pius IX and the significant Marian apparitions throughout the 19th century signified that Mother Mary was the new heroine for the Church, which popularized the privileged importance of women. Emulating the Virgin Mary, religious founders of the 19th century in Liège became the mediatrixes between the 'fallen' world and God.

The recatholicization of Belgium was reinforced by the rise of the industrial secular society. The Church offered a sense of eternal and sacred in a world of greed and materialism. Pius IX's 1864 encyclical Syllabus of Errors strengthened the papacy by adopting a policy of intransigence against the direction of modernity, yet inflamed the liberals. Intense industrial development followed throughout Belgium resulting in the accruing wealth of the bourgeoisie and the impoverishment of the workers. Political opponents, Catholics and liberals held conferences to address the social effects of industrialization with the publication of two opposing documents regarding social issues; Karl Marx's The Capital and Pope Leo XIII's 1891 Rerum Novarum. The encyclical Rerum Novarum introduced a new social Christianity that addressed the plight of the proletariat of the industrial revolution. It defended the workers whose salary did not meet their needs and asked for the intervention of the State to divide resources equally to help and protect workers. Following the encyclical, Bishop of Liege Victor-Joseph Doutreloux (1879-1901) published a pastoral letter asking for Catholic unity in this cause.

The "guerre scolaire" during the economic recession of 1875-1897 only deepened the political divide between Catholics and liberals. The war began with the liberals wanting to eliminate ecclesiastic authority over primary and secondary schools. Yet the rising clerical power had strong influences in the communities who were electing its officials. Parish committees were directly involved in the hiring of "sincerely pious" and practicing Catholics under the obedience of local

⁷⁴ Pelletier 151-152.

clergy and a rivalry began between catholic and public schools. The year 1884 is a turning point for Belgian Catholics. Catholic action in Belgium had become so strong that atheists did not dare rebel for fear of being marginalized.⁷⁵ In charge of the country, public schools were closed one after another and Catholic religion and ethics was taught in schools without any major obstacle.⁷⁶ Religious education kept at bay revolutionary upheavals, controlled the ideologies in anticlerical communities and favored the increase numbers of private schools which in turn molded its people in Christian ideologies.

Nevertheless, the battle was heated between the clerical strongholds who held the power in Belgium and the liberals seeking to overturn this power. Newspaper satirical cartoons⁷⁷ became the medium in which each side either defended its position or attacked the opposing side. According to Anne Morelli in her article, “Les thèmes de la caricature anticléricale en Belgique au XIXe siècle,” there was not a neutral press during the 19th century. Morelli explains that each provincial city had at least four newspapers representing the two opposing sides but may have also included very specific philosophies such as the ultramontane Catholic and the liberal Catholic or the liberal progressive and the doctrinal liberal. Several anticlerical newspapers included: Crocodile (1853-1858), L’Espiègle (1864-1868), Le Rasoir (1869-1880), La Bombe (1878-1887), Polichinelle du Vatican (1880). The anticlerical/liberal strategy entailed putting their philosophy at the forefront and mixing it with the denigration of the Church. The anticlerical themes⁷⁸ used included: 1) portraying the clergy with the vices of gluttony, greed, wealth, lack of chastity, overindulgence and pedophilia, 2) attacking the power of the Pope and his resistance to modernity to which Pius IX was a prominent target after the publication of his 1864 Syllabus of Errors, 3) ridiculing the numerous avouched 19th century miracles

⁷⁵ Massaut.

⁷⁶ Wynants studies the case in Soeurs de la Providence de Champion.

⁷⁷ See Laurence van Ypersele, “La caricature catholique belge de la Belle Époque” and Anne Morelli, “Les thèmes de la caricature anticléricale en Belgique au XIXe siècle.” Both articles are in De qui se moque-t-on? Caricature d’hier et d’aujourd’hui, de Rops à Kroll. (Musée Royal de Mariemont, 2001).

⁷⁸ Morelli 15-16

by attacking the credibility of the faithful, 4) portraying the education by the clergy and religious sisters during the “guerre scolaire” as dangerous to the moral and physical health of children insinuating the pedophilic nature of these men and women 5) mocking saints and the dogma of the Immaculate Conception and 6) contesting the alliance of the Church with the government because it was seen as restricting the freedoms of the Belgians. Below are three examples:

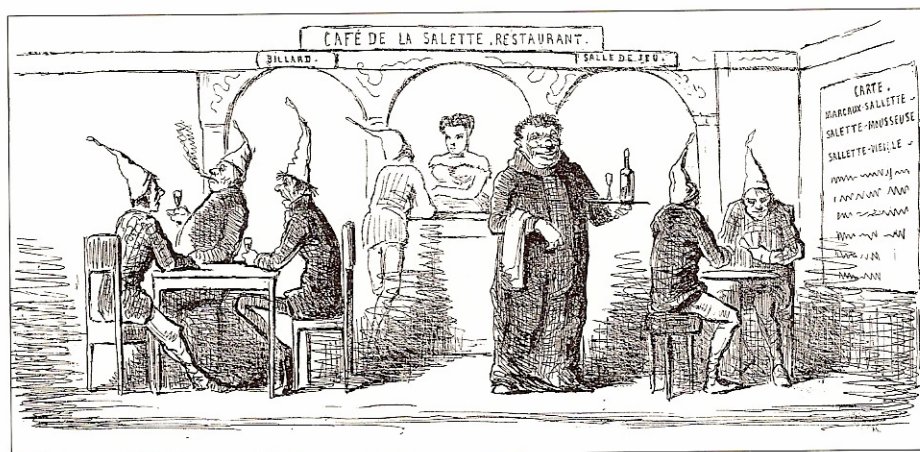


Figure 1.4 Anti-clerical caricature ridiculing the 19th century apparition of La Salette. In Le Crocodile, October 22, 1854.⁷⁹



Figure 1.5 Anti-clerical caricature against the recatholicization efforts in Catholic education. Le Rasoir June 12 1875.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Morelli 16.

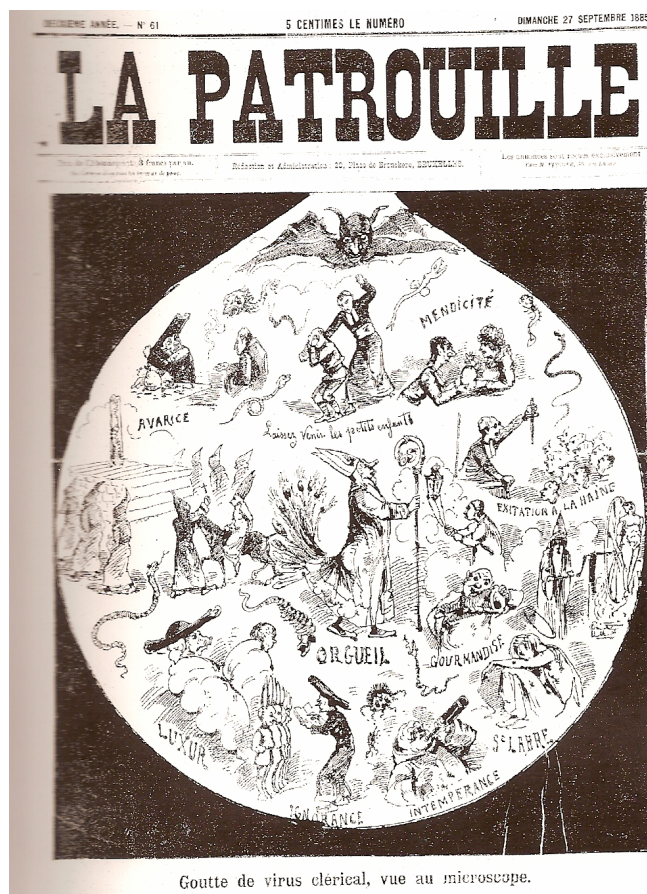


Figure 1.6 Anti-clerical caricature mocking all the vices of clergy in the newspaper *La Patrouille*, September 27, 1885.⁸¹

The notion of Belgian identity becomes significant in the debates for the ‘conversion’ to either camp. For example the Belgian lion, a national symbol represented on Belgium’s coat of arms, is domesticated and muzzled by a priest in *Les Guêpes Gauloises* (August 31 1884).⁸² On the opposing side, evident in the names of the Catholic press such as *Le Tirailleur* (1881-1891), *Le Patriote illustré* (1885-1895), *Le Petit Belge* (1895-1913), Catholic identity was also intertwined with Belgian identity. Politically, the clerical position established themselves as the guarantor of peace and stability and

⁸⁰ Morelli 20.

⁸¹ Morelli, 17.

⁸² Morelli 23.

portrayed the liberals as advocates of liberalism, i.e. evil. Their form was meant to ridicule⁸³ their adversary by depictions of physical deformations alluding to the “darkness of his soul,” infantilizing him, rendering him effeminate, or reducing him to an animal. Contrasting the liberals who used the podium of satirical caricature to advance their ideas, the Church hardly ever discussed Catholic values because they were considered eternal and understood. This stems from the remarkable legitimacy the Church had established in the first half of the 19th century. In ridiculing and denigrating the adversary with their own inconsistencies and internal arguments, the transparent values illuminated the Church as promoters of good, order and unity in Belgium. Within this environment the religious biographies inherited some of the same type of rhetoric.

Catholic literature flourished as writers participated in the renewal and “se tournèrent vers les vérités chrétiennes.”⁸⁴ During the course of the 19th century, a Catholic intellectual elite formed in order to defend the faith and combat the philosophers and promoters of the Enlightenment, who had hopes of “écraser l’infame.”⁸⁵ To the attacks against the faith, came newspapers, journals, letters, pamphlets, brochures, texts, novels, for the truth in matters of Church history and doctrine.⁸⁶ Counter-revolutionary thinkers produced influential writings to strengthen the religious reforms and restoration. Writers such as Louis de Bonald and Jacques de Maistre (1753-1821)⁸⁷ contributed greatly to the legitimacy of the Church, reacting against the rationalist reductionism of the Enlightenment philosophers. The aim was to justify the role of the Church, to give reasons of confidence to the people, and to change the unbelievers with a type of rhetoric that Daniel-Rops (Henry Petiot) calls an “apologétique doctrinale et dogmatique à la Bossuet; apologétique

⁸³ Ypersele 27-42.

⁸⁴ Daniel-Rops, 291.

⁸⁵ Daniel-Rops 571.

⁸⁶ Daniel-Rops 607.

⁸⁷ Louis de Bonald’s 1796 Théorie du pouvoir politique et religieux exalted religion as fundamental to society (Ormières, 55).

psychologique et mystique à la Pascal.”⁸⁸ Consequently, apologetics became a radiant discipline. Chateaubriand’s Le Génie du Christianisme provided a new orientation for apologetics as he combined the defense of the faith with esthetic and sentimental imagery. Opposing the traditional apologetic theological text, his triumph rested in evoking the senses by detailing Catholic traditions, processions, clothing, etc. and calling upon the faithful to use their hearts to discernment. This romantic apologetics influenced the works of Belgian redemptorist Victor Deschamps, archbishop of Malines (1810-1883) Entretiens sur la démonstration catholique de la révélation chrétienne and Lettres contre les antichrists. Also, one of the most well known apologetic journal-- the Revue Etudes (1856-present) stemmed from this genre. Evolving spiritual needs demanded more intellectual understanding of the faith resulting for example in Lacordaire’s influential apologetic series of Conférence de Notre-Dame 1835, which opened a forum on history, science, morality and Church doctrine.⁸⁹ Countess de Ségur’s (1799-1874) widely popular children’s books helped invigorate the faith by writing stories that combined humor, realism and catechism. There was also a search in the Walloonian and Flemish cultures for “l’âme belge.”

By the end of the 19th century the Belgian clergy was fully disciplined, educated and had regained legitimacy. The bishops became the protectors against revolutionary ideas and promoted the traditional symbolic gestures of faith such as festivals, devotions, and pilgrimages of the faithful. With more personal involvement with the laity, “les prêtres deviendraient à la fois instituteurs et inspecteurs scolaires, assistants sociaux, conseillers agricoles [...]”⁹⁰ Clergymen also participated in the movement of ideas and progress culminating in 1900 with the first issue of the journal Revue d’Histoire ecclésiastique. Influenced by the changing philosophical ideas, the Revue was an intellectual engagement giving 1) a forum for the work of seminarians at the University of Louvain, 2) an ordered forum for publications on church history, and 3) a place for religious scholarly

⁸⁸ Daniel-Rops 615.

⁸⁹ Daniel-Rops 610.

⁹⁰ Massaut III: 30.

debate.⁹¹ The Church had learned to evolve, adapt and participate in the progress of ideas acknowledging the relationship between faith and science.

Throughout the 19th century, the politics of conversion were at work between literature and faith. Le Génie du Christianisme by Chateaubriand contributed immensely in forming the consciousness of the people as a fervent defender of religion. Influential writers such as Lamennais called for the unity amongst Catholics and promoted their liberty in his Progrès de la révolution et de la guerre contre l'Église. Particularly influential was his newspaper L'Avenir promoting the freedom of religion and calling for the response of the church against liberalism.⁹² Like Bonald and de Maistre, Lamennais advocated for the restoration of one authority, in his 1825 La religion considérée dans ses rapports avec l'ordre politique et civil. The pre-19th century 'reasoned' theological writings did not connect much with the laity. Instead, the component of emotions, passions, and devotions were intertwined to a successful politic of conversion. As a result, the most profound change in religious rhetoric came from the promotion for an interior spiritual renewal mixing mysticism with rigid theories for the renewal of the soul and Christianity.⁹³ Accordingly, the "romanisation" of the 'lives' of religious women will promote a utopic Church with a clear sense of identity, coherence and unchanging in its doctrines and devotional practices.

The apologetic tone of the 19th century religious biographical writers combined with hagiographical elements (references of tradition and glorious past) implied a restorative mindset. As "livres de piété," religious biographies quickly became devotional literature with a goal of interior purification.⁹⁴ This was first achieved by Congregations consecrating themselves to the souls of

⁹¹ "New periodicals for new ideas. On the birth of the *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique*." Revue d'Histoire ecclésiastique (April-June 2000).

⁹² Ormières, 72.

⁹³ Daniel-Rops, 246-247.

⁹⁴ Philippe Martin studies the evolution of the "livre de piété" and its direct consequences on the re-edition of devotional/pious literature during the rupture of Enlightenment and Revolution

purgatory.⁹⁵ The significance of the purgatory theme results directly from events such as the Terror during the Revolution, the pandemic cases of tuberculosis during the Empire Years and the outbreak of cholera in 1845 killing 45,000 Belgians.⁹⁶ Furthermore, the source of literary religious restoration came from the martyrs of the Terror (1793-1794) and the heroism of its victims who refused to abandon their faith. Texts of martyrs defending their faith became a cause of the Church. For example Gertrude von Le Fort's 1794 work, Carmelites de Compiègne,⁹⁷ was used as a symbol in future Belgian religious biographical prefaces. Other examples include the martyrs, Ursulines of Valenciennes and the Filles de Charité d'Arras.

The strategies of legitimacy and success had been brought in part by the necessary collaboration of religious biographical writing. The notion of collaboration between priest and nun is not new as demonstrated by 17th century couples Jeanne de Chantal and Saint François de Sales in the creation of the Visitation Order and many others. However, what makes this biographical study intriguing is the degree of independence the clergy authorizes about the image of the nun. Within a very strategically controlled writing, the priest supports the new focus on religious women as keepers, restorers, promoters and finally as saviors of the faith. Yet the symbolic ecclesiastic hierarchy did not necessarily translate into a dominator/dominated relation.⁹⁸ Within this control, the biographies reflect an insight to an "histoire d'une mentalité." In other words, the attitudes that were reflected in Belgian catholic milieux regarding the "bonne religieuse," or the "sainte fondatrice" illuminate much autonomy. Many women found their values and vocations in these inspirational texts.

The environment was ripe for congregations to flourish. This research on Belgian religious biographies uncovers the changes in religious rhetoric, as many congregations were of feminine

⁹⁵ Guillaume Cuchet, "La crise théologique du Purgatoire., 1850-1950." dans Revue d'Histoire et l'Église de France, (86 2000) 333-353.

⁹⁶ Jo Gérard, Marie-Anne Paridaens, and Richard Boijen. La Belgique 1830-1980. (Meddens: Bruxelles, 1979).

⁹⁷ Daniel-Rops, 77.

⁹⁸ Marcélis, 561.

inspiration. Even with a total renunciation of self, religious life offered an affirmation of utility to society by aiding the helpless and caring for the education of the young. As “un vecteur de mobilisation des élites catholiques,”⁹⁹ the biographies initiated a religious elite who brought the Catholic Church to a new legitimacy and a strong Belgian identity.

⁹⁹ Wynants, Les religieuses 252.

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CHAPTER 2

NUN'S THE WORD: RE-VISIONING THE BELGIAN FEMALE ROLE IN SALVATION

I. INTRODUCTION

19th century republished medieval hagiographies served as a point of reference to jump start the recatholicization of Belgium after the Revolution. The Belgian female saint, particularly religious nuns, became the 'model' not only for religious vocations but also for proliferate religious biographical writing of nuns during the 19th century. As 'livres de piété', these hagiographies codified the spiritual renaissance and contributed immensely to the feminization of piety. Furthermore, the success of specific feminine hagiographies helped stir Belgian nationalism by establishing a specific Belgian identity.

Thus, the title *Nun's the Word*, refers to the national and spiritual salvation of the Church being vested in feminine hands, as model nuns were not only receptacles of the *Word* but also transmitters of this *Word*. Ecclesiastic authors developed 'mum' rhetorical strategies, in which the *words* of nuns direct an authoritative representation of the nun as keepers, restorers, promoters and finally as saviors of the faith. The rhetorical strategies of legitimacy and success also supported the new focus of religious women participating in the dialogue of the Enlightenment. The 'lives of nuns' became a forum of competitive erudition in which the Enlightenment philosophy was refuted and replaced with an effective 'enlightened' spiritual rhetoric or successful politic of conversion. I will examine the layers of meaning of *the Word* in explaining an effort to recatholicize the people of Belgium. For the words to be persuasive, hagiographies intertwined 19th century thematic and systematic constructs of writing or a 'sentimentalisation' of devotion and faith. Accordingly, the

romanticism of the 'lives' of religious women promoted a utopic Church with a clear sense of identity, coherence and unchanging in its doctrines and devotional practices. By promoting the nun's 'visibility' in disseminated hagiographies, the Church's visibility was enhanced. These texts demonstrate through the image and words of religious women the origins of the feminization of piety in Belgium.

II. THE BELGIAN SOUL: CONSTRUCTING A BELGIAN IDENTITY

The dechristianization that took place in Belgium as a result of the French Revolution forced the Catholic Church to redefine its vision in order to influence the political, economic, and religious outcomes in their favor. The vision was to restore authority of the Church within society by promoting a visibility outside its edifices. The new tactic involved restoring centuries of Catholic heritage and combining it with a specific Belgian identity. By seeking a unified people, it was much easier to affirm a faith, so the 'flock' was not dispersed.

Religion organizes social identities, gender identities, cultural identity as well as setting in place political and economic interests.¹⁰⁰ In Belgium, an influential proponent for this organization came in the form of hagiographical writing. Hagiographies were used as a resource to recatholicize by strengthening devotion, popularize a feast day, edify, defend the rights of a sanctuary, or support the process of a canonization. *Recatholicizing*, implies that the readers of the spiritual biographies were mostly Catholic. Therefore, the purpose of these texts was not meant to convert but instead to strengthen the losing faith. The publications of hagiographies (1787-1870) also served to unite the Catholic people by inspiring nationalist sentiments. Although the year 1830 represented a victory of independence for Belgium, its nation was still fragile prey to bigger nations and needed strength and unity so as not to be conquered once again. Considering this, it seems significant that most hagiographies were published within 40 years of the independence of Belgium during which its nationhood was still in its infant stages.

The new muse for Catholic restoration was the religious woman. Recatholicization by feminizing piety in 19th century Belgium began by rediscovering medieval Belgian religious traditions. The Middle Ages represented the golden era in which Catholicism prevailed throughout the Belgian territory. Chanoine Leclercq, in studying this medieval period, stated that this territory

¹⁰⁰ Danièle, Hervieu-Léger. Le Pèlerin et le Converti. La religion en mouvement. (Flammarion, 1999) 121.

was recognized as one of the most Christian in Europe where reigned “l’expression la plus pure.” The search for purity in faith was a necessity after revolutionary dechristianization. Furthermore, medieval saints were chosen to recall Belgium’s religious heritage because it was the only time Belgium produced women saints before the 19th century. There were no saints after the 14th century in Belgium for one reason: The process of medieval canonization by popular voice was rejected. ‘Modern devotion’ consisted of more methodical and practical implications of canonization as in the cases of Saint Teresa of Avila. Although Belgium produced 56 female saints between the 7th -12th centuries,¹⁰¹ 10 lives were republished in quantity.¹⁰² There appears to be a strategy involved in republishing the lives of specific saints. With fewer hagiographies republished, more attention was given to popularize the saint in order for her to become well identified and well known. The most popular saints derive from the 11th -13th centuries. Although this time period represents a diminution of female saints as compared to the 7th -8th century, this did not imply a lack of religious spirituality. On the contrary, it displayed a fervent spiritual atmosphere as less ‘model’ saints were needed. Using the theory that the increased medieval production of saintly “models” correlated with a loss in religious fervence, I opine that the massive production of ‘saintly’ women in the 19th century suggests that the need to ‘recatholicize’ was also initiated with literary religious texts.

Specific hagiographies were republished in order to strengthen Catholic and Belgian identity. Seven republished hagiographies were studied in depth spanning the 19th century; Sainte Lutgarde¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Between the 7th-8th century out of 65 saints, 24 were women. Between the 8th-11th century, a slight decrease occurs with 20 women saints and then a definite decrease in the 11th and 12th centuries to 12 women. Chanoine Jacques Leclercq, Saints de Belgique (Bruxelles: Editions de la Cité Chrétienne, 1942) 26.

¹⁰² This opinion is based on the hagiographies found in 2006 in convents, monasteries and libraries. Further study is needed to conclude the publication ratio between male and female Belgian saints. Sainte Aléna, Sainte Gertrude, Sainte Waudru, Sainte Lutgarde, Sainte Marie de Nivelles (Oignies), Sainte Julienne, Sainte Christine, Sainte Philomène, Sainte Cécile, and Sainte Eve.

¹⁰³ Sainte Lutgarde (1182-1246) although died in Aywiers near Brussels, her biography portrays her as a universal saint for the country of Belgium and not for one particular city (perhaps this was due to its pre-revolutionary publication date?). Though prioress of Benedictine abbey in Tongres, she later became a Cistercienne in Aywiers because she desired more austerity. She inspired a ‘following’ and spent time studying scripture.

(1787), Sainte Philomène¹⁰⁴ (1835), Sainte Aléna¹⁰⁵ (1838), Sainte Waudru¹⁰⁶ (1838), Sainte Julienne¹⁰⁷ (1846), Sainte Gertrude¹⁰⁸ (1868), and Sainte Marie d'Oignies¹⁰⁹ (n.d.; after 1888). I use the word 'republished' because at first glance the texts give the illusion they are simply transcribed or translated texts from original medieval manuscripts. However, the use of the word 'republished' is synonymous with 'reedited' because upon closer examination the hagiographies reveal 19th century constructs of language, form, style and themes.

¹⁰⁴ Sainte Philomène (early Christian) is known as *the* saint of the 19th century and was named the "Thaumaturga of the Nineteenth Century" in 1837 by Pope Gregory XVI. She is not a Belgian saint but she was promulgated in Belgium. She became known simply because her remains were found in 1802 in a catacomb in Italy, presumed as an early Christian martyr. Rome's recognition of her saintly character represented an act unprecedented in the history of Catholicism because her veneration rested solely on her intercession in miracles such as the cure of Pope Pius IX. There is little historical documentation about her. In 1849, she was named patroness of the Children of Mary and a confraternity was approved by Pope Leo XIII.

¹⁰⁵ Sainte Aléna (7th century) from Dilbeek, near Brussels, was not venerated as a saint before the 12th century and is the only saint from pagan parents. She was killed by her father's guards on her way to Mass. She is a 'true' martyr in the sense that she was killed because of her beliefs. She is the patron saint for the blind.

¹⁰⁶ Sainte Waudru (7th century) is the patron of Mons and from a family of saints. After marriage and four children, she was known for founding the convent of Saint Waudru in Mons around which grew the town of Mons. She dedicates her life to good works.

¹⁰⁷ Sainte Julienne (1193-1258) was placed as a young child in the convent of Mont-Cornillon in Liège. She later resided in the same convent by joining the Premonstratensian Order and soon after became the Superioress. She received a vision from God of a host in the sky communicating to her that the Church was missing a feast day that venerated the Blessed Sacrament. In her efforts to promote a new feast day, she was met with great opposition by the general superior, Roger who mounted opposition against her. She was forced to flee the convent. She returned to the convent due to the help of the Bishop of Liège who defended her reputation, only to flee once more from additional threats. She eventually settled in Fosses where she lived as a recluse. Soon after her death with the help of her friend Saint Ève, the Feast of Corpus Christi was instituted for the universal Church.

¹⁰⁸ Sainte Gertrude (626-659) also from a family of saints, is the patron saint of Nivelles and of travelers. She had a strong intellect and was known to study scripture. She became abbess of the Benedictine monastery of Nivelles that her mother had built. With inherited land she also built the monastery of Fosses. She was instrumental in helping Saint Ultan in his evangelization. Her age at death 33, predicted before it happened, was significant as it was also the age of the Lord at His death.

¹⁰⁹ Sainte Marie d'Oignies (1177-1213) from Nivelles was the most well known Belgian saint due to her infamous biographer, French theologian Jacques de Vitry. After her marriage, she lived chastely with her husband and convinced him of her religious calling to live as a beguine in Oignies to care for lepers. She had a strong public influence and many sought her advice. She started a community in Nivelles near the Augustinian monastery in Oignies. She convinced Vitry who later became a French cardinal to stay at monastery and taught him how to preach in public. Her relics were connected to the city where she was buried, in Oignies, and to the city in which she was born, Nivelles. Her relics were transferred to the church of Saint Nicholas at Nivelles in 1817.

Departing from the original manuscripts, the hagiographies were promoted as ‘history texts’ with much attention to detail particularly in bibliographic references. These bibliographic details distinguished the 19th century hagiographies as works of erudition from the oral source of the medieval hagiographies, some considered legends. The significance of a scholarly work played a role into the nationhood of Belgium. A nation is recognized in the international community by what it has written--“La littérature est le couronnement de tout édifice national.”¹¹⁰ Newly independent in 1830, Belgium necessitated a rich literary production. But more importantly, as a new country, Belgium had to be unified in one spirit in order to stand strong against its neighbors. Religious literature was instrumental in creating this unity by recalling the Belgian soul of faith and its heritage.

¹¹⁰ Jean-Louis Ormières. Politique et religion en France. (Bruxelles: Éditions Complexe, 2002) 16.

III. THE BELGIAN SAINT

Why the promotion of medieval Belgian saints and not the hagiographies of famous saints such as Saint Teresa of Avila or Saint Catherine of Siena? For recatholicization to be effective in a country that despised foreign rule, attachment to foreign saints would not be as powerful. Rather, recalling the symbols of Catholicism within Belgium maintained “la conservation de la Foi,”¹¹¹ in other words recatholicizing or strengthening the existing faith. Consequently, establishing a national appurtenance obliged a search of a heroine that defined the traits, characteristics, and virtues of a specific Belgian Catholic identity.¹¹²

The prominent distinction of the Belgian saint from saints of other countries may be that their example was one of attainable sainthood: “Oui, tous, nous pouvons et nous devons devenir des saints [...]. Ils ont combattu; combattons comme eux. Ils ont triomphé; triomphons comme eux [...]. O Dieu, [...] régné sur nos esprits par la foi [...].”¹¹³ Leclercq says of mystics that they “portent parfois un caractère de simplicité familière, où on serait porté à trouver quelque chose qui se rattache à l’esprit national, si une admirable familiarité divine ne se retrouvait chez les mystiques de tous pays.”¹¹⁴ Belgium was a land of simplicity with piety described as sweet and noble not seeking international acclaim.

¹¹¹ Souvenir de la Jubilé de Sainte Gertrude (1868). La Vie et les miracles de Sainte Gertrude, abbesse. Patronne et protectrice de Nivelles (Nivelles: Auguste Despret 1868) 64.

¹¹² The development of nationalism in all countries of Europe leads to a search of a hero that displays specific characteristics of the new nation state. These figures were often reinvented as well as their national appurtenance. As a result, the narrative of these figures did not reflect their time. Rather, the agenda was privileged and the story was inserted to enhance it. For example: Although Jeanne d’Arc was promoted as a French patriot in the 19th century, she came from Lorraine a non-French province in the 15th century. The same is the case for Begium saints.

¹¹³ Rayée, Abbé Th. Vie de Sainte Marie de Nivelles dites d’Oignies. Ch. Guignarde: Nivelles, s.d. (after 1888) 100.

¹¹⁴ Leclercq 129.

Medieval Belgian saints were generally from Christian families, except for Sainte Aléna, so there was no fight for religious freedom.¹¹⁵ They were not authentic martyrs.¹¹⁶ One was called a martyr in medieval Belgium simply by being a good Christian and killed for a good cause. The death did not necessarily result from being a witness of Christ but simply as a victim of criminals. Thus, their tragic death gained popular attention.¹¹⁷ As a result religious passion did not resolve in death because it was not a source of conflict.¹¹⁸ Religious vocation seemed natural, not exalted, but “calm, serious and deliberated.”¹¹⁹ The renouncement to a beguine way of life was no more romantic than other vocations. The desire for a life of contemplation was not exceptional but could easily be explained by the prominence of medieval Belgian monasteries. The medieval Belgian saint came from the image of a happy family; “[...] ils furent élevés dans le palais de leurs parents, qui était l’asile de l’innocence et une école de piété [...]”¹²⁰ Although many famous saints also came from good families as Saint Teresa of Avila and Saint Catherine of Siena, the distinguishing trait in Belgian hagiographies was the lack of familial rupture;¹²¹ i.e. rebellion against parents’ wishes, often regarding marriage.

When religious freedom was wanted, persistence and patience, however were sometimes needed as in the case of Sainte Marie d’Oignies and Sainte Yvette de Huy¹²². Although they both felt a calling for religious life, they agreed to marry out of respect and obedience for their parents. Sainte Marie d’Oignies later converts her husband and persuaded him to allow her to live as a beguine near

¹¹⁵ Except for Ide de Nivelles who flees from family to become a béguine.

¹¹⁶ Saint Aléna was the exception.

¹¹⁷ Saint Gudule did not have tragic death, Saint Godelieve was not a victim.

¹¹⁸ Leclercq 92.

¹¹⁹ Leclercq 147.

¹²⁰ Sainte Gertrude 2.

¹²¹ Leclercq 148.

¹²² Saint Yvette de Huy, upon the death of her husband, converts her father and convinces him to allow her to live as a recluse.

the monastery of Oignies. There were no dynastic dramas, assassinations,¹²³ or excommunications. Violence was not systemic but depicted as random acts.¹²⁴ The moderation in “moeurs” was representative of a pacified people.¹²⁵ Mortification was also in moderation. There was no flesh ripped, no rolling in thorns or plunging in icy waters.¹²⁶ For example medieval author Jacques de Vitry of Saint Marie d’Oignies explained that severe penance consisted of eating dried bread crusts, or dried fruits.¹²⁷ There was once a fast for 3 years on bread and water and one fast for 8-10 days. These details of course, seem excessive today but not for saints representative of medieval times. Other penances were represented in modest dress or reduced sleep. No Belgian saint displayed severe austerity:¹²⁸ “Comme les évêques le disaient à Vulfilaicus, les excès d’austérité ne s’accomodent pas <<de ce climat>>.”¹²⁹ When austerity of poverty was concerned, there was even debate as to whether this could be interpreted as spiritual poverty rather than material poverty. For example, Sainte Julienne did not claim her dowry after leaving the monastery of Mont de Cornillon but neither does she refuse material help from the abbess of Namur. In most cases except for Sainte Marie d’Oignies, there was no radical abandonment of property. Miracles were simplified. For example, Marie d’Oignies healed the sick just by touching; proof of her extraordinary power, common to all saints (and thaumaturge kings).¹³⁰ There is no mention that her desire was to heal them or that she blessed them or that she prayed for their healing but that she just touched them.

¹²³ Except for Saint Godelieve

¹²⁴ Leclercq 167.

¹²⁵ Leclercq 168.

¹²⁶ Leclercq 168-169.

¹²⁷ Leclercq 169.

¹²⁸ This is arguable for Christine l’Admirable however there were doubts as to her sanity.

¹²⁹ Rayée (Sainte Marie d’Oignies) 170.

¹³⁰ Leclercq 178. See also Marc Bloch Les Rois Thaumaturges (Istra, Strasbourg and Paris; Oxford University Press, London, 1924).

Saintly virtue, therefore, was reasonable! Just as the land is firm and flat leaving no places for avalanches or storms, so were the people moderated and not wanting to out prove one's neighbor. There were no violent reactions against their nature, i.e. mortification, in their passions; i.e. in vocations, or in their milieu;¹³¹ what 19th century clerical authors claim who are not inclined to relay excesses of mysticism or mortification, notably feminine. There appears to be a concerted effort to create a toned down image of the saints, denying what was known of the practices of mysticism and mortifications in medieval times. In describing saints, authors portrayed them as loyal, honest and dutiful with no ambition.¹³² This simplicity of saints inspired trust with the reader. They displayed simplicity in their exterior image, as in Sainte Marie d'Oignies: "Son regard, sa démarche, toutes ses manières ne respiraient que l'aimable simplicité [...] elle portait le vêtement noir qu'on avait coutume de porter dans le Brabant."¹³³ Written after 1888, the hagiography of Marie d'Oignies recatholicizes by offering an image of a "moderated" Catholicism; an ambition of the 19th century Church. Too much distinction or intellect could be construed as selfish and prideful and could hurt the cult. In Saint Gertrude: "La jeune vierge, disent des auteurs, avait une grande continence et elle devançait son âge par la maturité de sa raison, la gravité de ses mœurs et la modération de ses discours."¹³⁴ Even in the manner in which they spoke was simple. Sainte Marie d'Oignies' author incarnated the Belgian spirit of simplicity as he ridiculed 19th century fashion: "Mais que dire de ces toilettes ridicules, de ces costumes indécents, de ces habits d'un prix insensé!" He intended to persuade the reader to choose a life of simplicity over a life of luxury in a desire to morally reform Belgium in the present time. The past and the story of the saint's life were rewritten, consciously or not, on behalf of the author: "Chacun gémit actuellement sur le luxe effréné, qui est une plaie de

¹³¹ Leclercq 339.

¹³² Leclercq 178.

¹³³ Rayée (Sainte Marie d'Oignies) 45.

¹³⁴ Sainte Gertrude 6.

notre société; mais personne ne fait efforts pour arrêter le mal qui nous mine. Le luxe ruine les familles [...]. Oh! suivons l'exemple de notre patronne; fuyons les dépenses inutiles [...]."¹³⁵

Perhaps the reason there were no canonizations after the 14th century was not only due to stricter canon laws but because the Belgian people did not seek "grandeur" among their saints. In Saint Gertrude:

"Alors, suivie de son clergé et d'une foule de peuple, sans être retenue par la timidité de son sexe, sans s'arrêter à des considérations de respect humain, l'héroïque fille de Pepin devance la colonne (de lumière) et s'élance rapidement vers la forêt. Elle y pénètre la première, se fraie de ses tendres mains un chemin à travers les broussailles et les fourrés épais, et à force d'efforts et de travail elle atteint enfin le but désiré de ses recherches."¹³⁶

The heroine still displayed feminine qualities with her "tendres mains." But more importantly her status of heroine is obtained through work, in other words, her efforts. She wasn't simply born a saint. Promoting saints that exemplify more the characteristics and faults of the common Christian allowed a relatable experience with the reader, for the saints were not superhuman. For example, Sainte Marie d'Oignies would flee to the countryside so as not to be noticed but at each time, friends would bring her back, preventing her from becoming a saint, keeping her within the limits of ordinary virtue.¹³⁷ Yet she exerted her influence by *stimulating* an entire population which was more convincing than individual sainthood attained for example by great fasts and hours of mystical ecstasies. The greatness in 19th hagiographies did not lie with the 'saintly' example per se but by the love and commonality they inspired. Recatholization efforts therefore begin with promoting attainable reproduction of religious examples.

The medieval conception of saints was not so much an examination of one's 'saintly' life but a manifestation of God's will after death. Miracles performed, particularly after death, determined the saint in medieval times signifying perhaps that miracles transform faith more rapidly than one's

¹³⁵ Rayée (Sainte Marie d'Oignies) 47.

¹³⁶ Sainte Gertrude 15.

¹³⁷ Leclercq 203.

good works. The authors in renewing the devotion to these saints gave the hope that miracles could operate in individual lives. However, the 19th century religious biography, modeled after these republished hagiographies departed from these texts in that they celebrated the *life* of the nun and not the death.

Every Belgian medieval saint was ‘canonized’ by popular devotion and each hagiography was representative of the nation’s culture:

“Nous prévenons le lecteur que si édifiante qu’elle soit, cette histoire n’a pas les caractères d’authenticité requis pour prendre rang parmi les miracles proprement dits; il faut n’y voir que l’expression de la confiance et du sentiment populaires à l’égard de Sainte Gertrude, et ce n’est pas autrement que nous l’accueillons dans cet ouvrage.”¹³⁸

The ‘canonization’ of medieval saints by popular voice, was copied in almost the same reenactment with the publication of 19th century religious biographies—with their ‘saintly’ life published due to their reputation. The Church would later ratify the established culture¹³⁹ to an official process of canonization. Therefore for example, in recounting the life of Saint Gertrude, the author promoted the cult: “Ce miracle, authentique ou non, prouve au moins la grande vénération qui entourait le culte de Sainte Gertrude.”¹⁴⁰ The hesitation arose from conforming with papal decrees of canonization which forbade Catholic faithful from pronouncing a person a ‘Saint’ without official investigation and approval from Rome.

The republished hagiographies were similar to each other in length consisting of short details on the life of the saint with long descriptions of conversions due to miracles performed by the saint either during life or after death. Many of the miracles entailed visions taking place during mass or at communion. This focus on the Eucharist enhanced the images of mystics depicted in a more personal approach to Christ.¹⁴¹ Specifically, one of the most well known Belgian saints, Sainte

¹³⁸ Sainte Gertrude 41.

¹³⁹ Leclercq 86.

¹⁴⁰ Sainte Gertrude 46.

¹⁴¹ Leclercq 127.

Julienne of Liège was responsible for the institution of the Feast of the Holy Sacrament in the Church.¹⁴²



Figure 2.1 Sainte Julienne in Adoration in Arsène Noûe's Vie de Sainte Julienne de Retinne. Publication faite au profit de l'Eglise qu'on élève en l'honneur de cette sainte au lieu de sa naissance. Liège: H. Dessain, 1846. (Inserted between pages 64-65).

The visions themselves seemed less important than the fact that God's will was manifested in the saint. The dominating trait among the saints was the display of strong leadership qualities whether by founding convents, being in charge of convents, establishing hospices or defending their faith. They all were devoted to the Virgin Mary—a factor that was instrumental in the feminization of piety. They all developed a close relationship to Christ. All were venerated due to their reputation, except for Philomena whose remains were not found until 1802. Their social relationships remained

¹⁴² Leclercq, 128.

within Belgium with no saints having contact with the Pope or with royalty. All display penances for the conversion of sinners and the Souls of Purgatory; a symptomatic response to the Revolution. All the saints are mystics and nuns except for the martyrs, Sainte Aléna and Sainte Philoména.

It is significant that the typical medieval saint in the 19th century republished hagiography was characterized as the beguine—a religious woman living independently, free from constraints of monastic rules, but recognized by the Church. This vocation represented the most free form of living for women with no direct authority and living in communities in which they participated equally. According to Lerner there is a high increase of alternate modes of thought to patriarchal structures, such as mysticism, during periods of social upheavals and restrictions in religious expressions.¹⁴³ The beguine model, portrayed in the hagiographies, seems to have influenced the rise of religious semi-autonomous communities, open to the uneducated with no dowry required during the 19th century. These beguines were very successful in promoting faith among the laity, particularly the peasants. In promoting the beguines' apostolic mission, the Church offered a vision of religious life that was active in the remediation of societal conditions while evangelizing at the same time. Their life was relatable as they lived among the people and did not portray unattainable 'saintly' characteristics. The 19th century would see an explosion of apostolic nuns, some with few rules defining them.

The beguinages were the only national institution born on Belgian soil,¹⁴⁴ therefore the beguine was par excellence the Belgian religious woman. Specifically, they were representative of manifesting faith into a material aspect. In other words, for all saints, the spiritual had to be exemplified by some sort of materialization. The beguine, represented this Belgian spirit in that she made no official vow yet practiced chastity. In Sainte Marie d'Oignie's text, her fasts were detailed in its material proportions and consequences. For example, during fasts as reparation for sinners, she

¹⁴³ Gerda Lerner, The Creation of Feminist Conciousness, From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy (New York: Oxford UP, 1993) 77.

¹⁴⁴ Leclercq 214-215.

cried so hard that she soaked linens. Her confessor, Jacques de Vitry asked if she had headaches when sobbing during fasting. She responded that in fact her tears refreshed and soothed her. According to Leclercq, who sought to create a specific Belgian sainthood, these details of the materiality of faith will not be found in the hagiographies of Saint Catherine of Siena or Saint Angèle de Foligno.¹⁴⁵ Even miracles must be materialized: “en reconnaissance de sa guérison, elle fit suspendre à la chasse de Sainte Gertrude, un globe d’or sur lequel était gravée l’image d’un chevalier [...]”¹⁴⁶ in order to have some tangible reminder of the intangible.

But most of all the beguine represented a love of freedom. Beguines, though usually attached to a community or monastery live a religious life that was relatively free, keeping most often their fortunes and disposing of it as they pleased. They were also free in their choice of occupation whether it was helping the sick or making and selling goods. This freedom derived individual personalities that were easily typified into perseverance and stubbornness. Both Sainte Isabelle de Huy and Sainte Julienne exemplified stubborn women who pushed for certain freedoms. Blessed Isabelle de Huy refused to remarry after becoming a widow even though her father demanded that the Bishop of Liège convince her. She resisted religious and societal pressure. Saint Julienne, exuding no elegance or diplomacy, refused to bend to her prior’s demands. She simply continued to be in charge of the convent of Mont Cornillion in Liège without accessing to his authority. Sainte Marie d’Oignies persevered in patience while awaiting her husband’s approval to live out her religious vocation.

Belgian saints were also portrayed possessing an intellect such as Sainte Julienne: “[...] elle rechercha la retraite, appliquant toutes les facultés de son esprit et de son coeur à l’étude des vérités éternelles[...].”¹⁴⁷ In Saint Gertrude, the author recounts:

¹⁴⁵ Leclercq 215.

¹⁴⁶ Sainte Gertrude 57.

¹⁴⁷ Sainte Gertrude 2.

“Elle avait en outre le goût des lettres et ce goût joint à la culture de son esprit ne resta pas sans influence sur le développement intellectuel de son époque. Elle fit fleurir les lettres dans son monastère et tous les historiens s'accordent à la louer d'avoir fait venir de Rome et des pays d'outre mer des livres et des savants qui propagèrent l'instruction dans nos contrées.¹⁴⁸

What will arose from this portrayal of intellect in instruction was the greatest rise of religious women as educators ever seen in Belgium during the 19th century.

In order to jumpstart the restoration of the Church after its clergy had lost its power and credibility during the revolutionary period, religious clergy writers looked towards models of strong women to transmit Catholic values; i.e. first the beguine, later the 17th century reformers of orders, followed by 19th century founders of religious institutions culminating in the biographies of the simple nun. The significance of this is that women were viewed as the principal transmitters of the faith-- evident in the following quote by monsignor Bouvier, bishop of Mans in Pierre Jean Corneille Debreyne's 1868 Essai de théologie morale considérée dans ses rapports avec la physiologie et la médecine:¹⁴⁹

“Que l'on y fasse une sérieuse attention; qu'on ne s'aliène pas la femme par d'imprudentes rigueurs; la chose est d'une immense gravité. La génération naissante est entre les mains de la femme, l'avenir est à elle [...]. Si la femme nous échappe – le nous vise ses lecteurs prêtres -, avec elle tout peut disparaître et s'abîmer dans le gouffre de l'athéisme, croyance, morale et toute notre civilisation, parce que dès lors il n'y aura plus de principes de morale, plus de frein religieux, que dis-je! Peut-être plus de baptême [...]. Et alors le mal sera consommé et sans remède.”

Clergy chose these women as ‘models to inspire religious vocations’, because as Lerner explains, women were extremely successful when in small loosely structured groups since they were more likely to share authority with men. But once the group becomes successful, the men quickly structured the group hierarchally with “women relegated to auxiliary roles.”¹⁵⁰ Furthermore,

¹⁴⁸ Sainte Gertrude 6.

¹⁴⁹ Pierre Jean Corneille Debreyne. Essai sur la théologie morale, considérée dans ses rapports avec la physiologie et la médecine. Ouvrage spécialement destiné au clergé. 5^e édition, revue, corrigée et notablement augmentée in-12. (Paris: Librairie Poussielgue Frères, rue Cassette, 27, 1868).

¹⁵⁰ Lerner 73.

recatholicization goals are consistent with changing political structures-- the majority of the religious biographies¹⁵¹ was published between 1835-1875; the first 40 years of nationhood. Once independence was well established by the late 19th century, publications of religious biographies of founders of institutions diminished, being replaced by the 'simple nun' in the late 19th century. Religious women who were once portrayed as examples of strong leadership were later relegated to auxiliary roles because the Church having regained its status, became more centralized. Thus, the need to recatholicize with strong independent women was no longer in demand. Therefore, this seems to conclude that hagiographies and religious biographies represented to some extent, the political and social agendas of the 19th century.

¹⁵¹ Not to be confused with 19th century republished hagiographies; of which this chapter analyses. In other words, the first half of the century seems to depend on a hagiographical tradition while the second half of the 19th century depends heavily on the publication of 19th century founders of religious institutions.

IV. THE POLITICS OF CONVERSION

Throughout the 19th century, the politics of conversion were at work between literature and faith. The pre-19th century ‘reasoned’ theological writings did not connect with the laity. Instead, the component of emotions, passions, and devotions were intertwined to a successful politic of conversion. As a result, the most profound change in religious rhetoric came from the promotion for an interior spiritual renewal mixing mysticism with rigid theories for the renewal of the soul and Christianity.¹⁵² Accordingly, the “romanisation” of the ‘lives’ of religious women would promote a utopic Church with a clear sense of identity, coherence and unchanging in its doctrines and devotional practices.

Centuries of Catholic rhetorical traditions, beginning with Saint Augustine’s rhetoric of persuasion, developed into powerful teaching tools for religious writers. Spiritual biographers relied on rhetoric to persuade their readers of their interpretation of the mysteriously hidden and only partially understood meanings in religious’ experiences. In order for rhetorical persuasion to take hold in the spiritual biographies, the ‘Truth’ must first either be known or revealed. The speaker does not seek to prove but to proclaim the ‘Truth’, based upon authority and grace. The reader either believes or does not believe. The speaker, however, is concerned with the degree of his readers’ belief. Consequently, rhetorical persuasion in this instance, does not seek to persuade in the message itself but in the way the message is energetically proclaimed. If salvation is the goal, then the speaker must be successful in his teaching of the ‘Truth.’¹⁵³ Following the Augustinian model of rhetoric to move by emotion and not by reason, the speaker’s goal was to incite passion, emotion and devotion in his reader in order to strengthen his faith. The politics of conversion incorporates many different forms of rhetoric in order to convince readers of the author’s message. Different forms of

¹⁵² Rops-Daniel (Henri Petiot). *L’Église des Révolutions*. (Paris: Fayard, 1960) 246-247.

¹⁵³ George Kennedy. *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times*. (Chapel Hill: The U of North Carolina P., 1980).

rhetoric were used to obtain this result: 1) rhetoric of authority; 2) rhetoric of restoration; 3) rhetoric of sympathy; and 4) rhetoric of conversion.

A. Rhetoric of authority

Christian rhetoric, based on the authority, was necessary in order to rally readers in the cause of the author's goal of recatholicization. Without authority, the authors of hagiographies could not maintain persuasive power and maintain a legitimate voice. First, authority was established by presenting the text as a serious endeavor. René Aigrain lays out the 19th century evolution in hagiographical writing from pre 19th century to late 19th century by the application of positivist thought processes centered on documental research, dates, evaluation of fallibility, separating truth from doubt, and extracting all that was real from text. In Sainte Lutgarde's "Avis au Lecteur," the author distinguished himself from the ordinary religious writer. His details in the documentation of sources, his concern for authenticity and his citations to the "très-savant & très-éclairé" original 16th and 17th century authors, all supported his own authorship as 'éclairé.' His 'enlightened' sources proposed a scholarly text. In Sainte Gertrude's 'avant propos,' the author not only proceeded to great length to cite texts, documents and manuscripts used but also claimed to publish the *first* authentic text of Sainte Gertrude's life: "Il n'existe aucune vie de Sainte Gertrude composée d'après les sources authentiques, et nous n'avons pas la prétention de donner ce petit travail pour une histoire proprement dite de la patronne de Nivelles."¹⁵⁴ Yet after great attention to documenting his sources, the author played the humility card by denying its value as a 'history text.' In fact, the author felt compelled to update Belgium's history since the last Belgian publication of Sainte Gertrude was published in 1637. Sainte Lutgarde's author also placed importance on his research: "on a eu soin d'extraire, ou pour mieux dire, de vérifier les faits sur les Annales de L'Ordre de Citeaux."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Sainte Gertrude Avant propos.

¹⁵⁵ Sainte Lutgarde Avant propos.

Mentioning Pope Pius V approval's on the original 1570 text by Belgian Dominican, Thomas Cantimpré only gave more credence to the authority of the text. Perhaps the most significant change is that the word 'histoire' replaced the word 'Vie' in the titles of the reedited hagiographies. Consequently, recatholicization efforts began by offering a history text; a simple "recueil de son histoire" to be used "tant pour féconder la dévotion des fidèles par cette pieuse & édifiante lecture, que pour les engager de se le procurer commodément."¹⁵⁶

The presentation of scholarly work was enhanced by the correction of past endeavors. The need to correct or *repair*¹⁵⁷ is a theme found in all seven of the hagiographies. Sainte Gertrude's author mentioned in the introduction that critics could interpret her in a negative light and therefore felt compelled to write her life in order to correct the errors of the past:

"Dans ces légendes, postérieures à la première, on retrouve invariablement la fuite de Sainte Gertrude en Franconie. Les Bollandistes n'ont pas eu de peine à démontrer que ce trait est une fable, née peut-être de la confusion que l'on fait de l'abbesse de Nivelles avec une autre Gertrude, fille de Pépin de Herstal, et soeur de Charlemagne, qui mourut, dit-on, vers 811 ou 814, et qui est en effet honorée dans une partie de l'Allemagne."¹⁵⁸

The author first distinguished his text from previous 'legends' or incorrect versions. Specifically, he wanted to clear up any confusion over the Sainte Gertrude of Germany and the Belgian saint. Belgian identity at the time was linked to correct religious history. By persuading readers to attach themselves to this heritage, religious history then acted on the emotions of the reader, moving them to a conversion of faith. In Saint Waudru's text the author stated that no other text will be better than his, even though original manuscripts gave him little with which to work: "Malgré tout, on trouvera peut-être qu'il y a peu de variété dans cette *Légende*; cela est vrai, mais j'ose avancer qu'on ne trouvera guère plus de variété dans les vies les plus complètes de Ste Waudru que dans cet

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Reparation is a theological concept of God demanding atonement for the evil which man has done to Him.

¹⁵⁸ Sainte Gertrude VII.

opuscule.”¹⁵⁹ Despite, its status as “legend”, the author signaled the text to be “de l’histoire de Ste Waudru”¹⁶⁰ and set out to portray it as such by correcting any inconsistencies:

“Il me reste [...], que former une plainte sure la chicheté, ou négligence de l’antiquité, qui semble avoir voulu retenir pour soy tant seulement plusieurs beaux faits de ceux qui vivoient iadis en reputation de sainteté [...]. Mais où l’antiquité les a negligés, ou bien pour parler un petit à son avantage, les courses et dégasts qu’ont fait par deça les Nortmans, les ont ravis des bibliothèques, et peut-estre bruslés, ou esgarés qui ça qui là; tellement que ce qui reste n’est guere de chose au prix de ce que nous ont laissé nos ancestres. Encore va-t’il bien que la postérité en a pu recouvrir quelque chose pour son instruction, et consolation.”¹⁶¹

Reparation took on forms of consoling and teaching. By using the original author, the 19th century author attempted to parallel the burning of books in the 16th century with those of the Revolution. His text attempts to *console* and *repair* this damage.

Once writing was established as a scholarly work, the author then sought to establish authority by highlighting the celebrity of the saint. For example in Sainte Gertrude:

“[...] nous pourrons énumérer plus de cent localités où elle était honorée chez nous. Elle avait aussi un culte et des autels en Espagne, en Pologne, en France et dans toute l’Allemagne. Sa commémoration figure dans presque tous les bréviaires du monde catholique, et un grand nombre d’églises célèbrent son office propre.”¹⁶²

Her international status commanded authority. Thus the text’s authority would rest on Sainte Gertrude’s reputation. The status of the Belgian saint was so privileged, that pilgrimages to other locations were useless:

“[...] une autre guérison miraculeuse opérée sur une pauvre folle du pays, Agnès de Temp. pour laquelle ses amis avaient inutilement fait des pèlerinages en plusieurs endroits réputés. Elle ne fut guérie que lorsqu’on l’eut recommandée à Sainte Gertrude. [...] une femme de Namur [...] qui avait [...] recouru à tous les pèlerinages [...]”¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Légende de Sainte-Waudru, Comtesse du Hainaut, et Patronne de la Ville de Mons (J.B. Pauwels: Bruxelles, 1838) 6.

¹⁶⁰ Sainte Waudru 5.

¹⁶¹ Sainte Waudru 6-7.

¹⁶² Sainte Gertrude 46.

¹⁶³ Sainte Gertrude 50-51.

Thirdly, the author sought to establish authority in his status of clergy within the life of the saint. The clergy having suffered much criticism in the preceding century, could no longer resign to their status as ‘clergy’ as the only means of commanding authority. Collaboration, even if it was only the *image* of collaboration, lent to the aid of this status. By promoting the saint/nun as supporter of clergy and vice versa, unity was tight locked. The following hagiographic text of Sainte Marie d’Oignies *spoke of* the collaboration of the saint and its original author: “Si la science de ce grand homme était une lumière pour guider Marie dans les voies de la perfection, les vertus de la sainte fille étaient une autre lumière qui servaient à diriger le directeur lui-même.”¹⁶⁴ What is important to note in this passage is that Marie “directed” and the director only “guided.” Although they both enhanced each other in this rhetoric of collaboration, this religious woman was placed in an authoritative position. In the following passage of Sainte Marie d’Oignies, the saint acted upon her confessor, Jacques de Vitry in her collaboration:

“[...] elle le prépara à l’exécution de cette sainte charge [...]. Marie le guérit de la vaine complaisance qu’il prenait dans ces éloges, et tout en corrigeant l’amour-propre du prédicateur, elle remédia au défaut principal de ses discours qui provenait d’un amas excessif de matières dont il ne donnait pas des développements d’une manière intéressante.”¹⁶⁵

Here Sainte Marie took on a mothering role of healing, correcting and remediating. More importantly, Vitry was not successful in converting, but instead Marie was converting. The nun evangelized him and he in turn wrote about this evangelization because “Marie, à cause de son sexe, ne pouvant pas annoncer la parole de Dieu [...]”¹⁶⁶ It was impossible to attain sainthood without the backing of the clergy. Any woman who transcended this behavior was easily accused of heresy and disobedience, especially the uncloistered religious. The clergy proclaimed God’s word through the life of a woman. Thus the clergy promoted the religious nun as the figure of conversion and thereby regained his status as preacher, as ‘authority.’

¹⁶⁴ Rayée (Sainte Marie d’Oignies) 74-75.

¹⁶⁵ Rayée (Sainte Marie d’Oignies) 75-76.

¹⁶⁶ Rayée (Sainte Marie d’Oignies) 73.

For example in Sainte Marie d'Oignies, clergy was enhanced: "Nous avons remarqué que Marie ne fait rien sans consulter son Dieu. Sa parfaite obéissance lui fait reconnaître aussi l'autorité de son mari et celle du chapelain [...]. Sachons aussi reconnaître et respecter les autorités qui nous dirigent."¹⁶⁷ The loss of authority at the beginning of the 19th century was such a concern that the author explained that the cause for troubles in families was a result of loss of respect for authority: "C'est une des grandes plaies de notre époque." He even titled one of the chapters in Sainte Marie d'Oignies life, "Son respect pour les prêtres," to highlight this respect as a necessary 'saintly' virtue. Furthermore, if the text rejuvenated veneration to the saint, it would also enhance the authority of its author. For example in Sainte Gertrude:

"Voulant favoriser autant qu'il est en nous cet ardent désir, et propager le culte des saints, surtout de ceux qui ont illustré notre patrie et qui continuent à la protéger. Nous avons résolu d'instituer dans la prédite église de Sainte Gertrude, à Nivelles, une pieuse et dévote confrérie des fidèles de l'un et l'autre sexe, comme nous l'instituons et l'érigons par les présentes lettres, de notre pouvoir ordinaire. Nous en établissons Directeur le curé de la même église, ou son vice-gérant, pour tout le temps que lui ou son vice-gérant la gouverna."

The last sentence signals the visibility of the author, most likely the parish priest. As a result of the popularity of Sainte Gertrude, the author received a formal official installation from simple 'curé' to now a director of the most important devotion in the city. This undoubtedly increased his authority as his new position permitted him to now choose local leaders to form his committee. More importantly his visibility was enhanced through a woman.

B. Rhetoric of restoration

One of the main goals of Catholic restoration was to restore religious orders. In doing so, the Church maintained not only its visibility within society but also its influence. Many religious women were instrumental in teaching Catholic doctrine, in other words active in recatholization. The rhetoric of restoration entailed inspiring women to religious vocations. For example in Sainte

¹⁶⁷ Rayée (Sainte Marie d'Oignies) 59.

Marie d'Oignies: "Jeunes filles, suivez les traces de Marie. Fuyez comme elle le luxe [...] la vanité [...]. Que vos fronts soient toujours beaux de vertu et d'innocence, que vos regards reflètent la pureté de vos âmes, et que tout votre extérieur commande le respect."¹⁶⁸ In perpetuating the nun's image by describing the respectful demeanor of nuns not only by her exterior garb but also by her gestures, the author suggests that young women will command respect if they choose religious life. The goal in this type of restoration was to restore the image of purity in monastic life. In the "dédicace" of Sainte Aléna, young women had to represent symbols of purity in body and spirit: "C'est à vous, jeunes vierges du Seigneur, que nous offrons cette vie de la bienheureuse Aléna. Puissiez-vous l'imiter! Puissiez-vous, comme elle, garder avec le plus grand soin le trésor de votre innocence, pour l'offrir à Jésus Christ, l'époux de vos âmes et le rémunérateur de vos vertus!" Purity is even sought and found in idealized beauty, "merveilleusement belle d'espèce et de forme [...] la nature avait donné à cette jeune fille une beauté telle qu'elle surpassait toutes ses compagnes."¹⁶⁹ This purification characterized the reestablishment of the reputation of monastic life.

Wanting to inspire religious vocations, authors portrayed women as symbols of special graces. For example, the author of Sainte Waudru used the 1629 author to appeal to the need of religious vocations:

"Que le lecteur considère [...] que les visions ne sont pas si fréquentes à tout le monde [...] mais bien à celles qui abandonnent le monde avec ses pompes et attrait, ne refusent de se soumettre au ioug de N. Seigneur en toute humilité, et sainteté de vie. Telles reçoivent les visions célestes [...]. Or comme il s'en trouve tout peu, qui savent de la façon se détacher des choses terriennes[...]. Et bien que les vies des SS. seroient pleines semblables révélations; [...] Donnez moy un monde de grandes Dames, telle qu'estoit S. Wautrude, et vous aurez beaucoup de Saintes bénéficiées de plusieurs visites et visions illustres."¹⁷⁰

The author persuades by concluding that the more souls renounce to the world, i.e nuns, the more blessed is a region. God's will manifested through mystical visions showed divine action and favor

¹⁶⁸ Rayée (Sainte Marie d'Oignies) 8.

¹⁶⁹ Rayée (Sainte Marie d'Oignies) 6.

¹⁷⁰ Sainte Waudru 38-39.

upon a region and gives proof of fervent spiritual environments. It is to no surprise then that at the height of Flemish culture where material prosperity increased and spiritual fervor declined, there were no saints representative of Flanders except for Marguerite d'Ypres (13th century). Therefore, one can conclude that directives from Heaven through mysticism permitted French speaking religious women to enjoy a 'privileged' status.

C. Rhetoric of sympathy

Although the hagiographies sought to recruit religious vocations, they were also destined for the people. For example, Sainte Gertrude's text was directed "pour les fidèles de l'un et de l'autre sexe."¹⁷¹ Sainte Marie d'Oignies' text also attested to the demographics of the readers: "Chers ouvriers, braves ouvrières, oh! N'allez jamais vous croire malheureux parce que vous devez travailler. Le travail est votre plus beau titre de noblesse."¹⁷² Flattering the reader, the author sympathized with their plight.

After witnessing the destruction by the French of religious institutions representing the culture and traditions of the Belgian people, the authors played on the sympathies and emotions of a supposedly devastated people, using defensive and offensive rhetoric to put them on a unified front. The tone is harsh in the text of Sainte Marie d'Oignies as the author recounts the hiding of her relics. Sainte Marie's relics "arrachait au sacrilège des révolutionnaires français l'arche sainte de notre chère patronne."¹⁷³ The identity of this saint certainly did not lie with the French nation, even though her collaborator was a famous French theologian (Jacques de Vitry). Moreover, the sentiment of the revolution is revealed as that of persecution in Oignies' hagiography:¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Sainte Gertrude 64.

¹⁷² Rayée (Sainte Marie d'Oignies) Chapter 11.

¹⁷³ Rayée (Sainte Marie d'Oignies) 141.

¹⁷⁴ Rayée (Sainte Marie d'Oignies) 129.

“Elle éclate la grande catastrophe sociale préparée depuis longtemps par les fureurs des protestants, les haines et les violences des jansénistes, l’impiété et l’immoralité des nouveaux philosophes et le triomphe simultané des mauvaises doctrines dans tous les Etats de l’Europe chrétienne. La révolution s’étend comme une peste rapide et effroyable, proclamant la négation radicale, universelle, impitoyable de toutes les institutions, l’écroulement des trônes et des autels. Tandis que le peuple affolé se décore de l’emblème de l’opprobre, du fameux bonnet rouge des forçats, tandis que les meneurs font monter sur l’autel profane le marbre vivant d’une chair humaine, --pour employer un mot de Lacordaire, --la torche incendiaire détruit les églises, et l’échafaud verse des torrents de sang, au milieu des cris de liberté, égalité, fraternité. C’est alors, ô Belgique, ô chère patrie, que tu dus subir la tyrannie de l’oppresseur français; c’est alors que les impies étrangers, unis à tes enfants coupables, brisèrent les croix et les temples, massacrèrent tes prêtres et incendièrent tes monastères.”¹⁷⁵

This text is no longer about the virtues of Marie d’Oignies. In fact, this text becomes a forum in which to criticize the destruction of the French Revolution. By using the term “enfants,” the author acknowledges that the spirit of nationhood was in its infant stages and that innocence still remained in the Belgian people. Although Belgium was not independent at the time of the Revolution, the author revealed a significant thought—that it was certainly a distinct ‘nation’ as the French are represented as “opresseurs” and “étrangers”. This was a powerful tactic because it reaffirmed that a ‘Belgian nation’ preexisted the official independence of 1830 and that tyranny against its nationhood was displayed in the destruction of religious symbols and institutions. Therefore, the author makes an argument that nationhood and religious heritage were intertwined. Consequently, the stronger the nations’ faith, the stronger its nation. The text sought to rebuild the Catholic faith in an attempt to strengthen its nation. Once a nation was strong, then it would expectantly preserve its religion. Hagiographic authors achieved this by incorporating a rhetoric of defense and war, specifically that religious heroism combatted persecution. The mission was defiant and defensive representing the true Christian as courageous:

“A l’exemple de Marie, sachons toujours opposer aux railleries des méchants et aux persécutions du monde le front d’airain de la patience et de l’énergie. Soyons forts surtout contre la lâcheté du respect humain, et que les sourires des impies, les *qu’en dira-t-on* d’une foule insensée ne nous fassent pas reculer d’un pas dans la voie de nos devoirs et dans la pratique de notre noble mission de chrétiens.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Rayée (Sainte Marie d’Oignies) 128.

¹⁷⁶ Rayée (Sainte Marie d’Oignies) 18.

A rhetoric of combat incites the reader in the hagiographies to defend his faith. Below are a few examples from Rayée's Sainte Marie d'Oignies:

“[...] l'amour de la Croix doit enfanter l'amour des croix [...]. Et voilà depuis dix-huit siècles l'élite des generations[...], tombé sous l'effort ennemi, [...] comme le trophée de la victoire.”¹⁷⁷; “[...] avec la Croix nous vaincrons. “¹⁷⁸; “La Sainte fut toujours honorée à Falisolle [...] à laquelle les habitants de Falisolle se rendent d'ordinaire en marche militaire, selon la coutume du pays, où l'on aime à jouer au soldat et à faire parler la poudre.”¹⁷⁹; “[...] au Dieu libérateur [...] Dieu martyr.”¹⁸⁰; “[...] mais à l'exemple de notre sainte, recourons aux armes que la religion nous offre pour repousser les attaques de démon [...] et la victoire est entre nos mains.”¹⁸¹

The militant and combative vocabulary, taken from different hagiographies recalled the liberation of 1830 and the martyrs of the Revolution and provoked the idea that in order to attain victory, fighting was necessary. This example demonstrates that the heritage of Saints participated in the history of Belgium and therefore played an important role in Belgian's identity.

D. Rhetoric of conversion

For recatholicization to be effective, pride in the nation's faith had to be passionate. As the French were supposed to be secularizing throughout the 19th century, the authors distinguished the Belgians by their attachment to their faith: “Les exemples de Marie [...] contribuèrent à maintenir dans sa patrie l'esprit de foi et de piété qui distinguait alors les Belges entre toutes les nations chrétiennes.”¹⁸² Belgian Catholicism was equally distinguished in the life of Sainte Aléna.

¹⁷⁷ Rayée (Sainte Marie d'Oignies) 28.

¹⁷⁸ Rayée (Sainte Marie d'Oignies) 30.

¹⁷⁹ Rayée (Sainte Marie d'Oignies) 129.

¹⁸⁰ La Vie de Sainte Aléna-Religion, vierge et martyre, patronne de Vorst ou forêt près de Bruxelles. (La Société Nationale: Bruxelles, 1838) 36.

¹⁸¹ Sainte Waudru 29.

¹⁸² Rayée (Sainte Marie d'Oignies) 31.

“Et maintenant, nous le demandons hardiment : Où est la religion qui peut opposer à la nôtre de semblables merveilles? Quelle autre religion que la nôtre éclaire les esprits tout en guérissant les corps? Et que penser d’une religion qui depuis plus de dix-huit cents ans, couvre l’univers de ses prodiges et, comme son divin fondateur, passe en faisant le bien? Oh! nous devons redoubler de soin à pratiquer notre chère religion catholique! Et puisque notre croyance est une croyance incontestablement céleste, nous devons lui vouer à jamais notre amour; et nous-mêmes, nous ne devons nullement craindre d’en faire profession à la vue du monde entier. Pourquoi donc n’agirions-nous pas ainsi? Est-ce que le Dieu d’Aléna ne serait plus notre Dieu!”¹⁸³

The God of Aléna was the same God for the 19th century Belgians therefore, her life continued to be a meaningful lesson proving that Catholicism was alive.

The authors instilled passion for the Catholic faith in the form of conversion rhetoric.

“Va, cher petit livre, va parler de notre héroïne bien-aimée: c’est notre coeur que tu tiendras à tous. Loin de toi les folles prétentions! Fais-toi aimer et fais-toi lire de l’enfant et du vieillard, du savant et de l’ignorant, afin de faire aimer celle que nous aimons. Que Marie [...] verse à flots ses grâces et ses bienfaits sur notre chère ville et sur notre patrie. [...] Que son culte antique renaisse avec une nouvelle vigueur [...]. Va, cher petit livre, va, à la garde de Dieu!”¹⁸⁴

In denoting “notre héroïne”, the biographer of Marie d’Oignies Abbé Rayée, was attending to a specific rhetoric that would atune a particular audience defined by a geographic border. Furthermore, the author was acutely aware of the influence of romantic imagery incorporated in his writing. This text of the life of Marie d’Oignies became *word*- “Va parler”—in the sense that it revived the medieval oral traditions all the while the words inflamed the hearts of its readers; “Fais-toi aimer” promoted conversion of the heart.

Conversion did not necessarily entail a change from one faith to another but could entail an act of rediscovering or deepening one’s original faith,¹⁸⁵ or “réveiller la confiance et la foi des fidèles.”¹⁸⁶ For example, in a vision of Sainte Gertrude to an afflicted young girl: “Bientôt tu recouvreras la santé et la délivrance n’est pas éloignée, pourvu que tu t’abandonnes entièrement à

¹⁸³ Sainte Aléna 36-37.

¹⁸⁴ Rayée (Sainte Marie d’Oignies) vi-vii.

¹⁸⁵ Hervieu-Léger 121.

¹⁸⁶ Sainte Gertrude 31

Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ et que tu places toute ton espérance en sa miséricorde.”¹⁸⁷ The miracle of Saint Gertrude incited a conversion of complete passionate abandonment to Christ.

The conversion process was either a result from an ordering of chaotic life or a result of freeing oneself from debauchery and finding the authentic self.¹⁸⁸ The hagiographies presented these two types of conversion. The conversion process occurred in the face of some type of societal or individual disorder and attempts to create a utopic aspiration. The “ordering of the chaotic life” could be equated to the ordering of life after revolutionary destruction. The “freeing oneself from moral debauchery” could be equated to those persuaded by the “Enlightenment philosophy.” The conversion rhetoric recatholicized by offering what Leger calls “conversion de l’intérieur”¹⁸⁹ entailing a radical intensity of religious identity.

In an attempt to order the post-revolutionary chaos of the status of religious institutions and so called moral debauchery among its faithful, the *reading* of hagiographic texts initiated a first step in the conversion process. For example, in Sainte Marie d’Oignies, Jacques de Vitry suggested to a Cardinal who was being tempted away from his faith to read the life of Marie d’Oignies because it would convert him; i.e. strengthen him:

“[...] une multitude de tentations contre la foi m’agitent sans cesse. A chaque instant, je me vois sur le point de tomber dans le plus profond désespoir [...]” to which is replied, “Lisez la vie de Marie d’Oignies, vous y verrez les miracles opérés par son intercession; j’ai une pleine confiance que si vous invoquez cette bienheureuse, vous verrez bientôt se calmer les agitations d’esprit qui vous troublent [...] il lut la vie de la servante de Jésus-Christ et cette lecture lui rendit la tranquillité [...] il sentit renaître en lui la foi [...]”¹⁹⁰

The Cardinals’ temptation that was leading him to moral debauchery was first converted when his personal initiative to *read* the saintly text gave him peace. His faith was restored when he invoked the saint by actively praying; proof that his faith had strengthened. The reading was silent because it

¹⁸⁷ Sainte Gertrude 19.

¹⁸⁸ Hervieu-Léger 132.

¹⁸⁹ Hervieu-Léger 126.

¹⁹⁰ Rayée (Sainte Marie d’Oignies) 80-81.

encourages tranquility. Conversion also entailed becoming a witness of God's action. The Cardinal, by his mere position as leader in the faith was a witness of the Church's mission. He represented the presence of Christian values –a politics of visibility. The author also influenced the reader in propagating the chain of conversions: “Faisons aussi l’aumône de nos bons conseils, de nos bonnes paroles, de nos sourires, de nos bienveillances; il y tant de pauvres qui ont besoin de tout cela!”¹⁹¹ In another example, a young man sought the advice of Marie d'Oignies. Marie prayed for the wife who then converted and engaged the husband to deeper conversion: “[...] c'était elle qui le stimulait, et qui le tirait en quelque sorte derrière elle, alors qu'auparavant elle le retenait.”¹⁹² Hervieu-Léger states that “La figure du converti tend... à s'imposer comme la figure exemplaire du croyant.”¹⁹³ In fact the hagiographies by presenting for the most part conversion stories, were ‘texts of conversion’ par excellence.

The recounting of miracles played a significant role in the politics of conversion. First by edifying a particular locality: “Longue serait la liste des miracles opérés par l'intercession de Sainte Gertrude [...] nous ne citerons que ceux dont le pays de Nivelles fut le theater [...]”,¹⁹⁴ and second, it manifested the power of its saint: “[...] ayant entendu raconter plusieurs exemples de la puissance et de la bonté de Sainte Gertrude. [...] et daignerait manifester sur elle son pouvoir.”¹⁹⁵ During times of need the miracles of saints retained great power: “[...] souffrez que je vous donne un conseil: recommandez-vous à Sainte Gertrude.” For she was able to resuscitate the dead, save the drowning, deliver the imprisoned, heal the blind and paralyzed, and deliver those from devil.¹⁹⁶ Yet for the power of saint to be unleashed to aid in conversion, the saint had to be brought back to veneration:

¹⁹¹ Rayée (Sainte Marie d'Oignies) 53.

¹⁹² Leclercq 154.

¹⁹³ Hervieu-Léger 147.

¹⁹⁴ Sainte Gertrude 21.

¹⁹⁵ Sainte Gertrude 32.

¹⁹⁶ Sainte Gertrude 45.

“Mais que la dévotion allant toujours en se refroidissant, le pieux et infaillible remède était tombé dans l’oubli.”¹⁹⁷ The recounting of miracles served as testimony of a city’s history, acknowledgement of its identity—“une reconnaissance”---and reverence towards its history of faith.

Conversion gains social reconnaissance and auto-reconnaissance in religious integration.¹⁹⁸ This means that in affirming the traditions of the Catholic faith, the ecclesiastic authors gave to the people of Belgium a social recognizable identity. In order to promote this through a recognizable identity, the authors combined descriptions of landscape with religious traditions in order to draw his reader to his own country:

“Dans la partie méridionale du Brabant, non loin des populations industrielles du Hainaut, au fond d’une charmante vallée, se trouve l’ancienne capitale du Brabant wallon, jolie ville dont le nom est répété partout dans un proverbe que personne ignore. La Belgique la compte parmi ses cités les plus anciennes et les premières qui aient acquis de l’importance. La religion surtout la nomme avec bonheur... nous voulons désigner la bonne ville de Nivelles, si recommandable toujours pour la foi et la piété de ses habitants.”¹⁹⁹

The rhetoric of conversion was strengthened by the fact that the cult of Saint Gertrude has been well established in the city of Nivelles and therefore became the perfect fertile ground for the introduction of Sainte Marie de Nivelles, dite d’Oignies. The well established faith would thus encourage more faithful and more religious vocations. Recatholicization was effective when the Belgian land was given prestige and value. In Sainte Marie d’Oignies, the spiritual life of the diocese of Liège in the 12th-13th century is described as a sort of promised land, “qui apparaît à l’auteur comme une terre de saints.”²⁰⁰ Abbé Rayée quoted from original French medieval author and famous theologian Jacques de Vitry, in order to make a powerful distinction of Belgian virtues as opposed to those of his native country France. Vitry found many saintly women in the diocese of Liège whom exemplified all the characteristics of poverty, charity, contemplation with extraordinary

¹⁹⁷ Sainte Gertrude 59.

¹⁹⁸ Hervieu-Léger 137.

¹⁹⁹ Rayée (Sainte Marie d’Oignies) 5-6.

²⁰⁰ Leclercq 104.

ecstasy, prophecies, and acts of prayer.²⁰¹ To promote Belgium's rich religious history, he stated, "Voilà nos trésors [...] voilà notre plus précieux joyau."²⁰² The author implied a certain nostalgia in recounting the medieval golden age of Catholicism. In reestablishing a cult, he brought back what had been forgotten: "[...] c'est pour raviver la dévotion à Sainte Marie de Nivelles, que nous exaltons ses vertus et ses bonnes oeuvres; c'est pour étendre son culte, que nous venons rappeler et ses bienfaits et ses miracles."²⁰³

The texts represented symbols of faith. Each old cemetery, fountain or monument depicted a story.²⁰⁴ In *Sainte Philoména*, the author said: "Puisse cet opuscule contribuer à la propagation de son culte, ainsi qu'à la manifestation de sa puissance dans les lieux où son nom et sa gloire ne sont pas encore connus!" The symbols have a historical value. For example the influence of Saint Gertrude upon her region: "Si l'on tient compte de l'époque et de la famille de Sainte Gertrude, de l'influence que celle-ci a exercée personnellement et indirectement, de l'éclat auquel s'était élevé le monastère de Nivelles, dans la période la plus florissante de son existence, l'histoire de la Sainte offre un grand et légitime intérêt."²⁰⁵ Restoring the past was symptomatic of the writer's 'mal du siècle.'

The rhetoric of symbols functioned to record history. This was pertinent to the texts of *Sainte Gertrude* and *Sainte Philoména* whose remains were moved during the 19th century. Although *Sainte Philoména* is not a Belgian saint, her canonization became an unprecedented case in Church history. Both texts detailed the movement of the relics as a proud moment in the city's affairs: "Cet acte lui-même est un monument assez intéressant de l'histoire locale et de l'histoire de l'art dans nos contrées, pour que nous procurions aux lecteurs la satisfaction de la connaître."²⁰⁶ *Sainte Gertrude's*

²⁰¹ Leclercq 104-105.

²⁰² Rayée (*Sainte Marie d'Oignies*).

²⁰³ Rayée (*Sainte Marie d'Oignies*) vi.

²⁰⁴ Rayée (*Sainte Marie d'Oignies*) Chapter 4.

²⁰⁵ *Sainte Gertrude* VII.

²⁰⁶ *Sainte Gertrude* 61.

text not only spoke of revolutionary history but also of the symbolism of her relics. The author explained that in 1795, her relics were hidden in Germany, then in 1805 they were brought back to the city of Nivelles and in 1857 her reliquary was restored. These details are significant because they revealed that the revolution caused disruption in the veneration of this saint. By publishing the text in honor of the Sainte Gertrude's Jubilee, the author resounded the idea of triumph over the disruption that occurred. The recounting of the displacement of the relics moved the reader to appreciate the return of the nation's symbols of faith, fermenting a more passionate devotion to this saint. Symbols of faith stimulated the faithful to devotion by promising rewards as in Sainte Marie d'Oignies: "Visitez l'église de St. Nicolas, à Nivelles, et vous verrez les nombreux ex-voto apportés par les fidèles reconnaissants[...]. C'est à nous qui l'oublions et qui ne venons pas, comme nos pères le faisaient [...]. Ranimons notre dévotion envers cette Sainte si puissante auprès de Dieu."²⁰⁷

In the following passage in Sainte Gertrude, the description of cultural processions anchored the faith:

"Nous ne croyons mieux fermer notre livre qu'en donnant la narration succincte de la manière dont les cortèges historique et religieux étaient composés pour la procession instituée à l'occasion du Jubilé. Cette procession si édifiante [...] ne doit pas seulement rester dans la mémoire des populations actuelles, [...] elle doit aussi pouvoir éveiller et entretenir l'ardeur de la piété chez nos successeurs en ce monde. Le récit que nous faisons ici des fêtes du Jubilé, si laconique qu'il soit, sera un monument religieux que nos petits-enfants liront avec intérêt, et qui au retour des mêmes fêtes, enflammera leur vénération pour Ste-Gertrude, et les excitera à faire mieux que nous encore pour son culte."²⁰⁸

By describing cultural religious traditions with sentimental rhetoric such as "enflammer" and "exciter" the author spoke to the heart of his reader and engaged him/her to identify with his heritage. The propagation of faith was further materialized into symbols of faith; the details of the "cortège", the historical reincarnation of characters: "ce groupe, merveilleusement composé, permet de donner l'idée plus favorable des costumes, des personnages composant la cour, ainsi que des guerriers et armures de ces temps primitifs." Later the cortège reenacted the 16th century offering of

²⁰⁷ Rayée (Sainte Marie d'Oignies) 93-94.

²⁰⁸ Sainte Gertrude 66.

the royal necklace by Emperor Charles le Quint to the city Nivelles in recognition of Saint Gertrude. In the 19th century procession the author described the King of Belgium still wearing this necklace: “Le collier de la Toison d’or, que le Roi de la Société du Dévouement porte en public, est encore celui dont Charles-Quint gratifia les Arquebusiers.”²⁰⁹ Therefore the participation of the King of Belgium, as representative of the nation, in a Catholic procession, reenacting a historical event, officially reunited national identity with religious identity.

Recatholicization of a country was first made possible by the conversion of its cities:

“Puisse la dévotion à Sainte Marie de Nivelles ne jamais s’effacer du coeur de ses concitoyens! Certes, tous les Saints doivent être regardés comme nos amis, puisqu’ils sont les élus de Dieu; mais ceux qui ont habité notre pays, ceux qui ont vécu dans nos murs doivent être l’objet d’une affection spéciale. Heureuses les villes qui engendrent des Saints!”²¹⁰

Cities gained recognition through the popularity of its saint. The citizens of Nivelles were so adamant about possessing the relics of Sainte Marie d’Oignies that disputes broke out when the village of Oignies also claimed them. The argument was as follows:

“On l’a nommée Marie d’Oignies à cause du lieu où elle mourut et où elle fut enterrée. Mais ne voudrait-il pas mieux l’appeler Marie de Nivelles, puisque c’est à Nivelles qu’elle vit. [...] Qu’on permette au curé de sa paroisse de revendiquer l’honneur de la proclamer sa paroissienne, et qu’on ne trouve pas mauvais qu’il l’appelle ici Sainte Marie de Nivelles, dite Oignies.”²¹¹

As symbols of faith and opportunities for reveling and creating a unified feeling, the relics of saints united its citizens. Relics brought communities together and “fait fleurir la vie monastique”²¹² because they proved authenticity. For example, the prelate of another abbey in the life of Sainte Lutgarde: “demanda s’il ne convenoit pas de déposer ses précieuses dépouilles dans cette Eglise où la dévotion des peuples pourroit s’augmenter de jour en jour. On est tous d’un commun accord.”²¹³

²⁰⁹ Sainte Gertrude 68.

²¹⁰ Rayée (Sainte Marie d’Oignies) 141.

²¹¹ Rayée (Sainte Marie d’Oignies) 71-72.

²¹² Sainte Gertrude 25.

²¹³ Histoire abrégée de la vie de Sainte Lutgarde, religieuse de l’Ordre de Citeau, en grande vénération de à Aywiers en Brabant; monastère de son Ordre. (Stevens: Bruxelles, 1787) 14-15.

Recognition ensured economic stability which lended to a greater voice in political and social agendas! The placement of the relics, of Sainte Marie in the city of Nivelles in 1817 incited veneration and participation from its citizens:

“Le zèle du peuple de Nivelles pour les recevoir, ne le céda pas à celui du clergé. L’ornementation de toutes les maisons par où elles devaient passer, les emblems, les chroniques et la joie pieuse, pleine de dévotion, y rendirent témoignage. Cette fête attira un peuple immense du voisinage que la piété plus que la curiosité y avait invité.”²¹⁴

Yet the author makes a point to remind his readers that true unity resided in preparing for eternal life: “Nous n’avons pas ici de cité permanente; notre patrie est là-haut²¹⁵ [...] Mais du haut du ciel, veille sur nous, protège ta paroisse, soutiens ton Pasteur et ses ouailles, n’oublie pas ta bonne ville de Nivelles.”²¹⁶ Sainte Marie d’Oignies became the protector of the city of Nivelles sustaining the Pastor in his fight for Catholicism.

In the past, monasteries were extremely influential to the life of a city. In Saint Gertrude, the author engendered the history of the monastery of Nivelles. His strategy of revealing the triumphant success of the monastery, “elle (the monastery) sut résister à tous les assauts avec un succès triomphant [...]”²¹⁷ proves that the roots of this institution were deep and resilient. The descriptions of monasteries materialized the faith, “où son intercession procure encore tous les jours de nouveaux miracles.”²¹⁸ The writing activated the past in order to convert the faithful in the 19th century. The inspiration of national unity; “nous sommes tous frères”²¹⁹ through traditions was a crucial strategy for the hagiographic authors.

²¹⁴ Rayée (Sainte Marie d’Oignies) 132.

²¹⁵ Rayée (Sainte Marie d’Oignies) 63.

²¹⁶ Rayée (Sainte Marie d’Oignies) 70-71.

²¹⁷ Sainte Gertrude 7.

²¹⁸ Sainte Gertrude 8.

²¹⁹ Sainte Aléna 30.

V. NUN'S THE WORD

Leclercq said that Belgium was “Un pays où les femmes ont leur mot à dire.”²²⁰ Ecclesiastic authors developed ‘mum’ rhetorical strategies, in which the *words* of nuns direct an authoritative representation of the nun as keepers, restorers, promoters and finally as saviors of the faith.

John’s gospel opens by saying “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”²²¹ Christian philosopher, St. Augustine examined the analogy between the Divine Word and human speech. “He compares the Word of God, not to the word spoken by the lips, but to the interior speech of the soul, whereby we may in some measure grasp the Divine mystery.”²²² This doctrine was later developed and enriched by St. Thomas.”²²³ The Truth or Word of God is apprehended by the soul. The knowledge of this truth is not limited by gender for the soul is sexless. Therefore the interior speech of the soul concerns all human beings. However, the *manner* in which the Word is revealed has been transcribed in gender specific terms. For men, once the Word is revealed it is written; as in scripture or proclaimed for all to hear, as in sermons. For women, on the other hand, usually the Word is revealed orally through mystical experience to a select few. In other words mystical experiences tended to fit the psyche of women which was better suited for the femininity of women rather than the masculinity of men.²²⁴ This is because mysticism involved the emotional senses. Yet it is a realm of knowledge open to women. For example in Sainte Gertrude: “[...] et acquérant bientôt dans ces travaux et ces luttes ininterrompues une science

²²⁰ Leclercq 154.

²²¹ (1:1-2)

²²² See especially "De Trinit.", IX, vii, 12 sq., in P. L., XLII, 967, XV, x, 17 sq., *ibid.*, 1069. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09328a.htm>

²²³ "Contra Gent.", IV, xi-xiv, opusc. "De natura verbi intellectus"; "Quaest. disput. de verit." iv, "De potent.", ii-viii, 1, "Summa Theol.", I-I, xxvii, 2; xxxiv. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09328a.htm>

²²⁴ Lerner 72.

des choses divines qui confondait d'admiration tous ceux qui l'approchaient."²²⁵ Sainte Gertrude is placed on a genderless equal level for work and her "luttres" open the gateway to ultimate knowledge of Truth and divinity. What could upstage this privilege? Consequently, the privilege of mysticism refers to God acting within his saints: "[...] admirons la puissance éternelle qui agissait en eux."²²⁶; "Dieu! que vous êtes admirable dans vos saints!"²²⁷ As God operates in these women, these nuns become recipients of the Word:

"Venez, venez souvent comme Marie, vous nourrir du pain des anges [...]. Pauvres voyageurs dans cette vallée de larmes [...] pauvres âmes troublés, persécutés, oh! venez donc à la source des forces, des consolations et des grâces. Quel trésor plus grand que celui de l'Eucharistie!"²²⁸

The simple connotation of 'Marie' in a religious text referred almost immediately to the Virgin Mary. But here, the author of Sainte Marie d'Oignies did not intend to clarify and perhaps did so in order to present a deep theological meaning. The word "source" refers to Eucharist but 'source' may also mean the source from which Christ comes—the source of transubstantiation. In other words, in the Eucharist God becomes flesh. The Virgin Mary in obeying God's Word becomes the source or recipient of God's Word. And this Word becomes flesh through Christ. Mary appears as the sacred tent over which God's hidden presence becomes effective in the annunciation: "[...] the power of the most High will overshadow you."²²⁹ God's Word brings fruit and Mary is the mother of that Word. Just like Mary, Belgian mystics became receptacles of this Word during mystical experiences. This act of recipient of course did not contest authority of a patriarchal Church. On a textual level, the Word given to the saints was penned by the words of clergy bearing fruit in the conversions they provoked.

²²⁵ Sainte Gertrude 7.

²²⁶ Rayée (Sainte Marie d'Oignies) 12.

²²⁷ B., M. J. F. Vie et miracles de Sainte Philomène, vierge et martyre, surnommée la Thaumaturge du 19^{eme} siècle. Troisième Edition. (Bruxelles: Vanderborcht, 1835) 63.

²²⁸ Rayée (Sainte Marie d'Oignies) 40.

²²⁹ Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal. Daughter of Zion. Meditation on the Church's Marian Belief. Trans. John M. McDermott S.J. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983) 44.

Just as Christ spoke his Word, republished 19th century hagiographies transcribed not the written word of the nun but her ‘spoken’ words since these texts referred to a medieval oral tradition:

“Je sçais qu’après ma mort la main du tout-puissant punira les soeurs de la négligence avec laquelle elles s’acquittent de l’office divin; pour lors elles se souviendront de mes paroles. Et les chatimens de Dieu les ayant rendües plus sages & plus humbles le Seigneur retirera la main qu’il avoit étendue pour punir leur peu de dévotion, l’événement, le triste événement fit voir la vérité de cette prédiction.²³⁰ Cette plaie ayant fait rentrer les religieuses en elles-mêmes; elles se resouvinrent des paroles de la sainte, elles se corrigèrent; le fléau cessa.”²³¹

Her “paroles” became truth and had enough authority behind them to warn of punishment. However, in transcribing her words into written form, 19th century authors broke with this medieval oral tradition in the very fact that their texts were meant for silent reading, hence *mum’s the word*: “Comme Marie, aimez le recueillement et le silence. Que de fautes ne commet-on pas par la langue!”²³² Thus the rhetorical strategy of silence signified the interior speech of the soul in the mystical revelations of the nun. The author even wrote about the feminine privileges of silence: “Son amour pour le travail et le silence.”²³³ It is through the ‘spoken words’ of the Belgian saint, in other words—the reading of her words, that her image sold the vocational life. Her words promoted the conservation of the faith and her actions stimulated the hearts of the faithful: “Quelle douce paix, quelle bonheur ineffable règneront dans votre maison, si la loi sainte est toujours écrite devant vos yeux.”²³⁴

The privileged status to the words of nuns is displayed in Sainte Philoména’s text. In this text, the author indicates there are three revelations—one by an artisan, one by clergy, and one by a nun. Out of the three, the author chose to write about the nun’s revelation as it is more “circonstanciée.” The nun’s revelation reveals that she was under special protection from the martyr from “tentations de défiance et d’impureté” but that “la Sainte lui donnait des avis pleins de sagesse,

²³⁰ Sainte Lutgarde 13.

²³¹ Sainte Lutgarde 19

²³² Rayée (Sainte Marie d’Oignies) 44.

²³³ Rayée (Sainte Marie d’Oignies) 40.

²³⁴ Rayée (Sainte Marie d’Oignies) 14.

tantôt sur la direction de la communauté dont cette religieuse avait été chargée par ses supérieurs [...].”²³⁵ Based on her revelation, the nun had a statue made of the saint and placed in the Church for all to venerate. This action then inspired the nuns in her community. Choosing to print the nun’s words along with the Saints’ “avis de sagesse” reaffirmed the privileged status of the nun. Additionally, the writing of the recatholicization of a religious community, further recatholicized the readers of future religious vocations. Sainte Lutgarde’s words also displayed the privileged status of religious life: “[...] le monastère est rempli des armées célestes; les saints & les bienheureux sont ici présents aussi bien que plusieurs de nos soeurs qui sont allées de la terre au Ciel [...]. Ayant dit ces paroles, elle demeura dans le silence [...].”²³⁶ The author then placed a privilege to the nuns of this specific monastery: “[...] de là enfin le zèle empressé de ces saintes qui se sont fait un point d’honneur de s’engager particulièrement à Dieu dans ce monastère.”²³⁷ His intention of advertising the monastery as a place where saints reside was persuasive in the recruitment of vocations.

Nun’s the Word also refers to the authority in the Saints’ name:

“Tu t’appelles Lumena, comme ton Époux s’appelle Lumière, Étoile, Soleil; comme je suis appelée, moi aussi, Aurore, Étoile, Lune dans la plénitude de son éclat, et Soleil. Ne crains pas, je t’aiderai. Maintenant la nature dont la faiblesse t’humilie, revendique ses droits; au moment du combat, la grâce viendra te prêter sa force [...].”²³⁸

In this case, Sainte Philomène’s name in the vision, is the same name as Christ—her “Epoux”—therefore this saint incarnates to a certain degree the Word. In another example, in the hagiography of Sainte Gertrude, “L’éclat du nom” combined with the humble nature of the author’s task refers to this “mum”—silence—humility: “Mais plus humble est notre tâche et d’ailleurs l’éclat du nom de notre héroïne lui fit moins d’honneur qu’elle ne s’en fit elle-même par ses propres vertus.”²³⁹ The

²³⁵ B.M.J.F. (Sainte Philomène) 19.

²³⁶ Sainte Lutgarde 14.

²³⁷ Sainte Lutgarde 16.

²³⁸ Sainte Philomène 29.

²³⁹ Sainte Gertrude 1.

“éclat” of her virtues gives honor to her name and as her name is proclaimed, the nun becomes the *word*.

If the name was not compared to Christ’s then the nun was portrayed like Christ. Sainte Marie d’Oignies’ death was described: “[...] penchant sa tête, comme Jésus sur la Croix, elle remet sa belle âme entre les mains de son Père céleste.”²⁴⁰ Sainte Gertrude was also compared to Christ in the performing of miracles: “Toutes ses forces lui étaient revenues à la fois, comme si l’homme-Dieu lui avait dit aussi à elle, comme au paralytique de l’Evangile: <<Prends ton lit et marche!>>”²⁴¹ Saint Gertrude became the savior: “Elle s’était faite la Providence des pauvres et des voyageurs.”²⁴² In recounting the following miracle of Saint Gertrude, the author alluded to a parallel of Christ’s resurrection when Christ appears to his disciples: “<<Raconte aux soeurs, mon enfant, que Gertrude elle-même vient de t’apparaître: et si elles ne veulent pas ajouter foi à ton récit, dis-leur que demain, avant la troisième heure du jour, je leur donnerai sur ta personne un signe si certain de mon apparition, qu’elles ne douteront plus qu’elle ne soit bien vraie.>>--Et elle disparut.”²⁴³ The author was certainly eliminating any doubting Thomas’ by focusing on believing by faith alone: “Personne ne douta que cette resurrection inattendue fût due aux mérites de Sainte Gertrude [...]”²⁴⁴ The saint, taking on the image of Christ whether by name or by action, propelled the *words* into a commanding authority—*Nun’s The Word*.

The Oxford Annotated Bible notes that the Word of God is more than speech; it is God in action, creating, revealing, and redeeming.²⁴⁵ The lives of nuns would equally be redeeming and revealing the Word of God: “De temps en temps, il suscite de saints personnages qui montrent la

²⁴⁰ Rayée (Sainte Marie d’Oignies) 70.

²⁴¹ Sainte Gertrude 20.

²⁴² Sainte Gertrude 6.

²⁴³ Sainte Gertrude 35.

²⁴⁴ Sainte Gertrude 48.

²⁴⁵ Kennedy 128.

bonne route autrement qu'avec des paroles et des mots.”²⁴⁶ By her action, she was to be the restorer of morals for the clergy: “[...] et sa sollicitude s’étendait même au clergé, dont elle s’efforçait de restaurer les mœurs alors un peu relâchées.”²⁴⁷ She became the model of the restoration of Catholicism because “Le ciel le permettait ainsi pour l’édification de l’église.”²⁴⁸

Religious women were exalted to a salvific role. Lerner examines texts throughout centuries that reinterpret the status of women giving history an alternative interpretation to the patriarchal interpretation to explain how through Mary, humanity was lifted to higher status of grace. Lerner cites to the text of Christine de Pisan: “and if anyone would say that man was banished because of Lady Eve, I tell you that he gained more through Mary than he lost through Eve... For as low as human nature fell through this creature woman, was human nature lifted higher by this creature.”²⁴⁹ Man’s salvation therefore sprang from woman as she bore the Redeemer of Mankind. Her womb guaranteed man’s salvation. The Virgin Mary, was the model for feminine piety in the 19th century. Mary was often assimilated with the image of the Church as holy and Immaculate:²⁵⁰ “This name Mary stands for the Church itself, for its definitive state of salvation[...].”²⁵¹ To leave woman out of the whole theology would be to deny creation and election (salvation history) and thereby nullify revelation.²⁵² [...] Mary is in person the true Zion, toward whom hopes have yearned throughout all the devastations of history. She is the true Israel in whom Old and New Covenant, Israel and Church, are indivisibly one. She is the ‘people of God’ bearing fruit through God’s gracious

²⁴⁶ Sainte Waudru 30.

²⁴⁷ Sainte Gertrude 6.

²⁴⁸ Saint Waudru 30.

²⁴⁹ Lerner 145.

²⁵⁰ Ratzinger 67.

²⁵¹ Ratzinger 77.

²⁵² Ratzinger 23.

power.”²⁵³ The Church houses the Word and through Mary it rested its salvation in feminine hands of saints and nuns, thereby resulting in a feminization of piety: “[...] que Dieu nous fait passer tous ses dons par les mains de Marie, et heureux presage des bienfaits que Marie, par l’entremise de Sainte Philomène, allait répandre sur le monde [...]”²⁵⁴

²⁵³ Ratzinger 43.

²⁵⁴ B.M.J.F. (Saint Philomène) 41.

VI. RESPONSE TO ENLIGHTENMENT PHILOSOPHY

For the 19th century editors of religious hagiographies, devastating effects due to the suppression of clergy and monastic life resulted in a passionate defensive and offensive response from the Catholic Church in order to restore strong leadership in the recatholicizing efforts. To the criticism of the uselessness of monastic vocations, the defensive response entailed representing ideal monastic spirituality while the offensive response implied refuting the enlightenment philosophy and replacing it with an effective enlightened spiritual rhetoric.

The evidence of the relentment of Catholic practice, symptomatic of new philosophies proclaiming atheism, deism, and agnosticism, with knowledge residing in human reasoning alone, resulted in a formidable centralizing of Church power unlike centuries past. Remediation began by centralizing all clergy and religious women under one authority. It was inevitable for Catholics to find in the Enlightenment philosophers the “boucs émissaires” towards the threat to the peace of humanity and responsible for all literature deemed dangerous to the soul.²⁵⁵ Specifically, clerical authors sought to quell the negative image that 18th and 19th century literature in which portrayed forced religious life. For example in Diderot’s *La Religieuse*, abandoned nuns long for their lovers, some are kidnapped, and perverse superiors seduce or martyr innocent novices. Diderot specifically attacked the religious life of nuns as a ‘dangerous’ vocation where perversity reigned and forced vows. Marie d’Oignies’ author attested to this image: “Peut-être craignaient-ils pour elle la vocation religieuse et plutôt que de la donner au cloître, il l’eussent livrée à tous les dangers du siècle. Pauvres parents, il y en a tant aujourd’hui qui vous ressemblent!”²⁵⁶ while highlighting the true dangers to be the “époque d’ignorance et de ténèbres,” blinded “par le fanatisme de l’irréligion,” due to its

²⁵⁵ Massaut, Jean-Pierre; Henneau, Marie-Elisabeth et Hélin, Étienne. *Liège Histoire d’une Église*. (T. 1- 4. Strasbourg: Éditions du Signe, 1993).

²⁵⁶ Rayée (Sainte Marie d’Oignies) 10.

representation of “l’Église comme l’ennemie des arts, des sciences et des vrais progress [...]”²⁵⁷ Additionally, Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s 1762 Émile promotes the idea that convents develop “all the wrongdoings of women” and Bernardin de St. Pierre’s Oeuvres Posthumes, his 1777 Discourse on the Education of Women accuses monastic education to be “one of the greatest misfortunes of which the weakness of families has afflicted society.” A unified and idealized vision also entailed re-visioning the image of monasticism as being “sans artifice & sans violence.”²⁵⁸ To contradict philosophers such as Diderot, the author portrays religious life as a vocation above all others: “L’état religieux, qui est pour l’âme un véritable port de salut.”²⁵⁹ In Sainte Gertrude, the author is concerned with the misrepresentation of monastic life mentioning that “beaucoup de choses curieuses”²⁶⁰ specifically represents targeted criticism against the monastery.

“[...] et au milieu de détails très-intéressants, une refutation des griefs qu’on faisait vulgairement aux chanoinesses, et qui se traduisaient par cet adage populaire: *Canonica et sancta? non credo*. Ces reproches étaient fort exagérés, et l’on pourrait appliquer à l’abbaye de Nivelles, comme à la plupart de nos monastères, ce que dit M. de Montalebert [...]. <<...je me sens saisi, pénétré, dominé par l’ardent et respectueux amour de la vérité [...]. La seule idée d’ajouter une ombre à toutes celles qui la recouvrent déjà, me fait horreur. La voiler, la taire, sous prétexte de servir la cause de la religion, qui n’est autre chose que la suprême religion [...]. Mais je tiens que dans l’histoire tout doit être sacrifié à la vérité. [...] J’ai donc recherché [...] la trace de tous les abus et de tous les désordres qui pouvaient se produire dans les monastères anglais, et surtout dans les communautés de femmes. Si je n’ai presque rien trouvé, ce n’est pas faute d’avoir suffisamment fouillé les historiens et les autres écrivains du temps; j’ose donc conclure que le mal, inseparable de tout ce qui est humain, avait laissé dans les cloîtres Anglo-Saxons moins, de traces qu’ailleurs.”²⁶¹

By citing to Montalebert in his text, the author is justifying his position that no abuses occurred in this Belgian monastery. Therefore, his research —“j’ai donc recherché”—confirming a specific reply, disproves the philosophers’ claims that monasteries were filled with abuses. His references to “ailleurs” conclude that Belgium is not the scene of this perversity since he is promoting this

²⁵⁷ Rayée (Sainte Marie d’Oignies) 4.

²⁵⁸ Sainte Lutgarde 5.

²⁵⁹ Sainte Waudru 17.

²⁶⁰ Sainte Gertrude ix.

²⁶¹ Sainte Gertrude xii.

monastery of Nivelles. “Ailleurs” could be alluding to France? He is engaging in a defensive position against the criticisms made towards monasticism—he will not “voiler” or “taire” the position of the Church. He will not silence this nun.

The fall of the Catholic Church during the Revolution was not only dismantled by its opposers but also by the lukewarm faith of its members. In the preface of *Sainte Marie de Nivelles*:

“Notre but, en prenant la plume, est d’abord de rééditer ce que les autres ont écrit, mais en nous conformant aux exigences modernes et en faisant un choix de faits qui pourront être lus utilement par tous. Puis, en composant une histoire si bien rapportée par d’autres, nous avons eu avant tout le désir de présenter à nos lecteurs une oeuvre de coeur.”

This ecclesiastic author is cogniscent and reflective of a Church that wants and needs change. The biggest problem faced by the Belgian Catholic Church in the 18th century was its lack of effective response to the enlightenment ideas and its lack of adapting to the changing intellectual environment. The references of “exigences modernes” and “oeuvre de coeur” are symptomatic of a romantic writer who is attacking the religious literary tradition. “En composant une histoire,” the author is also presenting by *Sainte Marie* his philosophy on history. His “histoire” will manifest some sort of progress in order to end further conflicts. This text must not only move the reader but it must also be read “utilement.” It is evident that after a century of harsh criticisms towards the uselessness of monasticism, this author is certainly plagued in justifying not only his existence as simple author but also the existence of his vocation. As priest of the parish of Nivelles, the success of *Sainte Marie*’s veneration in his parish, highlights his importance. The fact that he makes “a choix de faits” reflects a deliberate act in his spiritual, political and social intentions. Spiritually in the way the choices will reflect certain virtues, socially in the way processions and veneration of the cult promote the faith, i.e. establishment of confraternities; and politically in the way the city of Nivelles will identify with *Sainte Marie*. Thus this romantic writer with his taste for the past will adjoin literature with patriotism in creating a unification of values and morals that reflect singly the Belgian spirit.

The author in *Sainte Waudru*’s life indicates that the Catholic faith was no longer obtained solely through the passive listening of Sunday sermons: “Heureux celui qui préfère les délices

ineffables de la vertu et de la solitude aux remords et aux agitations tumultueuses du monde! Oh! si nous connaissions bien le don de Dieu [...]! Madelgaire le connut, le comprit et l'apprécia! [...] et mourut saintement.”²⁶² Instead the faithful would “connaître, comprendre, then apprécier.” The changing pastoral mission introduced an active participation in the understanding of faith.

The saint that most symbolically defended the Church's position in revoking the Enlightenment philosophy of religion is Sainte Philomène. Named the Thaumaturge of the 19th century, she was promoted as an early Christian saint by miracles alone, an unprecedented act in Church history. Perhaps it was because her name opposed “the *Enlightenment*”-- “filia luminis,” “LUMENA” meant “lumière de la foi”²⁶³ representing the ‘light’ of understanding. In all of the hagiographies, the motif of light is abundant. Light that gives way not only to a radiant image but to understanding. The text of Sainte Philomène begins with a question: “Pourquoi ne s’opère-t-il plus aujourd’hui un seul miracle? [...] C’est, s’ajoutent-ils (les impies), que nous vivons dans le siècle des lumières, et qu’il est maintenant impossible d’abuser les hommes, comme ils l’ont été autrefois.”²⁶⁴ As argued earlier, miracles were a sign of divine grace over a region. But in his sarcasm was the author not turning the argument of the “impies” against themselves?—that the Enlightenment philosophy was actually abusing man in that it turned him away from states of grace to receive the divine miracles. Continuing in the text, the author argued that the “impies” explained everything by science and the unexplainable was reasoned as “not possible.” In particular, he used Voltaire as his spokesperson for the “impies:” “Tout Paris viendrait me dire qu’il a vu ressusciter un mort, je l’aurais vu moi-même, que je n’y croirais pas, parce qu’il est impossible qu’un mort ressuscite.”²⁶⁵ With this statement, the author showed that faith (believing without seeing) was not the issue for the philosophers, it was religion itself. Portraying Voltaire in the denial of this resurrection was forceful

²⁶² Sainte Waudru 18.

²⁶³ B.M.J.F. (Sainte Philomène) 23.

²⁶⁴ B.M.J.F. (Sainte Philomène) 6.

²⁶⁵ B.M.J.F. (Sainte Philomène) 7.

in his rejection of Catholicism, where its basis of faith lied in the resurrection; in the hope of life after death. Therefore, Voltaire represented the *one* who had denied Christ—Satan. This was powerful rhetoric because it signaled to the reader that Enlightenment philosophy did not allow for a middle ground. The reader was either in the camp of believers or in the camp “les ennemis de Dieu.” The author was not in any way seeking to convert atheists:

“Ne disputons donc point avec les impies, car nous ne saurions leur donner la foi; c’est un présent qui vient du Ciel, et nous ne pouvons que gémir sur leur sort, si Dieu le leur refuse. Adressons-nous seulement aux fidèles à qui la divine Providence dispense ses faveurs. C’est pour ces âmes pieuses que nous écrivons, c’est à elles que nous adressons la relation que l’on va lire.”

It seems that the 19th century Belgian Catholic mission was to shepherd its own flock strengthening them to an even deeper faith with the *light* of knowledge.

The light of the Catholic faith had intense power, “semblable à la lumière, qui en quelques instants, franchit l’espace immense qu’il y a du ciel à la terre [...]”²⁶⁶ The light surpassed any human knowledge: “[...] mais le divin Esprit, auquel j’étais redevable de ma constance, me remplit alors de tant de lumières, qu’à toutes les preuves que je donnais de la solidité de notre foi, ni Dioclétien, ni aucun de ses courtisans, ne trouvèrent quoi que ce soit à répondre.”²⁶⁷ Nature, revealing the existence of God was the true indicator of the intensity of light. In the following quote, the light of dawn was evoked on a journey for the transport of relics during storm:

“[...] car tandis que l’escorte pieuse l’invoquait avec ferveur, une colonne de lumière se forma tout-à-coup dans l’air; la partie inférieure vient reposer sur la châsse, où elle se tint constamment fixée jusqu’au jour; et la supérieure, s’étendant jusqu’à la hauteur de ciel, découvre l’astre de la nuit et un certain nombre d’étoiles qui semblaient lui former une ceinture.”²⁶⁸

The light of nature wrapped its light around the reliquary representing an intercession of the divine with humanity. Nature blinds the reader with the light of God, “l’aurore blanchissait l’horizon

²⁶⁶ B.M.J.F. (Sainte Philomène) 8.

²⁶⁷ B.M.J.F. (Sainte Philomène) 31.

²⁶⁸ B.M.J.F. (Sainte Philomène) 54.

[...].”²⁶⁹ And the light of God was the only hope in conversion: “[...] le grand Dieu qui fait percer les rayons de sa gloire jusque dans l’obscurité la plus profonde [...].”²⁷⁰

The author of *Sainte Waudru* portrayed a woman who has inherited the true “enlightenment”. He described a miracle wherein Saint Waudru’s text speaks of a woman who at the moment of her conversion witnessed a candle relighting itself in the Church: “Qui sait s’il ne voulait pas aussi montrer par cette faveur, que celles qui étaient illuminées intérieurement, le devaient être extérieurement aux yeux du monde? Ou bien, n’était-ce pas pour les déclarer de vraies filles de lumières.”²⁷¹ The statement of interior enlightenment refers to the privileges of mysticism. The exterior enlightenment however reveals she used her faculty of reason! The light gave understanding: “Une lumière plus brillante que le soleil parut sur Lutgarde” in which understanding followed: “Les Religieuses étrangement surprises commencerent à comprendre dès ce moment, qu’elle fut leur méprise en jugeant mal de sa vertu;”²⁷² reminiscent of Voltaire’s “lumières” criticizing on the vices of religious and moral decline in convents. The author, on the other hand, showed that the light was a source of understanding from judging incorrectly “en jugeant mal,” turning Voltaire’s arguments against him—that it was he who judged incorrectly because he lacked the right kind of “lumière.” Continuing to oppose Enlightenment philosophy regarding the argument that knowledge comes from the senses, the author in *Saint Lutgarde*, refuted this argument by proposing that the heart was the key to understanding what was divine: “Elle trouva des délices ineffables dans la jouissance de cette lumière spirituelle & divine, qui éclaira, d’autant plus les yeux de son coeur, qu’elle n’étoit plus distraite par les objets des choses sensibles.”²⁷³ The light displayed in Saint Gertrude is significant of the author’s intentions: “[...] elle vit descendre sur elle un globe de feu étincelant, qui éclaira toute

²⁶⁹ B.M.J.F. (*Sainte Philomène*) 55.

²⁷⁰ B.M.J.F. (*Sainte Philomène*) 74.

²⁷¹ *Sainte Waudru* 74.

²⁷² *Sainte Lutgarde* 6.

²⁷³ *Sainte Lutgarde* 7.

l'église [...]. Peu à peu la lumière du météore se retira et se concentra vers son point de départ [...] au royaume des lumières.”²⁷⁴ The Church was bathed by the light of woman! Hence the argument that women were portrayed as the muse for the salvation of the Church.

Just as the light of nature evoked God, the evocation of nature brought the reader closer to the ‘sentimentalisation’ of God. Nature established a relation with the sentiments in order to derive an essence. For example speaking of Sainte Marie d’Oignies: “Comme la rose répand ses suaves parfums sur tout ce qui l’environne [...]” or personified religion: “O sainte religion, toi seule es capable d’inspirer de tels dévouements.”²⁷⁵ Writing even became poetic: “[...] chacune de ses respirations, chacun de ses battements de son coeur étaient pour ainsi dire une prière.”²⁷⁶ 19th century religious writing was more subjective, more lyrical, and more sentimental, reflecting a passionate stance of faith towards a more intimate approach to God.

²⁷⁴ Sainte Gertrude 7.

²⁷⁵ Rayée (Sainte Marie d’Oignies) 17.

²⁷⁶ Rayée (Sainte Marie d’Oignies) 32.

VII. CONCLUSION

Saints throughout Catholic history exemplified the most pure expression of virtues for human beings. The need to purify after the Revolution propelled the model of purity towards a status of heroine. These hagiographies elucidated on how 19th century authors conceptualized the Belgian saint in the characteristics they held. The goal was to increase devotion by focusing on the heart, making faith a passionate encounter: “[...] et nous, qui lisons ceci, pourrions-nous contenir les transports de notre admiration? Ah! bienheureuses, encore une fois les âmes simples et les coeurs vraiment fidèles!”²⁷⁷ Passionate in writing, yet simple in portrayals. “Le Belge est peu amateur de discussions doctrinales, car celles-ci ne donnent guère de fruits pratiques.”²⁷⁸ The literary value was not as important as the “entreprise” that was carried out. ‘Republishing’ a medieval hagiography meant to extract from history as many details as possible in order to instill a certain culture. The Belgian transmitting of saintly virtues was meant to initiate action and not contemplation. The Word was felt. The authors advocated for a passionate stance for their faith. There was no middle ground:

“Gardez, oh! gardez vos coeurs purs et innocents, en vous éloignant des compagnons pervers, en fuyant les plaisirs des coupables ou dangereux, en bannissant surtout ces livres, ces romans immoraux, serpents venimeux qui cherchent à jeter leur bave impure sur la robe blanche de votre innocence. O sainte Marie, donnez-nous des jeunes gens purs, donnez-nous des jeunes filles qui vous ressemblent.”²⁷⁹

There was either evil “Serpents venimeux” or good “gens purs.” The rhetoric of persuasion for the recatholicization of Belgium was a passionate faith through the example of religious women. In the following passage, Sainte Gertrude in a vision, stopped a fire threatening her monastery by taking a veil to blow the flames away: “Là où avaient échoué les efforts les plus violents et les plus héroïques des hommes, la tranquille puissance d’une sainte femme triompha sans peine et sans

²⁷⁷ B.M.J.F. (Sainte Philomène) 83.

²⁷⁸ Leclercq 181.

²⁷⁹ Rayée (Sainte Marie d’Oignies) 25.

travail: le fléau ne laissa même pas une trace.”²⁸⁰ Saintly women brought peace (tranquility) and eradicate all “fléau.” With her *veil* she stopped destruction of religious institutions. This saint, like all portrayed in the Belgian hagiographies, served as examples that shaped the writing of the proliferate biographies of 19th century Belgian nuns and the direction for the salvation of the Catholic Church. “Et puis, qu’y a-t-il de plus puissant que le récit des miracles des saints?”²⁸¹

²⁸⁰ Sainte Gertrude 17.

²⁸¹ Sainte Aléna 28.

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CHAPTER 3

DECODING THE BIOGRAPHICAL RHETORIC

I. EVOLUTION OF THE RELIGIOUS MODEL

Recatholicization through the biographies of nuns was effective due to its particular shifting models. The beginning of the 19th century exemplified the first model, the medieval saint. In propelling an ideal Belgian saint, hagiographies not only served to revive monastic life after revolutionary suppression but also united the Catholic Belgians against their oppressors by reminding them of their religious history and culture. The goal was to restore Catholicism to a trepid Catholic population influenced by the criticism against monasticism and clerical abuse of power. Anne-Dolorès Marcélis explains that, “Les abbayes doivent retrouver leur mission civilisatrice et évangélisatrice et être, au milieu d’une société en voie de <<déchristianisation>>, des foyers de culture et d’érudition catholique.”²⁸² The female medieval saint represented a spirituality that lay outside of masculine conventions varying from beguines that lived apart but not confined to an order, to lay women beginning spiritual public movements such as Marie d’Oignies in her care of the lepers in Nivelles. Gerda Lerner believes that during periods of social upheaval, there is a high increase of “an alternate mode of thought to patriarchal thinking.”²⁸³ The authors of these texts understood that exemplifying the virtues of these types of women, unscathed from abuse of power, was one way to bring back the faithful.

²⁸² The abbey of Maredsous is an example. Anne-Dolorès Marcélis, Femmes Cloîtrées des Temps Contemporains. 1000 pages d’Histoire de Carmélites et de Clarisses en Namurois. (diss., Université Catholique de Louvain) 204.

²⁸³ Gerda Lerner, The Creation of Feminist Consciousness. (New York: Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1993) 77.

During the same time, there was also an introduction of the model abbess in religious biographies of 15th-17th century founders of contemplative orders and congregations. The contemplative model provided a boost for recruitment for an already low count of contemplative numbers of nuns.²⁸⁴ The “Mère Abbess” recreated the family unit inside the convent walls. These texts much like the hagiographies sought to return to an idyllic time: “Ces asiles *de la Paix* firent revivre, dans nos temps modernes, la piété qui animait les fidèles des premiers âges du christianisme.”²⁸⁵

The hagiographies of medieval saints and the biographies of abbesses of the Renaissance and the Counter-Reform are similar in that they represented examples of strong religious women whom by their faith transformed and impacted society by their virtue and public service. Both the beguine and even the reformer were free to roam about. Even though the reformer most often advocated for a cloistered religious life, often the founder herself was moving freely from convent to convent in order to expand her congregation. The biographies, however, departed from hagiographies in that they represented an institutionalized ordered Church. The goal was to incite women in restoring pre-revolutionary convents. The medieval saint exemplified above all specific virtues and sought to recruit the “pieuse fille.” While the reformer defined by rules of her congregation, exemplified strong obedience to the Magisterium and sought to recruit the “heroine.” The message is clear. Hagiographies propelled a romantic idea of faith, not anchored with historic detail that moved not so much by precision in historical sources but by the virtues that spoke to the Catholic reader’s heart and soul. They sought a more personal approach to God, thereby hoping to transform the interior faith of the individual. The biographies of reformers on the other hand, highlighted an institution defined by rules of obedience all the while promoting the status of clergy. Published at the beginning of the 19th century, hagiographies and religious biographies of reformers sought to mobilize and

²⁸⁴ In 1850 only 10% of religious were contemplative.

²⁸⁵ Abbé Parenty, Histoire de Florence de Werquinoeul première abbessse de la Paix de Notre Dame, à Douai, et Institutrice de la Réforme de l’Ordre de Saint-Benoît dans le Nord de la France et en Belgique. (L.Lefort: Lille, 1846) Vj.

unify the Church through a fight in re-conquering souls led astray while portraying monasteries as “les centres emblématiques d’une Belgique catholique et royaliste.”²⁸⁶

Once hagiographies popularized certain saints and biographies certain religious orders, the focus turned to establishing an identity through the cities in which they were influential. This was achieved by incorporating: feast days of the saint into the calendar, religious festivals in the city streets, and sermons dedicated to founders of congregations. For example Bishop Van Bommel of Liège (1790-1859) pushed for an internal missionary movement by encouraging a Catholic press, specifically *La Gazette de Liège* beginning in 1840.²⁸⁷ This daily reminder of local Catholic events, such as processions of founders’ relics was a successful approach in unifying people who were still quite rooted in their villages.

What developed from the hagiographic republications and initial biographies of reformers was a new religious sociability, proclaiming a new religious and social legitimacy. The recruitment efforts initially directed towards the “pieuse fille” and the “héroïne,” later evolved towards the “bonne soeur.” As a result, the formalization of the “modèle congréganiste” arose in order to elevate even more the image of the nun. This formalization included magnifying not only the type of families the women come from, i.e. hard-working bourgeois, but also magnifying their education, their initiative of faith and even the smallest of mannerisms. This detailing was an important aspect in recruiting women, yearning for tangibility and relatability. The biographies of 19th century Belgian founders no longer searched the past to recreate an idyllic time but rather, represented the present times in which the reader is living. For example, in the preface of *Mère Julie des Pauvres Claires* (1890), a connection was made with the reader in its representation of the times: “Ajoutons que le profit est plus grande encore, quand le personnage dont nous lisons la vie, a vécu à notre époque.” However, the evocation of past, serving as anchor or foundation, continued from the early

²⁸⁶ Marcélis 211.

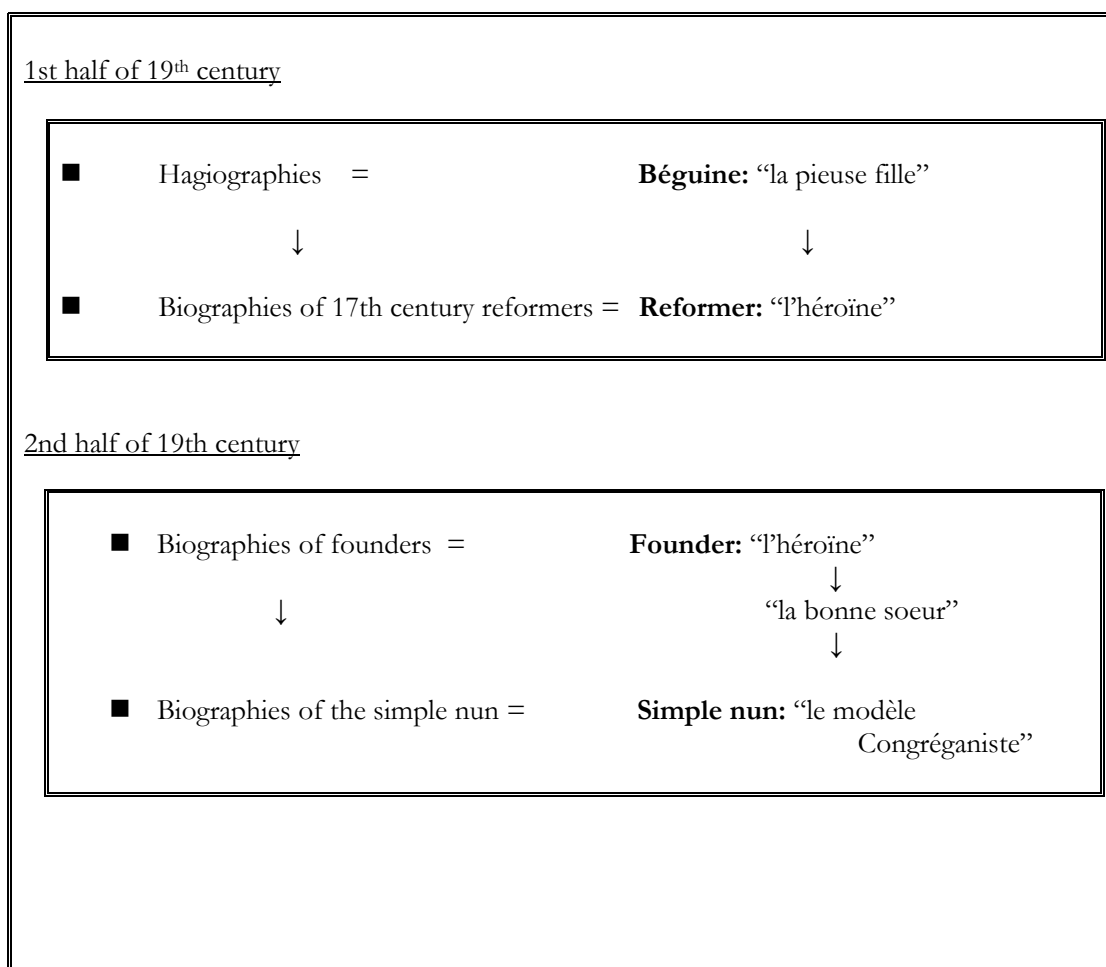
²⁸⁷ Alfred Minke and Paul Gérin, *IV Du Concordat à Aujourd’hui. Liège, Histoire d’une Eglise*. (Strasbourg: Editions du Signe) 10.

hagiographographic writing as founders were compared to great saints. Mère Julie was compared to Saint Theresa of Avila in her passion for reading.²⁸⁸ This comparison with great saints of earlier times authenticated Mère Julie's endeavors: "Car si les religieuses font tous leurs efforts pour s'approprier les influences primitives et rendre efficace la mémoire du passé, elles sont aussi elles-mêmes les personnages sacrés ou vénérés, objets de leur admiration et soutien de leur dévotion: non pas seulement une imitation ou un souvenir, mais ces personnages eux-mêmes."²⁸⁹ These women become venerated as saints and admired for their heroism. Thus, the evolution of the image of the nun that took place during the 19th century was as follows: the model was no longer a beguine or a contemplative cloistered reformer but a cross between the two—an apostolate nun, who defined by the rules of her congregation, brought service to the community in a tangible manner. This evolution arose from and was influenced by the present political and religious structures at the beginning of the 19th century. Politically, the law (1801-1830) required congregations to be useful to society in order to exist. Furthermore, in religious circles, the term "religieuse" was no longer sufficient to define a nun. Instead, the term "congréganiste" was used to distinguish the nun from the religious lay person as the Church promoted spirituality also with the lay people. The "modèle congréganiste" evolved once again by the late 19th-early 20th century from a very defined manner of being, to the connotation of "simple religieuse." A table that summarizes these points follows:

²⁸⁸ P. Henri Saintrain, Notice sur la vie et les vertus de la Révérende Mère Julie, abbesse des Pauvres-Clares de Tournai 1810-1882 d'après les mémoires conservés dans son couvent, par le Père Henri Saintrain de la Congrégation du T.-S.-Rédempteur. (Tournai: Société de Saint Augustin Desclée: Desclée de Brouwer et C^{ie}: 1890). 6.

²⁸⁹ Saintrain 117.

Table 3.1 **Shifting models of piety in 19th century Belgian religious biographies**



II. THE 'PARATEXTE' OF RELIGIOUS BIOGRAPHIES

The 'paratexte' of 19th century religious biographies regards the combination of textual accompaniment such as titles, prefaces, introductions, images and or illustrations found before and after the text. The 'paratexte' is significant as it reveals the motive of the author and the rhetorical strategies involved in his writing. In other words, the prefaces give some of the keys to decode the text itself, specifically on all that is unsaid- the 'non-dit.' For example, the biography of Mère Julie (1890) is based on the "mémoires" of her religious "filles" and of a friend of Julie. The author explains: "Toute notre peine a consisté à changer la disposition des matières et à rendre le récit plus rapide, en retranchant en partie l'exubérance des détails accumulés [...]"²⁹⁰ In other words, the author's 'non-dit' is that the writing of these women is not the same caliber as his as he describes his "peine" to rework the writing of women, consisting of too many "exuberant details." Yet he resorts to simple content in transcribing actual words: "[...] bien souvent, nous nous sommes contenté de transcrire,"²⁹¹ in order to authenticate his text. The prefaces can elucidate the author's intentions, his sources, his collaboration, and his direction of the nun's image.

Whether the work is a shortened version of the original as in the case of the life of Vanderhaeghen (1789) or comes from a rare source found in a library, as in the case of Florence Werquinoeul's author, who based his work on an anonymous *vie* published in 1753 in Douai, concern for sources, history and authenticity is highlighted in all the prefaces of Belgian religious biographies of the 19th century. In many cases the title itself highlights the serious work based on documentation: "[...] d'après les mémoires conservés dans son couvent"²⁹² or "[...] suivi de ses

²⁹⁰ Saintrain 2.

²⁹¹ Saintrain 2.

²⁹² Saintrain.

letters [...].”²⁹³ In the life of Madame Bourtonbourt (1841), the preface stressed the authenticity of recopying from original sources: “Ils ont été exactement suivis” giving the appearance of republishing. Yet, the author concerned in presenting a historical endeavor reedits the original text as the author Wilmet pointed out: “Il a fallu aussi corriger quelques expressions qui pourroient blesser aujourd’hui.” There was ‘appearance’ of authenticity yet there was no mention to the specific changes. In other cases, such as Cornet’s work on Jeanne de Jésus, the reediting served to make the text more appropriate to the times: “[...] nous publions [...] la Vie de la Réverende Mère Jeanne de Jésus écrite par R.P. Simon Récollet, que nous avons cru devoir rendre accessible à tous en retranchant plusieurs longueurs et en changeant les expressions surannées et inintelligibles de l’édition publiée à Ypres en 1688 [...].” However, presenting these biographies as mere history texts was not enough to make a resounding impact. Most significantly, through the guise of promoting exemplary female models, prefaces became forums of denunciation of revolutionary dechristianization and of the promotion of Belgian clergy. The themes that resonated in these biographies were: the resurrection of a glorious Catholic past, the struggles nuns faced in order to follow and imitate the life of Christ and a desire to sacrifice and devote their lives to reparation as in the case of Jeanne de Jésus’ “Pénitentes Récollectines.” As a result, a new version of hero for the Church emerged through women.

The main goal of the prefaces was to maintain the face of Catholicism as beneficial to society. For example in the preface of Bourtonbourt (1841): “Puisse la publication de ce livre amener un résultat meilleur! [...] en vue d’utilité plus grande.” The religious that survived the Revolution or the French and Dutch occupation, did so only by proving their use to society, i.e. opening schools. The Benedictines of Liège were an example of such survival. In 1841, l’Abbé Parenty demonstrated that the ever present past still pervaded his Catholic rhetoric in his biography of Benedictine Florence de Werquinoeul. The tides shifted to combine secular reasoning on history

²⁹³ Vie de la Mère Marie-Dominique dans le monde Julie Berlamont. Abbess des Pauvres-Clares-Colettines de Bruges suivi de ses lettres et de notices sur les couvents qu’elle a fondés et sur la vie de la Mère Marie-Bernardine dans le monde Rose Liebaert. (Bruges: Vandenberghe-Denaux, 1888).

with religious patriotism: “Cependant il y a toujours profit, même au point de vue purement historique, à lire une vie qui s’est écoulée à une époque où la contrée que nous habitons, agitée par divers partis religieux et politiques, luttait avec courage contre les doctrines nouvelles de la réforme, pour y maintenir le catholicisme.”²⁹⁴ Behind a testament veil of Belgian’s struggle for their faith, the author desired to refurbish what was forgotten in the foundation of the Benedictines in Liège and strove to reenergize the continued survival of the congregation. The life of a founder supported the continuation and the success of future religious: “Car une congrégation vit dans la mémoire du fondateur et de la première Mère et elle retourne à chaque instant au moment privilégié du surgissement d’un esprit.”²⁹⁵

A. Prefaces analyzed

The texts below were chosen in order to reflect, by their dates of publication, a representation of the 19th century. The earlier publications reveal an effort to focus on the lives of 16th-17th century founders of successful congregations with the second half of the century focusing on representing new apostolate congregations. A more complete list of Belgian biographies consulted can be found in the bibliography.

Clarisses de Tournai (1582-1648)

Abrégée de la Vie de la Vénérable Mère Françoise Vanderhaeghen, première abbesse et fondatrice du couvent de l’Immaculée Conception de Notre-Dames, des religieuses Clarisses de Tournai. Lille: E.J. Henry, 1789.

²⁹⁴ Parenty

²⁹⁵ ?

Soeurs de la Charité (Namur) (17th -18th century)

Wilmet, M. Ch. Vie de Madame Bourtonbourt. Fondatrice des Soeurs de la Charité à Namur écrite par son confesseur le R.P. Bonaventure de Luxembourg, capucin, et publiée avec la notice biographique de ce père et celle de Mgr. Strickland, évêque de Namur. Namur: Lagauche, **1841.**

Bénédictines (Liège) (1559-1638)

Parenty, Abbé. Chanoine d'Arras. Histoire de Florence de Werquinoeul première abbesse de la Paix de Notre Dame, à Douai, et Institutrice de la Réforme de l'Ordre de Saint-Benoît dans le Nord de la France et en Belgique. Lille: L.Lefort, **1846.**

Pénitentes-Récollectines (Limbourg) (1582-1648)

Cornet, l'abbé N.-J.. Vie et opuscles spirituels de la Vénérable Mère Jeanne de Jésus. Réformatrice du Tiers-Ordre de saint François, et Fondatrice des Pénitentes-Récollectines de Limbourg, d'après le R. P. Mars, recollect, et les archives de l'ancien couvent de Dolhain-Limbourg. Tournai: Casterman, **1861.**

Soeurs de Notre-Dame (Namur) (1751-1816)

Vie de la Mère Julie Billiard. Fondatrice de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur. 1751-1816. Par un Père de la Compagnie de Jésus. Deuxième Edition. Bruxelles, Tournai: Casterman, **1881.**

Filles de la Croix (Liège) (1792-1876)

De Ville, Théophile. Histoire de la Mère Marie-Thérèse. Fondatrice de la Congrégation des Filles de la Croix, de Liège. Liège: H. Dessain, **1887.**

Pauvres-Clares-Colettines (Bruges et Tournai) (1799-1871)

Vie de la Mère Marie-Dominique dans le monde Julie Berlamont. Abbess des Pauvres-Clares-Colettines de Bruges suivi de ses lettres et de notices sur les couvents qu'elle a fondés et sur la vie de la Mère Marie-Bernardine dans le monde Rose Liebaert. Vandenberghe-Denaux: Bruges, 1888.

---(Tournai) (1810-1882)

Saintrain, Henri, P.. Notice sur la vie et les vertus de la Révérende Mère Julie, abbess des Pauvres-Clares de Tournai 1810-1882 d'après les mémoires conservés dans son couvent, par le Père Henri Saintrain de la Congrégation du T.-S.-Rédempteur. Tournai: Société de Saint Augustin Desclée; Desclée, de Brouwer et Cie, 1890.

Clarisses-Colettines (1830-1890)

Notice sur la Vie de la Réverende Mère Marie-Josephe-Céline de Saint François dans le monde Clotilde Ortega, Abbess et Fondatrice des Clarisses-Colettines d'Enghien 1830-1890. Tournai: Desclée, de Brouwer et Cie, 1893.

B. Restoring the image of clergy

Once revolutionary suppression was lifted, the clergy was determined to not only restore their presence in Belgian towns but also restore their image. Restoring their presence began actively under the direction of bishops. The bishop of Liège, Van Bommel, led the diocese through Belgium's independence from the Dutch and the Prussians. He played an important role in restoring the Episcopal hierarchy in advocating for a free Church but believed the government should do all that was necessary for Catholics because "ce sont eux qui font la nationalité belge."²⁹⁶ His stance opened

²⁹⁶ Minke and Gérin 9.

the way for the reorganization of his diocese, meeting with his clergy regularly and advocating for their role in teaching Catholic morals and dogma.²⁹⁷ Throughout the first half of the 19th century, clergy were busily reconstructing parishes. The administrative tasks that followed did not allow for them to be available in the reorganization and restoration of convents. One reason perhaps that 19th century foundations did not overtly signify male clergy as co-founders of religious congregations. Or, perhaps the non recognition was intentional. Women, on the other hand, were more available to found new congregations and their initiatives were more tolerated after the Terror and even encouraged after the Concordat²⁹⁸ with the prominence of women founders responding to a certain need for feminine charisma.²⁹⁹

Restoring the image of clergy and the Church's institutions through religious women was the initial goal towards a successful recatholicization of Belgium's people. However, the task was accomplished through religious writing in the biographies of nuns. The words were forceful in their depictions of clergy: keepers of authority and civil order; benefactors of respect; and committed, loving pastors. The readers of the biographies were Catholic, therefore the Church's attempt to restore its image was with its faithful—those that would not seek to oppose them. Enough opposition stood in their way as liberals and franc-masons began to rally against the growing of the Church involvement in governmental affairs such as government supported Catholic schools. The groundwork to unite Catholics continued even after independence. And what better way than to be forceful in an innocuous biography.

Since the purpose of these texts was to render a certain congregation or Order more visible, all the while supporting the Orders of clergy that helped bring forth the congregation, publication to obtain beatification seemed the logical step towards official successful recognition. The backing of

²⁹⁷ Minke and Gérin 10.

²⁹⁸ René Rémond, Religion et Société en Europe: La sécularisation aux 19^e et 20^e siècle 1789-2000. (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 2001) 265.

²⁹⁹ Rémond 266.

clergy was indispensable in order to attain sainthood. Most often, the initial edition was due to the initiative of the sisters which indicated that the efforts to gain notoriety were collaborative and not so much a concession to editors. This was because there is not a sense of rebellion against the authority of masculine clergy even when manuscripts were consulted.³⁰⁰ These women who chose to devote themselves to God understood that it was not their place to reveal the word of God openly but had to steer delicately through the proper channels.

Restoring the image of clergy in religious biographies evolved over the century from a demure presentation towards a bold influence as ‘source’ in a foundation. In the earliest biography of Mère Vanderhaeghen (1789), the author only mentions the Jesuit priest who wrote the original biography at the end of the preface: “Il est dû au zèle du Révérend Père Antoine-Joseph Picard, de la Compagnie de Jésus, qui mourut le 8 Mai 1771 [...]. C’étoit un homme de mérite, également recommandable par ses talens & ses vertus.”³⁰¹ At the time of the publication, the French Revolution had begun and stirred heated animosity towards religious orders, especially against the Jesuit order. It seemed only natural for this author to discreetly vouch this man’s virtues at the end of the preface, once Mère Vanderhaeghen had been introduced. This strategy boldens in future biographies as clergy members are introduced at the beginning of prefaces, only to be followed by an introduction of the nun, as for example in the *Vie de Madame Bourtonbourt* (1841). The biography is prefaced with two “notices” of male clergy. While the clergy were not officially recognized as true co-founders of this feminine congregation, they were certainly indirectly mentioned in the prefaces, by using words as ‘instrumental’. The first being of Father Bonaventure whom was instrumental in the foundation of the congregation of the Soeurs de la Charité de la Namur. In the preface, Bonaventure is described as coadjutor of Mme Boutonbourt, a discretion that does not match the title of the text which only indicates him as her confessor. The preface therefore functioned to build

³⁰⁰ For example, *Soeurs de Notre-Dame*, Benedictines of Liège.

³⁰¹ Abrégée de la Vie de la Vénérable Mère Françoise Vanderhaeghen, première abbessse et fondatrice du couvent de l’Immaculée Conception de Notre-Dames, des religieuses Clarisses de Tournai. (Lille E.J. Henry, 1789) i-iii.

his reputation: “[...] les capucins disent de lui, dans leurs annales, qu’il a institué les Soeurs de la Charité à Namur. Ce fut lui en effet qui devint l’âme de toute l’entreprise et qui en procura le succès.”³⁰² If he was the soul of the entire enterprise, then why was he not listed as founder? Either this was a slight exaggeration or this biography was much attuned to the image it wanted to portray. A nun, as founder of a congregation, would be more relatable to young women recruits reading this text in boarding schools, proving once more that a certain strategy of rhetoric was at play and that women were pivotal in the recatholicization movement. Mentioning Bonaventure’s erudition as annalist for the Walloonian provinces and historian for most of the congregations and convents in Belgium, highlighted the intellectual competence of clergy. More importantly, the author Wilmet, stressed on Bonaventure’s respect for “anciennes coutumes des pères, son éloignement des moindres nouveautés, son attention et son zèle à les reprendre.”³⁰³ This text, therefore emphasized the importance of restoring old traditions of religious life and featured Bonaventure’s success on creating uniformity among male religious in all provinces in Belgium. Wilmet commended him specifically on his reform for the Capuchin Order which under his advocacy rose from a simple congregation to an established respectable body of the Church—an Order. The author exalted the Capucins by accrediting Bonaventure’s work: “Ils ne rendoient pas de moindres services dans le ministère de la confession, et leur vie pauvre et mortifiée, autant que leurs travaux, leur attiroit partout une estime et un respect qui parurent avec éclat [...]”³⁰⁴ These “Hommes illustres [...] qui jettent tant d’éclat sur notre habit,”³⁰⁵ by their religious example needed to be remembered: “[...] que le souvenir de leur personnes, de leurs travaux, de leurs vertus, etc., subsiste dans la posterité pour l’émulation et

³⁰² M. Ch. Wilmet, *Vie de Madame Bourtonbourt. Fondatrice des Soeurs de la Charité à Namur écrite par son confesseur le R.P. Bonaventure de Luxembourg, capuchin, et publiée avec la notice biographique de ce père et celle de Mgr. Strickland, évêque de Namur.* (Namur: Lagauche, 1841) xxvi.

³⁰³ Wilmet x.

³⁰⁴ Wilmet xii.

³⁰⁵ Wilmet xix.

l'édification de nos suivants.”³⁰⁶ Wilmet's second “notice” was on the Bishop of Namur who was responsible for approving the rules and constitutions of the congregation. The text went one step further and was not only recognicent of his influence but also restored and edified his image. In restoring the bishop's image, the text recounting his approval of Mère Boutonbourt justified his life: “Sa mémoire n'a pas été respectée par ceux qui durant sa vie avoient décrié son zèle et ses travaux [...]”³⁰⁷ His edified image was also important for the reconstruction of a holy priesthood:

“Il renouvelloit en quelque sorte la face de son église [...]. On reconnoissoit partout les ecclésiastiques de son diocèse. La gravité dans les manières, la modestie et la propreté dans les habits, la piété exemplaire dans le lieu saint, une science humble et éclairée, un zèle édifiant; la subordination et la régularité parmi les religieux, [...] l'éloignement de la fréquentation des séculiers [...]”³⁰⁸

Who would have thought that the “life of a nun” restored the image of her superior?

Florence Werquinoeul (1846) biography also invested in clergy recognition, this time in the Benedictine Order: “C'est honorer la mémoire de ces grands hommes, que de relier les faits qu'ils nous ont laissés dans leurs savantes compositions, en les reprenant à l'époque où ils ont cessé d'écrire.”³⁰⁹ Once again, the clergy's scholarly contribution was highlighted. Just like Florence Werquinoeul, the clergy were also models for the present generation:

“Des hommes distingués par leurs vertus, leur savoir, ou le rang qu'ils ont occupé, honorèrent de leur protection les diverses foundations de l'humble abbessse de la Paix. Ces bienfaiteurs de la religion, aujourd'hui peu connus, nous ont paru mériter des notices biographiques. Puisse cet hommage rendu à leur mémoire être un sujet d'émulation pour la génération présente!”

Abbé Parenty mentions their role as “instrumental” in the founding of many teaching institutions and found it important to mention that, “les nombreux établissements religieux, dont ces villes furent autrefois dotées par la piété de nos pères [...] d'autres sont encore à créer.”³¹⁰ Therefore, the piety

³⁰⁶ Wilmet xviii.

³⁰⁷ Wilmet xxxvi.

³⁰⁸ Wilmet xxxiii.

³⁰⁹ Parenty vij.

³¹⁰ Parenty viij.

of priests was related to number of religious institutions founded. “[...] rétablir la Compagnie de Jésus,”³¹¹ would prove to be a major contributor to the education of young men in Belgium during the second half of the 19th century.

In some religious biographies, the author is designated in the title to underscore his affiliation. Père Saintrain, author of *Mère Julie des Pauvres Claires* (1890) mentions two motives for his publication. The first that the “filles” of Mère Julie promised prayers for his order and the three Orders instituted by Francis of Assisi and second, that he hoped to show admiration for the Order of Saint Francis.

The clergy image boldens in later publications. For example, the life of Mère Marie-Josèphe-Céline (1893) was dedicated to the bishop of Tournai who was instrumental in founding the congregation calling him the “le premier fondateur.” The author asks him “de jeter un regard bienveillant.” By the time this text was published, the clergy was in full power, evident by the use of capital words such as “Votre Grandeur” and “L’illustrissime et Révérendissime.” In strengthening the position of his status, the author stressed the perfect obedience of Mère Marie-Josèphe-Céline towards the bishop, “la fille très humble et très soumise, et dont nous voulons imiter l’exemple [...]” whom foresaw the beginnings of this congregation: “[...] les prémices de cette première fleur [...] devaient être cueillies par vous.”³¹² Combined with the edification of religious women, it is evident by these examples, there clearly was intent to restore the image of the clergy and as the image was restored, the evolution boldened to the point of inferring clergy as the source and inspiration of feminine congregations.

³¹¹ Vie de la Mère Julie Billiart. Fondatrice de l’Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur. 1751-1816. Par un Père de la Compagnie de Jésus. Deuxième Edition. (Bruxelles, Tournai: Casterman, 1881) 12.

³¹² Notice sur la Vie de la Réverende Mère Marie-Josèphe-Céline de Saint François dans le monde Clotilde Ortega, Abbessse et Fondatrice des Clarisses-Colettines d’Enghien 1830-1890. (Tournai: Desclée de Brouwer et C^{ie}, 1893) ii.

C. Biographical topoi of the image of the nun

The preponderance of founders, specifically of the model abbess, appears to correlate with a specific structural plan. Apart from setting the tone of order within a convent, the abbess incarnates the role of mother. As “Mère,” the abbess seeks to emulate the virtues of the Blessed Mother in her motherhood, virginity and submission to divine will. Marian piety exploded in the 19th century. Republications of 18th century texts on the Virgin were brought back to life in the 19th century such as “Traité de la vraie devotion à la Sainte Vierge” of Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort and 18 editions of Jesuit Dionisi’s “Il mese di Maria” or Alphonse de Liguori’s “Glorie di Marie.”³¹³ A feminization of Catholicism ensued and religious writing was influenced thereafter by works of the like of Chateaubriand who venerated the Blessed Mother’s sweetness and her role as mediatrix in calming the wrath of God.³¹⁴ Hagiographies were also brought back to life, as for example in Sainte Marie d’Oignies who in recounting a pilgrimage to the Notre-Dame of Oignies, describes the Virgin Mary as an approachable mother: “[...] recourons à elle comme l’enfant recourt à sa mère, avec le même abandon, le même empressement.”³¹⁵ Hagiographies and later biographies, privilege the Blessed Mother as model to follow: “[...] suivons les traces de notre patronne, en nous consacrons tout entiers, corps et âme, à la dévotion envers la Sainte Vierge.”³¹⁶

The Virgin Mary was the highest exemplary model for all religious. In representing patient love as she waited for the birth of Jesus, the nun also in imitation awaited for the birth of the Word in her soul.³¹⁷ Like Mary, the nun followed Jesus in silence in his suffering until her death. This

³¹³ Anne-Marie Pelletier, Le christianisme et les femmes. Vingt siècles d’histoire. (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2001) 151-152.

³¹⁴ Pelletier, 143.

³¹⁵ Abbé Th Rayée, Vie de Sainte Marie de Nivelles dites d’Oignies. (Nivelles: Ch. Guignarde, s.d. (after 1888)) 38.

³¹⁶ Rayée 38.

³¹⁷ Jean Pirotte, “Filles du silence.” Filles du silence. Moniales en Belgique et Luxembourg, du Moyen-Âge à nos jours. Bastogne: Musée en Piconrue, 1998) 33.

suffering took on the two possible directions in religious life, either a contemplative vocation or an apostolate one. The biographies of the first half of the century represented the contemplative nun who wanted to be free in her love for God and dedicated her life to prayer. Her contribution to society was to live in communion with humanity in her love for God. The symbolism was represented in her way of life.³¹⁸ Her prayers and chants concentrated on a mediatrix function, hidden to prepare the divine plan of God. She lived out a prefiguration of eternal life, a life completely devoted to God yet still belonging to the mortal world with all of its functions and duties. The suffering love was indispensable in the search for God and her silent acceptance of cloistered prayerful life allowed the nun to carry her cross for the love of humanity. Uniting her nuptial love in participation of redemptive suffering of Christ,³¹⁹ she became a victim with Christ for the salvation of the world. This victimal ideology allowed the nun to be part of the mystical body of Christ and “qu’elles soient construites sur l’image de l’Eglise peuple de Dieu.”³²⁰ On the other hand, the nuns called to an apostolate vocation, reincarnated the role of mother in their public service for the poor, the sick, the orphaned, and the education of the young. These nuns would make up the bulk of religious women in Belgium and were represented in the biographies of the second half of the 19th century.

As a result of the increased devotion, many congregations were founded and named under the Virgin Mary’s protection. She was the model of sweetness, innocence, humility and obedience. Pelletier says “cette voix féminine qui, en la personne de Marie, se donne pour interlocuteurs et enseigne des humbles, représente certainement une forte protestation contre la dureté d’une société de sensibilité et de projets très masculins.”³²¹ As a result, clergy acknowledged in their biographical prefaces their devotion to Mary. Wilmet mentioned in the life of Bourtonbourt, Bonaventure’s

³¹⁸ Pirotte 37.

³¹⁹ Pirotte 34.

³²⁰ Pirotte 36.

³²¹ Pelletier 154.

defense of the cult of Mary and his creation of two confraternities in Arlon—Sacred Heart of Jesus and devotion to the protection of Notre-Dame d’Arlon. A confraternity is “a voluntary association of the faithful, established and guided by competent ecclesiastical authority for the promotion of special works of Christian charity or piety [...] their members often wear a peculiar costume and recite the Office in common.”³²² These groups deepened the faith of parishioners and were very influential in reviving the faith among rural Belgium. It only helped the Catholic movement of renewal and restoration to illuminate the Marian apparitions of the century, destined mostly to either women or children. The tenor of the apparitions was a call to conversion, to name a few; Catherine Labouré in Paris (1830), Einsiedeln in Switzerland (1835), 2 children in La Salette (1846), Bernadette Soubirous in Lourdes (1858), and Giertzwald in Poland (1877). All of which portrayed Mary as a Heavenly Mother.

The religious biographies highlighted all the qualities and virtues of the Virgin Mary that women should emulate: innocence, purity, modesty, piety, perfection, sainthood, supernatural and divine virtues:

“Plus le siècle donne de mauvais exemples, montre de corruption, étales des scandales, des vices, des désordres, des passions, qui ne connoissent plus de frein, plus on doit lui opposer d’exemples d’innocence, de pudeur, de modestie, de piété, de perfection, de sainteté, de vertus surnaturelles & divines, pour le faire rougir, le confondre, lui arracher, s’il est possible, quelques-unes de ses victimes, & empêcher quelques âmes, qui ne le sont point encore, de le devenir pour leur Malheur. C’est précisément le motif qui nous engage à donner au Public l’Histoire abrégée de la Vie de la Vénérable & Pieuse Fondatrice des Clarisses de Tournay, persuadé que la lecture de ce pieux ouvrage fera très propre par elle-même à produire ces heureux effets, [...]”³²³

Vanderhaeghen’s life functioned as mediator to the reader providing attainable ways to reach perfection. The “lecture” of this work would produce effects such as shamefulness-- “pour faire rougir”-- towards those who chose to follow instead, their passions, bad examples, or scandalous behavior. To cite her as first abbess, founder, and Venerable, was an effort to root this congregation of Clarisses in authoritative recognizable manner, all the while promoting Marian virtues.

³²² <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04223a.htm>

³²³ Abrégée de la Vie de la Vénérable Mère Françoise Vanderheagen j.

To save a soul was deemed most heroic. Religious women were portrayed also as heroines in the beginning of the century. For the faithful, the Belgian Church under six regimes in less than 40 years,³²⁴ was seen as a victim rather than a decapitated tyrant of the Revolution. The portrayal of the nun heroine began with texts such as “Martyrs de la Foi” published in 1800, which demonstrated the significance of honoring and remembering the religious martyrs of the Revolution.

“L’un des premiers soins qui doivent occuper les évêques et l’Église de France, après la persécution, c’est de rendre honneur aux SS. Martyrs et aux confesseurs de la Foi, pendant la révolution. Ce devoir est le plus honorable pour l’Église, comme le plus utile pour la rétablir; car cet honneur est un témoignage éclatant de la Foi, et un encouragement des fidèles [...]”³²⁵

Thus the reestablishment of the Church began and was witnessed by the brief biographical writing of martyrs, i.e. (in other words) saints. This same concept was promoted in many prefaces of religious biographies after the death of the nun with the ultimate goal of making them saints. The engagement of priests, to find worthy examples for the edification of Catholicism, was already promoted in this same text. For example,

“Puisque Dieu a voulu susciter de nouveaux témoins dans ce siècle d’impiété, et que l’exemple de leur Foi et de leur courage n’est pas moins nécessaire à la gloire de la religion et à l’édification des chrétiens, que dans les premiers temps, nous serions bien coupables de les laisser dans l’obscurité. Toutes sortes de motifs nous engagent à prendre les moyens de conserver à la postérité des monuments si glorieux à la Foi, et si utiles aux peuples. Chaque prêtre doit donc s’informer exactement de tous ceux qui ont souffert pour la cause de la religion dans le lieu où il sera chargé d’exercer le saint ministère, et en envoyer une relation détaillée à son évêque, accompagnée de tous les témoignages qu’il aura pu recueillir pour en constater la vérité [...] mais encore tous ceux qui ont souffert pour défendre l’unité de l’Église contre les schismatiques [...] et de ceux qui participent à la gloire des autres.”³²⁶

These religious biographies, glorious monuments to the faith, stressed on their validity and their goal to make the truth be known. The same style of writing of eliminating obscurity was evident in

³²⁴ The six regimes include: the principality of Liège, Austrian rule, brief Prussian rule, French rule, Dutch rule, ending with independence in 1830.

³²⁵ L’Abbé 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. (Troisième volume. Paris: 1821) xix.

³²⁶ Guillon xxij.

this early biography of Vanderhaeghen, while addition of the word “héroïque” was combined with sentimental rhetoric:

“Le respectable dépositaire de son manuscrit, ayant jugé à propos de nous l’envoyer & de la laisser à notre disposition, nous l’avons trouvé si édifiant, si beau & si bien écrit, que nous aurions cru faire un vol à la Religion, à la Piété & à la Vertu, en le laissant dans l’obscurité. Nous n’avons donc pas balancé un seul instant à lui donner le jour, dans la ferme espérance, qu’avec le secours de la grace, on ne pourra le lire sans en être édifié & sans se sentir touché, attendri, excité, porté par une sainte émulation, à imiter les beaux exemples de sainteté, de perfection, de vertus héroïques & sublimes, qu’on aura lieu d’admirer dans l’Héroïne de la pièce toute chrétienne & toute religieuse.”³²⁷

Mère Françoise was portrayed as a heroic image of woman who exalts Catholicism by her very being of religious example. Although the prefaces edified their “vertus héroïques,”³²⁸ the text itself (not the paratexte), denounced words like “a virile” woman--possessing both feminine and masculine virtues. Gerda Lerner explains through the Renaissance humanist Giovanni Boccaccio in his De clarion mulierilous that the “virile” definition as one of strength and valor could co exist with the traditional qualities assigned to women as weaker and gentler in nature. By exposing these contradictory definitions of women, it was possible to account for the heroic and the exceptional without seeing the patriarchal gender definitions as problematic.³²⁹ The dialogue of the female mystics with God proved the essential equality of human beings before God.”³³⁰ Therefore, those that professed religious wisdom, but not mystical gifts were defined as “virile,” especially if they were engaged in some sort of ‘battle’ to regain souls.

Recatholicization would be incomplete without the comparison of nuns to great saints. Although titled “Révérende,” Mère Julie des Pauvres Claires was “sainte”: “[...] elle peut être mise en parallèle [...] avec les saints les plus illustres.” Thus the heroine image of the early 19th century evolved into a image of the nuns as “sainte” to announce her humility. In later publications, humility

³²⁷ Abrégée de la Vie de la Vénérable Mère Françoise Vanderheagen i-iii.

³²⁸ Wilmet 1.

³²⁹ Lerner 257.

³³⁰ Lerner 221.

trumped the heroic virtue, displaying a more pacified, less engaging and defensive stance. For example, Florence de Werquinoeul is the “modèle d’humilité et de simplicité évangéliques [...]” Additionally, the heroine topos of exceptional sacrifice for God evolved into the display of the human mortal aspect of the nun: “Les nombreuses infirmités, les maladies mortelles par où elle a passé, attestent qu’elle n’était pas de fer: or, ces pénitences, elles les a pratiquées [...]”³³¹ Her holiness was not a given, instead she had to work on her perfection as the author also asks the reader to strive for this perfection: “[...] ne pourrions-nous pas faire quelque chose de plus?”³³²

As transmitters of religious socio-culture, nuns were judged by every gesture and word that they enounced. Therefore it was in clergy’s interest, in its restructuring of the church, to choose women who exemplified a mastery of language and body. As a result, a specific biographical topos or “modèle congréganiste” was adopted in order to portray these women in the most positive light. In some cases, their social status was presented in very vague terms, representative of all classes of humanity from the poorest to the richest.³³³ In the avant-propos of Julie Billiard’s biography, she represented the poor of humanity: “Une pauvre fille de la campagne, sans naissance, sans fortune, sans grande instruction, sans aucun appui humain [...]”³³⁴ and who inspired “des milliers d’enfants, appartenant à toutes les classes de la société.”³³⁵ Yet, creating an ambiguous portrayal, the author portrayed this poor girl without great education, as a prolific writer who left behind many letters. The Benedictine, Florence de Werquinoeul, was a reformer wanting to return to primitive ideals who recruited from all classes of society: “[...] elle parvint à fonder plusieurs monastères où l’on vit, en peu d’années, se multiplier de jeunes vierges prises dans tous les rangs de la société.”³³⁶ The

³³¹ Saintrain 1.

³³² Saintrain 2.

³³³ Rémond 269.

³³⁴ Vie de la Mère Julie Billiard 5

³³⁵ Vie de la Mère Julie Billiard 6.

³³⁶ Parenty vj.

ambiguous portrayal was an attempt to connect with the Catholic readers, those of whom by mid-century represented mostly the lower classes. The biographies were sending the message that religious vocations were open to all women, regardless of socio-economic backgrounds. What the author failed to mention, however, was that the founding of a convent was not open to everyone. Rather, founding a convent was reserved to those of a certain economic status that necessitated the support of a clergy member, most often a confessor. This relationship with a private confessor was considered a luxury. Furthermore, the founding of a convent was not a project that was undertaken alone and monetary funds were necessary for its survival during a time when dowries were being abolished. Economic status of the nun allowed her to deploy her social contacts for financial support. The social status of the founder was in fact very important in that it was not only necessary in becoming a founder but actually necessary for its validity.³³⁷ She had to be well regarded by clergy and civil authority, as well as able to recruit, based solely on her reputation. Reputation began as early as childhood by displaying abilities in school and as good teachers.³³⁸ Furthermore, the importance of her social upbringing determined the model repeated of what was to become inside the new walls of convent. Therefore, the Church was selective as to what class was to represent them in such an important missionary endeavor. In the majority of cases, congregations in which the founders came from peasant classes, remained small congregations. All the founders of 19th century congregations had work experience in which they were in charge of a group of people, whether working for a family business, serving clients in a store, or as teachers.

³³⁷ Rémond 270.

³³⁸ Rémond 288.

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Richaudeau. Vie de la Révérende Mère Marie de L'Incarnation, Ursuline, née Marie Guyard, première supérieure du monastère des Ursulines de Québec. Tournai: Casterman, 1873.

Tiers-Ordre de la Très-Sainte Trinité

Calixte, R. P.. La Vénérable Anna-Maria Taigi et la servante de Dieu Elisabeth Canori-Mora, Tertiaires Trinitaires avec une notice sur le Tiers-Ordre de la Très-Sainte Trinité. Bruxelles: H. Goemaere, 1871.

Calixte, R. P.. Vie de la Vénérable Anna-Maria Taigi Romaine (1769-1837). Membre du Tiers-Ordre de la Très-Sainte Trinité; Sa vie intime, ses vertus héroïques, ses dons surnaturels, ses prédictions, ses miracles, d'après les documents authentiques du procès de béatification. Quatrième Edition, considérablement augmentée. Tournai: H. Casterman, 1877.

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I.V.S., O.P.. Une Fleur Caché. La Bienheureuse Christine du Christ, Religieuse du Monastère de Rhetirs de l'Ordre des Prémontré. Namur: Douxfils, 1885.

I.V.S., O.P.. Une Patronne contre la Chloéra. Vie de la Bienheureuse Bronislava, religieuse de l'Ordre de Prémontré. Namur: Douxfils, 1886.

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Bertholo-Ignace de Sainte-Anne, R. P.. Vie de la Mère Anne de Jésus, co-adjutrice de Sainte Thérèse

dans l'oeuvre de Sainte Thérèse dans l'oeuvre de la réforme du Carmel et Fondatrice de l'Ordre en France et en Belgique. Malines: H. Dessain, 1876.

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Labis, Ch.. Abrégé de la Vie de la Bienheureuse Marie des Anges, Carmélite deschaussée. Tournai: Casterman, 1867.

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Bertholet, R. P. Vies de Sainte Julienne et de la Bienheureuse Eve, ou Histoire de l'Institution de la Fête Dieu. Liège: Lardinois; Duvivier-Sterpin, 1846.

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CHAPTER 4

THE BIOGRAPHY OF JULIE BILLIART: FOUNDER OF THE SISTERS OF NOTRE-DAME

I. INTRODUCTION

Religious biographies such as the Vie de la Mère Julie Billiart, Fondatrice de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur. 1751-1816 sought to recatholicize the public by rooting Catholic beliefs in the young as a moral compass for all their societal and political decisions. Julie Billiart's biography was effective in rallying emotive responses from its readers to combat present religious attacks by combining the events that surrounded the years of her life, 1751-1816, with the events occurring at the time of publication, 1881. The strategic weapon was to inspire national religious unity against the Revolutionary destruction and in resistance against secular education.

This chapter will examine in detail, revealed in the analysis of the 1881 biography of Julie Billiart,³³⁹ founder of the Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur, how a specific rhetoric functioned to recatholicize the faithful. In a deliberative manner, the author uses the reputation and life of Julie Billiart to reestablish the good reputation and authority of clergy, to unite resistance against anti-Catholic agendas through a rhetoric of solidarity, to inspire devotion to the Church, and to protect the image of the nun. The strategies the author used, exhibited collaboration and concessions of both religious men and women, in order to gain favorable advertisement and provide examples to the general public.

³³⁹ S.J. V. Baesten. Vie de la Mère Julie Billiart. Fondatrice de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur 1751-1816. (Tournai, Bruxelles: Casterman, 1881).

This biography is also representative of a successful congregation, with several establishments in Belgium (Namur: 1807; Gand: 1809; Saint-Hubert: 1809; Zèle: 1811; Gembloux: 1813; Fleurus: 1814; and Andenne: 1814). Julie Billiard's life diffused many biographies that were representative of the successful projects of sanctification from "Mère" to "Sainte" (canonized in 1906). The text functioned as a documented approval of saintly status permitting a certain authority of speech from Julie Billiard all in keeping within specific hagiographic conventions, i.e. biographic topoi. Although projects of sanctification, supported by a long hagiographic tradition, the definition of these texts as 'biographies' is called into question. These types of religious texts can neither be defined entirely as biographies nor autobiographies due to the mixture of both genres within the text; a strategy the author uses in order to control the interpretation of the text.

This chapter also reveals the significant changes that occurred in religious life in the 19th century, specifically in responding to the need of public ministry, tearing away at cultural boundaries, challenging clerical oversight, eliminating class distinctions within religious convents and dowries, and unveiling the changes in spirituality that personalized faith to a greater degree.

II. HISTORY OF JULIE BILLIART ³⁴⁰



Figure 4.1 Portrait of Julie Billiart in Vie de la Mère Julie Billiart, Fondatrice de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur 1751-1816 par un Père de la Compagnie de Jésus. Bruxelles: J. Albanel; Namur: Balon, 1879.

Julie Billiart was born in 1751 in the village of Cuvilly, France. She was one of nine children; four of her siblings died before reaching adulthood. Her parents lived modestly, “dans une aisance relative,”³⁴¹ owning a store selling lingerie and lace as well as owning a good size parcel of land that provided crops. At a young age, Julie showed signs of devotion to God and was especially attracted

³⁴⁰ <http://catho60.ccf.fr/histoire/temoins/Ste-julie-billiart/ste-julie-billiart.htm#julieBilliartVie> and Baesten's Vie de la Mère Julie Billiart, Fondatrice de L'Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur. 1751-1816. (Tournai, Bruxelles: Casterman, 1881).

³⁴¹ Baesten 16.

to the study of catechism. She enjoyed teaching her friends what she had retained, which laid the foundation for her future religious vocation of teaching catechism to young girls. She learned to read and write at her uncle's school.³⁴² The priest of Cuvilly, Father Dangicourt, noticed Julie's spiritual ardor and began directing her to a deeper commitment, allowing her, for example, to receive communion in secret two years before her friends. At 14 years old, certain of her vocation to God, she made a vow of perpetual chastity. At 16, her trials began when her parents' store was robbed, reducing them to poverty. As a result, Julie took the initiative to sell the remaining goods from her father's store, often traveling alone for long distances. Soon after, Julie was forced to find work at neighbouring farms to support her family. Seven years later in 1774, an attempted murder against Julie's father caused a massive psychosomatic shock rendering her paralyzed which later aggravated to a bedridden state and a loss of speech over the span of 22 years. During the Revolutionary period, Julie practiced mental prayer—"oraison."³⁴³ Meanwhile, her priest and confessor, Father Dangicourt fled to Paris because he refused to pledge allegiance to the State dictated in the infamous "serment de fidélité." Soon after, Julie was also forced to flee Cuvilly as revolutionaries uncovered that she hid priests who held mass at her house in secret. She fled first from Cuvilly, to Gournay-en-Arond, then to Compiègne, and finally remaining in Amiens. While in Compiègne, she had a vision of founding a new religious Order, specifically an institution for poor young girls. In 1797, Julie met her future co-founder, Ms. Françoise-Blin de Bourdon de Gézaincourt.³⁴⁴ Blin, an aristocrat who was committed to becoming a Carmelite, decided upon seeing Julie's deep devotion to commit her life and money to Julie's vision. Thus formed a life-long alliance. The promoter of such an endeavor was Jesuit priest, Father Varin, whom with the support of Françoise Blin helped Julie Billiard in

³⁴² Interesting note on the SND website since her first biographer in 1881 describes her as "une pauvre fille de la campagne, sans naissance, sans fortune, sans grande instruction, sans aucun appui humain [...]". 5.

³⁴³ This detail is not mentioned in her biography suggesting that 19th century clerical authors did not promote this type of mental praying. In fact, Baesten inserts Julie's denouncement of such in her biography. See page 50 in this chapter.

³⁴⁴ See JoAnn M Recker, SND de Namur, Françoise Blin de Bourdon: Women of Influence. (New York: Paulist Press, 2001).

opening a school for abandoned children in 1803. With Blin and one other sister Julie professed religious vows and took the name “Soeurs de Notre-Dame” on the feast of “Notre-Dame aux Neiges.” Here began the first community in an apartment in Amiens. Shortly thereafter, during a devotion to the Sacred Heart, Julie Billiart was miraculously cured of her paralysis. Julie desired to expand her congregation outside of France, into Belgium. However, French priest Father Sambucy of Amiens, elected superior of her congregation, opposed Julie’s plans to spread into Belgium. The opposition was so great, that Sambucy sought to discredit her among Belgian clergy. She abates the attacks and remained resolved during her trial. Due to the oppressive atmosphere, Julie influences her sisters to leave for Belgium. Welcomed with open arms in Belgium, the Bishop of Namur offers his diocese as an “asile” and wanting to “possess them.”³⁴⁵ She begins a foundation in Namur in 1807 and establishes it as the “maison mère” in 1809. The bishop of Namur supported her desires: “Non, non, votre Institut n’est pas fait pour un seul diocèse: votre vocation est d’aller partout où les évêques réclament vos services.”³⁴⁶ The Jesuits supported the community by forging a strong alliance with the Sisters of Notre-Dame and as a result of their influence, “les Pères de la Foi mirent à profit le zèle de la nouvelle communauté des Soeurs de Notre-Dame.”³⁴⁷ And once in Belgium, Abbé Lamarche said “elle produisait un grand bien dans notre pays [...]”³⁴⁸ The foundation in Namur propels her vision of expanding her community to other cities in Belgium: Jumet in 1807; Saint-Hubert in 1809; Gand in 1810; Zele in 1811; Andenne and Gembloux in 1813; Fleurus in 1814 followed later by Liège in 1816 and Dinant. Obstacles were encountered in founding Fleurus and Gand, still Belgium offered her freedom, “Libre [...] de toute entrave,”³⁴⁹ that France did not, allowing Julie to spread her work. Julie Billiart died in April of 1816. Her co-founder Françoise Blin,

³⁴⁵ Baesten 129-130.

³⁴⁶ Baesten 166.

³⁴⁷ Baesten 59.

³⁴⁸ Baesten 238.

³⁴⁹ Baesten 163.

named 2nd superior of the Sisters of Notre-Dame, continued Julie Billiard's work until her death in 1838. Shortly thereafter, the congregation expanded to the United States (1840), Britain (1845), Guatemala (1859), Congo (1894), and Rhodesia (1895). Julie Billiard was beatified in Rome in 1906 by Pope Pius X. In 1969 she was declared a saint by Pope Paul VI.

III. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The post-Revolutionary period was a critical time for the Church in Belgium. Under Napoleon, Catholicism remained the religion of the country but it did not return to its Old Regime power. The Empire began the process of the separation of Church and State advocating only for Catholicism to function as a social influence, reestablishing relations with the Church but not its restoration. Opposition towards Napoleon's Concordat grew as the State seized and controlled all Church property resulting in catastrophic financial repercussions for Catholic institutions. Complicating matters for the French government, the Concordat had been envisioned for a unified linguistic cultural country; such as France. In Belgium, however, there were linguistic problems to overcome (French Walloonian, Flemish and German) as well as cultural divisions (Flemish and Walloonian) all of which had previously been united particularly under Catholic traditions. Once this cement was disrupted, opposition grew quickly towards the French administrative government. Furthermore, ecclesiastical positions were named by State officials privileging civil goals over spiritual goals.³⁵⁰ Consequently this created a division between those loyal to Church hierarchal authority over placements and decisions and those state officials that dictated new installments. What followed was a division of clergy between "refractaires" and "adherents." The "refractaires" were those that swore allegiance only to the Pope and rallied villagers and religious women for opposition against the adherents who supported the election of Episcopal hierarchy by State officials. The biography of Julie Billiart speaks to all these changes with a tone of resistance and opposition refusing to acknowledge the adherents, otherwise known as "intrus."

The tampering of State authority in Church affairs resulted in the disorganization of parish life. Most devastating to the faith of its members was the dechristianization that took place in order to denounce the Catholic faith as the 'Truth.' René Rémond explains that dechristianization was "Le décalage qui en résulte entre la perception des besoins spirituels de la population et la formation d'un

³⁵⁰ Alfred Minke and Paul Gérin. Liège, Histoire d'une Église. (Strasbourg: Editions du Signe) 4.5.

prolétariat ouvrier qui a de ce fait grandi à l'écart de toute instruction religieuse et de toute pratique des sacraments.”³⁵¹ It was precisely the decrease of religious instruction that religious affiliates sought to remedy in the 19th century. Specifically, clerical writers foresaw the threat upon the young, “dans un temps où les ennemis de Jésus-Christ essaient de toute manière de s’emparer de l’esprit et du Coeur des jeunes générations, et s’efforcent par tous les moyens d’arracher des âmes à l’Eglise.”³⁵² The Episcopal mission sought to focus its efforts on the formation of priests and future educators of Catholic schools; which explains why most of the subjects of religious biographies of the 19th century reflect religious educators. The task was not easy; Catholics faced interior resistance from a rising bourgeoisie that had been split by liberals who wanted no interference of religious leaders in public education as well as exterior resistances of foreign French occupation (1801-1815) and Dutch occupation (1815-1830). However the hate towards Protestant King Guillaume of Orange’s occupation was much fiercer than the internal struggles and for a short time, united liberals and Catholics banded together to revolt against him. In 1830, Belgium won independence and with the support of loyal Catholic king Leopold I, Catholic restoration was given full indemnity. The restoration entailed foremost the education of the young generation, the recruitment of religious from rural areas, the formation of priests, and the undeniable allegiance to the Pope. Specifically in Namur, during the 1830’s and 1840’s, Bishop Théodore Alexis Montpellier³⁵³ focused his mission on religious education, became the inspector of primary schools for the diocese, promoted pilgrimages, Pope infallibility, supported Pius IX proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception (1854), reinstated Catholic traditions regarding Lent fasting, and combated the liberal politics for secular education.³⁵⁴

³⁵¹ René Rémond. Religion et Société en Europe: La sécularisation aux 19^e et 20^e siècle 1789-2000. (Paris: Éditions de Seuil 2001) 65.

³⁵² V.J. Baesten 12.

³⁵³ He was very influential in the Catholic restoration of the Namur diocese and later the Liège diocese.

³⁵⁴ Minke and Gérin 10.11.

The young, easily stimulated by bold new revolutionary ideas and wanting to control their destiny independently, could not be countered by authoritative clerical male figures as a rescue effort. Rather, it seemed that the nature of women would be more effective in the hostile virile environment that stood before them. Women, less threatening to the secular structure being put into place, infiltrated their influence through a very effective means of teaching future wives and mothers so as not to “laisser nos frères dans l’erreur”³⁵⁵ in order to reinvigorate the Catholic faith: “Après la Révolution, qui s’était vantée de répandre partout les lumières, l’instruction était presque nulle parmi le peuple: c’est pour la propager, l’élever et la sanctifier, que l’Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame fut alors établi.”³⁵⁶ The Sisters of Notre Dame focused their efforts on the future generations, specifically the “malheureux, dépourvus de toute instruction,”³⁵⁷ by preparing them for the Sacraments, inspiring devotions, and teaching them their Catechism. At the time of the publication of Julie’s biography, the debate on education was in full swing. As a reward for completing good marks in school, religious women presented students with religious texts as prizes, including hagiographies, religious biographies of founders or catechism books. Thereby reinforcing, by the example below, the fundamentals of the Catholic faith.

³⁵⁵ Baesten 41.

³⁵⁶ Baesten 69.

³⁵⁷ Baesten 47.



Figure 4.2 Dame Constance de Greck (1768-1836) mentioned above, was the restorer of the Benedictine convent of Liège after the Revolution. This 1823 loose leaf inscription, located in the archives of the Benedictine convent in Liège, denotes a text as an award to a student 1st in her geography class. Perhaps Constance de Greck was awarding the biography of the first founder of her Benedictine convent of Liège of 1627, Florence de Werquinoeul, of which this note was found next to, in the archival folder.

Another example of texts as awards:

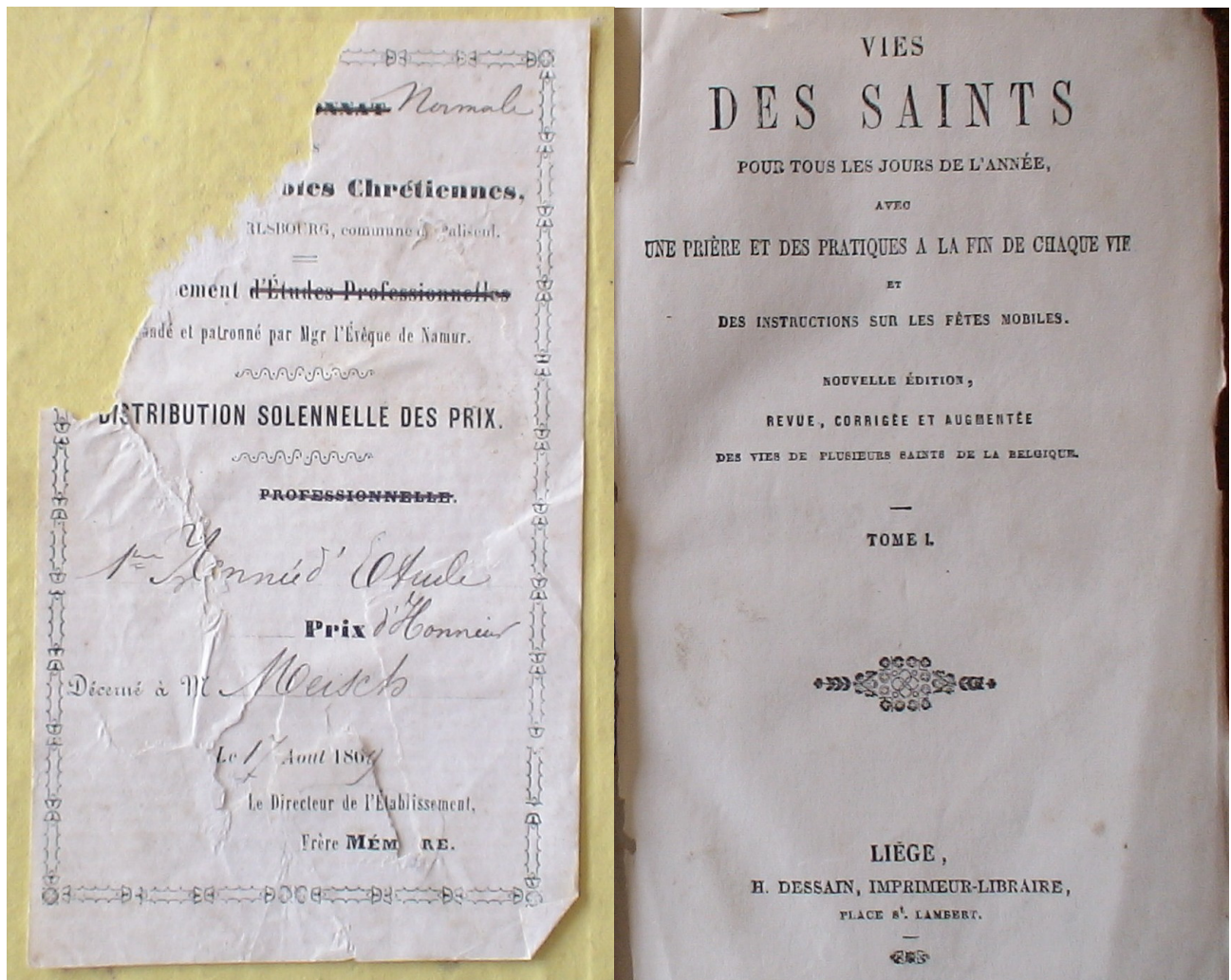


Figure 4.3 Vie des Saints published in 1852 was disseminated to a first year student in August of 1869 evident by the left, affixed, partially torn, prize label.

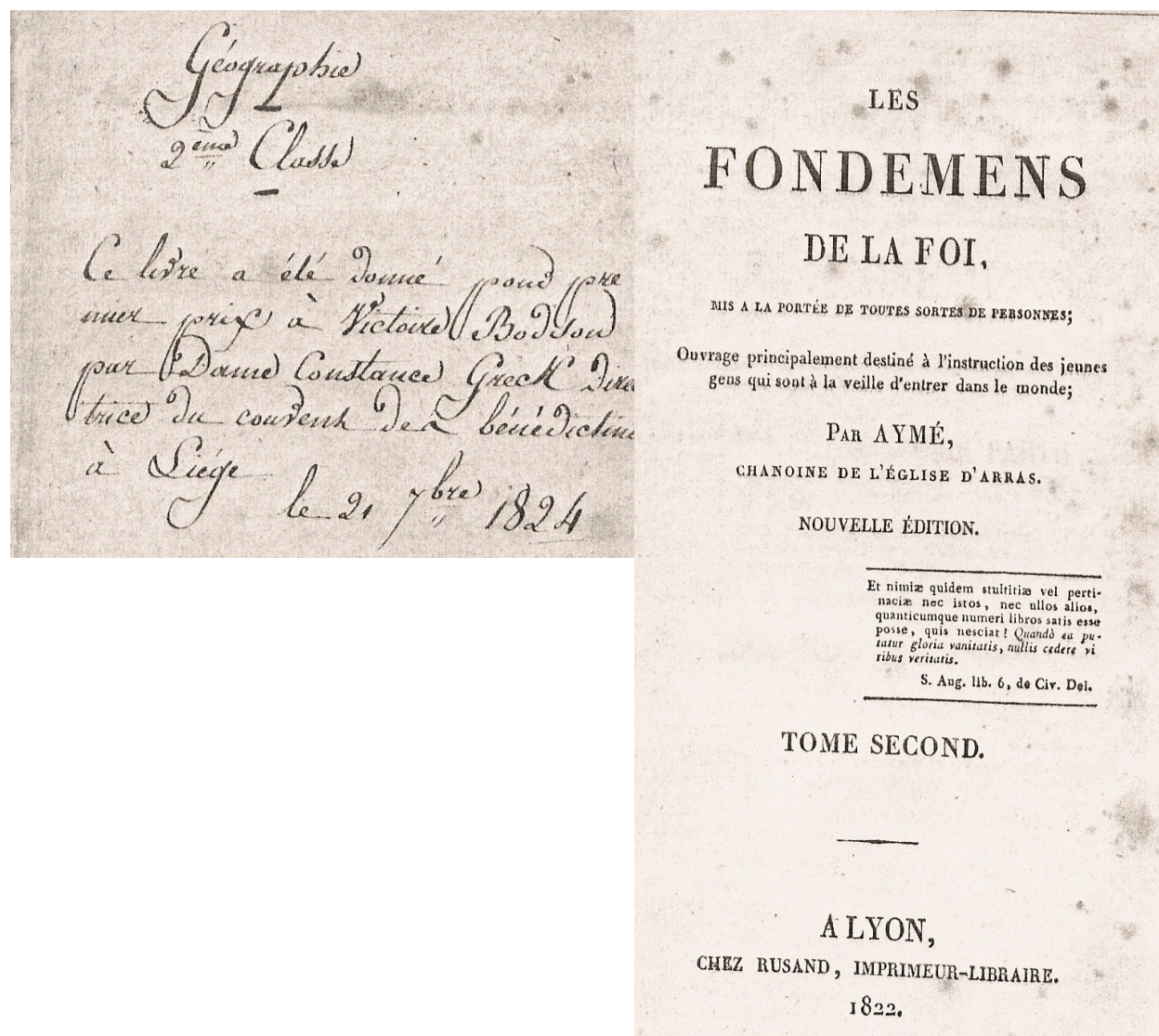


Figure 4.4 The prize dedication is inscribed on the inside cover of the 1822 book Les Fondemens de la Foi, found in the Benedictine library in Liège given by Constance Greck (1768-1836) who was the 2nd founder for the Liège Benedictine convent.

The Benedictines, like Julie Billiart, believed the remedy to a dechristianized society was teaching the young the fundamentals of the Catholic faith:

“C’est la chose du monde la plus nécessaire que de bien instruire de la doctrine chrétienne les enfants qui vous sont confiées [...].³⁵⁸ Tâchez de faire ce qui dépend de vous, pour que ces chères enfants prient bien, qu’elles apprennent leur catéchisme, et les principaux mystères de la religion. Voilà à quoi on doit particulièrement s’appliquer: car voilà ce qui doit les sauver pour le temps et pour l’éternité; voilà ce qui doit sauver les familles et la société entière.”³⁵⁹

Therefore, religious education taught by religious women would reverse the dechristianization of society and restore souls to God. The restoration of the principals of the Catholic faith would promote Christian modes of behavior and save society from destruction.

The biographies of 19th century religious women helped mobilize the reconstruction of the Church after the Revolution. In elevating the benevolent work provided by religious women to society, the clerical writers were rehabilitating the nuns’ presence, reputation and authority in teaching the Catholic faith. In turn, clerical reputation was elevated by the support and obedience of these women to their pastors, as well as their influence in the guidance of souls for Christ. The dissemination of religious biographies strengthened an alliance between religious women and clergy, which served as the backbone of a unified strong Belgian Catholic community. The tone is alike in all 19th century religious biographies—a desire to rebuild the faith of the faithful, in order to bring the Catholic Church to a glorified stature. For success to be garnered at a time when the Church’s authority was fragile, specific rhetoric was used to amass a strong community of faithful. In turn, these texts represented much more than the Catholic restoration rhetoric. They represented an account of revolutionary struggles, testimonies of women’s struggles towards obtaining freedom in religious vocations, women’s ‘sisterhoods,’ and evidence of religious men and women forging new paths in catholic missionary works all the while adapting to changing intellectual, social and political

³⁵⁸ Baesten 240.

³⁵⁹ Baesten 241.

environments. A testimony of all such changes is presented in the following detailed analysis of Julie Billiard's biography, founder and Superior of the Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur.

IV. EDITIONS CONSULTED

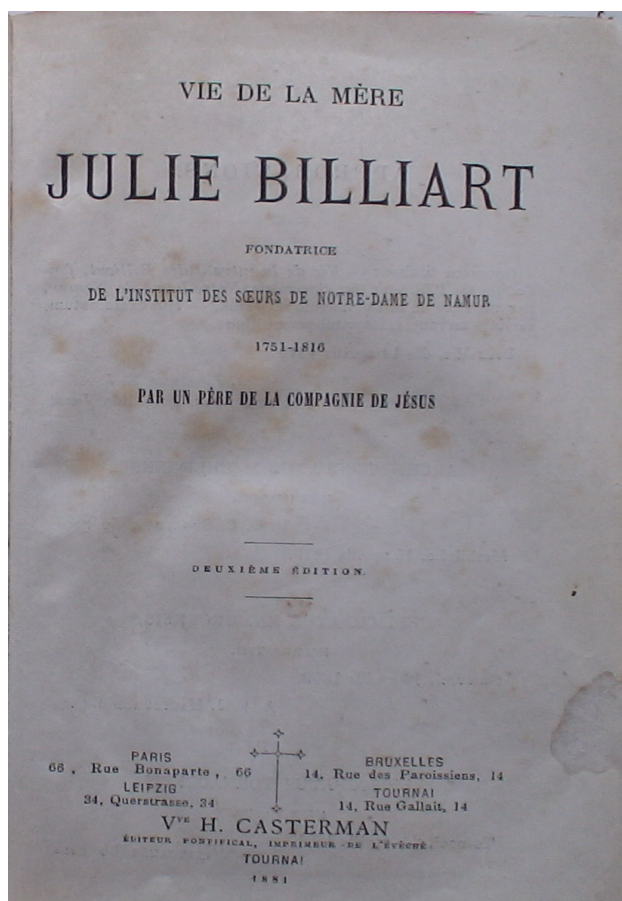


Figure 4.5 Title page of the 2nd edition of Father Baesten's work, Vie de la Mère Julie Billiart, Fondatrice de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur. 1751-1816, published in Tournai, Belgium in 1881.

The analysis of this chapter is based upon the 2nd edition of Father Baesten's work, Vie de la Mère Julie Billiart, Fondatrice de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur. 1751-1816, published in Tournai Belgium in 1881.³⁶⁰ This edition was chosen based upon 3 factors: its goal, its publication date and place of publication. The edition was promoted *to all Belgian Catholics* as a

³⁶⁰ Note: a copy of the text belonged to the Sisters of Charles Borromée in Liège—supporting the idea that these types of biographies were read by other congregations.

manner to venerate Julie Billiart who influenced the education and religious vocations of many young Belgian girls. The editor and printing house, Casterman founded in Tournai in 1780, known for religious publications, published the text at a time when religious congregations were very successful in Belgium. The amelioration of this 2nd edition from its 1st edition of 1862 included the addition of Father Jean-Victor Decker's 1875 notes who died prematurely before its completion of the 2nd edition, including a historical account as well as additional correspondence of Julie Billiart, the Mémoires of Sister Joseph (her sister) and the manuscript "Annales." The name of the author, Father Baesten, is not mentioned on the title page nor on the cover. Rather, his book is signed "par un Père de la Compagnie de Jésus" privileging more his order than himself. The Jesuits were the first directors of the Institute of Notre-Dame and the first to publish this biography. The Jesuits known for their excellent schools in the 18th century supported the Soeurs de Notre-Dame as their "porte-parole" in the mission of teaching in the early 19th century.

In comparison, the 1st edition of 1862 was published at the request of the sisters, "imprimée pour l'usage exclusive des Soeurs,"³⁶¹ in order to preserve a published testimony of their founder. The 1866 version (not considered a 2nd edition but rather an extension of the 1st edition) was for the use of the students and families of the Institute to educate them on the origins of the convent. The publicity was absent, evident by the lack of a preface, because it was a response to satisfy the piety of those who requested it: "[...] destinés uniquement à *satisfaire la piété* filiale des Soeurs et de leurs enfants envers la *sainte* fondatrice."³⁶²

Other consulted biographies of Julie Billiart were by Chanoine B. Charlier³⁶³ and by Father Clair³⁶⁴ and serve only to enhance a few referenced remarks in this chapter. The latter, published in

³⁶¹ Baesten 6-7.

³⁶² Baesten 7.

³⁶³ B. Charlier, Notice Biographique sur la Servante de Dieu Julie Billiart, Fondatrice de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur. (Namur: Librairie de AD. Wesmael-Charlier, Imprimeur de l'Évêché, 1883).

³⁶⁴ P. Ch Clair, La Bienheureuse Mère Julie Billiart, Fondatrice et Première Supérieure Générale de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur. (Paris: Arthur Savaète, 1906).

France in 1906,³⁶⁵ advertised her new “Bienheureuse” status, promoting her notoriety outside of Belgium. Prior to this 3rd edition, Father Clair had published an 1894 edition with fragments found in the journal Revue du monde Catholique, as well as an 1896 edition. These first two editions advertised her “Venerable” state, a step prior to Beatification as “Bienheureuse.” The publicity of Julie’s beatification served to remind the world against religious ignorance, where faith no longer inspired family life. Clair referred to Baesten’s work but believed his work was more thorough in its sources of documents and testimonies. Interestingly, Clair reuses an early 19th century description of religious women in the story of the glorification of the “holy heroine,”³⁶⁶ all the while tying its relation to the 20th century, specifying “les traits qui la désignent spécialement aux hommages de notre temps.”³⁶⁷ Furthermore, to render his work palpable to 20th century readers, he inserts official decrees after inquiries were done on her behalf. This edition presented a model for Catholicism, “de proposer un de ses enfants à l’imitation et à l’admiration du peuple de Dieu.”³⁶⁸ Although the same saint and the same stories are presented in all these editions, different motives for publication evolve over time in religious biographies.

³⁶⁵ Edited by another Jesuit priest, but remains for the most part Father Clair’s work.

³⁶⁶ Clair, Chapter 21.

³⁶⁷ Clair v.

³⁶⁸ Clair v.

V. IS IT AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY OR A BIOGRAPHY?

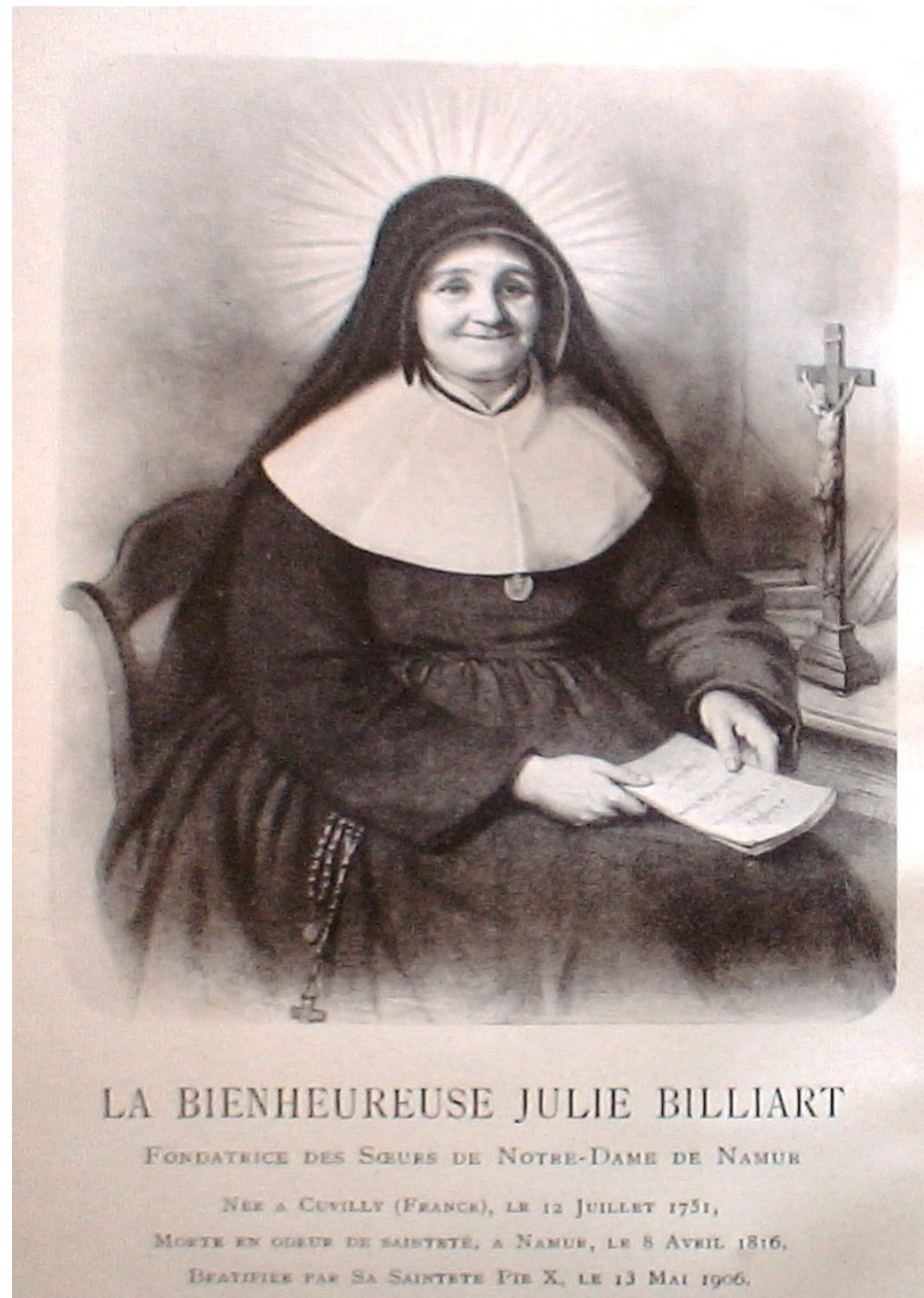


Figure 4.6 Portrait of Julie Billiart on the inside cover of Father Clair’s 1906 edition. The same portrait is found in Baesten’s 1881 biography of Billiart but without the ray of light around her head signifying her elevated status to “Bienheureuse.”

Julie Billiart’s drawn picture in Father Baesten’s 1881 edition echoes his intention: “reproduire avec la plus scrupuleuse exactitude, les paroles, les lettres de la mère Julie [...]”. Dans

l'histoire des Saints, plus encore que dans l'histoire profane, [...] il faut que l'auteur tâche de s'effacer [...] que le récit ne soit [...] qu'une *photographie* [...]”(author's emphasis),³⁶⁹ making it so there is no intervention of the author as artist. Providing neither creation nor idealization, “sans que l'artiste ait besoin de la retoucher, de l'idéaliser ou de la défigurer par ses propres idées et ses conceptions personnelles,”³⁷⁰ the author presents the true portrait in an effort to depart from the modeling of the hagiographic convention of writing. Yet, the author *chooses* the citations to use “à ménager entre de nombreuses citations les transitions nécessaires [...] nous avons, non pas composé, mais coordonné ce livre.”³⁷¹ In essence, the author simply gathered the manuscripts and put them together signaling some sort of autobiography.

“[...] nous avons fait en sorte que le trame de notre récit fût uniquement ourdie avec les propres paroles de la sainte fondatrice et de ses premières compagnes; nous nous sommes gardé d'y ajouter nos réflexions personnelles; en un mot, nous avons essayé de faire un livre qui ne fût, pour ainsi dire, autre chose que la *vie* de la fondatrice *écrite par elle-même*, et par ses filles, et cela, à leur insu.”³⁷² (author's emphasis).

Hence, the border between biography and autobiography becomes very blurry with the notions of “faire un livre” that is “écrite par elle meme.”

The word “biography” is not often mentioned in biographical texts of religious women. An exception, the 1883 Notice Biographique sur la Servante de Dieu Julie Billiart, Fondatrice de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur of B. Charlier, possibly because it is written *after* Julie had been well recognized. However, interestingly, the term “biographique” is more often used when referencing male clergy within women's biographies. For example in the 1846 preface of Histoire de Florence de Werquinoeul,³⁷³ the word “biographique” is mentioned for the “notices” of male clergy: “Ces bienfaiteurs (Bénédictins) de la religion, aujourd'hui peu connus, nous ont paru mériter des

³⁶⁹ Baesten 8-9.

³⁷⁰ Baesten 9.

³⁷¹ Baesten 8.

³⁷² Baesten 9.

³⁷³ 16th century Benedictine reformer

notices biographiques.” Therefore the question remains: is the intention of the religious texts truly ‘biographical’ and does this intention supersede the format of the text? At first glance, the biographical intentions are illustrated in the title itself: “Vie de ...,” written by someone other than the subject as opposed to an overt indication of an autobiography written by the subject herself. These texts act as “circulaire necrologique habituelle”³⁷⁴—a tradition that involves the congregation to print a work of the nun’s life after her death. But, how is the text defined if the content of the text is derived mostly from her own quotes making up over half of the ‘biographical’ text? The confusion arises when Julie Billiart’s letters, the source of her quotes, were intended to be read by her sisters. For example:

“Mais c’est dans la correspondance même de la mère Julie, que nous avons si souvent citée, et qui compose, pour ainsi dire, à elle seule, toute la trame de cette biographie, c’est là que l’on voit à l’œuvre son incessante solitude pour tout ce qui touché à l’esprit religieux et à la pratique des vertus propres à l’Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame.”³⁷⁵

Doesn’t the didactic approach qualify the text to be autobiographical when the originality of Julie’s writing is not lost? The impreciseness is due to the lack of an imprecise literary genre in the 19th century. In most cases, the prefaces indicate that the authors in their duty as historians had to correct, refine the style and more importantly render the text more “lisible” and more “utile” from which the materiality of text is drawn at the liberty of authors. In transcribing Julie’s thoughts, her ‘lesser’ writing and her littlest gestures and appearances, the author attempts to even erase himself as being an intermediary in the testimonial of her life: “C’est là que nous pourrions apercevoir [...] directement et sans aucun intermédiaire [...] toutes les vertus qui font les saintes et qui opèrent perpétuellement de grandes choses dans l’Église de Dieu.”³⁷⁶

³⁷⁴ Soon after a member of the congregation died, a short small looseleaf parchment would be dissiminated recounting the life of the nun, often stressing on her virtues and her professed vows.

³⁷⁵ Baesten 244.

³⁷⁶ Baesten 10-11.

With no detailed literary distinction put into place, it seems evident that there is rhetorical confusion at play. The author's intent is to elevate his text above a typical "notice biographique." In other words, the life of Julie Billiard is not *just* a biography. It is a closer rendition to a true *presentation* (and not representation) of Julie, for representation insinuates creation and fiction. In other words, the author wants the reader to be inserted into a temporal unchanging reality that is not reflected by 'hindsight,' evident in the constant reminders that the text is for "notre temps"—a similar 'present' ambiance created in an autobiography. Baesten's efforts reside in trying to represent reality and perhaps leave behind a public record; "Biography is after all, a sister discipline to history."³⁷⁷ In the 19th century there were great strides in historiography which maintained that biographies could reflect the actuality of the past but this argument did not take into account the biographer's biases regarding selection of material and presentation.³⁷⁸ The positivist tradition on presenting an impartial biography certainly had influence on the writers as seen in the following citation: "Le P. Clair l'a écrite avec impartialité [...]"³⁷⁹ with awareness highlighting the concern for prejudices that form in reading the texts. All the religious biographers cite in their prefaces their extensive scientific research of original source material. However, Heffernan in his Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages, defends that there are limits to religious biographies in that "it cannot claim in a substantial way that it can give us what actually was, since the past is accessible to the biographer only as a reconstituted present in which the original context is determined by the selectivity of the biographer."³⁸⁰ Baesten rectifies this problem by inserting as many quotes from Julie's letters into his biography, hoping to authenticate a more 'present' temporality. The epistolary writing renders the text more persuasive of a present spirit, guaranteeing a higher degree of authenticity. He attempts to present a text to his reader as a factual document due his consultation

³⁷⁷ Heffernan, Thomas. Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages. (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1988) 12.

³⁷⁸ Heffernan 45.

³⁷⁹ Clair iv.

³⁸⁰ Heffernan 66.

of not only letters but other manuscripts and interviews. The sisters of Notre-Dame had access to her letters. Why not publish these? Epistolary writing reserved for the privacy of women rarely became public records in the 19th century. In fact, her letters were not published until the late 20th century.³⁸¹ Moreover they reveal a process of self-discovery and an affirmed feminine identity rather than accomplishments and achievements as noted in the biographical format.

All the same, Baesten *chooses* the letters, experiences even the words to highlight. Moreover, he functions as a sort of cultural historian because he creates explanations to these words by bringing in more insight than perhaps Julie could have included in her letters. His commentary functions within tradition of meaning surrounding the text, continuing no doubt in a well-established tradition of hagiographical writing including quotations of sayings or writings. After all, the purpose of the text was to illuminate a saint, start devotion and present her as an inspirational source of a successful religious congregation. He hopes that his writing will provoke emulation and continued support in the future endeavors of religious women.

The pre-19th century religious autobiographical genre was often in response to a request made by a woman's confessor with the writing process under his direction. However, 19th century religious biographies, written mostly by men, were no longer always initiated by male clergy, but rather by the sisters of the congregation who had to convince clergy to take responsibility for its publishing and its approval within Church regulations. This is important in revealing the feminine initiative in reconquering souls, and shaking off the required 'humility topos' of past writing traditions, appearing more autonomous on the part of women. However, taking responsibility over publication meant that the clerical author was ultimately responsible for shaping the identity of Julie: "Dieu aime à bâtir sur le néant [...]" –a phrase often repeated in the Vie de Julie Billiard, which suggests in fact that the author also had a blank canvas from which to start. Biographers tend to write about those subjects that have value for themselves. Interestingly, in Julie Billiard's biography,

³⁸¹ See Lettres de Sainte Julie Billiard, fondatrice des Sœurs de Notre-Dame de Namur. 3 vols. (Rome: Congrégation des Sœurs de Notre-Dame, 1976).

Baesten also becomes part of the narrative which according to Heffernan means that the text becomes an autobiography by confronting the reader with his own testimony--creating a dialectic between the reader and the text.³⁸² His own testimony justifies his own actions of supporting this nun with his conviction directing the writing as well as building an identity for Julie. The traces of an “aveu” that he leaves behind takes its meaning not from the word “confession” but its Latin meaning of “praise to God.” He is in fact recounting his own spiritual journey by seeking to trace God’s action in human life.

Although the Vie de Julie Billiard contains autobiographical features, the text finishes with the death of Julie Billiard. Death is the confirmation and the crowning of an exemplary life. A common Christian vision of death was that it represented a moment of truth that resulted in a departure towards a ‘true life.’ In a biography, the memory is perpetuated from the physical death whereas an autobiography has no closure, with the potential that the life may eventually betray itself. Chronologically, the “Vie” follows the biographical pattern of ordering events from birth until death and does not entail a layering of memories, as one would encounter in an autobiographical format. Yet, the Christian biographer attempts with his rhetoric to preserve a life from death; believing to have the language to recreate a life and perpetuate it, specifically by anchoring his belief in the power of Julie’s eternal existence.

³⁸² Heffernan Chapter 3.

VI. LITERATURE OF RECATHOLICIZATION

A. The power of rhetoric in Belgian religious biographies

Rhetoric, or the art of persuasion, long developed by Greeks and Romans as a theory of discourse comprised of both oratory and written material covered a whole spectrum of goals,³⁸³ “from converting hearers to a view opposed to that they previously held, to implanting a conviction not otherwise considered, to the deepening of belief in a view already entertained, to a demonstration of the cleverness of the author, to teaching or exposition. In practice almost every communication is rhetorical in that it uses some device to try to affect the thought, actions and emotions of an audience but the degree of rhetoric varies immensely.”³⁸⁴

The authors of the religious biographies utilize Christian rhetoric in order to recatholicize their audience. The three factors of Christian rhetoric are grace, authority and the message “proclaimed.” The message proclaimed is based on authority and grace, not proof.³⁸⁵ In other words, “its truth must be apprehended by the listener, not proved by the speaker. The reaction of a person in the audience to the message is similar to his reaction to a miracle, the direct evidence of authority: he believes or he does not.”³⁸⁶ Two Christian writers appear to have influenced religious biographical writing, Jacques Bénigne Bossuet and Saint Augustine, both of whom sought to cultivate emotion to move their audience.

St. Augustine’s Christian rhetoric is representative of a belief more in the power of what was said than in its artistry.³⁸⁷ According to Saint Augustine, Christian rhetoric “should conciliate those

³⁸³ George Kennedy Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980) 3.

³⁸⁴ Kennedy 4.

³⁸⁵ Kennedy Chapter 7.

³⁸⁶ Kennedy 127.

³⁸⁷ Kennedy 155.

who are opposed, arouse those who are remiss, and teach those ignorant of his subject.”³⁸⁸ In other words, the writing must teach, delight and move. Pronouncing the message energetically and clearly is more important than its analysis or ornamentation. Biographers of the 19th century will grasp this aspect but differ in that they are not striving for audience conversion since those who were not Catholic were considered “hors de la vrai Église, hors de la voie du salut”³⁸⁹ but focus instead on strengthening their Catholic audience’s losing faith--- in other words, a process of recatholicization.

Religious biographies are similar to Bossuet’s funeral orations in that they represent posthumous expressions of celebrating a life designed by men for posterity. All the biographies are published after the death of the nun in order to preserve the humility of the “saint” and to protect her from any objections. Remembering the founders by rendering them immortal through the text was an act of piety, of praise to God. The holiness attested in posthumous texts confirmed the power of the Word allowing knowledge to come from text and not the visible life. That is, “Immortality results from a transformation of the flesh into words [...] whereas flesh becomes word in the scriptural sanctification of the hero, word returns to flesh when popular devotion is concerned.”³⁹⁰ It was believed that even devotion resided in the mimicking of ritual gestures recorded in the texts allowing the reader to have contact with the sacred which in turn instructed the faithful virtuous modes of behavior.³⁹¹

Bossuet’s persuasive skill in his funeral orations was demonstrated in his mixing of profane and sacred rhetoric that did not focalize on the entertaining display of rhetoric. Religious biographical writing combined the profane and sacred by mixing historical detailed accounts with Christian rhetoric. Rejecting any form of flattery towards his audience, Bossuet’s eloquence rested in

³⁸⁸ Kennedy 156.

³⁸⁹ Baesten 41.

³⁹⁰ Brigitte Cazelles, “Saint’s Lives” in A New History of French Literature, ed. Denis Hollier. (Cambridge: Harvard U. P.) 14-15.

³⁹¹ Aviad M. Kleinberg, Prophets in their own country : living saints and the making of sainthood in the later middle ages. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 50.

its effectiveness to move his listener: “Il doivent rechercher, mes soeurs, non des brillants qui égayent, ni une harmonie qui délecte, ni des mouvements qui chatouillent, mais des éclairs qui percent, un tonnerre qui émeuve, une foudre qui brise les coeurs.”³⁹² Bossuet was convinced that the audience was most likely moved by the appearance of the emotion of the preacher. The religious biographers like Bossuet, bring themselves into the narrative of the “eulogy”³⁹³ by expressing the first person, exclaiming, questioning, engaging in imaginary dialogue with his listeners, and crying out passionately for an emotion to match his theatricality. It is perhaps Bossuet’s influential appeal to project emotions in a dramatic form that is most evident in Julie’s biography. To be more persuasive, Baesten inserts Julie’s words because it carried more personality and conviction allowing the appearance of conversation to seduce the ordinary reader, where he might have been repelled by the aridity of a theological text. Inserting Julie’s words was a rhetorical device seeking accessibility of women as well as authenticity. Julie’s letters were representative of feminine rhetoric or “poetics of women that avoided standard theological vocabulary.”³⁹⁴

Christian rhetoric in the 19th century was not only rooted in the imitation of model writers such as Christian preachers Saint Augustine and Jacques Bénigne Bossuet, but also influenced by 19th century romantic rhetoric that also persuaded by moving the emotions of its readers: “Peu à peu, le village changea de face. La paix, la concorde, la piété prirent la place de la haine, de la violence et de l’incrédulité. Le catholicisme répond si bien aux exigences de la nature humaine que, pour peu que le coeur soit disposé, le pécheur converti arrive bientôt à la pratique des plus belles vertus.”³⁹⁵ Romantic writing refers to a type of sensitivity that attaches great importance to emotions and to the impetuosity of the heart. It professes a communion with nature as well as dramatic

³⁹² Peter France. Rhetoric and Truth in France: Descartes to Diderot. (The Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1972) 130.

³⁹³ Biographies, specifically those published soon after the death of the nun, can be described as a long form of a eulogy due to the insertion of the author’s voice as well as the subject’s.

³⁹⁴ Alison Weber, Theresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity. (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1990) 10-11.

³⁹⁵ Baesten 51.

descriptions of a romantic hero who yearns for the past through his melancholic dreams. Although Catholic religious biographical writers were strongly influenced by aspects of romantic writing, they posit alternative positive behavior while striking the heart of its readers. Much like romantic writers, they are nostalgic of the faith of the Church from past centuries, yet they do not display a melancholic predisposition. Rather, they combat the dechristianization of society at the turn of the century, not with a “mal du siècle” but with words filled of triumphant energy. Romantic writers personify their sentiments through the romantic hero, and Catholic biographical writers through a ‘heroine.’ The romantic hero, characterized by a young man who is born too late is thrust into secular society and must accept a conformist and materialist society. The religious ‘heroine’ contrary to the romantic hero, feels compelled to be included in society and agitating it. The religious authors present nuns such as Julie Billiart, as born at the right time to rectify and correct the ills of society. The religious “heroine” is not miserably sad, suffering from being too sensitive. Rather, she is “virile” and “femme forte” who suffers only in reparation for sins committed against the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Yet they behold a divine peace of knowing God exists. Much like the romantic hero’s focus on oneself, the religious heroine’s life is defined by the introspection of prayer. She, however, does not stop her focus there but also focuses her thoughts on God and on others: “Tous ceux qui avaient des rapports avec la mère Julie, reconnaissaient bientôt en elle une âme uniquement embrasée de l’amour de Dieu”³⁹⁶ and in doing so “les bienfaits qu’elles semaient sous leurs pas faisaient aimer la religion qui les inspirait.”³⁹⁷ The societal impact of religious women is recounted in the biographies: “Ah! Combien d’âmes ne seraient pas sorties de l’état de mort où elles étaient, sans ce secours!”³⁹⁸ The biographer was not interested in the form of the text but how the speech was aimed at producing effects on its readers in its relation to their beliefs and desires. The goal was to celebrate modes of behavior through romantic imagery that would in turn influence public behavior.

³⁹⁶ Baesten 232.

³⁹⁷ Baesten 48.

³⁹⁸ Baesten 67.

Illustrating virtuous deeds as paradigms for appropriate social behavior³⁹⁹ would be accomplished by well established topoi and narrative structures that were sanctioned by a specific set of traditions. “Tradition, the fidelity to an established rhetoric, plays a vital role in narratives that illustrate the timeless reality of the sacred.”⁴⁰⁰

George Kennedy describes in his Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times that the 19th century rhetorical movement was influenced by romanticism, what he coins as “letteraturizzazione” -- the elocutionary movement in which rhetoric slipped into a literary composition.⁴⁰¹ He states that “19th century historians abandoned the convention of writing speeches for characters in their narratives.”⁴⁰² “Christian rhetoric experienced a kind of letteraturizzazione of its own, moving from simple, oral homily to the elaborate, epideictic sermon.”⁴⁰³ Julie Billiart’s biography takes the form of an elaborate sermon in its inclusion of Julie’s autobiographical quotes, or Christian rhetoric, with the author’s explanations of these all set against the work of a “historian.” Both the author’s use of Christian rhetoric and historical events present an assertion of authority through speech. As a historian, he advocated a non-emotive form of communication in his concern for truth (i.e. scientific certainty), using techniques of appealing to the rational side of man’s nature [using mathematical certainties (dates, numbers etc), natural ways of speaking, and positive expressions] in the presentation and description of his source in a way to validate the ‘scientific’ process of the book. ⁴⁰⁴ His presence serves to explain, elucidate, or draw conclusion for the reader so as not to leave it a guessing game as to what he meant. As a Catholic

³⁹⁹ Heffernan 150.

⁴⁰⁰ Heffernan 88.

⁴⁰¹ Kennedy 109.

⁴⁰² Kennedy 110-111.

⁴⁰³ Kennedy 114.

⁴⁰⁴ France Chapter 2: Philosophy and Persuasion

writer, he applies Christian rhetoric rooted in ritualism of liturgy which seeks to convert with testimony of the saint's life.⁴⁰⁵

1. Rhetorical role of author

The rhetorical role of the author was to teach and to move his reader all in an effort to promote his authority. Why would clergy invest in publishing lives of religious women? 1. to reestablish the status of clergy in Belgian society, 2. to unite resistance against anti-Catholic agendas, 3. to interpret the life of the nun in an effort to protect her from damaging rumor, 4. to inspire devotion to the Church while promoting a saint, and 5. to promote a particular convent or Order. All this investment, of course, required the assistance of the religious women themselves.

2. Rhetoric of authority and alliance: the reestablishment of clergy

The initial embracement of clergy support was fundamental in order to establish a congregation in a region. And quid pro quo, as a Jesuit, V.J. Baesten recognized the importance of publishing the Vie de Julie Billiart in order to “rétablir la Compagnie de Jésus.”⁴⁰⁶ This paradox lies in an alliance of both clergy and religious women aiding each other in their roles within the recatholicization movement. Within the text, the author could highlight the influence of past clergy members in the formation of the Soeurs de Notre-Dame. But more importantly, the preface became a privileged writing space for the Jesuit author to elevate present priests or bishops in their continued support of a successful congregation. Father Baesten's first 1860 edition was published at the request of the Sisters of Notre-Dame. In return, the Sisters needing clerical authority for publication,

⁴⁰⁵ Kennedy 120.

⁴⁰⁶ Baesten 12.

promised to pray for the Jesuits. Jesuits whom helped promote and validate their founder, Julie Billiart, were then given freedom to advertise themselves in the preface of the text. Thus, formed an alliance between religious women and clergy.

In comparing 19th century preface remarks to 20th century historical accounts of the life of Julie listed on the Soeurs de Notre Dame website, it becomes very clear that the preface becomes a forum for the reestablishment of clergy. Although it was Julie who had the initial vision of a teaching religious community (evident by her taking vows at 16, teaching catechism to young girls while paralyzed, and forming a friendship with an aristocrat who financed its development), the Jesuit author and advocate for the Soeurs de Notre-Dame, Father Baesten, promoted Father Varin as the *initiator* of the beginnings of the congregations. For example: “[...] un saint prêtre (Father Varin) *constituait* en France une Société qui, par l’enseignement et la prédication, devait concourir efficacement à la restauration du règne de Jésus-Christ dans les âmes”⁴⁰⁷ (my emphasis). Julie’s vision and lifelong vocation is undermined by the ‘organizer who put it all together,’ in this case, Father Varin. The author in his choices of words could have simply used “influçait” or “surveillait.” But the quid pro quo obliged the foundation to begin with an alliance of a priest. Within this alliance was the understanding that the writing in Julie’s biography would display a hierarchal structure of male clergy, even if it meant crediting the Jesuits for the foundation of a congregation. However, Julie’s writing, perhaps unbeknownst to the author Baesten, reveals a bit of irony in this submission: “[...] comme Supérieure générale de *votre* Institut, je vous engage simplement à venir pour visiter la maison que *vous y avez*, et y faire toutes les réformes que vous jugerez convenables”⁴⁰⁸ (my emphasis), specifically because she in fact disputes against any type of reforms since she judged herself and her sisters capable of deciding on its constitutions.

The hierarchal structure of the Catholic Church demanded that Julie did not take the place of a director or as a ‘recognized initiator’ but rather simply that of a ‘founder.’ As a founder, Julie

⁴⁰⁷ Baesten 52.

⁴⁰⁸ Baesten 204.

was required to have a network of support in order to represent a group of women. This would not be possible without clergy or the social backing of aristocrat Françoise Blin de Bourdon regardless of her initiative! Father Varin's influence and Julie's submission to him contributed to her formation in gaining legitimate authority: "Il avait été l'instrument de Dieu [...] il devait encore l'aider à lui faire atteindre un plus haut degré de vertu."⁴⁰⁹ Chosen, Julie displayed allegiance and accordance to the Church of which the author reveals in the following quote: "Inutile de faire remarquer ici le profond attachement de Julie à l'Eglise, et la sagesse de ces conseils dont, hélas! il y a, de nos jours encore, à profiter dans plus d'un pays de l'Europe."⁴¹⁰ Promoting allegiance to the Church not only represented an alliance between religious women and men but also served as model for Catholics to emulate the same attachement during a time of increasing attacks for the complete separation of Church and State. The author is rallying for Catholics to honor the Magisterium of the Church by promoting a deep attachment to the Church itself.

3. Interactive text: rhetoric of solidarity and resistance.

The fundamental principle of rhetoric is the awareness of the audience. Religious biographies iterate a system of values with narratives that are designed to promote social cohesion⁴¹¹ in order to inspire trust and encourage the reader to place faith in the honest words of the author. In order to influence the spirit of his reader, the author includes events and experiences that relate to his audience. Julie Billiard's biography is especially effective in creating Catholic unity through shared struggles by providing, for example, references to the revolutionary hardships Julie and her loved ones faced. These references were important in establishing a relationship, showing the reader that her faith stemmed not from a privileged, sheltered, unrealistic, and unattainable origin but rather

⁴⁰⁹ Baesten 62.

⁴¹⁰ Baesten 41.

⁴¹¹ Heffernan 18.

from the very roots from which her readers originate. Thus, the reader more easily identifies with her and is more easily convinced of a deeper spiritual active life in order to combat these types of hardships. In the face of devastation, such as the poverty that Julie and her family were subjected to after looters stole merchandise from their store, the author notes how Julie puts all her faith in God. He inserts Julie's comforting actions towards her father's employees, of Julie uniting them in prayer.⁴¹² The author further establishes the perilous times in which Julie sacrifices by not eating much in order to save money and finds work at 16 to help provide for her family. More importantly, he establishes Julie's virtuous manner even when she is suffering, for suffering had its purpose: "Dieu voulait éprouver sa servante et la fortifier, pour en faire un jour l'instrument de ses desseins miséricordieux."⁴¹³ The description of Julie's everyday struggles was meant to provoke devotion to a woman who had fought for religious freedom: "[...] pour rappeler au monde *jouisseur* le prix d'une vie dévouée et protester, par un acte solennel contre *l'ignorance religieuse*, fléau d'une époque où la foi n'inspire plus la vie de famille."⁴¹⁴ The writing served as the act that would protest. Moreover her struggles were similar to the everyday struggles of many Belgians. Thus, the writing of her struggles create a rhetoric of solidarity with the Belgian Catholic: "*Ces épreuves*, d'autant plus pénibles qu'elles atteignent ce qu'il y a de plus délicat et de plus intime en *nous*, purifient, élèvent et transforment nos âmes" (my emphasis).⁴¹⁵ The author can privilege this suffering and preach that it is only in suffering that one follows God. The reader wants to be virtuous like the saint and the more suffering he/she accepts, the more devout she/he becomes.

Historically anchored, the author is successful in describing the terror in the lives of the people: "En 1790, paraissait la fameuse Constitution civile du clergé. L'Église se vit privée de ses

⁴¹² Baesten 19.

⁴¹³ Baesten 20.

⁴¹⁴ Clair v.

⁴¹⁵ Baesten 117.

plus fidèles ministres. C'était, pour la plupart d'entre eux, l'exil, la prison, ou la mort."⁴¹⁶ As a result, he convincingly presents the Revolution as an evil event responsible for the deaths of not only her parents and grandmother but many other families much like Julie—whose only crime was practicing their Catholic faith: "La République voulant sans doute ajouter aux souffrances physiques les plus affreuses tortures morales."⁴¹⁷ Captured by the revolutionaries she is told to have trust in the Republic. Instead, she puts her trust in God even after seeing her name on the list to be decapitated along with her father and brother.⁴¹⁸ Her reputation of devout was so repudiated that she even became a sort of 'patron' to the revolutionaries: "[...]et comme sa réputation de sainteté lui donnait un grand ascendant sur les habitants [...] les révolutionnaires prirent bientôt ombrage de la pieuse paralytique."⁴¹⁹ Her notoriety was enhanced by her reputation, essential in promoting one's 'saintly' virtue. Yet, all this suffering could only have meaning if one put their complete trust in God. The religious persecution was explained as a grace in a letter from Mademoiselle Blin: "Les grâces que vous y recevez sont bien la récompense d'une grande fidélité dans les différents temps d'épreuve par où le bon Dieu fait passer toutes les âmes appelées à ce saint exercice."⁴²⁰ Therefore, struggles are not meant to discourage nor to disperse but instead fortify and unite.

The author's description of the environment was indicative of the struggles Catholics had faced and the ones Catholics *continued* to face. Julie's life, written 63 years after her death, had a purpose for posterity. Baesten equates Julie's suffering during the Revolution to the troubled times of 1879 during which Catholics battled liberals who advocated for the elimination of Church involvement in education. The author elevated the spirit of his reader by highlighting the past resistance of their fellow countrymen: "L'esprit révolutionnaire avait eu peu de prise sur le caractère

⁴¹⁶ Baesten 22.

⁴¹⁷ Baesten 31.

⁴¹⁸ All narrowly escaping death days after Robespierre fell.

⁴¹⁹ Baesten 22.

⁴²⁰ Baesten 37.

droit et religieux des habitants de cette ville.”⁴²¹ Having established a relationship with the audience by sympathizing with a commonality of struggles, Julie’s biography calls for unity in resistance against all attacks on the Catholic faith: “[...] de retremper son courage et de fortifier sa faiblesse par le souvenir des âmes ardentes qui ont énergiquement lutté pour le bien, par la mémoire des bénédictions et des graces que Dieu accorde aux âmes fidèles qui mettent en lui seul leur appui et leur confiance.”⁴²² The religious biographies have now slipped into a political agenda—to resist all that is contrary to preserving what is Belgian—that is the tradition of the Catholic faith, even it meant risking one’s life! For example, in demonstrating Julie’s resistance against revolutionaries, the author compares her to the early Christians who resisted against the pagans. Knowing her life was at stake, she partakes in the salvation of mankind in hiding priests and providing her bedroom as a secret place to hear mass:

“[...] la Messe fut célébrée secrètement dans la chambre de la malade. Il semblait à ces âmes pieuses que semblables aux premiers chrétiens dans les catacombs [...]. De cette pauvre chambre montèrent vers le ciel des accents [...] qui demandaient pardon et miséricorde pour les crimes d’un peuple aveuglé.”⁴²³

This act of protecting the Eucharist from sacrilege at the risk of her life marks her to a very elevated distinction.

Resistance, however, did not often entail risking one’s life, but rather a desire to change society’s status quo. Julie’s resistance continued after the Revolution against Napoleon’s and Guillaume of Orange’s politics to unite all congregations under one Order. Julie, like many other founders, was against this idea as her identity and purpose of life was represented by her distinct name, habit, and missionary work: “Nous sommes dans un moment orageux: le bon Dieu nous en tirera. Je crois qu’il nous faut prier plus que jamais, afin de ne pas être obligés de nous réunir à des

⁴²¹ Baesten 87.

⁴²² Baesten 12.

⁴²³ Baesten 34.

Sociétés qui ne rempliraient pas notre but.”⁴²⁴ Julie resists against this change commenting that the unification would be the end to the Catholic faith:

“C’est une triste chose, quand on veut amalgamer toutes sortes de cultes [...]. A Namur, l’on tient bon. Dans une assemblée, il n’y en a eu qu’un seul qui a donné sa voix pour cette constitution; mais notre ville seule ne suffit pas; il faut que toutes tiennent ferme [...]. Enfin, que le bon Dieu nous préserve, s’il lui plaît, du plus grand de tous les malheurs; celui de perdre notre sainte foi catholique. Ce serait le plus terrible de tous les fléaux, celui qui toucherait à la religion de nos enfants et au salut de nos âmes.”⁴²⁵

Julie stands firm against political changes for religious. Julie’s words evoking struggles incite unity: “Pour vous animer au travail, mes chères filles, voyez, après la terrible révolution *que nous venons de traverser*, dans quelle profondes ténèbres d’ignorance croupit la jeunesse”(my emphasis).⁴²⁶ By uniting women in vocation, Julie was convinced of the importance of women’s congregations in the future of the Church and her rhetoric of solidarity rewards those that resist and fight:

“Tâchons de nous mettre dans cette voie et de conduire les autres par ce chemin.⁴²⁷ [...] “Courage! Courage! Il n’y a que ceux qui auront bien combattu, qui recevront la couronne de gloire.⁴²⁸ [...] Recevons bien toutes les âmes que le Seigneur nous présente, pour tâcher de les gagner au bon Dieu et de leur donner de solides principes de religion; tenez, voilà mon unique ambition sur la terre.”⁴²⁹

4. Author as interpreter

The author’s function in the text was to not only document the divine in these persons but to *interpret* for the community what was partially understood. At the turn of the century, Napoleon’s politics obliged priests to swear allegiance to him in his famous “serment de fidélité,” ensuing in a division among clergy between adherents and the “réfractaires.” Julie’s biography demonstrates this

⁴²⁴ Baesten 108.

⁴²⁵ Baesten 317.

⁴²⁶ Baesten 261.

⁴²⁷ Baesten 321.

⁴²⁸ Baesten 324.

⁴²⁹ Baesten 333.

division. More importantly she herself resisted to submit herself under any clergy member who accepted the “serment de fidélité.” In 1790 her director is forced to flee and dies soon after. “Un intrus prit la place du pasteur légitime” to which she refuses to communicate, “Par son exemple et sa parole, elle préserva du schisme plus d’une âme chancelante [...]”⁴³⁰

Later, while establishing the first foundation of the Soeurs de Notre-Dame in Amiens with the support of Father Varin, Julie’s plans to expand her congregation was impeded by a new bishop in power, Father Sambucy. Elected also as the new superior of her congregation he wishes to control her endeavors and change her plans:

“Assez versé dans le droit canon, il aurait voulu ramener aux formes anciennes l’Institut nouveau. Pour lui, il ne fallait ni Supérieure générale, ni lien entre les communautés; il semblait, de plus, vouloir restreindre l’oeuvre à un seul diocèse. La mère Julie avait des idées plus larges: elle ambitionnait de conquérir le plus d’âmes possible à Jésus-Christ, au moyen d’une société fortement organisée et répandue partout.”⁴³¹

The author enunciates the division of clergy and clearly takes sides with Julie as he describes the restriction placed upon her in her virtuous endeavor to save souls. Baesten was in fact establishing distinctions even among clergy—representing the battle between traditionalists as Monsignor Sambucy and the new visionary priests as P. Varin.

“Car, quelle que soit la confiance que j’ai dans M. de Sambucy, ce n’est pas sur lui que je compte pour donner à vos bonnes filles l’esprit qu’elles doivent avoir pour entrer dans les desseins de Notre Seigneur. Et s’il n’est pas celui qui doit le leur donner, il n’est pas non plus celui qui doit l’entretenir et le perfectionner. C’est la bonne mère que Dieu en a chargée. Je vais écrire à M. de Sambucy pour lui écrire amicalement ce que je pense, sur la conduite qu’il a à tenir, et pour le mettre en garde contre l’esprit de changement, même sous prétexte d’amélioration.”⁴³²

Alerting clergy to the “spirit of change” is the author’s attempt to directly speak out against those priests who supported changes in the traditions and the authority of the Church. Since Sambucy could not change Julie Billiard’s mind, he tried to exile her from Amiens, chose a younger sister to

⁴³⁰ Baesten 22.

⁴³¹ Baesten, 94.

⁴³² Baesten 98.

replace her as superior, and forbade the sisters in Amiens to have contact with her in Bordeaux. It was important for Father Baesten to validate Julie's resistance in order to make the distinction between her as one that served God and a heretical founder that showed no obedience to the Magisterium of the Church. Her resistance resulted only because God's call was being impeded by "illegitimate" clergy members. Baesten explains that Julie's reputation was tarnished temporarily: "[...] que la fondatrice était dans l'illusion, qu'elle était rebelle à la volonté de son évêque, qu'elle avait porter un joug de fer à ses filles, qu'elles ne réussirait pas à Namur, et que toutes celles qui la suivraient seraient considérées comme des réfractaires."⁴³³ Including the negative rumors and predictions that Julie would not succeed in her endeavor was a strategic move by the author, which were nullified by the very fact that Julie Billiard had succeeded in Namur. Baesten also negated any negative reputation emitted by certain priests in the Sambucy affair against Julie Billiard's plans. For example, "Le prince de Broglie avait été prévenu contre elle par de faux rapports [...]" and always concluding with her exemplary virtue, in that she withdrew "dans une profonde humilité [...]"⁴³⁴

Father Baesten's role was to interpret Julie's words and actions in order to guide his reader to a truthful understanding. For example, he clears up any rumors, misconceptions or of sanctity itself⁴³⁵ by stating Julie's intentions clearly during her resistance to the bishop:

"Cette opposition pouvait paraître à plusieurs quelque peu intéressée, et comme le fruit où l'indice d'un orgueil caché! C'était, hélas! bien peu connaître le fond de cette âme, aussi humble que magnanime, aussi indifférente à l'amour-propre que soucieuse de la gloire de Dieu [...]. Un oubli, une inadvertance, une plaisanterie, deviennent parfois des greffs sérieux par l'interprétation qu'on en fait."⁴³⁶

Once her actions were interpreted, the author could then place Julie in a position of authority. In her resistance against Sambucy, Julie compared his interdiction of her congregation to relocate to Namur

⁴³³ Baesten 150.

⁴³⁴ Baesten 181.

⁴³⁵ Heffernan 21.

⁴³⁶ Baesten 94-95.

to the plight of the Israelites held captive by the Egyptians. In establishing not only Julie's authority but also his authority, the author includes letters of bishops in order to affirm their wrongdoing or wrongdoing all the while affirming her right as leader. Father Baesten was so adamantly against the likes of Sambucy that he plays a powerful reversal of Julie's humility by opposing it with an insinuating commanding authority over certain opposing bishops:

“Rien ne manquait à l'entière justification de la conduite que la fondatrice avait cru devoir tenir au milieu des plus tristes contradictions, et des persécutions les plus cruelles; rien ne manquait à la complète réhabilitation de l'humble fondatrice, dans la ville même et dans le diocèse où l'on avait vainement essayé de la mettre en opposition avec ses premiers supérieurs. Grande leçon donnée par Dieu, tout à la fois, à ceux qui doivent commander et à ceux qui doivent obéir!”⁴³⁷

This is powerful rhetoric as it places her on a very assertive pedestal of authority in order to advance the cause of recatholicization in cohort of a strong alliance of religious women and clergy. Moreover, the question of the authority of women is later privileged above the single authority of a clergy member of the city in which the congregation resides.

“Un ecclésiastique de Gand [...] commençait à exercer dans cette maison une influence et une autorité incompatibles avec le bon ordre d'une communauté; il voulait, par lui-même, décider et trancher toutes les affaires, sans demander conseil à personne, sans se concerter ni avec la supérieure, ni avec la fondatrice.”⁴³⁸

Later he “se conforma en tout aux désirs de la Supérieure générale.”

5. Promoting a saint

While Father Baesten gave evidence of Julie's authority over certain priests, for her authority to be justified, Julie had to have displayed a supernatural persona of saintly character. Father Baesten's primary goal was to deepen the faith of his reader through the principle of individual example of Julie. Religious biographers gave considerable attention to the art of persuasion,

⁴³⁷ Baesten 207-208.

⁴³⁸ Baesten 271.

specifically by “the use of specific rhetoric (that) stimulated the reader to action since the belief in redemption was contingent upon prescriptive formulae which regulated behavior.”⁴³⁹ For example, Julie says: “J’espère que vous allez encore semer, dans le pays où vous êtes, par vos bon exemples; et puis le bon Dieu donnera sa sainte benediction, et il sera glorifié en vous et par vous.”⁴⁴⁰ According to Heffernan, the author highlights portions particular to what the faithful could emulate. This practice dates back to the hagiographies of the Middle Ages. Similar to these hagiographers, religious biographical writing was designed to inform or provoke approved behavior from the reader “by means of rhetorically sophisticated and avowedly mimetic reminiscences of the life of Christ. The effectiveness of the historical or biographical record depended heavily on the writer’s persuasive skills, or [...] the writer’s *elocution*.”⁴⁴¹ As Julie’s status of nun is elevated to one of heroine, and saint (Bienheureuse), she becomes part of the Catholic tradition as a model for public imitation. She becomes part of the Catholic tradition by reclaiming virtues of past models, such as Saint Theresa d’Avila and Saint Jeanne de Chantal. “By virtue of this constitutive imperative or ethical imperative, the individual sacred biography continually renews for the faithful a tradition of great antiquity.”⁴⁴²

All worship of saints began as local cults. In order to facilitate the growth of the cult, a text of testimony was to be provided as a record and to “terminate unsanctioned oral tradition and coalesces the myth-making powers of the community around its paradigms.”⁴⁴³ The text fossilized the community’s understanding of Julie as a holy person and in turn the text became a document worthy of reverence and relic.

“Nous pourrions rapporter une foule de faits semblables: mais nous croyons plus prudent de ne pas y arrêter. Un jour, peut-être, Dieu glorifiera sa fidèle servante par des merveilles signalées; ce

⁴³⁹ Heffernan 29.

⁴⁴⁰ Baesten 43.

⁴⁴¹ Heffernan 30

⁴⁴² Heffernan 24.

⁴⁴³ Heffernan 35.

sera alors le moment de parler. En attendant, il doit nous suffir de mentionner ici les témoignages rendus aux vertus de la fondatrice par des hommes d'un mérite éminent."⁴⁴⁴

The text serves as proof of documented approval from the community that Baesten's Vie de Julie Billiard is source of great wisdom. Thus, elevating not only Julie's authority but reinforcing his own since he transmits the 'great wisdom.'

"[...] je crois que, pour la gloire de Dieu et l'édification de votre Société, il est à propos de conserver la mémoire de cette bonne Mère [...]. Quoi qu'il en soit, il me semble bien à désirer qu'on fasse un recueil de ce qu'il y a eu dans sa vie de plus remarquable et de plus propre à faire admirer les miséricordes du Seigneur sur cette sainte âme.⁴⁴⁵ [...] le moment était venu enfin de faire connaître aux gens du monde et aux pieux fidèles [...] l'oeuvre fondée par elle [...] répondait aux pressants besoins de l'Églises de notre Siècle."⁴⁴⁶

Furthermore, written narratives become part of the Vatican's apparatus of canonization of a saint; "In its participation in the tradition, the text is canonized by the tradition and thereafter becomes part of the appropriating force of the tradition."⁴⁴⁷ However, Baesten must wait until Julie's 'saintly' stature is confirmed before promoting her as a SAINT of the Church. In the meantime, he promotes her 'saintly' character.

In order to promote a woman of saintly virtue, the author must be able to highlight her humble nature. But because humility is a silent virtue, rhetoric had to be developed in order to give it voice.⁴⁴⁸ Julie Billiard's biographer provided evidence of her humility by inserting quotes from her letters. For example: "Quand je considère que toutes les fondatrices étaient des saintes et que moi je ne suis qu'une infâme pécheresse!!!"⁴⁴⁹ But is it true humility? Neither the author nor Julie mentions any sins or sins of omissions of which she is guilty. This rhetoric of humility in fact reinforces her

⁴⁴⁴ Baesten 353.

⁴⁴⁵ Baesten 354.

⁴⁴⁶ Baesten 355.

⁴⁴⁷ Heffernan 16.

⁴⁴⁸ Weber 48.

⁴⁴⁹ Baesten 89.

induction into the family of saints because there are no sins of which to speak. Humility constitutes a proof of authenticity of her religious experiences. It is a special virtue in Christian teaching that is essential for the reception of graces and wisdom.⁴⁵⁰ The hagiographic tradition of humility rhetoric is characterized by this type of denigration of one's faults and sins as well as the inadequateness of one's writing with success attributed to divine intervention: "Je ne prétends pas faire des miracles par mes paroles; mais c'est vous qui pouvez en faire, en conformant votre conduite à cette science divine que le bon Dieu m'inspire de vous faire connaître."⁴⁵¹ Her inadequateness to take up the pen is mitigated by divine intervention: "Quand on parcourt les pieuses pages dans lesquelles les anciennes Soeurs ont résumé les instructions de leur Mère, on ne peut s'empêcher de s'écrier à chaque instant <<Oui, l'esprit de Dieu est là>> Notre Institut n'a pas été établi par des moyens humains [...]."⁴⁵² The more abundance of abased interjections, the more precarious the nun's position.⁴⁵³ However, humility rhetoric is rare in Julie Billiard's biography. This is because Julie's position was not compromised because her writing was supported by the pen of a priest. Authority had already been given to her: "Mère, Mère, disait-il souvent à Julie Billiard, ne laissez pas prendre d'autorité aux prêtres dans l'intérieur de vos maisons; le confesseur même ne doit y gouverner que les consciences, et pas autre chose."⁴⁵⁴ Julie is aware of this support and unlike the writing of Teresa d'Avila, to whom she is compared in the preface of the biography, she neither digresses into a rhetoric of incompetence nor insinuate that she writes her letters upon advice of her confessor in order to enhance her humility.⁴⁵⁵ Rather, Julie defends her writing by saying: "Je me suis rappelé que l'on m'a toujours reproché de me laisser juger sans jamais me défendre. C'est ici le cas de faire connaître la

⁴⁵⁰ Weber Chapter 2.

⁴⁵¹ Baesten 312.

⁴⁵² Baesten 308-309.

⁴⁵³ Weber 49.

⁴⁵⁴ Baesten 273.

⁴⁵⁵ Weber 109.

vérité avec toute la sincérité possible [...].”⁴⁵⁶ But is self defense incompatible with humility?⁴⁵⁷ Julie has a need, a need for her words to be heard in order for her desire as legitimate authority of Superior be fulfilled: “Il faut vous parler à coeur ouvert. Tout ce que je demande, c’est de pouvoir faire mes petites représentations, en ce qui concerne le bien et l’avantage de nos maisons.”⁴⁵⁸ Therefore, the author’s rare use of her humility rhetoric, signifying a continuation as well as a departure from the hagiographic writing tradition, functions on a superficial level only to accredit her endeavor in founding an important congregation and to insert her in the traditions of saints, in order to promote her beatification.

Providing testimony of a saint necessitates the author to establish Julie Billiart as an exceptional individual by inserting hagiographic biographical topoi. Julie, humbly born, exhibited profound attachment and respect for her parents, guided by holy priests, cured from devastating paralysis, encountered many struggles in founding her congregation, and having a saintly death all contributed to her edification. As a result, Julie was compared to other well known saints and even to Christ. The author inserts the impression of a passerby who describes Julie; “elle croyait voir en Julie une autre Sainte Thérèse.” Baesten reinforces the passerby’s comments by showing Julie’s resemblance to the great 16th century reformer of religious Carmels: “L’héroïque réformatrice du Carmel, qui parcourut l’Espagne, créant partout des monastères pleins de ferveur et de zèle, accorda sans doute en ce jour⁴⁵⁹ à la mère Julie, qui devait l’imiter, quelque chose de sa courageuse initiative et de son inébranlable fermeté.”⁴⁶⁰ Yet, Baesten’s stresses that Julie imitates Saint Teresa only in her initiative. She is not compared to Teresa the “reformer”, but simply as Teresa the “initiator.” While hagiographies of the early 19th century sought to mimic mannerisms of past saints, Julie’s

⁴⁵⁶ Baesten 157.

⁴⁵⁷ Weber 46.

⁴⁵⁸ Baesten 116.

⁴⁵⁹ Julie renews her vows on October 15 1805, on the feast of Saint Theresa.

⁴⁶⁰ Baesten 70.

courageous, heroic and unmoving will allowed her to situate herself in a post-Revolutionary context all the while maintaining a similarity to a successful founder. While using clichés of the hagiographical genre,⁴⁶¹ the author gives new meaning to this future saint. The biography of Julie becomes a testimony of her ‘sainthood’ as others describe her as “sans art et sans étude [...] que Julie, avait, dans un degré que Dieu seul connaît, l’esprit, les vertus et les maximes des Saints.”⁴⁶² Her innocence in intellectual matters furthers her cause for beatification as Baesten describes her as eloquent, yet simple, persuasive, “a woman without science or culture.”⁴⁶³ And like many saints, her soul became a gateway of communication with God: “[...] Dieu s’était communiqué a cette âme généreuse avec tout le trésor de ses grâces et de ses lumières.”⁴⁶⁴ Baesten presents enough hagiographical elements to prove Julie’s sanctity with enough atypical elements to convince the reader of his sincerity.⁴⁶⁵ In other words, Julie’s saintly character acquires status because it is against the “background of other descriptions within the genre.”⁴⁶⁶

Once Julie’s exceptional persona is established, the author convincingly promotes her authority in the direction of the community of the Soeurs de Notre-Dame as well as a source of spiritual inspiration to others, even to the point of her taking the role of Pastor: “C’est grâce aux leçons de Julie que les habitants de Cuvilly, privés de leur Pasteur légitime, furent préservés du schisme constitutionnel, pendant les mauvais jours de la Révolution.”⁴⁶⁷ [...] avec des succès qu’auraient enviés plus d’un prêtre vieilli dans le saint ministère.”⁴⁶⁸ More successful than some

⁴⁶¹ Kleinberg 3.

⁴⁶² Baesten 223.

⁴⁶³ Baesten 223.

⁴⁶⁴ Baesten 48.

⁴⁶⁵ Michel De Certeau. *The Writing of History*. Trans. Tom Conley. (New York: Columbia U.P., 1988) 54.

⁴⁶⁶ De Certeau 55.

⁴⁶⁷ Baesten 237.

⁴⁶⁸ Baesten 238.

priests, Baesten privileges Julie's role as "Master"—a comparison to Christ: "Les nouvelles recrues étaient si enchantées, qu'elles comparaient leur bonheur à celui dont jouirent les apôtres voyageant dans la compagnie de leur Maître."⁴⁶⁹ The rhetoric of authority has been strategized to the point that when her authoritative words to her sister are inserted, there is no shock to her command:

"[...] vous me devez respect et soumission, comme à celle qui tient la place de Dieu à votre égard; vous lui devez, en cette qualité, l'honneur, l'amour, l'obéissance, toute misérable qu'elle soit [...]. Dieu opera dans une âme qui lui remet les rênes entre les mains, il l'ennoblit, il la divinise eu quelque sorte [...]."⁴⁷⁰

This is not the image of a frail and humble sister. In order to comprehend her virtue of speaking, writing, teaching, ordering, commanding or governing, Julie had to disavow some feminine qualities.⁴⁷¹ The author does so by transforming Julie's gender into a virile woman:

"[...] il ne faut, d'après elle, rien de petit, pas de femmelettes. Les âmes ordinaires, les caractères de femmes ne seront jamais propres à notre Institut. Il faut des âmes viriles, des caractères mâles qui ne trouvent rien de difficile quand il s'agit de la gloire de Dieu et du salut des âmes [...] il faut des âmes grandes, magnanimes, généreuses, intrépides, des âmes d'oraison, bien intérieures, mortes à la volonté propre. Il faut des coeurs d'apôtres, il faut des saintes."⁴⁷²

The association of Julie's humility, for example, with a virile initiative disassociated her from being a sexual woman. By diverting this attention away from women's fallen nature (her seductiveness), and accentuating the "virile" she could concentrate on presenting spiritual guidance all the while in submission to the Church:⁴⁷³ "Elle consigna par écrit ses lumières et ses résolutions, et l'abbé Thomas, qui la dirigeait, lui laissa de sages avis spirituels."⁴⁷⁴ Although man is still omnipresent in order to legitimize her, she is as reasonable as man as the word "lumières" denotes permitting her to

⁴⁶⁹ Baesten 76.

⁴⁷⁰ Baesten 311.

⁴⁷¹ Weber 165.

⁴⁷² Clair preface.

⁴⁷³ Weber 33-43.

⁴⁷⁴ Baesten 44.

direct even the clergy: “J’ai connu plusieurs de nos Pères qui ne dédaignaient pas de la consulter, et de lui soumettre les difficultés qu’ils rencontraient relativement à la conduite des âmes et même pour leur propre direction.”⁴⁷⁵ In all 19th century biographies, the founders of institutions are described with some male characteristics. Using Julie’s biography as an example:

“Les *Annales* Manuscrites et les *Mémoires* de la mère Saint-Joseph renferment [...] quelques traits, que nous réunissons ici, pour compléter l’idée que l’on doit se faire du caractère de la fondatrice, de son gouvernement, et des mâles vertus qu’elle voulait voir pratiquer à ses généreuses filles.⁴⁷⁶ [...] on dirait que la fondatrice, sentant sa fin prochaine, veut asseoir son oeuvre, ou plutôt l’oeuvre dont Dieu l’a chargée, sur des bases indestructibles, et faire pénétrer dans l’âme de ses filles la sève féconde d’une mâle doctrine et d’une inébranlable confiance en Dieu.”⁴⁷⁷

And writing to her sisters in Amiens, Julie says “Allons, du courage! Mais un courage mâle, que nulle difficulté ne rebute jamais.”⁴⁷⁸ The masculine traits were appropriated when Julie stepped out of her feminine domain, specifically when she was assuming a position of authority or resistance. Stepping out of her feminine domain required a celibate vow which in turn minimized the importance of gender: “As long as a woman is for birth and children, she is different from man as body is from soul. But when she wishes to serve Christ more than the world, then she will cease to be a woman and will be called a man.”⁴⁷⁹ However, similar to the decrease of humility rhetoric in 19th century biographies, male virtues were also not as omnipresent as in early hagiographies, representing a change in biographical writing. When Julie is teaching or caring for others, she is draped with maternal feminine qualities: “Il fallait prendre soin des enfants, les instruire, les placer, les entourer de protection et de tendresse.”⁴⁸⁰ In fact, feminine qualities were edified: “C’est par l’éducation des jeunes générations que nous devons former des *mères chrétiennes*, des familles chrétiennes, et *sauver ainsi des âmes qui, sans nous* peut-être, se perdraient éternellement. Dieu nous a destinées à procurer le salut

⁴⁷⁵ Baesten 254.

⁴⁷⁶ Baesten 245.

⁴⁷⁷ Baesten 315.

⁴⁷⁸ Baesten 86.

⁴⁷⁹ Heffernan 242. See commentary on the epistle to the Ephesians: Jerome

⁴⁸⁰ Baesten 47.

d'un grand nombre d'âmes [...]."⁴⁸¹ (my emphasis). This is a result of the increased presence and devotion of the Blessed Mother in Catholic spirituality in the 19th century. Feminine virtues were increasingly validated and women were viewed as central participants in the recatholicization of Belgium. The presence and validation of Marian maternal virtues in society is evident by the countless of religious congregations assuming the name of Mary in their title as well as religious women taking on Mary as a name when they professed their vows. As an example, Julie incarnates Mary by being Superior of the *Soeurs of Notre-Dame* and her biographer does the same by portraying her death scene resembling the Virgin Mary's Ascension into Heaven: "Réunies comme les Apôtres dans le cenacle, avec Marie, la Mère de Jésus, elles s'apprêtaient à recevoir la force d'en haut et tous les dons de l'Esprit sanctificateur."⁴⁸²

Saintly, authoritative and influential over clergy, the author constitutes a text that recatholicizes through a rhetoric of heroines: Julie posits a new term for religious women as apostles:

"Mes chères filles, il nous faut des âmes magnanimes pour notre sublime vocation! Rien de petit parmi nous; il nous faut des cœurs d'apôtres [...]. Vous êtes les gonds sur lesquels toute la vie spirituelle de notre saint Institut doit rouler [...] il nous faut des saintes, oui des saintes [...] pour faire l'oeuvre de Dieu."⁴⁸³

The impact of religious biographies was monumental in the encouragement of religious vocations. This is because they served as exemplary manuals for future religious needing detailed accounts of how to bring back the faithful successfully. Julie understood that her example as well her correspondence would influence others: "Il faut que vous deveniez des RÉGLES VIVANTES. Car les Soeurs qui viendront après vous, se formeront sur vos exemples." (author's emphasis).⁴⁸⁴ Julie is placed on a pedestal of greatness in an environment so centered on the privileges and the rights of men. Baesten says, "En parlant à ses filles, l'humble fondatrice s'étonnait de ce que le bon Dieu

⁴⁸¹ Baesten 223.

⁴⁸² Baesten, 314.

⁴⁸³ Baesten 261.

⁴⁸⁴ Baesten 259.

voulût bien se servir de pauvres femmes, pour accomplir des choses si grandes aux yeux de la foi.”⁴⁸⁵

With this endorsement by clergy, religious women believed they could in fact change society for the better especially if their impact was recognized by the other half. Julie says:

“Si nous étions bien pénétrées de la sublimité de cette fonction, quels progrès rapides ne ferions-nous pas dans la vie chrétienne! Nous serions la gloire de l’Église et la joie de ses enfants [...] chères Soeurs, à la suite de tant de révolutions et de ruines, il y a si peu de religieux, si peu de prêtres aujourd’hui! [...] Votre zèle devrait vous faire voler à l’instruction de tant d’enfants qui croupissent dans l’ignorance la plus funeste. Quand je vous vois occupées à cet employ, vous me paraissez plus grandes que toutes les potentats de l’univers!”⁴⁸⁶

Promoting Julie’s authority through her saintly behavior had societal implications. For one it increased religious vocations for the Soeurs de Notre-Dame and as a Catholic newspaper of Amiens once reported, her sisters rehabilitated 600 marriages, and brought as many as 10,000 faithful to attend cathedral masses. Most importantly, the presence and influence of these women as the principal educators for girls no doubt was consequential for Catholic restoration in Belgian cities.

⁴⁸⁵ Baesten 224.

⁴⁸⁶ Baesten 224.

VII. BIOGRAPHIES: TESTAMENTS OF DIRECTIONAL CHANGES IN SPIRITUALITY

The 19th century witnessed an extraordinary ampler of religious congregations in Belgium. This phenomenon required flexibility to adapt to the changing political environment and to changing spiritual needs. After the revolution, the beginning separation of Church and State proved consequential to the foundation, restoration, and development of congregations.

Apostolic congregations such as the Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur were the most adept at adapting to the changing approval requirements for establishment. In order to gain legitimacy under French and Dutch rule, Belgian nuns, due to secular government mandates, were forced to anchor themselves in a very public manner. In order to found or restore a congregation, the government imposed that religious women must offer some public service or prove its “utility” to society, a word often repeated in the biographies. As a result, contemplative orders that had not opened schools, nursing homes or businesses were forced to a continual closure. By the time freedom of religious association was allowed in 1830 (Belgium’s independence), they had suffered a drastic decline in the 19th century while apostolic orders, visible and influential in society, had begun to garner tremendous success. Other factors contributed as well to the struggle of founding new congregations. Economic instability and the lack of diocesan structure were the greatest contributing factors to the inability to restore a congregation. Due to the suppression of religious orders during the Revolutionary period, the majority of religious women were dispersed and returned to families, many of whom returned to a lower social status and chose marriage in order to survive economically. Those that returned to religious life after 1800 were able to do so because of family fortune or because of their business sense. Some pre-revolutionary established nuns, accepted by the imperial administrations, were able to rally old noble families to support them.

Part of the old nobility helped some of the pre-revolutionary contemplative Orders reestablish themselves and found new Orders which in turn helped the nobility regain their social

legitimacy more rapidly. Although there was rupture for the Catholic Church with society at the onset of the Revolution, unlike the revolutionary model of society of eradicating the notion of nobility, the Church continued to establish relationships with the wealthy. According to Rémond, by 1830 there was a new ardor by the nobility to help establish new congregations perhaps as a way to manifest political influence lost during the Revolution and to the competing rise of the bourgeois class. He insinuates a link between political influence within congregations and a desire to retain it.⁴⁸⁷ Julie's alliance with aristocrat Françoise Blin de Bourdon invites the nobility to have a societal influence. More importantly, with the noble support, Julie had access to all classes of society being that she herself was from a peasant family; a factor that certainly contributed to her success and expansion with financial contributions. She was well accepted among the poor as with the rising bourgeois class. When confined to her bed, she was versatile enough to keep the company of both peasants and nobles so much so that others were "edified" simply by her presence: "Ces personnes, distinguées par leur naissance et leur éducation, se plurent si bien dans la compagnie de la pauvre paralytique [...]"⁴⁸⁸ Hence the success of her congregation lied with how her members were able to identify with her as the founder. The author doesn't hesitate to signal the change taking place in the foundation of this convent as opposed to those from the past:

"Ce n'étaient plus, comme auparavant, des jeunes personnes de familles distinguées, qui s'unissaient aux deux fondatrices; c'étaient de simples bourgeoises cachant, sous un extérieur bien modeste, des âmes grandes et fortes. [...] de ces âmes, enfin, telles qu'il les faut, pour être les pierres fondamentales d'un Institut naissant."⁴⁸⁹

Since class determined the lieu of the foundation, in order to settle in Namur Julie's peasant status had to be overcome by an alliance of an upper class supporter.⁴⁹⁰ For the continual support after her

⁴⁸⁷ Rémond 280.

An example: Emilie d'Oultremont, also known as Mère Marie de Jésus, began les Soeurs de Marie Réparatrice in 1857. Her father was a senator and a minister to the king for the Pope.

⁴⁸⁸ Baesten 22.

⁴⁸⁹ Baesten 57.

⁴⁹⁰ Rémond 290-292.

death, Julie had to foresee the influence of bourgeois families who had settled in cities, like that of Namur. Claude Langois' monumental work Le Catholicisme au féminin. Les congrégations à supérieure générale au XIXe siècle, does confirm the change of class support for religious congregations, supported mostly from bourgeois milieu. Bourgeois families as backers of religious institutions reflected a continuity with the past and represented the backbone of many communities—a great necessity in the 19th century when Church resources were liquidated to the power of the State.

Understanding the financial incentives, the author seeks to continue the recruitment of the upper class through the representative alliance of aristocrat Françoise Blin and peasant Julie Billiard.

“Mademoiselle Blin, après la mort de son père bien-aimé, devait mettre ordre à ses affaires, et se décider le parti qu'elle avait à prendre. C'était, en effet, une détermination bien grave, et, aux yeux du monde une idée pour le moins très étrange, que celle d'associer son sort à celui d'une pauvre paralytique, et de prendre une simple fille du peuple pour le guide et la compagne de sa vie.”⁴⁹¹

On several occasions the author makes a point to mention the generosity of these women and their instrumental design in the future of this founder. Baesten privileges the importance of Blin's protection and act of charity over Julie Billiard: “Détachée des grandeurs et de la vanité [...] lui rendant les humbles services d'infirmière [...] tant étaient précieux pour son âme les avantages qu'elle retirait de son commerce avec Julie Billiard.”⁴⁹² The author is convincing noble women of the high spiritual rewards for those that care and support religious women. By using the word “commerce” he relates their social status of their everyday world of business yet attempting to attract them to a world of service rather than a world of frivolous vanity and ephemeral existence:

“Dieu et le monde se disputaient son coeur. Mais la noble demoiselle eut bientôt pris son parti. [...] les grandeurs de cette terre lui parassaient trop vaines et les joies de ce monde trop

⁴⁹¹ Baesten 47.

⁴⁹² Baesten 27.

passagères pour qu'elle n'aspirât pas à quelque chose de plus haut de plus durable.⁴⁹³ [...] Sa vertu ne resta pas oisive elle devint bientôt l'ange consolateur de la paroisse [...]."⁴⁹⁴

By seeking what was above, Blin was still able to be influential upon society as she ameliorated the lives of many poor children. The alliance of Julie and Blin developed into a very close friendship resulting with Mademoiselle Blin eventually becoming Mère Joseph, the 2nd superior of the Congregation of Sisters of Notre Dame: "Entre la noble demoiselle et la pauvre délaissée se noua une de ses saintes amities [...] l'amie de Julie deviendra sa soeur, sa coopératrice [...]."⁴⁹⁵ Her influence is noteworthy in the formation of this congregation. Having had a strong religious background in the boarding schools of the Benedictines and Ursulines, she was influential in helping to create a new spirit for the Soeurs de Notre-Dame. Julie wrote daily letters to Blin explaining in detail all the ordeals of the convent, asking in reply for her support and advice. This alliance developed into a sisterhood which extended into the spirit of her Society: "La paix et l'union font et feront toujours l'âme de notre Société [...].⁴⁹⁶; [...] tâchons de nous aider mutuellement à porter les croix qu'il nous destine."⁴⁹⁷ Letters between convents, which elucidated on the interior battles they experienced, helped resist outside pressures to succumb to the changing of the original Rules. Whenever separation was threatened, she always advised to submit themselves to the desire and the will of God while supporting each other with courage: "[...] ne nous relâchons pas dans la route où sa grande bonté nous a fait la grace d'entrer. Nous voilà lancer dans la carrière: marchons-y avec courage."⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹³ Baesten 28.

⁴⁹⁴ Baesten 29.

⁴⁹⁵ Baesten 27.

⁴⁹⁶ Baesten 124.

⁴⁹⁷ Baesten 110.

⁴⁹⁸ Baesten 90.

Unity was imperative in the goal of recatholicization but the process differed within each Order and even within congregations:

“L’Eglise est un jardin, riche de nombreuses communautés. Faut-il que toutes se ressemblent, ou même s’identifient? [...] Le Père Varin qui comprenait si bien les nécessités du temps. [...] il tenait surtout à choisir une supérieure capable, qui pût, selon les desseins de Dieu, employer chacune des soeurs dans la place qui lui convenait le mieux.”⁴⁹⁹

Julie did desire to establish distinctions between the management of each convent, foreseeing that the independent judgment of each house would be more beneficial to the success of the community. In other words, what was needed and beneficial for the convent of Namur, may not be true for the convent in Gand. Yet within this spirit of distinction Julie was committed about her desire to unify all the sisters: “L’égalité en tout,” placing no distinction between those who did domestic chores and those that did not.⁵⁰⁰ Julie did not place any importance on the eliteness of noble birth, education, nationality, or cultural differences. Rather, she focused on recruiting women who were devoted to the spirit of her congregation. In the spirit of equality, Julie insisted on tearing away any linguistic barriers. For example, when Julie Billiard sent Walloonian French sisters to Gand to found a new convent, she insisted that her sisters speak Flemish—the language of the people. The novelty of a Walloonian French speaking congregation not exerting its own authority of language was representative of changes in the formation and direction of this apostolic congregation’s spirituality. Similarly, the Sisters of the Namur were taught the patois of the city in order to better educate their students all the while teaching them to speak clear good French. The different mission goals of each house depended on an analysis of the surrounding community weighing its needs and its possible contributions. Julie’s sisters were able to immerse and relate with the people tearing away at distinctions of class and even cultural boundaries between Flemish and Walloons, thus more able to create a unified community.

⁴⁹⁹ Baesten 70.

⁵⁰⁰ Baesten 309-310.

The apostolic orders were more successful than their contemplative compatriots because their mission was not axed on restoration but on a “reconquête” followed by a “reparation.” Restoration, the mantra of the contemplative orders, meant restoring the religious way of life to the purity of pre-revolutionary standards. “Reconquête” allowed for new techniques to bring back the faithful that incorporated Catholic tradition with new visions of Catholic spirituality. The faith itself remained traditional, but innovative in its active social participation of ministering to the people. The new approach to ministry was forced upon in part by the governmental requirements of religious congregations providing social services more and more centered on charitable acts of teaching, of nursing or of boarding the poor. Because they were able to support themselves by their work, most congregations no longer required a dowry as a condition of acceptance. Additionally, the inalienable freedoms assessed for all individuals broke down barriers between classes and consequently religious congregations experienced a change in social class representation, admitting those “called” to serve Christ regardless of financial disparity. The existing restrictions or changes influenced the type of founder that would be capable of leading a community with such contact with the outside world. Most all founders came from a bourgeois milieu in which they were exposed to a family business, that managed money and or people: “[...] où les contacts avec autrui s’établissent sur la base d’un rapport d’autorité institutionnalisé, de domination morale ou de sujétion économique, sont nettement majoritaires, parmi les familles de fondatrice.”⁵⁰¹ Those that came from noble families witnessed their mother in charge of domestic staff within the home. Julie Billiard, came from a family of merchants in which she herself had the daily contact with the public. From this exposure came a need to serve the public “un véritable <<service>> public au sens laïc que religieux.”⁵⁰² Hence, post-revolution apostolic congregations were often referred to as “enterprises,” “Institution” or “Société” and abandoning pre-revolutionary terms of “couvent” or “maison religieuse.” “Nous

⁵⁰¹ Rémond 300.

⁵⁰² Rémond 300.

verrons plus tard le P. Varin s'employer personnellement à la formation d'une Société qu'il jugeait si utile à la gloire de Dieu."⁵⁰³

With 'reconquering' of souls as mission, religious women and clergy implemented new changes to religious life and spirituality. In the case of the Soeurs de Notre-Dame, the new foundation permitted Father Varin "à formuler pour les Soeurs de Notre-Dame, une Règle plus étendue, quoique non encore définitive [...]. Ce nouvel essai fut béni de Dieu,"⁵⁰⁴ since it was accepted by Pope Gregory XVI. The use of the words "plus étendue" and "nouvel essai" for a new congregation signified a departure from pre-revolutionary congregations by which more independence was claimed. More emphasis was placed on the search for individual faith rather than adhering to a uniform collectivity: "[...] quant aux Soeurs de Montdidier, je leur ai écrit que je les laissais libres de faire ce que le bon Dieu leur inspirerait."⁵⁰⁵ In Julie's biography, the development of private individual faith began before she officially vowed herself to religious life-- when the Holy Eucharist was hidden in her bedroom from the revolutionaries. In the most private of rooms, the bedroom became the place where Julie exemplified spirituality and prayer--beginning in the most private of places--the heart. This private lieu permitted Julie to be surrounded by the interior presence of God:

"Dans ses entretiens, dans ses conférences ou publiques, la fondatrice revenait sans cesse sur la nécessité de se laisser conduire en tout par l'esprit de foi⁵⁰⁶ [...] Je vous engage au saint exercice de la présence de Dieu, qui est la porte de la vie intérieur. Cet esprit intérieur est l'âme, et fait la force et le caractère du vrai Chrétien. La paix est un de ses fruits; puis, l'amour marche à sa suite; et tout cet ensemble fait le bonheur du chrétien dans cette vie. [...] A une personne du monde, qui se laissait conduire par quelques vues humaines, la mère Julie donnait cet *esprit de foi* comme remède."⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰³ Baesten 53.

⁵⁰⁴ Baesten 69.

⁵⁰⁵ Baesten 154.

⁵⁰⁶ Baesten 227.

⁵⁰⁷ Baesten 228.

The independence of spirit seemed to reflect on certain customs within each house Julie Billiart founded, allowing each to reflect its individuality all the while remaining unified to the “maison mère” and to the community. For example, in 1806, rather than imposing the habit of the same French congregation in Amiens for a new convent in Waes, Flanders, Julie permitted the nuns of Waes to design their own Flemish style headdress. Although Julie was recognized as the original source for the Waes foundation, the sisters also established their own founders and superiors, a foreign concept to many congregations.

Perhaps the trend towards more individual faith arose from the change in the management of convents. Religious institutions could no longer own its property collectively. Rather, in an effort to maintain individual property rights, the law mandated that each sister had a right to own a portion of its house. However, they could not donate their property for the ‘good’ of the congregation. This created havoc with claims of inheritance, and at times ruining convents financially. The Church could no longer support congregations financially since any revenue generating property was confiscated by the State. Combined with the political sanction of proving “utility” to society and the lack of government funds, each convent had to manage a way to financially support itself, especially if wealthy donations were not a given. Congregations, instead, were engaged as private contracts with the State.⁵⁰⁸ The Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Waes, under Julie’s direction, differentiated from other Soeurs de Notre Dame convents she founded in their acceptance of not only poor but also middle class students into their school with the latter being charged tuition. Combining the charitable act of catering to the poor while having the business sense to maintain the survival of the convent was a necessary change for this particular convent. Contrarily, the Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Gand, not relying on tuition like the Waes convent for sustenance, opened its doors to educate the poor girls of the region for free. They proved ability to sustain by opening an atelier of lace making, in which the poor girls took lessons and contributed to their business. This difference from the Sisters of Notre-Dame of Gand and the Sisters of Waes certainly affected the spiritual manner in

⁵⁰⁸ Rémond 131.

which each house is managed, one directly influenced by poverty: “C’est ainsi que, dans la sainte pauvreté, Dieu voulait faire prospérer la Congrégation nouvelle;” while the other by greater money management. More importantly, the convent of Gand represented a drastic change from pre-revolutionary religious presence in the city. The Soeurs de Notre-Dame, not allowed by the government to build a new house in Gand, were forced to take up residence in an existing convent. They chose the former Cistercian convent, a contemplative Order who were suppressed during the Revolution and did not return. Julie describes the devastating abandonment of this convent and its reprimandful use. Within it, she opens a pensionnat specifically for poor young girls, “dont la vertu était exposée à de grands dangers, et parmi lesquelles quelques-unes avaient grands besoin de conversion. On leur donna le nom de néophytes, parce que l’on espérait que la religion et le bon exemple aideraient ces jeunes coeurs à abandonner les sentiers de vice.”⁵⁰⁹ The new vision for this congregation represented a complete reversal of the admittance requirement for the Cistercians who only allowed the most reputable girls from noble families! Julie’s unprecedented action of taking rejected souls resulted in an impressionable social presence, taking relations with the outside world to a different level. As a result of Julie’s growing reputation--in Zele, some people gave their homes for free so that the Soeurs de Notre-Dame could quickly influence the Christian education of the people. The success of congregations played an important role in the life of a city. For example: “La soeur Saint-Jean, que la fondatrice avait établie supérieure à Saint-Hubert en 1809, réussit à y développer l’oeuvre des classes pauvres, avec un succès et une édification qui lui valurent la reconnaissance de cette petite capitale de l’Ardenne.”⁵¹⁰ As a result of the writing of recatholicization, the notoriety of a congregation became informally associated with the name of a city.

⁵⁰⁹ Baesten 179-180.

⁵¹⁰ Baesten 281.

Impression and garnering support had to be tied to a particular appearance. Marie-Elisabeth Henneau states that the 19th century was a time of codification,⁵¹¹ by which importance is placed on “une religiosité très axée sur l’exteriorité.”⁵¹² Being that Julie’s sisters were in contact with society on a daily basis, she was not only concerned with the image but the intellect as well: “[...] perfectionnez-vous dans la vertu et dans les sciences: comprenez la nécessité où vous êtes de tendre au but d’un Institut qui ne vous conduit pas seulement dans la voie du salut, mais qui vous oblige à conduire toutes les enfants qui vont sont confiées, à la connaissance et à l’amour de Dieu.”⁵¹³ The recatholicization process entailed an adaptment to the changing intellectual environment. What Julie advocates for is freedom of thought: “Tâchez, ma bonne amie, d’avoir une entière liberté d’esprit [...]”⁵¹⁴ Simply, this was a novel departure from religious codification and strict observance. This open mind led a push in the engagement of people to read, focusing on the importance of the written word rather than on the adornment of reliques: “Les lettres d’un saint sont des reliques plus précieuses que le fil de son vêtement ou la frange de son manteau [...] il donne, à qui veut le savoir, le secret de sa perfection, le secret du pouvoir attractif qu’il a exercé sur les âmes, le secret de toute sa conduite.”⁵¹⁵ However, religious women seeking societal support had to appear unified, conformed and harmonious: “Il faut qu’en voyant une Soeur de Notre-Dame, on puisse croire qu’on les voit toutes,”⁵¹⁶ and places importance on their behavior as the essential glue for the continuation of the congregation: “Travaillez sans cesse à devenir des saintes: car, plus vous le serez, plus celles qui vous suivront le seront aussi. Je vous le répète, disait souvent notre Mère, vous devez être, par vos bons

⁵¹¹ Filles du silence. Moniales en Belgique et Luxembourg, du Moyen-Âge à nos jours. (Bastogne: Musée en Piconrue, 1998) 321.

⁵¹² Filles du Silence 321.

⁵¹³ Baesten 260.

⁵¹⁴ Baesten 43.

⁵¹⁵ Baesten 9.

⁵¹⁶ Baesten 309.

exemples, *les colonnes de l'Institut*.”⁵¹⁷ Appearance dictated that the “show of numbers,” was more influential for the masses than “selection.”⁵¹⁸ Reconquering involved restoring religious life to a commandable influence within society.

Innovative spiritual direction and flexibility in religious life led to a more loving, more compassionate stance within Catholic ministries. 19th century congregations, both apostolic and contemplative, were influenced by Alphonse de Liguori’s “morale ascétique.”⁵¹⁹ In practicing the ascetic acts of denial of oneself and concentrating on two virtues in particular—humility and love, religious women focused all their efforts on serving the ‘other.’ This asceticism required a degree of silence. In the case of humility, the nun should remain quiet even when misjudged and in the case of love, the nun became more attentive to others, renounced her own ideas, and accepted frustrations. Julie became a model of compassionate love:

“Dieu l’avait douée de toutes les qualités qui font la parfaite supérieure: un certain mélange de douceur et de force, le bon sens pratique, légalité d’humeur, l’humilité sincère, le parfait détachement de soi-même, une intention toujours pure et désintéressée, en un mot une sorte de reflet de l’autorité divine qui rend la loi légère, le commandement aimable, l’obéissance facile, et inspire tout à la fois aux inférieurs l’estime et la confiance, le respect et l’amour.”⁵²⁰

The denial of oneself reflected more of an interior act rather than an exterior act. Religious life was a perpetual life Fiat—a continual humble submission to the will of God in all daily activities.⁵²¹ The silence of the ascetic acts were voiced by the words of nuns in the religious biographies hence...mum’s the word.⁵²²

The 19th century ascetic spirituality influenced other changes. The focus on interior humility resulted in a lessening of corporal mortification and an increase of a mental one. This is due to the

⁵¹⁷ Baesten 261.

⁵¹⁸ *Filles du Silence* 332.

⁵¹⁹ *Filles du Silence* 340.

⁵²⁰ Baesten 242.

⁵²¹ *Filles du Silence* 331.

⁵²² See Dissertation chapter 1.

changing view vis-à-vis the body. In the past, the body was often condemned with deep sinfulness and was impeding the union of the soul with God.⁵²³ Contrarily, in the 19th century, the body itself was seen as holy, as part of the sanctification leading towards eternal life: “[...] il faut parler un peu de notre enveloppe mortelle. Le corps est notre monture: c’est notre esquif pour arriver au port de la sainte et bienheureuse éternité, où doivent tendre tous nos désirs et nos soupirs; ne visions qu’à cela dans toutes nos actions.”⁵²⁴ Discussed later in Chapter 5, my research will expand on this concept of evolving changes towards the body in images of nuns.⁵²⁵ Mortification of the body is no longer viewed as a saintly virtue because the body brings men to salvation. The author in the following quote speaks of the French sisters of Amiens:

“Les macérations excessives (which were encouraged by new director, Father Sambucy) et les exercices de piété trop prolongés sont contraires à l’esprit d’un institut dont le but n’est pas seulement la perfection propre, mais aussi la sanctification du prochain par le travail de l’enseignement.”⁵²⁶

Instead, the body was to be used towards the service of the other. Julie writes to Ms Blin of the necessity to mortify the spirit⁵²⁷ as well as the dangers of self recognition:

“[...] tout simplement, quand l’occasion se présente de dire une chose utile au prochain [...]. Il m’a dit aussi que plus vous agirez ainsi, plus votre timidité disparaîtra [...]. Il veut que nous prenions bien garde à une certaine recherche de nous-mêmes dans les choses de Dieu: on voudrait toujours s’assurer que tout ce que l’on fait est bien, et cela, par un retour de complaisance sur soi-même; on aime à ne voir rien de défectueux en soi, et l’on devient semblable aux filles du monde qui retournent souvent au miroir pour voir s’il ne manque rien à leur toilette.”⁵²⁸

⁵²³ See Caroline Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1987).

⁵²⁴ Baesten 329.

⁵²⁵ The 19th century portraits of nuns in biographical texts confront the nun’s body frontally, compared to previous renditions of nuns, appearing distant and angled sideways.

⁵²⁶ Baesten 96.

⁵²⁷ Baesten 40.

⁵²⁸ Baesten 41.

The cornerstone of 19th century spirituality was axed on penance and suffering for the reparation of sins in the world. The goal was for the “soulagement du prochain,”⁵²⁹ humbly serving Christ in the reparation for sins committed against his Sacred Heart.⁵³⁰ In Liège, Julie single handedly propagates this devotion: “M. le curé faites aimer et connaître le Sacré-Coeur; et moi je vous donnerai des Soeurs de Notre-Dame pour votre paroisse.”⁵³¹ Reparation⁵³² involved the nuns to unite themselves interiorly to Christ’s suffering and by doing so consoled the heart of Jesus. Julie is pushed by her own desire to repair even her own life: “Oui, je vois que vous toutes, mes chères bonnes filles, vous allez faire une sainte violence au Ciel pour que je répare, pendant le peu de jours qu’il plaira au Seigneur de me laisser sur la terre, toutes les années que j’ai abuse.”⁵³³ Unity of spirit was achieved through a victimal spirituality in which the biographical writing was efficacious by the continual repeated call for repentance and reparation: “Oui, voilà la route, [...] c’est cette disposition habituelle d’être victims [...]. C’est bien alors, ma bonne demoiselle, que le Seigneur attend que nous lui donnions des marques de notre fidélité.”⁵³⁴

The source of this united victimal spirituality can be traced to the martyrs of the Revolution:

“[...] ce que le P. Clair n’a pu dire, mais qu’il eût été heureux de signaler, c’est que les bienheureuses martyres de Compiègne, dont il avait esquissé la figure, sont unies aujourd’hui dans la glorification officielle de l’Eglise, avec leur ancienne compagne de labeur et émule de dévotion. Le décret qui permettait de procéder sûrement au reste de la discussion de leur cause, paraissait en même temps que le Bref définitif consacrant le triomphe de la Bienheureuse mère Billiart.”⁵³⁵

⁵²⁹ Baesten 47.

⁵³⁰ 3 carmels in Belgium founded based on this devotion.

⁵³¹ Baesten 291.

⁵³² Reparation is a theological concept whereby a person makes sacrifices in order to have God’s forgiveness for the sins committed in the world.

⁵³³ Baesten 86.

⁵³⁴ Baesten 37.

⁵³⁵ Clair v.

For the early 19th century, it seems that identity occurred through suffering and perhaps this emotion related to the people who struggled during the years of the Revolution. Since Julie Billiard's biography is reflective of early 19th century spirituality, perfection was gained in heroic actions of martyr like sacrifice and not simple actions:⁵³⁶ "[...] s'offrant à Dieu comme une victime pour détourner les foudres de sa colère."⁵³⁷ Françoise Blin is portrayed as a heroine while taken away by revolutionaries in 1794: "Alors, nous raconte simplement l'héroïne, je fis à Dieu le sacrifice de ma vie [...],"⁵³⁸ signifying words chosen by author to elevate her to status of pre-martyr. Marcelis notes that when the restoration of a congregation occurs later in 19th century, it was less marked by victimal spirituality—as in the case of the Benedictines as opposed to the Carmelites.⁵³⁹ Validating suffering is powerful for it unifies in the recatholicization process: "[...] nous commençons à être vraiment *des soeurs de Notre-Dame* [...] c'est en ce moment que je commence à être Chrétien" (author's emphasis).⁵⁴⁰

The emphasis on individual faith develops into a rhetoric that puts complete trust in God: Mettons notre confiance en lui, *toujours, toujours* [...] mettons *en lui seul* notre confiance." (author's emphasis).⁵⁴¹ Mystical experiences⁵⁴² were not positively supported because they could potentially omit the participation of confessors or priests since women speak to or hear directly from God. Recatholicization in the 19th century depended on an alliance of both religious women and men.

⁵³⁶ Filles du Silence 340.

⁵³⁷ Baesten 25.

⁵³⁸ Baesten 30.

⁵³⁹ Filles du Silence 340.

⁵⁴⁰ Baesten 155.

⁵⁴¹ Baesten 102.

⁵⁴² Mystical experience refers to the contemplation that encompasses "extraordinary forms of prayer" and often result in a union of the soul with God, permitting divine knowledge to transpire from the mystics. See <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14621a.htm>

VIII. CONCLUSION

The public environment was ripe for women to be influential because as Rémond suggests: “La sociabilité sans contrainte n’est possible qu’aux femmes, car elle n’a pas de conséquences politiques.”⁵⁴³ Unlike religious men who were regarded as citizens of the State, religious women had no rights as citizens, and so did not pose a threat to the existence of the State. Their lack of political power explains why women became privileged sources of Church recatholicization and conciliated with an increase in public service. With Napoleon’s Concordat reorganization, the structure of the congregation itself with a General Superior corresponded very well to the centralizing political goal of the Empire.⁵⁴⁴

The initiator at the beginning of the 19th century however was not the government but rather the resistance and struggles that formed a spirit of rebuttal towards the dechristianization of Belgian institutions, pervasive in all biographies as well as of Julie Billiart. Most often, they typify nostalgic and painful memories of the Revolution contributing to a rallying of more active participation. Events surrounding the revolution certainly contributed to alternative modes of spiritual life. In her study of contemplative Orders of the 19th century, Marie-Elisabeth Henneau sees religious life as a choice of an ecclesiastical career for women rather than a cutting off from the world. The same can be applied to apostolic Orders who are symbolized in 19th century religious biographies in which their relation with the ecclesiastic world and with the secular world defined for them an affirmed feminine identity even in solitude and isolation.⁵⁴⁵ Influenced by their ministries in education and nursing, their management of their community necessitated a communication and transfer of goods from outside of cloister. By their direction of communities, religious women take

⁵⁴³ Rémond 69.

⁵⁴⁴ Rémond 151.

⁵⁴⁵ Marie-Élisabeth Henneau. “Réforme de Touraine et Réforme Thérésienne chez les Carmélites du Pays de Liège.” *Actes du Colloque de Lyon* (Cerf, 25-26 septembre 1997) 10.

part in reversing the social established order by becoming superiors.⁵⁴⁶ This feminine identity is affirmed by Julie's independence of mind and freedom of spirit in the Vie de Julie Billiard.

⁵⁴⁶ Henneau 15.

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CHAPTER 5

MEDIATING THROUGH TEXT AND IMAGES

I. INTRODUCTION: TEXT, IMAGE AND DEVOTION IN SPIRITUAL BOOKS. A LONG STORY.

Throughout Catholic history, saints were essential to Catholic spirituality. As exceptional individuals, they served as examples for all professed virtues of Christian life. The means by which a saint was identified had varied over the history of the Church. The early centuries were mostly represented by martyrs who were killed because of their belief in God. Later, without too many formal requirements, medieval saints were those that characterized pious lives dedicated to God. Progressively, certain criterion was implemented. In order to raise the bar on saintly status, Pope Alexander III (12th century)⁵⁴⁷ declared that only popes could elect saints of the Church. But it was not until the 17th century that standards became formalized. Those non-martyred that had led pious lives had to prove four miraculous posthumous healings after which the pope, convinced of the saint's worthiness, would then commence the process of beatification. An investigation followed and if the case was proven, only the Pope could officially declare one a saint. This lengthy process could take many years. The beatification process itself required a 5 year waiting period.⁵⁴⁸ 19th century Belgian religious biographies, all published posthumously, were projects of sanctification proclaiming the 'saintly' virtues of their subjects all in the hopes of gaining adequate attention for beatification.

⁵⁴⁷ http://www.saint-mike.org/library/papal_library/AlexanderIII/biography.html

⁵⁴⁸ New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia: "Beatification and Canonization."
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02364b.htm>

Some, such as the biography of Julie Billiart,⁵⁴⁹ had already secured the status of 'Bienheureuse' and the author desired to publicize her/ his / village's/ country's new honor. The notoriety helped the Catholic cause of recatholicization of its towns by edifying the obedience of women to the Church and to God. Veneration of the saintly nun helped wage a unified solidarity within Catholics who had been ruffled by the dechristianization of the Revolution. Processions with her relics, image, devotional prayers, and feast days assembled the townspeople under a common faith, all the more intense if the saint was from the town itself. Thus, the unity of faith, aided in part by the veneration of the country's citizens, created servants who had invested themselves in the recatholicization process. This investment advanced the support of a Catholic government whose governing officials could guarantee its mission and preservation of its rituals. In turn, it was necessary for the Church to promote the independence of Belgium so as to create an island that was free of anti-Catholic influences of neighboring 'enlightened' countries. While all biographies were projects of sanctification on its surface, Belgian religious biographies explicitly married politics with religion. In fact, these texts emerge as quite complex, reflecting political, religious, theological and social projects all in one.

Sanctification of one's holiness begins with one's reputation. This reputation had to be supported by clergy, in order to receive any official recognition, as well as formalized in writing or art, often enjoining the two. The 19th century religious biographical 'book' was the bridge between the sacred devotions of the Church and the lay devotions of the people. Since in most cases the nuns had not yet been officially recognized, the book formalized popular devotion in harmony with devotions established by the institutional Church.⁵⁵⁰ For example, the Sacrament of the Eucharist celebrated at Mass would be enhanced by a private devotion to the Saint Julienne of Liège who promoted the Feast of Corpus Christi. Popular devotion of nuns not only began with her reputation

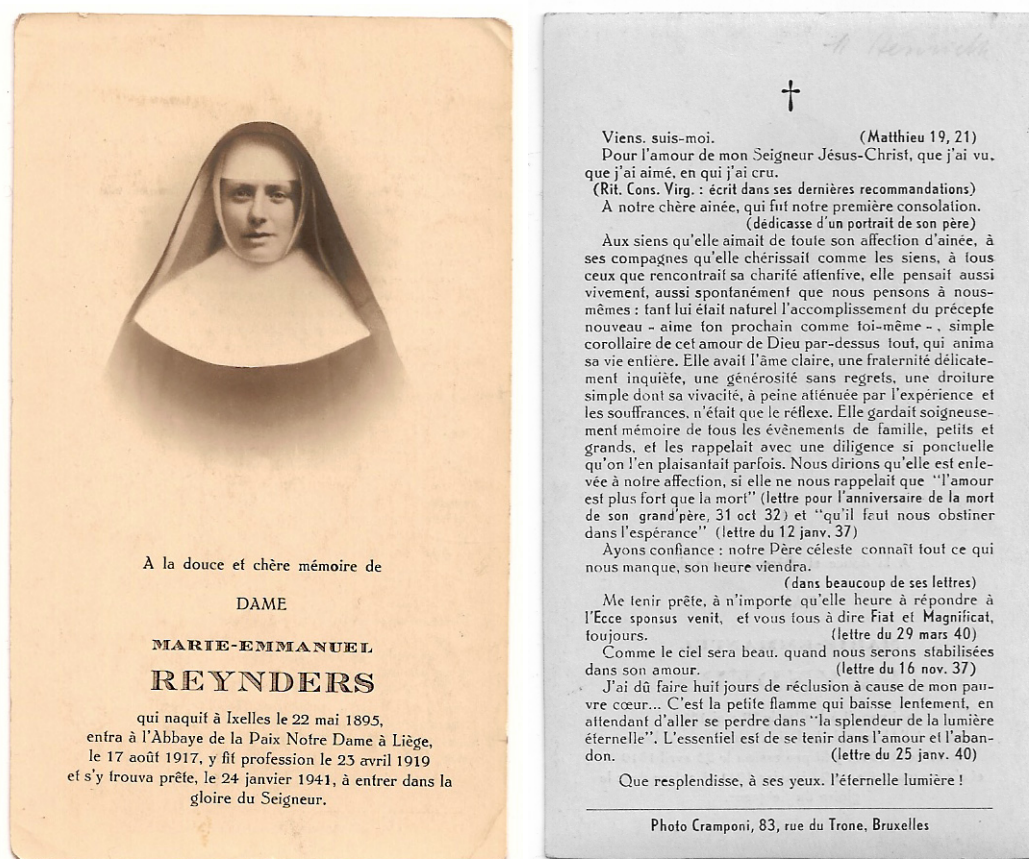
⁵⁴⁹ Julie Billiart (1751-1816) received 'Blessed' status in 1906 by Pius X, with the process beginning in 1881. Biographical publications prior to 1881 were projects of sanctification.

⁵⁵⁰ Rosemary Muir Wright. Sacred Distance: Representing the Virgin. (Manchester UP: New York, 2006) 11.

among the village people but also with the dissemination of her images sketched, drawn, painted, photographed or fabricated in statuettes within the town. Once a viable interest was made concerning the nun to promote her status from sister/founder of congregation to that of 'saint,' a biography was then written incorporating her reputation among townspeople with her recognizable image. Many such images originated from simple funeral cards⁵⁵¹ circulated upon her death. For

⁵⁵¹ Funeral cards were disseminated at the nun's funeral. It consisted of the nun's image on one side and on the other side, Biblical passages or prayers, sometimes written by the nun herself. Below are two examples of Benedictine funeral cards from the archives of the Benedictine Abbey in Liège; one of a typical nun and the other of an Abbess: *Figure 5.1*

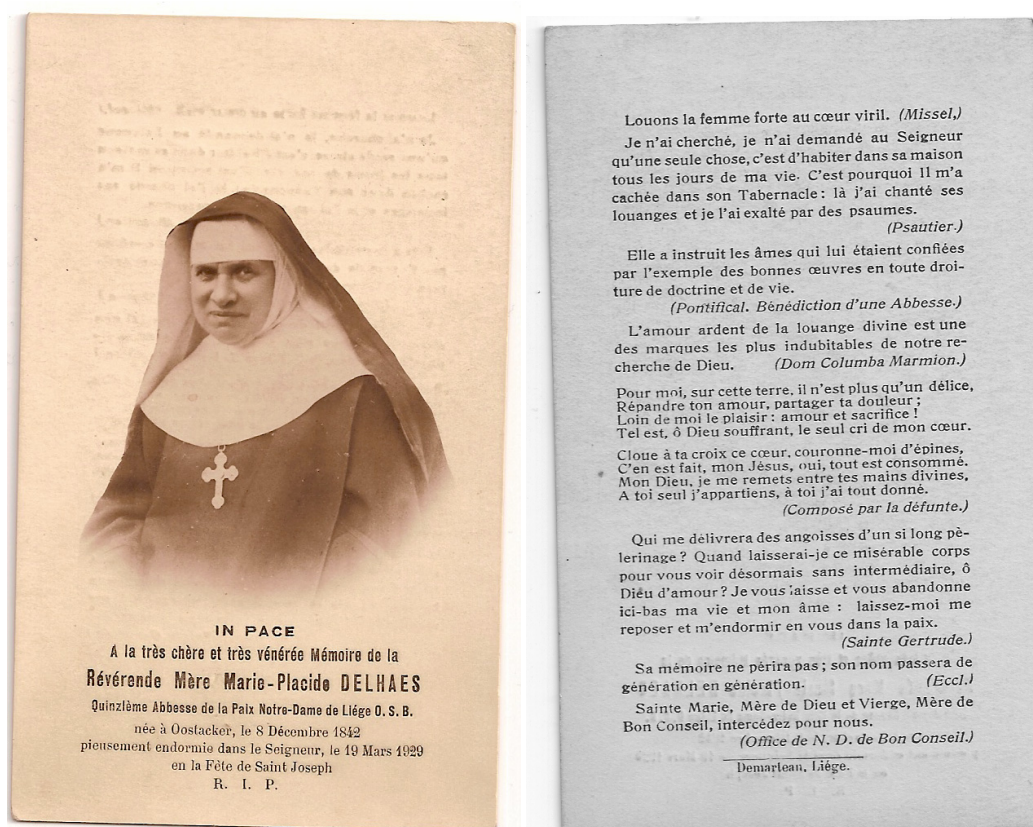
1)



those nuns whose lives predated the 19th century, yet republished or newly written during the 19th century, their image most likely incorporated 19th century iconic representations while some were resurrected images of the past providing consistency to a recognizable image. The resurrection of these saints not only typified idyllic and glorious times of the Church but was also a result of a long awaited beatification process,⁵⁵² a manuscript resurrected, remains found,⁵⁵³ or simply being of Belgian ancestry.

About half of the Belgian biographies in this research included images of the nun. Images received their cult status because they were visually simple yet theologically complex. More importantly, far from the regurgitation of Christian culture found in hagiographies, these biographies are innovative in their correspondence between image and message, reflecting a change in 19th

2)



⁵⁵² For example, 17th century Margaret Mary was not beatified before 1864.

⁵⁵³ For example, Saint Philomena's remains were found in Rome in the early 19th century.

century religious representations. The process began each time the text was opened. As the reader directed his focus to the title page, the image of the nun appeared adjacent. Of those biographies that contained images of nuns, these texts always contained an image before or adjacent to the title page, even if additional images were later included within the chapters of the text. This is important to note since it was indicative of the author's intentions. He was guiding his reader towards a devotional reading through first, a reflection on a specific image. Breaking new ground, the 19th century religious biography with its images, prepares the reading to be a pious act, a strategy used to recatholicize the reader. Presumably, the text was read during several sittings predisposing the image to resurrect at every reading. In the past, religious images of nuns had been self-sufficient in that, meaning did not need additional supplementation. The 19th century witnesses an evolution of the nun's image from rich in symbolism to increased variance in representations resulting in more austere representations that required supplemental reading for meaning; reflecting perhaps a mistrust of 'free' interpretation. Hence the image's symbolism in the 19th century Belgian religious biographies evolved as more information through the words in the text evolved and illuminated its meaning. Rosemary Wright, author of Sacred Distance, argues that the association of word and image becomes an extension to devotional reading. In other words, meditating on the images became a prayer for the reader.⁵⁵⁴ Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that the images found in religious biographies became forms of private devotion much in the same manner as public devotions towards images found in churches. The image of the nun and its biographical text 'mediated' together in order to construct and promote her 'saintly' character.

The author shaped the identity of the nun he was promoting by tapping into a framework that was based upon imitation and recognition from rich historical legacy,⁵⁵⁵ while inserting 19th century devotions in order to strengthen and increase the followers of the Church. The devotions resplendent in symbolism were mostly centered on the Sacrament of the Eucharist with the element

⁵⁵⁴ Wright 11.

⁵⁵⁵ Wright 13.

of sacrifice and suffering of Christ as adjoining themes. First, however, the image of the religious women had to draw upon a historical legacy of iconic representations of the Mother of Christ. This is because the Virgin Mary, honored for almost two millennium,⁵⁵⁶ was *the* model for Catholic women in the 19th century. In order to represent the nun as emulating the ultimate mediator, the Virgin Mary, both the image and text collaborated together. The research into iconic representations of Mary required the analysis of Belgian painted portrayals with a few famous exceptions,⁵⁵⁷ which either had been displayed in cathedrals or churches in Belgium or influenced paintings by less known artists found in smaller chapels and churches. The images of nuns were compared to Marian images in order to decipher what aspects were imitated: the maternal aspect? the framework of surrounding saints or angels? the symbolic elevation of her status on a throne? what physical representations were replicated --a sorrowful and downcast gaze, or one that was hopeful and elevated? In what biblical scene was she represented? Once these questions were answered, then the symbolism of the image permeated and elucidated *what* the nun/saint was promoting for the Catholic Church.

⁵⁵⁶ Picturing Mary [videorecording] /(a production of Thirteen/WNET New York and the Edge Facilities Ltd in association with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; director, Martin Johnson; producer, Rosemary Plum; scriptwriters, James Clifton. New York, NY: Educational Broadcasting Corp.; Chicago, IL: Distributed by Questar, 2007).

⁵⁵⁷ Buoninsegna's Maestà and Bellini's Pietà were used to illuminate this research on religious symbolism.

II. RECATHOLICIZING BELGIUM ONE NUN AT A TIME.

This research does not deny the good intentions, the espoused virtues or charitable service of these women, it merely questions how the religious biographies were influential in the recatholicization movement in Belgium. The study will examine in what manner the identity of ‘sainte’ was relayed to the public in order to rouse support for her veneration. In other words, I examine how her ‘constructed’ identity contributed to not only her sanctification, but more importantly to the sanctification of the Catholic Church in Belgian towns. Distinguishing this research from art history criticism, the analysis will not separate the visual discourse from the textual discourse, examining an evolution in the new type of iconography of ‘saints in gestation.’ In other words, the relationship between text-context-image plays an integral role in recatholicizing its readers by rendering the text into an object of piety. The illustration is no longer self-sufficient but weaves itself into the rhetorical strategy of its author, convincing one reader at a time, with one nun at a time. Through images of gestures and images of religious foundations, the author attracts the reader towards the places of foundations, bringing him to support a foundation either spiritually or financially or recruiting a future vocation. This research will also demonstrate an evolution in the representations of nuns in the religious biographies spanning the century, beginning with a 17th century wood-cut engraving and ending with a 20th century photograph, all in a quest in recatholicizing the faithful. The evolution will show how the images in religious biographies move from “self-sufficiency” towards a dependency upon the text for meaning. The following study examined images found in 29 religious biographies of nuns published between 1722-1925. See the table (*Table 5.1*) below.

Out of the 32 religious biographies, 11 were contemplative nuns, 2 were beguine, and 4 were recluses all of which lived before the 19th century. This suggests that the contemplative intent was restorative rather than innovative. About one third of the biographies, most from 19th century

apostolic nuns, had implemented the name “Marie” in their religious name, 11 of which were members of congregations that made references to the Virgin Mary in their appellation and most all were designated with the title “Mère,” all supporting factors of the increased emulation of the Blessed Virgin Mother in the 19th century. There was evident intent to publish biographies on the founders of congregations, a premise that helped restore hierarchal authority within the Church. From these 32 biographies, 20 were founders (11 of which were 19th century founders) and 2 were co-founders. All except 5 were “Mère” of their congregations, 1 promoted a church sacrament, while one, not a nun, remained a French example of piety.

Figure 5.1. **RELIGIOUS BIOGRAPHICAL IMAGES IN BELGIAN PUBLISHED RELIGIOUS BIOGRAPHIES 1722-1925**

<u>Publication date</u>	<u>Images</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Bibliographic reference</u>	<u>Life</u>	<u>Founder</u>	<u>Congregation</u>	<u>City of Belgian Foundation</u>	<u>Place of publication</u>	<u>Publisher</u>
1722	I	Sainte Wivina	De Griek, Emanuel. <u>Het Leven ende Mirakelen van de H. Wivina, eerste abdisse en fondaterse der edele en vermaerde Abdye van Grooten Bygaerden.</u> Griek: Brussels, 1722.	12th century	F	Bénédictine	Grand-Bigard (Brussels)	Bruxelles	Emanuel de Griek
1787	I	Sainte Lutgarde	<u>Histoire abrégée de la vie de Sainte Lutgarde, religieuse de l'Ordre de Citeau, en grande vénération de à Aywiers en Brabant; monastère de son Ordre.</u> Stevens: Bruxelles, 1787.	1182-1246	Ø	Cisterciennes	Aywiers	Bruxelles	Stevens
1844	AI (4)	Marie D'Oyenbrugge AND Madame Marie Joséphine de Clotz de Kukum	Léon Herckenrode de St. Trond, S.J.. <u>Vie de la Comtesse Marie d'Oyenbrugge dites de Duras, première supérieure du couvent de Berlaymont à Bruxelles, précédé d'une notice sur Marguerite Comtesse de Berlaymont, née Comtesse de Lalaing, fondatrice dudit couvent.</u> Première Edition. Vanderborght: Bruxelles, 1844.	16th-17th century	F, AND R	Chanoinesses Régulières	Bruxelles	Bruxelles	Vanderborght
1846	I, AI (4)	Sainte Julienne	Noûe, Arsène. <u>Vie de Sainte Julienne de Retinne. Publication faite au profit de l'Eglise qu'on élève en l'honneur de cette sainte au lieu de sa naissance.</u> Liège: H. Dessain, 1846.	1193-1258	S	Premonstratensian Order, later a recluse	Liège	Liège	H. Dessain

<u>Publication date</u>	<u>Images</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Bibliographic reference</u>	<u>Life</u>	<u>Founder</u>	<u>Congregation</u>	<u>City of Belgian Foundation</u>	<u>Place of publication</u>	<u>Publisher</u>
1846	I, AI (16)	Sainte Julienne	Bertholet, R. P. <u>Histoire de l'Institution de la Fête Dieu avec les Vies des Bienheureuses Julienne et Ève qui en furent les premières promulgatrices, suivie de l'abrégé historique de l'Institution des illustres confréries de l'Adoration perpétuelle de l'auguste Sacrement des autels, et surtout de celle érigée dans l'église de Saint Martin à Liège en 1765.</u> Troisième Edition. Liège: Félix-Oudart, 1846.	1193-1258	S	Premonstratensian Order, later a recluse	Liège	Liège	Félix-Oudart
1846	I, AI (4)	Sainte Julienne et Sainte Ève	Bertholet, Félix R.P.. <u>Vies de Sainte Julienne et de la Bienheureuse Ève, ou Histoire de l'Institution de la Fête Dieu.</u> Liège: Lardinois; Duvivier-Sterpin, 1846.	1193-1258 and	S, and recluse	Premonstratensian Order, later a recluse	Liège	Liège	Lardinois; Duvivier-Sterpin
1846	I	Florence de Werquinoeul	Abbé Parenty. Chanoine d'Arras. <u>Histoire de Florence de Werquinoeul première abesse de la Paix de Notre Dame, à Douai, et Institutrice de la Réforme de l'Ordre de Saint-Benoît dans le Nord de la France et en Belgique.</u> L.Lefort: Lille, 1846	1559-1638	F	Bénédictines	Liège, Namur, Bruges, Mons,	Lille	L.Lefort
1848	I (2)	Sainte Catherine de Sienne	Émilie Chavin de Malan. <u>Vie de Sainte Catherine de Sienne.</u> J. Casterman: Tournai, 1848.	1347-1380	Ø	Dominicaine	<i>Italian nun</i> Belgium ▲	Tournai	Casterman
1863	I	Marie Eustelle	<u>Recueil des Ecrits de Marie Eustelle née à Saint Palais des Saintes le 19 juin 1814 morte le 20 juin 1842.</u> Nouvelle Edition: Tome Premier. Librairie Catholique de Perisse Frères. Regis Ruffet et Ce: Bruxelles, 1863.	1814-1842	*	Ø	Ø <i>French example of piety</i> (La Rochelle)	Bruxelles	Regis Ruffet et Cie

<u>Publication date</u>	<u>Images</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Bibliographic reference</u>	<u>Life</u>	<u>Founder</u>	<u>Congregation</u>	<u>City of Belgian Foundation</u>	<u>Place of publication</u>	<u>Publisher</u>
1866	I	Pénitentes Récollectines (Jeanne de Jésus)	Abbé Cornet N.J.. <u>Notices Historique sur l'Ancienne Congrégation des Pénitentes -Récollectines de Limbourg et sur quelques religieuses qui s'y sont sanctifiés.</u> Victor Devaux et C ^{ie} : Bruxelles, 1866.	?-1648	F	Pénitentes Récollectines (Jeanne de Jésus)	Limbourg, Liège, Louvain	Bruxelles	Victor Devaux et Cie
1867	I	Vénérable Marie de Jésus d'Agréda	R. P. Séraphin. <u>Précis historique de la vie de la Vénérable Mère Abesse Marie de Jesus d'Agréda, religieuse Conceptioniste affiliée à l'Ordre de Saint-François.</u> Vandenbrouck: Tournai, 1867.	1602-1665	F	Conceptioniste (Congregation of the Immaculate Conception)	Nivelles	Tournai	Vandenbrouck
1867	I	Bienheureuse Marie des Anges	Labis, Ch.. <u>Vie et opuscles de la Bienheureuse Marie des Anges de l'Ordre des Carmélites déchaussées. Nouvelle Édition, revue et considérablement augmentée.</u> Casterman: Tournai, 1867.	1661-1717	F	Carmélites déhaussées	<i>Italian nun</i> Belgium ▲	Tournai	Casterman
1871	I	Mère Marie-Félicité de Saint Joseph	R. P. Alexandre Pruvost de la Compagnie de Jésus. <u>Vie de la R.M. (Révérende Mère) Marie-Félicité de Saint Joseph (Jeanne-Marguerite Bouhon) première supérieure des soeurs de Saint Joseph au Beauregard à Liège.</u> Deuxième Edition. Casterman: Tournai, 1871	1802-1865	F	Soeurs de Saint Joseph	Liège	Tournai	Casterman
1873	I	Sainte Marguerite du Saint Sacrement	Mgr. Fliche. <u>Vie de la Vénérable Soeur Marguerite du Saint Sacrement, religieuse Carmélite, promotrice dans ces derniers temps de la dévotion à Jésus Enfant.</u> Casterman: Tournai, 1873	1619-1648	Ø	Carmélite	<i>French nun</i> Belgium ▲	Tournai	Casterman
1879	I	Mère Julie Billiat	V.S.J. Baesten. <u>Vie de la Mère Julie Billiat, fondatrice de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur 1751-1816.</u> J. Albanel: Bruxelles; Balon: Namur, 1879	1751-1816	F	Soeurs de Notre Dame	Namur	Bruxelles, Namur	Albanel, Balon

<u>Publication date</u>	<u>Images</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Bibliographic reference</u>	<u>Life</u>	<u>Founder</u>	<u>Congregation</u>	<u>City of Belgian Foundation</u>	<u>Place of publication</u>	<u>Publisher</u>
1881	I	Mère Julie Billiat	<u>Vie de la Mère Julie Billiat. Fondatrice de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur. 1751-1816. Par un Père de la Compagnie de Jésus.</u> Deuxième Edition. Casterman: Bruxelles, Tournai, 1881.	1751-1861	F	Soeurs de Notre Dame	Namur	Bruxelles, Tournai	Casterman
1882	I	Mère Alix le Clerk	A Gandellet. <u>La vie de la Mère Alix le Clerk, Fondatrice, première Mère et religieuse de l'Ordre et de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame. Chanoinesses Régulières de Saint-Augustin.</u> Polleunis, Ceuterick, et Lefébure: Bruxelles, 1882	1576-1622	F	Chanoinesses Régulières de Saint Augustin	<i>French nun</i> Belgium ▲	Bruxelles	Polleunis, Ceuterick et Lefébure
1886	I	Soeur Marie Gonzaga	Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame, à Namur. <u>Vie de la Soeur Marie Gonzaga dans le monde Victorine-Françoise-Antoinette-Marie Baronne de Loë décédée à Cincinnati, le 6 mars 1884.</u> Deuxième Edition. Paul Godenne: Namur, 1886.	1826-1884	Ø	Soeurs de Notre Dame	Namur	Namur	Paul Godenne
1887	I	Mère Marie-Thérèse Haze	Théophile De Ville. <u>Histoire de la Mère Marie-Thérèse. Fondatrice de la Congrégation des Filles de la Croix, de Liège.</u> H. Dessain: Liège, 1887.	1792-1876	F	Filles de la Croix	Liège	Liège	H. Dessain
1889	I, AI (11)	Mère Gertrude	Bailly, Rèv. Père. <u>Mère Gertrude Fondatrice des Soeurs de l'Institut de L'Enfant Jésus.</u> Nouvelle Edition. Mechlinia, 1889.	1801-1866	F	Soeurs de l'Institut de l'Enfant Jésus	Nivelles, Brugelette	Mechlinia,	Kuyt-Otto?
s.d after 1892?	AI (18)	Sainte Marie de Nivelles	<u>Rayée, Abbé Th. Vie de Sainte Marie de Nivelles dites Oignies.</u> Nivelles: Ch. Guignarde, s.d.	1177-1213	F	Béguine	Oignies	Nivelles	Ch. Guignarde

<u>Publication date</u>	<u>Images</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Bibliographic reference</u>	<u>Life</u>	<u>Founder</u>	<u>Congregation</u>	<u>City of Belgian Foundation</u>	<u>Place of publication</u>	<u>Publisher</u>
1895	I	Bienheureuse Mère Julie Billiart	P. Ch Clair. <u>La Bienheureuse Mère Julie Billiart. Fondatrice et Première Supérieure Générale de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur.</u> Arthur Savaète: Paris, 1895.	1751-1816	F	Soeurs de Notre Dame	Namur	Paris	Arthur Savaete
1895	I	Mère Marie Claire de Jésus	Soeurs de Sainte Marie. <u>Vie de la Révérende Mère Marie Claire de Jésus. Co-fondatrice et deuxième Supérieure Générale de l'Institut des Soeurs de Sainte Marie.</u> Paul Godenne: Namur, 1895.	1811-1870	CF	Soeurs de Sainte Marie	Mons, Liege, Namur, Bruxelles,	Namur	Paul Godenne
1896	I	Bienheureuse Mère Julie Billiart	P. Ch Clair. <u>La Bienheureuse Mère Julie Billiart. Fondatrice et Première Supérieure Générale de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur.</u> Troisième Edition. Arthur Savaète: Paris, 1896.	1751-1816	F	Soeurs de Notre Dame	Namur	Paris	Arthur Savaète
1897	I, AI (4)	Mère Fanny de l'Eucharistie	<u>La Révérende Mère Fanny de l'Eucharistie (Madame Fanny Kestre) Fondatrice de l'Institut des Dames de Sainte Julienne dites Apostolines du Très Saint Sacrement.</u> Société Belge de Librairie: Bruxelles, 1897.	1824-1882	F	Institut des Dames de Sainte Julienne	Namur, Bruxelles, Anvers	Bruxelles	Société Belge de Librairie
1898	AI (5)	Cisterciennes	H. Nimal, Rédemptoriste. <u>Fleurs Cisterciennes en Belgique.</u> H. Dessain: Liège, 1898.	Middle Ages	F	Cisterciennes	Belgium ▲	Liège	H. Dessain
1902	CI, AI (5)	Sainte Ève	Joseff, l'Abbé. <u>Vie de Sainte Ève, recluse de Saint Martin à Liège.</u> Liège: DeMarteau, 1902.	12th-13th century	Ø	recluse	Liège	Liège	DeMarteau

<u>Publication date</u>	<u>Images</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Bibliographic reference</u>	<u>Life</u>	<u>Founder</u>	<u>Congregation</u>	<u>City of Belgian Foundation</u>	<u>Place of publication</u>	<u>Publisher</u>
1906	I	Bienheureuse Mère Julie Billiart	P. Ch Clair. <u>La Bienheureuse Mère Julie Billiart. Fondatrice et Première Supérieure Générale de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur.</u> Troisième Edition. Arthur Savaète: Paris 1906.	1751-1816	F	Soeurs de Notre Dame	Namur	Paris	Arthur Savaète
1912	I	Mère Marie de Jesus	<u>Vie Abrégée de la Mère Marie de Jésus. Emilie d'Oultremont, Baronne d'Hooghvoorst 1818-1878. Fondatrice de la Société de Marie Réparatrice.</u> Tournai, Paris: Casterman, 1912.	1818-1878	F	Société de Marie Réparatrice	Ø	Tournai, Paris	Casterman
1920	I, AI (30)	Mère Saint-Joseph	Soeurs de Notre Dame de Namur. <u>Histoire de la Vénérable Mère Saint Joseph née Marie-Louise-Françoise Blin de Bourdon Demoiselle de Gézaincourt 1756-1838.</u> Cofondatrice et deuxième supérieure générale de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre Dame de Namur. L.Téchy-Tomme: Marchienne-au-Pont, 1920.	1756-1838	CF	Soeurs de Notre Dame	Namur	Marchenne-au-Pont	L. Téchy-Tomme
1924	I, AI (13)	Vénérable Mère Marie-Thérèse Haze	Humblet, Louis S.J. <u>La Vénérable Mère Marie-Thérèse Haze, fondatrice de la Congrégation des Filles de la Croix de Liège.</u> Liège: H. Dessain, 1924.	1792-1876	F	Filles de la Croix	Liège	Liège	H. Dessain
1925	I, AI (5)	Mère Marie-Stanislas Deprez	Visitation Sainte Marie. <u>Mère Marie-Stanislas Deprez de la Visitation Sainte-Marie de Celles.</u> D. Samain: Anderlues, 1925.	1818-1849	S	Visitation Sainte Marie	Celles	Anderlues	D. Samain

KEY

I = IMAGE OF FRONTISPIECE

CI = COLORED IMAGES

AI = ADDITIONAL IMAGES OF CONVENTS, LOCALS, RELIGIOUS PERSONS, OR NUN HERSELF (total # of images)

Ø = NONE

F = FOUNDER

CF = CO-FOUNDER

R = RESTORER

S= SUPERIOR

* = NOT A NUN

Belgium ▲ = ORDER

ESTABLISHED BELGIAN
FOUNDATIONS

III. EVOLUTION OF THE 19TH CENTURY IMAGES OF NUNS

A. New iconography for Saints in history.

1. Saint Wivina: An iconographic debut

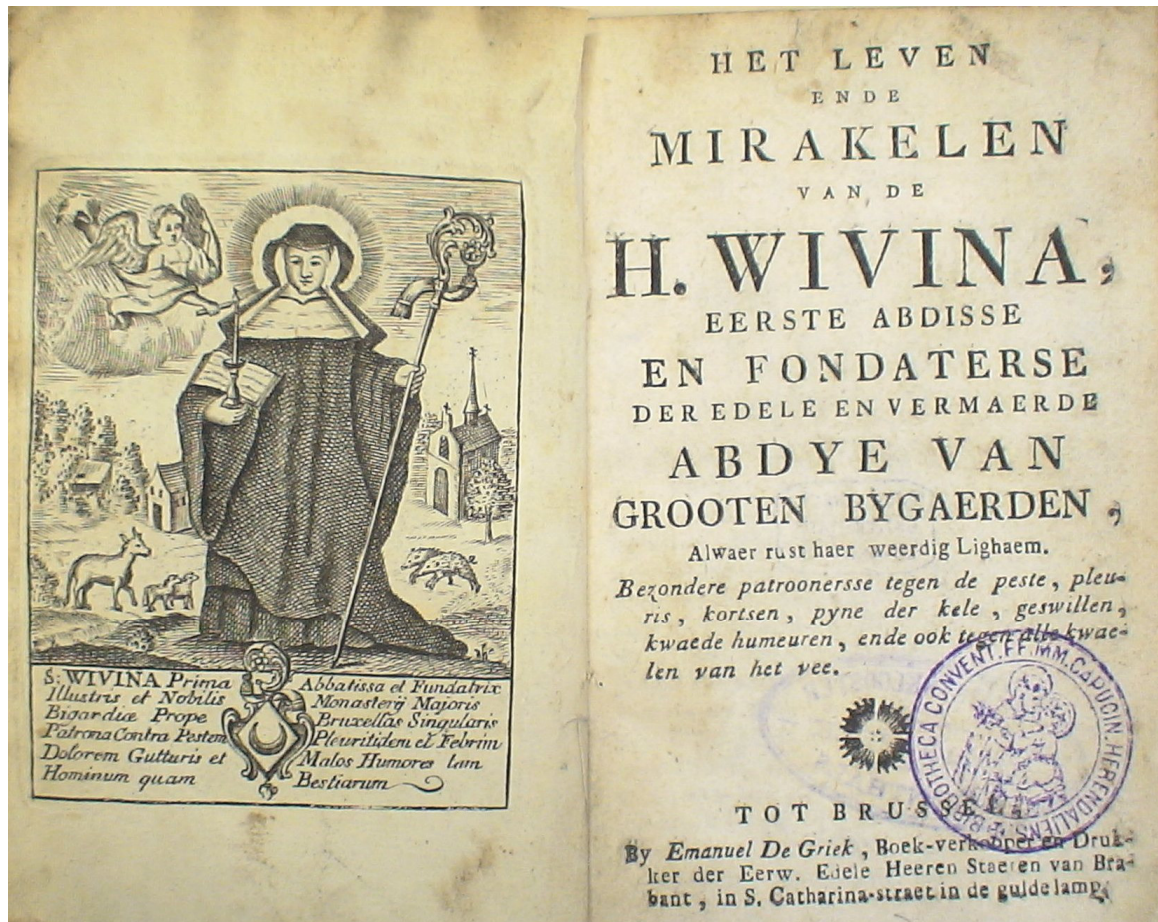


Figure 5.2 Emanuel De Griek. The life and miracles of Saint Wivina, first abbess and founder of the noble and famous Abbey of Grand-Bigard. Brussels, 1722.

The analysis begins with this Flemish text, a small cheap edition published in 1722 of the life and miracles of 12th century Benedictine abbess Saint Wivina from Oisy in Flanders. Because of its date of publication and language difference, this text was not included in the comprehensive rhetorical analysis of religious biographies in previous chapters of this dissertation. However, it was

important to include it in the study of images as a point of comparison with 19th century images as well as denoting the continuity of themes that appear a century later. The text recounts the life of a recluse near Brussels, who later, after gathering a following, established a convent in Grand-Bigard. She was of noble lineage and refused marriage in order to live a life of solitude dedicated to God. Curiously, Saint Wivina is not listed among the saints in the 19th century Belgian hagiographies.⁵⁵⁸ Perhaps this insight is indicative of a specific Flemish biographical project as opposed to the Walloonian one? This idea will not be discussed in this research but perchance could lead to a future project by a bilingual Flemish/French speaker.

The image adjacent to the title page is a wood-cut engraving of a common image of an Abbess as saint and founder of a convent, with some particularities deriving from her specific legends. Several things appeared to be significant in this image. First, the identification of a saint resides in the importance of her legend, officiated by a Latin text occupying ¼ of the image. The identity of the nun is established through her appurtenance to a town demonstrated by the sketch of the village, of which its church displays significance. This considers that as the nun gains more recognition, the village, its church and herself procure national recognition. The Abbey of Grand-Bigard in Brussels is no longer just any convent, but one that has special divine protection from its founder, officially recognized by the Church as a saint. The notoriety could only be of help in garnering vocations to this Benedictine congregation from a variety of regions. This identifying relationship will become most relevant during the 19th century especially soon after Belgian's independence, as a way to guarantee the Church's position and influence within society.

Second, representative of a medieval saint, it was not uncommon to link her miracle/s with wildlife—depicted in the image. Popular folklore assigned meaning to animals and saints, demonstrating the power of the Creator, and the Church depended on this folklore for the

⁵⁵⁸ 1. J. B Dufau. *Hagiographie belge*. (Bruxelles: Jamar, 1849?); 2. L'Abbé Normand. *Galerie des Saints et des Saintes qui protègent la Belgique et les Pays-Bas*. (Bruxelles: Société des Beaux-Arts, 1841); 3. Nimal, H. *Vies de quelques-unes de nos Grandes Saintes au Pays de Liège*. (H. Dessain: Liège, 1897).

propagation of spiritual messages.⁵⁵⁹ The halo depicting Wivina's holy stature of saint will be replaced by a ray of light in 19th century images for those whose beatification process had begun.

Third, the image of Saint Wivina is "auto-suffisante" or "self-sufficient" in that it references one spectacular event in her life which was used to define her saintly existence. The motif of light recalls the miracle by which during the night office the devil extinguished all the candles, then by her prayers one candle was miraculously re-lighted. The light is a visual testimony of her exceptionality—her closeness to the sacred. The candle light also illuminates the book in her hand providing a symbolic counter-attack to the Enlightenment philosophy beginning to take root (see chapter 3) as well as privileging the founder's work in establishing a convent at Grand-Bigard. That is to say, that the book, symbol attached to a founder of a congregation, is representative of the rules and constitutions the Benedictines of this convent must follow that she, as Abbess, enforced. The abbatial cross (much adorned here in rococo style), not only symbolically reinforces her authority in presenting the constitutions and rules of the convent but also is characteristic of the topoi of representations of 'saintly' women. Interestingly, this symbol of the commanding abbatial cross is not replicated in 19th century nun representations, but rather, is replaced by images of a pen in hand or the fingers holding a page in a closed book. This 1722 text therefore, upheld the 17th century concept of empowerment and ennoblement of founders of convents. The 19th century texts will recourse to a more subtle form of authority of religious women.

⁵⁵⁹ See Dominic Alexander. Saints and Animals in the Middle Ages. (Boydell & Brewer, 2008).

2. Saint Lutgarde: Evolution in religious symbolism



Figure 5.3 **Histoire Abrégée de la Vie de Sainte Lutgarde, Religieuse de l'Ordre de Citeaux, en grande vénération à Aywiers en Brabant; Monastère de Son Ordre.** Bruxelles: Ed. Stevens Imprimeur 1787.

Although Flemish Cistercian nun Saint Lutgarde (1182-1246) died in Aywiers near Brussels, her biography portrays her as a universal saint for the country of Belgium and not for one particular city (perhaps this is due to its pre-revolutionary publication date?) She is one of the first mystics of the Sacred Heart and was a contemporary of Saint Francis of Assisi. Though prioress of Benedictine abbey in Tongres, she later became a Cistercienne in Aywiers because she desired more austerity, specifically more silence. The silence was intensified by the fact she spoke Flemish and very little French while living among French speaking nuns. She experienced a mystical vision whereby the

crucified Christ asked her to drink the blood from His speared side wound; symbolically recalling the daily Eucharist. She possessed the stigmata of the lance wound and experienced a mystical exchange of hearts with Christ.⁵⁶⁰ She inspired a ‘following’ and spent time studying scripture.

Saint Lutgarde’s image is printed with a reusable wood engraving while the adjacent print of the text is modern. The word “sainte” is printed in a smaller font in comparison, with the big font letter *H* (= *saint in Dutch*) for Saint Wivina. The typography is distinct but comparable to contemporary published novels of Voltaire or Rousseau. The Latin text at the bottom of the page, encompassing less space than the previous image of Saint Wivina, imitates cursive writing effectuating a proximity towards the reader and enhanced by the Biblical Song of Solomon (Chapter 7:11). These evolutions were symbolic steps toward laicizing the persona, as texts were beginning to be made more available to the public.

Significantly, Saint Lutgarde’s image also continues the tradition of “auto-suffisance” in that the meaning of the image is explicit. All the symbolism that represented her life lies in the image space divided triply; a) the cloister and the life of Saint Lutgarde, b) the miracle and her interiority, and c) the message of death and eternal life. This analysis will show how the image of Saint Lutgarde evolved from one century to the next by adjusting the image in order to promote devotional themes that abounded during the 19th century; remarking on a sensual symbolism moving towards an intellectual symbolism. Just as the religious biographies were built upon a hagiographic past, religious art illustrated in biographies built upon art history in order to incorporate new ideas and themes in an apparently continuous manner. Two examples follow:

⁵⁶⁰ <http://vultus.stblogs.org/2008/06/draw-me-to-thy-pierced-side-1.html>



Figure 5.4 Saint Lutgarde and the miracle of Christ in H. Nimal. Vies de quelques-unes de nos Grandes Saintes au Pays de Liège. Liège: H. Dessain, 1897.



Figure 5.5 Maestà: Deposition panel by Italian of Siena Duccio di Buoninsegna (1255-1319)⁵⁶¹

⁵⁶¹ <http://www.wga.hu/>

Two different images are presented below the biographical image of Saint Lutgarde: *Figure 5.4* --a photograph? of a painting (17th century?) of Saint Lutgarde located in the Abbey of Rosendael (later at the Monastery of the Dames Bernardines of Colen) and inserted in an 1897 religious biographical text serves as a comparison in order to elucidate on the new 19th century motifs and *Figure 5.5*-- a medieval painting by Siena painter Buoninsegna serves in its historical symbolic similarity. The relationship of these two images (*Figures 5.4 and 5.5*) with the biographical image of 1787 is indicative of very different artistic projects, plus their difference in medium, size, and theological projects that depended upon a framework of imitation and recognition. Buoninsegna represents an artist that would have influenced medieval and renaissance art in northern Europe to which the artist would have been exposed. His painting was chosen because the image of Saint Lutgarde has striking similarities in its formal message and its apparent emulation of the Mother of Christ in the Maestà. Nimal's text of 1897, also bound by rich hagiographical traditional art, renewed the message of Saint Lutgarde in his new visual intention demonstrated by specific nuances.

The deposition of the body of Christ scene is found on the back panel of the Maestà (*Figure 5.5*) in the Cathedral of Siena named "Most Holy Mary of the Assumption." The Maestà depicts scenes from Christ's Passion. It was commissioned in honor of Siena's victory in battle over the Florentines who tried to conquer their city. The artist had been influenced by the spirituality of the friars in the area, whom desired to portray the maternal image of Mary and celebrate her protection as patron saint over the city.⁵⁶² The Maestà is a perfect example of art in devotion. This painting, much like religious biographies and texts⁵⁶³ contained smaller predella panels of saints which

⁵⁶² Wright 32.

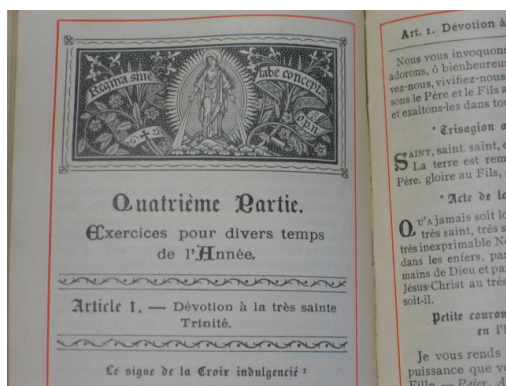
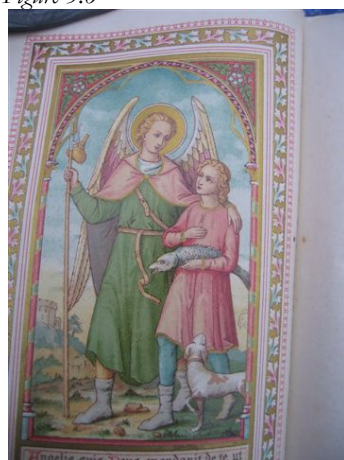
⁵⁶³ Much like the predella panels of Buoninsegna's Maestà, the connection between the worshipper and the intercessory holy figure is replicated in the following religious images, in Les Plus Belles Prières de Saint Alphonse de Liguori réunies dans un ordre méthodique et formant un manuel complet par le Père Saint-Omer, Rédemptoriste. 120eme Édition. Tournai: Casterman, 1899: smaller holy images that are distinct from the subject of the text but symbolize intercessory figures.

“elaborating on their hagiography, [...] reaffirmed the spiritual pathway of intercession between the saint and the worshipper.”⁵⁶⁴

Buoninsegna’s medieval painting was striking in several ways: First and most importantly, in the embracement of the body of Christ by both the Virgin Mary (*Figure 5.5*) and Saint Lutgarde (*Figure 5.3*). Contrarily, the image of Saint Lutgarde (*Figure 5.4*) does not allegorize this embrace. Second, Lutgarde similarly to all the images of nuns to follow in this analysis, emulates attributes of the Virgin Mary; specifically in the privileged relationship with Christ. Third, symbolic traits or gestures of Sainte Lutgarde would have resembled medieval models such as Buoninsegna’s models, in an effort to not only capture her essence as she lived approximately close to the same time period-1182-1246 but also in an effort to revive the “golden ages” of Catholicism. Fourth, the symbolism of Jesus’ suffering and martyrdom is a point of departure in order to understand what this image was promoting for the Catholic Church.

The embracement of the body of Christ by Mary in Buoninsegna’s scene above (*Figure 5.4*), and the reciprocal embrace in the sketch of Saint Lutgarde (*Figure 5.3*) illustrates a relationship with Christ that is not distant. “The visual association of Mary with the body of Christ was most

Figure 5.6



⁵⁶⁴ Wright 34.

identifiable in the subject of the sorrowing mother at the foot of the Cross.”⁵⁶⁵ For example the following Belgian image supports this visual association:

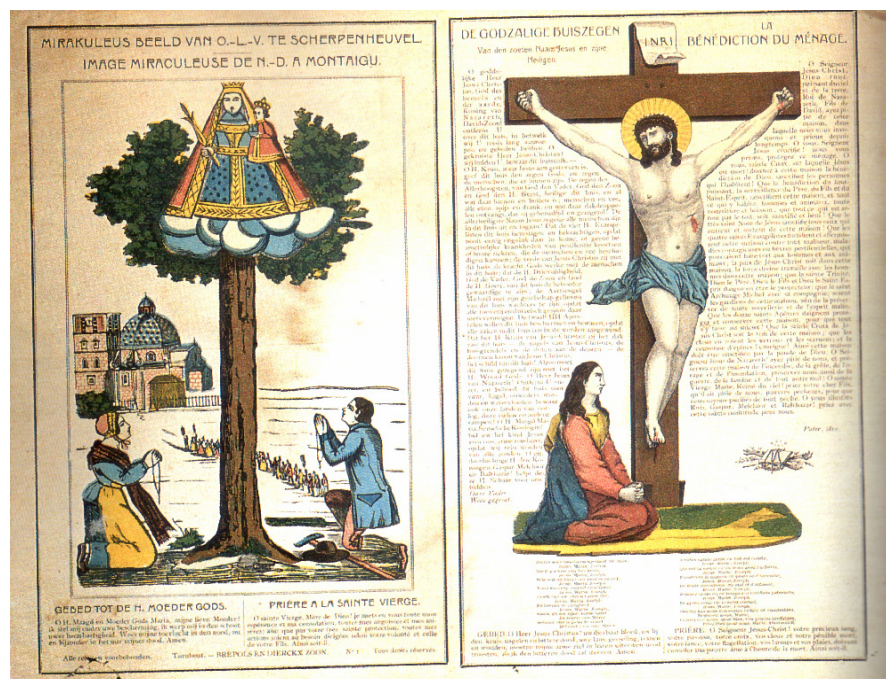


Figure 5.7 Notre-Dame de Montaigu. Large colored mural image of the house of Brepols of Dierckx, in Turnhout, Belgium. Mid 19th century. This image combines the devotion to Notre-Dame of Montaigu with a Crucified Christ.⁵⁶⁶

Reminiscent of the Virgin at the foot of the Cross, Saint Lutgarde’s close relationship is further enhanced by the fact that Lutgarde’s feet (Figure 5.3) are at the same level as the cross suggesting that she is not venerating Christ (at least not visually) but instead the author/artist displays a relationship with Christ that is not distant and demonstrates that Saint Lutgarde has a certain privilege status of one that intercedes for those that venerate her. This privilege illustrated by the image is then further enhanced by the text: “Bienheureuse Lutgarde, [...] nous réclamons aujourd’hui

⁵⁶⁵ Wright 15.

⁵⁶⁶ *Imagiers de paradis: Images de piété populaire du XV^{ème} au XX^{ème} siècle.* (Musée en Piconrue – Bastogne. Edité par le Crédit Communal 1990).

avec la plus sincère confiance votre puissante intercession auprès du tout puissant.”⁵⁶⁷ Much as the Mother of God was venerated for her intercessory powers, she is also venerated as an intercessor for humankind. In return for venerating her, the text promises a recompense: “Il n’eut presque personne qui ne l’ait invoqué sans ressentir les heureux effets de sa puissante intercession auprès de Dieu. De là cette vénération que lui rendent les fidèles de tout état, de tout rang, de tout âge.” Additionally, Jesus’ cross, framed by two pillars on either of his sides, is not placed on an altar—thus placing no depth between the viewer’s eye and this image.

Contrarily, the Abbey painting (*Figure 5.4*) in Nimal’s 1897 text, does not depict a reciprocal embrace, rather the embrace comes only from Christ. This is not only indicative of a change in representation but more importantly represents an intention on the part of the author to highlight a different message. 100 years before, in the 1787 text, the reciprocal embrace demonstrated by the touching of both the body of Lutgarde and the body of Christ concerns a more sentimental union with Christ—one that is representative of a Church that has not yet lived through the Revolution and its suppression. Absent in 1897 text, on the other hand, is the reciprocity and the bloody wounds, which indicate a more intellectual message that presents Christ’s gesture towards Lutgarde as a beckoning of his faithful towards Him—a message that is representative of a Church who has traversed suffering of three revolutions (Liège Revolution of 1789, Brussels Revolution of 1830 and the industrial revolution), and two occupiers (French and Dutch). The relationship calls on the faithful to heed to the calling of Christ, be it in religious vocations or living a ‘saintly’ way of life. However, both texts representing a suffering and tender Christ, consequently efface all distance of veneration by its proximity of the visual to the eye of the reader, developed a new 19th century definition of religious biographies as personal ‘pious objects’ that functioned to recatholicize an entire generation of Belgian Catholics. The image prompted devotion and reading that could be accomplished in another space than inside the church.

⁵⁶⁷ Histoire abrégée de la vie de Sainte Lutgarde, religieuse de l’Ordre de Citeau, en grande vénération de à Aywiers en Brabant; monastère de son Ordre. (Bruxelles: Stevens, 1787) 16.

The biographical sketch of Saint Lutgarde (*Figure 5.3*) is visually simple yet theologically complex. The sanctuary, in which Christ hangs from the cross, is partially enclosed and open to the outside. Note the difference with image (*Figure 5.4*) where no enclosure is present. Could this signify an institutionalization or formalization of devotions by the protective enclosure? The enclosed space flows and connects to the outside space. The spiritual meditation of Christ's sacrifice within this sanctuary continues outside the sanctuary where the drawing of life-giving well water by the saint recalls the sacrament of Baptism—the initiation rite into Catholicism; and death as the last sacramental rite with the cross on the right at the cemetery. The intimate environment of the embrace is drawn to the outside as a reminder that interior faith has to be reinforced and demonstrated publicly. The cross of Jesus is placed in the middle of these two spaces—to remind the viewer that it is through Jesus, by taking up the Cross that life is redeemed at death. The left hand of Jesus, symmetrically above the cemetery cross, appears to symbolically recall the judgment of Christ upon the criminals crucified with him at Golgotha.

“When they came upon the place of ‘the Skull,’ they crucified Jesus there, and the two other criminals, one on his right and the other on his left. [...] One of the criminals hanging there hurled insults at him: <<Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!>> The other one, however, rebuked him, saying, <<Don’t you fear God? You received the same sentence he did. Ours, however, is only right, because we are getting what we deserve for what we did; but he has done no wrong.>> And he said to Jesus, <<Remember me, Jesus, when you come as King!>> Jesus said to him, <<I promise you that today you will be in Paradise with me.>>”⁵⁶⁸

The judgment on Christ's left is death while the judgment represented by the water and his merciful embrace on his right, is life. Jesus' left hand remains nailed to the cross to remind the reader that Jesus chose to accept his suffering with His martyrdom being the key to human salvation. In Buoninsegna's work, one of the apostles also hangs his arm on the cross as he lets down Jesus from the cross—in doing so, he accepts to suffer in order to follow Jesus. Lutgarde also accepts to share in Christ's suffering through interior suffering. As a contemplative religious, her suffering is meditative with her head against His chest and her eyes gazing at His Heart: “Je veux que vous

⁵⁶⁸ Luke 23: 33-43 Bible: Good News Translation. (New York: American Bible Society, 1993) 1166.

passiez le reste de votre vie dans une ferveur de coeur qui soit tranquille, & c'est ainsi que je veux que vous appaissiez la colère de mon Père, irrité contre les pécheurs.”⁵⁶⁹ This suffering is rewarded by appeasing God's anger toward men and works to permit more salvation of men's souls. The religious biography, therefore, is not simply the story of the life of a holy person. It is a text that in advancing the sanctification of a religious women, seeks to promote in its readers a closer sentimental relationship to Christ. This relationship with a loving intimate God, undoubtedly strengthens Catholic' allegiance to the Church. In turn, this strength develops into a corps of defense for the Church which in turn impacts and influences societal and political affairs in the manner of sanctioning anti-Catholic agendas.

Both images of Saint Lutgarde (*Figure 5.3*) and the Virgin Mary (*Figure 5.5*) illustrate a communication of tenderness and of calm spirituality in their expressions. Both embracing Christ's body, do so differently. The Blessed Virgin possessing more privilege, presses her face against His, her eyes cast into His in a motherly way. Saint Lutgarde embraces Jesus by pressing her face against his chest but with her eyes cast in the direction of Jesus' heart. The scene is framed by the biblical words of Chapter 7:11 of the Song of Solomon: “Ego dilecto meo et ad me conversio eius”: *I am my beloved's and his desire is toward me*. The Song of Solomon, consisting of eight chapters, recounts the intimate communion of the Royal Bridegroom, King Solomon and his Bride. It allegorizes the mutual love of Christ, the Royal Bridegroom and the Church, the Bride. Specifically, the passage above allegorizes “the relation between Christ and the soul of the believer [...]”⁵⁷⁰ By framing this intimate biblical passage with the intimate gaze of Saint Lutgarde upon the heart of Jesus, the author provokes a meditation upon what this reciprocal love suggests. The intimacy brings the believer to

⁵⁶⁹ Histoire abrégée de la vie de Sainte Lutgarde 9.

⁵⁷⁰ Hughes Oliphant Old. The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church. (Volume 3 The Medieval Church. Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Erdemans Publishing, 1999) 514.

meditate more closely on the Passion of Christ, conforming his soul to suffer more with Christ;⁵⁷¹ thereby forming a oneness of love in complete unity.

This text with all its theological complexity speaks to a variety of levels of spiritual intellectualism packaged as a serious historical endeavor “HISTOIRE abrégée de...”. The thematic string of this research recalling the dissertation title *Nun's the Word* takes on a newer deeper theological meaning. Through the veneration of Saint Lutgarde, the believer in his meditation, suffers white martyrdom,⁵⁷² which in turn sanctifies *his life*. The nun, portrayed with the power of God's mouthpiece, intercesses for the believer, loyal in his dutiful recited prayer to her at the end of the book.⁵⁷³ This veneration raises equality among the ‘fidèles,’ trying to create a strong solidarity among Catholic faithful.

The life of Saint Lutgarde has several objectives: 1. It is foremost a “mirror of piety”⁵⁷⁴ hoping to engage the believer in his faith: “[...] pour seconder la dévotion des fidèles par cette pieuse & édifiante lecture [...]”⁵⁷⁵; 2. it promotes the salvation of religious life--“Sainte Lutgarde, la gloire des religieuses [...]”⁵⁷⁶ specifically of the Benedictines (initially), then later the Order of Cîteaux (in Ayrwiers) at a time⁵⁷⁷ when they were threatened of extinction; 3. it promotes the status of the abbess; 4. it promotes the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus; 5. it maintains the authority of sacraments:

⁵⁷¹ Old 515.

⁵⁷² There are two types of martyrdom in the Catholic Church. The first is red martyrdom when one loses his life for God by shedding his blood. The other is white martyrdom, a type of martyrdom that does not shed blood and does not violently take away life. Rather one's life becomes a complete sacrificial offering to God, refusing all the worldly temptations and promises. The sacrificial offering of oneself becomes a perpetual devotion to God and in this devotion, one desires to unite oneself to Christ's sufferings.
<http://www.catholic.org/featured/headline.php?ID=980>

⁵⁷³ “Litanie de Sainte Lutgarde” Histoire abrégée de la vie de Sainte Lutgarde 17-19.

⁵⁷⁴ Histoire abrégée de la vie de Sainte Lutgarde 17.

⁵⁷⁵ Histoire abrégée de la vie de Sainte Lutgarde Avis au lecteur.

⁵⁷⁶ Histoire abrégée de la vie de Sainte Lutgarde 18.

⁵⁷⁷ Note the publication is 1787 when contemplative religious were suppressed one after another.

“Le profond respect que Lutgarde portoit au plus auguste de nos Sacremens [...]”⁵⁷⁸ 6. it offers penance and recourse for sinners.⁵⁷⁹ These types of biographies, in providing visual stimulation of suffering with its images accompanied by meditative reading on suffering, posits the adversity of the times to seem less significant and counters discouragement in a fight for religious influence in the daily lives of the faithful.

3. Saint Julienne: A Belgian icon

a. Promoting national identity by way of the Belgian Catholic Church.

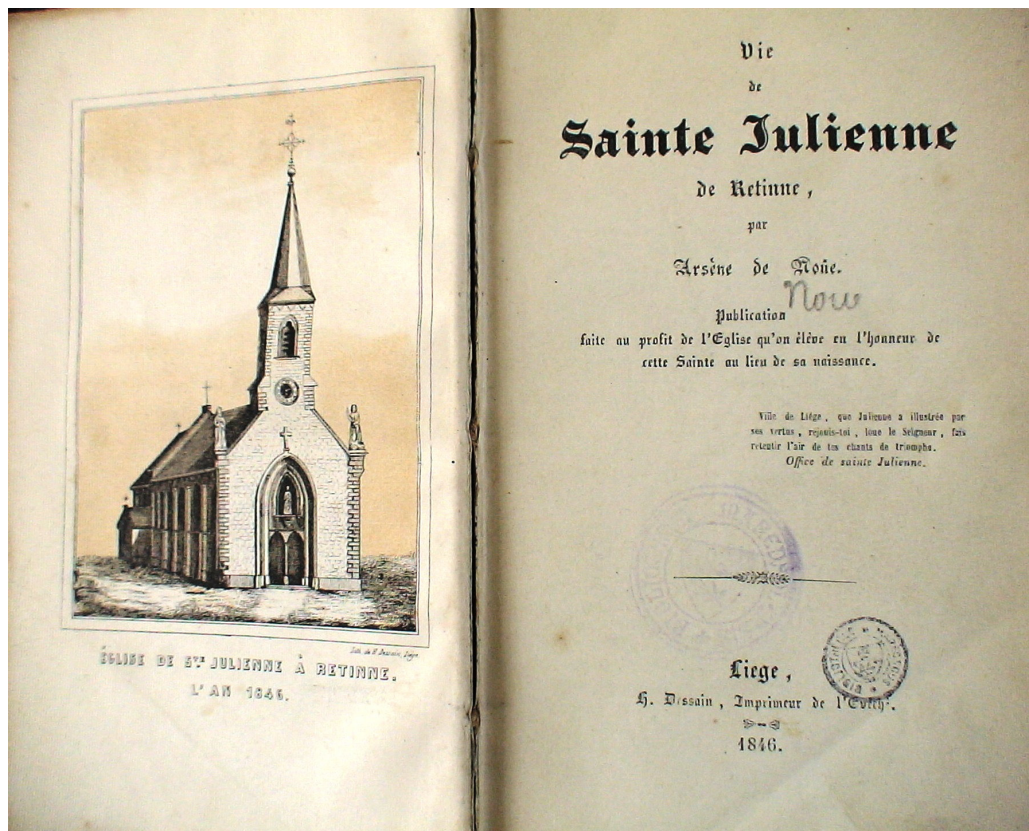


Figure 5.8 Portrait of the 19th century church. Arsène Noüe. Vie de Sainte Julienne de Retinne. Publication faite au profit de l'Eglise qu'on élève en l'honneur de cette sainte au lieu de sa naissance. Liège: H. Dessain, 1846.

⁵⁷⁸ Histoire abrégée de la vie de Sainte Lutgarde 12.

⁵⁷⁹ Histoire abrégée de la vie de Sainte Lutgarde 18.

“Ville de Liège, que Julienne a illustré par ses vertus, réjouis-toi, loue le Seigneur, fais retentir l’air de tes chants de triomphe. *Office de sainte Julienne*.”⁵⁸⁰

Arsène de Noûe’s Vie de Sainte Julienne 1846, published 16 years after Belgian’s independence, combines religious imagery with nationalistic imagery with three unconventional images: a 19th century church; a medieval saint in prayer (taken from a frequent 18th century model); and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament by three women, of which one is Sainte Julienne, in a fictional non-enclosed edifice. Words such as “*triomphe*,” placed at the end of the epigraph on the title page, remind the people of the struggle it withstood to maintain the symbiotic relationship of Catholicism and the state of the new nation. As the most famous saint of Belgium, Julienne is eternally linked to the city of Liège in her efforts to establish a new feast day in the Church. Celebrated by all Catholics around the world, the Feast of Corpus Christi instituted in 1264 brought international reputation to the city of Liège.

As a very young child, Saint Julienne (1193-1258) was placed in the convent of Mont-Cornillon in Liège. She later resided in the same convent by joining the Premonstratensian Order and soon after became the Superioress. She received a vision from God of a host in the sky communicating to her that the Church was missing a feast day that venerated the Blessed Sacrament. In her efforts to promote this new feast day, she was met with great opposition by the general superior, Roger who mounted opposition against her. She was forced to flee the convent. She returned to the convent due to the help of the Bishop of Liège who defended her reputation, only to flee once more from additional threats. She eventually settled in Fosses where she lived as a recluse. Soon after her death with the help of her friend Saint Ève, the Feast of Corpus Christi was instituted for the universal Church.

In the 19th century, this international reputation was reaffirmed⁵⁸¹ in order to form a distinct honorable ‘national’ reputation: “Nous écrivons la vie de Sainte Julienne, mais nous ne perdrons pas

⁵⁸⁰ See title page of Vie de Sainte Julienne.

un instant de vue la gloire du Dieu qu'elle a tant aimé ni l'honneur de son pays.”⁵⁸² Arsène de Noûe stresses the medieval roots of a great liberating city, insinuating that the new freedoms professed during the Revolutionary war were in fact not innovative at all:

“Mais le 13eme siècle fut pour le pays de Liège le grand siècle des libertés politiques. [...] Liberté individuelle mise sous protection des magistrats de la ville – inviolabilité du domicile – abolition de la confiscation – vote des impôts par la cité- exemption du service et logement militaire, sauf dans certains cas et après que l'évêque aura rempli les formalités voulues- : tel est le noble faisceau de libertés que le peuple avait déjà conquis. Ajoutez encore pour la gloire de Liège, que le serf devenait personne civile, que les officiers publics ne pouvaient exiger des citoyens aucun salaire pour l'exercice de leurs fonctions, que nul ne pouvait être distrait de son juge naturel, et dites-moi quelle nation pouvait alors vanter d'avoir de plus larges et de plus nobles franchises [...]. Ce siècle tant à cause de son émancipation politique peut donc être compté parmi les plus glorieux et les plus heureux du pays de Liège; car les troubles passent avec les hommes qui les ont fait naître, mais les libertés prennent racine dans le sol”⁵⁸³ (my emphasis).

In emphasizing this golden age of Catholicism, the Liege people were a righteous example of an emancipated country only because religion was primordial and central; so much so that in the 13th century, Liège as independent principality was governed by bishops and those (the “magistrats”) appointed by the Church. In order to support his favor of religious intervention in the matters of public affairs, the author inserts a quote from Chateaubriand: “Les villes qui sont sorties le plus tôt de la barbarie sont celles mêmes qui ont été soumises à des princes ecclésiastiques.”⁵⁸⁴ At that time, Liège was governed by laws supported by the Catholic Church. The Church protected some kind of political emancipation—an argument that was under attack during the course of the 19th century by the libertarians. Rooted patriotism finds itself attached with the biography of Saint Julienne. The rhetoric of combining the virtues of a saint to that of the virtues of an ancient people rouses individual desires to continue this exceptional past in order to surpass those that desire to acquire them and stifle their deeply rooted religious heritage, namely the French, the Dutch and the

⁵⁸¹ Reaffirmed because many biographies of Saint Julienne were published during the 19th century.

⁵⁸² Arsène Noûe. Vie de Sainte Julienne de Retinne. Publication faite au profit de l'Eglise qu'on élève en l'honneur de cette sainte au lieu de sa naissance. (Liège: H. Dessain, 1846) 2.

⁵⁸³ Noûe 14.

⁵⁸⁴ Noûe --Beginning quote for Chapter 4 “Liège au treizieme siècle.”

Austrians. Once the foundation is laid to embellish the rhetoric of a nation's freedoms and glorious patriotic roots, additional imagery of Church establishments of rituals, feasts, and doctrine are then highlighted.



Figure 5.9 Saint Julienne in Arsène Noûe's Vie de Sainte Julienne de Retinne. Publication faite au profit de l'Eglise qu'on élève en l'honneur de cette sainte au lieu de sa naissance. Liège: H. Dessain, 1846. (inserted between pages 64-65).



Figure 5.10 Saint Julienne, Saint Eve, and Isabelle de Huy in Arsène Noûe's Vie de Sainte Julienne de Retinne. Publication faite au profit de l'Eglise qu'on élève en l'honneur de cette sainte au lieu de sa naissance. Liège: H. Dessain, 1846. (inserted between pages 120 and 121).

Figures 5.9 and 5.10, in Noûe's biography, placed emphasis not on political issues, but on the central axes of Catholic beliefs that separated it from Protestantism; an ever-growing threat to the north. Specifically, on the belief of divine presence in the Eucharist:

"Le protestanisme, [...] devait se trouver dans le coeur des Liégeois le même attachement à la foi: tous les efforts vinrent se briser contre ce cri solennel et unanime: <<Non, non, nous ne voulons point changer de religion.>> [...] Dieu devait aimer néanmoins à se reposer au milieu d'une ville si admirable par la perpétuité de sa foi [...]"⁵⁸⁵ (author's emphasis).

⁵⁸⁵ Noûe 11.

The rhetorical strategy of depicting the Liégeois as a united people in their perpetual faith, combined with the images of Eucharistic Adoration, enhanced the privileged sacraments of the Church.

The images in this text are no longer “self-sufficient,” meaning that it must be reinforced by the textual context. The above images *Figure 5.9* and *Figure 5.10*, are quite distinct from the initial frontispiece of the Church in Retinne. The first image is very different from the second, which appears many pages later, epitomizing a progression in the message of the text. *Figure 5.9* shows Saint Julienne in prayer with a gate in the background while *Figure 5.10* displays the altar and the monstrance in the center of the image. The spiritual message is very clear and quite evolved in details (due to the added benefit of a copper printed engraving) in comparison to the images of Saint Wivina and Saint Lutgarde. The spiritual message is all the much clearer as the faces of the nuns turned away from the viewer do not detract attention away from it. The presence of Christ in the Eucharist is the center of the spiritual message.

Saint Julienne promoted the Feast of Corpus Christi after her visions relayed to her a missing feast day in the Church-- represented by the host in the air next to the angel. In both images, the inside sanctuary seamlessly flows towards the outside emphasizing the importance of Saint Julienne’s contribution to the world of bringing new church doctrine to light. This text, albeit the medieval resonances, is for a 19th century audience, using époque buzz words against the atheist revolutionary philosophy of the time:

“La civilisation est la fille d’une sage liberté; rien d’étonnant donc que déjà à cette époque le peuple liégeois eût atteint un haut degré de perfection intellectuelle; et lui revient d’autant plus d’honneur d’avoir accepté le premier sans contrainte morale et par pure conviction, la nouvelle fête de l’Institution de Très-Saint Sacrement.”⁵⁸⁶

The words “civilization,” “sage,” “liberté,” “intellectuelle,” recall the words used by certain philosophers in campaign to break away from the Church’s authority. For most of them, the Church did not offer freedom, intellectual perfection or a civilized society. The influence of philosophical

⁵⁸⁶ Noûe 15.

thinking contributed immensely to changing the way Catholic philosophy of 19th century was advertised and asserted. The change directed the spokesmen of the Church to capitalize on ‘Reason.’ Wise and derived from God, it was argued that reason could not be separated from faith. Those in favor maintained that if reason and faith were separated, they each would become diseased. Reason without faith led to paganism and faith without reason led to fanaticism. This manner of thinking protrudes in Arsène de Noûe’s biography of Saint Julienne. Arsène de Noûe was a well read writer who inserted quotes of famous writers, philosophers or texts at the beginning of each chapter including Virgil, Horace, Biblical chapters, Christine de Pisan, Saint Augustine, Racine, Bossuet, l’abbé de Rancé, J.B. Rousseau, Italian poet Le Tasse, Persian poet Hymne de Saady, Lamartine, Schiller, Victor Hugo, as well as quotes of local bishops. The diversity of his inclusions enhanced his authority and most probably his receptivity among those who were more inclined to be persuaded through words rather than through devotional images. Effectively, he was applying philosophical thinking for the cause of the Church. By supplementing his dialogue to the congenerous religious rhetoric of the past, he was active in dressing the new communication for the Catholic Church. His sources most definitely influenced his style of writing. In the following example Noûe describes Liège in a romantic embrace of visual imagery:

“De là Liège se déroule devant vous avec toutes ses pompes, ses flèches, ses montagnes où sont étagées quantité de petites villas, avec ses monuments et son beau fleuve. La citadelle se dresse devant vous avec sa ligne sévère de murailles et ses bastions comme une sentinelle avancée de la grande ville; puis l’œil court se perdre dans le lointain sur les hauteurs de St.-Gilles. Les montagnes de droite sont couvertes de vignes, au milieu desquelles s’élèvent les fumées tourbillonnantes des usines et des houillères qui passent à travers l’horizon leurs têtes nues et noircies. Vous distinguez à votre gauche St.-Martin, la collégiale eucharistique, le lieu où vivait l’amie de Julienne, Ève la recluse; puis les immenses bâtiments de l’abbaye de St.-Laurent, dont les abbés furent les premiers honorés de la mitre et de la crosse; enfin à l’ombre des montagnes, Liège couchée majestueusement sur les bords de la Meuse.”⁵⁸⁷

Noûe’s romantic imagery feeds a generation that has been enriched by the romantic movement, and in doing so, portrays Liège as a Catholic bastion in an arousal of patriotic emotions. Along with his background as jurist and historian, Arsène de Noûe also took part in forming one of the first choral

⁵⁸⁷ Noûe 38.

groups in Belgium, namely Société de l'Union, in Malmedy (1847) with Abbé Jéhin, with the intention of embellishing religious ceremonies:⁵⁸⁸ “Écoutez, ne croyez-vous pas entendre ses musiciens annoncer à l'univers catholique, du haut de la tour de Saint-Martin, la grande solennité de la Fête-Dieu!”⁵⁸⁹ By inserting the introductory image of the church of Retinne⁵⁹⁰ (see title page of the biography above), the author emphasized the generosity of the townspeople whom were the laborers and the financial backers of the church erected in 1842.⁵⁹¹ Maintaining their generosity was a smart way to solicit continuing donations for the upkeep of the church and in return “cette église sera les archives modernes de Retinne où les habitants liront à livre ouvert les renseignements de sa vie écrite sur la Pierre.”⁵⁹² Therefore, the biography of Saint Julienne functions as a Church solicitor for financial contributions and advertiser of Church institutional devotions.

Images have long been used as devotional sources instilling faith in the masses in part because most were illiterate and in part because the reading of religious texts were reserved for the elite. Largely disseminated to the masses, religious biographies adopted reasonable rhetorical arguments to further enhance the symbolism of the images found in the texts. For example in the following citation, Saint Julienne's role is much more profound than at first glance: “[...] c'est une Vierge choisie par Dieu pour provoquer dans son église une grande, solennelle, perpétuelle démonstration d'amour au *Dieu caché*, au Dieu que la foi catholique adore sous le voile eucharistique.”⁵⁹³ The Word is hidden under the veil of whom brought about the Eucharistic feast. The nun who brought the Word, hence *Nun's the Word*, presents a God that must be sought. In

⁵⁸⁸ <http://ruw.bigm-web.com/cgi-bin/histoire.plx>

⁵⁸⁹ Noûe 38.

⁵⁹⁰ Retinne is the birthplace of Julienne.

⁵⁹¹ Noûe 223-226.

⁵⁹² Noûe 252.

⁵⁹³ Noûe introduction.

accordance, the image of the holy virgin, symbolized by the halo,⁵⁹⁴ necessitates a close relationship with Christ, which is *silent*. She, a nun, reveals profound intimacy one can behold with Christ through Eucharistic Adoration and becomes an iconic figure for the Catholics around the world. Moreover, originating in Belgium, this theological understanding of intimacy with Christ changes the manner in which Catholics personalize their faith and the independence that derives from this personalization.

The Belgian biographies of Saint Julienne are multifarious throughout the 19th century for several reasons. First, from Belgium, she instituted a universal Church feast day claiming international reputation; second, she catechizes Eucharistic Adoration which physically brings people into the sanctuary of the Church; third, Eucharistic Adoration places emphasis on the Holy Sacrifice of Christ, which was inline with the 19th century culture of suffering (discussed later).

⁵⁹⁴ The symbolized “halo” will be replaced in later religious biographies by words of “sainte” to deter from the unofficial recognition of the Church and be persuasive in the project of sanctification.

b. Sanctifying the Church



Figure 5.11 Bertholet, R. P. Histoire de l'Institution de la Fête Dieu avec les Vies des Bienheureuses Julienne et Ève qui en furent les premières promulgatrices, suivie de l'abrégé historique de l'institution des illustres confréries de l'Adoration perpétuelle de l'auguste Sacrement des autels, et surtout de celle érigée dans l'église de Saint Martin à Liège en 1765. Troisième Edition. Liège: Félix-Oudart, 1846.

Bertholet delivers the crescendo of his message in his opening page (Figure 5.12) with the image of the triumph of the church of Liège, the daughter of the Roman Catholic Church. The “Vies” of Sainte Julienne and Sainte Ève appear as an accessory to the sanctification of a Church Feast. Additionally, the biographical project appears to be subordinate to the historical project. Nourished by the scientific advancements of the 19th century, the author deliberately entitles his text “Histoire” in order to focus attention to the serious project of the text, an act that distances from a

hagiographical (legendary aspect) project. The intent is to recall Belgium's history with an opening image that easily recalls revolutionary pillages, suppression and vandalism and enouncing the Belgian Church's triumph over political events. Additionally, the image symbolizes spiritual triumph over the vanity of the world. This romantic infusion of things past, shows the destruction of vases, masks, paintings—perhaps even treasures acquired during Napoleon's reign with a sight towards an arduous path leading to a celestial Jerusalem.

The message of the opening image together with the title page is clear; the author intends to centralize a Sacrament of the Church, leaving the text to explain the profundity of this Sacrament for the faithful. The complexity of the message is matched by the complexity of the 16 images found in the text. For example:

Figure 5.12 Saint Eve in Bertholet, R. P. Histoire de l'Institution de la Fête Dieu avec les Vies des Bienheureuses Julienne et Ève qui en furent les premières promulgatrices, suivie de l'abrégé historique de l'institution des illustres confréries de l'Adoration perpétuelle de l'auguste Sacrement des autels, et surtout de celle érigée dans l'église de Saint Martin à Liège en 1765. Troisième Edition. Liège: Félix-Oudart, 1846. (inserted between pages 30-31).





Figure 5.13 Sainte Julienne in Bertholet, R. P. Histoire de l'Institution de la Fête Dieu avec les Vies des Bienheureuses Julienne et Ève qui en furent les premières promulgatrices, suivie de l'abrégé historique de l'institution des illustres confréries de l'Adoration perpétuelle de l'auguste Sacrement des autels, et surtout de celle érigée dans l'église de Saint Martin à Liège en 1765. Troisième Edition. Liège: Félix-Oudart, 1846. (inserted between pages 44-45).



Figure 5.14 Clergy venerating the Holy Eucharist in Bertholet, R. P. Histoire de L'Institution de la Fête Dieu avec les Vies des furent les Vies des Bienheureuses Julienne et Ève qui en furent les premières promulgatrices, suivie de l'abrégé historique de l'institution des illustres confréries de l'Adoration perpétuelle de l'auguste Sacrement des autels, et surtout de celle érigée dans l'église de Saint Martin à Liège en 1765. Troisième Edition. Liège: Félix-Oudart, 1846. (Inserted between pages 72-73).

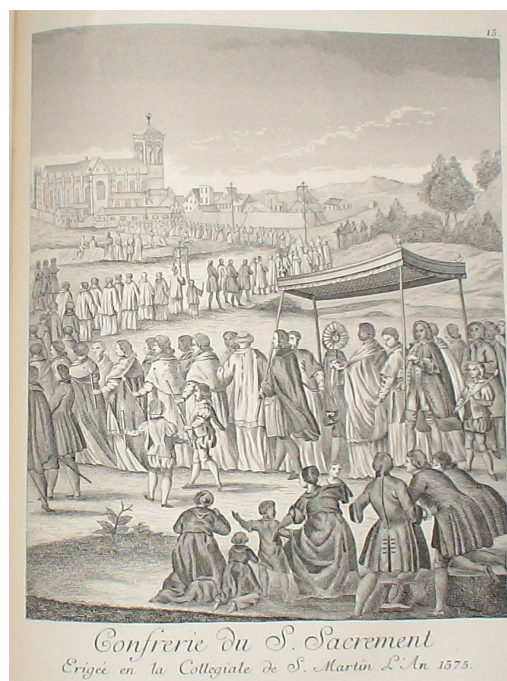


Figure 5.15 Procession of the Holy Eucharist in Bertholet, R. P. Histoire de l'Institution de la Fête Dieu avec les Vies des Bienheureuses Julienne et Ève qui en furent les premières promulgatrices, suivie de l'abrégé historique de l'institution des illustres confréries de l'Adoration perpétuelle de l'auguste Sacrement des autels, et surtout de celle érigée dans l'église de Saint Martin à Liège en 1765. Troisième Edition. Liège: Félix-Oudart, 1846. (Inserted between pages 88-89).

Set within a rococo frame; with an added play of shadows and 18th century garb, the engraved copper printed scenes are more complex than the previous images analysed (Saint Wivina, Sainte Lutgarde, and Saint Julienne), inserting secondary scenes in a scrupulously detailed setting. Similar to the Arsène de Noûe's 1846 biography of Saint Julienne, the images develop a progression in meaning that must be aided by the text in order to gain full understanding.

This Belgian text with its images, like many others, emphasized the presence and authority of clergy in an effort to restore the Church's authority and influence in all daily decision making processes. This could only be guaranteed if the government supported, aided and funded the Church's endeavor. For the government to support the Church's authoritarian presence in society, the people of Belgium had to be convinced of its long-standing successful historic past and the fundamental necessity of clergymen in the transmission of Catholic teachings. The sanctification of the Church was embellished in Belgian religious biographies. However the means by which this sanctification was portrayed is unique to 19th century Catholic writing. For example, Félix Bertholet in his biography of Saint Julienne, expounded the sanctification of the clergy with the aid of the 'representation' of one religious woman, Julienne. The four images above, illustrate how the authority of clergy is enhanced by the presence of the nun detailed in the following analysis. In *Figures 5.12* and *Figure 5.13*, both Saint Eve and Saint Julienne are represented with authority. Both are centered but flanked by clergy. *Figure 5.12* shows Eve atop of a flight of stairs as if she were up on a throne and surrounded by her mortal superiors. She is further privileged by the diagonal placement of her arms and extended hands which recalled iconic representations of the Virgin Mary. For example in the image below:



Figure 5.16 The Virgin Mary in Les Plus Belles Prières de Saint Alphonse de Liguori réunies dans un ordre méthodique et formant un manuel complet par le Père Saint-Omer, Rédemptoriste. 120^{eme} Édition. Tournai: Casterman, 1899.

In *Figure 5.13*, Saint Julienne although kneeling, the authority placed upon her is visually stimulated by the oval window above Julienne’s head forming a halo. Yet the halo is absent, when compared to Arsène de Nou’s biography because this biography is initially sanctifying the authority of clergy. Referring back to the introduction of this chapter, to be declared a saint required a lengthy process of Church examination before approval. By withholding the halo, this image, in fact, reinforces the authority of the proclamations of the Church necessitating an entire hierarchal body of approval. In the image, Julienne is still living while the clergy documents her experience which has not yet been approved by the Church. This final word of Church approval is especially highlighted in the biographies of the 2nd half of the century as authors are careful to explain their use of the word “sainte” before the nun in question has been declared a saint.

Saint Julienne’s centered appearance is also flanked by the presence of clergy who is composing for her / about her/ through her. The biographies then depict the Church in action as a

result of the contributions of these two women. It is important to remember that although these were medieval occurrences, 19th century authors found it important to highlight them for several reasons. *Figures 5.14* and *5.15* display the devotions carried out by the Liégeois people—textually explaining and visually parading a procession of the Holy Sacrament and official Eucharistic Adoration by clergy. These images persuade by codifying Belgian's long standing rituals necessitating of course the direction of clergymen. These ritualistic endeavors will function throughout the course of the century to establish a Catholic identity with a Belgian identity, supporting the reason why editors published bounteously the life of Saint Julienne-- for she did not symbolize just any saint, but a Belgian one.

4. Saint Ève: Restored clerical authority

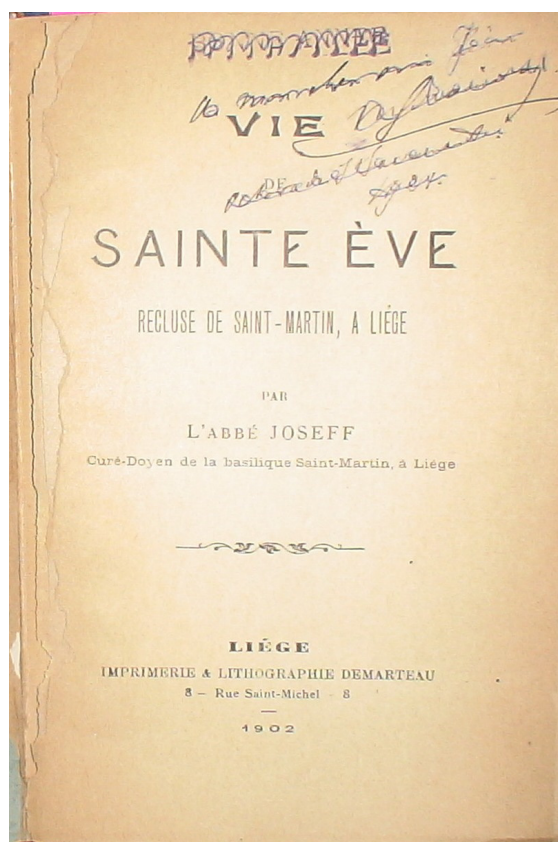


Figure 5.17 L'Abbé Joseff. Vie de Sainte Ève, recluse de Saint Martin à Liège. Liège: DeMarteau, 1902.

By the beginning of the 20th century, religious textual imagery revealed changes that had taken place in Catholic religious biographical writing. The text, increasingly laicized by its book covering, typeface and format, no longer has a frontispiece but rather the content of the book privileges over the five colored images within the text. Saint Eve (12th-13th century) sheltered Saint Julienne when she was under attack by her Superior. She later took over as prioress of the Abbey of Mont Cornillon when Julienne died. More importantly, she continued Saint Julienne's steps in obtaining the Corpus Christi feast day for the universal Catholic Church and was personally sent the approbation by Pope Urban IV. She is honored in being instrumental in the process of garnering this special recognition.



Figure 5.18 The veneration of the Holy Eucharist by nuns and clergy in l'Abbé Joseff. Vie de Sainte Ève, recluse de Saint Martin à Liège. Liège: DeMarteau, 1902. (inserted between pages 36-37).

This 1902 image in the Vie de Sainte Ève, no longer participates in a project of sanctification of a religious woman. Rather, this image functions simply in sanctifying a devotion resulting in the text fully functioning as a devotional text. This reasoning is concluded by the fact that the religious women in the image are no longer physically central but flanked by two ecclesiastics, of which one is a bishop, who is taller than the others, and highlighted by his Episcopal chair which reinforces his authority. The five people are dominated by the glorified monstrance, privileging the devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. In fact, Chanoine Jean de Lausanne looks directly towards the viewer, as if to invite him to the scene of the adoration and meditation of the Blessed Sacrament. The lack of veneration of the exceptional women in the image is explained by the fact that religious orders were well established and proliferous in Belgium by 1902. However, Saint Julienne's presence in the image is exists because in the year of this publication, her cult was officially confirmed. In this devotion to one of the Sacraments of the Church, the religious women with the clergy are represented unified together. More importantly, unlike the previous images of clergy in Félix Bertholet's 1846 biography, the bishop's head is above Saint Julienne signifying the reinstatement of authority within the Church over even such decorated women as Julienne, Eve and Isabelle. Although Saint Julienne stands on equal level of the clergy and facing him, her eyes are downcast further enhancing her submission. Saint Eve, considered to have less saintly status, kneels with a reverent gaze towards the Eucharist. With even less status, "Blessed" Isabelle kneels with a bowed head.

B. 19TH CENTURY PROJECTS OF SANCTIFICATION

1. Vénérable Soeur Marguerite du Saint Sacrement: A saintly example of piety.

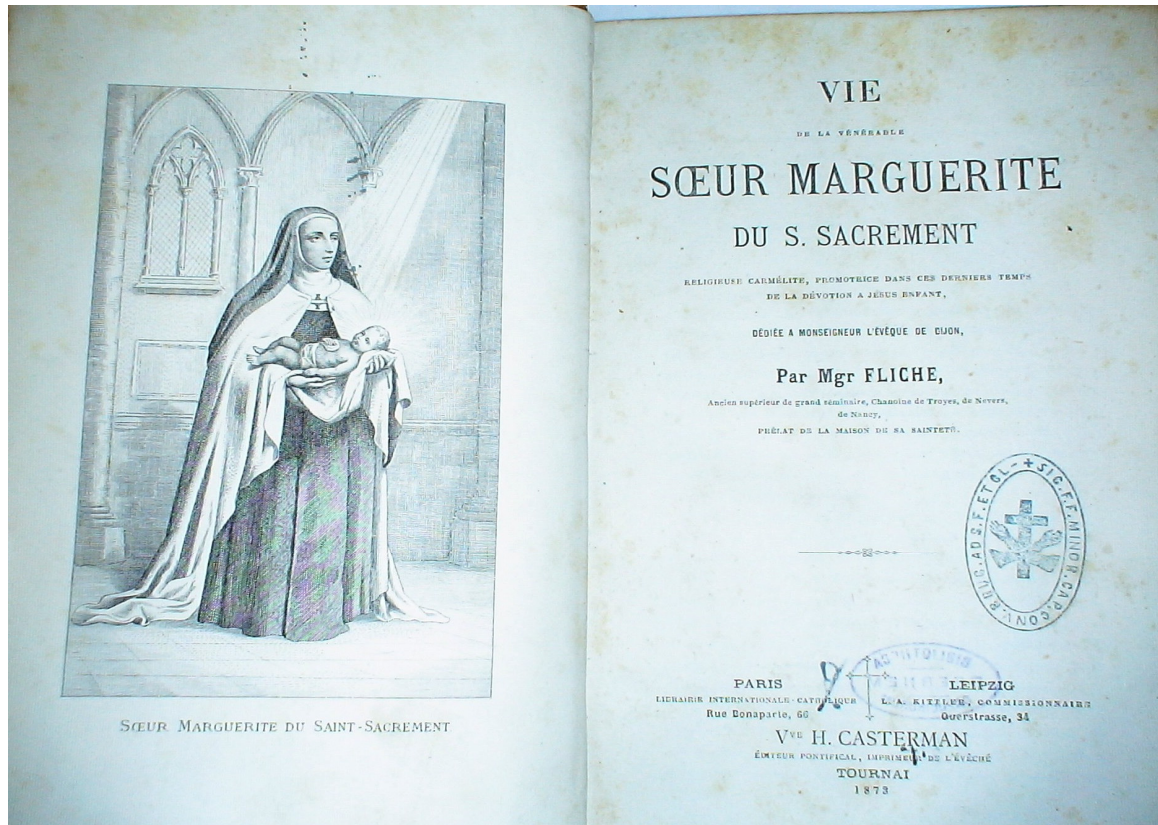


Figure 5.19 Mgr. Fliche. Vie de la Vénérable Soeur Marguerite du Saint Sacrement, religieuse Carmélite, promotrice dans ces derniers temps de la dévotion à Jésus Enfant. Tournai: Casterman, 1873.

Belgian publishing house, Casterman, found value in publishing the biography of a 17th century French Carmelite nun, Soeur Marguerite du Saint Sacrement (1619-1648), not so much to arouse nationalistic sentiments but rather to offer a ‘saintly’ example to the public. Particularly after 1850, the religious biographies became projects of sanctification, whereby the author desired to procure an official ‘Saint’ status for the “Vie” in question. This had great ramifications and benefits. First, it privileged the Order the nun represented, increasing its recognition which inevitably garnered prestige; an attractive position to be in when recruiting vocations. Second, the clerical author is recognized as being instrumental in the beatification process, which promises a sense of immortalization as well as recognition of his Order. Third, and more expansively, the sanctification process provides an example of a piety, who still remains ‘unexceptional’ in the sense that the nun is not officially considered a ‘Saint’ yet is ‘saintly’ in action; a fundamental principle of the 19th century recatholicization goal of converting hearts towards an attainable ‘saintly’ way of life.

For those nuns not yet officially recognized as saints by the church, writing strategies come into play to continue the hagiographic rhetoric all the while remaining within the church statutes of limitations. Soeur Marguerite du Sacrement was one step closer to canonization, since she was declared “Vénérable,” a status that preceeded the beatification process and declared her “heroic in virtue.”⁵⁹⁵ It is evident that all the Belgian biographies of nuns written in the 19th century are sanctification projects, first vying for the ‘Venerable’ status, then eventually a status of ‘Saint.’

Over the course of the century as the hagiographical project evolves into a biographical one, the noun *sainte*, as in the previous hagiographic examples of Saint Wivina and Saint Lutgarde, is replaced by the adjective “*sainte*” in the following biographical excerpts of those nuns whose authors desired sainthood for them: “[...] d’activité sainte;”⁵⁹⁶ “Une vie si pure, si humble et si sainte

⁵⁹⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venerable>

⁵⁹⁶ Abbé V Postel. Vie de la Mère Marie Madeleine (Julie Postel), fondatrice et première supérieure des Soeurs de la Miséricorde des Ecoles Chrétiennes. (Bruges: Desclée, de Brouwer et C^{ie}, 1881) i.

[...].”⁵⁹⁷ If the word was used as a noun, it only did so in reflecting the life and not the person: “[...] la vie d’une femme [...] dont la sainteté consistait à faire avec une perfection extraordinaire les actions ordinaires [...]”.⁵⁹⁸ This innocuous change is significant in Belgium’s recatholicization rhetoric. Used as an adjective, the word “sainte” focuses on actions rather than the person. That is to say, that a saint has certain exceptional qualities that rises above mere mortals, since she had already been chosen by God. A “holy” person or holy actions, however, direct one’s life towards the will of God, permitting a type of sainthood to be attainable by everyone. The 19th century Catholic crusade was to transform society to one of good Catholic citizens with the persuasion that all could be exceptional individuals and make an impact in their community.

The 19th century biographical projects of sanctification will also differ from the hagiographical biographies, to some degree, with its images. For example, the former designated holiness by attributive characteristics rather than a signifying halo and placed more word emphasis on saintly virtues. However, what continues seamlessly from 17th and 18th century biographies is that *founders* of abbeys are always promoted in a saintly manner. It is not until the end of the 19th century and mostly 20th century, that religious biographies included those that did not establish a new Order or Congregation.

The saintly example of Soeur Marguerite du Saint Sacrement was highlighted in the 19th century because in 1865, the canonical inquiry that had been interrupted for over two hundred years was reopened.⁵⁹⁹ The process of beatification was being considered for Soeur Marguerite in 1873,⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁷ Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame, à Namur. Vie de la Soeur Marie Gonzaga dans le monde Victorine-Françoise-Antoinette-Marie Baronne de Loë décédée à Cincinnati, le 6 mars 1884. (Deuxième Edition. Namur: Paul Godenne, 1886) 15.

⁵⁹⁸ Notice sur la Vie de la Réverende Mère Marie-Josephe-Céline de Saint François dans le monde Clotilde Ortega, Abbessse et Fondatrice des Clarisses-Colettines d’Enghien 1830-1890. (Tournai: Desclée, de Brouwer et C^{ie}, 1893) introduction.

⁵⁹⁹ Manuscripts lost since 1655 were recovered in 1850. The original biography of Soeur Marguerite dates back to 1655 by Amelotte de l’Oratoire, whom emphasized her innocence, purity, simplicity, and extraordinary renunciation. Raymond Darricau: <http://carmelnet.org/biographies/Margaret.pdf>

at the time of publication. The exemplification of her devotions would incite others to follow in her footsteps:

“Lisez, comme nous, sans parti pris, les Ecritures sacrées, étudiez de même les traditions impérissables de la piété catholique, fouillez les imposantes biographies des Saints de tous les temps, [...] celle de la Bienheureuse Marguerite-Marie de la Visitation, dépositaire des secrets du *Sacré Cœur*, qui a de si grands points de rapprochement avec notre soeur Marguerite.”⁶⁰¹

Promoting Soeur Marguerite alongside the canon of hagiographies enhanced her persuasiveness as a role model. Inclusive of this goal was to elevate the ‘imperishable traditions’ of Catholicism by promoting specifically the devotions of the Sacred Heart, for which Soeur Marguerite had a specific worship. Belgium was the first country to consecrate itself to the devotion of the Sacred Heart on December 8, 1868. This consecration ensued fraternities and associations to the Sacred Heart, dedications of the family to the Sacred Heart, and rituals of enthronization and coronation of the statue of the Sacred Heart.⁶⁰²

Since the biography was written by a French author and not a Belgian one, the veneration of this religious woman is overshadowed by what she represents for the Church. The text together with a multilayered frontispiece, advances to a new level of the inseparable union between the visual and textual discourse in religious biographies. This union will promote devotion on the part of the reader producing a devotional text; a pious object. The rhetorical strategy evolves in a multi layered manner. First the religious biography promotes the Carmelite Order and the support for the Church. Second, it promotes a prototype for religious women in Soeur Marguerite’s emulation of the Virgin Mary in image and in some aspects, in symbolism as well. Third, as her name suggests, the biography of Soeur Marguerite du Saint Sacrement, promotes devotion to the Holy Eucharist.

⁶⁰⁰ These events subsequently led to the recognition of Margaret's remains in December of 1880, in the monastery of the Carmelite nuns at Beaune. In December 1905 a decree was announced crediting the nun of her extraordinary virtues. After which the cause for ‘Venerable’ status had not progressed.

⁶⁰¹ Mgr. Fliche. Vie de la Vénérable Soeur Marguerite du Saint Sacrement, religieuse Carmélite, promotrice dans ces derniers temps de la dévotion à Jésus Enfant. Tournai: Casterman, 1873. xi.

⁶⁰² Tine Van Osselaer. “‘From that moment on, I was a man.’ Images of the Catholic male in the Sacred Heart Devotion.” Conference paper: University of Ghent Belgium, January 4-6 2008.

- Promotion of the Carmelite Order and support for the Church

Carmelite nuns lived a cloistered life which revolved around quiet contemplation, pious devotions, and mental prayer. If time permitted, their leisure hours were supplemented by private devotions such as the reading of this text all in the desire to be united to the presence of God and His truths. The daily routine appears austere but household work allowed one to practice many virtues:

“La vie des Carmélites a pour but de consommer, comme celle de ces âmes magnanimes, dans une complète union avec la vie de Jésus. Elles doivent la continuer, en priant et en s’immolant pour la glorification et la défense des droits de Dieu dans l’Eglise”(my emphasis).⁶⁰³

Their contemplative work, unseen to the outside world, served to support and to enhance the strength of the Church. Hence, the biography reveals with a stroke of idealism, what is hidden behind the cloistered walls: “Et le Carmel [...] n’est-il pas dans l’Eglise, à nos yeux, comme le jardin fermé de l’Ecriture (Cant. 4), tout odorant des fleurs les plus saintes [...]”.⁶⁰⁴ Accordingly with her portrait, the words paint a picture of the ideal Carmelite nun:

“Douée d’un naturel charmant, d’une candide innocence, d’une bonté sans égale, d’une docilité toujours prompte et joyeuse [...] elle montrait de rares dispositions pour la piété, et, quand on la conduisit à l’église, elle était animée d’un si vif sentiment de la divine présence, qu’elle ne pouvait plus s’arracher à la contemplation du tabernacle. [...] Les mains jointes, le corps incline, le coeur palpitant [...]”.⁶⁰⁵

These physical and character descriptions are important because they describe without individualizing. In line with their austere life, the Carmel is described as a heroic place, where one can gain salvation through renouncement and sacrifice.

⁶⁰³ Fliche 31.

⁶⁰⁴ Fliche 29.

⁶⁰⁵ Fliche 2.

- The nun promotes religious life through the emulation of the Virgin Mary

This image is significant in that it assembles popular symbolic representations of Christ's life (The Annunciation, the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, the Adoration of the Christ Child and that of Christ's sacrifice and deposition—discussed further. See *Figures 5.20 – 5.23* below), all the while emulating certain aspects of the life and image of the Virgin Mary in order to propagate a certain ideal for religious women: The following paintings below depict some examples from well known Flemish painters with the exception of Giovanni (due to the lack of a Belgian example) that influenced future artistic renditions of holy images in Belgium. Their symbolism, influence and representations were used to analyze the image of Soeur Marguerite du Saint Sacrement.



Figure 5.20 Annunciation
RUBENS, Pieter Pauwel; 1609-10 leading painter of Antwerp



Figure 5.21 Adoration of the Magi
DAVID, Gerard; c. 1500 leading painter of Brugges



Figure 5.22 Presentation at the Temple
WEYDEN, Rogier van der; c. 1455 painter of Brussels, Tournai.



Figure 5.23 Pietà
BELLINI, Giovanni; 1505

This virgin nun in relation to her paradoxal maternity with the babe in arms recalls similar iconic representations of the Virgin Mary. This is reinforced by her textual reference in the preface of the book “[...] de cette illustre Vierge”⁶⁰⁶ (Vierge with a capital “V”). The Virgin is always symbolized with a cloak-like garment and always with a veil on her head, much like Soeur Marguerite du Saint Sacrement. According to a study of Mary in the work *Icons and Portraits*, “iconic images of Mary do not use a consistent, recognizable facial type. Mary is identified by her attributes (lily, book, deep blue mantle) and her special relationship to Christ.”⁶⁰⁷ This is also true for many drawn representations of nuns. Attributes were also reinforced in biographical writing, particularly for contemplative nuns when unique individual characteristics were contrary to the portrayal of humility. In emulating the Virgin Mary in her humility and purity, the nun exemplified obedience to the Church.

The light bestowed upon Soeur Marguerite recalls the Annunciation of the Virgin (*Figure 5.20*) which symbolizes her acceptance of God’s Word to bear His Son. The revelation parallels the visions religious women have of their destiny to be bearers of God’s Word. Mary’s acceptance conveyed her free will, as did Soeur Marguerite when she chose to enter religious life and bear God’s Word by her sacrificial life. Free will on part of the nun was a contested issue among anti-religious order advocates who argued that religious life was imposed rather than chosen. Even though Mary’s acceptance was obedient to God’s request, her free will in this response allows her to cooperate with God in the redemptive act.⁶⁰⁸ Soeur Marguerite cooperates by offering her life to meditation and sacrifice. The image displays this by her meditative and humble look which looks out into the distance, her eyes sublime, expressionless, all reinforced by Father Fliche’s preface: “[...] j’ai cru que je ne pouvais rien faire de plus profitable aux âmes, que de les exciter, sur les pas et les exemples de Marguerite, à la pratique de ces deux choses qu’on ne connaît plus dans le monde, [...] la

⁶⁰⁶ Fliche xi.

⁶⁰⁷ *Icons or Portraits? Images of Jesus and Mary from the collection of Michael Hall: the Gallery at the American Bible Society*. (New York: American bible Society, 2002) 223.

⁶⁰⁸ Wright 76 note 9.

RÉFLEXION et le SACRIFICE” (author’s emphasis). Sacrifice brings this analysis to its third point and deeper theological reflection.

- Promotion of the body of Christ in the Holy Eucharist.

Casting a separate gaze from the child, Soeur Marguerite differs in her meditation of the Christ Child from the Virgin Mary, who bestows motherly downcast eyes at her Child in most iconic representations. See examples below:



Figure 5.24 19th century Marian statue with Holy Child displayed in the village church of Melen, Belgium (20 km from Liège)



Figure 5.25 19th century Marian image with Holy Child found in Abbé Rayée’s Vie de Sainte Marie de Nivelles dites d’Oignies. Nivelles: Ch. Guignarde, s.d. (page 34).

Far from coddling the child, Soeur Marguerite (*Figure 5.19*) offers the viewer the body of Christ as she points her left index finger forward in a presenting position. The babe in the outstretched arms with the temple background recalls paintings portraying the Presentation of the Christ child in the Temple (*Figure 5.22*). This image in its presentation of Jesus has a message about the presence of Jesus. The cloth that is beneath reminds the reader of the altar where He is also present. The cloth melds with the cloak of the nun and drapes to the floor as it would from a table. Thereupon, reinforced by the author's rhetoric, she becomes part of this altar:

“[...] le jugement solennel du Siège apostolique aura comblé nos vœux. *Marguerite du Saint Sacrement* sera placée sur nos autels, et pourra publiquement recevoir nos vénérationes et nos hommages. Fallait-il attendre cette éclatante déclaration du Pontiffe suprême pour exposer, avec détails, comme nous allons faire dans ce volume, l'existence pleine de merveilles de notre grande Soeur? Nous ne le pensons pas.”⁶⁰⁹

Her sacrificial life is symbolized by her becoming part of the altar. The enthronement of her sacrificial religious life highlights her order in a very public way as her cult is made official:

“[...] elle s'offrait en sacrifice au Rédempteur [...] par l'effet des lumières qui lui était mystiquement envoyées sur les sanglants opprobres et les douleurs incommensurables de la croix. Elle voulait déjà souffrir et s'immoler avec Jésus; et le Calvaire dont elle faisait choix pour consommer ce sacrifice, était précisément l'ordre vénérable des Carmélites qu'elle était appelée, en réalité, à embrasser un jour, et qui devait devenir le théâtre de ses héroïques dévouements.”⁶¹⁰

Furthermore, in an effort to sacrifice herself, she illuminates the Word offered up at the altar. The Carmelite Order placed emphasis on the contemplation of Jesus's suffering ---“[...] le sang de Jésus-Christ nous a réhabilités [...]”⁶¹¹ through the meditation of the contemplation of the Infant Jesus as seen in the image of the biography. His sacrifice and suffering is foreseen by the white cloth under his body. This imagery resonates the sacrificial body of the Piéta (*Figure 5.23*).

The motif of the infancy of the Incarnate Word was to become one of the most frequent sermon subjects of the Carmelites spiritual director, famous 17th century theologian Cardinal Pierre

⁶⁰⁹ Fliche ix-x.

⁶¹⁰ Fliche 2.

⁶¹¹ Fliche xii.

de Bérulle. Specifically, he directed Marie de l'Incarnation (founder of the French Carmel)—of whom Marguerite de Saint Sacrement was her second daughter and prioress of two convents in France. As a result of his influence, the Carmelite nuns honored devotions to the Infant Child Jesus and meditated on the aspects of sweetness, of love, of “the dependence of Jesus, of the absence of communication with others, of the silence, of the humiliation of His wisdom, of the hiding of His power, of the graces of humility, of purity, and of docility.”⁶¹² This meditation of the state of Infancy of Jesus incited a spirituality of dependence upon Jesus that affected a way of living Christianity emphasizing one’s interior state to become “like a child.” Jan de Maeyer’s recent work on “Child-isation”⁶¹³ has enlightened the reasons why this type of spirituality may have been emboldened in 19th century Belgium. He outlines how societal factors of a child-oriented society flourished with the development of pediatric hospitals, emergences of campaigns against child abuse such as bans on child labor, increased framework of orphanages, the introduction of compulsory education in the second half of the 19th century, children’s literature and the appearance of genuine toys. Religious ideology developed alongside emphasizing that children ought to be cherished with the perception that the child is an emotional treasure, innocent gifts and messengers from God. Initiated by Marguerite du Saint Sacrement, and others, and retold in her biographies of the 19th century, devotions to the Child Jesus permitted a favorable environment for its replication in the late 19th century with Carmelite nun Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus of Lisieux. Significant in this devotion to spiritual infancy and spiritual abandonment to Jesus was that it was promulgated as accessible to all, --a mantra that defines Belgian sanctification of its people in its inclusiveness. This accessibility is aided by the personification of a gentle God: “Dieu est si patient envers les pécheurs

⁶¹² Raymond Darricau, <http://carmelnet.org/biographies/Margaret.pdf>

⁶¹³ See Jan De Maeyer “ ‘Child-isation:’ Attracting the Innocent and the Modernisation of Religion in the Western World, c. 1750-1920.” ‘Dieu changea de sexe?’ Christian Feminisation and Masculinisation in Europe: Comparative Perspectives. International Workshop Ghent, January 4-6 2008. Outlines the emergence of devotion to the Infant Jesus in the 19th century.

[...].”⁶¹⁴ The Carmélite goal was: “Faire connaître la dévotion à l’Enfant-Jésus [...]”⁶¹⁵ much in the same way the Virgin Mary, often referred to as the Tabernacle of Christ, Throne of God, and the Bridal Chamber of God,⁶¹⁶ is depicted in religious art holding her infant Son for the world to come to know (specifically *Figure 5.21*). It comes to no surprise to uncover, with Mary being such a central figure for religious women, that the author writes his preface on the 8th of December of 1871 on the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God; a feast that was declared a dogma in the 19th century by Pope Pius IX in 1854.

⁶¹⁴ Fliche xii.

⁶¹⁵ Fliche xiii.

⁶¹⁶ Picturing Mary.

2. Florence de Werquinoeul: Diffusing a portrait to reinforce prayer

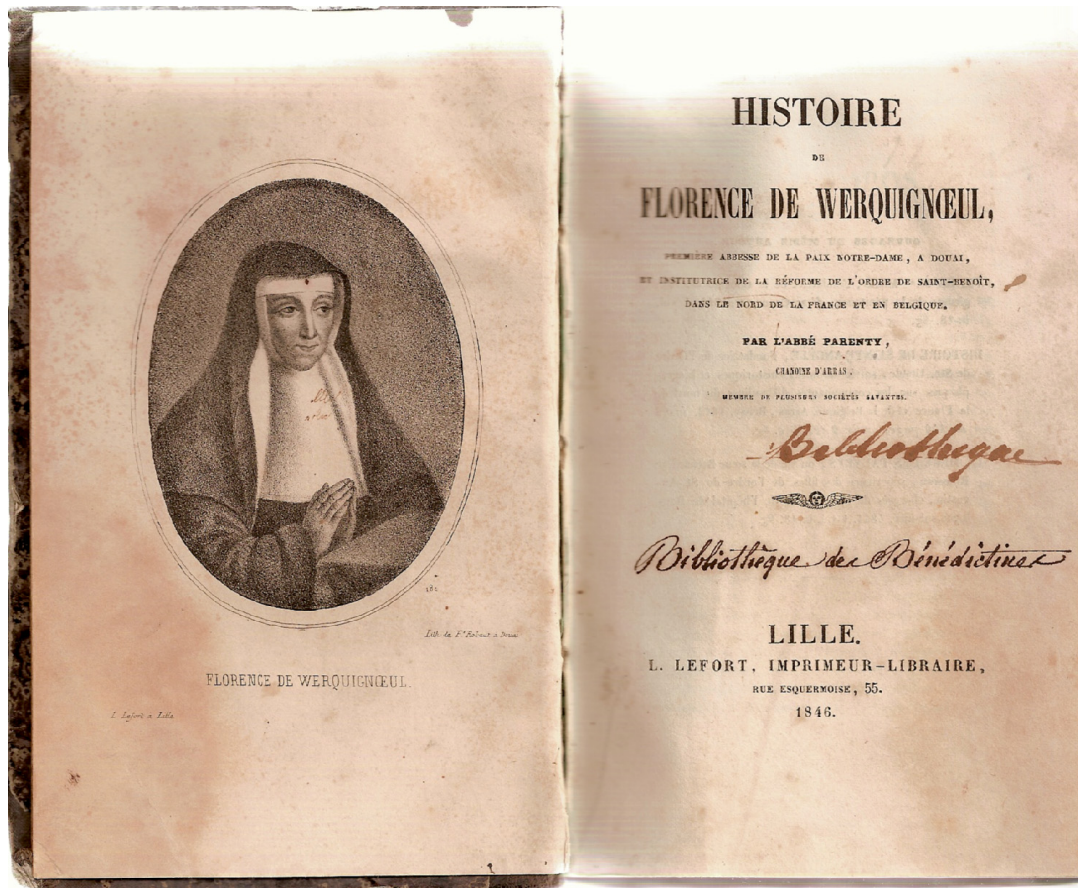


Figure 5.26 Abbé Parenty, Chanoine d'Arras. Histoire de Florence de Werquinoeul première abbesse de la Paix de Notre Dame, à Douai, et Institutrice de la Réforme de l'Ordre de Saint-Benoît dans le Nord de la France et en Belgique. Lille: L.Lefort, 1846.

The biography of Florence de Werquinoeul, preserved in the archives of the Liège Benedictine convent, recounts the life of the reformer of the Benedictine order in the Pays-Bas⁶¹⁷ during the 17th century. The Benedictine abbey of Liège was founded in 1627. This 17th century life is published in the 19th century because she is a model of “Restoration” in all of its implications; in

⁶¹⁷ The Benedictine abbey of Douai was founded in 1604, which gave rise to the foundation in Namur in 1613 (does not survive the Revolution); Namur led to the foundation of Liège in 1627; Liège led to Mons in 1640 (does not survive the Revolution), and Bruges in 1623.

the restoration of the 16th AND 19th century Benedictine Order, the restoration of the clergy, the restoration of religious history and the restoration of contemplative life in general.

The biography of Florence de Werquinoeul is an example of the diffusion of the “*biographie à portrait*” which is representative of the majority of the biographical models to follow in the 2nd half of the 19th century. These types of biographies consist of a portrait of the nun in frontispiece in which the image presents no nuances in the background, symbolizing further dependence on the text for meaning. Additionally, differing from the previous examples of Saint Wivina, Saint Lutgarde, Saint Julienne, and Soeur Marguerite du Saint Sacrement, the portraits, most often, founders of congregations, do not play on the affective, but rather obliges a distance with her far off gaze, restrained in a confined space. The affective aspect in late 19th century religious biographies resurfaces only after one is proclaimed “Venerable” or a “Saint” as in the case of Julie Billiart, discussed later. In the case of Florence de Werquinoeul, the restraint of the affective is evident as she is not yet a saint. However, this fact does not diminish the special devotion, predisposed to her and highlighted by the emphasized oval, like a medal one wears to honor special devotions or garner special protection. Therefore, this small black book, a cheap edition represented by one illustration is a devotional text; arising from a need of pious books to reinforce one’s prayer. Lastly, the portrait, taken from an anterior image defines the historical project and insists on the intellectual side of the Benedictine Order, known for their contributions in historical documentations.

Abbé Parenty highlights the sources of the Order’s ‘discipline’ tracing as far back as Saint Benedict in the hopes that his desire of restoration will breathe a new fight for the continuation of contemplative religious life. However his edification of a 17th century reformer was not to impose a 17th century form of religious discipline of the Reformation. Rather, his focus on the 17th century reformer was meant to *reintroduce* the Benedictines into society. Restoration in this case does not imply the 17th century meaning of bringing back what has been forgotten when religious life was known to be lackadaisical and rules gone array. This is not the case for the 19th century contemplatives who were forced by government forces to withdraw from religious life. Thus the

goal was not to restore what was forgotten, but to reintroduce their presence in the ever changing dechristianized society which for the first time imposed external rules upon their existence. Since returning to a purely contemplative life seemed dismal, the Benedictines chose to open a school in order to remain in 19th century society. Though the Benedictines had already established a boarding school by 1846, at the time of publication, they were certainly the minority against the imposing increasing numbers of religious apostolic women. Their future was at risk since many more women chose apostolic work and the competition for financial support became all the more significant. Consequently, the biography of Florence de Werquinoeul is published to reinvigorate the Benedictines by presenting a lineage of struggle, defiance and faith: “Ces asiles *de la Paix* firent revivre, dans nos temps modernes, la piété qui animait les fidèles des premiers ages du christianisme”⁶¹⁸ (author’s emphasis). Her work has meaning for the Benedictines of Liège in 1846 because it deeply anchors them into their past of turmoil being overcome by faith—called to mind and reinforced by the hands in prayer in the image above. That even if there are momentary glitches, such as changing initial contemplative work to apostolic work, Florence offers hope, that contemplative life could continue, just as she reformed a disorderly Order. The text also commends the Benedictines in their contributions to humanity.

In the plan for restoration, Florence is the model to follow for other Benedictine religious women: “Nous présentons Florence de Werquinoeul comme un modèle d’humilité et de simplicité évangéliques [...] une histoire [...] d’une femme qui a passé presque toute sa vie dans les cloîtres et ne s’y occupée que de la contemplation.” In fact, this simplicity is translated in the simple nature of her image. Her biography was written in order to impassion future religious women to a contemplative religious life. In fact, the author, having written other biographies⁶¹⁹ on other

⁶¹⁸ Abbé Parenty, Chanoine d’Arras. Histoire de Florence de Werquinoeul première abbesse de la Paix de Notre Dame, à Douai, et Institutrice de la Réforme de l’Ordre de Saint-Benoît dans le Nord de la France et en Belgique. (Lille: L.Lefort, 1846) vj.

⁶¹⁹ L’Abbé Parenty. Vie de Mme Maes, Fondatrice de la réforme des religieuses de la pénitence, dites Capucines. 1841. 1 vol. in-18. fig. AND Histoire de Sainte Angèle, Fondatrice de L’Ordre de Ste.-Ursule,

contemplative religious women such as Saint Angèle—founder of Ursulines (1474-1540), Mme Maes—founder of the reform of Capucines (16th century?) supports, even more, Parenty's desire to advance this type of religious life. It seems his goal was to provide a testimony of the struggles, reinforced by the pursed lips and the determined gaze in the image above, that resulted from the defense of the Catholic faith. Catholicism, true to its originator, could not be without its crosses to carry:

“[...] il y a toujours profit, même au point de vue purement historique, à lire une vie qui s'est écoulée à une époque où la contrée que nous habitons, agitée par divers parties religieux et politiques, luttait avec courage contre les doctrines nouvelles de la réforme, pour y maintenir le catholicisme.”

By providing a history book “Histoire de Florence Werquinoeul...” he restores religious history. His deliberate enterprise is accomplished by his use of rare original sources of biographies dating from 1717 and 1753 biography including 16th century manuscripts conserved at the library of Arras. In the endeavor of conserving history, he dignifies the useful work of religious *men* in agriculture, in arts, archeology and in industry and teaching of certain arts:

“Des hommes distingués par leurs vertus, leur savoir, ou le rang qu'ils ont occupé, honorèrent de leur protection les diverses fondations de l'humble abbesse de la Paix. Ces bienfaiteurs de la religion, aujourd'hui peu connus, nous ont paru mériter des notices biographiques. Puisse cet hommage rendu à leur mémoire être un sujet d'émulation pour la generation présente!”⁶²⁰

By edifying clergy in the reform and success of the Benedictines, he is glorifying their contribution implying the restoration of these men: “C'est honorer la mémoire de ces grands homes [...]”⁶²¹ Unlike contemplative religious women, a *restoration* of clergy was championed rather than their *reintroduction* to society, because their authority was never revoked under Catholic terms. Women had no authority to begin with, or so it was implied, even if they were superiors of a convent. All

suivie de notices historiques et biographiques sur les communautés d'Ursulines du nord de la France et de la Belgique. Arras, Brissy. 1842. in-12 de 440 pages, prix 2fr. 25 c. fig.

⁶²⁰ Parenty, Histoire de Florence de Werquinoeul viij.

⁶²¹ Parenty, Histoire de Florence de Werquinoeul vij.

authority they derived came from clergy. Even during their suppression, clergy still had commanded a certain degree of authority amongst most of the population. As such, 1800 years of Catholic history/authority could not have been erased by one Revolution. As a clergy member himself, his book no doubt serves to enhance his position amongst those that represented the ‘elite’—the intellectuals—since he presents his work as a historical endeavor. So while this nun was an example of humility and contemplation, this biography serves to *honor* the religious men. The project of sanctification, here, seems to highlight the handiworks of clergy: “[...] des notices destinées principalement à rappeler les nombreux établissements religieux, dont ces villes furent autrefois dotées par la piété de nos pères.”⁶²²

In order to compete with the existing apostolic congregations who did not require a dowry, the author beguiles the reader with the statement of well-rounded recruitment: “[...] l’on vit, en peu d’années, se multiplier de jeunes vierges prises dans tous les rangs de la société.”⁶²³ What the author fails to mention is that dowries were required—a requirement that could only allow the entrance of women financially supported. Class distinctions continued even after the Revolution within the convent life between those nuns who were *Dames* and those who were *Soeurs Converses*. It is certainly plausible that peasant women may have been able to enter under the patronage of wealthy charitable contributors. However, this was the exception and not the rule. Hence his rhetoric is persuasive without including explanations. The conclusion to this exaggeration draws upon the competition Benedictine religious women faced to the ever growing apostolic congregations which attracted many by their inclusiveness.

The tone set forth in the biography of Florence de Werquinoeul may have influenced the Benedictine manuscripts, (see example below) outlining the revolutionary period, appearing to have been written after 1846 (due to the paper type and absence of local dialect which was often used in earlier records of historical documents).

⁶²² Parenty, *Histoire de Florence de Werquinoeul* viij.

⁶²³ Parenty, *Histoire de Florence de Werquinoeul* vj.

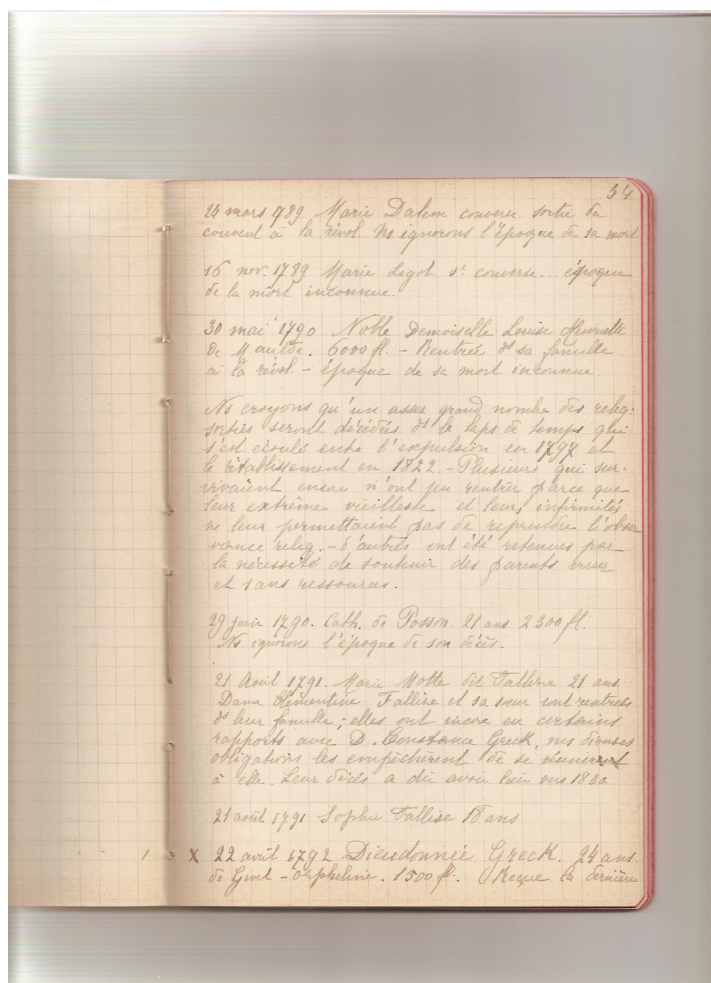


Figure 5.27 Manuscript recounting historical events of the Benedictine convent of Liège written by a Benedictine nun of the same convent, presumably a historian for Congregation. Archives of the Benedictines of Liège convent.

Constance Greck (1768-1836), considered the second founder,⁶²⁴ entered the convent in 1792 and refused to leave the convent along with a few companions at the time of the expulsion in 1797. Her adversity, much like the tone set forth in the biography of Florence de Werquinoeul, navigated the Benedictines of Liège through the tumultuous events, and allowed her to become the 2nd founder of the Order in Liège.

⁶²⁴ Due to the suppression of religious life during the revolutionary period, she was responsible in reassembling religious women and reestablishing the Benedictines in Liège after the Revolution. This is why she is considered a second founder.

“Dame Constance quoique toute jeune et sans expérience, ne prit conseil que de son courage et de son amour pour la vie religieuse, elle se cramponne pour ainsi dire aux murailles de son couvent et rien ne put l’ébranler. Elle brava les menaces, les dangers, les privations et resta cachée avec quelques religieuses qui partageaient sa résolution. Réunissant ensuite ses ressources à celles des Dames Geneviève de Gherkier et Emmanuelle Coumont elle racheta le couvent où elle commença un pensionnat.”⁶²⁵

Unlike the Chanoinesses de L’Ordre de Saint Augustin, the Benedictines of Liège were not dispersed during the Revolution and remained in their convent throughout the chaotic years following the Revolution. Courageous, Constance Greck resisted and as a result:

“L’institut de Florence de Werquinoeul n’a pas été entièrement éteint pendant la révolution de 1792.⁶²⁶ Il peut encore se propager. Son histoire se rattache, d’ailleurs, à celle de tout l’ordre de St-Benoît [...] mais plusieurs ont besoin d’être consolidées, d’autres sont encore à créer.”⁶²⁷

The reformatory order Florence de Werquinoeul put into place for the Benedictines in the 17th century relates to the work Constance Greck had to manage after the suppressive years of the Revolution: “Elle a donc été pour nous la tradition vivante, le trait d’union qui a relié le présent au passé et le nouveau Nehenie (?) qui devait rallumer le feu sous l’autel du Seigneur, après avoir purifié et restauré le Lieu Saint.”⁶²⁸ After refusing to leave the convent, she soon purchased the monastery with 2 other women, Dame Emmanuel and Dame Geneviève de Gheckier. Since the law prohibited ownership between several parties, each woman sold her part to the priest Bertho --“ce qui empêche la division de notre cher couvent.”⁶²⁹ She opened a boarding school of girls in 1797 but was not officially recognized before 1822 as l’Institut de la Paix de Notre-Dame. Her death in 1836, ten years before the publication of Florence Werquinoeul’s biography, did not initiate a biographical endeavor.

⁶²⁵ Archives of the Benedictine Convent in Liège. Page 55 in the black book: handwritten memoirs of the revolutionary period by a Benedictine nun of the convent of Liège, presumably working as the historian for the Congregation. No name is mentioned as to who is the author.

⁶²⁶ Referring here to religious suppression and not the onset of the Revolution in 1789.

⁶²⁷ Parenty, Histoire de Florence de Werquinoeul Vij-viii.

⁶²⁸ Parenty, Histoire de Florence de Werquinoeul.

⁶²⁹ Archives of the Benedictine Convent in Liège. Page 55 in the black book: handwritten memoirs of the Revolutionary period.

However, Parenty's biography rekindles the link of the reformed Benedictine Order of the past with that of the restored / reintroduced Benedictine Order of the present.

3. Révérende Mère Marie-Félicité and Mère Marie Stanislas Deprez: From cross to crucifix



Figure 5.28 R. P. Alexandre de la Compagnie de Jésus Pruvost. Vie de la R.M. (Révérende Mère) Marie-Félicité de Saint Joseph (Jeanne-Marguerite Bouhon) première supérieure des sœurs de Saint Joseph au Beauregard à Liège. Deuxième Edition. Casterman: Tournai, 1871.



Figure 5.29 Frontispiece. Visitation Sainte Marie. Mère Marie-Stanislas Deprez de la Visitation Sainte-Marie de Celles. Anderlues: D. Samain, 1925.

Two religious women, Mère Marie-Félicité (1802-1865) and Mère Marie-Stanislas (1818-1849), portrayed on their deathbed holding a crucifix, are quite different perspectives when compared to the frontispiece of Saint Lutgarde's a century before. The embracement of the crucified, suffering body of Jesus are replaced by images that inspire romantic deathbed scenes; one clutching dearly to a crucifix while the other is crowned as the bride of Christ, also highlighting the crucifix.

The theme that appears to connect all the religious biographies together appears to be the fostering of a closer relationship to Jesus. The 19th century Church capitalizes on this personal relationship for several significant reasons. With the rise of literacy and competing philosophical ideas in Belgian society, Catholics needed to feel empowered in the learning of their faith. This empowerment was gained in the new possibilities of reading sacred, theological and religious texts. With this in mind, the authors of religious texts focused their attention on the personal relationship Jesus desired of each one of His members. In effect, this cultivated less distance of the believer with

God which in turn promoted more attachment to the Church He founded, encouraged more active participation, and most significantly contributed to a willingness to fight for and defend His Church. Jesus was portrayed as an approachable familial figure, for example in Mère Félicité's biography: "Apprenez de moi que je suis doux et humble de Coeur."⁶³⁰ The image of Mère Marie-Félicité in its visual symbolism, round in shape, communicates this close relationship. Its shape educes one of a medal—Catholic medals often oval or round worn around the neck symbolized the wearer's special devotion and need of protection to either a certain saint, or to Jesus or Mary. Marie-Félicité transpires as the devotional object. Although Mère Marie-Stanislas' image is not evoking devotion by its shape, it does so with the paper in her hands. The written work in her hands is proof she leaves behind something of value, which in turn valorizes her. Next, the object of meditation for both images is the crucifix;⁶³¹ the cross that each must carry brings about an intimate relationship "que de temps en temps Jésus se retourne pour voir si vous êtes encore près de lui."⁶³² This symbol of death shifts to one of eternal life, enhanced by the writing of their lives for posterity. The images of death suggest nothing somber, but rather, a death from suffering from earthly life.

⁶³⁰ R. P. Alexandre de la Compagnie de Jésus Pruvost. Vie de la R.M. (Révérende Mère) Marie-Félicité de Saint Joseph (Jeanne-Marguerite Bouhon) première supérieure des soeurs de Saint Joseph au Bearegard à Liège. (Deuxième Edition. Tournai: Casterman, 1871) 119.

⁶³¹ The beneficence of this text may have influenced the 1881 fusion of the Sisters of Saint-Joseph of Bearegard of Liège with the Filles de la Croix—the cross and its symbolism being the conjoining factor---and together built in Verviers "Couvent des Saints-Anges" which dedicated its services to an orphanage, a preschool and a primary school.

⁶³² Pruvost 119.

4. Mère Marie-Thérèse Haze: Stoically photographed

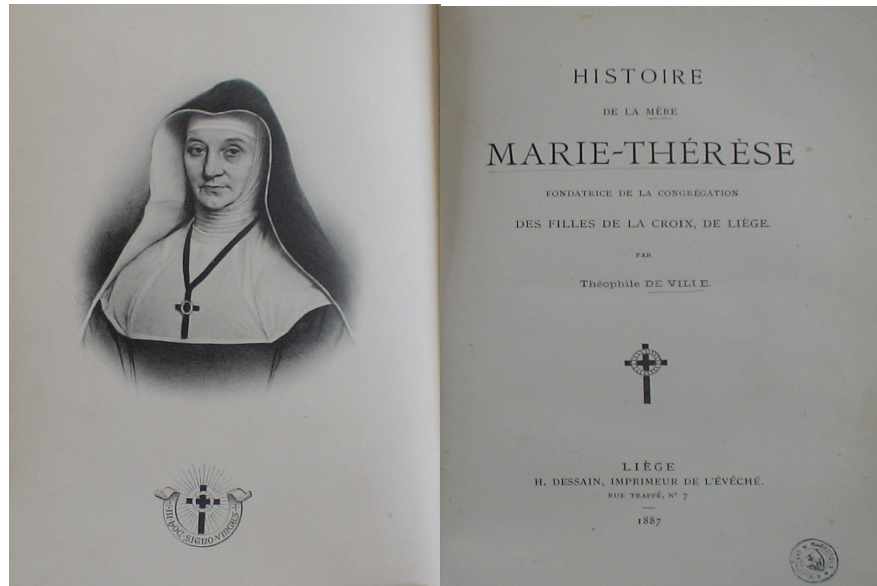


Figure 5.30 Théophile De Ville, Histoire de la Mère Marie-Thérèse, Fondatrice de la Congrégation des Filles de la Croix, de Liège. Liège: H. Dessain, Imprimeur de l'Evêché 1887.

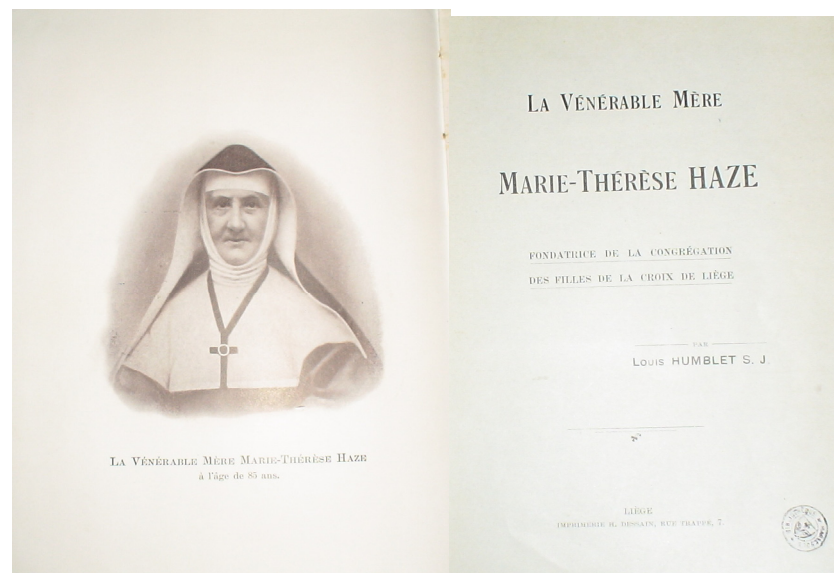


Figure 5.31 Louis Humblet S.J. , La Vénérable Mère Marie-Thérèse Haze, Fondatrice de la Congrégation des Filles de la Croix de Liège. Liège: H. Dessain, 1924.

One of the most influential congregations in Liège, the Filles de la Croix was founded in 1833 by local Jeanne Haze, (Mère Marie-Thérèse du Sacré-Coeur de Jésus; 1792-1876) who was the daughter of the last prince bishop's secretary before the Revolution of 1789. The Frésart family offered her a 17th century Capucine convent that had been sold after the monks had been forced out by the revolutionaries. At first, inspired by the rule of Ignatius, the apostolic work of the Filles de la Croix focused on the religious education of girls and the care of the sick. Later, this work diversified to include opening more schools, hospices, boarding schools, orphanages and providing a refuge for repented prostitutes. They visited the poor, the sick and the women imprisoned. This congregation had an enormous societal impact on the rehabilitation of its citizens. At her death in 1876, Haze had inspired 900 women to join the Filles de la Croix, including women in the West Indies, Germany and England. In 1881, the Filles de la Croix were benefited by the merger with the Soeurs de Saint-Joseph who had recognized the profound impact of their spiritual influence. Mère Marie-Thérèse was beatified 115 years later by Pope John Paul II in 1991.

The two images of the biographies above, both published by Dessain and depicting the same nun, present the evolution of rhetorical writing strategies and nuances from the late 19th century into the early 20th century. First, the title marks the most obvious change from a project of sanctification (*Figure 5.30*) that must be presented as a serious work—designated by the word “Histoire,”-- to a project that is sanctified (*Figure 5.31*)—evident by the words “LA VÉNÉRABLE.” This significant change is emphasized by the enveloping halo-like semi-oval around the photograph of the 1924 text. The capital role of illustration in this text reaches its apogee by including 13 additional images in order to anchor the recatholicization movement in its attraction of religious buildings, convents, and religious persons. In other words, it is representative of a success story that reels the reader into its Catholic bastions. Secondly, this “biographie / histoire à portrait” displays nuns looking directly at the reader, a frank change from the distant gaze of Florence de Werquineoul and Soeur Marguerite du Saint Sacrement or the closed ones of Mère Marie Félicité or Mère Marie Stanislas. This aspect will be discussed further.

Interestingly, the 1887 version was written by a religious woman of the same congregation; the author Théophile de Ville was a pseudonym for Sister Adolphine⁶³³ (Mélanie Gaillard of Liège).⁶³⁴ In comparing the 1887 biography with that of male author Louis Humblet of the 1924 biography, several distinctions arose that revealed both an evolution in religious biographical writing and one of established male authorship versus an unrecognized female one. It was clear that the 1887 version made no allusions to female authorship, so far as to even appear less intimate (i.e. less feminine) by omitting the prescribed 19th century biographical title of “Vie de...” and replacing it with a more serious endeavor of “Histoire.” Serious historical accounts were distinctly regarded as a male endeavor. Not wanting to challenge conventions in writing, thus not bringing attention upon herself, her pseudonym also became part of the title; while in the 1924 version the author’s name is separate and distinct. This is explained by the fact that 19th century biographies were typically written by spiritual confessors for the newly founded congregation or by strong advocates in power positions vowing for needed recognition for their part in the establishment of the congregation. The 1924 version is quite different in its motive. The separation and distinction of the name of author suggests the increased recognition of the profession of writers, even if the publisher was in cohorts with the bishopric as well as a clergy well cemented in their societal positions of authority and power. The 1924 avant-propos differs from the 1887 biography (and from all 19th century biographies) in its tone. There are no exclamations of faith, no thanks to certain clergy (specifically to bishop Doutreloux who was instrumental in the propagation of the congregation), no “edification of faithful” (as in the above biography), and no reference to Mère Marie-Thérèse Haze as an “example of religious devotion.” Rather Louis Humblet draws attention to the meticulous research of his

⁶³³ The only case known to have been written under a masculine pseudonym.

⁶³⁴ Sister Adolphine wrote the 2nd biography written on Jeanne Haze while the 1st unpublished and unedited biography was written by Sister Eléonore. A third version was written by Soeur Marie-Stanislas (of whom also a biography was written), but she died before its completion. See M.E. Henneau’s work on the role of nuns as historians. M.-E. Henneau, “Femmes en quête de rôles dans l’histoire du salut: biographies de religieuses et religieuses biographes,” in Sylvie Steinberg et Jean-Claude Arnould eds., *Les femmes et l’écriture de l’histoire, 1400-1800*. Rouen: Publications des universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2008. 219-231. AND - id., in Nicole pellegrin ed., “Vivre et écrire son histoire en clôture: de la relecture du passé à l’écriture du présent (XVI^e-XVIII^e),” *Histoires d’historiennes*. Saint-Etienne: PUSE, 2006. 47-66.

sources and his confident final word on this religious nun: “Il ne semble pas qu’il reste de trouvailles à espérer sur aucun point.”⁶³⁵

Just as Sister Adolphine desired to *appear* masculine in her writing, so does her image of Mère Marie-Thérèse *appear* to depict a masculine, “viril” image. I was hard pressed to find many resemblances of the 1887 sketch with the 1924 photograph. Rather than finding droopy eyes and a puffy nose as seen in the 1924 photograph, her head and neck are cocked back with a stern disposition. Her robust chest is over inflated in a masculine manner with no trace of feminine roundness. Accompanied with her angled shoulders suggesting distance with the viewer this image purports to a defined authoritative figure. Although the 1887 sketch has evolved from the idyllic representations of nuns with angelic softened feminine faces, Humblet’s 1924 photograph is even more realistic in its illustration. The photograph also portrays a woman, far from idyllic beauty, looking directly at the viewer. Facing squarely, her shoulders are more rounded with a mouth slightly open. The historical details only added to enhance the background of Haze.

“Nous avons mis tout notre soin à ce travail exclusivement littéraire. En somme, nous n’avons guère visé qu’à dégager plus nettement et à dessiner d’un trait plus ferme une physionomie assez fuyante; à l’isoler de son oeuvre et à la connaître en elle-même, [...] à la retrouver, dans cet oeuvre, un peu plus personnellement.”⁶³⁶

Humblet’s confidence reveals her without masquerading appearances; in an enhanced ‘natural’ state compared to earlier religious biographies, yet influenced by the previous generation in the perpetuation of the ‘personalization’ theme that resonated in 19th century biographies.

⁶³⁵ Louis Humblet S.J., La Vénérable Mère Marie-Thérèse Haze, Fondatrice de la Congrégation des Filles de la Croix de Liège. (Liège: H. Dessain, 1924) Avant-propos.

⁶³⁶ Humblet, Vi-vii.

C. Representation of clergy vis-à-vis religious women

What seemed to be so curious in religious biographical imagery was the discovery that the photos of clergy never faced the viewer as seen in the example below in Humblet's biography of Haze. Is it because their authority does not need to be conveyed by the gaze upon the viewer? These questions are important because they elucidate as to how the projects of the sanctification of religious women may have influenced the reader's perspective and how they were successful in cultivating support and devotion.



Figure 5.32 Portrait of Chanoine Habet, Co-Founder of the Filles de la Croix, in Louis Humblet S.J., La Vénérable Mère Marie-Thérèse Haze, Fondatrice de la Congrégation des Filles de la Croix de Liège. Liège: H. Dessain, 1924. (between pages 64-65).

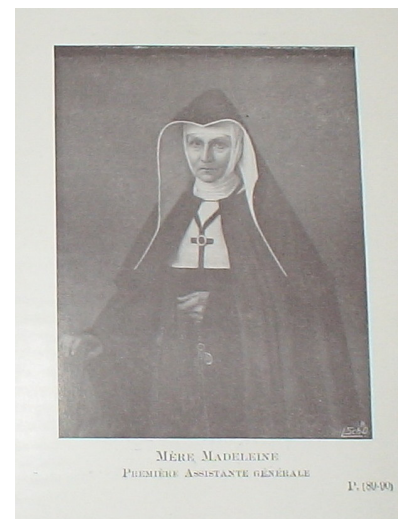


Figure 5.33 Portrait of Mère Madeleine, Première Assistante Générale, in Louis Humblet S.J., La Vénérable Mère Marie-Thérèse Haze, Fondatrice de la Congrégation des Filles de la Croix de Liège. Liège: H. Dessain, 1924. (between pages 102-103).

Other examples of this nuance are shown below:



Figure 5.34 Frontispiece portrait of Mère Gertrude, Founder of the Soeurs de l'Institut de l'Enfant Jésus in Nivelles, in Rèv. Père Bailly's Mère Gertrude Fondatrice des Soeurs de l'Institut de l'Enfant Jésus. Nouvelle Edition. Mechliniæ, 1889.

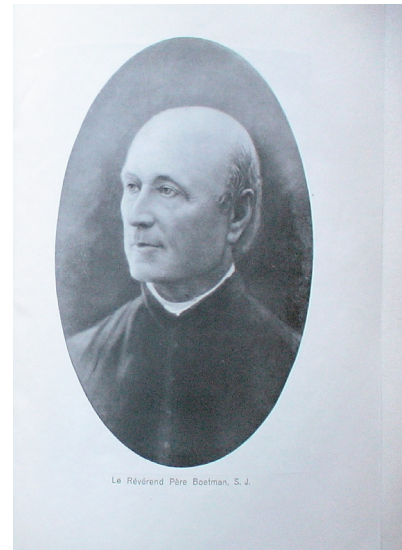


Figure 5.35 Portrait of clergy; Father Boetman in Rèv. Père Bailly's Mère Gertrude Fondatrice des Soeurs de l'Institut de l'Enfant Jésus. Nouvelle Edition. Mechliniæ, 1889. (Page 100).



Figure 5.36 Portrait of clergy; Chanoine du Cuvellier in Soeurs de Notre Dame de Namur's Histoire de la Vénérée Mère Saint Joseph née Marie-Louise-Françoise Blin de Bourdon Demoiselle de Gézaincourt 1756-1838. Co-fondatrice et deuxième supérieure générale de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre Dame de Namur. Marchienne-au-Pont: L. Téchy-Tomme, 1920. (Page 349).

The exception, however, arises in images of clergy writing or reading, actions which require authority.

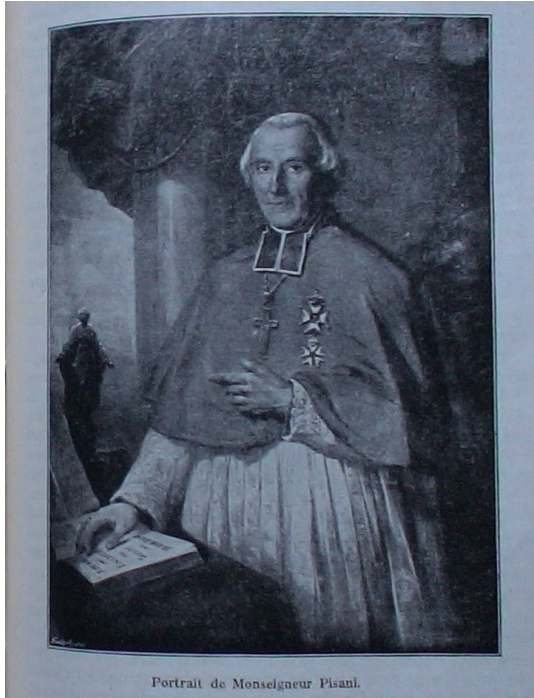


Figure 5.37 Portrait of clergy; Monseigneur Pisani in Soeurs de Notre Dame de Namur's Histoire de la Vénérée Mère Saint Joseph née Marie-Louise-Françoise Blin de Bourdon Demoiselle de Gézaincourt 1756-1838. Co-fondatrice et deuxième supérieure générale de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre Dame de Namur. Marchienne-au-Pont: L. Téchy-Tomme, 1920. (Page 291).



Figure 5.38 Frontispiece portrait of clergy; Father Petrus Marchand (1661) in Abbé Cornet's Notice Historique sur l'Ancienne Congrégation des Pénitentes-Récollectines de Limbourg et sur quelques religieuses qui s'y sont sanctifiées. Bruxelles: Victor Devaux et Cie, 1886.



Figure 5.39 Note clergy with pen in hand in the background looking directly at viewer in R. P. Félix Bertholet's Histoire de l'Institution de la Fête Dieu avec les Vies des Bienheureuses Julienne et Ève qui en furent les premières promulgatrices, suivie de l'abrégé historique de l'institution des illustres confréries de l'Adoration perpétuelle de l'auguste Sacrement des autels, et surtout de celle érigée dans l'église de Saint Martin à Liège en 1765. Troisième Edition. Liège: Félix-Oudart, 1846. (between pages 44-45).

Thus, explains the argument that the gaze upon the viewer is symbolic for religious women. It functions by enhancing her appearance of authority in order to influence her worthiness of veneration and the posterity of her congregation.

D. Contemplative versus apostolic imagery

The comparison of Mère Marie-Thérèse Haze biography of 1887 with that of 1924 reflects one example of evolutionary change within apostolic representations of religious women. However, there were also representational differences between contemplative religious women and apostolic religious women.

Contemplative cloistered women voiced their participation in the human condition by praying for souls, sinners, and the church. "Prayer has an apostolic value"⁶³⁷ transforming the world

⁶³⁷ Filles du silence. Moniales en Belgique et Luxembourg, du Moyen-Âge à nos jours. (Bastogne: Musée en Piconrue, 1998) 319.

through sacrifice, offering and prayer. Their sacrifice of cloistered life is considered a heroic act, a suffering which contributes to expire the sins of the world; what Marie Elisabeth Henneau calls “une spiritualité victimale”⁶³⁸ resulting perhaps from the trauma of the Revolution. This victimal spirituality most often includes the nun in meditation upon the cross of Jesus. This visual imagery was important in the promotion of devotions such as the devotion to the Sacred Heart. The images of contemplative women communicate in their biographies this interior spirituality by the humility of their eyes, never looking towards the reader but rather gazing away or meditating on a religious object. For example:



Figure 5.40 Sainte Marie d'Oignies (1177-1213) in Abbé Th. Rayée Vie de Sainte Marie de Nivelles dites d'Oignies. Ch. Guignarde: Nivelles, s.d. (Page 98).

⁶³⁸ Filles du Silence 319.



Figure 5.41 Sainte Marie des Anges (1616-1717) in frontispiece in Ch. Labis' Abrégé de la Vie de la Bienheureuse Marie des Anges, carmélite dechaussée. Tournai: Casterman, 1867.

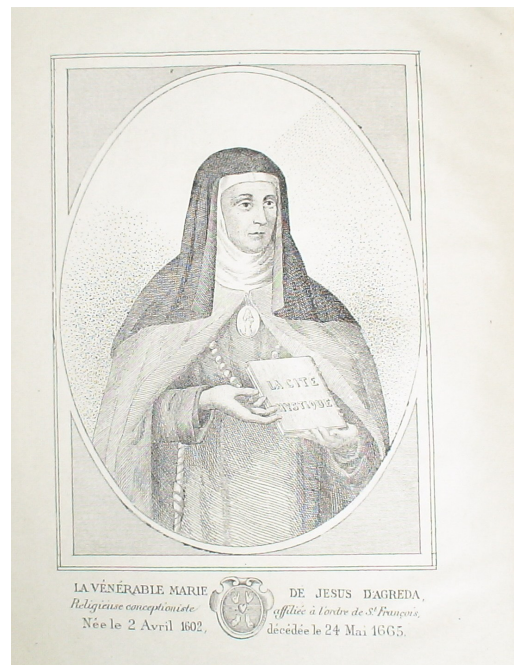


Figure 5.42 Mère Marie de Jésus d'Agréda (1602-1665) in frontispiece in R.P. Séraphin's Précis historique de la vie de la Vénérable Mère Abbessse Marie de Jésus d'Agréda, religieuse Conceptioniste affiliée à l'Ordre de Saint-François. Tournai: Vandenbrouck, 1867.



Figure 5.43 Mère Alix le Clerk (1576-1622) in frontispiece in A. Gandelet's La Vie de la Mère Alix le Clerk, Fondatrice, première Mère et religieuse de l'Ordre de Notre-Dame. Chanoinesse Régulière de Saint-Augustin. Bruxelles: Polleunis, Ceuterick, et Lefebvre, 1882.

The contemplative cloistered life was paradoxical to apostolic missionary work, in its contribution to humanity. The contemplative nuns aspired to sainthood by separating themselves from the sinful world and offering their sacrificial life in silent reparation for the sins offending God. This separation was precisely what new apostolic foundations reversed—for sainthood was also attainable in the service for others. Partly influenced by political factors,⁶³⁹ some contemplative orders included apostolic work in order to meet the conditions of survival in the early 19th century. Since almost all contemplative orders in Belgium originated from pre-19th century founders, the representations of nuns do not evolve from their original imagery unless the contemplative order *changes* its ministry. That is to say, that a cloistered contemplative Order centered on prayer, evolved into a congregation that ministered to the sick or opened schools to educate children—adding a contact with the outside world that had initially not been in their form of spiritual vocation and /or

⁶³⁹ i.e. eradication of “useless” religious congregations by the government prior to 1830 while ministry driven congregations were encouraged.

the tenants of the founder of the Religious Order. An example of this change is reflected in the Chanoinesses de l'Ordre de Saint Augustin as they adjust to a new transition in their spirituality:

Pre-19th century imagery:



Figure 5.44 Comtesse Marguerite d'Oyenbrugge-Duras in Léon S.J. Herckenrode de St. Trond's Vie de la Comtesse Marie d'Oyenbrugge dites de Duras, première supérieure du couvent de Berlaymont à Bruxelles, précédé d'une notice sur Marguerite Comtesse de Berlaymont, née Comtesse de Lalaing, Fondatrice dudit couvent. Première Edition. Bruxelles: Vanderborght, 1844. (Between pages 68-69).

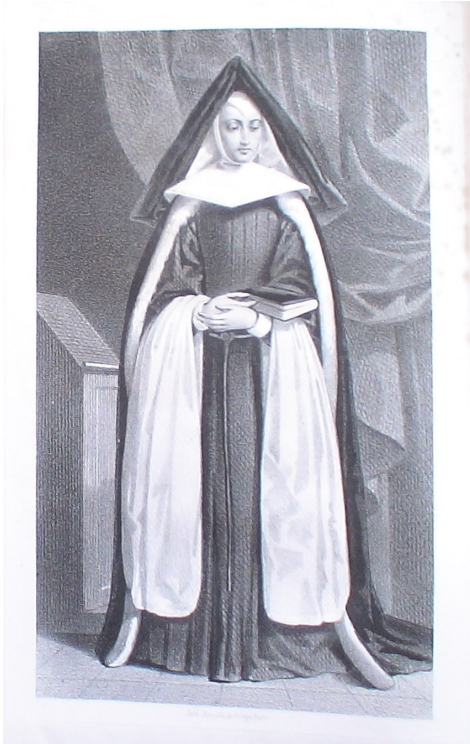


Figure 5.45 Chanoinesse of L'Ordre de Saint Augustin in Léon S.J. Herckenrode de St. Trond. Vie de la Comtesse Marie d'Oyenbrugge dites de Duras, première supérieure du couvent de Berlaymont à Bruxelles, précédé d'une notice sur Marguerite Comtesse de Berlaymont, née Comtesse de Lalaing, Fondatrice dudit couvent. Première Edition. Bruxelles: Vanderborght, 1844. (Between pages 124-125).

19th century change:

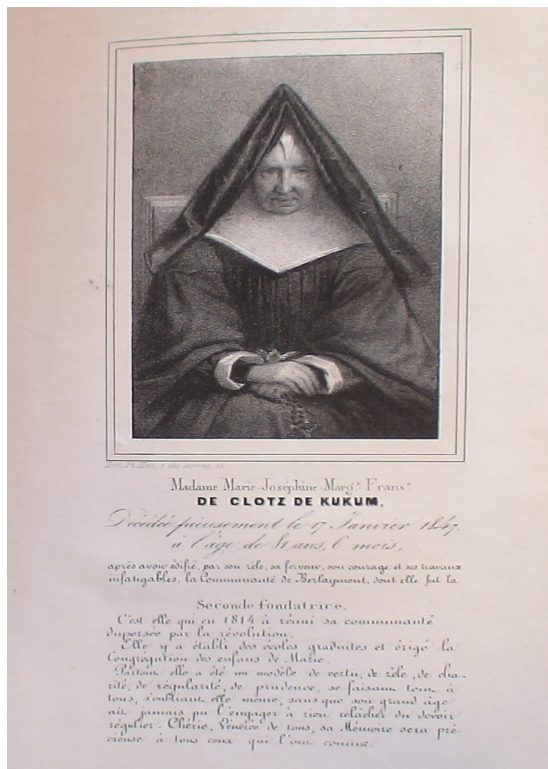


Figure 5.46 Devotional card of Madame Marie Joséphine de Clotz de Kukum (19th century), second founder of La Congrégation des Enfants de Marie, established in 1814 in Léon S.J. Herckenrode de St. Trond's Vie de la Comtesse Marie d'Oyenbrugge dites de Duras, première supérieure du couvent de Berlaymont à Bruxelles, précédé d'une notice sur Marguerite Comtesse de Berlaymont, née Comtesse de Lalaing, fondatrice dudit couvent. Première Edition. Bruxelles: Vanderborght, 1844. (Between pages 134-135).

A change has been effectuated in the image of Madame Marie Joséphine de Clotz Kukum, who was among the Chanoinesses de l'Ordre de Saint Augustin prior to their suppression. The change is reflected in her gaze upon the viewer rather than a distant meditative gaze as illustrated in almost all contemplative representations before her. This symbolizes the change in ministry that this Order underwent from a strictly contemplative life to an apostolic one. Marie Joséphine is credited as the second founder of the Chanoiness. However, in reuniting the dispersed nuns as a result of the French Revolution in 1814, she changes the name to “La Congregation des Enfants de Marie” and opens free schools for children. This is significant because she changes a 200 year old order from a cloistered society to one that has regular contact with the public. Implementing the name of “Mary” in the name of the congregation was following the fashion of the times. However, the remnants of the contemplative Order remain by the fact that the habit had not changed. The unchanged outward distinction of this congregation reinforces the symbolism of obedience, order, and *perhaps only temporal changes* to its spirituality—remedied perchance after political factors favored contemplative religious life? If the habit served to distinguish each order and each congregation, why then keep the habit of an Order that has completely changed its name and way of life? Was the project of sanctification more rewarded if the history of its past was incorporated with the new (second) foundation? The 19th century banked on evoking past histories in a glorified manner in order to accentuate the ties religious foundations had with its people. Yet it seems as was the case with 2nd Benedictine founder Constance de Griek, that the contemplative plan was to restore / reintroduce under the appearance of innovation. Neither Constance de Griek nor Madame Marie Josephine de Clotz Kukum had a biography written about them. Instead, Marie Joséphine is only mentioned briefly at the end of the text, but with no mention of her influence in either the title or the preface!

Henneau states that the 19th century was a time of codification during which importance was placed on “une religiosité très axée sur l’exteriorité”⁶⁴⁰ in order to concur for unity, conformity and harmony. For both contemplative and apostolic religious women, the habit commanded a

⁶⁴⁰ Filles du Silence 321.

degree of respect and was an outward sign of renouncement of the world. The habit represented the professed vows each religious commits to for the rest of her life—obedience, poverty and chastity.⁶⁴¹ Specific pieces of the habit symbolized different aspects of religious life. The white veil represented innocence, the black veil represented love; the cloak like gown (differed in color between congregations) represented obedience to the congregation, to the superior, to clergy, to God and the belt underneath the gown represented chastity. For example:



Figure 5.47 **Portrait of Mère Ignace Goetals, in General Superior in Soeurs de Notre Dame de Namur's Histoire de la Vénérée Mère Saint Joseph née Marie-Louise-Françoise Blin de Bourdon Demoiselle de Gézaincourt 1756-1838. Co-fondatrice et deuxième supérieure générale de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre Dame de Namur. Marchienne-au-Pont: L. Téchy-Tomme, 1920. (page 456).**

⁶⁴¹ Filles du Silence 337.



Figure 5.48 Frontispiece portrait of Mere Saint Joseph in Soeurs de Notre Dame de Namur's Histoire de la Vénérée Mère Saint Joseph née Marie-Louise-Françoise Blin de Bourdon Demoiselle de Gézaincourt 1756-1838. Co-fondatrice et deuxième supérieure générale de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre Dame de Namur. Marchienne-au-Pont: L. Téchy-Tomme, 1920.

The modest garment recalling foremost her celibacy, minimized the importance of her gender and therefore accentuated the significance of her writing, displayed in the foreground of the images. Her vows of virginity allowed her the freedom of female rationality and authority, symbolized by the pen. With a book in hands, she is never portrayed reading, symbolizing her inner vision. With the modest garment came modesty in spirit, often captured in biographical writing seeking to convey that complete mastery over one's behavior was a requirement—as such: walking slowly, displaying interiority, eliminating the first person in one's vocabulary—replacing “I” by “nous” and “notre,” having modesty in one's eyes by keeping them lowered, and having a purpose in all coming and

goings. Everything was centered on form.⁶⁴² This focus on form is especially apparent in the images of apostolic nuns in their rigidly seated positions. The modesty in eye contact, however, is neither assimilated into apostolic imagery nor in biographical rhetoric of apostolic nuns. The following image of Julie Billiard displays an intimate eye contact, however, it is unique in its lack of rigidity for the 19th century; Julie Billiard is smiling and represented sitting naturally and with squattier proportions compared to her colleagues. This is perhaps because, unlike most other biographies of 19th century founders, Julie was already proclaimed a saint, and therefore a less austere demeanor could be displayed, as well as her congregation very well established and expanded in Belgium.



Figure 5.49 Saint Julie Billiard: Title page in Vie de la Mère Julie Billiard, Fondatrice de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre Dame de Namur. 1751-1816 Par un Père de la Compagnie de Jésus. 2eme édition. Bruxelles, Tournai: Casterman, 1881.

⁶⁴² Filles du Silence 324.

Furthermore, these apostolic communities functioned like small governments with an abbess as the “governor.” The sisters were in charge of their own accounting, ordering furniture, managing the convent, of the infirmary, the surveillance of entry, the education of boarders, the formation of novices, domestic help, music direction, finding funds, the care of sacristy.⁶⁴³ The gaze reinforces this contact that goes beyond the convent wall. And where writing is illustrated, this gaze can only substantiate that she has no modesty in her authority.



Figure 5.50 Mère Fanny de l'Eucharistie in La Révérende Mère Fanny de l'Eucharistie (Madame Fanny Kestre), Fondatrice de l'Institut des Dames de Sainte Julienne dites Apostolines du Très Saint Sacrement. Bruxelles: Société Belge de Librairie, 1897.

⁶⁴³ Filles du Silence 306.

IV. CONCLUSION

A. Proof and reinforcement of piety: Manipulating religious biographies

Nun's the Word: Through the personalized devotion of certain nuns, the faithful comes to know Jesus. However, personalized devotions did not cease at passive meditation. Rather active engagement was necessary for the project of sanctification to be fulfilled. Not only do the images and the textual references of the nuns' mediate in the project of sanctification but also the special devotional cards and "admission cards" inserted in the text (sometimes separate from the text but found inserted in between a page nonetheless) function towards this goal. Certain biographies included "Act of Consecration" cards, an additional paper inserted appearing to have been inserted when the book was rebound, which required the signing of one's name to a particular devotion. Below for example, on February 17th 1844, Mathilde Balleau made an act of consecration to the "Association de François de Sales" in the biographical text of Sainte Marie d'Oignies.

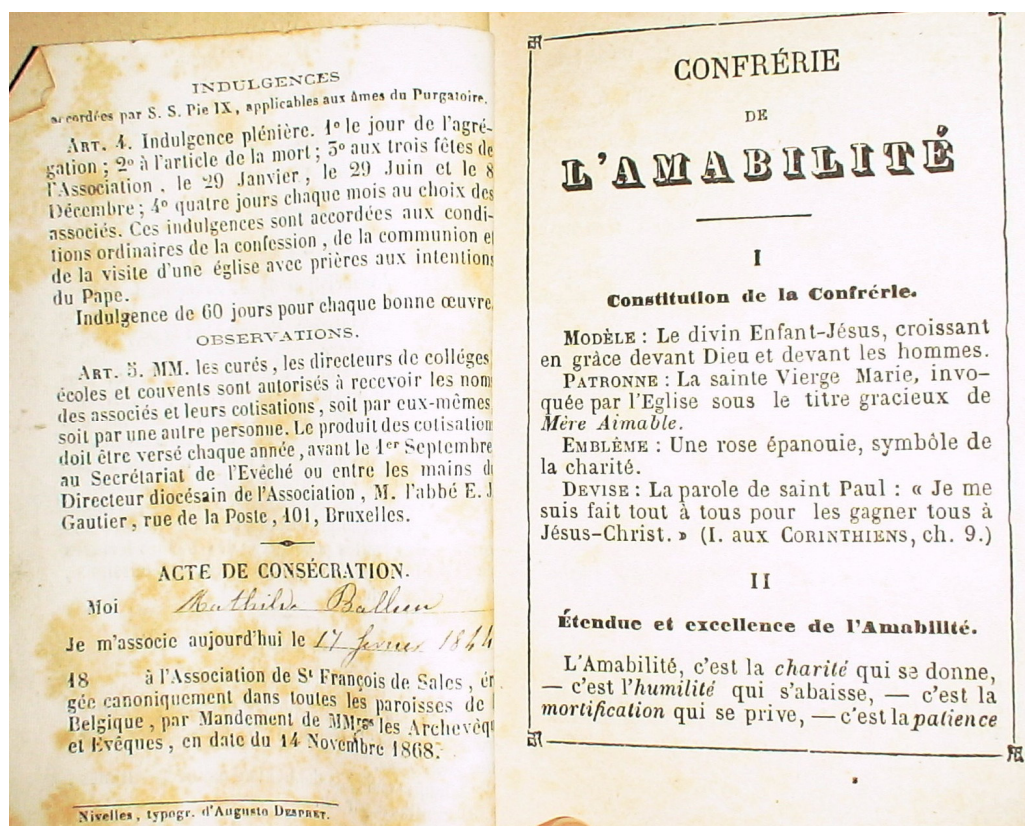


Figure 5.51 Act of Consecration insert in Abbé Th. Rayée's Vie de Sainte Marie de Nivelles dites d'Oignies. Ch. Guignarde: Nivelles, s.d.

Consequently, the text not only promotes additional devotions not included in the biographical text but it more importantly, becomes a possession of a personal endeavor and a constant reminder of one's devotion and investment to a particular devotion; renewing her/his commitment each time the book is perused.

Personal investment could also be in the form of donations to a certain monastery. In the example below, Madame la Duchesse d'Arenberg by her "titre d'admission" became part of a confraternity recorded in the biography of Marie d'Oyenbrugge which was conserved at the monastery of Berlaymont. As part of the confraternity, the Duchess would recite certain prayers which would continually remind her of her support to this specific monastery. The initial "titre d'admission" was for the year 1861, but later the years 1862 and 1863 were added in pen perhaps to

record her ongoing devotional and contributory practices. In return, religious women who possessed the text, containing this proof of admission, would promulgate prayers for the contributor.

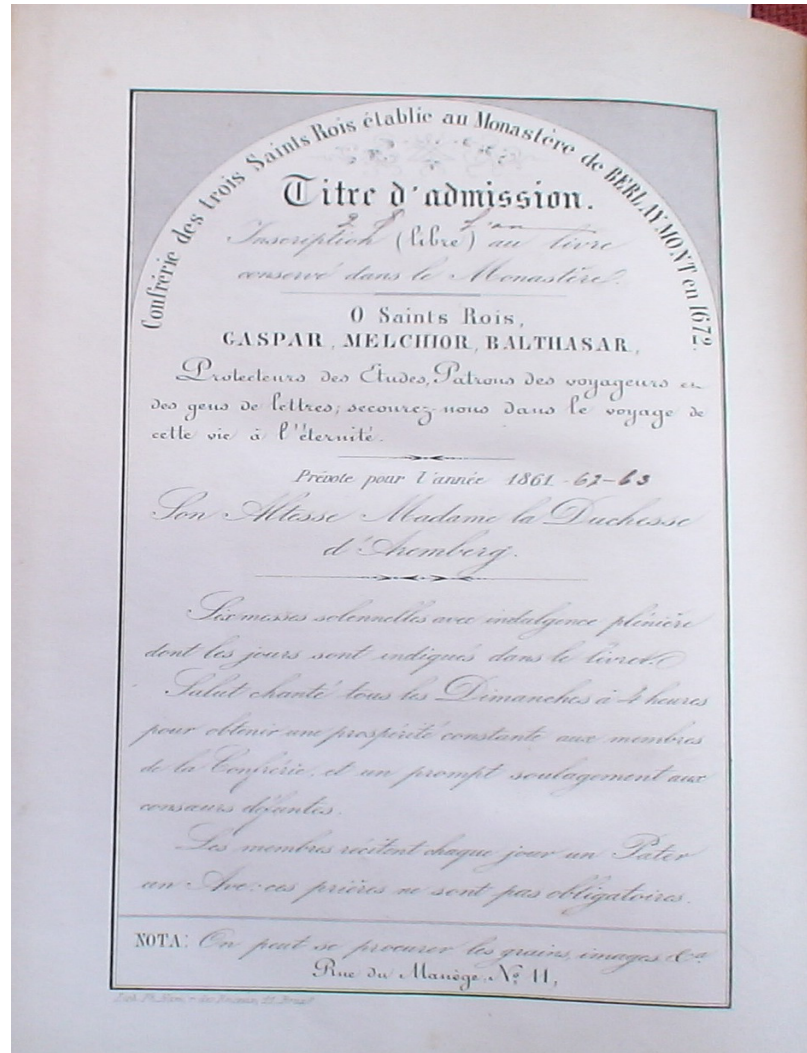


Figure 5.52 Title of admission in Confraternity of the three Holy Kings in Léon S.J. Herckenrode de St. Trond's Vie de la Comtesse Marie d'Oyenbrugge dites de Duras, première supérieure du couvent de Berlaymont à Bruxelles, précédée d'une notice sur Marguerite Comtesse de Berlaymont, née Comtesse de Lalaing, Fondatrice dudit couvent. Première Edition. Bruxelles: Vanderborgh, 1844. (Inserted between 134-135).

Images of pious examples ensued in this environment of representational active engagement. The image below of Marie Eustelle, pasted in a text that compiled her saintly writings, and portraying a lay woman exercising her daily devotions, adds further proof that in the 19th century, there was a need of iconographic support and of the diffusion of religious biographies containing portraits.



Figure 5.53 Frontispiece devotional image of Marie Eustelle in Receuil des Ecrits de Marie Eustelle née à Saint Palais des Saintes le 19 juin 1814 morte le 20 juin 1842. Nouvelle Edition: Tome Premier. Librairie Catholique de Perisse Frères. Bruxelles: Regis Ruffet et Cie, 1863.

Although Marie Eustelle was a French example of piety, born in La Rochelle, and not a nun, Brussels publishing house Regis Ruffet et Cie found interest in what she represented for the Church, much for the same reasons Casterman of Tournai published the life of Soeur Marguerite du Saint Sacrement. She had a special devotion to the Eucharist, the theme par excellence that resounds in

Belgian religious biographies. The similarity of this image with those of religious women, specifically contemplative, is striking. Her head covered, wearing a cloak like garment, her eyes gazing upward toward devotional image, and her arms across the chest displaying humility and simplicity. It is an image that epitomizes Catholic devotion in the 19th century and throughout the first half of the 20th century. In the same manner, devotional images of the Holy Eucharist, were affixed to the walls in homes under which a 'bénitier' would be found. Devotional images inspired a way of life, personalizing one's faith to a more intimate approach towards Christ and portraying mannerisms of piety to be emulated in the privacy of the home, as seen in the photo above. With the image inviting the faithful to return to the special devotions of the Eucharist, the text reinforces its plea: "Plaise au ciel que cette publication contribue à l'édification des âmes et au retour de quelques brébis égarées!"⁶⁴⁴ The recatholicization by religious biographies rooted in hagiographical traditions, transpires into a devotional text which becomes proof of allegiance as well as an active engagement in the manipulation of these devotional possessions.

The theme of saintly virtues being accessible to all the faithful, professed in all the Belgian biographies, had transpired into devotional cards that promoted the faithful as an intercessory power much in the same manner religious women were viewed as intercessors for the faithful. In the following example, the faithful acts as an intercessor on a pilgrimage to Lourdes, France for his friend and sends proof of doing so, in the form of a devotional card.

⁶⁴⁴ Receuil des Ecrits de Marie Eustelle née à Saint Palais des Saintes le 19 juin 1814 morte le 20 juin 1842. (Nouvelle Edition: Tome Premier. Librairie Catholique de Perisse Frères. Bruxelles: Regis Ruffet et C^{ie} 1863) 16.

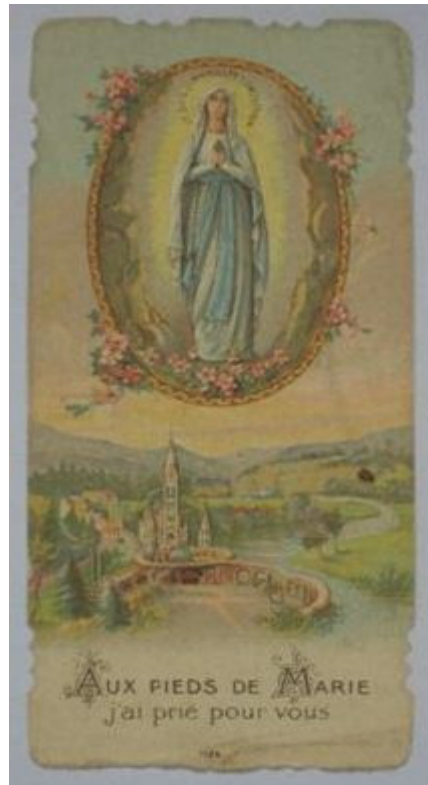


Figure 5.54 Souvenir card from Lourdes for a villager of Herve, Belgium 1901.

This intercession or mediation, inscribed by “j’ai prié pour vous” presupposes a type of spiritual journey of suffering. Suffering entailed sacrifice and renouncement of self in all things which acted as a penance not only for oneself but also for the reparation of the sins of others. In a symbolic return to Christ and Mary,⁶⁴⁵ meaning was given to this suffering of which was further magnified by pilgrimages to several 19th century sites of Marian apparitions: 1. Paris, France 1839; 2. La Salette, France 1846; 3. Lourdes, France 1858 (above image); 4. Pontmain, France 1870; 5. Beauraing, Belgium 1932-1933; and 6. Banneaux, Belgium 1933. These apparitions produced numerous devotional cards. The messages of the visionaries recommended prayer followed by sacraments of

⁶⁴⁵ Sandra Zimdars-Swartz. Encountering Mary: from La Salette to Medjugorje. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U.P., 1991) 266.

the Church and specific devotional exercises.⁶⁴⁶ Devotional cards of suffering remind the faithful to remain committed in their piety.



Figure 5.55 Marian devotional funeral card;
Froidthier 1922



Figure 5.56 Marian devotional
funeral card; Norbeek 1889.

⁶⁴⁶ Stéphane Michaud. Muse et Madone: Visages de la Femme de la Révolution française aux apparitions de Lourdes. (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1985) 8.



Figure 5.57 19th century funeral cards for Benedictine sisters. Archives of the Benedictine Abbey in Liège.

Lay devotional cards, some handmade bookmarks used in religious biographies, also enhanced the theme of victimal spirituality. Below, the cross, a collage inserted in Marie Stanislas Deprez' biography, has the following inscription: "Les grandes oeuvres, les grandes âmes sont marquées par le sceau de la croix. Alléluia! Alléluia!"

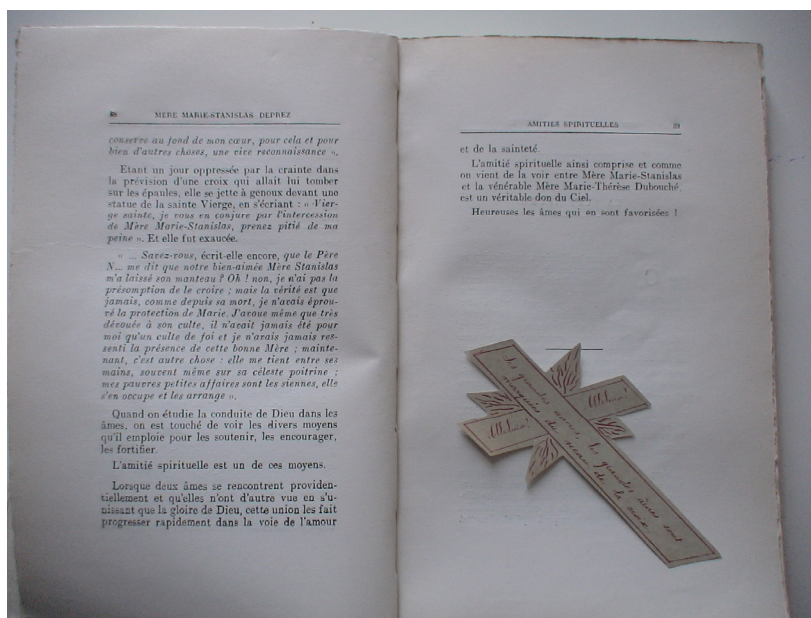


Figure 5.58 Cross insert in Visitation Sainte Marie. Mère Marie-Stanislas Deprez de la Visitation Sainte-Marie de Celles. Anderlues: D. Samain, 1925.

Perpetuating the theme of suffering, this cross alongside the image of Mère Marie-Stanislas on her deathbed (See Figure 5.29) reinforces the idea that suffering and death are short passages to gaining eternal life. The sanctification of religious women's humility was all the more pronounced by the humble nature of publishing a biography after their death. A humble nun would not have desired to "publicize" her virtues nor want a cult following. Silent, the nun is exalted by her own death. However it is her sisters who have all to gain. Publication brought notoriety to their congregation which augmented interest of new novices. The more members initiated, the more influence over a

city's politics, education and social services with the same ringing true for those clergy members who desired publicity through their role as author and confessor.

In summary, the project of sanctification of religious women in religious biographies was influential in the recatholicization of Belgium. Nuances in imagery conveyed an ever-changing religious presence in society and an increasing invitation of reader participation in the maintenance of Church institutions. Depictions of nuns had evolved over time, reflecting religious and socio-political developments (stern face representing strict enforcement and authority), and stylistic evolutions (naturalism). The changes are indicative of a changing society where contemplative convents were no longer regarded as an oasis from harsh societal conditions and a possible avenue for an upgrade in class distinction for some as was the case in the past. Rather, increased material well being and diminished class distinctions reversed the cloistered life into a much more austere way of life. The promoters of contemplative religious life, therefore, used their energy to create an idyllic heroic place that promised eternal sanctification on earth through pictures and words. Rhetorical strategies were used to persuade those who aspired to contemplative but were hesitant of breaching contact with the world; changing ever so rapidly.

Changes were assumed in the biographical projects of sanctification over the course of the 19th century: beginning with religious women standing alone with a scepter dignified in authority, to incorporating clergy at their side while she still stands authoritatively centered, to then the clergy standing next to her at an equal level but with his head above her, and finally to highlighting the sanctifications of devotions in favor of individual projects of sanctification. The process from *being venerated* to one *venerating* a devotion took a century to accomplish but revealed the big steps the Church had acquired from being suppressed from society to gaining complete hold of it. Religious biographies defined the goals of restoration, reintroduction, or innovation of religious orders through the mediation of images and text, all in an effort to protect the veil.

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CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

I. “Nun’s the Word:” protecting the veil in order to promote the clergy.

“Chers lecteurs et lectrices, lisez cette vie avec attention, vous en serez édifiés, et vous y puiserez bien des encouragements à la vertu; et si la lecture que vous ferez de ce livre vous inspire de bonnes pensées, vous porte à la pratique des bonnes oeuvres, ou excite dans votre âme de pieuses et saintes prières, souvenez-vous devant Dieu de celui qui, pour sa plus grande gloire et le salut de vos âmes, vous présente cet ouvrage.”⁶⁴⁷

This dissertation entitled, “Nun’s the Word; restoring Catholic faith and forming national identity in the 19th century,” reveals how biographical representations of the nun participated in the recatholicization endeavor of the Catholic Church during the 19th century. Recatholicization efforts by the Church, used to its advantage a unifying sentiment that cemented the citizens of a newly declared independent country. In a rare moment in Belgian history, Flemish and Walloons were more concerned with their strengths and common bond of religious faith than with their divisions and conflicts. In order for Catholicism to take hold in a rapidly changing post-revolutionary environment, it was essential that newly formed Belgium had a governing Catholic body. It is within these texts that the authors advocated for a unified corps of Catholics, calling religious women to patriotic duties of instilling a ‘feminized’ faith that involved a sentimental yet intellectual approach towards God. The biographical authors used specific rhetorical strategies to play on the nationalistic

⁶⁴⁷ Vie de la Mère Marie-Dominique dans le monde Julie Berlamont, Abbessse des Pauvres-Clares-Colettines de Bruges, suivie de ses lettres et de notices sur les couvents qu’elle a fondés et sur la vie de Mère Marie-Bernardine dans le monde Rose Liebaert. (Bruges: Vandernberghe-Denaux 1888) XXVIII.

aspect of Catholic revival; asking the citizens to support what was uniquely Belgian in an attempt to distance themselves from neighboring countries, specifically France who had denied their religious heritage. References to France as an enemy were common: “[...] François de Sales, ce saint qui appartient à la France, quoiqu’il soit né chez une nation ennemie de la nôtre [...]”⁶⁴⁸ as well as references to the Protestant threat to the north: “[...] en chassant les Hollandais de notre patrie [...]” and in doing so “la religion refleurit [...]”⁶⁴⁹ Therefore, there was a nationalistic incentive to restore the presence of the Church because religious faith created unity. Instilling ‘unity’ was an imperative strategy to claiming and keeping independence. Once independence was established, the unified vision was so ingrained with Catholicism that those who wished to disassociate themselves were cutting at the very core of their Belgian existence. Thus, the recatholicization of Belgium was so victorious and extraordinary because it called into question the appurtenance of one’s being to country, to citizenship, to one’s village when hatred for foreign control was at its peak.

The biographical texts became a stage for which the clerical authors applied the restored presence of the Church in society. By legitimizing an influential founder of a religious congregation, the author hoped to attract new recruits. New recruits led to more religious presence. More religious presence led to more Catholic influence. In their successful efforts, Belgian religious women educated generations of Catholics.⁶⁵⁰ The strategy was so effective that by the late 19th century, there was virulent opposition against the dominion of Catholic education, specifically because of its influential results in government.

⁶⁴⁸ ? 7.

⁶⁴⁹ Vie de la Mère Marie-Dominique. Chapter xxvii. Marie-Dominique propagates this Order in Belgium restoring it to its rule of origin. During the Revolution these nuns lived their vocation secretly. She enters in 1825 while still under Dutch control.

⁶⁵⁰ See two articles by Paul Wynants: 1) “Une stratégie catholique de lutte scolaire (fin XIX-début XXe s.): la réadoption anticipée.” Politique, imaginaire et éducation. Textes réunis et présentés par Jean-Pierre Nandrin et Laurence Van Ypersele. Facultés Universitaires Saint Louis Bruxelles, 2000. and 2) “Les religieuses contemplatives en Belgique (1801-1983). De la restauration à la renovation. Les religieuses contemplatives en Belgique (1801-1983)” in: André Neuberg, ed. Filles du Silence. Moniales en Belgique et Luxembourg du Moyen Âge à nos jours. Bastogne-Bruxelles: Musée en Piconrue- Archives générales du royaume, 1998. 59-107.

In restoring/strengthening the existing Catholic faith, through the representation of the nun, Catholic authors used specific rhetorical strategies to form a Belgian identity. Relying upon an approach that was more as a literary analyst than as a historian, this research exposed an evolving representation that shifted in its models, ideals, messages, and motives throughout the course of the 19th century. The discovery of Belgian biographies in religious institutions has been a fruitful endeavor, for they have revealed a Belgian mentality and unlocked some keys as to how Belgians regained their “Catholicism” with such ardor in so little time and displayed how men as well as women rebuffed the atheistic discourses of their generation.

Historical circumstances led to the implementation of Belgian “Vies.” In the past, when Catholic tradition had been threatened during the Reformation, the Counter Reformation agenda sought monastic orders to oppose Protestant reform.⁶⁵¹ Consequently, the Counter Reformation years experienced a return of begging orders and enhanced presence of clergy, especially Jesuits. The 19th century witnesses a similar upheaval with the onslaught of secularization and becomes a melting pot of old and new ideas combining nostalgia with a new type of missionary fervor. Once again, attention was drawn to monastic orders, this time towards the talents and virtues of religious women. The biographies focused on the strongest aspect of Catholic restoration: the conservation of popular piety (rituals, devotions, festivals, etc.) and its relation to national identity.

The reference to *Nun's the Word* symbolizes the overall strategy that clerical authors implemented in their biographical writing in order to advance the nun's authority and reputation as well as his own. Specifically, how the rhetorical strategy of silence gave authority to the nun's words illustrated in the format of the text. The title is a play on words on several levels: First, presenting a text of a substantial amount of autobiographical quotes which persuade by bringing truth, the Word, and yet silencing these words by framing them with biographical comments from the author in order to control the nun's image. Second, the title also brings attention to the paradox of these humble

⁶⁵¹ *Filles du silence. Moniales en Belgique et Luxembourg, du Moyen-Âge à nos jours.* (Bastogne: Musée en Piconrue, 1998) 23.

religious lives in the life of Mère Marie Félicité for example, who in a letter to her novices advises: “Exercez-vous à une vie pauvre, humble et cache [...]”⁶⁵² yet knowingly encourages their very un-silent transmission of their knowledge, as a teaching congregation. And third, how, most importantly, the “Vie” of a nun became word “va, cher petit livre, va parler [...]”⁶⁵³ in the manner that it reinforced clerical authority through the posthumous writing of a nun by a male biographer. In other words, her silence legitimizes his existence as a writer. Referring back to the introductory quote on page 1, it is the author, in his *veiling* attempt (or pretense) of the edification, for example, of Mère Marie-Dominique, that he hopes to retain great glory from a religious woman.

Most importantly, the religious biographies seem to pivot as responses to Enlightenment philosophy regarding religion. Religious biographical authors insert themselves as critical opponents to the separation of church and state; specifically, advocating that religion brought goodness and truth illuminating the mind and healing the body. They defended that God belonged to all humanity, remaining unchanging even among the changing philosophies of men. In other words, the God of the primitive Church was still the same God for 19th century men. Clerical authors also defended against attacks on religious life, finding virtue in defending religious vocations while promoting clerical necessity in the transmission of faith and the administering of Church sacraments.

⁶⁵² R. P. Alexandre Pruvost de la Compagnie de Jésus. Vie de la R.M. (Révérende Mère) Marie-Félicité de Saint Joseph (Jeanne-Marguerite Bouhon) première supérieure des soeurs de Saint Joseph au Beauregard à Liège. (Deuxième Edition. Tournai: Casterman, 1871) 119.

⁶⁵³ Abbé Th. Rayée. Vie de Sainte Marie de Nivelles dites d'Oignies. (Nivelles: Ch. Guignarde, s.d) vi-vii.

II. BIOGRAPHICAL LITERATURE, BIOGRAPHICAL HISTORIES, OR HAGIOGRAPHIES?

In what genre does one classify the “Vies” of nuns? Due to its lack of inclusion in anthologies of literature, literary critics categorize these texts as “hagiographies” simply because the essence is the edification of one’s saintly virtues placed within the canon of canonized saints of the Catholic Church. Additionally, historians are skeptical to include them in historical anthologies because they question the veracity of sources in the biographical project.⁶⁵⁴ What if the “Vies” include hagiographical, literary and historical elements? Should they still be classified as hagiographies, even if the elements of edification are present, but the nun is not yet canonized, like Mère Marie-Félicité? (1802-1865; Soeurs de Saint Joseph in Liège) How does one classify those “Vies” of canonized saints, like Sainte Julienne, republished and reedited when Belgian history establishes the core of the text, with added elements of romantic writing and responses to Enlightenment?

The answer to this question was aided by Lucie Robert’s research⁶⁵⁵ on the “Vies” of religious women in Québec in the 19th century. She defines “Vies” by using Marc Fumaroli’s⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁵⁴ Lucie Robert. “Sa Vie n’est pas son Oeuvre. Figures Féminines dans les vies Québécoises.” Recherches sociographiques. (XLIV, 3, 2003: 433-453) 446.

⁶⁵⁵ Lucie Robert. 1. “Sa Vie n’est pas son Oeuvre. Figures Féminines dans les vies Québécoises.” Recherches sociographiques. (XLIV, 3, 2003: 433-453); 2. “Les vies, éloges et biographies.” La vie littéraire au Québec. Un peuple sans histoire ni littérature. Sous la direction de Maurice Lemire et Denis Saint-Jacques. V. 3 (Sainte-Foy: Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 1996. 197-206); 3. “Sois fidèle à la Laurentie.” La vie littéraire au Québec. Un peuple sans histoire ni littérature. Sous la direction de Maurice Lemire et Denis Saint-Jacques. V. v (Sainte-Foy: Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 2005. 277-284); 4. “Je me souviens.” La vie littéraire au Québec. Un peuple sans histoire ni littérature. Sous la direction de Maurice Lemire et Denis Saint-Jacques. V. iv (Sainte-Foy: Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 1999. 254-260); 5. “À la recherche de << l’église des premiers temps >>: formes médiévales, classiques, et romantiques dans les <<Vies>> au Québec au milieu du XIXe siècle.” Entre la Lumière et les Ténèbres: Aspects du Moyen Age et de la Renaissance dans la culture des XIXe et XXe siècles. (Edités par Brenda Dunn-Lardeau. Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 1999).

⁶⁵⁶ Marc Fumaroli. “Des *Vies* à la biographie: le crépuscule du Parnasse.” Diogène (n. 139, juillet-sept. 1987) 24.

definition in order to distinguish these works from the modern genre of “biography” which span from Antiquity to the present time:⁶⁵⁷

“Forme narrative, plus proche du roman que de l’historiographie, la “Vie” érige un monument bien plus qu’elle ne présente un document informatif ou explicatif. Elle opère donc dans une perspective d’ensemble (qui interdit toute réduction à un <<episode>>) et d’un point de vue posthume puisque seule la mort peut fixer cette logique de manière définitive.”⁶⁵⁸

My quest for a definition begins by using and *adding to* this reference. I will argue how the “Vies,” derived from a posthumous point of view represents a collective vision from the edification of an individual, not centered on one historical event, *and* anchored in forming a national identity through religious unity. Much in the same manner that Robert concluded for the “Vies” Québécoises, the 19th century Belgian religious biographies are also a hybrid form in which they are histories in their methodology; literary in their diffusion and their response to political, religious, philosophical, social debates; and hagiographical in their resemblance with former hagiographical writing.

Robert observed that other forms of writing such as travel accounts, pamphlets, and public letters that situated themselves between literature and political engagement, were given much attention to their importance in the development of enlightenment philosophy, specifically in the resistance against ultramontane thought. Yet, absent from all the great summaries of history and literature, no literary or historical status was accorded to the opposing view. Conservative may they be, she begs the consideration of the “Vies” to be decorated with the same prestige.⁶⁵⁹ Some of Robert’s conclusions on Québécois “Vies” cited in footnoted references, has been applied to my research on Belgian religious biographies.

⁶⁵⁷ Robert “Les vies, éloges et biographies...” 209.

⁶⁵⁸ Robert “À la recherche de ...” 210.

⁶⁵⁹ Robert “Sa Vie n’est pas son Oeuvre...” 434.

Robert explains why the Québécois “Vies” were not considered as literary works.⁶⁶⁰ Initially ordered by a religious community, the premier editions in essence negate the author’s “projet d’écriture.” In fact, some Belgian prefaces concede to this mandate while others stipulate to a simple reorganization of documents in order to provide a summary. Robert argues that the author in this case only functions as a mediator and acts as a privileged witness since he is not the one who attests to the sainthood of his subjects but rather those who order the publication of her reputation. Furthermore, the lack of inclusion in the biographical anthologies rests on the fact that the biographical genre is not well defined. Boundaries are blurry between fiction, truth, the summary of one’s life and literary criticism and the genre equally borrows from historiography as well as hagiography.⁶⁶¹

A. Arguments for “Vies” as literature

While it is true that some Belgian religious biographies were privately requested, subsequent editions however, actually reveal a “projet d’écriture” by their modality of publication, diffusion, and reception.⁶⁶² Prefaces, in focusing on the scientific process of documentation, dismiss any hagiographical resemblance to legend, corresponding more to a historical endeavor. Furthermore, prefaces frequently dismissed the author’s ego as an initiative to the work, a criticism made by literary analysts.⁶⁶³ Additionally, citations to literary works and classical authors were not uncommon in order to edify the writing project of the author.

⁶⁶⁰ Robert “Sa Vie n’est pas son Oeuvre...” 445.

⁶⁶¹ Robert “Sois fidèle à la Laurentie...” 277.

⁶⁶² Robert “Les vies, éloges et biographies...” 200.

⁶⁶³ Robert “Les vies, éloges et biographies...” 201.

1. Biographical literature?

The “Vies” of canonized saints and the “Vies” of non-canonized ‘saintly’ women reflect a new development in titles, changing from *Vie de* to *Histoire de*, revealing a response to the criticism of credible sources of hagiographical writing. “Vies” connotes an attention to a story of virtues while “Histoire” typifies a story of success or accomplishments.⁶⁶⁴ For both types of texts, however, the authors sought to distinguish their writing from the hagiographic legends. This was accomplished by emphasizing on locations (many designated in the titles) where the saint or nun had influence in order to valorize Church foundations in a historical methodological process.⁶⁶⁵ The resurrection of these place names as signs of foundations, represented establishments of success. The titles emphasize on place names rather than on historical events in order to give the “Vie” an extemporal aspect.⁶⁶⁶ In other words, there is never “une soeur de la Révolution” but rather “une soeur de Namur.” The subject and lieu still remain the center of the project while both gain value from the occurring historical event.⁶⁶⁷

Let us take for example, the different agendas decoded in the title pages of the editions of the “Vie de Julie Billiart.” The first edition was written at the request of the community of the Soeurs de Notre Dame in order to trace back the historical foundation of the community. Establishing the roots of a foundation in a historical manner provides an anchor for the individuals of the religious community, disabling threats of disintegration: 1. Vie de la Révérende Mère Julie, fondatrice et première supérieure des Soeurs de Notre Dame comprenant l’histoire des premières années de cette Congrégation. Tournai: Casterman, 1862. The second edition, with the historical premise absent, was written for the children of the school. Reserved for private circulation, the literary project is

⁶⁶⁴ Robert “À la recherche de...” 223.

⁶⁶⁵ Robert “Sa Vie n’est pas son Oeuvre...” 436.

⁶⁶⁶ Robert “Je me souviens...” 258.

⁶⁶⁷ Robert “Sois fidèle à la Laurentie...” 282.

absent and thus there is no signature on the part of the author: 2. Vie de la Révérende Mère Julie, fondatrice et première supérieure des Soeurs de Notre Dame de Namur. Tournai: Casterman, 1866. The literary project begins with the third edition which included the author's name as well as a commercial publisher. The title also designates a change in the appellation of the congregation adding the word "Institut" in order to designate and advertise a successful religious community: 3. Baesten, V. S.J.. Vie de la Mère Julie Billiart, fondatrice de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur 1751-1816. Bruxelles; Balon: Namur: J. Albanel, 1879. Having established himself as a writer in the previous edition, his subsequent edition glorifies his Order: 4. Vie de la Mère Julie Billiart. Fondatrice de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur. 1751-1816. Par un Père de la Compagnie de Jésus. Deuxième Edition. Casterman: Bruxelles, Tournai, 1881. The next edition is represented by a different writer and the appearance of the "biographical" nature of the text displays a new literary intention from past publications: 5. Charlier, B. Notice biographique sur la servante de Dieu Julie Billiart, fondatrice de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame de Namur. Wesmael-Charlier: Namur, 1883. Next, Father Clair's edition omits all references to "vie" or "biographique" and just designates Julie as "La" displaying a collective association with a well known person: 6. Clair, P. Ch.. La Vénérable Mère Julie Billiart, fondatrice et première supérieure générale de l'Institut des Soeurs de Notre-Dame à Namur. Arthur Savaète: Paris, 1895. And finally, a 20th century edition commercially diffused, written by the Sisters of Notre-Dame regarding Julie Billiart's co-founder. The word "Histoire" correlates with a serious endeavor taking attention away from a "vie" that may have given the impression of a simple summary of one's virtues: 7. Histoire de la Vénérée Mère Saint Joseph née Marie-Louise-Françoise Blin de Bourdon Demoiselle de Gézaincourt 1756-1838. Cofondatrice et deuxième supérieure générale de l'institut des Soeurs de Notre Dame de Namur. L.Téchy-Tomme: Marchienne-au-Pont, 1920. The modalities of publication and reception "empruntera donc la voie de la critique littéraire."⁶⁶⁸ Therefore, due to the nature of the literary project, it is plausible to argue that these texts are no longer hagiographies.⁶⁶⁹

⁶⁶⁸ Robert "Sa Vie n'est pas son Oeuvre..." 444.

2. Hagiographies?

However, the argument for “Vies” to contain elements of biographical literature does not negate that these texts borrow from the hagiographic tradition. The 19th century “Vies” indeed included hagiographical elements in the edification of the nun’s virtues and adopted similar structures of the established canon.⁶⁷⁰ The adopted structure was such that saintly qualities were exhibited in childhood with an early vocation to religious life. Later, struggles by providential will were encountered in order to accomplish a foundation. Then, a long description of her death. Lastly, ending with testimonies from the community of her reputation: “[...] dont la nature inscrit le personnage dans une sorte de durée anhistorique” bordering on a “mythe” framework.⁶⁷¹ Hoping for institutional recognition, the reputation served as a step toward the beatification process.

Unlike the Québécois “Vies,” the Belgian “Vies” differed in that sainthood or “saintly” qualities were not qualities already in place at birth but rather a developed human quality.⁶⁷² Additionally, sainthood reflected in Canadian biographies as an innate form, had to be recognized which explained why vocations occurred later in life. If vocations were retarded in Belgian “Vies” it was rather due to political circumstances. Belgian sainthood was not innate, rather it developed from virtuous actions and was attainable by all humankind.

Furthermore, the Belgian “Vies” are hagiographical in the sense that they contain elements of ultramontane rhetoric. The 19th was “marquée par une spiritualité ultramontaine abondante, est nourrie par des fantasmes de reconquête de la société, on rêve cette société reconquise sur le modèle idéalisé de la Chrétienté médiévale, une société que l’on croit unanime dans la foi, où les grandes

⁶⁶⁹ Robert “Sa Vie n’est pas son Oeuvre...” 437.

⁶⁷⁰ Robert “Sa Vie n’est pas son Oeuvre...” 439.

⁶⁷¹ Robert “Sa Vie n’est pas son Oeuvre...” 439.

⁶⁷² Robert “Sa Vie n’est pas son Oeuvre...” 440.

questions se règlent en accord avec la papauté.”⁶⁷³ With this in mind, the biographies will represent a Church that has been sieged, convents as fortresses, while detailing romantic sentimental piety and moral rigorousness with a victimal ideology of suffering.⁶⁷⁴ The tactic will prove beneficial in emboldening the authority of clergy and religious women as types of defending knights. Prefaces will mount these chains of authority by including approval letters from diocesan bishops as well as written submissions to the Magisterium of the Church: “C’est dans cette structure que se repère spécifiquement le caractère ultramontain de l’histoire providentielle: l’action humaine ne trouve son sens qu’au regard de Dieu, mais à travers la nécessaire médiation de la hiérarchie ecclésiastique.”⁶⁷⁵ Through the representation of a religious woman and the support of providential historical discourse, ecclesiastic hierarchy is redefined.

3. Belgian literature?

“Ah! C’est que j’ai quitté pour la paix du désert
La foule où toute paix se corrompt et se perd
C’est que j’ai trouvé dans ce vallon champêtre
Les soupirs de ma source et l’ombre de mon hêtre”

Lamartine⁶⁷⁶

Lamartine’s quote debuting one of the chapters entitled “Retinne,” the birthplace of Sainte Julienne, in the Vie de Sainte Julienne emphasizes the alliance of literature, religion and national identity. If literature serves as the crowning of all national edifices⁶⁷⁷ then the “Vies” can also be

⁶⁷³ Filles du silence 28.

⁶⁷⁴ Jean Pirotte. “Filles du silence,” Filles du silence. Moniales en Belgique et Luxembourg, du Moyen-Âge à nos jours. (Bastogne: Musée en Piconrue, 1998) 29.

⁶⁷⁵ Robert “Sa Vie n’est pas son Oeuvre...” 444.

⁶⁷⁶ Arsène Noûe. Vie de Sainte Julienne de Retinne. Publication faite au profit de l’Eglise qu’on élève en l’honneur de cette sainte au lieu de sa naissance. (Liège: H. Dessain, 1846) 15.

⁶⁷⁷ Jean-Louis Ormières. Politique et religion en France. (Bruxelles: Éditions Complexe, 2002) 16.

classified in the literary genre. In the example above, the identity of one's belonging depicted in Lamartine's "vallon champêtre" glorifies the town of Retinne as a place of serenity. Retinne's identity is associated to a great Belgian saint who brought international reputation to Retinne (as well as Liège and Belgium) by incorporating a significant feast day for the Catholic Church. This chapter specifically edifies the people who in celebration of Saint Julienne's jubilee, financially supported the construction of the 1844 church of Retinne. Influenced by the spirit of romanticism, the author interrelates this church foundation with the cultural and religious roots of a nation:⁶⁷⁸ "La littérature romantique est la seule qui soit susceptible encore d'être perfectionnée, parce qu'ayant ses racines dans notre propre sol, elle est la seule qui puisse croître et se vivifier de nouveau; elle exprime notre religion; elle rappelle notre histoire: son origine est ancienne, mais non antique."⁶⁷⁹

The "Vies" dramatize the relationship between citizenship and Catholic faith. Conjoining religious loyalty and patriotic rhetoric resulted in a united mass politic creating a specific Belgian identity that moved the people to resist ideas contrary to their faith. Therefore, the authors impressed that religious faith was a criteria for national identity. Understanding that the preservation of the Church could only be guaranteed by the government, authors illustrated alliances between the Church and the crown. For example in the Vie de Marie d'Oignies,⁶⁸⁰ Rayée describes in detail the participation of the King of Belgium, Leopold I (1831-1865) in a processional ritual for the Saint. These types of inclusions portray a leader who shares the same values and in turn the author hopes for a country in which the people live in religious harmony.⁶⁸¹ Furthermore, the depictions of religious rituals situate these texts as histories since they represent actions of popular piety which

⁶⁷⁸ Robert "À la recherche de..." 213.

⁶⁷⁹ Madame de Stael. De l'Allemagne II. Chronologie et préface par Simone Balayé. (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1968) 27.

⁶⁸⁰ Abbé Th Rayée. Vie de Sainte Marie de Nivelles dites d'Oignies. Nivelles: Ch. Guignarde, s.d.

⁶⁸¹ René Rémond. Religion et Société en Europe: La sécularisation aux 19e et 20e siècle 1789-2000. (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 2001) 47.

regulated daily life-- from the preparation of feast days, to community reunions for devotions--- which all served to anchor villagers to their “patrie.”

The independence of Belgium provided an ultimate opportunity for the Catholic Church in Belgium to cement its nationhood with Catholic roots. Rich rhetoric for the unity of faith ensued a “collective conscience”⁶⁸² and became a priority goal for the Church in Belgium: “L’écriture biographique vise ainsi la réunion d’une société de gens choisis selon les principes de la démocratie moderne, non plus pour leur caractère exemplaire, mais pour leur caractère representative.”⁶⁸³ The religious “heroine” became the symbol for the nation. This heroine⁶⁸⁴ will “batir un édifice”⁶⁸⁵ representing the values of society and contributing in the development of ‘nationhood’ in their contribution or representation of the collective conscious and struggle.⁶⁸⁶ To build this edifice for the Church, the authors have to rely on hagiographic rhetoric.⁶⁸⁷ Belgian identity procured by retaining the nations’ religious values did not simply rest in the resistance to foreign control, but was also contingent in the resistance against human nature. Essential to the symbolism of the heroine is the manner in which she transmits the preservation of faith as well as initiate the preservation of the Belgian nation. Since the religious biographies reflect women who were awaiting canonization resulting from their reputation of piety, they in essence reflect popular piety. In other words, the “Vies” promote the edification of a people rather than for religious glorification.⁶⁸⁸

Almost 100 years after its independence, the attachment to country continues to resonate in Belgian religious biographies:

⁶⁸² Robert “Les vies, éloges et biographies...” 202.

⁶⁸³ Robert “Les vies, éloges et biographies...” 203.

⁶⁸⁴ The term “héroïne”, explained in Chapter 3, is the new nominative term for religious women in the “Vies.”

⁶⁸⁵ This phrase was repeatedly enounced in the biography of Julie Billiart for example.

⁶⁸⁶ Robert “Les vies, éloges et biographies...” 197.

⁶⁸⁷ Robert “Je me souviens...” 254.

⁶⁸⁸ Robert “À la recherche de...” 212.

“Le principal titre qu’on a découvert en nous [...] est tout simplement que nous sommes liégeois. On a pensé que c’était là une prédisposition à comprendre et à exprimer une personnalité liégeoise et une oeuvre qui, née à Liège, a débordé de Liège sur le monde, mais par beaucoup de ses aspects, est demeurée si liégeoise.”⁶⁸⁹

The textual reference of a local pride is reinforced by the photograph of the convent below to provide visual memory to the reader as well as proof of a success story; the story of one congregation:



Figure 6.1 Convent house of the Filles de la Croix in Liège in Louis S.J. Humblet’s La Vénérable Mère Marie-Thérèse Haze, Fondatrice de la Congrégation des Filles de la Croix de Liège. H. Dessain: Liège, 1924.

In doing so, Humblet describes the construction of the 1862 chapel modeled after the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris interiorly decorated by local liégeois Jules Helbig et Van Marck. This reference only serves to promulgate the convent as a historical treasure for the locals—a plan that hopes to preserve its existence.

⁶⁸⁹ Humblet vii.

4. Concluding remarks

The process of establishing Belgian nationhood through Catholic identity in the “Vies” encompassed hagiographical elements to build the virtues of a heroine, scientific methodology to present a serious historical endeavor, and literature in its response to political and philosophical discourse of the 19th century. The authors implement romantic themes of nature (and human nature) in order to resist the anti-clerical discourse and the secularization discourse. As testaments of Belgian faith, the “Vies” in recounting the foundation of a religious community gave society an example of societal organization combined with a precise hierarchy. Writers borrow from Bossuet’s Discours sur l’histoire universelle that history is not without the act of providence in which God and Church are the law and the community acts as mediator between God’s law and the individual.⁶⁹⁰ The “Vies” also represent civil histories in which the saints/nuns are presented as the moral and social civilizers all in an effort to progress humanitarian and political projects that have moral implications: “Nous ne touchons point à la question religieuse: nous ne nous sommes proposé qu’un seul objet, -- la démonstration d’une action morale, féconde [...] c’est une page de notre HISTOIRE CIVILE que nous avons voulu écrire” (author’s emphasis).⁶⁹¹ In essence, these religious biographies display the Catholic Church’s efforts to progress its evangelization by inserting themselves in discourses of history, literature, sociology, and religion all in their desire to help humankind.

Perhaps the Revolution itself worked in the favor of Catholic recatholicization. The rhetoric of faith sought to eliminate class distinctions, sympathized with the poor while maintaining the equality of all the faithful before God. There was however, no room for the ‘cafeteria Catholic’ as there was an absolute refusal to concede to those who did not adhere to all of the Church’s positions, making clear distinctions between the pious and the impious. Most of all, the Belgian people seemed to be portrayed with resiliency:

⁶⁹⁰ Robert “À la recherche de...” 214.

⁶⁹¹ Félix Bogaerts. Histoire du culte des Saints en Belgique, envisagé comme élément social. (Anvers: Ed. Buschmann 1848) ix.

“[...] les invasions peuvent affluer; les révolutions se déchaîner; au lendemain de la catastrophe, ils sortent de leur maison, ou si elle est en ruine, de l’abri où ils se sont réfugiés; ils reprennent leurs outils, se remettent au travail, réparent leur toit, labourent leur champ. La vie continue et tout a repris son apparence habituelle, avant que les pouvoirs publics aient eu le temps d’étudier le problème de la restauration des régions dévastées.”⁶⁹²

⁶⁹² Chanoine Jacques Leclercq. Saints de Belgique. (Editions de la Cité Chrétienne: Bruxelles, 1942) 185-186.

III. FEMINIZATION?

A. Women's initiatives: Feminization of piety

Are the religious biographies of nuns' representative of a 19th century feminized Christian culture? The feminization of Christian culture appeared to come about by the increased growth of female religious orders, increased promotion of feminine virtues, more feminized devotions to Belgian feminine saints, and the writing of such, symbolized in the identity of the nun in religious biographies. It was not until the 1980's and 1990's that the feminization thesis was applied to European Christian narratives.

Patrick Pasture's article "Dieu changea de sexe? Gendering the History of Christianity in the 19th and 20th century"⁶⁹³ examines the original formulations of the feminization thesis that reflect a particular sentimentalism⁶⁹⁴ in Christian narratives.⁶⁹⁵ Pasture compiles a meaning for feminization from several scholars, Bernard Schneider, Thomas Buerman, and Tine Van Osselaer⁶⁹⁶ in the following points: 1. "A feminization of the faithful" reflected in the increased participation of women in religious activities such as devotional rituals and pilgrimages; 2. More feminization in religious life vis à vis societal charitable work; 3. "A change in piety" reflected in a more intimate spirituality "characterized by emotion and sentimentality"; and 4. "The feminization of Christian culture" reflected in the discourses of examples of piety.

⁶⁹³ Patrick Pasture "Dieu changea de sexe? Gendering the History of Christianity in the 19th and 20th century." Workshop paper "Dieu changea de sexe?, Gent, 4-5 january 2008. A portion of this dissertation was presented at this conference.

⁶⁹⁴ Pasture uses Ann Douglass as a source to this meaning—"[Sentimentalism] asserts that the values a society's activity denies are precisely the ones it cherishes; it attempts to deal with the phenomenon of cultural bifurcation by the manipulation of nostalgia. Sentimentalism provides a way to protest a power to which one has already in part capitulated." 1

⁶⁹⁵ Pasture, 1 In this quote he refers to Ann Douglass, The Feminization of American Culture. (New York: Knopf, 1977) 6;12.

⁶⁹⁶ Pasture 2.

The Enlightenment and the French Revolution provoked “the rise of sometimes militant atheism and anticlericalism as a sociopolitical force.”⁶⁹⁷ As a reaction against the secularization and dechristianization occupying many agendas of the beginning at the 19th century, emphasis was placed on the sentimental aspect of man’s relationship with God. Pasture presents the argument that feminization arose from an alternative to secularization narratives in scientific discourses citing to thinkers believing that religion was irreconcilable with modernity.⁶⁹⁸ Perhaps his most convincing argument is his presentation of Callum Brown’s theory that feminization was not only “an expression or consequence of secularization, but also a correction to it.”⁶⁹⁹ Pasture defines secularization primarily as an interpretation against the Christian institutional perspective—a separation of church and state in 19th century.⁷⁰⁰ He makes a strong argument in that the labeling perhaps came from an anticlerical point of view which viewed the Catholic Church as belonging to the private sphere: “In the nineteenth and twentieth century, European anticlericalism labeled religion and particularly the Roman Catholic Church as belonging to the private sphere, as an extension of the home and thus feminine [...].”⁷⁰¹ In the separation of Church from State, along with the lengthy suppression of religious men and women, religious authority and involvement were no longer dignified in the public sphere. Rather it became a private concern and as a result, clerical authority diminished substantially as a political power. Consequently, this loss provoked narratives which symbolized this relegation to a privatized sphere. However, this diminutive status was then used as an advantageous strategy by clerical authors against the opposition. In other words, the feminized discourse, not taken seriously by the “secularized” in power, used this type of discourse to rally the faithful into a political force, as

⁶⁹⁷ Pasture 4.

⁶⁹⁸ Pasture 6-7.

⁶⁹⁹ Pasture 7. See Callum Brown. The Dearth of Christian Britain. Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000. (Routledge, London, 2001) 59.

⁷⁰⁰ Pasture 5 or 9.

⁷⁰⁰ Pasture 8.

⁷⁰¹ Pasture 9.

testified in the religious biographies. This movement began to take shape before Belgium's 1830 independence, evident by the manuscripts of letters written by religious women and included in the religious biographies. Pasture admits that feminization, the movement of a more sentimental Catholicism, had a space of its own, a more intermediate space between the public and the private. Influential in both spheres, he gives the example that pulpits and sermons became political while the home was a nuclear version of the public moral and social order of society.⁷⁰² He points out however that many sources pointing toward the feminization of Christian culture were produced by men,⁷⁰³ hence representing most of the biographical writing. He questions whether this reflected in part, male anxieties of a loss of faith in society and nostalgia for a patriarchal past.⁷⁰⁴ The loss of faith was combated with the female voice of nuns who emulated in virtue the Virgin Mary. They temporarily replaced clergy on certain pronouncements for the Catholic Church. Nuns, similar to the focus of the Virgin Mary, "may have suited patriarchal Catholic theology to see her [Mary] as symbolizing the model of feminine qualities of chastity, humility, and maternal forgiveness."⁷⁰⁵ Was *feminization* as Pasture suggests, empowering?⁷⁰⁶—and was this replacement, meant to be empowering by clergy? Women offered a resistance against the impiety of men as a result of the dechristianisation of French revolution by returning to the convents. Their religious involvement was perhaps also a way to resist the male interpretation and segregation of women from societal governance which allowed women responsibility over missionary work while continuing to be moral examples for society. But with this empowerment, Pasture comments that the elevated authority could only come with a price of sexual disempowerment in a century which fully promulgated sexual morality.⁷⁰⁷

⁷⁰² Pasture 9.

⁷⁰³ Pasture 6.

⁷⁰⁴ Pasture 6

⁷⁰⁵ Rosemary Muir Wright. Sacred Distance: Representing the Virgin. (New York: Manchester UP, 2006) 147-148.

⁷⁰⁶ Pasture 10.

⁷⁰⁷ Pasture 11.

Although I do agree that there was a feminization of piety during the 19th century, I am not convinced that it resulted from a patriarchal ideology intent on presenting “an ideal” for women to follow in order to justify patriarchal authority. Rather, I argue that perhaps the feminization of piety may have *originated from women*, and later men propagated the notion on a grander scale. If the biographies serve as testimonials with the inclusion of verbatim letters, then the initiative of women founders of congregations must bear some weight. The archives alone of many congregations testify to the immense initiative of women religious in the founding convents; all documented by nun historians. These nun historians, in a need to preserve the history of their Order or Congregation, not only provided detailed accounts of the activities of convent life, including the entries and deaths of all religious women, financial accounts, dowries accumulated, but they also provided historical reflection on the political events of the time. In addition, spiritual advice by founders of religious establishments was a main reference to the formation of the nun educators. Most often these historians were the first to write an unpublished version of the “Vie” of their founder. In fact, many clerical authors cite to the enormous aid of these women’s writing to their editions; contributing immensely to a certain ‘model of saint’ as well as “personalized conceptions of the evolution of history.”⁷⁰⁸ The biographers assert the nuns’ inner vision to begin religious foundations who most often sought by themselves the materials and the people needed to accomplish their endeavor. Why? It is evident that the feeling is unanimous amongst the epistolary writing of these women whom estimated that there was a loss of morals and that moral education would overcome this loss. Additionally, the culmination of factors such as legalized divorce brought upon under Napoleon’s reign, the death of many breadwinners during the Revolution, and the lack of support from suppressed clergy opened a threatening door to the existence and caretaking of women. Religious women quickly understood that women were the primary transmitters of values and faith that held

⁷⁰⁸ M.-E. Henneau, “Femmes en quête de rôles dans l’histoire du salut: biographies de religieuses et religieuses biographes,” in Sylvie Steinberg et Jean-Claude Arnould eds., Les femmes et l’écriture de l’histoire, 1400-1800, (Rouen: Publications des universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2008) 220.

families in check; thus society in check. With the decreasing number of male participation in church activities, women who depended financially on men, needed to address the situation through religious education and made it their duty to advocate its propaganda. By beginning their agenda on educating young girls, they perpetuated in them their duty to be models for their future family, whether it be in the home for their sons or in a convent as examples for clergy!



Figure 6.2 Soeur de la Charité with school children in Imagiers de paradis: Images de piété populaire du XV^{ème} au XX^{ème} siècle. Musée en Piconrue – Bastogne: Edité par le Crédit Communal, 1990. (p. 8)

B. The convent: a sheltered space for the formation of feminine consciousness.

Do the religious biographies develop a *feminist consciousness*? According to Gerda Lerner, who coined the term in her work The creation of feminist consciousness: from the Middle Ages to eighteen-seventy, the following criteria must be met: women are economically independent and

unmarried; they do not bear children; they have equal access to education; and women's spaces are created. The term does not apply if the women are defined under traditional maternal and nurturing functions and if the readers of the text are women.⁷⁰⁹ Once she establishes the criteria, she then defines feminist consciousness as an awareness of belonging to a subordinate group that suffered wrongs; recognition that subordination is not natural but determined socially; a development of a sisterhood; a creation of independent strategies for changing conditions and a development of alternate visions for the future.⁷¹⁰

Lerner does not address whether the author had to be female. I therefore would argue that these biographies do indeed develop a feminine consciousness. For example, the biography of Julie Billiart fits into all the criteria and definitions. Julie Billiart developed a congregation (sisterhood) of celibate women that survived financially on their teaching and placement of young girls in their boarding school. She and her sisters suffered wrongs as a religious group during the Revolution. She challenged certain authority to whom she was submitted to and developed strategies of change to immerse and propagate their group. Additionally, the text was intended for both Catholic men and women. But Lerner points out only a small minority of upper class women could form these networks but all changes to be made in society had to go through authority of men in power.⁷¹¹

The biographies testify to a collaborative effort of female religious and male clergy in order to strengthen the Catholic faith and transform society. The biographical writing was collaborative on several levels: collaborative sanctification by images and textual references, collaborative between the sisters of a congregation who wanted to promote their founder and the clergy who accepted the responsibility of publishing, collaborative in the lending of documents and images, sketches and or

⁷⁰⁹ Gerda Lerner. The creation of feminist consciousness: from the Middle Ages to eighteen-seventy. (New York: Oxford U.P., 1993) 232.

⁷¹⁰ Lerner 274.

⁷¹¹ Lerner 276.

photographs by the sisters to the clergy; all in effort to protect and promote the ‘veil.’ Images were strong persuasive means to sway public opinions.

While aspects of this dissertation focused on the feminization of religious women (i.e. mission and spirituality) in Belgium during the 19th century, it could perhaps have also affected the clergy. In fact, anti-clerical rhetoric focused on their effeminate transformation (i.e. the long black smock).⁷¹² The biographies portray lucid details of authors’ emotional outcries for God’s love all the while devoted to the Virgin Mary. Moreover the accumulating strength of clergy did not arise from the dominant ideals of Christian masculinity but instead from “obedience, sacrifice, an inclination to show emotion, charity, and restraint.”⁷¹³ However, I question whether the anti-clerical rhetoric of effeminacy was not due to a threatened reaction against the strong developing alliance of female presence and male power? Was their virility in fact attacked because of the enhanced presence of religious women in the public sphere?

⁷¹² Pasture 13.

⁷¹³ Pasture 14.

IV. FUTURE RESEARCH

This research has led me to conclude that these texts are much more significant than what has been myopically believed. The condition in which these biographies are stored serves as evidence of this belief. Many have been thrown away and those that are left are either sold at book auctions for pennies on the dollar or stacked in basements or attics of religious institutions in conditions that will not safeguard their longevity.

This dissertation serves as a starting point for future research on these influential religious women. This research could be augmented by a historical approach in the supplementation of statistical data. For example, calculations including the numbers of women consecrated to religious life and the number of books devoted to this life in order to ascertain which congregations were the most successful. This may then help to determine specific factors that aided their success. Additional research could be done on the promotions of devotions separated into particular geographic areas in Belgium which could reveal more insight as to Catholic mentalities of farming towns versus cities. Additionally, more research on nun imagery, such as statuettes for example, could enlighten additional details in the evolution of representation. On a literary note, a detailed comparison of trials depicted in the biographies among all religious who traversed the revolutionary period in order to determine what unifying characteristics linked them together? Clerical Support? Devotions? Trauma? Life experience? Inquiry on the comparison of writing between female authors (pseudonyms) and male authors may reveal further support that recatholicization may have originally been instigated by women? Furthermore, research concerning the Flemish and Walloonian perspective in religious biographical writing could elucidate on the different strategies and agendas utilized in order to determine if strategies evolve into antagonistic perspectives? Additional research on the diffusion of the religious biographies may provide more detail as to what other texts were promoted by the same author—other philosophical or political texts? It would also be quite interesting to compare the archival notes of nun historians who prepared the first manuscript

versions of the biographies and later used as main sources for the male published versions in order to compare what aspects of the creation of a saintly persona were capitalized or even dismissed from the initial manuscripts. And finally, it may be interesting to compare the biographical “notice” of clerical figures with those of religious woman to display the differences between the “public” man and the very public woman.

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