

The Girls Who Spoke for God:  
Vocation and Discernment in Seventeenth-Century France

by

Meghan Kort  
B.A., University of Northern BC, 2014

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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Dr. Sara Beam, Department of History  
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Dr. Jill Walshaw, Department of History  
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## Abstract

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During the seventeenth century, the Catholic Reformation sparked unprecedented growth in girls' educational opportunities with the opening of over five hundred new teaching convents. Yet, the active role girls played in these institutional and social changes is often overlooked. Even though girls' autobiographical writing from the seventeenth century is rare, prescriptive, educational, and biographical sources from convent schools are rich in details about girls' lives and vocational discernment. Upon leaving school, girls were encouraged to take either marriage or religious vows. Since orthodox Catholicism taught that salvation could only be received if one's life reflected God's will this decision was weighty. In fact, reformed convents tested their entrants to ensure that their vocations were freely chosen and not forced. Seventeenth-century girls' educational theorists shared this concern, and while they debated the details of curriculum, they agreed that only girls had the authority to articulate their own God-given vocations. At convent schools, girls encountered both models of female domesticity and women who were dedicated to religious life. The repeated affirmation of both of these paths created an atmosphere in which girls could legitimately choose either. Furthermore, the memories of vocational discernment recorded in nuns' lives offer evidence of plausible ways in which girls proved their callings to their communities. Focusing on religious vocation reveals how girls in the seventeenth century actively articulated their ideas, impacted their societies, and challenged adult authority.

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## Introduction

In 1703, Madame de Maintenon, the founder of Saint-Cyr girls' school, issued a pertinent warning to the graduating class. She cautioned them, "better for you to be a mediocre Christian lay woman than to be a bad nun."<sup>1</sup> Maintenon was concerned that her students would choose to become nuns without thorough consideration of God's calling, thus endangering their souls' salvation.<sup>2</sup> Her fears were echoed in the words of one of the students in the class, Marie Liée de Girard Merbouton who reminded Maintenon, "we've heard so often that if you're not in the state of life to which God has called you, it's almost certain that you can't be saved."<sup>3</sup> Merbouton and her classmates, all noble girls between the ages of seventeen and twenty, had spent at least ten years away from their families receiving an education in domesticity and housekeeping. Each girl knew that upon graduating she must either "get married or become a nun."<sup>4</sup> Singlehood was highly discouraged; Maintenon described it as "one of the most dangerous states," and the greatest risk to a good reputation.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the girls faced a choice between wedding vows or religious vows, knowing that an incorrect decision had eternal consequences. Merbouton's comments and Maintenon's advice highlight the centrality of vocational discernment in the lives of noble girls in early modern France.

The mentorship discussion between Madame de Maintenon and her students in 1703 points towards larger changes to girls' education occurring over the preceding century. Before the seventeenth century, girls were taught in a variety of spaces including

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<sup>1</sup> François d'Aubigné de Maintenon, "Addresses to Students," in *Madame de Maintenon: Dialogues and Addresses*, trans. John Conley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 102.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

at their family residences, at convents, and at the homes of employers or future in-laws.<sup>6</sup> During the seventeenth century, educational opportunities for noble girls became more institutionalized with the establishment of new religious communities dedicated to teaching. These new religious schools were products and agents of the Catholic Reformation, an ongoing movement from within the church aimed at improving ecclesiastical institutions, revitalizing spiritual practices, and regaining Protestant converts.<sup>7</sup> While the earliest schools focused their efforts on boys and men, church reformers rapidly realized that girls and women's education was equally, if not more, important since mothers were responsible for their childrens' religious education.<sup>8</sup> In response, several religious orders including, the Filles de Notre-Dame, the Ursulines, the Congrégation de Notre-Dame, and the Visitandines incorporated teaching into their nuns' regular monastic and devotional duties.<sup>9</sup>

Yet the founding of five hundred new teaching convents over only a century raised some alarm.<sup>10</sup> Church reformers were eager to educate girls, but afraid that teaching might expose nuns to the outside world and breach convent enclosure policies. Therefore, a boarding system was put in place to protect the nuns. While poorer girls

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<sup>6</sup> Fiona Harris Stoertz, "Young Women in France and England, 1050-1300," *Journal of Women's History* 12, no. 4 (2001): 24–25; Kim Phillips, *Medieval Maidens: Young Women and Gender in England, C. 1270- C. 1540* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 109.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Mullett, *The Counter-Reformation* (New York: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1984), 12–13.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Rapley, *The Dévotes: Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), 43.

<sup>9</sup> Roger Chartier, Marie-Madeleine Compère, and Dominique Julia, *L'Éducation en France du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Société d'Édition d'Enseignement Supérieur, 1976), 233; Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 147.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Rapley, "Fénelon Revisited: A Review of Girls' Education in Seventeenth Century France," *Social History* 20, no. 40 (1987): 301; Po-Chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540-1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 37.

attended convent schools during the day in designated rooms equipped with double sets of doors designed to keep the teacher-nuns away from the outside world, wealthier families paid for their daughters to be housed in the convent, where they stayed until their education was complete.<sup>11</sup> This living arrangement fostered close bonds between the nuns and students. For example, at the Port-Royal convent school, nuns interviewed students on a bi-weekly basis to discuss personal interests and to look for signs of a religious vocation.<sup>12</sup> Nuns at convent schools were more than teachers. They were also mentors, responsible for guiding their boarding students through major life decisions as they approached adulthood.

The Catholic Reformation not only brought changes to children's education, but also contributed to ongoing shifts in conceptions of individuality and choice in French aristocratic society. According to historian Jonathan Dewald, the French nobility in the late sixteenth century gained a new awareness of themselves as individuals distinct from their familial groups.<sup>13</sup> Prior to this shift, regardless of a noble person's "merits or achievements, the individual remained an expression of these larger entities, notably the lineage and order from which he or she emerged."<sup>14</sup> Therefore marriages and religious vows were often collective decisions which aligned families with other families, institutions, and social groups.<sup>15</sup> This is not to say that vocational decisions never came

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<sup>11</sup> Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 144.

<sup>12</sup> Jacqueline Pascal, "A Rule For Children," in *A Rule for Children and Other Writings*, trans. John Conley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 105–107.

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Dewald, *Aristocratic Experience and the Origins of Modern Culture: France, 1570-1715* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 15.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>15</sup> Aldo Scaglione, *Knights at Court: Courtliness, Chivalry, and Courtesy From Ottonian Germany to the Italian Renaissance* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 2, 21, 31.

out of individual experience. The rich history of medieval mysticism is proof that long before the seventeenth century individuals interpreted, articulated, and acted upon their personal encounters with the divine.<sup>16</sup> Yet an interiorized sense of calling was not always required for entrance into a medieval religious institution and this meant that many girls who entered convents did so “at the behest of their family and without a true religious vocation.”<sup>17</sup> Catholic parents tended to think of religious life pragmatically and in terms of the spiritual, material, and social rewards that the family might receive with a child in religion.<sup>18</sup> In terms of spiritual benefits, families could expect their child’s prayers to bolster the family’s claim to salvation. The material and social implications were more complex. Noble families sometimes used religious institutions to move children into powerful ecclesiastical positions, to gain access to estates and property, to hide away

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<sup>16</sup> See Sean Field, “Agnes of Harcourt, Felipa of Porcelet, and Marguerite de Oingt: Women Writing About Women at the End of the Thirteenth Century,” *Church History* 76, no. 2 (2007): 298–329; Rosalynn Voaden and Stephanie Volf, “Visions of My Youth: Representations of the Childhood of Medieval Visionaries,” *Gender and History* 12, no. 3 (2000): 665–84; Nancy Caciola, “Mystics, Demoniacs and the Physiology of Spirit Possession,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42, no. 2 (2000): 268–306; Bernard McGinn, “The Changing Shape of Late Medieval Mysticism,” *Church History* 65, no. 2 (1996): 197–219; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982).

<sup>17</sup> Barbara Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 53; For further discussion of family strategy and religious vocations in medieval Europe see: Jennifer Ward, “Religious Life: Nuns and Nunneries,” in *Women in Medieval Europe: 1200-1500* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 182; Linda McMillin, “Anonymous Lives: Documents from the Benedictine Convent of Sant Pere de Les Puelles,” in *Women Writing Latin: Medieval Modern Women Writing Latin*, ed. Laurie Churchill, Phyllis Brown, and Jane Jeffrey (New York: Routledge, 2002), 268; Silvia Evangelisti, “Wives, Widows, and Brides of Christ: Marriage and the Convent in the Historiography of Early Modern Italy,” *The Historical Journal* 43, no. 1 (2000): 241; Natalie Zemon Davis, “Boundaries and the Sense of Self in Sixteenth-Century France,” in *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought*, ed. Thomas Heller et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 53.

<sup>18</sup> Barbara Diefendorf, “Give Us Back Our Children: Patriarchal Authority and Parental Consent to Religious Vocations in Early Counter-Reformation France,” *The Journal of Modern History* 68, no. 2 (1996): 274.

troublesome family members, and to offload children with poor marriage prospects.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, a child's entrance into medieval religious communities was often a component of a larger family strategy.

By the early seventeenth century, however, notions of individual choice began to play a more significant role in the language and practices surrounding religious vocation. Although the Catholic Reformation was in part a response against Protestantism, aspects of reformed belief were subsumed into orthodox Catholicism, including a new emphasis on personal and emotive spiritual experiences.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, interiorized and contemplative spirituality did exist within Christian practice before the Catholic Reformation in movements like the *Devotio Moderna*, and groups such as the Brethren of the Common Life and the Beguines.<sup>21</sup> However, during the Catholic Reformation interior forms of spirituality, such as private confession of sins and more frequent intimacy with God through communion, gained wider acceptance and adherence.<sup>22</sup>

Yet the Catholic Reformation's ideas did not impact all generations equally. Rather, as Barabra Diefendorf argues, "like many spiritual revivals, the Catholic Reformation does seem to have had a particular attraction for adolescents and young

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<sup>19</sup> Barbara Woshinsky, "Convent Parleys: Listening to Women's Voices in Madame De Villedieu's *Mémoires de La Vie de Henriette-Sylvie de Molière*," in *The Cloister and the World: Early Modern Convent Voices*, ed. Thomas Carr (Charlottesville, Virginia: Rookwood Press, Inc., 2007), 168; Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, 52, 57.

<sup>20</sup> Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 11; Mullett, *The Counter-Reformation*, 45.

<sup>21</sup> Sara Poor, *Mechtild of Magdeburg and Her Book: Gender and the Making of Textual Authority* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 4, 59, 137; Mullett, *The Counter-Reformation*, 7.

<sup>22</sup> John Bossy, *Christianity in the West 1400-1700* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 48, 72; Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540-1770*, 198; Moshe Sluhovskiy, *Believe Not Every Spirit: Possession, Mysticism, and Discernment in Early Modern Catholicism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 98.

adults,” many of whom decided to pursue religious vocations.<sup>23</sup> Children educated in late sixteenth and seventeenth-century schools were more likely than previous generations to learn that entering religious life was an expression of an interior sense of calling.<sup>24</sup> The combined effects of schools teaching interiorized spirituality and the excitement of a religious revival produced a spike in elite children’s interest in taking religious vows in the first three decades of the seventeenth century.<sup>25</sup> Compiled data from Ursuline, Filles de Notre-Dame, and Congrégation de Notre-Dame convents in six French cities between 1611 and 1700 shows that total entrance numbers increased from twenty in 1613 to almost seventy in 1628. In addition, over seventy percent of those who entered in 1628 were aged seventeen and younger. In fact, the average age of convent entrance steadily dropped over this same period, starting at twenty four in 1613 and falling to seventeen by the 1630s.<sup>26</sup> Of course, this data only measures the number of girls who managed to secure a space in a religious community. Many convents struggled to accommodate the growing number of applicants, as was the case for a Capuchin convent established in 1604 which could only accept twelve of the three hundred young women who applied.<sup>27</sup> These numbers point to a remarkable enthusiasm for religious life amongst young women in the early seventeenth century. Parents sometimes struggled to understand their daughters' motivations, since they assumed that vocational decisions belonged to the family, while their children tended to place more significance on their personal sense of calling.

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<sup>23</sup> Diefendorf, “Give Us Back Our Children,” 282.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 200.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, 121.

The seventeenth-century Catholic church's emphasis on personal choice was not only a product of the Reformation, but was also a strategy used to overcome cynical attitudes towards children in religious institutions. Even in the late medieval period, popular literature and songs characterized religious communities as restrictive and repressive places in which to grow up. Satirical representations of convent life in song gained popularity in the thirteenth and fourteenth century in France, and were performed in both Latin and vernacular languages. One such song, from the *Chanson de Nonne* genre, tells the story of a fifteen-year-old nun who felt trapped by her vows. In the song she declares, "I have been put in prison. May God curse the one who put me here! An evil, vile and sinful thing he did, sending such a young girl to a nunnery. He did a wicked thing, by my faith. In the convent I live in great misery—God! —for I am too young. I feel the sweet pangs beneath my little belt!"<sup>28</sup> Literary representations of convent life often set up love and youth in opposition to institutional and parental authority. These themes continued from the medieval into the early modern period. In 1667, Molière's theatre company performed *L'Embaras de godard, ou l'accouchée*, a short comedy in which a suitor foils a father's plan to place his daughter in a convent.<sup>29</sup> Other popular literary works, including the anonymously published *Lettres portugaises* and Madame de Villedieu's pseudo-autobiographical novel *Mémoires de la Vie de Henriette-Sylvie de Molière* also made references to the unjust restrictions of convent life.<sup>30</sup> In fact, one memoirist writing in the mid-seventeenth century characterized convents as "perpetual

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<sup>28</sup> As quoted in Lisa Colton, "The Articulation of Virginity in the Medieval *Chanson de Nonne*," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 133, no. 2 (2008): 184.

<sup>29</sup> Anne Jacobson Schutte, *By Force and Fear: Taking and Breaking Monastic Vows in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 32.

<sup>30</sup> Woshinsky, "Convent Parleys," 170; Schutte, *By Force and Fear*, 33.

prisons” where girls were locked away before they reached the age of reason.<sup>31</sup> From medieval times through to the early modern period, literature and popular culture satirized the image of the young female nun and characterized her as a victim of forced vocation.

This trope of girlhood captivity within convent walls posed a problem for seventeenth-century religious communities trying to implement reforms and regain legitimacy. Prior to the Catholic Reformation, many convents had lost sight of the core tenets of monastic life, obedience, poverty, and chastity.<sup>32</sup> In addition, financial hardships, brought on by the devastation of wars fought on church-owned land and declining dowry income, forced convent superiors to rely on the generosity of wealthy noble sponsors who, in return for their contributions, treated "convents as extensions of their social milieu."<sup>33</sup> During the Catholic Reformation, convent communities attempted to reestablish their institutions as spaces of religious devotion. Reformed convents limited the privileges of sponsors and imposed higher entrance requirements. Entrants not only needed to provide a dowry, but also proof of a veritable divine calling and a personal desire to pursue a religious vocation.<sup>34</sup> This language of individual choice is emphasized in nuns' biographies and eulogies, in which authors recorded the evidence of each woman's vocation, insisting that even if parents encouraged a girl to enter a convent the

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<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth Rapley, “Women and the Religious Vocation in Seventeenth-Century France,” *French Historical Studies* 18, no. 3 (1994): 614.

<sup>32</sup> Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 25.

<sup>33</sup> Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540-1770*, 34.

<sup>34</sup> Jean de Viguierie, “La vocation sacerdotale et religieuse aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles la théorie et la réalité,” in *La vocation religieuse et sacerdotale en France* (Angers: Université d’Angers, 1986), 29–30.

final decision was based on the girl's understanding of God's will.<sup>35</sup> Likewise, when nuns at reformed convents taught girls, they stressed that divine vocations must be accepted freely and in obedience to God alone.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, vocation was a recurrent theme in seventeenth-century convent discourse. Both educators and convent superiors were concerned that girls undergo a genuine discernment process.

Prior to the declaration of a religious vocation, girls were encouraged to discern God's calling with prayers, interviews, and internal reflection. In the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*, published in the early eighteenth century, the entry for religious vocation reads, "do not take for a heavenly vocation the whims or hidden disappointments of a girl who just shut herself away in a convent."<sup>37</sup> This entry affirms that there was some ambiguity in determining which vocations were from God and which were self-motivated. Seventeenth-century theorists had conflicting views about this process. Most recommended prayer, counsel with religious superiors, and ultimately acceptance of God's will.<sup>38</sup>

Early modern Christians were fascinated with the concept of discernment, because they believed that encounters between humans and the divine were real, manifested within the human body and soul.<sup>39</sup> But the movement of the divine could easily be confused with evil or demonic encounters. Therefore, a thorough discernment process was necessary before a calling was acknowledged as divine. Yet theologians and

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<sup>35</sup> This evidence will be explored in Chapter 3.

<sup>36</sup> This evidence will be explored in Chapter 2.

<sup>37</sup> As quoted in de Viguerie, "La vocation sacerdotale et religieuse," 28.

<sup>38</sup> Barbara Diefendorf, "Give Us Back Our Children: Patriarchal Authority and Parental Consent to Religious Vocations in Early Counter-Reformation France," *The Journal of Modern History* 68, no. 2 (1996): 286.

<sup>39</sup> Sluhovsky, *Believe Not Every Spirit*, 1.

clergy struggled to agree on the best method for discerning spirits. In his research on demon possession in Spain, Italy, and France in the early modern period, Moshe Sluhovsky argues that in the attempt to overcome this confusion the church increasingly institutionalized discernment, policing both the mystics and their confessors.<sup>40</sup> Evidence for this practice can be found in some nuns' biographies, where male clergy act as the final check before a girl actually entered a convent.<sup>41</sup> However, these accounts also testify to the involvement of lay people, such as family, friends, and spiritual mentors in girls' discernment processes.<sup>42</sup> Both institutional and non-institutional actors listened as girls articulated their sense of calling, and acted as guides during their vocational discernment.

An examination of religious vocation is not complete without attention to the structural conditions that shaped convent entry. Countless economic and social factors shaped each girl's access to religious life. Many families could not afford convent dowries. One Ursuline convent in the late 1690s required a 4000 livre dowry at entrance, along with a wardrobe of suitable clothing, bed linens, dishes, bedroom furniture, and an extra 400 livres to cover boarding expenses for the first two years.<sup>43</sup> Even some noble families were unable to pay these costs. Furthermore, while the price of marriage dowries fluctuated depending on the status of the bride and groom, the cost of convent entrance was relatively stable.<sup>44</sup> Therefore convent dowries were in some cases more expensive

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>41</sup> Examples will be examined on pages 100-103.

<sup>42</sup> These communities of discernment will be discussed on pages 92-100.

<sup>43</sup> Elizabeth Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister: Daily Life in the Teaching Monasteries of the Old Regime* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 164.

<sup>44</sup> Rapley, "Women and the Religious Vocation in Seventeenth-Century France," 618.

than wedding dowries, especially for lower status families. These costs undoubtedly prevented a number of girls from becoming nuns who otherwise would have felt called to enter an order. Conversely, girls without an interest in religious life may have felt they had no choice when their parents enrolled them in a convent school. As boarders they were not yet committed to becoming nuns, but after spending ten to fifteen years living away from the world, they may have taken religious vows because convent life was more familiar than marriage.<sup>45</sup> Certainly, as Elizabeth Rapley points out, “if our focus were limited strictly to questions of dowry and family strategies, we would have to conclude that this was indeed a society without choices for young women.”<sup>46</sup> A more nuanced perspective on these constraints takes into consideration the inherent limitations of childhood as well as the unique ways in which children navigated family pressures.

Scholars interested in early modern children’s individuality and capacity for choice argue that, like adults, children articulated their identities and made decisions, but they used different strategies. For example, Claire Busse found that child actors in England used their popularity on stage to manipulate audiences and employers. Theatre companies often assumed that children would be easy to manage because of their small size and vulnerability, but the child actors’ “ability to control the performance require[d] adults to negotiate and form alliances with them.”<sup>47</sup> Christopher Corley’s work on both boys and girls in urban spaces offers another example of children navigating the constraints of the adult world. According to Corley, in early modern France the

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<sup>45</sup> de Viguierie, “La vocation sacerdotale et religieuse,” 31.

<sup>46</sup> Rapley, “Women and the Religious Vocation in Seventeenth-Century France,” 618.

<sup>47</sup> Claire Busse, “‘Pretty Fictions’ and ‘Little Stories,’” in *Childhood and Children’s Books in Early Modern Europe, 1550-1800*, ed. Andrea Immel and Michael Witmore (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2006), 86.

imperative to maintain one's honour was not unique to adults, "but since youths did not yet have independent access to their own households, marriages, and professions, their strategies for articulating their honour differed significantly from that of the adults in their communities."<sup>48</sup> Young men used games and tests of strength to prove their authority over each other and spent their days on the city walls, where they were outside of direct adult control.<sup>49</sup> Girls also used spaces on the peripheries of parental supervision to assert their identities. They hurled insults from windows, dashed out into the streets to dance, and interacted with their neighbourhoods from their doorways.<sup>50</sup> The work of these scholars models an approach to the history of childhood that pays careful attention to liminal spaces, whether they are fleeting performances, the edges of a city, or quick exchanges over a courtyard.

For girls in early modern France, a liminal space existed between childhood and womanhood. While the categories of 'child' and 'woman' seem unambiguous, in reality, the transition was complicated because the church and state had conflicting notions of youth and adulthood. In 1566 and again in 1579, the Catholic church decreed minimum ages for the profession of religious vows, setting the standard at sixteen for girls and twenty-five for boys.<sup>51</sup> Most convents, especially after the Reformation, abided by this standard and did not allow girls to take religious vows until after their sixteenth birthday. However, the French crown's legal age of majority for both genders was set at twenty-

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<sup>48</sup> Christopher Corley, "On the Threshold: Youth as Arbiters of Urban Space in Early Modern France," *Journal of Social History* 43, no. 1 (2009): 142–143.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>51</sup> René Pillorget, "Vocation religieuse et état en France aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles," in *La vocation religieuse et sacerdotale en France* (Angers: Université d'Angers, 1986), 12; Diefendorf, "Give Us Back Our Children," 286.

five.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, young women between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five were caught in an intermediary stage. They were legally defined as children and subject to their parents' authority, yet the church permitted them to choose a religious life, even against their parents' will. The overlapping jurisdiction of ecclesiastical and secular law created a contested space in which girls had some ability to articulate their own ideas. Therefore, these years were especially pivotal in girls' vocational discernment.

Vocation was not only a genuine experience, but also a recurrent trope in biographical, educational, and prescriptive sources on girlhood. Increasingly, social and cultural historians point to recurrent literary themes as significant for examining the ideas and experiences of pre-modern childhood. Indeed, Sarah Hanley argues, "silences may be mitigated by formats that attempt to read encoded phenomena, such as gendered rhetoric and relations, patterns of symbol and ritual, notions of honour and shame."<sup>53</sup> The first historians of pre-modern childhood overlooked the nuances of these thematic recurrences. For example, Lloyd DeMause characterized the history of childhood as a "nightmare from which we have only recently begun to awaken," filled with increasing levels of abuse and neglect in each preceding century.<sup>54</sup> Likewise, Lawrence Stone argued that high child mortality, and "the sacrifice of daughters by putting them into nunneries, and the extrusion of younger sons to fend for themselves as military adventurers or clergy," indicates that parents did not love their children as much in pre-

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<sup>52</sup> Pillorget, "Vocation religieuse et état en France aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles," 13.

<sup>53</sup> Sarah Hanley, "Engendering the State: Family Formation and State Building in Early Modern France," *French Historical Studies* 16, no. 1 (1989): 4.

<sup>54</sup> Lloyd de Mause, *The History of Childhood* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 1.

modern Europe as they do today.<sup>55</sup> DeMause and Stone assumed that intelligible forms of parental love should be immediately recognizable in past families and they overlooked the cultural construction of affection. More recently, historians have challenged their assumptions, using legal and notarial sources to reveal affectionate ties between family members and a diversity of family structures.<sup>56</sup> In fact, historians of childhood increasingly push the debate beyond the topic of parent-child affection and reintegrate children into broader intellectual, economic, and social trends.<sup>57</sup> This broader framework embraces a range of analytical tools borrowed from other disciplines.

Historians of childhood increasingly employ interdisciplinary approaches to identify repeated themes or recurrent practices in a wide cross-section of sources. Philosophy, music, literary studies, and geography each offer useful tools for historians to overcome some of the silences inherent to the history of childhood.<sup>58</sup> For example, Erica

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<sup>55</sup> Lawrence Stone, *The Family Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 43.

<sup>56</sup> See Barbara Hanawalt, *Growing Up in Medieval London* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Kristin Gager, *Blood Ties and Fictive Ties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Julie Hardwick, *Family Business: Litigation and the Political Economies of Daily Life in Early Modern France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Matthew Gerber, *Bastards: Politics, Family, and Law in Early Modern France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>57</sup> Andrea Immel and Michael Witmore, "Introduction," in *Childhood and Children's Books in Early Modern Europe: 1550-1800* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 4.

<sup>58</sup> On philosophy see Erica Fudge, "Learning to Laugh: Children and Being Human in Early Modern Thought," in *Childhood and Children's Books in Early Modern Europe, 1550-1800*, ed. Andrea Immel and Witmore (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2006), 19–40; On music see Jeanice Brooks, "All You Need Is Love: Music, Romance, and Adolescent Recreation in Sixteenth Century France," in *Masculinities, Childhood, Violence: Attending to Early Modern Women and Men*, ed. Amy Leonard and Karen Nelson (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), 169–94; Anne Piéjus, "Avant-Propos," in *Tragédies tirées de l'écriture sainte Esther tragédie de Jean Racine intermèdes de Jean-Baptiste Moreau* (Paris: Société Française de Musicologie, 2003); Colton, "The Articulation of Virginité"; On literary studies see Busse, "'Pretty Fictions' and 'Little Stories'"; Deanne Williams, *Shakespeare and the Performance of Girlhood* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Jennifer Higginbotham, "Shakespeare and Girlhood" 10, no. 2 (2013): 189–200; Marianne Novy, "Adopted Children and Constructions of Heredity, Nurture, and Parenthood in Shakespeare's Romances," in *Childhood and Children's Books in Early Modern Europe, 1550-1800*, ed. Andrea Immel and Michael Witmore (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2006); Holly Tucker, *Pregnant Fictions: Childbirth and the Fairy Tale in Early-Modern France* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003); Catherine Bicks, "Producing Girls on the English Stage:

Fudge examines philosophical, prescriptive, and literary texts for evidence of children's laughter. She argues that the regulation of laughter was a part of the civilizing process of early modern education and that children were treated as humans in progress.<sup>59</sup> Music professor Jeanice Brooks applies a similar approach in her examination of sixteenth-century child musicians in pedagogical literature, courtesy manuals, and illustrated novels. She parallels motifs of young people making music in three different source types and argues that the value of musical education was debated and gendered portrayals were contradictory.<sup>60</sup> Fudge and Brooks provide models for connecting prescriptive sources, traditionally used to study childhood, with less-conventional historical sources, such as literary works or artistic representations. As these scholars demonstrate, the history of pre-modern childhood is best addressed through a cross-examination of a wide variety of sources using the lens of a specific theme or question.

This thesis uses the concept of vocation as a lens to examine the ideas and experiences surrounding elite girls' entrance into religious communities in seventeenth-century France. Education manuals, catechisms, children's bibles, school theatre, devotional reading, student interviews, biographies, and poetry all reveal elements of the ideas and experiences of girlhood vocation. Author, audience, and style are important considerations for each genre. The chapters in this thesis will reflect the three categories into which these genres fall. First, prescriptive literature, which is made up of sources written by moralists and clergy for the purpose of instructing parents and educators.

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Performance as Pedagogy in Mary Ward's Convent Schools," in *Gender and Early Modern Constructions of Childhood*, ed. Naomi Miller and Naomi Yavneh (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 139–53; On geography see Corley, "On the Threshold."

<sup>59</sup> Fudge, "Learning to Laugh," 33.

<sup>60</sup> Brooks, "All You Need Is Love," 170.

These sources are most useful for examining theoretical ideas about girls' capacity for spirituality and religious learning. In addition, they also reflect competing notions of womanhood and women's social roles in elite French society. The second category, educational curriculum, is made up of sources designed for girls' consumption in institutional settings. Therefore, the ideas about vocational discernment presented in these sources are instructional and intended to guide girls as they move towards their future marriage or religious vows. This chapter also situates these texts within the broader experience of convent education. Finally, the third category is biographical literature. These include nuns' biographies, hagiographies, and eulogies, as well as a set of introspective poems written by one nun when she was a child. These sources reflect the communal and individual memories of religious calling. Vocation is a recurrent theme in each of these source types and their concurrent analysis informs historical understanding of girls' individuality and capacity for choice in seventeenth-century France.

Vocational discernment as a concept and experience offers a useful lens to investigate early modern girls' individuality because it highlights a pivotal life stage during which girls expressed their own ideas and inclinations. Expressions of individuality are not usually associated with childhood. Rather, acts of self-determination such as life writing, forging social or political alliances, and pursuing careers are typically tied to adulthood and are inaccessible to young people.<sup>61</sup> This thesis seeks to widen the lens used to assess individuality in pre-modern France. Stories of religious

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<sup>61</sup> Historians interested in individuality in pre-modern France tend to focus on pieces of evidence unique to adults. See: Dewald, *Aristocratic Experience and the Origins of Modern Culture*; Susan Crane, *The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing, and Identity During the Hundred Years War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

vocation show that even before reaching adulthood, girls had the capacity to think independently, articulate their reasoning, and define themselves in contrast to their communities. Furthermore, vocational accounts reveal that the power to influence political and social events was not reserved for adults. Girls in seventeenth-century France were historical actors who exerted a profound influence on their families, churches, and communities.

## Chapter 1

### **"If on the Contrary She Makes Up Her Mind to Become a Nun:" Girls' Education and Vocation in Prescriptive Literature**

By the age of twelve, Jacqueline Pascal had won a prestigious poetry prize, performed at court, negotiated her father's return from political exile, and won the praises of renowned playwright, Pierre Corneille himself.<sup>62</sup> She would go on to choose religious life in her early twenties and become the headmistress at Port-Royal, where she would publish works on girls' education and spirituality.<sup>63</sup> Yet even before entering religious life, she did not attribute her fame and success to her education or connections at court.<sup>64</sup> Rather, she describes her talents as gifts from God. In one poem, she compares her connection with God to a river and the ocean. She writes that as "all the waters return to the sea, place of their origin, so my tiny poems, great God! Without concern for the world, will return to you, their divine source."<sup>65</sup> In this poem and others, Jacqueline explains that her literary and social successes are rooted in her intimate relationship with God.<sup>66</sup> As a virgin, Jacqueline had a legitimate claim to this bond with the divine. The

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<sup>62</sup> Thérèse Goyet, "Une poétesse de douze ans: Jacqueline Pascal," in *Chroniques de Port-Royal: Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Port-Royal* (Paris: Bibliothèque Mazarine, 1982), 129.

<sup>63</sup> For more on Jacqueline Pascal's life, see chapter three.

<sup>64</sup> As a girl raised under the influence of salonnières, Jacqueline Pascal would have been taught to aspire to *honnêteté* and to credit her success to the individuals who influenced her. For example, in Du Bosc's *L'honnête femme*, he personifies the book and writes "she attributes [her glory] to so many illustrious women of whom she is only a shadow or a feeble copy." This self-effacing rhetoric of humility conforms to the ideals of *honnêteté*. Jacques Du Bosc, *L'honnête femme: The Respectable Woman in Society and the New Collection of Letters and Responses by Contemporary Women*, trans. Sharon Diane Nell and Aurora Wolfgang (Toronto: Iter Inc. and Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2014), 46.

<sup>65</sup> Jacqueline Pascal, "Poetry," in *A Rule for Children and Other Writings*, trans. John Conley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 23.

<sup>66</sup> Jacqueline published at least four other poems on this theme. Also note that for consistency and clarity, I have chosen to use girls' first names rather than their last names as shorthand in examples throughout this thesis. Typically, girls took on religious names after making their professions and these names are often long and difficult to distinguish from each other. Moreover, nuns' Lives do not always include information about the nun's secular name. In addition, several of the girls

Catholic Church celebrated virginity and theologians from Tertullian to Augustine agreed that sexual purity brought women closer to God, and Catholic educational theorists in the early modern period continued to uphold this tradition.<sup>67</sup>

François Grenaille and François Fénelon, both authors of seventeenth-century treatises on girls' education, shared the view that girls, as virgins, had a special connection with God. Yet their approaches to girls' education differed significantly. Grenaille, in his three volume work *L'honnête fille* published between 1639 and 1642, claims that girls can think rationally and should learn theology. In contrast, Fénelon argues that girls' education should cover only domestic training and basic Christian doctrines. He published these ideas in 1687 in his *Traité de l'éducation des filles*. Each author's approach to girls' education reflected his assumptions about women's social roles. Grenaille argued that women had a small but important place in society as conversationalists and companions to men, while Fénelon believed women should avoid society entirely in favour of domestic spaces. Grenaille and Fénelon's different conceptions of womanhood meant that they also had distinctive notions of girls' spiritual capacity for discernment. Yet both writers agreed that girls were able to hear God's voice and respond.<sup>68</sup> In essence, they affirmed that the attitudes and experiences expressed in

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discussed in this thesis were related and had the same last names. I find that using first names is a convenient solution to all three of these problems.

<sup>67</sup> Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, "Introduction: The Visionary Tradition in Women's Writings: Dialogue and Autobiography," in *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 34; Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 21.

<sup>68</sup> François de Salignac de la Mothe- Fénelon, "The Education of Girls," in *Fénelon on Education: A Translation of the "Traité de l'éducation des filles" and Other Documents Illustrating Fénelon's Educational Theories and Practice, Together with an Introduction and Notes*, trans. H.C. Barnard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 90; François de Grenaille, *L'honnête fille dédiée à Mademoiselle de Bourbon*, vol. 2 (Paris: Toussaint Quinet, 1640), 48; François de Grenaille, *L'honnête fille où dans le premier livre il est traité de l'esprit des filles*, ed. Alain Vizier, vol. 3 (Paris: Honoré Champion Editeur, 2003), 324, 326.

Jacqueline Pascal's poems were accessible to other girls. If girls could communicate with God, they could also participate in the discernment and pursuit of religious vocations. In 1694, *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* defined vocation as "an interior movement by which God calls a person to a way of life in order to serve and honour God."<sup>69</sup> Therefore, vocation by definition was a personal spiritual experience.<sup>70</sup> Despite the many differences in Grenaille and Fénelon's programs for girls' education, both theorists agree that in cases of divine calling, girls are able to discern and articulate their vocations.

### **Contextualizing Grenaille and Fénelon**

Before the seventeenth century, scholars and theologians showed little interest in girls' education, with the notable exception of Juan Vives and Pierre de Changy.<sup>71</sup> The Catholic church's efforts to establish schools for girls in the seventeenth century created a new demand for prescriptive literature on girls' education.<sup>72</sup> Some authors included short excerpts on girls in manuals dedicated to boys' education, like in the *Traité du choix et de la méthode des études* published by the Abbé Claude Fleury in 1686.<sup>73</sup> Others incorporated discussions of girls' education into the broader context of women's

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<sup>69</sup> "Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française, 1st Edition (1694): Vocation," The ARTFL Project, *Dictionnaires D'Autrefois*, (2010), <http://artflsrv02.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/dicos/pubdico1look.pl?strippedhw=vocation>. "Mouvement interieur par lequel Dieu appelle une personne à quelque genre de vie, pour le servir & l'honorer."

<sup>70</sup> Robert Sauzet, "La vocation religieuse d'après les chroniques des récollets de Provence (1602-1676)," in *La Vocation religieuse et sacerdotale en France* (Angers: Université d'Angers, 1986), 21; de Viguerie, "La vocation sacerdotale et religieuse," 28.

<sup>71</sup> Rapley, "Fénelon Revisited," 299.

<sup>72</sup> For a list of pro-female writers in France see: Carolyn Lougee, *Le Paradis Des Femmes: Women, Salons, and Social Stratification in Seventeenth-Century France* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), 175; Marc Angenot, *Les champions des femmes: examen du discours sur la supériorité des femmes, 1400-1800* (Québec City: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1977).

<sup>73</sup> Claude Fleury, *Traité du choix et de la méthode des études* (Paris: Chez Pierre Aubouin, Pierre Emery et Charles Clousier, 1687), 264–280.

education, as Jacques Du Bosc did in *L'honnête femme*, published between 1632 and 1636, and Poullain de la Barré in *De l'éducation des dames*.<sup>74</sup> Yet Grenaille and Fénelon were the only two moralist authors in the seventeenth-century to dedicate entire books to girls' education.<sup>75</sup> They were also both clergymen and they valued girls' education because they saw girls as the future generation of mothers, tasked with raising Catholics. Therefore, their thoughts on girls' education must be understood within the context of the Catholic Reformation.

On December 13, 1545, Pope Paul III convened the first session of the Council of Trent, an ecumenical gathering comprised of archbishops, bishops, representatives of religious orders, papal legates, cardinals, and theologians.<sup>76</sup> These delegates met in response to the rise of Protestantism, a religious movement which had grown considerably over the three decades since Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses for reform on the door of the *Schlosskirche* in Wittenburg, Germany. The Council addressed issues of doctrinal clarity, scripture translation, clerical corruption, and heresy.<sup>77</sup> The Council of Trent also placed a new impetus on education, encouraging parishes to hold regular lectures and catechism classes aimed at disseminating orthodox doctrine and

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<sup>74</sup> Du Bosc, *L'Honnête Femme*; François Poullain de la Barre, *De l'éducation des dames pour la conduite de l'esprit dans les sciences et dans les moeurs* (Paris: Jean du Puis, 1674).

<sup>75</sup> Right at the end of the seventeenth century, an advice book written by Madame de Schomberg, duchesse de Liancourt, for her grand-daughter, Mademoiselle de la Roche-Guyon was published. This text will not be examined here, since it would have had more impact on eighteenth-century audiences than on Madame de Schomberg's contemporaries. Jeanne de Schomberg, *Règlement donné par une dame de haute qualité à M\*\*\* sa petite-fille pour sa conduite, et pour celle de sa maison: Avec un autre Règlement que cette Dame avoit dressé pour elle-mesme* (Paris: Augustin Leguerrier, 1698).

<sup>76</sup> Robert Bireley, *The Refashioning of Catholicism, 1450-1700: A Reassessment of the Counter Reformation* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 48.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 49; Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540-1770*, 115.

overcoming religious ignorance.<sup>78</sup> Even though the attendees of the Council of Trent were all adult men, the implementation of their decisions relied on the participation of children, and especially young girls. Chantal Grell argues that “for the Catholic reformers, the little girl played a decisive role in the process of the religious and moral revival of society.”<sup>79</sup> Church clerics and theologians saw girls’ education as an investment in the future. They knew that girls would grow up to become mothers with a profound influence on their children’s beliefs.<sup>80</sup> In fact, even a mother’s breast milk was thought to transmit moral qualities to a child.<sup>81</sup> They were expected to correct, teach, and nourish the next generation of Christians. Therefore, mothers were seen as the first line of defense against unorthodox belief and “as agents of the faith and a force against the monster of heresy.”<sup>82</sup> The Council of Trent’s plan to reach this upcoming generation of mothers involved both the establishment of *petites écoles* in rural parishes and the founding of new teaching convents in larger towns and cities.<sup>83</sup> The seventeenth century was thus an era of growth and change in girls’ education across France.

The Catholic Reformation was not the only influence on Grenaille's and Fénelon’s work; they also engaged with an existing academic debate on the nature of women.<sup>84</sup> The

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<sup>78</sup> Karen Carter, *Creating Catholics: Catechism and Primary Education in Early Modern France* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), 59.

<sup>79</sup> Chantal Grell, “France et Angleterre: l’héritage du Grande Siècle,” in *L’Éducation des jeunes filles nobles en Europe XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles*, ed. Chantal Grell and Arnaud Ramière de Fortanier (Paris: Presses de l’Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2004), 11. “pour les réformateurs catholiques, la petite fille devait jouer un rôle décisive dans le processus de reconquête religieuse et morale de la société.”

<sup>80</sup> Susan Broomhall, *Women and the Book Trade in Sixteenth-Century France* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 17.

<sup>81</sup> Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 92.

<sup>82</sup> Domna Stanton, *The Dynamics of Gender in Early Modern France: Women Writ, Women Writing* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 22.

<sup>83</sup> Grell, “France et Angleterre,” 11; Chartier, Compère, and Julia, *L’Éducation en France*, 232.

<sup>84</sup> For a brief overview of this 400 year history see Joan Kelly, “Early Feminist Theory and the ‘Querelle Des Femmes,’ 1400-1789,” *Signs* 8, no. 1 (1982): 4–28.

debate originated in classical times, but the resurgence of this discussion in late-medieval and early modern France is known as the *querelle des femmes*. The central issue in the debate is women's access to knowledge and their capacity for rational thought.<sup>85</sup> Authors involved in the *querelle des femmes* used historical examples of women drawn from classical and biblical texts as their primary evidence to support both pro-women and misogynistic arguments.<sup>86</sup> While Christine de Pizan, a female humanist, used classical examples to argue for women's ability to fulfill every necessary role in society, Giovanni Boccaccio used similar evidence to characterize powerful women as exceptions to the norm.<sup>87</sup> At its root, the *querelle* was a two-sided debate: those who argued that women were capable of rationality and full participation in public life, and those who viewed women as intellectually weak and inferior to men.<sup>88</sup> Within these two groups were countless variations, as authors contested the extent of women's natural capabilities and the amount of education suitable for the development of these skills.<sup>89</sup>

Girls' education was a key component of the broader debate because humanist authors argued that women's intellectual capacity was shaped during their youth. Christine de Pizan, for example, argued that "if the custom was to put little girls in school, and if they were taught science like boys are taught, then they would learn as perfectly and would understand all of the subtleties of the arts and sciences as the boys

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<sup>85</sup> Lougee, *Le Paradis Des Femmes*, 5; Linda Timmermans, *L'Accès des femmes à la culture (1598-1715): Un débat d'idées de Saint François de Sales à la Marquise de Lambert* (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 1993), 20; Daniella Kostroun, *Feminism, Absolutism, and Jansenism: Louis XIV and the Port-Royal Nuns* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 38.

<sup>86</sup> Kelly, "Early Feminist Theory," 27.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, 25.

<sup>88</sup> Lougee, *Le Paradis Des Femmes*, 6.

<sup>89</sup> Colleen Fitzgerald, "To Educate or Instruct? Du Bosc and Fénelon on Women," in *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Barbara Whitehead (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999), 182.

do.”<sup>90</sup> Like Pizan, Desiderius Erasmus and Juan Vives, humanist scholars writing over one hundred years later, also argued for the value of girls' education. In fact, Vives' text, *De institutione feminae Christianae*, published in 1524 and dedicated to Catherine of Aragon, is widely regarded as the first Christian book devoted to the education of young women.<sup>91</sup> Yet, compared to Pizan, Vives' suggested curriculum and rationale for girls' education reveals a more limited conception of their abilities and potential. He argues that girls need a practical education, not for their own benefit, but so that they might be suitable companions for men, since “obviously there is nothing so troublesome as sharing one's life with a person of no principles.”<sup>92</sup> Therefore, while many humanists supported women's education, they were not necessarily in favour of overturning gendered norms. When humanists wrote about female rulers and renowned mystics or when their own daughters became scholars they described these women as exceptional. Books that praised women's achievements on the surface, such as Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*, contributed to the proliferation of a narrative of exceptionalism and the continued exclusion of the vast majority of women from education.<sup>93</sup> Humanist theorists were some of the earliest advocates of girls' education, but their ideas were not all as revolutionary

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<sup>90</sup> As cited in Timmermans, *L'Accès des femmes à la culture*, 23. “Si la coutume estoit de mettre les petites filles à l'escole, et que communement on les fist apprendres les sciences comme on fait auz filz, qu'elles apprendroient aussi parfaitement et entendoient les subtilités de toutes les arz et sciences comme ils font.”

<sup>91</sup> Charles Fantazzi, “Preface to the Books on the Education of a Christian Woman,” in *The Education of a Christian Woman: A Sixteenth-Century Manual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>92</sup> Juan Luis Vives, “Education of a Christian Woman,” in *The Education of a Christian Woman: A Sixteenth-Century Manual*, trans. Charles Fantazzi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 45.

<sup>93</sup> Kelly, “Early Feminist Theory,” 25.

as Pizan's. For the most part, they prescribed limited curricula with exceptions made only for extraordinary girls.

The *Institutione feminae Christianae* gained a wider audience after Pierre de Changy translated it into French in the 1540s. This French version was republished nine times over the second half of the sixteenth century.<sup>94</sup> De Changy did not dedicate his translation to royalty, like Vives did, but to his unmarried daughter Marguerite.<sup>95</sup> This difference suggests that de Changy wanted his translation to reach women from both noble and upper mercantile families who were literate in French but could not read Latin.<sup>96</sup> De Changy's interest in a broader audience is also evidenced in his editorial selections and omissions. In the text, he privileges practical instruction over historical examples, leaving out long sections of evidence that would have meant more to scholarly men than to literate elite women.<sup>97</sup> Even biblical illustrations are reduced, and most of de Changy's discussion of girls' spirituality focuses on recommended devotional reading.<sup>98</sup> Therefore, de Changy's version is more didactic than intellectual. Elite women who read this text were presented with basic religious teachings that were applicable to their roles as wives and mothers.<sup>99</sup> Like other humanist authors in the *querelle des femmes*, de

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<sup>94</sup> Fantazzi, "Preface to the Books on the Education of a Christian Woman," 32; Pollie Bromilow, "An Emerging Female Readership of Print in Sixteenth-Century France?: Pierre de Changy's Translation of the *De institutione feminae Christianae* by Luis Vives," *French Studies* 67, no. 2 (2013): 159.

<sup>95</sup> Fantazzi, "Preface to the Books on the Education of a Christian Woman," 1.

<sup>96</sup> Bromilow, "An Emerging Female Readership," 157.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>98</sup> Jehan Loys Vives, *L'education de la femme Chrétienne*, trans. Pierre de Changy (Geneve: Slatkine Reprints, 1970), 39, 43.

<sup>99</sup> For a discussion on women's literacy in early modern France see Broomhall, *Women and the Book Trade*, 15–18.

Changy's conception of elite women's social roles determined his ideas about girls' education.

The emergence of literary salons in the late sixteenth century added a new dynamic to the *querelle des femmes* as educated women took on leadership roles in these groups and were increasingly seen as authorities on literary taste.<sup>100</sup> In fact, "the salon threatened dominant gender relations," because it offered new opportunities for women to access knowledge and pursue intellectual engagement.<sup>101</sup> Women played irreplaceable roles in salons, because a female hostess was seen as a selfless and neutral moderator.<sup>102</sup> Salons also offered a platform for pro-women authors to voice their arguments for girls' education. For example, Du Bosc's *L'honnête femme*, which was widely read amongst salonnières, pits domesticity against girls' education.<sup>103</sup> In fact, he describes housekeeping as "a tyranny and a custom no less unjust than it is old." Instead of learning domestic tasks, he recommends that women study moral philosophy, history, and the art of conversation.<sup>104</sup> Salonnière Madeleine de Scudéry agreed, and in her novel series *Artamène ou le grand Cyrus* she writes, "I would like to see as much attention paid to

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<sup>100</sup> Michael Moriarty, *Taste and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century France* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Joan DeJean, "The (Literary) World at War, Or, What Can Happen When Women Go Public," in *Going Public: Women and Publishing in Early Modern France*, ed. Elizabeth Goldsmith and Dena Goodman (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 116–28; Erica Harth, "The Salon Woman Goes Public...or Does She?," in *Going Public: Women and Publishing in Early Modern France*, ed. Elizabeth Goldsmith and Dena Goodman (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 179–93; Faith Beasley, *Salons, History, and the Creation of Seventeenth-Century France* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 21.

<sup>101</sup> Domna Stanton, *The Dynamics of Gender in Early Modern France: Women Writ, Women Writing* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 96.

<sup>102</sup> Harth, "The Salon Woman Goes Public," 181.

<sup>103</sup> Fitzgerald, "To Educate or Instruct?," 161; Sharon Diane Nell and Aurora Wolfgang, "Introduction," in *L'honnête femme: The Respectable Woman in Society and the New Collection of Letters and Responses by Contemporary Women* (Toronto: Iter Inc. and Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2014), 5.

<sup>104</sup> Du Bosc, *L'Honnête Femme*, 13, 44, 114, 151–152.

embellishing [a woman's] mind as her body." The girls who attended literary salons, like Jacqueline Pascal, interacted with individuals who prized girls' education, not for the benefit of their future husbands, but for their own empowerment.

In opposition to pro-women writers in the *querelle des femmes*, there was a group of authors who argued that women were only suited for domestic tasks and childrearing. For example, in his *Traité de l'excellence du mariage*, Jacques Chaussé instructs women to focus on motherly responsibilities since, in the process of "procuring the salvation of your children, you will work toward your own."<sup>105</sup> He celebrates the family as the most important social unit for ensuring the salvation of souls and maintaining social stability. Seventeenth-century authors who advocated for women's domesticity, like Chaussé, envisioned a curriculum for girls' education dedicated to practical housekeeping skills and basic morality.<sup>106</sup> Therefore, theorists on both sides of the *querelle des femmes* argued for the necessity of girls' education, but with different ends in mind. While pro-women authors promoted girls' access to philosophical and classical texts, more conservative authors argued that girls' education should focus on housework and childrearing. Each educational theorist's arguments were rooted in his or her perception of women's social roles.

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<sup>105</sup> Jacques Chaussé, *Traité de l'excellence du mariage de sa nécessité et des moyens d'y vivre heureux où l'on fait l'apologie des femmes contre les calomnies des hommes* (Paris: Martin Jouvenel, 1689), 233. "En procurant le salut de vos enfans, vous travaillerez au vôtre proper." Translated by Lougee, *Le Paradis Des Femmes*, 67.

<sup>106</sup> Karen Carter, "'Les garçons et les filles sont pêle-mêle dans l'école:' Gender and Primary Education in Early Modern Europe," *French Historical Studies* 31, no. 3 (2008): 421.

### **Girls' Religious Education: Theological vs. Moralistic**

While historians typically analyze early modern writings on women's education according to the conservative or progressive tendencies in their work, this dichotomy fails to capture the nuances of Grenaille's and Fénelon's arguments. The debate surrounding Fénelon's *Traité de l'éducation des filles* is particularly contentious, and Carolyn Lougee argues that it remains one of the "best-known and least often understood treatises ever written in French about women."<sup>107</sup> Several scholars interpret Fénelon's focus on women's roles in household economies as progressive and even proto-feminist. For example, Nadine Bérenguer situates Fénelon's work as a forerunner for eighteenth-century education manuals; Warren Lewis portrays him as a pioneer ahead of his times; and Wendy Gibson describes Fénelon as one of the "most liberal advocates for feminine instruction."<sup>108</sup> However, Lougee argues that his interest in girls' education is not progressive or pro-women, but rather that it is rooted in a traditional mistrust of natural feminine inclinations.<sup>109</sup> Colleen Fitzgerald supports Lougee's position, arguing that in comparison to Du Bosc's *L'honnête femme* published over fifty years earlier, Fénelon has a more limited sense of women's potential for greater achievement.<sup>110</sup> A similar but much smaller debate exists around François Grenaille's *L'honnête fille*. Katherine Jensen describes Grenaille as an anti-salon traditionalist and John Conley agrees, even labeling him as a misogynist.<sup>111</sup> Meanwhile, Alain Vizier situates Grenaille as a leader in

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<sup>107</sup> Lougee, *Le Paradis Des Femmes*, 174.

<sup>108</sup> Nadine Bérenguer, *Conduct Books For Girls in Enlightenment France* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 1; Warren Lewis, *The Splendid Century: Life in the France of Louis XIV* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1953), 242; Wendy Gibson, *Women in Seventeenth-Century France* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1989), 19.

<sup>109</sup> Lougee, *Le Paradis Des Femmes*, 186.

<sup>110</sup> Fitzgerald, "To Educate or Instruct?," 184.

<sup>111</sup> John Conley, *The Suspicion of Virtue* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 9.

seventeenth-century literature on the defense of women.<sup>112</sup> Linda Timmermans takes a more balanced approach. Describing Grenaille as a pseudo-feminist, she argues that he has some liberal and pro-women tendencies which hide his underlying misogyny.<sup>113</sup>

The debate over progressive, traditional, liberal, or conservative labels for seventeenth-century female education theorists indicates that the terms are too limiting to discuss the various agendas and interests of these authors. Colleen Fitzgerald models an approach for overcoming this oversimplification in her comparison of Du Bosc and Fénelon's works, in which she uses the terms "*éducation*" and "*instruction*" to differentiate between their pedagogical approaches. Rather than create a new dichotomy, these descriptive words capture subtle distinctions between prescriptive works that both promote women's education. Indeed, Du Bosc believed that girls were responsible for acting as partners in their learning, while Fénelon emphasized girls' subordination to teachers and instructors.<sup>114</sup> In following Fitzgerald's model, the terms "theological" and "moralistic" can be used to identify the differences between Grenaille and Fénelon's approaches to girls' spirituality. Grenaille promotes a theological approach to girls' education because he believes that girls can comprehend complex religious concepts through interior discourses with God and their own rational capacity. On the other hand, Fénelon encourages girls' educators to use a moralistic method to teach only basic biblical truths and simple doctrines.

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<sup>112</sup> Katherine Ann Jensen, *Uneasy Possessions: The Mother-Daughter Dilemma in French Women's Writing 1671-1928* (Lanham, Maryland: University of Delaware Press, 2011), 29; Alain Vizier, "Présentation," in *L'honnête fille où dans le premier livre il est traité de l'esprit des filles* (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2003), 20.

<sup>113</sup> Timmermans, *L'Accès des femmes à la culture*, 302. "sous une attitude en apparence très libérale et très favorable aux femmes, cache une misogynie profonde."

<sup>114</sup> Fitzgerald, "To Educate or Instruct?," 173, 183.

Several factors including personal experiences, assumptions about women's social roles, and intended audiences contribute to the differences in Grenaille and Fénelon's ideas about girls' religious training and spirituality. For one, Grenaille was more engaged in Parisian salon society than Fénelon. In 1639, the year the first volume of *L'honnête fille* was published, Grenaille was twenty-three, living in Paris, and working as a scholar. He was in the process of translating Petrarch's *De Remediis*, a text about refinement and style of speech, both popular concepts in Parisian elite society.<sup>115</sup> Between 1639 and 1644 he published approximately thirty original and translated works, several of which aligned him with the civilizing society of the salon.<sup>116</sup> Yet he was not an advocate of women's leadership in the salon. Rather he insisted that women "use extreme caution when they speak with men in order for the superiority of our sex to impress upon them some respect."<sup>117</sup> While his ideas about women's social roles are markedly more limited than those promoted in Du Bosc's *L'honnête femme*, Grenaille maintained that women are intelligent, rational, and capable of achieving the ideal of *honnêteté*.

According to Joan DeJean the term '*honnête*' is "both among the most frequently used adjectives in seventeenth-century French prose from this period and one of the most difficult to translate."<sup>118</sup> Historians have used a variety of English translations for the

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<sup>115</sup> Vizier, "Présentation," 63.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>117</sup> Grenaille, *L'honnête fille où dans le premier livre il est traité de l'esprit des filles*, 3:247.

"Usent d'une extreme precaution quand elles parlent à des hommes à cause que la supériorité de nostre sexe imprime quelque respect au leur."

<sup>118</sup> Joan DeJean, "Introduction," in *Against Marriage: The Correspondence of La Grande Mademoiselle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 29.

term including virtuous, honest, accomplished, complete, righteous, and upright.<sup>119</sup> Yet the most convincing explanations of *honnêteté* go beyond simple translation. For example, Aurora Wolfgang and Sharon Nell describe *honnêteté* as a cultural ideology rather than a value or attribute. They argue that *honnêteté* “functioned as an emerging code of conduct—related to sociability, urbanity and politeness—that transformed elite French society from a military class to a cultural aristocracy.”<sup>120</sup> Central to this civilizing process was the moderation of passions.<sup>121</sup> In practice, an *honnête* person was well read in classical literature, able to control their natural impulses, inclined to rational discourse, attuned to social propriety, and most of all, adept at conversation. Therefore, *honnêteté* was not achieved through status, but required education and constant work.<sup>122</sup>

The title of François Grenaille’s *L’honnête fille* situates the text amidst an early seventeenth-century vogue of civility books aimed at teaching elite audiences how to become *honnête*. Authors in this genre aligned themselves with the growing salon culture of France’s urban centres, and against the less sophisticated climate of Louis XIII’s court. However, the impetus for this genre started long before the emergence of salons, going back to the sixteenth century when French society “became less conflict-driven and more ‘civil’ after the Wars of Religion.”<sup>123</sup> In brief, when the benefits of civilized court-life began to outweigh the spoils of the battlefield, the warrior nobles of the late-medieval

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<sup>119</sup> Aurora Wolfgang and Sharon Diane Nell, “The Theory and Practice of Honnêteté in Jacques Du Bosc’s *L’Honnête femme* (1632-36) and *Nouveau Recueil de Lettres des Dames de ce Temps*,” *Cahiers du dix-septième: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 13, no. 2 (2011): 60.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Vizier, “Présentation, 13.”

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>123</sup> Nell and Wolfgang, “Introduction,” 2.

period transitioned into the courtiers of the seventeenth century.<sup>124</sup> It was as a guide for this newly emergent group of men that Baldassare Castiglione published his courtesy manual, *Il cortegiano*, in 1528. In this text, he encouraged men to socialize with women, since the very presence of women forces men to speak with eloquence and act with restraint.<sup>125</sup> Castiglione's ideas inspired similar works in France, including Nicholas Faret's *L'honnête homme*, published in 1630. Like Castiglione, Faret argues that men should socialize with people who enhance their pursuit of civility, especially *honnête* women.

Recognizing that there was no guide for these *honnête* women, Jacques Du Bosc began work on a treatise that would parallel Faret's, titling it: *L'honnête femme*.<sup>126</sup> In the text, he encourages women to take up reading, participate in conversation, and engage in self-reflection so that they might be equal and suitable companions for the men in their lives.<sup>127</sup> When Grenaille published *L'honnête fille* in 1639, he saw himself as filling a similar gap in the literature.<sup>128</sup> In fact, he echoes some of Du Bosc's arguments about women's role as conversationalists, when he mentions that men will "consider themselves honoured to marry a Princess who prevails among company by the beauty of her discourse."<sup>129</sup> Here the term 'princess' is not specific to royalty, but neither is it intended to encompass all of the nobility. Grenaille is writing about girls who are

<sup>124</sup> Dewald, *Aristocratic Experience and the Origins of Modern Culture*, 8.

<sup>125</sup> Moriarty, *Taste and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century France*, 40.

<sup>126</sup> Nell and Wolfgang, "Introduction," 7.

<sup>127</sup> Du Bosc, *L'Honnête Femme*, 44; Grell, "France et Angleterre," 20.

<sup>128</sup> Vizier, "Présentation," 14.

<sup>129</sup> Grenaille, *L'honnête fille où dans le premier livre il est traité de l'esprit des filles*, 3:258. "s'estimeront honnorer d'épouser des Princesses qui regnent dans les compagnies par la beauté de leurs discours."

destined to become salonnières and wives of urban noble men, not rural homemakers.

Even though he claims that any girl can be *honnête*, whether born in a village or at court, the education he recommends emphasizes conversational and intellectual skills more relevant to elite society than to a mother at home with children.<sup>130</sup>

François Fénelon's *Traite de l'éducation des filles* is also about elite girls, but instead of equipping them to become salonnières, Fénelon's curriculum instructs girls to be mothers and household managers of noble estates. In fact, Fénelon's work is distinctly anti-salon; his work "effectively outlines a means of reforming a society he saw as frivolous and decadent."<sup>131</sup> According to Fénelon, salon society was economically wasteful and morally dangerous.<sup>132</sup> In fact, he recommends keeping the rural noble girl away from urban elite society, and to "be careful that she does not cherish hopes which are above her fortune and condition. There is hardly anyone who has not had to suffer for setting his hopes too high."<sup>133</sup> In further contrast to Grenaille, Fénelon shows a distaste for the concept of *honnêteté*. He rarely mentions the word, and, when he does, it is with cynicism. For example, in a section on the importance of diligence and hard work, he writes, "one says, without knowing why, that it is *honnête* for a woman to work."<sup>134</sup> Therefore, he argues that it is better to actually work hard than to speak of the virtue of industriousness with salon-style maxims. According to Fénelon, women should stay away from salons, instead dedicating their time to raising children and running an efficient

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<sup>130</sup> Timmermans, *L'Accès des femmes à la culture*, 291; François de Grenaille, *L'honnête fille dédiée à Mademoiselle*, vol. 1 (Paris: Jean Pasle, 1649), 56–57.

<sup>131</sup> Fitzgerald, "To Educate or Instruct?," 174.

<sup>132</sup> Lougee, *Le Paradis Des Femmes*, 176.

<sup>133</sup> Fénelon, "The Education of Girls," 89.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 10. "on dit, sans sçavoir pourquoi, qu'il est honneste aux femmes de travailler."

household. In fact, all of Fénelon's recommended subjects and curriculum correlate with daily household tasks like calculating budgets, mediating property disputes, keeping account books, managing servants, and running charitable organizations.<sup>135</sup> In the text, he argues that:

it is doubtless necessary to have a much higher and more developed intelligence in order to be instructed in all the arts related to estate management, and to be in a position to organise a whole household, which is like a little republic, than to play at cards or gossip about the fashions or be concerned with making pretty little speeches.<sup>136</sup>

Therefore, Fénelon elevated household tasks over the activities of the salonnières and emphasized domestic skills in his curriculum for girls' education.

Fénelon's condemnation of salon society was shared by several contemporaries and colleagues, who also promoted domestic management as women's proper social role. For example, in his *Traité du choix et de méthode des études*, the Abbé Claude Fleury argues that girls play an irreplaceable social and economic role within the home.<sup>137</sup> Fleury's curriculum echoes Fénelon's, with each subject tied to a particular household task. For example, he instructs educators to show girls how to write letters and memoirs, but not to teach them complex grammar and lengthy words since these are unnecessary for household accounts. Likewise, he encourages girls to learn how to make basic medicines, but to prepare them only within the confines of their homes.<sup>138</sup> Madame de Maintenon, as a close friend of Fénelon's, implemented Fleury and Fénelon's domestic

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>137</sup> Fleury, *Traité du choix et de la méthode des études*, 266.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 268.

curriculums at Saint-Cyr, a school for economically disadvantaged noble girls.<sup>139</sup> The institution offered an opportunity for noble girls to learn basic household skills and gain a dowry. Along with Louis XIV, she believed that the school would improve the girls' marriage prospects, help to revitalize struggling noble families, and solidify ties of loyalty between the nobility and the crown.<sup>140</sup> While Maintenon and Fénelon shared similar ideas about curriculum, Carolyn Lougee points out that they were actually opponents, politically.<sup>141</sup> Fénelon's economic theory harkened to a pre-Louis XIV era in which nobles held considerable political power within their rural estates. Despite this political misalignment between Fénelon, Fleury, and Maintenon, all three were united in their opposition to Parisian salon society.

Despite the differences in Grenaille and Fénelon's opinions about salon society, *honnêteté*, and women's social roles, both theorists, as churchmen, share an interest in girls' spirituality. They both dedicate sections of their treatises to religious and moral teaching, and continue to mention spiritual themes throughout their texts. For example, Grenaille is adamant that it is impossible to find an *honnête* girl who does not also exhibit spiritual qualities. He writes, "it is as difficult to find a fire without warmth, as it is to find *honnête* without devotion."<sup>142</sup> In much the same vein, in a section titled "the Foundations of Education," Fénelon argues that above all else, girls must be taught the

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<sup>139</sup> Fitzgerald, "To Educate or Instruct?," 163, 175; Dominique Picco, "La perception de l'éducation reçue à Saint-Cyr (1686-1719)," *Dix-Septième Siècle* 4, no. 249 (2010): 736.

<sup>140</sup> Dominique Picco, "Adultes et enfants en la Maison Royale de Saint-Cyr (Fin XVIIe-XVIIIe Siècles)," *Mélanges de l'école Française de Rome-Italie et Méditerranée modernes et contemporaines* 123, no. 2 (2011): 2.

<sup>141</sup> Lougee, *Le Paradis Des Femmes*, 176.

<sup>142</sup> François de Grenaille, *L'Honnête Fille Dediée à Mademoiselle de Bourbon*, vol. 2 (Paris: Toussaint Quinet, 1640), 29. "Il n'est pas si difficile de trouver le feu sans chaleur que l'honnêteté sans devotion"

difference between good and evil.<sup>143</sup> Therefore, for both Grenaille and Fénelon, girls' spirituality is a primary consideration in their theories of education and it is foundational to their notions of girls' vocational discernment.

Grenaille recommends a theologically focused approach to girls' education that exposes girls to biblical texts and complex religious concepts. In a section titled "Theology is Not a Science Unknown to Girls," Grenaille praises girls' natural theological capabilities, arguing that because of their virginity they have a special knowledge of God.<sup>144</sup> He argues that the Holy Spirit teaches young virgins, "immediately in an unexplainable exchange," the mysteries of grace and the saints.<sup>145</sup> Therefore, their understanding is especially pure because it comes directly from God, rather than from fallible human beings.<sup>146</sup> His examples include Saint Angelle, Saint Catherine de Genes, and Saint Theresa, all of whom, he argues, understood more about God than some of the most eminent church doctors.<sup>147</sup> In addition, God chose a young virgin to give birth to the saviour of the world, "showing that the extraordinary attractions of Jesus Christ seem to be ordinary for girls."<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, while Grenaille names particular women, he does not characterize them as exceptional. Rather, he insists that generally girls have a heightened awareness of the supernatural and a profound understanding of theological truths.<sup>149</sup> In fact, he argues that despite their small size and physical weakness, girls "have

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<sup>143</sup> Fénelon, "The Education of Girls," 8–9.

<sup>144</sup> Grenaille, *L'honnête fille où dans le premier livre il est traité de l'esprit des filles*, 3:324. "Que la Theologie n'est pas une Science Inconue aux Filles."

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. "immédiatement dans un commerce infable,"

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 3:326.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 3:324, 326.

<sup>148</sup> Grenaille, *L'honnête fille dédiée à Mademoiselle de Bourbon*, 2:30. "Montrent que les saveurs extraordinaires de Jesus-Christ semblent estre ordinaires pour les filles que ses plus hauts Mysteres n'ont rien de secret pour elles."

<sup>149</sup> Grenaille, *L'honnête fille où dans le premier livre il est traité de l'esprit des filles*, 3:326.

enough strength to uphold God's cause against Atheists, as well as Heretics."<sup>150</sup> As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the reformers of the Catholic church championed girls as defenders against heresy, since in the future they would be responsible for the religious education of their own children. Strategically, Grenaille aligns his arguments with the church's stance on girls' education. He affirms that girls have significant spiritual responsibilities, and insists that God equips them for this task with a special relationship to the divine.

Grenaille is especially concerned that girls develop a rational capacity to discern between good and evil. He therefore criticizes the existing state of girls' education and warns his audience "not to be astonished if a girl finds herself deceived since she does not know how to discern the intentions of traitors and of faithful servants."<sup>151</sup> In contrast, he lists examples of both classical and Christian young women who were known for their wisdom because "they consulted their books more than their mirror."<sup>152</sup> Grenaille often juxtaposes beauty and intelligence. He argues that "it is better that girls are ugly and well instructed, than beautiful and ignorant."<sup>153</sup> Yet Grenaille insists that girls apply their intelligence to spiritual discernment rather than self-promotion, since it is more important to serve God than to please men.<sup>154</sup> Although they are physically inferior to men, girls' theological understanding and interior experience of God are more profound.

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.; Grenaille, *L'honnête fille dédiée à Mademoiselle de Bourbon*, 2:99. "Dans la foiblesse de leur sexe, ont assez de force pour soutenir la cause de Dieu contre les Athées, aussi bien que contre les Herétiques."

<sup>151</sup> Grenaille, *L'honnête fille où dans le premier livre il est traité de l'esprit des filles*, 3:301. "Il ne se faut pas estonner si elle se trouvent trompées lors qu'elles ne savent pas discerner les intentions des traitres et des fidelles serviteurs."

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 3:261, 265, 274.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 3:140.

<sup>154</sup> Grenaille, *L'honnête fille dédiée à Mademoiselle de Bourbon*, 2:18.

Fénelon's approach to religious education is different than Grenaille's in both style and content. While Grenaille constructs complex theological arguments, and uses long lists of biblical and classical examples, Fénelon employs a distinctly moralizing and didactic tone, focusing on the basic doctrines of grace and salvation. In his discussions on girls' spirituality, Fénelon relies heavily on his own practical experience as a confessor at a Parisian school for converted Huguenot girls.<sup>155</sup> Based on this experience, Fénelon's program for teaching girls about spirituality and religion is highly structured. He recommends that educators and parents discuss the most important theological concepts one-on-one, to ensure immediate intervention in cases of misapprehension.<sup>156</sup> In one such interview, the girl is asked whether she knows the difference between a table and a chair. When she confirms that she does, she is asked whether the table knows her, whether it loves her, and whether the chair or table loves her more.<sup>157</sup> At each ridiculous question the educator is told not to proceed until "the child begins to laugh at the absurdity of this question," to be sure that she is following the line of reasoning.<sup>158</sup> If she does not laugh, then she has missed the important difference between humans who have souls and the inanimate objects which do not.<sup>159</sup> In Fénelon's approach to religious education, girls are deliberately guided through structured steps designed to teach doctrines.<sup>160</sup>

This highly regulated and moralistic religious education suits Fénelon's conception of women's role in society. In Fénelon's mind, a girl is a mother-in-training.

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<sup>155</sup> Fitzgerald, "To Educate or Instruct?," 162; Penny Brown, *A Critical History of French Children's Literature* (New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2008), 40.

<sup>156</sup> Fénelon, "The Education of Girls," 119.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>160</sup> Fitzgerald, "To Educate or Instruct?," 160.

In the future, her primary responsibilities will be raising her children and cultivating her family's religious devotion.<sup>161</sup> Therefore girls must know only enough about religion to avoid superstition, but they have no need for higher level theology. Of course, this limit contrasts with Grenaille's idea that girls are capable of understanding profound theological truths and discussing these with men. Yet Fénelon is not alone in his limited view of girls' religious education. The Abbé Claude Fleury sets similar constraints in his *Traité* in which he suggests that girls "should content themselves to learn common dogmas, without entering into theology."<sup>162</sup> Fénelon and Fleury's apprehensions about girls' theological learning indicates an underlying fear that girls are highly susceptible to heresy and corruption. For both Fénelon and Fleury, religious education is necessary, not because girls are spiritually gifted, as Grenaille suggests, but because they are expected to teach basic Catholic beliefs to their future children.

### **Grenaille and Fénelon on Religious Vocation**

Despite differing conceptions of girls' spiritual and theological capacities, Fénelon and Grenaille's treatises do intersect at a few key points. Specifically, both theorists recognize girls' capacity for hearing and responding to God's calling within certain contexts. In Fénelon's text, this acknowledgement takes the form of a discussion about girls who feel called to become nuns. In Grenaille's work, he discusses virginity as a state of marriage to Jesus, and he argues that girls receive messages directly from God through this intimate relationship.

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<sup>161</sup> Chartier, Compère, and Julia, *L'Éducation en France*, 232; Carter, "Les garçons et les filles sont pêle-mêle dans l'école," 421.

<sup>162</sup> Fleury, *Traité du choix et de la méthode des études*, 267. "Il faut donc se contenter de leur apprendre les dogmes communs, sans entrer dans la théologie."

As members of the clergy, both theorists are situated in a long tradition of reverence for girlhood virginity. Tertullian, writing in the second century, praised women who chose virginity describing them as “brides of Christ.”<sup>163</sup> Two hundred years later, St. Jerome argued that women were created intellectually, physically, and morally inferior to men, but those who commit to a life of virginity “will cease to be a woman and will be called man.”<sup>164</sup> The medieval church elevated the status of virgins through the worship of the virgin Mary. Medieval theologians argued that while Eve brought about the fall of human kind, Mary acted as the second Eve and through her virginity gave birth to the saviour of the world.<sup>165</sup> Finally, a popular seventeenth-century preacher, Philippe d’Angoumois, taught that “virginity is the Sun, chastity the dawn, and marriage the night; marriage is the sea, chastity the port, and virginity the homeland.”<sup>166</sup> Therefore, virginal bodies were consistently revered in the the works of Christian theorists and only virgins were considered capable of mystical intimacy with God.<sup>167</sup>

Grenaille draws on this tradition in his arguments for girls’ capacity for religious learning. He describes virgins as “spouses of Jesus-Christ” who “have no difficulty approaching God since they are never far from him.”<sup>168</sup> Grenaille assumes that all females are in a state of marriage, either to their husbands as wives, to God as virgins, or to the devil if they stray from either of the other two commitments. Yet he insists that

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<sup>163</sup> Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 21.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Colton, “The Articulation of Virginity,” 165; Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 19, 23; Christa Grössinger, *Picturing Women in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 5.

<sup>166</sup> As quoted in Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 17.

<sup>167</sup> Petroff, “Introduction: The Visionary Tradition in Women’s Writings,” 34.

<sup>168</sup> Grenaille, *L’honneste fille dédiée à Mademoiselle de Bourbon*, 2:29, 31. “Espouses de Jesus-Christ.” “N’ont pas de peine à s’approcher de Dieu ne s’en estant jamais esloignées.”

girls, because of their natural innocence, are the least likely to abandon their form of marriage, which is virginity. In fact, their deep connection with their divine spouse teaches them the truths of grace and they “would sooner learn these secrets in the school of the Word (Jesus), than in that of Saint Thomas.”<sup>169</sup> Therefore, Grenaille argues that girls have a special connection to God through which they communicate freely.

As a priest, Fénelon was also a part of the ecclesiastical tradition that celebrates virginity, but he was more interested in practical instruction than theoretical arguments. Fénelon largely assumes that girls are not in direct communication with God, but must receive their spiritual understanding through teachers and other earthly mediators. However, Fénelon does make one exception to this rule. At the very end of a lengthy section on the duties of women, he writes: “if on the contrary she makes up her mind to become a nun, without being persuaded into it by her parents, direct all her education thence forward towards the state to which she is aspiring.”<sup>170</sup> He encourages these parents to expose their daughters to the rigours of poverty and hard labour, and to teach them the value of obedience and silence. He instructs parents, “try to find out by degrees how far she is adapted to the rule of the Order which she wishes to enter,” and then train her in the disciplines required for that order.<sup>171</sup> The girl is still a passive recipient of instruction and discipline, but the direction of this training is a product of her own choice. Fénelon emphasizes that the impetus to join a religious community must come from the girl herself and he instructs parents that they must never encourage their daughters to choose

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<sup>169</sup> Grenaille, *L'honnête fille où dans le premier livre il est traité de l'esprit des filles*, 3:326. “Ont plustost appris ces secrets dans l'école du Verbe, que dans celle de Saint Thomas.”

<sup>170</sup> Fénelon, “The Education of Girls,” 90.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

the religious life. He urges parents and educators “above all never let girls suspect that you want them to aspire to become nuns,” as this will make them feel trapped.<sup>172</sup> Despite Fénelon’s limited conception of girls’ spiritual abilities, he does not deny that some girls will receive divine callings. Moreover, he even admits that in these instances girls must play decisive roles in the direction of their education.

Even though Fénelon focused on girls as future mothers rather than nuns, he could not deny the legitimacy of religious callings. As mentioned in my introduction, Madame de Maintenon articulates this concept in a discussion with students at Saint-Cyr in which she responds to a student’s concern about failing to respond to God’s call. According to Maintenon, the student spoke for the class, saying that they had heard that if they miss their vocation “God usually withdraws the graces which he had designated for the state of life He desired for you. That makes us very fearful.”<sup>173</sup> Fénelon’s brief instructions for girls who are called to become nuns speak to these fears. The weight of salvation means that even within his highly structured educational regime he must recognize that God will call some girls to become nuns, and the articulation of this vocation must come from the girl herself. It should be noted that Fénelon’s *Traité* was dedicated to the Duchesse de Beauvillier who had nine young daughters at the time of writing, seven of whom grew up to become nuns.<sup>174</sup> Neither he, nor Madame de Maintenon, nor the Duchess could oppose a virgin’s claim to know God’s will for her life.

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>173</sup> de Maintenon, “Addresses to Students,” 102.

<sup>174</sup> H.C. Barnard, “Introduction,” in *Fénelon on Education: A Translation of the Traité de L’Éducation Des Filles and Other Documents Illustrating Fénelon’s Educational Theories and Practice, Together with an Introduction and Notes* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1966), xxxix.

Conceptions of women's societal roles and ideas about salvation were intrinsically linked in the minds of seventeenth-century girls' education theorists. The events of the Catholic Reformation meant that both Grenaille and Fénelon were aware of the urgency of girls' education, and were concerned about orthodoxy of belief and the salvation of souls. At the same time, the ideas of the *querelle des femmes* also influenced these authors. Grenaille thought that women belonged in civil society as companions to men and conversationalists, while Fénelon recommended that women stay home to manage the household and raise children. This difference in the authors' conceptions of women's social roles have corresponding implications for their conceptions of girls' education. Grenaille had an elevated view of girls' rational capacity and knowledge of God. In fact, he argues that even adult men can learn from having a conversation with a young girl. On the other hand, Fénelon limits girls' education to household tasks, and recommends that their spiritual training cover only the doctrines that they must teach to their children. While these theorists' programs for girls' education differ, they intersect at one important point. Both recognize that girls have the capacity to receive and respond to callings from God. Therefore, Grenaille and Fénelon's works lend legitimacy to girls' claims to religious vocation. Furthermore, the attention these educational theorists paid to issues of girls' spiritual training and authority suggests that Jacqueline Pascal was not the only girl in the seventeenth century to lay claim to an intimate connection with the divine. The next chapters will investigate the educational experiences of other girls who, like Jacqueline, spent time discerning God's will and eventually asserted their own religious vocations.

## Chapter 2

### **Becoming a "Mediocre Christian Lay Woman or a Bad Nun:" Learning Domestic and Religious Vocation at Convent School**

When Louis XIV established the Saint-Cyr girls' school in 1686 he declared: "the goal of this foundation is not to increase convents, which increase enough already by themselves, but to give to the state women who are well raised. There are enough nuns and not enough good mothers for families."<sup>175</sup> Yet for the next three decades, two-thirds of the girls who graduated from the school became nuns.<sup>176</sup> The failure of the king's plan points to a deep-seated contradiction in girls' educational curriculum and experience in seventeenth-century France. This chapter will examine the competing models of female vocation presented at convent schools through various media including written texts, illustrated Bibles, theatrical performances, and interviews with nuns. While the previous chapter examined theoretical ideas about girls' education and capacity for spiritual discernment, this chapter will explore the pedagogical experience and the factors that influenced girls' vocational choices. Children's Bibles and catechisms taught girls that God had a general calling for them to become wives and mothers. However, students at convent schools had other influences in their lives that complicated this message. Girls who read biographical literature about medieval mystics or attended classes taught by nuns encountered examples of women who responded to God's unique calling to

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<sup>175</sup> As quoted in Picco, "La perception de l'éducation reçue à Saint-Cyr (1686-1719)," 740. "L'objet de la foundation n'est pas de multiplier les couvents, qui se multiplient assez d'eux-mêmes mais de donner à l'État des femmes bien élevées. Il y a assez de bonnes religieuses et pas assez de bonnes meres de famille."

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 742; John Conley, "Introduction," in *Madame de Maintenon: Dialogues and Addresses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 9. The ratio of students who entered religious communities vs those who did not is debated. Conley says it was just a significant minority. Perhaps he included the significant number of deceased students in his calculations, whereas Picco excluded these from the total percentage.

religious life. On one hand, girls were encouraged to become mothers, while at the same time, they were taught that God might call them into a divine vocation. These two callings were at odds, because the first assumed that girls were recipients of a pre-established vocation, while the second required individual engagement with God and a discernment process. Girls navigated conflicting notions of vocation throughout their education and were forced to reconcile these as they approached womanhood.

The Catholic Reformation, as discussed in chapter one, brought about an unprecedented growth in teaching orders and pedagogical material aimed at the education of children. Karen Carter argues that “children’s religious education was the centerpiece of Catholic reform,” and it was effective because parents believed that a religious education would benefit their children.<sup>177</sup> Parents were willing to spend money on catechism classes because they wanted their children to learn the behaviours and ideas essential for attaining salvation.<sup>178</sup> Religious education took on different forms in rural and urban settings and for poor and wealthy children. Rural parents weighed the value of education with some of their more immediate needs, and often kept children at home during the harvest.<sup>179</sup> Urban children were more likely to attend gender-segregated classes, in accordance with the 1598 Edict of Nantes which mandated separate classes for boys and girls.<sup>180</sup> Poor families sought informal schooling for their children, especially for their daughters. These girls were typically sent to a local lay woman to learn basic reading, prayers, catechism, and sewing.<sup>181</sup> On the other hand, noble families could

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<sup>177</sup> Carter, *Creating Catholics*, 3.

<sup>178</sup> Rapley, “Fénelon Revisited,” 303; Carter, *Creating Catholics*, 13.

<sup>179</sup> Carter, *Creating Catholics*, 131.

<sup>180</sup> Carter, “Les garçons et les filles sont pêle-mêle dans l’école,” 428.

<sup>181</sup> Carter, *Creating Catholics*, 188; Rapley, “Fénelon Revisited,” 301.

usually afford to send their daughters to convent schools, where they learned more advanced subjects such as writing, history, and mathematics.<sup>182</sup> Since the teachers at these schools were nuns, noble girls in the seventeenth century came into contact with nuns more frequently than in previous generations. In fact, Barbara Diefendorf argues that between 1580 and 1615 the growing popularity of convent education caused a spike in noble girls' interest in joining religious communities.<sup>183</sup> Non-noble girls were not affected in the same way since their access to convent spaces remained more limited. Despite some of rural-urban differences, the actual catechism material taught across France was strikingly similar. There were no separate doctrines for boys and girls, and lessons followed a question and answer format, focusing on the practical requirements for being a good Catholic.<sup>184</sup>

### **Catechizing Female Vocation**

The first catechism written explicitly for children was Robert Bellarmine's *Dottrina Christiana Breve*, published in Italian in 1597 and translated into French in 1600.<sup>185</sup> In the text, Bellarmine uses simple and memorable questions and answers to explain Catholic practices such as the sign of the cross, making confession, and taking the Eucharist.<sup>186</sup> He even offers detailed advice on what to do if the Eucharist gets stuck to the roof of the mouth while taking communion and how long to wait after the sacraments

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<sup>182</sup> Picco, "La perception de l'éducation reçue à Saint-Cyr (1686-1719)," 730; Broomhall, *Women and the Book Trade*, 18.

<sup>183</sup> Diefendorf, "Give Us Back Our Children," 267, 305.

<sup>184</sup> Carter, *Creating Catholics*, 7, 95; John Bossy, "The Counter-Reformation and the People of Catholic Europe," *Past and Present* 47 (1970): 66.

<sup>185</sup> Jill Fehleison, *Boundaries of Faith: Catholics and Protestants in the Diocese of Geneva* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2010), 183.

<sup>186</sup> Carter, *Creating Catholics*, 32; Bossy, *Christianity in the West 1400-1700*, 120.

before spitting on the ground.<sup>187</sup> Bellarmine's catechism was widely used in France, and formed the central curriculum for the Ursulines and other teaching orders.<sup>188</sup> Even amidst the increase in publication of local catechisms in the second half of the seventeenth century, the Bellarmine catechism remained one of the most popular and in 1742 Pope Benedict XIV called for its official use in all dioceses.<sup>189</sup> The catechism elaborates on all the most essential points of doctrine, including the trinity, the apostle's creed, the ten commandments, and the sacraments.

In the section on sacraments, the catechism touches on the concept of divine vocation. First, the teacher asks "what effect does the sacrament of Order work?" The response is, "it gives virtue and grace to priests and other ministers of the church, to be able to do their duties well."<sup>190</sup> This answer is followed with a question about marriage, the alternative to religious orders. The teacher asks "what effect does the sacrament of Matrimony work?"<sup>191</sup> The response given to this question is more detailed, reading, "it gives virtue and grace to those who are lawfully joined together, to live in matrimony with peace and charity, and to beget and bring up their children in the holy fear of God, to the end that they may have joy in this life and in the other."<sup>192</sup> Religious and marriage vows are offered as two parallel sacraments through which grace can be received.<sup>193</sup> Nonetheless, they are not presented as equally accessible or desirable. The reference to

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<sup>187</sup> Robert Bellarmine, "A Brief Christian Doctrine to Be Learned by Heart," in *Christian Catechetical Texts Medieval and Reformation, 1357-1579*, ed. William McDonald, trans. George Mayr (Queenston, Ont: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2011), 553.

<sup>188</sup> Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 156; Conley, *The Suspicion of Virtue*, 3.

<sup>189</sup> Bellarmine, "A Brief Christian Doctrine," 532.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 542.

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

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> Carter, *Creating Catholics*, 34.

priests and ministers implies that men are the chief recipients of the sacrament of Order. In practice, women also took part in this sacrament as nuns, but Bellarmine makes no mention of this option. Bellarmine's description of the sacrament of Orders is more informational than instructional. It serves as an explanation for children wondering about their priests' receipt of God's grace, but it does not encourage children to see themselves in a priestly role.<sup>194</sup> In contrast, the section on the sacrament of marriage is more inclusive and rewarding. Both genders are implicitly involved, and they are given peace and charity, in addition to the grace and virtue that comes with all sacraments. Bellarmine also mentions the birth and education of children and the importance of raising them as Christians. This mention of parental responsibilities and his additional instructions reaffirm the significance of this sacrament. Bellarmine explains the sacrament of marriage in more detail than the sacrament of orders because he assumes that marriage is the more applicable option to his audience. His intention, especially for girls, is that they see themselves as future recipients of the sacrament of Matrimony and all of its rewards and responsibilities.

### **Depicting Female Vocation**

Bellarmino's assumption that girls will one day become wives is echoed in another seventeenth-century genre directed at young audiences—children's Bibles. According to literary scholar Ruth Bottigheimer, "Bible story collections reached a far greater proportion of European child-readers than any other single genre of narrative

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 35.

writing in the early modern period.”<sup>195</sup> The most popular children’s Bible in early modern France was Nicholas Fontaine’s *L’Histoire de Vieux et du Nouveau Testament* published in 1670. This text was dedicated to the young dauphin, but was read widely in elite homes and schools. In fact, due to its popularity, it was republished almost every decade for the next two hundred years.<sup>196</sup> Furthermore, when Fénelon recommends Bible stories for girls in his *Traite de l’éducation des filles* he uses titles that correlate with Fontaine’s version, suggesting that it was widely accessible. Fontaine was a teacher at Port-Royal and his Bible was used at the Saint-Cyr school, where girls of the lesser nobility were taught to be wives and mothers.<sup>197</sup> Fontaine’s Bible was designed for young audiences still learning to read, and was illustrated with “images that convey very important teachings through your eyes and into your mind.”<sup>198</sup> Therefore, the images are an integral part of the author’s pedagogical approach. The men, women, and children depicted were intended to be models for the many elite children who read these Bibles.

There are very few young women pictured in Fontaine’s Bible, and no girls. Even characters who should be well below adult years based on the text are depicted as mature in the accompanying prints. The youngest representations of women are those on the cusp of marriage. The first of these is Rebecca, the young woman who would become Isaac’s

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<sup>195</sup> Ruth Bottigheimer, “The Child-Reader of Children’s Bibles, 1656-1753,” in *Infant Tongues*, ed. Elizabeth Goodenough, Mark Heberle, and Naomi Sokoloff (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 46.

<sup>196</sup> Ruth Bottigheimer, “The Bible for Children: The Emergence and Development of the Genre, 1550-1990,” in *The Church and Childhood*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford: Ecclesiastical History Society, 1994), 353.

<sup>197</sup> Nicholas Hammond, *Fragmentary Voices: Memory and Education at Port-Royal* (Tübingen, Germany: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2004), 53.

<sup>198</sup> Nicolas Fontaine, *L’Histoire du vieux et du Nouveau Testament représentée avec des figures et des explications édifiantes, tirées des SS. PP. pour régler les moeurs dans toute sorte de conditions* (Paris: Chez Pierre le Petit, 1670), epistre. “Des figures, et en faisant passer ainsi de vos yeux dans vostre esprit des instructions tres-importantes.”

wife and the mother of Jacob and Esau. The illustration accompanying this story portrays the moment at which Eliazar, the servant tasked with finding a wife for Isaac, first sees Rebecca [Figure 1]. Fontaine describes her in the text as “a young girl, strong and well-



**Figure 1**

built.”<sup>199</sup> In the image, Rebecca stands facing Eliazar and with her back to the reader. She has a large clay jug in her arms to give water to Eliazar’s camels and her rippling muscles are visible through her thin garment.<sup>200</sup> She appears prepared for domestic duties in both body and posture.<sup>201</sup> Her hair, which is wound neatly in a scarf is still visible yet tamed,

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 43. “une jeune fille fort bien faite.”

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>201</sup> Yvonne Bleyerveld, “Chaste, Obedient and Devout: Biblical Women as Patterns of Female Virtue in Netherlandish and Germanic Graphic Art, Ca. 1500-1750,” *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 28, no. 4 (2001): 226, 233, 241, 244, 248. Bleyerveld analysis of biblical women depicted in the Dutch and German contexts can be extended to depictions of women in French

emphasizing her modesty, chastity, and self-restraint.<sup>202</sup> When Rebecca's future daughter-in-law, Rachel, enters the saga she is depicted similarly. She is in the distance, herding sheep with a stick, while in the foreground, Jacob begs her father to give her to him in



**Figure 2**

marriage [Figure 2].<sup>203</sup> Rachel appears active and industrious in the image; there is movement in her step and her robes swirl around her legs.<sup>204</sup> Her face is turned towards

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Bibles at the same time. In and Dutch and German representations of Rebecca she is also depicted carrying a jug and representing the virtue of obedience.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 220; Grössinger, *Picturing Women in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art*, 116.

<sup>203</sup> Bleyerveld, "Chaste, Obedient and Devout," 230, 233, 243. In Dutch and German representations of Rachel she is often situated in pastoral scenes or with props that emphasize her fertility, maternal nurturing, and domestic industry.

<sup>204</sup> Fontaine, *L'Histoire du vieux et du Nouveau Testament*, 51.

the sheep in her care, showing no interest in the men's conversation. Both Rebecca and Rachel are depicted as edifying models of young domestic women.

Rebecca and Rachel are the youngest women depicted in Fontaine's Bible, and the absence of other girls is significant. The author and his illustrator wanted to focus on images of successful womanhood to which girl readers could aspire, rather than mirroring the child reader on the page and affirming the legitimacy of her current life stage.<sup>205</sup> Therefore, adult women are consistently depicted as domestic or motherly figures. For example, in an image of Jesus teaching a crowd the only visible woman is a mother [Figure 3].<sup>206</sup> She is positioned to the left of Jesus, looking towards him and standing amongst three children. With one outstretched arm she directs her children and ushers the smallest one onto Jesus' lap. A man on Jesus' right also holds out his hand as if to encourage the children.<sup>207</sup> He appears as a father figure mirroring the woman. Between this couple is Jesus, cradling the smallest of the three children, while the others rush towards him. The body of the woman, the man, and Jesus create a triangle, symbolizing the holy family of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus.<sup>208</sup> This reference to the holy family is

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<sup>205</sup> Bleyerveld, "Chaste, Obedient and Devout," 220. Bleyerveld argues that "in sixteenth and seventeenth-century didactic works for women, it was customary to hold up to the reader images of exemplary women of the past as a mirror of their own conduct."

<sup>206</sup> Fontaine, *L'Histoire du vieux et du Nouveau Testament*, 435.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> My appreciation to Art Historian, Dr. Catherine Harding for her insightful interpretation of the image as a reference to the holy family.

emphasized in Jesus' posture, as he holds a baby and looks towards heaven, alluding to



**Figure 3**

popular imagery of the Madonna.<sup>209</sup> The woman is situated in this pious scene as a supportive and domestic facilitator of Jesus' interaction with her children.

The story of Mary and Martha provides an ideal opportunity for Fontaine to speak directly on the topic of domesticity. In the story, Jesus visits Martha's home. While her sister Mary sits at his feet enraptured in his teachings, Martha works in the kitchen to prepare their meal.<sup>210</sup> When she comes out of the kitchen to reprimand her sister, Jesus

<sup>209</sup> For more on depictions of Jesus in motherly roles see Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*.

<sup>210</sup> Fontaine, *L'Histoire du vieux et du Nouveau Testament*, 445.

defends Mary, explaining that she chose the better task. Immediately following this story, Fontaine slips into pedagogical prose, explaining to his young readers that undertaking domestic tasks is not wrong, “but, they should be careful that the distress and hastiness that accompany these tasks do not little by little begin to harm their interior piety.”<sup>211</sup>



*IESVS-CHRIST entre dans la maison de Marthe , qui s'empresse de le recevoir pendant que sa sœur entend sa parole.*

**Figure 4**

According to Fontaine, Jesus' reprimand is against Martha's attitude rather than her domesticity. To reinforce this interpretation, the accompanying image shows the

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 446. “Ils doivent craindre néanmoins que le trouble et l'empressement qui les accompagne, ne nuise peu à peu à la pureté intérieure.”

household scene, with the kitchen in the foreground and the dining area in the distance [Figure 4]. Three women work on the left side of the kitchen; their hands are busy and their heads are bent. A group of three men work on the opposite side of the kitchen roasting meat and carrying dishes. The prominence of the kitchen activity in the foreground of the image affirms the legitimacy of domestic work. Fontaine uses the image and explanatory aside to reframe the biblical story and affirm Martha's domesticity.

Fontaine's depictions of Rebecca, Rachel, and Martha reflect the narrative of womanhood taught at Saint-Cyr girls' school and recommended in Fénelon's *Traité de l'éducation des filles*. As discussed in chapter one, Fénelon devotes the largest section of his treatise on girls' education to women's domestic duties. He instructs girls to “shun and despise idleness,” and to “make of their work a serious, steady and useful occupation.”<sup>212</sup> Fénelon's ideas were implemented at Saint-Cyr because they suited Louis XIV's vision for the school as an institution for training the next generation of noble mothers. Yet Fontaine's Bible and Bellarmine's catechism are evidence that Fénelon's pro-domesticity approach to girls' education had traction beyond the walls of Saint-Cyr. The many elite girls who attended convent schools, catechism classes, or grew up in a home with a copy of Fontaine's Bible encountered biblical models of women in domestic spaces and were taught to receive God's grace through marriage. These girls saw and internalized the images of Rachel and Rebecca working to impress their future husbands. Amidst the images of disciples talking they would have noticed that women were standing with

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<sup>212</sup> Fénelon, “The Education of Girls,” 89.

children or kneeling on the ground. These girls also memorized a catechism which encouraged them to receive God's grace, joy, and peace through the bearing and raising of children. In word and image, girls learned that God designed young women with strong bodies for the purpose of domestic work and childrearing. In terms of pursuing a domestic vocation, discernment was not necessary because this calling applied to all women.

Yet despite strong themes of female domesticity, girls reading Fontaine's Bible also encountered biblical women who responded to God's call to act outside of the domestic sphere. These women killed enemies, led armies, and negotiated with rulers. For example, Fontaine recounts the story of Jael, an Israelite woman who slayed a Canaanite general with a tent peg in her home. The text describes this gruesome deed in detail, writing "this woman, who fought just for the sake of God's people, took a big nail that she struck in Sisara's head and into the earth."<sup>213</sup> However, the accompanying illustration does not show any of this action [Figure 5]. Rather Jael is depicted standing in her doorway, a warm smile on her face, a hammer grasped in her left fist, and the other hand gesturing towards the interior of her home where a water jug sits on a table just above the obscured form of Sisera. Behind Jael, a writhing mass of horses, soldiers, and weapons battle on the hillside, but she is separated from this violence. Her open door acts as a barrier between her domestic space and the clashing armies. In fact, her body is turned towards her home and away from the battle. The message in the text and the image

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<sup>213</sup> Fontaine, *L'Histoire du vieux et du Nouveau Testament*, 134. "cette femme combattant encore pour le peuple de Dieu, prit un grand clou qu'elle enforça dans la teste de Sisara et la cloüa contre terre."

is that God can use anyone for his purpose, but Jael's domain is still the home, not the battlefield.<sup>214</sup> Therefore, Fontaine frames Jael's violence as an exception to the domestic norm.



**Figure 5**

Similarly, Fontaine describes Debora, one of Israel's female judges, as an exception to the tradition of male leadership. Fontaine writes that after God gave Israel several male judges, "God made the government of the people fall to a woman named

<sup>214</sup> Thomas Carr, *Voix des abbesses du Grand Siècle: La prédication au féminin à Port-Royal* (Tübingen, Germany: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2006), 167; Kathleen Llewellyn, *Representing Judith in Early Modern French Literature* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 30, 135. Llewellyn makes a similar argument in her analysis of Early Modern accounts of Judith, the Israelite heroine who killed Holofernes, the general of an enemy army. Since Judith's violent act is exceptional, it does not disrupt the domestic norm.

Debora, which shows that every instrument is good in the hand of God.”<sup>215</sup> Fontaine explains this further in a pedagogical aside following the narrative. He paraphrases Saint Paul’s letter to the Corinthians and reminds his young readers that God uses “the least wise, according to the world, to confound the wisest; and the weakest, according to the world, to confound the most powerful.”<sup>216</sup> According to Fontaine, both Jael and Debora were exceptional women, used by God in a specific time for a prescribed purpose. After killing Sisera, Jael returns to her domestic duties, and only after the failure of several male judges did God set up Debora as a leader. Therefore, Fontaine portrays Jael and Debora as exceptional women, neither of whom disrupt the normative concept of women’s domesticity.

Fontaine’s interest in depicting domestic femininity even amidst women’s extraordinary activities is especially evident in his telling of the story of Esther. The biblical account of Esther begins with the failure of the marriage between Vashti and King Assuerus, also known as Xerxes I of Persia. In search of a replacement queen, the king gathers all of the most beautiful young virgins from the kingdom. After a long selection process, the king chooses Esther, an orphaned Hebrew girl, as his next queen.<sup>217</sup> Not long after, Esther becomes aware of a plot to kill all of the Jews in the kingdom and she bravely approaches the king to ask for his intervention. Fontaine's account of Esther

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<sup>215</sup> Fontaine, *L’Histoire du vieux et du Nouveau Testament*, 133. “Dieu fit tomber le gouvernement du peuple à une femme nommé Debora qui fit voir que tout instrument est bon dans la main de Dieu.”

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 134. “les moins sages, selon le monde, pour confondre les plus sages; et les plus foibles, selon le monde, pour confondre les plus puissans.”

<sup>217</sup> “The Latin Vulgate Old Testament Bible,” *Esther*, accessed April 4, 2016, [vulgate.org](http://vulgate.org); R.J. Howells, “Racine’s Esther: Reintegration and Ritual,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 20, no. 2 (1984): 105. According to Howells Racine used The Vulgate as his source text.

focuses on this throne room drama. In fact, he skips the backstory, simply describing Esther as a woman who “by a personal directive from God, became the wife of Assuerus in the place of Vashti.”<sup>218</sup> Fontaine omits the scandal and introduces Esther as a wife, in order to set her up as a model for his young readers. He goes on to describe her as a “holy woman” who prepared herself with fasting, prayers, and tears, before going before her husband, the king, to request his mercy for the Israelite people.<sup>219</sup> Fontaine also frames Esther’s audacious court entrance with tropes of feminine humility.



Figure 6

<sup>218</sup> Fontaine, *L'Histoire du vieux et du Nouveau Testament*, 296. “par une conduite toute particuliere de Dieu est devenuë femme d’Assuerus à la place de Vasthi.”

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.* “sainte femme.”

Upon approaching the king's throne without his invitation, an act punishable by death, Esther sees fury in the king's eyes and faints. This moment is depicted in the accompanying image, in which Esther appears weak and sickly, slumped against her two ladies in waiting [Figure 6].<sup>220</sup> In fact, Esther faints twice in the text, and it is only after this second show of weakness that Esther is able to capture the king's sympathies. Therefore, according to Fontaine, Esther is physically unable to disobey her husband. Nicole Hochner argues that this emphasis on Esther's frailty was a reflection of shifting concepts of femininity. Versions of Esther prior to 1520 rarely mention her fainting, while later authors and artists including Tintoretto, Rembrandt, Poussin, and Racine identify this moment as the climax of the story.<sup>221</sup> In his depiction of Esther, Fontaine aligns himself with arguments in favour of women's submissiveness and downplays her disobedience to her husband.

Debora, Jael, and Esther highlight two conflicting notions of women's vocations in seventeenth-century France. First, the idea that all women are called to domestic work and second that God has the power to call individuals into his service. God gives Jael the opportunity to kill the enemy commander, but she accomplishes this in a household space, not the battlefield. Debora is called to lead the Israelites, but only after the failure of several male judges. God places Esther in a position to save her people, but she takes on a submissive posture even in her audacious act. Fontaine does not omit the stories of

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 295.

<sup>221</sup> Nicole Hochner, "Imagining Esther in Early Modern France," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 41, no. 3 (2010): 787.

God calling women to extraordinary tasks. Rather, he frames their activities as exceptions to the domestic norm.

### **Enacting Female Vocation at Saint-Cyr**

The tension between these two types of vocation, a general calling to domesticity and a special calling to serve God, came to life for the girls attending Saint-Cyr in 1689 when they performed Jean Racine's theatrical version of the story of Esther. This production was the first and only of its kind at Saint-Cyr and it shaped the educational experience of its young female performers. In the past, the Saint-Cyr girls had put on small sketches in class, but never in front of an audience and never in costume. To improve upon this rudimentary theatrical education, their headmistress, Madame de Maintenon, had asked Jean Racine to write "some kind of moral or historical poem from which love was entirely excluded" for the girls to perform.<sup>222</sup> The result was an elaborate production costing over fifteen thousand livres and involving the court decorator, royal musicians, and costumes borrowed from the King's wardrobe.<sup>223</sup> Racine himself directed the countless practices leading up to the series of performances in January and February of 1689.<sup>224</sup> Between eight hundred and a thousand courtiers and royalty saw Saint-Cyr's public performances of *Esther*, including Louis XIV and James II of England.<sup>225</sup> The casting of girls between the ages of twelve and sixteen for all of the parts, including that of the king and his chief advisors, along with the emotional intensity inherent to theatrical

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<sup>222</sup> As quoted in Piéjus, "Avant-Propos," xii. "Quelque espèce de poème moral ou historique où l'amour fût entièrement banni."

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., xii; Jean Dubu, *Les demoiselles de Saint-Cyr, maison royale d'éducation, 1686-1793* (Paris: Somogy, 1999), 119.

<sup>224</sup> Brown, *A Critical History of French Children's Literature*, 28.

<sup>225</sup> Dubu, *Les demoiselles de Saint-Cyr*, 119.

performances, sparked some controversy and criticism, bringing a swift end to Saint-Cyr's brief foray into theatrical production.<sup>226</sup> There were no more public performances after 1689, but the script and music score were retained and integrated into the Saint-Cyr curriculum until the school's closure in 1792.<sup>227</sup>

The pedagogical significance of *Esther* lies in the process of practice and performance. As Sara Beam has shown in the context of Jesuit schools, early modern educators used theatre as a pedagogical tool for teaching behaviours and beliefs.<sup>228</sup> Likewise, through the memorization of lines and the repetition of scenes, the Saint-Cyr girls experienced the story of Esther and learned through embodiment and emulation. Since Saint-Cyr was tasked with a royal mandate to produce wives and mothers, Madame de Maintenon intended that through the performance, the girls would encounter Esther as a role model for their future domestic vocations.<sup>229</sup> Much like the story of Esther in Fontaine's Bible, Racine's version of *Esther* does not recount the disgrace and replacement of Vashti, but opens with Esther as the loyal and obedient wife of Assuerus. Penny Brown confirms this interpretation, arguing that Racine sets up Esther as a domestic model, since she is portrayed as an obedient wife and a protective mother for the children of Israel.<sup>230</sup> Esther's motherly role is further emphasized because Racine and

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<sup>226</sup> Brown, *A Critical History of French Children's Literature*, 29.

<sup>227</sup> Piéjus, "Avant-Propos," xiv.

<sup>228</sup> Sara Beam, *Laughing Matters: Farce and the Making of Absolutism in France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 237.

<sup>229</sup> Brown, *A Critical History of French Children's Literature*, 27; Anne Birberick, "Behind Closed Doors: Theater, Pedagogy and the 'Crisis' of Esther," in *The Art of Instruction: Essays on Pedagogy and Literature in 17th-Century France*, ed. Anne Birberick (New York: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2008), 181.

<sup>230</sup> Brown, *A Critical History of French Children's Literature*, 27.

Maintenon intentionally cast the youngest students as her entourage of maidens.<sup>231</sup> In the initial production, the role of Esther was played by Thérèse de Veilhenne, one of the Saint-Cyr students, but in later productions the role was played by Madame de Maintenon's married niece, Madame de Caylus.<sup>232</sup> This switch to an older and married actress for the role of Esther further affirms that both Racine and Maintenon wanted Esther to be portrayed as a wife figure, rather than a girl.

Despite efforts to portray Esther as a model of domesticity, the play also has strong themes of divine vocation, which undercut the domestic message.<sup>233</sup> Racine's Esther is clearly situated in a tradition of women called by God to extraordinary tasks.<sup>234</sup> Like the biblical heroines Jael and Debora, Esther is called by God to save the Israelites from impending destruction. In the opening scene of the play, Élise expresses her amazement that her friend has become queen of Persia, stating "by what secret motives, by what sequence have the heavens directed this great event?"<sup>235</sup> In her question Élise implies that God has called Esther to fulfill a particular role within his plan. Racine employs the theme of calling again at the climax of the drama when Esther confronts King Assuerus in his throne room. Before entering the forbidden space, Esther explains that in order "to speak to [the king], it is necessary that he seeks me out, or at least that he

<sup>231</sup> Jean Racine, "Esther Tragédie Tirée de l'Écriture Sainte," in *Tragédies Tirées de l'Écriture Sainte Esther Tragédie de Jean Racine Intermèdes de Jean-Baptiste Moreau*, trans. Anne Piéjus (Paris: Société Française de Musicologie, 2003), 19. "Une des plus jeunes Israélites."

<sup>232</sup> Jean-Joseph Milhiet, "Esther 1689," in *Saint-Cyr. Trois Siècle D'Histoire, Du Poète Jean Racine Au Sculpteur César* (Paris: Editions Christian, 1998), 95.

<sup>233</sup> Birberick, "The Art of Instruction," 194; Bicks, "Producing Girls on the English Stage," 141. Bicks warns against using domestic roles, like daughter or wife, as the only interpretive lens for examining girls' theatre performances.

<sup>234</sup> For more on seventeenth-century conceptions of biblical heroines see Llewellyn, *Representing Judith*.

<sup>235</sup> Racine, "Esther Tragédie Tirée de l'Écriture Sainte," 6. "Par quels secrets resorts, par quell enchaînement le ciel a-t-il conduit ce grand événement."

calls for me.”<sup>236</sup> Esther only dares to approach the king with her request to save the Israelites because she believes that God has chosen her for this task. This concept of divine calling contrasted with the will of human beings reoccurs later in the play. For example, when Esther reveals her Jewish heritage to King Assuerus, she describes the exile of the Israelites and explains that “God chose Cyrus, before that day came to pass, called him by name” and gave him victory over the Israelites to punish them for their sinfulness.<sup>237</sup> Racine frames the story in terms of divine calling, thus emphasizing God’s supremacy over earthly kings. The final spoken line of the play belongs to Esther and reads, “O God! By what ways unknown to Mortals! Your wisdom directs your eternal plans!”<sup>238</sup> This concluding remark again affirms that God rescued the Israelites and Esther acted according to his will. In essence, Esther had a divine vocation to save her people which superseded her call to wifely obedience.

Much like other biblical heroines, Esther's calling is only justified within the larger context of good and evil. As was discussed earlier in this chapter, Jael and Debora were called in response to the presence of an evil enemy. In Racine's account of Esther, Aman, the king’s advisor who master-minded the decree calling for the death of the Israelites is the primary villain.<sup>239</sup> However, the king, Esther’s husband, is also caught up in this evil. In fact, since Assuerus is not an Israelite he is by definition a pagan. The contrast between Assuerus and Esther’s beliefs is especially evident when Assuerus invites her to listen to his diviners interpret his dreams. She agrees to join him but only

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 12. “Il faut pour lui parler, qu’il me cherche, ou du moins qu’il me fasse appeler.”

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 61. “Dieu fit choix de Cyrus, avant qu’il vist le jour, l’appela par son nom.”

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 63. “O Dieu! Par quelle route inconnuë aux Mortels! Ta sagesse conduit ses desseins éternels!”

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 30.

after reminding her Israelite handmaid that these are the practices of a “profane court.”<sup>240</sup> This dynamic complicates the husband-wife relationship, because in order to be obedient to God, Esther must be disobedient to her husband. She enters his throne room without an invitation and later asks him to repeal the decree for the death of the Israelites. Esther’s intervention in her husband’s political responsibilities contradicts the domestic subservient core to Saint-Cyr’s pedagogical mission. While there are still strong themes of domesticity in *Esther*, the overall plot teaches that God’s calling is greater than any earthly calling, especially in the face of evil. Therefore, *Esther* introduced girls to a complicated notion of vocation which required discernment between good and evil, as well as a reverence for God’s ability to call women to tasks beyond the domestic sphere.

### **Reading Religious Vocation at Home and School**

Depictions of women in Fontaine’s Bible and the enactment of *Esther* at Saint-Cyr taught seventeenth-century elite girls conflicting messages about women’s vocations. On one hand, they were introduced to loyal, obedient, and submissive women in domestic spaces, while on the other they learned about cases in which God called women to leadership, violence, and political negotiation. To complicate matters further, Bibles and religious plays were not the only genres to which elite girls had access. The biographies and hagiographies of medieval religious women like Catherine of Siena and Catherine of Genoa, as well as the writings of early modern women like Teresa of Ávila, were popular reading for seventeenth-century elite women and their daughters.<sup>241</sup> Collectively, these

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>241</sup> Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, 19.

biographical sources can be referred to as "Lives," a term which distinguishes these texts from lay people's life writing and recognizes them as a distinct genre.<sup>242</sup>

Religious women's Lives offered encouragement and inspiration for seventeenth-century women. For example, Barbara Diefendorf found that although women's spiritual practices during the seventeenth century generally shifted away from penitence and towards charitable activities, there was some persistence of asceticism.<sup>243</sup> The continued practices of wearing of hair shirts, sleeping on planks, and fasting, are evidence that seventeenth-century women continued to find inspiration in the Lives of medieval mystics.<sup>244</sup> Additionally, Francis de Sales' popular devotional book *Introduction à la Vie Dévote* also encouraged lay women to model their own religious practices after the examples recorded in religious women's Lives.<sup>245</sup> Nor was the imitation of mystics unique to adult women. In *L'honnête fille* Grenaille encourages girls to read the Lives of past religious women and to follow their example. He explains that God communicates with girls through these texts, for "if by prayer we speak to him, he speaks to us through the reading of holy books."<sup>246</sup> Therefore parents and educators had good reason to encourage their daughters to read the Lives of medieval mystics, as these women served as role models and interpreters of God's will.

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<sup>242</sup> The term "Lives" or "Life" is more fitting than "biography" or "autobiography" because the latter two terms are associated with notions of authorship that do not apply to nuns' life stories. In some cases, a nun's life story could be considered both biography and autobiography, thus the terms lose their usefulness. Nicky Hallett, *Lives of Spirit: English Carmelite Self-Writing of the Early Modern Period* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 1, 11.

<sup>243</sup> Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, 242.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 19, 66.

<sup>245</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, trans. Michael Day (New York: Lowe and Brydone Ltd., 1961), 253–254.

<sup>246</sup> Grenaille, *L'honnête fille où dans le premier livre il est traité de l'esprit des filles*, 3:241. "Si par la priere nous luy parlons, il nous parle par la lecture de saints livres."

Some seventeenth-century nuns' Lives include explicit evidence that they read about and were inspired by past religious women. In a study of English Carmelite nuns living in the Low Countries, Nicky Hallett found that many discovered their vocations through reading about others' vocations.<sup>247</sup> For example, the author of Tecla of Saint Paul's life writes that when she was a child she and a friend "spent most of their time in reading the lives of saints, and imitating them by several kinds of little penances and devotions."<sup>248</sup> Whether or not Tecla and her friend spent as much time reading these lives as the author suggests is not significant. Instead, the mention of reading religious literature in this nuns' Life means that such reading was considered a plausible activity for young girls and the author believed that mentioning it would be an inspiration to others. Similarly, the author of Mary Frances of Saint Teresa's Life explains that she grew up reading books by Saint Francis Sales and Teresa de Jesus.<sup>249</sup> According to the author, young Mary loved reading and one day her priest caught her going through his library. He reprimanded her for making a mess, but then invited her to choose a book to borrow. She chose the Life of Saint Teresa and after reading it several times, she felt convicted to join the Carmelite order.<sup>250</sup> Discussions of pious reading in nuns' Lives indicates that female mystics were seen as models of God's direct communication with young women. Past religious women's Lives offered encouragement to seventeenth-century girls struggling through their own discernment processes.

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<sup>247</sup> Hallett, *Lives of Spirit*, 18.

<sup>248</sup> As quoted in *ibid.*, 86.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

Religious women's Lives do not adhere to one common storyline in their descriptions of girlhood vocation. In fact, Teresa of Ávila, Catherine of Genoa, and Catherine of Siena each had different experiences of God's calling, showing their readers that divine vocations have various manifestations. This diversity made mystics' Lives more relatable for their audiences. If a girl did not identify with Catherine of Siena's continuous calling from birth, she might relate to Teresa of Ávila's conversion calling received in her teenage years. However, some seventeenth-century nuns' Lives mirror those of mystics not because they were inspired by that mystic, but because their biographers used that mystic's life as a formulaic guide.<sup>251</sup> For example, Catherine de Jesus Ranquet's biographer compares her to Catherine of Genoa and Catherine of Siena, since these saints were her namesake.<sup>252</sup> Likewise Magdeleine de Saint Joseph's biographer compares her directly with Teresa of Ávila and writes, "she had a fortunate resemblance with Saint Teresa, who also, beginning with these profound thoughts about eternity, entered the way of God."<sup>253</sup> The biographer also writes that Magdeleine enjoyed spending time in solitude like Saint Teresa and decided to enter a Carmelite convent because Saint Teresa had founded it. While it is plausible that Magdeleine had access to Teresa of Ávila's autobiography and that it inspired her spiritual practices, this is not necessarily the case. The hagiographer may have been motivated by his own personal

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<sup>251</sup> Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, 20.

<sup>252</sup> Gaspard Augeri, *La Vie et vertus de la venerable mere Catherine de Jesus Ranquet Religieuse Ursuline*, 4.

<sup>253</sup> Prestre de l'Oratoire de Jesus-Christ N.S., *La vie de la Mère Magdeleine de S Joseph Religieuse Carmelite Déchaussée de la Première Regle selon la reforme de Sainte Therese* (Paris: Chez Pierre le Petit, Imprimeur et Libraire Ordinaire du Roy, 1670), 12. "Elle avoit en cela une heureuse ressemblance avec Sainte Terese, qui avoit aussi commence par ces profondes pensées de l'eternité à entrer dans les voyes de Dieu."

attraction to Saint Teresa, or possibly he was seeking patronage from a wealthy sponsor who was especially devoted to the saint. Therefore, especially in hagiographical accounts of nuns' lives, it is difficult to determine on a detailed and individual basis which mystic inspired a girl's sense of vocation. Nonetheless, there is evidence that elite girls generally read the Lives of medieval mystics, and in this sense it is useful to examine how these texts as a genre introduced girls to the concept of divine vocation.

In 1601, the first copies of Teresa of Ávila's autobiography became available in French. The printer, Guillaume de la Noue, was responding to an increasing demand for reading material on religious subjects, especially the Lives of female saints. In fact, Barbara Diefendorf argues that "among the women writers favoured by Parisian dévots, Teresa of Ávila was doubtless the most influential, because she spoke to the fear of heresy and desire to reform religious life."<sup>254</sup> Teresa of Ávila's autobiography was also included in Port-Royal's approved reading list, and the students were encouraged to see the saint as a role model.<sup>255</sup> Jacqueline Pascal instructed her students that, whenever the Lives of the saints or the scriptures were read, they must "listen with a desire to apply their lessons to their lives."<sup>256</sup> Teresa of Ávila's story of girlhood vocation was a particularly powerful example at Port-Royal because it closely mirrored that of Angélique Arnauld, the abbey's beloved reformer and spiritual mother.

Both Teresa of Ávila and Angélique Arnauld experienced conversions in their teens after entering a convent at the behest of their families. In her autobiography, Teresa

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<sup>254</sup> Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, 95.

<sup>255</sup> Pascal, "A Rule For Children," 117.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*

of Ávila writes, “when I was with other girls I especially enjoyed playing at nunneries, and pretending to be nuns; and I think I wanted to be one, though not so much as I wanted the other things.”<sup>257</sup> She spent the rest of her childhood reading secular books, wearing jewelry, and gossiping with friends. Similarly, as a child, Angelique Arnauld preferred visiting with friends and reading profane books to religious activities.<sup>258</sup> Angelique was placed in the Port-Royal abbey as a child and made Abbess at age ten.<sup>259</sup> Teresa of Ávila was not sent to a convent until her early teenage years, but like Angelique, it was not her own decision. Both Teresa and Angelique discovered genuine religious vocations in sudden conversion experiences linked with illness. For Teresa, an illness forced her to leave the convent and stay with a pious uncle, and it was during this time that she declared her desire to become a nun.<sup>260</sup> In Angelique’s case, she declared her calling to her family while at home with a serious illness. In both cases, these teenage girls articulated their vocation with their bodies and voices. In a state of illness, they convinced their families of the legitimacy of their vocations. Girls at Port-Royal who read Teresa of Ávila’s life and knew Angelique Arnaud, likely saw these women as models for their own vocational discernment.

Even though the Lives of medieval mystics like Catherine of Siena and Catherine of Genoa were not included in the list of approved books Jacqueline recorded, there is evidence that the students at Port-Royal read them and saw medieval mystics as spiritual

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<sup>257</sup> Teresa Ávila, *The Life of Saint Teresa of Ávila*, trans. J.M. Cohen (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1957), 24.

<sup>258</sup> Alexander Sedgwick, *The Travails of Conscience: The Arnauld Family and the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 41.

<sup>259</sup> Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, 54.

<sup>260</sup> Ávila, *The Life of Saint Teresa of Ávila*, 31.

role models. Reading was core to the Port-Royal curriculum and the Lives of medieval mystics and virgin martyrs were much preferred to secular novels and plays. Each day during breakfast at Port-Royal one girl was selected to read the martyrology. They were instructed to meditate on the Lives of these saints over the course of the day, to honour them and entrust themselves to their protection.<sup>261</sup> It is conceivable that the images of the virgin martyrs from the morning reading figured prominently into their daydreams as they worked and played. Beyond Port-Royal, other elite girls may have encountered the Lives of medieval mystics at convent school or in their parents' personal collection. For example, Pierre and Barbe Acarie introduced their three daughters to the Lives of medieval mystics since these texts were central to their family's spiritual practices.<sup>262</sup> The Acaries hosted a group of devout lay people on a regular basis at their home to discuss spiritual topics. Several members of the group even worked on the vernacular translation of Catherine of Genoa and other medieval mystics' Lives.<sup>263</sup> As this group exchanged copies of books and discussed their ideas, their daughters joined in the conversation. They, like other girls growing up with devout lay mothers, had a strong religious education at home.<sup>264</sup> These girls also encountered the medieval mystics as role models. Indeed, all three of the Acarie girls decided to become nuns.

While the Acarie family facilitated their daughters' vocational claims, many noble girls did not enjoy the same support. In fact, throughout the seventeenth century, parental opposition was a common experience for girls interested in religious life and it was a

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<sup>261</sup> Pascal, "A Rule For Children," 75, 116.

<sup>262</sup> Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, 82.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 82–83.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

recurrent trope in nuns' biographical literature.<sup>265</sup> Girls with religious vocations who confronted family disapproval likely found kindred spirits in Catherine of Siena and Catherine of Genoa, both of whom struggled to overcome parental opposition. As a child, Catherine of Siena was fascinated with religious life; she made a vow of virginity, experienced visions of Christ, and taught her friends and neighbours about God. When Catherine refused her parents' efforts to find a husband, they mocked her and forced her to work as a maid.<sup>266</sup> Yet she insisted saying "I advise you to throw all thoughts of an engagement for me to the winds, because I have no intention whatsoever of obliging you in that respect: I must obey God rather than men."<sup>267</sup> In Catherine of Genoa's case, her family's efforts to marry her were successful despite her claims to a religious vocation. She showed all the same early signs as Catherine of Siena, but ultimately her parents' wishes prevailed. Yet after ten years of marriage, Catherine of Genoa experienced a sudden mystical encounter which convinced her to abandon lay life and pursue religion after all. When girls with a religious vocation read the Lives of medieval mystics, they encountered textual companions for their spiritual journey. The reader and subject were bound together in the common experience of divine calling. Moreover, the Lives of the medieval mystics legitimized girls' voices in family dialogues over vocation. After all, Catherine of Siena and Catherine of Genoa's ability to detect God's calling was celebrated and rewarded. Girls reading these Lives learned that they too should articulate

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<sup>265</sup> This evidence is explored in depth in chapter three.

<sup>266</sup> Raymond of Capua, *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, trans. George Lamb (London: Harvill Press, 1960), 42.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

their callings to their families, because the existence of the mystics' Lives meant that their own stories might be believable.

### **Modeling and Imitating Religious Vocation**

Girls attending convent schools were not only exposed to textual examples of religious vocation, but also interacted with living religious women on a daily basis. As mentioned in the introduction and first chapter, opportunities for elite families to send their daughters to convent schools increased drastically over the seventeenth century. Wealthy families who could afford the boarding fees often entrusted their daughters to teaching convents under the assumption that their girls would receive a superior education to that offered in the free classes for day students.<sup>268</sup> Boarding students were immersed in religious life and distanced from domestic spaces since they were required to abide by the convent's enclosure policies.<sup>269</sup> These policies were also applied at Saint-Cyr where the girls were allowed to visit their families only four times a year even before the school was registered as a convent 1694.<sup>270</sup> Put in this perspective, it is unsurprising that many of Saint-Cyr's graduates were more inclined to religious than marital life. Indeed, the prospect of marriage must have been an intimidating unknown after spending at least ten years away from the outside world. In fact, the majority of Saint-Cyr alumni who became nuns chose teaching orders, just like the one in which they had grown up.<sup>271</sup>

Saint-Cyr was not the only girls' school to produce a high proportion of nuns. In a study of 403 Visitation nuns deceased between 1667 and 1767, Roger Chartier,

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<sup>268</sup> Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 144.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 27; Rapley, "Fénelon Revisited," 300. I discuss the distinction between boarding and day students in more detail on pages 2-3.

<sup>270</sup> Picco, "La perception de l'éducation reçue à Saint-Cyr (1686-1719)," 733.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, 744.

Dominique Julia, and Marie-Madeleine Compère found that two-thirds of these nuns received their education as boarders at a convent, and more than half at Visitation convents.<sup>272</sup> Thus, they argue “clearly the education of cloistered boarders tended to ultimately reproduce nuns and for the most part, entering as a student into a convent was already a declaration of vocation.”<sup>273</sup> Likewise, Ursuline death notices usually indicate the formative role boarding school played in bringing about the nuns’ religious vocation.<sup>274</sup> These findings point to a cyclical trend in seventeenth-century girls’ education, in which girls who attended convent schools felt compelled to become nuns.

Living amongst nuns influenced girls’ conception of divine vocation because of the mentorship relationships formed between the girls and the school mistresses. The Catholic Reformation encouraged convents to foster these teaching relationships. Even amongst the adult nuns there were regular opportunities for the exchange of spiritual advice. These included the daily recreation hour after dinner, private conversations with superiors, and letters of advice exchanged among nuns.<sup>275</sup> The close ties between the nuns and the boarding students caused concern for some parents. Especially in the later half of the seventeenth century, it became common practice for parents to remove their daughters from the convent at the end of their education for a test period before allowing them to return to enter the novitiate and become a nun.<sup>276</sup> For example, Anne Claude de

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<sup>272</sup> Roger Chartier, Marie-Madeleine Compère, and Dominique Julia, *L’Éducation En France Du XVIe Au XVIIIe Siècle* (Paris: Société d’Édition d’Enseignement Supérieur, 1976), 236.

<sup>273</sup> Chartier, Compère, and Julia, *L’Éducation en France*, 236. “Il apparaît donc clairement que l’éducation des pensionnats monastiques est tendue vers une finalité de reproduction religieuse et que pour beaucoup l’entrée comme élève dans un couvent est déjà annonce de vocation.”

<sup>274</sup> Rapley, “Women and the Religious Vocation in Seventeenth-Century France,” 622.

<sup>275</sup> Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, 149.

<sup>276</sup> Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister*, 166.

Sainte Agnes entered an Ursuline convent as a boarding student when she was only eleven. The nuns noticed early signs of her religious vocation and encouraged the growth of her piety. Fearful that the nuns had an undue influence in their daughter's life, her parents withdrew Anne from the school when she turned sixteen.<sup>277</sup> Parental insistence on their daughter's immersion in the world before pursuing a religious vocation draws attention to the influence of living role models in girls' discernment processes.

The dialogue between nun-teachers and students is especially evident in Jacqueline Pascal's *Rule for Children*. This unique and revealing source was written at the request of Pascal's spiritual director, Abbé Singlin, and it details the daily lives of students at the Port-Royal girls' school. The document is broken into two sections, the first which describes the girls' routine, and the second which explains Pascal's pedagogical method. The first section provides detailed descriptions for each phase of the girls' day: getting dressed, making beds, breakfast, work, mass, writing, dinner, recreation, class instruction, reading, evening meal, and recreation before bed. This basic schedule was adapted on Thursdays, Sundays, and feast days, when the girls participated in some of the liturgical offices alongside the nuns.<sup>278</sup> Needless to say, the girls were taught to be mindful of the liturgy on every day of the week. They regularly paused their activities to pray when they heard the abbey bells, and they made an effort to be quieter while a liturgical office was underway.<sup>279</sup> Pascal writes that they stopped to pray at

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<sup>277</sup> Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS 4990, 29.

<sup>278</sup> Pascal, "A Rule For Children," 77; Frédéric Delforge, "Le Ministère Pédagogique de Jacqueline," in *Chroniques de Port-Royal: Bulletin de La Société Des Amis de Port-Royal*, vol. 31 (Paris: Bibliothèque Mazarine, 1982), 111.

<sup>279</sup> Pascal, "A Rule For Children," 80; François Lagarde, "Instruction et conversion: Le règlement pour les enfants de Port-Royal," in *Travaux de Littérature* (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique et du Centre National des Lettres, 1989), 129.

midday in order to “assist at least in spirit in this hour of the liturgical office now being chanted in the choir of the church.”<sup>280</sup> Even though the school building was separate from the convent, the students were constantly made aware of the nuns’ activities through their participation in the monastic liturgy.

Port-Royal's strong sense of community encouraged the development of a uniquely collaborative approach to education. Agnes Cousson, in her study of letters and ego-documents produced by the Port-Royal nuns, argues that Saint Cyran, the nuns’ confessor, helped to set this tone since he was habitually considerate, and supportive, not pressuring the nuns into confessions.<sup>281</sup> Port-Royal’s teacher-nuns applied this same attitude to the pupils in their care, “working towards the ‘redemption’ of the girls with them, not against them.”<sup>282</sup> Jacqueline's discussion of teacher-student mentorship in her *Rule for Children* indicates the importance she placed on this pedagogical approach. Pascal insisted that the nuns keep their conversations with students confidential. She argues that if the girls disclose “things that are of little importance, there are occasions when they want to confide something important, especially as they grow older.”<sup>283</sup> Pascal’s appeal for discretion points towards the existence of a mentoring relationship between the girls and nuns at Port-Royal.

Student-teacher collaboration occurred both during informal conversations and private interviews. Pascal explains to her fellow nuns, that while the younger girls played games, they should take the opportunity to gather the older girls around to discuss their

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<sup>280</sup> Pascal, “A Rule For Children,” 80.

<sup>281</sup> Agnès Cousson, *L'Écriture de soi: Lettres et récits autobiographiques des religieuses de Port-Royal* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2012), 128.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, 132. “Travaillent à la « réfection » des filles avec elles, non contre elles.”

<sup>283</sup> Pascal, “A Rule For Children,” 98.

interests.<sup>284</sup> During these daily interactions it is not necessary to limit the girls' "conversations to serious subjects. Nor should they always be speaking about God. We can only try discreetly to move the conversations in a more serious direction. If we see that the pupils have taken a liking to that direction, then they will continue on the topic."<sup>285</sup> The school mistresses were supposed to use these informal discussions to gauge the students' interests and form close relationships. During private interviews held once every two weeks, teachers and students were able to discuss discernment and vocation more explicitly. Pascal urges her fellow teachers to share with the girls "the feelings we have about our own way of life. It is good not to hide our joy, our happiness, and our peace."<sup>286</sup> Yet she cautions that "given their youth, we do not try to make them too spiritual, unless we recognize that this comes from God."<sup>287</sup> Therefore the school mistresses used regular interactions and formal interviews to assess the girls' spiritual inclinations and to guide the girls as they discerned their vocations.

Girls attending Port-Royal were also given exceptional opportunities to experiment with religious life beyond those available at most convent schools. Each week, a girl was selected to lead the common prayers and given the title "the weekly leader."<sup>288</sup> The oldest girls were even allowed to help with all of the liturgical offices if they showed the proper piety. These were unique opportunities since in most cases women in the seventeenth century "were excluded from the service of the altar, from handling the sacred vessels; from teaching or preaching the word, even from

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 73.

understanding the liturgy.”<sup>289</sup> John Conley argues that the Port-Royal community subverted some of the hierarchical distinctions between male-female and lay-religious spiritual practices. This subversion afforded girls opportunities to engage with religious life that may have been out of reach for girls attending other convent schools during the same time. In this sense, Port-Royal is not necessarily representative of all convent school experiences.

If Port-Royal was more inclined to facilitating girls’ religious vocations, then Saint-Cyr was the opposite. In most aspects there was little similarity between the educational philosophies of Port-Royal and Saint-Cyr because of their profound theological differences.<sup>290</sup> The Port-Royal community was closely associated with the teachings of Dutch theologian Cornelius Jansen and several of France’s leading Jansenist writers lived at the abbey.<sup>291</sup> Jansenism, like Calvinism, argued that humans were helpless in securing their own salvation and instead must rely on God’s gracious calling.<sup>292</sup> This idea threatened the orthodox Catholic belief that people could receive salvation through their own initiative when they actively participated in the sacraments. Jansenist influence at the Port-Royal convent school meant that God’s will was given special reverence and parents were told that sending their daughters to the abbey was equivalent to giving them to God.<sup>293</sup> In contrast, as we have seen, Saint-Cyr was given a royal command at its founding to produce wives rather than nuns. In addition, the

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<sup>289</sup> Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 4.

<sup>290</sup> Hammond, *Fragmentary Voices*, 154.

<sup>291</sup> Kostroun, *Feminism, Absolutism, and Jansenism*, 2; Carr, *Voix des abbesses du Grand Siècle*, 16.

<sup>292</sup> de Viguerie, “La vocation sacerdotale et religieuse,” 28.

<sup>293</sup> Frédéric Delforge, *Les petites écoles de Port-Royal, 1637-1660* (Paris: Les Éditions Du Cerf, 1985), 111.

institution's close association with the monarchy meant there was no place for Jansenist ideas, which were considered heretical. While there were significant differences in the missions of these schools, the role model relationships between students and teachers were similar. At Port-Royal, these relationships were fostered during regular interviews.<sup>294</sup> Such interviews were not as common at Saint-Cyr, but there is evidence that students and teachers met to discuss the girls' sense of vocation and girls showed a genuine interest in religious life.

The opening anecdote of this thesis, a discussion about vocation between Madame de Maintenon and the oldest group of girls at Saint-Cyr, is a prime example of teacher-student mentorship. Maintenon not only listened to her students' fears but she also used humour and a series of hypothetical examples to help the girls to reflect on God's calling. First she empathizes with their struggle, admitting that unfortunately God does not “send some of His angels to tell you with a trumpet blast whether you should become a nun or not.”<sup>295</sup> She proceeds to offer several scenarios to guide their discernment. First, she describes a girl who considers entering a lax convent only because she wants to be free from the pressures of society while still receiving all of life's necessities. Emphatically, Maintenon explains to her students that, “if you have feelings like that, be assured that you don't have a vocation to be a nun! Stay in the world.”<sup>296</sup> Conversely Maintenon describes a girl who decides to enter a convent because she recognizes that she does not really belong in high society and feels she can better serve God in an austere convent

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<sup>294</sup> Hammond, *Fragmentary Voices*, 89; Delforge, “Le Ministère Pédagogique de Jacqueline,” 113.

<sup>295</sup> de Maintenon, “Addresses to Students,” 102.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*

where her faithful observance of the rule will guarantee her salvation.<sup>297</sup> This attitude, she affirms, is evidence of a true vocation.

Maintenon goes on to explain to the class some of the benefits of becoming a nun. First she challenges the students' misconception that salvation is more difficult to attain as a nun because there are more rules to follow. She explains that it is actually easier to avoid sin after taking religious vows because "everything is firmly marked out, from dawn until dusk."<sup>298</sup> She also argues that it is easier for nuns to keep the first commandment to love God with all your heart, mind, and strength because there are many more distractions in the world that steal attention and affection away from God.<sup>299</sup> Even though Saint-Cyr had a royal mandate to educate girls into wifedom rather than the nunnery, the school mistresses could not overlook the real threat to salvation their students faced if they did not live out their God-given vocations.

Girls at Saint-Cyr imitated their teachers in words and actions. In fact, in a faculty meeting in 1686, Madame de Maintenon addressed some of the teachers' questions about acceptable make-believe games. In the meeting, Maintenon instructed the teachers to forbid the girls to play dress-up as nuns, to pretend to take vows, and to act-out any church ceremony. Madame de Saily responded to this directive saying, "but in the lives of the saints, authors considered it a good omen that in childhood games, future saints imitated the ceremonies of the Church, offered sermons, preached, and sang the parts of the Mass."<sup>300</sup> To which Maintenon insisted that these practices were acceptable in the

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> François d'Aubigné de Maintenon, "Addresses to Faculty," in *Madame de Maintenon: Dialogues and Addresses*, trans. John Conley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 150.

past because earlier generations continued to respect these activities, instead of trivializing them. However the teachers sought further clarification and Madame de Bouju asked “Do you disapprove of the pupils pretending that they are making visits as if they were nuns, just as they often pretend to make visits as if they were adult ladies?”<sup>301</sup> To which Maintenon conceded “No, this game is not bad in and of itself. It’s not a real problem if they enjoy pretending that they are in a convent: acting as a teacher or as boarding students, pretending to go to the parlor, and so forth.”<sup>302</sup> Maintenon makes a distinction between nuns’ religious and social activities. It is unacceptable for girls to pretend to take part in the religious aspects of nuns’ lives, but they may pretend to visit, teach, and learn with each other. The girls living at Saint-Cyr were inclined to imitate the adults in their lives. This discussion between Madame de Maintenon and the Dames de Saint Louis who taught the girls shows that the teachers were interested in encouraging this activity. Even when Maintenon chastises their practices, she instates parameters, rather than outright banning all pretend games involving nuns.

While girls were memorizing the catechism and reading children’s Bibles, both at school and at home, they were met with conflicting images of female vocation both on the pages before them and in the lives around them. The Bellarmine Catechism and Fontaine’s children’s Bible, both common components of seventeenth-century educational curriculum, encouraged girls to pursue domestic lives as mothers and wives. Yet in the characters of Jael, Deborah, and Esther, girls were met with women who responded to a unique calling from God to act outside of the domestic sphere. Even

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

though these women were situated as exceptions to the norm, they still demonstrated to girls that a unique call from God was within the realm of possibility. In the Saint-Cyr context, the enactment of the exceptional life of Esther raised girls' awareness to the idea that God could call anyone according to his purposes. The seventeenth century saw a massive increase in teaching convents, and, as such, many noble girls spent their childhoods in convent schools living side-by-side with nuns who had discerned and declared their divine vocations. At Port-Royal, the nuns took time to meet with students and assess their vocations regularly, even giving them opportunities to experience liturgical life. Even at Saint-Cyr, a very different institution from Port-Royal, girls showed an interest in religious life and were inspired by their school mistresses to seriously consider God's calling. Despite attempts to encourage girls to pursue domesticity, the link between vocation and salvation meant that discernment was unavoidable. During their education, girls were met with conflicting notions of female vocation and these contradictory models gave girls more power in the discernment process. With no clearly right or wrong vocational path, girls were able to use their bodies and voices to articulate their own sense of vocation.

### Chapter 3

#### **"It is Here that God Wants Me:" Discerning and Proving Religious Vocation**

On Good Friday 1656, the miraculous healing of a twelve-year old girl brought the mobilized army of Anne of Austria, France's regent, to a swift standstill.<sup>303</sup> The girl was Marguerite Périer, a student at the Port-Royal abbey and Jaqueline Pascal's niece. There was no clear political or social reason why she should have any sway over the regent or her army. Marguerite, like her classmates, came from a family of minor nobles, and her father held an unassuming position as a conseiller at a provincial Cour des Aides.<sup>304</sup> Yet she was unique in one way. Marguerite was suffering from an incurable physical ailment: an eye abscess. Several doctors had examined the wound, performed blood lettings, and tried other procedures, all without any success. This changed on the Friday before Easter, when Marguerite's testimony and body suddenly gained the power to intervene in a serious theological debate and halt a strategic political maneuver.

For most of the seventeenth century, Port-Royal and the French monarchy were at odds over a doctrinal dispute. As explained in chapter two, Port-Royal was closely tied to a heretical movement known as Jansenism. By the mid-seventeenth century, the French monarchy and the church had grown anxious that the community was not only producing Jansenist publications, but was also teaching these heretical beliefs to the nuns and girls living at the Port-Royal abbey.<sup>305</sup> Therefore, in the interests of religious orthodoxy and political stability, Anne of Austria, with the pope's encouragement, had ordered the

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<sup>303</sup> Kostroun, *Feminism, Absolutism, and Jansenism*, 96; Conley, "Introduction," 8.

<sup>304</sup> Régine Pouzet, *Chronique des Pascal: Les affaires du monde, d'Etienne Pascal à Marguerite Périer, 1588-1733* (Paris: Champion, 2001).

<sup>305</sup> Kostroun, *Feminism, Absolutism, and Jansenism*, 3.

removal of the pensioners and the destruction of Port-Royal on Thursday March 16, 1656.<sup>306</sup>

Anne of Austria's injunction was only a catalyst in the series of events that elevated Marguerite to a position of political influence. With Easter just over a week away, and the abbey's closure imminent, a Jansenist priest arranged for a reliquary containing a sliver from Christ's crown of thorns to be displayed at the abbey.<sup>307</sup> On the morning of Good Friday, the nuns and pupils filed past the relic, kneeling in respect. When, young Marguerite approached the sacred space, the nun in charge of the pensioners, Soeur Flavie, motioned for the girl to touch her swollen eye to the object. Later that evening, Soeur Flavie overheard Marguerite say to one of her friends "My eye has healed. I no longer feel any pain in it."<sup>308</sup> Soeur Flavie relayed Marguerite's words to the abbess, Mère Agnès, who then informed the vicar general. He had just arrived at the convent to oversee its closure, but rather than dispersing the convent's population, he began calling witnesses and experts to verify the miracle. Suddenly, the convent became a pilgrimage site for all those eager to experience their own supernatural healing. Amidst this excitement, Anne of Austria was forced to cancel her closure plans, and Port-Royal experienced a revival. At the centre of this political turning point is the voice and body of a young girl.

Marguerite's girlhood experience as a conduit of God's word was sensational, but not impossible. Countless other girls living in early modern France also claimed that they

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<sup>306</sup> Les Religieuses de Port-Royal, *Histoire des persecutions des religieuses de Port-Royal* (Ville-Franche: au dépens de la Société, 1753), 117.

<sup>307</sup> Jacqueline Pascal, "To Gilberte Pascal Périer, on the Miracle of the Thorn," in *A Rule for Children and Other Writings*, trans. John Conley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 141.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

had received messages from God and acted upon them. For those girls who became nuns, these accounts of divine revelation became integral pieces of their life stories and were preserved in a variety of Life formats including hagiographies, biographies, convent chronicles, and *lettres circulaires*.<sup>309</sup> Since Marguerite did not end up becoming a nun, her miraculous healing was not recorded as a Life. Her story was only preserved in family letters and investigation reports on her healing. In contrast, Marguerite's aunt Jacqueline Pascal, who was a nun, had her girlhood experiences immortalized in several Lives.<sup>310</sup> Unlike lay women, nuns' girlhood accounts were recorded because they provided evidence of God's calling on the individual nun. As noted in the introduction, reformed convents in the seventeenth century required all of their entrants to profess a God-given vocation at entrance.<sup>311</sup> These communities used nuns' Lives as evidence that their members had legitimate and not forced vocations. Therefore, stories of girlhood vocation figure prominently in seventeenth-century nuns' Lives because they prove that the individual chose God and expressed her vocation voluntarily.

### **Interpreting the Sources**

Seventeenth-century nuns rarely wrote autobiographies. Rather, confessors, scribes, editors, fellow nuns, and family members all played roles in remembering, retelling, and recording each nun's Life.<sup>312</sup> Sara Poor argues that too often historians

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<sup>309</sup> See footnote 239 for an explanation of my use of the terms "Life" and "Lives" to refer to religious biographical writing.

<sup>310</sup> Including one written by Gilberte Périer, who was Marguerite Périer's mother and Jacqueline Pascal's sister. John Conley, "Introduction and Bibliography on Jacqueline Pascal," in *A Rule for Children and Other Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 15.

<sup>311</sup> de Viguierie, "La vocation sacerdotale et religieuse," 29; Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 186.

<sup>312</sup> Pascale Mengotti-Thouvenin, "Port-Royal, laboratoire de mémoires," in *Chroniques de Port-Royal: Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Port-Royal* (Paris: Bibliothèque Mazarine, 1982), 28. "la fusion des contributions dans une oeuvre commune atteste la prédominance d'une écriture collective."

search for a single author, instead of recognizing the inherent difficulty in determining which words were written by whose hand.<sup>313</sup> For example, Gilberte Périier based her biography of Jacqueline Pascal on a vast archive of letters, testimonies, and eye-witness accounts gathered at Port-Royal over several decades.<sup>314</sup> The editors of the project, Angelique de Saint-Jean and her cousin Antoine Arnauld, collected much of their material during the violence of the Fronde, when the Port-Royal nuns were forced to take refuge at their abbey's Paris location.<sup>315</sup> Therefore, Gilberte's biography of Jacqueline was the product of a collective writing process that included at least two convent communities. Similar collaborations happened at other institutions. For example, the frontispiece of Mère Marie Agnès Dauvaine's biography explains that the enclosed testimony was "gathered on the memories of the nuns of the same monastery and composed by a father of the company of Jesus, Friend of the order."<sup>316</sup> This collaboration was essential to these nuns' purposes. Writing was considered a scandalous occupation in seventeenth-century France, and as such, religious women were discouraged from circulating their writings beyond their own order.<sup>317</sup> Therefore in the preface of Dauvaine's biography, the nuns strategically situate themselves as contributors. They explain that a Jesuit priest is the text's primary author, claiming that "outside of the material that we supplied, the work has nothing which should not pass for being entirely

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<sup>313</sup> Poor, *Mechtilde of Magdeburg and Her Book*, 11.

<sup>314</sup> Mengotti-Thouvenin, "Port-Royal, laboratoire de mémoires," 31.

<sup>315</sup> Hammond, *Fragmentary Voices*, 23.

<sup>316</sup> Jean-Baptiste de La Barre, *La vie de la Vénérable Mère Marie Agnès Dauvaine* (Paris: Chez Estienne Michallet, 1675). "recueillie sur les memoires des Religieuses du mesme Monastere et composée par un Pere de la Compagnie de Jesus, Amy de l'Ordre."

<sup>317</sup> Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), 128; Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, 21.

his.”<sup>318</sup> Collaboration with a male author ensured a wider audience for the Life outside of the order. Since Dauvaine was the founder of the Annonciade convent in Paris, the authors of her biography saw her life story as evidence for the community’s legitimacy. The practice of collective authorship points towards the important role Lives played in communal memory.

Authors of nuns' biographical literature saw their subjects as representatives of their communities and as models for future generations. In *lettres circulaires* “it was not the true character of the deceased that counted, but rather the way in which it could be used to personify the *institute*.”<sup>319</sup> An individual nun’s obedience to a divine vocation reflected God’s calling on her order more generally. For example, the author of Carmelite Louise de Jésus’s Life wrote “her vocation for our holy order was marked by the hand of God.”<sup>320</sup> Therefore, the author not only recognizes Louise de Jésus’ divine calling, but also associates God’s blessing with the order that she entered. For religious communities facing public criticism, like Port-Royal, biographical writing was an opportunity to launch a defence of the community based on the virtue of its members.<sup>321</sup> In June 1661, the nuns at Port-Royal recorded their versions of the biographical statements given to church authorities during an inquisition. The editor of one of these volumes explains that

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<sup>318</sup> La Barre, *La vie de la Vénérable Mère Marie Agnès Dauvaine*, ii. “Hors de la matiere que nous avons fournie, l’Ouvrage n’a rien qui ne doive passer pour estre entierement à luy.”

<sup>319</sup> Elizabeth Rapley, “‘Un Trésor Enfoui, Une Lampe Sous Un Boisseau:’ Seventeenth-Century Visitandines Describe Their Vocation,” in *Studies in Early Modern France*, ed. Anne Birberick and Russell Ganim (Charlottesville, Virginia: Rookwood Press, Inc., 2007), 157.

<sup>320</sup> Jean-Marie-Matthias Debelay, *Chroniques de l’ordre des Carmélites de la réforme de Sainte-Thérèse depuis leur introduction en France Tome Cinquième* (Troyes: Imprimerie D’Anner-André, 1865), 26. “Sa vocation pour notre saint ordre a été marquée du doigt de Dieu.”

<sup>321</sup> Hammond, *Fragmentary Voices*, 22; Carol Baxter, “Writing the Self and Community Identity: The Personal Records of Port-Royal Nuns,” in *Remembering Port-Royal: Memoire-Writing in the Eighteenth Century* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers, 2007), 99.

some of the testimonies are repetitive, but “this gives the work more authenticity for justifying the nuns of Port-Royal and their directors.”<sup>322</sup> Even when the authors of biographical literature wrote for their own communities rather than public audiences they still had a vested interest in promoting their subjects’ merits. For example the author of a collection of Feuillantine nuns’ biographies explains “I wrote only to provide an example and instruction for our very dear sisters in Jesus-Christ.”<sup>323</sup> These life stories were prime reading material for the convent’s members, especially for those with questions about their own sense of vocation.

Convent communities’ anxiety concerning valid vocations is central to the interpretation of these documents. As noted in the introduction, convents in pre-modern France were frequently satirized as places of imprisonment for surplus noble daughters.<sup>324</sup> Catholic reformers in the seventeenth century worked to mend this reputation and restore convents as places dedicated to monastic discipline and worship. The implication of these reforms were twofold. Convent superiors tried to remove prohibitive financial barriers for those who had a divine calling, and placed a new emphasis on verifying vocational claims.<sup>325</sup> This shift is exemplified in a letter Jacqueline Pascal wrote to a young woman interested in religious life. She explained that at Port-Royal “the only dowry that will be demanded of you is a great desire to serve God and to

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<sup>322</sup> Les Religieuses de Port-Royal, *Histoire des persecutions des religieuses de Port-Royal*, 91. “On donneroit la piece la plus authentique pour Justifier les Religieuses de Port-Royal et leurs Directeurs.”

<sup>323</sup> Un Religieux Feuillant, *Histoire de la fondation du Monastere des Religieuses Feuillantes de Toulouse* (Bordeaux: Chez la Vve de G. de la Court et N. de la Court, 1696), 281. “J’ai écrit, suffira pour l’exemple et l’instruction de nos tres cheres soeurs en Jesus-Christ.”

<sup>324</sup> Schutte, *By Force and Fear*, 32–33.

<sup>325</sup> Pillorget, “Vocation religieuse et état en France aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles,” 14.

be entirely his.”<sup>326</sup> Reformed convents required their entrants to prove that their divine vocation was genuine before they could become novices. Childhood virtue and early signs of devotional practice were considered evidence of a true vocation. Ursuline nun, Jeanne de St. Bernard’s eulogist wrote, “since her childhood [Jeanne] showed signs of piety; these formed a foundation on which she established her innocence, and the desires she had for the religious life, a life to which she was consecrated since her youth.”<sup>327</sup> Such a description was typical in nuns’ Lives and even operated as a literary trope, signalling that a girl’s vocation was authentic because she received it when she was pure and innocent.

While the vast majority of nuns’ Lives include tropes and caricatures, entangled in these elements is evidence of historical actors and their plausible interactions. This concept of plausibility is inspired by Jonathan Dewald’s work on literary sources and Natalie Zemon Davis’ approach to sixteenth-century pardon letters. As early modern authors constructed narratives, they incorporated elements of their life-experiences into their tales. Dewald explains, “I make no claim that the literary sources I have used accurately mirrored daily life, though I believe that they often do show us what contemporaries believed to be the possible and the plausible in daily life.”<sup>328</sup> Likewise, the girlhood accounts recorded in nuns’ Lives do not necessarily reflect their subject’s lived experience, but they do touch on elements of that nun’s life story and indicate the

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<sup>326</sup> Jacqueline Pascal, “Lettre de Jacqueline Pascal,” in *Oeuvres diverses de Blaise Pascal*, trans. Jean Mesnard, vol. 2 (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991), 960. “Le seul dot qu’on exigera de vous sera un grand désir de server Dieu et d’être toute à lui.”

<sup>327</sup> Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, MS 4990 BA, 38. “Elle fut prévenuë dès son enfance d’un esprit de piété, qui a été un fond sur lequel elle a établi son innocence, et les desirs qu’elle a eû pour la vie Religieuse, à laquelle elle s’est consacrée dès sa jeunesse.”

<sup>328</sup> Dewald, *Aristocratic Experience and the Origins of Modern Culture*, 10.

range of possible experiences for an elite girl in the seventeenth century. In fact, Elizabeth Rapley applies this logic in her work on *lettres circulaires*. She argues that “once the eulogizing tendency is taken into account, [...] many of the stories the death notices tell ring true.”<sup>329</sup> For example, authors of nuns' Lives tend to overstate parental support or resistance, since pious parents proved that their daughter was naturally virtuous, and oppositional parents proved that the girl's vocation was not forced. While parental characterizations are likely exaggerated, they are not necessarily fabricated, since authors of nuns' Lives viewed both parental support and resistance as components of a larger story which God had already worked out for the good of the church and all of those involved. Furthermore, authors' characterizations of parents are usually reinforced with specific evidence; these examples, which will be discussed in detail in this chapter, are diverse and do not always follow a formula.

Nuns' Lives reveal a remarkable variety in seventeenth-century girls' experiences while discerning their religious vocations. Some girls pursued solitude, others community. Some ran away from home, while others negotiated with their parents. Some experienced conversions, while others always had a sense of calling. Each of these variations will be explored in more detail in this chapter. Authors of nuns' Lives were not satisfied with reproducing formulaic accounts of girlhood vocation. Rather they included details that were consistent with the convent's shared memory of the nun's Life.<sup>330</sup> After all, fabricated stories or significant omissions would have seeded doubt and division

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<sup>329</sup> Rapley, “Women and the Religious Vocation in Seventeenth-Century France,” 616; Barbara Diefendorf and Jean de Viguier support Rapley's argument, see: Diefendorf, “Give Us Back Our Children,” 267, 285; de Viguier, “La vocation sacerdotale et religieuse,” 33.

<sup>330</sup> Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, 21.

rather than edify the community. The anecdotes and personalized details in nuns' vocational accounts tell stories of girls making choices and asserting their vocations that convent communities considered believable. Therefore, nuns' Lives give an indication of the range of possible girlhood experiences and the importance religious communities placed on girls' claims to religious vocation.

Historical analysis of girlhood vocation in nuns' Lives requires attention to both literary tropes and lived experience. Moshe Sluhovsky provides a model for this approach in his work on demon possession, in which he “shifts back and forth among three distinct ways of reading early modern sources.”<sup>331</sup> Sometimes he uses a straightforward reading of events as recounted by the participants, while at other moments he employs a critical lens to interpret factors impacting the possessed individual, or a sceptical approach to analyse the exorcists' motivations. Like accounts of possession, nuns' Lives also offer a blend of the mystical and the tangible.<sup>332</sup> Stories of divine vocation often include miracles, visions, prophecies, and extreme charitable acts. As Carolyn Walker Bynum argues, the historian should resist the urge to divide these events into the categories of real and imagined since “there is the distinct possibility that the authors themselves may not have meant them literally.”<sup>333</sup> A flexible reading of nuns' Lives uses both literal and sceptical readings to interpret authorial intention and distill key themes. In terms of girlhood vocation, these common themes can be organized into two categories: communities of discernment and vocational articulation. The first of these categories

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<sup>331</sup> Sluhovsky, *Believe Not Every Spirit*, 10.

<sup>332</sup> Hallett, *Lives of Spirit*, 23.

<sup>333</sup> Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 82.

centres on the human actors, such as parents, friends, nuns, family members, and religious men who helped girls to understand their vocations. The second thematic category focuses on the actual evidence of calling. Girls who became nuns articulated their vocations through their daily practices, conversion experiences, bodily proofs, and verbal declarations. Strategically, authors of nuns' Lives wanted to emphasize the validity of the girl's vocation. Therefore, the centrality of the girl's body and voice within the discernment community means that the girl's testimony was considered convincing. Amidst a cacophony of influence, girls claimed the authority to articulate and pursue their divine vocations.

### **Communities of Discernment**

Childhood accounts in nuns' biographies, hagiographies, and eulogies describe vocational discernment as a communal process in which a variety of actors helped a girl to understand her calling and determine its implications. In her study of 856 Ursuline death notices, Elizabeth Rapley found only five in which the girl was consecrated to religious life from birth. The rest of these girls underwent a discernment process, during which a variety of people helped them to interpret their calling. Communities of discernment were made up of men and women, old and young, religious and lay. A girl's decision to become a nun was shaped by her family's religious convictions, childhood playmates, attendance at convent schools, the deaths of loved ones, and advice from religious superiors among other factors.<sup>334</sup> A girl did not necessarily need a male

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<sup>334</sup> Rapley lists all of these factors except "childhood playmates," since her sources tend to focus on the institutional modes of discernment. Rapley, "Women and the Religious Vocation in Seventeenth-Century France," 622.

confessor to validate her calling before entering a convent. Rather, female networks made up of mothers, aunts, friends, lay women, nuns, and mother superiors were consistently involved in girls' decision making processes. Amidst all of these influences, girls' voices were not overwhelmed. Narratives captured in nuns' Lives represent girls playing decisive roles in their religious callings, negotiating with parents, collaborating with female networks, and petitioning male clergy for support.

In nuns' Lives, parent-daughter conflicts over entrance into religious institutions fall into one of two categories: either a girl was forced to enter without a vocation, or parents prevented a daughter's entrance despite her claims to calling.<sup>335</sup> Elizabeth Rapley argues that over the seventeenth century the first form of conflict became less common as the practice of forced vocation "lost favour in the eyes of the public."<sup>336</sup> At the same time, Jean de Viguere argues that the second type of conflict increased; most notably, he found that "in the Visitandine order nearly half of nuns who entered after 1660, had to overcome family opposition."<sup>337</sup> Yet Barbara Diefendorf notes a spike in parental opposition as early as the late sixteenth century.<sup>338</sup> My sample of sixty Lives of nuns born between 1558 and 1678 and taken from six different orders does not reveal any measurable shift in parental opposition or support over this period. More systematic archival research across institutional lines is needed to measure shifting attitudes towards religious institutions and parent-daughter conflicts over convent entrance.

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<sup>335</sup> Pillorget, "Vocation religieuse et état en France aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles," 9.

<sup>336</sup> Rapley, "Women and the Religious Vocation in Seventeenth-Century France," 619.

<sup>337</sup> de Viguere, "La vocation sacerdotale et religieuse," 34. "À la Visitation, près de la moitié des religieuses entrées après 1660, ont eu à vaincre l'opposition familiale."

<sup>338</sup> Diefendorf, "Give Us Back Our Children," 274.

Parent-child relationships have long held a central place in the historiography of pre-modern childhood. The first generation of historians working in this field argued that pre-modern parents did not show love in the same way as parents today.<sup>339</sup> Linda Pollock and Barbara Hanawalt refuted these arguments with evidence of parental affection in children's diaries, family letters, and notarial records.<sup>340</sup> Nuns' Lives invite a different set of questions about parent-child relationships. Rather than asking if parents loved their children, these sources allow the question: did parents listen to their children? Accounts of girlhood vocation reveal parents and children exchanging ideas with each playing both listening and speaking roles at various stages. Furthermore, this dialogue was not straight-forward. Parents and daughters fluctuated between doubt and confidence, support and resistance.

Parental attitudes towards their daughter's religious vocation sometimes shifted as girls grew up. Jean de Viguerie argues that during the early modern period parents were "both the best helper of vocation and the worst enemy."<sup>341</sup> Parents who once took their young daughters to religious services, modeled charity, and encouraged penitence were the same ones who warned their teenage daughters of the hardships of religious life and encouraged them to get married.<sup>342</sup> For example, during her childhood Marie-Madeleine

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<sup>339</sup> Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (London: Methuen, 1965); de Mause, *The History of Childhood*; Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (London: Basic Books, 1976); Stone, *The Family Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*.

<sup>340</sup> Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations From 1500-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Linda Pollock, *A Lasting Relationship: Parents and Children Over Three Centuries* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1987); Hanawalt, *Growing Up in Medieval London*; Barbara Hanawalt, "Medievalists and the Study of Childhood," *Speculum* 77, no. 2 (2002): 440-60.

<sup>341</sup> Jean de Viguerie, "Avant-propos," in *La vocation religieuse et sacerdotale en France* (Angers: Université d'Angers, 1986), 8. "La famille est à fois le meilleur auxiliaire de la vocation et son pire ennemi."

<sup>342</sup> Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, 52, 71.

de la Trinité's mother taught her how to practice charity, host pilgrims, and give alms to beggars.<sup>343</sup> The author of her life even includes an exciting anecdote in which Marie-Madeleine and her mother petition the king for pardon on behalf of a hermit condemned to the galleys. Marie-Madeliene's mother encouraged all of these charitable acts, and even allowed her daughter to dress as a nun.<sup>344</sup> However, once Marie-Madeleine reached her later teenage years, her mother demanded that she cease her penitential activities, start dressing well, and accept a suitor's marriage proposal.<sup>345</sup> Yet, Marie-Madeleine persisted in her goals: she told her mother that she would consult with God and then return with her decision. Sometime later, she gathered her family together and informed them all that she felt called to become a nun not a wife.<sup>346</sup> From childhood up until her declaration of vocation, Marie-Madeleine's family played a primary role in her vocational discernment.

Girls convinced their parents of their vocations with a combination of actions, attitudes, and words. For example, Jeanne Michel practiced religious austerity at home, dressing in rags, and refusing to eat fruit.<sup>347</sup> Whenever her parents brought suitors to the house, she refused to talk to them, even stuffing her mouth full of food at dinner.<sup>348</sup> Once Jeanne's parents realized that she intended to resist their matchmaking attempts, they allowed her to wear a veil and to live alone in her room.<sup>349</sup> Her parents hoped that her inclinations would change with time, but she persisted and entered a Ursuline house at

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<sup>343</sup> Jean-Étienne Grosez, *Vie de la Mère Marie-Madeleine de la Trinité, fondatrice des religieuses de N. Dame de Misericorde* (Lyon: Chez Jean Thioly, 1696), 8.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>347</sup> Marie de Pommereuse, *Les chroniques de l'ordre des Ursulines* (Paris: J Henault, 1673), 91.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

age twenty-three.<sup>350</sup> Marie de l'Assomption also had to convince her parents of her vocation, but rather than using behaviours like Jeanne Michel, she used verbal argumentation. She recounted the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac and explained to her parents that just as God called Abraham to sacrifice his son, they too were required to give up their daughter for his service.<sup>351</sup> Louise de Jésus' mother also listened while her daughter explained her vocation. Once while they were attending a Carmelite church, Louise told her mother, "it is here that God wants me."<sup>352</sup> Thinking her daughter was joking, Louise's mother reminded her not to make light of such a serious topic.<sup>353</sup> Yet Louise insisted on the sincerity of her commitment and she proceeded to enter a Carmelite convent only a few months later. Jeanne Michel, Marie de l'Assomption, and Louise de Jésus' parents were originally sceptical of their daughters' claims to divine vocation, but the girls constructed arguments that changed their parents' minds. The authors of nuns' Lives emphasize girls' power to convince their parents of their vocations through their behaviours and words.

In the case of parental death or absence, girls tended to make decisions more independently, navigating various guardian arrangements and crafting their own communities of discernment. Especially when their mothers were absent, girls looked to other women in their lives for guidance and care. Kristen Gager identifies the existence

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<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 90, 91.

<sup>351</sup> Jean-Marie-Matthias Debelay, *Chroniques de l'ordre des Carmélites de la réforme de Sainte-Thérèse depuis leur introduction en France Tome Quatrième* (Troyes: Imprimerie D'Anner-André, 1861), 83.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 27 "c'est ici que Dieu me veut."

<sup>353</sup> Debelay, *Chroniques de l'ordre des Carmélites Tome Cinquième*, 27.

of these extra-familial relationships in her work on adoption in early modern France.<sup>354</sup> She argues that widows, separated women, and unmarried women adopted children to satisfy material, emotional, occupational, and familial needs.<sup>355</sup> Conversely, orphan girls or those living away from their mothers sought out motherly figures to fulfill their needs, especially spiritual and vocational guidance. These female mentors included friends, sisters, and adult women, both lay and religious.

Childhood friends rarely appear in nuns' vocational accounts, yet those who are mentioned serve irreplaceable roles in the storyline. Authors of nuns' Lives tended to deemphasize friends' involvement for two reasons. First, they had a vested interest in focusing on the activities of their own order's members and not the work of various lay people. Secondly, convents discouraged nuns from developing close friendships out of fear that these might undermine the community as a whole.<sup>356</sup> Since nuns' Lives were written for the edification of the community, descriptions of friendships in the world were deemphasized. Therefore, when friends are mentioned it is because the author could not write the story any other way. For some girls considering religious vocations, friends facilitated the physical movement and logistics required to get to a convent or to explore religious lifestyles. For example, Marguerite de Sainte Marie ran away from home at the age of nine or ten because she was curious about religious life. She escaped with a friend to some rocks where they planned to live out their lives in solitude and spiritual

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<sup>354</sup> See Gager, *Blood Ties and Fictive Ties*; Kristin Gager, "Women, Adoption, and Family Life in Early Modern Paris," *Journal of Family History* 22, no. 1 (1997): 5–25.

<sup>355</sup> Gager, *Blood Ties and Fictive Ties*, 139; Gager, "Women, Adoption, and Family Life in Early Modern Paris," 14.

<sup>356</sup> Hallett, *Lives of Spirit*, 12.

devotion.<sup>357</sup> In some cases, friends did more than imaginary play and actually escorted each other to religious spaces. Anne du Saint-Sacrement was already considering becoming a nun when she joined a group of friends on a visit to a local recluse. When she got to his house, the recluse welcomed her friends but he refused to let Anne in, asking her “for how long will you resist God?”<sup>358</sup> Rather than run away or visit the recluse alone, Marguerite and Anne asked friends to join them. In this way, they took control of their discernment processes, creating an opportunity where fear or loneliness may have otherwise become a deterrent.

For various reasons, some girls had to leave the care of their birth parents and live in another family’s home. This physical movement relieved some of the pressures and opportunities of parental influence, introducing girls to new ideas and role models. Thérèse du Mont-Carmel, born in Troyes in 1581, left home before her eighteenth birthday to escape a traumatic childhood. Her life had been threatened on three separate occasions, first by a plague, then a dog attack, and finally a mad woman who broke into her family home.<sup>359</sup> Thérèse’s parents offered her two options, either she move north and stay with family in the court of the Duc de Lorraine, or go to live with family in Paris. Marguerite’s biographer writes that she chose M and Mme de Renti in Paris because she was interested in becoming a nun and knew that the luxuries of court would be too tempting to resist.<sup>360</sup> Therefore, while staying in Paris, she embraced the opportunity to

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<sup>357</sup> Un Religieux Feuillant, *Histoire de la fondation du Monastere des Religieuses Feuillontines de Toulouse*, 73.

<sup>358</sup> Debelay, *Chroniques de l’ordre des Carmélites Tome Quatrième*, 144.

<sup>359</sup> Jean-Marie-Matthias Debelay, *Chroniques de l’ordre des Carmélites de la réforme de Sainte-Thérèse depuis leur introduction en France Tome Troisième* (Troyes: Imprimerie D’Anner-André, 1856), 58.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

pursue her religious interests, spending as much time as she could in churches, secretly meeting with Jesuits, and even making a pilgrimage to Notre-Dame-de-Liesse.<sup>361</sup> Moving from Troyes to Paris expanded Thérèse's discernment community. In fact, it allowed her to meet Mme Acarie and Mme de Bréauté who invited her into their newly-founded religious order.<sup>362</sup>

Similarly, when Marie-Madeleine de la Trinité left home at the age of eighteen she rediscovered her childhood sense of calling and gained the confidence to overcome her mother's objections. Marie-Madeleine left her home because of a plague, and, while away, she became convinced that God had spared her life in order to make her a nun.<sup>363</sup> She turned down a marriage proposal, returned home, and explained her decision to her mother.<sup>364</sup> She also began the process of constructing her own community of discernment. She sought out another young woman who also felt drawn to religious life.<sup>365</sup> Together they practiced charity and attended church services. Marie-Madeleine also independently secured the guidance of a spiritual confessor, Père Yvan, who gave her a book to read and recommended that she connect with a young widow, Mme de Bontems, who was also interested in religious life.<sup>366</sup> As Marie-Madeleine encountered other young female role-models and mentors her mother's influence in her discernment process diminished.

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<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>363</sup> Grosez, *Vie de la Mère Marie-Madeleine de la Trinité*, 20.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 22, 24.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid., 27, 45.

Yet another teenage girl, Marie de L'Incarnation, constructed her own discernment community after leaving her family home. Marie was staying with a brother-in-law when she noticed that one of his relatives was a particularly pious young woman. Marie approached her relative after mass one day, imploring her, "dear cousin, I am powerfully drawn to follow your example; like you, I have resolved to give myself to God. I invite you to take me for a companion and that we may work together to love God."<sup>367</sup> Marie's cousin accepted, and the two began praying, attending religious services, and practicing charity together.<sup>368</sup> They became close, and decided to enter religious life together. However, during an interview with one convent's abbess, Marie became nervous and began shaking. The abbess mistook Marie's anxiety for sickliness and decided to accept her companion but to reject Marie.<sup>369</sup> After recovering from her disappointment, Marie set out to find a new community of supportive young women. Soon after, she found a widow and several girls living together in Rennes who endeavoured to establish a teaching convent.<sup>370</sup> Thérèse du Mont-Carmel, Marie-Madeleine de la Trinité, and Marie de L'Incarnation each actively shaped their discernment communities, intentionally connecting with lay women who could support their callings when family failed to fill that role.

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<sup>367</sup> Les Religieuses du Couvent de Rennes, *La vie de la Mère Marie de L'Incarnation Religieuse Ursuline* (Rennes: Chez Jean Durant, 1644), 9. "Chere cousine, je suis viuement sollicitée de suivre vostre exemple; resolutement il faut que je me donne à Dieu comme vous, je vous convie de me prendre pour compagne, et d'aggréer que nous conspirions ensemble à aimer Dieu."

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., 20. The involvement of women is particularly prominent in Marie de L'Incarnation's Life, and perhaps this is a reflection of the text's female authorship. More work needs to be done on the connections between gender, authorship, and the identification of key actors in nuns' vocational discernment.

While female mentors offered valuable guidance, their approval of a girl's vocation was not usually sufficient to permit her entry into a religious community. Therefore, girls sought out male confessors, priests, and monks in the final stages of their discernment. These men acted as gatekeepers with the power to either permit or refuse a girl's entrance based on their assessment of her vocation. Gary Ferguson argues that men were always involved in convent spaces, whether as religious authorities such as priests, confessors, preachers, and bishops or as male professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, tradesmen, and artisans.<sup>371</sup> The reality of male presence in female-dominated convent spaces is reflected in girlhood vocational accounts, as girls often sought the opinion of religious men just before or just after entering convent communities. For example, Magdeleine de S. Joseph had already entered a Carmelite convent, but still consulted with several Capuchin fathers to determine whether or not this order suited her best.<sup>372</sup> In cases of conversion, nuns' biographers consistently mention male clergy members' involvement in the discernment process prior to the girl's entrance into a religious community. Marguerite de Sainte Magdeleine was raised in a Protestant family in Pamiers, but when her family moved to Toulouse she met a young woman who convinced her to convert to Catholicism. Yet this young woman's spiritual guidance was not sufficient. Marguerite's biographer emphasizes that she had to first talk to a confessor before deciding to join a convent.<sup>373</sup> Similarly, Louise-Eugénie who converted from Protestantism to Catholicism at the age of

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<sup>371</sup> Gary Ferguson, "Rules for Writing: The 'Dames de Poissy,'" in *The Cloister and the World: Early Modern Convent Voices*, ed. Thomas Carr (Charlottesville, Virginia: Rookwood Press, Inc., 2007), 44.

<sup>372</sup> Prestre de l'Oratoire de Jesus-Christ N.S., *La vie de la Mère Magdeleine de S Joseph*, 44.

<sup>373</sup> Un Religieux Feuillant, *Histoire de la fondation du Monastere des Religieuses Feuillentes de Toulouse*, 137.

fourteen, consulted with a Jesuit father before entering a Visitation convent.<sup>374</sup> Even girls who grew up as Catholics but were attached to worldly pleasures were considered converts and required approval from male religious superiors.

Male clergy could play a very practical role in facilitating girls' discernment when they physically escorted girls to religious communities. Louise du Saint Esprit's mother refused to facilitate her daughter's vocation, insisting that she was too beautiful to enter a convent. Hearing about her vocation, Louise's cousin, a Jesuit, collaborated with her brother to help Louise escape to a Feuillentine community.<sup>375</sup> Louise's mother pursued her run-away daughter all the way from Bordeaux to Toulouse, but because of the extraordinary circumstances the order allowed Louise to take the habit immediately, leaving her mother helpless to reverse the decision. While parents usually carried the most weight in girls' communities of discernment, Louise was able to circumvent parental influence because she successfully convinced a male clergy member of the veracity of her vocation.

On at least two occasions, girls asked male clergy to intervene in parent-child disputes over religious calling. These instances show the powerful ways in which girls could take control of their discernment process, solicit expert opinions, and construct convincing arguments. Lucrèce Granian, born in 1657 in Grenoble, grew up in an Ursuline convent as a boarding student. Upon completion of her education, her parents brought her back home to live in the world. Opposed to this decision, Lucrèce

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<sup>374</sup> Jacqueline-Marie Du Plessis Bonneau, *La vie de la Vénérable Mère Louise-Eugénie de Fontaine, religieuse et quatrième supérieure du premier monastère de la Visitation Saint-Marie de Paris* (Paris: Chez François Muguet, 1696), 15.

<sup>375</sup> Un Religieux Feuillant, *Histoire de la fondation du Monastère des Religieuses Feuillentes de Toulouse*, 249.

approached the local bishop, knelt at his feet, and begged him to speak to her parents about her return to the Ursulines. At first he refused, but after repeated requests, “being defeated by her persistence, he granted her demand.”<sup>376</sup> About twenty-five years earlier, another Ursuline pensioner, Jeanne Ravault, accomplished a similar feat. She was her father’s only daughter and he was set on keeping her away from religious life.<sup>377</sup> In desperation she approached Monseigneur Octave de Bellegarde, the local bishop, and asked him to convince her father to change his mind. His response was immediate, as she had already “proved her vocation over the course of three years” of living in the world and rejecting its pleasures.<sup>378</sup> Both Lucrece and Jeanne entered Ursuline convents despite their parents’ protests. Therefore, they successfully overcame their limited authority as daughters. They used their bodies and voices to communicate their goals to their communities and to strategically align themselves with powerful religious men. The authors of Lucrece and Jeanne's Lives use parental opposition to highlight the girls' self-determination. As these girls define themselves against their families they are able to restructure their discernment communities and amplify their own voices.

### **Holy Habits and Words of Wisdom: Proving Vocation**

For seventeenth-century convent communities, the strongest evidence of a nun's genuine religious vocation did not come from religious superiors or clergy members, but from the nun herself. Therefore, authors of nuns' Lives included detailed accounts of girls' attitudes towards the world, habits developed in youth, conversion experiences,

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<sup>376</sup> Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal MS 4993, 79. “étant vaincu de sa perseverance, il luy accorda agreablement sa demande, ce qu’elle executa au plûtôt avec ferveur et reconnaissance.”

<sup>377</sup> Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, MS 4992, 19.

<sup>378</sup> Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, MS 4992, 19. “ont éprouvé sa vocation pendant trois ans.”

bodily appearances, and spoken words.<sup>379</sup> Even when priests or friars predicted girls' vocations these premonitions were not the basis of the girl's calling; instead they served as confirmations of the signs she already exhibited. Whether verbal messages or physical proofs, childhood habits or sudden conversions, girls themselves were at the centre of their vocational accounts.

Prior to entering a religious community, girls with religious vocations lived in a liminal space between the world and the convent. Physically, they lived in the world, residing in the homes of their parents, relatives, or friends, but emotionally, spiritually, and mentally these girls experienced a disconnect from the world around them.

Therefore, the primary way in which girls proved their calling was through resistance to the temptations of the world. Even girls who grew up in convents or entered at a very young age were required to return to the outside world for a few months to test their vocation.<sup>380</sup> This testing period continued until the girl took formal vows, usually about two years after her entrance into the convent as a novice. During this probationary time, the prospective nun reserved her right to take back her dowry and return to the world.<sup>381</sup>

While drop-out rates varied across institutions, the difference between the number of girls who entered and those who actually took vows is evidence for the continuation of discernment even after entrance.<sup>382</sup> Vocational accounts typically include descriptions of the entire testing phase, both before and after entrance, to emphasize the girl's rejection

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<sup>379</sup> de Viguerie, "La vocation sacerdotale et religieuse," 30.

<sup>380</sup> Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister*, 166.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>382</sup> de Viguerie, "La vocation sacerdotale et religieuse," 30.

of the world. The proof of this denunciation lay with the girl herself, evidenced in her attitudes and actions.

Parents and relatives who disagreed with a girl's vocation used a variety of mechanisms to make the world appear more enticing than the convent. Madeleine de Sainte-Christine Briquet, who was placed in the Port-Royal abbey at age three, declared her renunciation of the world and desire to become a nun by the age of fifteen.<sup>383</sup> Since she had limited experience of the outside world, her family was sceptical of her vocation and they arranged for her to leave the convent for four months.<sup>384</sup> During this time, several eminent men including the President Guillaume de Lamoignon and the Curé de Saint-Nicolas du Chardonnet tried to persuade Madeleine of the advantages of bourgeois life over the convent. In response, Madeleine wrote to Antoine Singlin, the confessor at the Port-Royal abbey, laying out her proposed rebuttal and asking for his advice.<sup>385</sup> Singlin approved her arguments and Madeleine was ultimately successful in the debate, returning to Port-Royal within a few months. Upon her return, she also experienced the miraculous healing of a swollen knee and interpreted this as further confirmation of her vocation.

Like Madeleine, Thérèse de Jésus-Maria also experienced physical healing upon re-entering a convent. However, according to Thérèse's biographer, her body was the primary, rather than secondary, evidence of her calling.<sup>386</sup> Thérèse had entered a Carmelite house at the age of twelve. Thinking she was too young to make this life-

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<sup>383</sup> Jean Lesaulnier and Antony McKenna, eds., *Dictionnaire de Port-Royal* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004), 219.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

<sup>386</sup> Debelay, *Chroniques de l'ordre des Carmélites Tome Quatrième*, 82.

altering decision, Thérèse's mother brought her back home, where her body responded with paralysis. When the family could find no cure for Thérèse's sudden illness, she was returned to the convent where she fully regained movement in her limbs.<sup>387</sup> Much like the healing that Marguerite Périer experienced on the Good Friday before the imminent closure of the Port-Royal abbey, Thérèse and Madeleine's healings were considered evidence of God's intercession. The miraculous healing of their bodies was a sign of God's calling on their lives more generally.

Thérèse, Madeleine, and Marguerite are situated in a long tradition of religious women who expressed their spirituality with their bodies. In her book *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, Caroline Walker Bynum compares hagiographical accounts of male and female mysticism in the late medieval period. She argues that food and the body played more significant roles in women's mysticism than in men's because these things were within women's domain.<sup>388</sup> Since women were typically responsible for preparing food and dressing their own bodies, they could take control of their diet and physical appearance more easily than some other aspects of life like finances or marriage. This concept applies to seventeenth-century girls as well, who expressed their religious callings through their bodies and daily habits. Girls could use their physical appearance to set themselves apart from the world, and perform their spirituality in a visible way.

Descriptions of beauty were typically used in nuns' biographies to emphasize the difficulty of choosing convent life over worldly temptations. The more beautiful the girl, the more shocking her decision to enter religion. The opposition between beauty and

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<sup>387</sup> Ibid.

<sup>388</sup> Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 4, 95.

calling are especially pronounced for girls who wished to enter extremely ascetic orders, like the Feuillantines. For example, Marie-Madeleine's biographer describes her joyful nature, ideal body-type, and lively eyes as obstacles to her vocation.<sup>389</sup> Similarly, the author of Louise de Saint Pierre's Life writes that although her beauty was a gift from God, it was a hindrance to her calling because it made her a desirable marriage partner.<sup>390</sup> Louise herself took responsibility for solving this problem as she prayed to God for a deformity which would free her from marriage and consecrate her to his service.<sup>391</sup> Beauty and calling are also oppositional themes in Marie de la Sainte-Trinité's vocational account. To her father's dismay, Marie turned down a marriage proposal from the Duc de Villars, who the king had just made grand-admiral of France and governor of Le Havre. To explain her choice to her father, Marie cut off her hair, gathered her family together and announced that "the offer of a crown would not change her resolution to devote herself to God without reservation."<sup>392</sup> Catherine de Jesus Ranquet, who entered an Ursuline convent, also cut her hair to prove her sincerity to her parents, even though this type of austerity was not commonly practiced in this order.<sup>393</sup> Girls used their bodies to show their parents what was happening in their hearts, creating a link between the spiritual and physical.

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<sup>389</sup> Grosez, *Vie de la Mère Marie-Madeleine de la Trinité*, 16.

<sup>390</sup> Un Religieux Feuillant, *Histoire de la fondation du Monastere des Religieuses Feuillantines de Toulouse*, 249.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid.

<sup>392</sup> Debelay, *Chroniques de l'ordre des Carmélites Tome Troisième*, 412. "L'offre d'une couronne ne lui ferait pas changer sa resolution de se dévouer à Dieu sans reserve."

<sup>393</sup> Gaspard Augeri, Predicateur Ordinaire de sa Majesté, *La vie et vertus de la Vénérable Mère Catherine de Jesus Ranquet Religieuse Ursuline, native de la ville de Lyon* (Lyon: Chez Mathieu Liberal Maître Imprimeur, 1670), 14.

Girls also performed their callings with their habitual actions and everyday activities. When convent communities remembered and retold nuns' vocation stories, childhood habits were used as evidence for a girl's alignment with a particular religious order. For example, Catherine de Jésus, who became a Carmelite nun in the early seventeenth century, expressed her spiritual calling as a child in her interactions with food. According to her biographer, she would sometimes go for days eating only bread and water, and even then she would cover her food with ashes before eating them.<sup>394</sup> Likewise, as a child Marie-Madeleine de la Trinité wore crosses, dressed as a nun, and buried the rings that people had given her. The author of Marie-Madeleine's Life describes these ascetic practices as "fortunate signs that marked the contempt that Madeleine would one day have for the world."<sup>395</sup> The authors of these Lives mention Catherine and Marie-Madeleine's childhood habits because they align these girls with the penitential practices of the Carmelites, particularly in the first half of the seventeenth century before the order shifted its focus to charity.<sup>396</sup>

Even playtime was a site for vocational performance. For example, Angele de Bresse and her sister loved play-acting religious activities. They "set up altars together and, in accordance with their limited ability, they imitated church ceremonies," even fasting on occasion.<sup>397</sup> In fact, one day they ran away from home to go to a hermitage. There is evidence that Angele and her sister were not the only children to play-act

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<sup>394</sup> Debelay, *Chroniques de l'ordre des Carmélites Tome Troisième*, 245.

<sup>395</sup> Grosez, *Vie de la Mère Marie-Madelaine de la Trinité*, 12. "D'heureux presages qui marquoient le mépris que Madeleine auroit un jour pour le monde."

<sup>396</sup> Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, 167.

<sup>397</sup> de Pommereuse, *Les chroniques de l'ordre des Ursulines*, 1, 24. "Dressoient ensemble des autels, et imitoient selon leur petit pouvoir les ceremonies de l'Eglise."

religious life. A similar activity is depicted in Pieter Bruegel's 1560 painting of children playing in a street [Figure 7].<sup>398</sup> In the image there are dozens of games portrayed, including knucklebones, wrestling, stilt-walking, leap-frog, and make-believe imitations of adult ceremonies.<sup>399</sup> One of these re-enactment games appears to mimic a religious



**Figure 7**

procession in which four children sing hymns [Figure 8]. In another corner sits a pretend altar covered in items imitating those priests used to perform mass [Figure 9].<sup>400</sup> This

<sup>398</sup> Pieter Bruegel, *Children's Games*, oil on wood, 1560, [http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/b/bruegel/pieter\\_e/02/index.html](http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/b/bruegel/pieter_e/02/index.html).

<sup>399</sup> Sandra Hindman, "Pieter Bruegel's Children's Games, Folly, and Chance," *The Art Bulletin* 63, no. 3 (1981): 449.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*, 452.

image gives a visual aid for understanding how girls may have performed their religious vocations publicly through play.



**Figure 8**



**Figure 9**

For girls who did not have a long history of spiritual inclinations from childhood, a conversion experience was usually a key component of their vocation accounts. Authors' use of conversion as evidence of divine calling is a unique development of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. During the medieval period, hagiographical accounts of nuns' Lives tend to show a continuity of purity from birth through girlhood and into adulthood. Typically, conversion stories were only found in men's accounts. This gendered difference correlated with medieval social norms and literary motifs. Religious women's hagiographies were modeled on the life of the Virgin Mary, who was pure from birth, while men's hagiographies were inspired by the biographies of church fathers who, like Augustine, experienced a conversion from worldliness.<sup>401</sup> However, this gendered pattern does not hold true for seventeenth-century nuns' Lives. In these

<sup>401</sup> Voaden and Volf, "Visions of My Youth," 672.

accounts, conversions were considered evidence of God's calling, since they proved that the girl could overcome the temptations of the world around her. This difference between early modern and medieval nuns' Lives reveals changing notions of individuality.

Authors of nuns' Lives in the seventeenth century were more willing to recognize girls' ability to consciously choose conversion than authors of medieval nuns' Lives.

Furthermore, seventeenth-century authors would not have included girlhood conversion accounts if they were not considered believable and edifying. Therefore, accounts of girlhood vocation through conversion are some of the strongest examples of girls articulating their individuality through divine vocation.

Authors of seventeenth-century nuns' Lives did not downplay conversion; much to the contrary, they applied the term to a wide variety of spiritual realignments, from dramatic transitions between Protestantism and Catholicism to more minor renunciations of worldly entertainments. Phibberte de Sainte Magdeleine was not ashamed of her childhood conversion experience. In fact, she even discussed it with two inquisitors who interviewed her in 1661. According to Phibberte's written account of the conversation, she said "I was very social and even I thought that I would never become a nun."<sup>402</sup>

Similarly, Louise-Eugénie's biographer does not neglect to mention that she was not only a Protestant, but also loved attending parties and festivals with her friends.<sup>403</sup> Marie de la Grandiere Cornuau also enjoyed attending balls and the theatre before deciding to reject the world.<sup>404</sup> Even the famous reforming abbess at Port-Royal, Angelique Arnauld, had a

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<sup>402</sup> Les Religieuses de Port-Royal, *Histoire des persecutions des religieuses de Port-Royal*, 124. "Fort mondaine et même je croyois que je ne serois jamais religieuse."

<sup>403</sup> Bonneau, *La vie de la Vénérable Mère Louise-Eugénie de Fontaine*, 14.

<sup>404</sup> Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS 4990, 3.

history of worldly frivolity, as she enjoyed reading profane books and openly disparaged her parents' decision to place her in a convent at the age of seven. Each of these girls experienced conversions in their later teenage years or early twenties, during which they rejected their past interest in the world and dedicated their lives to God. Rather than detracting from the legitimacy of their vocations, these stories operated as a sign of God's powerful hold over these girls.

In the case of Angelique Arnauld, her conversion experience and sudden sense of vocation became central not only to her personal identity, but also to that of her religious community. Angelique was only one of the twenty children born to Antoine and Catherine Arnauld, yet from a young age she had a strong sense of herself as an individual.<sup>405</sup> She often had disagreements with her mother, some resulting in beatings, and was more inclined to spend time with her grandfather than anyone else in the family.<sup>406</sup> This may have also been a strategic choice for Angelique, as her grandfather, Marion, controlled the family fortune, and consistently trumped her father in decision-making.<sup>407</sup> Indeed, it was Marion who decided each of the Arnaud girls' destinies.<sup>408</sup> In her memoir, Angelique admits that as a child she enjoyed being in charge; she told her grandfather "because you want me to be a nun, I want to be one too, but on the condition that I will be an abbess."<sup>409</sup> While Angelique embraced the title of abbess, she did not

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<sup>405</sup> Sedgwick, *The Travails of Conscience*, 35, 37.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>409</sup> Angelique de Saint Jean Arnauld and Mère Marie Angelique de Sainte Magdeleine Arnauld, *Memoires pour servir à l'histoire de Port-Royal et à la vie de la Reverende Mere Marie Angelique de Sainte Magdeleine Arnauld reformatrice de ce monastere*, vol. 1 (Utrecht: aux depens de la compagnie, 1742), 8. "Puisque vous voulez que je sois Religieuse, je le veux bien, mais à condition que je serai Abbess."

want the responsibilities of the position. As a young girl, she continued to pursue her secular interests, reading Plutarch and other non-religious books, frequently visiting friends, and leading her mother to believe that she was hiding illicit love letters.<sup>410</sup> This behaviour continued until her conversion experience at age sixteen. During Lent in 1608, Angelique was listening to a sermon preached by a young itinerant monk when she experienced a sudden peace and contentment with her family's decision to place her in a convent.<sup>411</sup> In her memoir she wrote, "I found myself happier to be a nun than I had ever believed it possible."<sup>412</sup> Through her conversion experience, Angelique exchanged her forced vocation for a voluntary one. Therefore, she used this pivotal event to distinguish herself from her family and legitimize her role as abbess.<sup>413</sup>

Shortly after she discovered her vocation, Angelique crafted a new individual identity as a convent reformer. First, she instated a stricter version of the Benedictine Rule, a sixth-century monastic document that emphasizes obedience in daily work and diligent practice of the daily offices.<sup>414</sup> Next, she enacted the enclosure policies mandated at the Council of Trent over fifty years earlier. These rules worked two ways, forcing nuns to remain inside the convent walls and requiring visitors to remain outside the community's walls.<sup>415</sup> Visitors could converse with the nuns only through a window in the small entry-way parlor. These reforms infuriated Angelique's family, who had grown

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<sup>410</sup> Sedgwick, *The Travails of Conscience*, 41.

<sup>411</sup> Arnauld and Arnauld, *Memoires pour servir à l'histoire de Port-Royal*, 1:26.

<sup>412</sup> As cited in Sedgwick, *The Travails of Conscience*, 42.

<sup>413</sup> Kostroun, *Feminism, Absolutism, and Jansenism*, 50.

<sup>414</sup> Perle Bugnion-Secretan, *La Mère Angélique Arnauld 1591-1661 d'après ses écrits: Abbessse et réformatrice de Port-Royal* (Paris: Les Éditions Du Cerf, 1991), 26.

<sup>415</sup> Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, 13, 128.

accustomed to using the cloister as a private estate.<sup>416</sup> One day, Angelique was forced to confront her father in an episode later referred to as the *journée du guichet*. Angelique refused to allow her father to enter the convent explaining to him that “she was only doing what she was obliged to do, and what the Council of Trent had commanded her.”<sup>417</sup> Her father, who was the primary financial supporter of the abbey, was enraged at his daughter’s public display of disrespect.<sup>418</sup> Daniella Kostroun argues that “the *journée du guichet* conflict reflected more than teenage rebellion or a struggle for individual autonomy; it reflected an upheaval in the social order in which the daughter stepped forward to replace her grandfather as protector of the family’s financial interests and social ambitions at Port-Royal based on her merit as a reformer.”<sup>419</sup> When Angelique upheld the Council of Trent’s enclosure policies she aligned herself with the church and by extension with God. The credibility Angelique gained as a reformer allowed her to override her father’s authority. Therefore, in her defiance, she signaled to her community her allegiance to her heavenly father, rather than her earthly father. The drama of the *journée du guichet* demonstrates the inverted power dynamic achieved when a girl claimed God’s authority.

Girls with divine vocations were in some accounts described as oracles, arbitrators, and even mouth-pieces of God. These girls not only managed to convince their communities of their calling, but also to impact these peoples' lives in return, since they were seen as channels of God’s word. For example, when Magdeleine de St Joseph

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<sup>416</sup> Kostroun, *Feminism, Absolutism, and Jansenism*, 24.

<sup>417</sup> Arnauld and Arnauld, *Memoires pour servir à l’histoire de Port-Royal*, 1:47. “Elle ne faisoit que ce qu’elle étoit obligée de faire, et ce que le concile de Trente lui commandoit.”

<sup>418</sup> Kostroun, *Feminism, Absolutism, and Jansenism*, 24.

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

was only fifteen years old, people came to her for counsel and conflict-resolution. On one occasion, she prevented a quarrel between two men from escalating into a duel.<sup>420</sup> Her biographer writes that she only got involved when she realized that the men's souls were at risk, at which time "she agreed to be informed about the root of their differences, and then told them simply what she thought of them."<sup>421</sup> To the astonishment of the men's friends, "they received her advice like a royal decree, made their peace in her presence, and embraced each other."<sup>422</sup> Magdeleine's talents were not unprecedented; young Thérèse du Mont-Carmel also acted as an arbitrator in her community, and her guardian Mme de Renti often asked her for advice.<sup>423</sup> Likewise, Jeanne de Sainte Claire was known to receive messages from God. The author of her Life writes that when members of her community asked for advice "God spoke by her mouth on these occasions, without her knowing what she was saying to those people."<sup>424</sup> In their roles as arbitrators and advisors, these girls showed wisdom beyond their years. Since these girls had limited life-experiences and no formal training, their biographers argued that their wisdom was evidence of their closeness to God. As discussed in chapter one, the idea that girls could achieve intimacy with God more easily than other people gave young women a level of authority otherwise unavailable to them. If a girl could claim that her words came from

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<sup>420</sup> Prestre de l'Oratoire de Jesus-Christ N.S., *La vie de la Mère Magdeleine de S Joseph*, 20.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid. "Elle consentit d'estre instruite du fonds de leur differens, et puis leur dit simplement ce qu'elle en pensoit."

<sup>422</sup> Ibid. "Ils receurent son avis comme un arrest souverain, firent leur paix en sa presence, et s'embrassent à l'heure-mesme."

<sup>423</sup> Debelay, *Chroniques de l'ordre des Carmélites Tome Troisième*, 60.

<sup>424</sup> Un Religieux Feuillant, *Histoire de la fondation du Monastere des Religieuses Feuillontines de Toulouse*, 160. "Dieu parloit par sa bouche dans ces occasions, sans qu'elle scût bien ce qu'elle disoit aux personnes."

God, she might gain the opportunity to assert influence over social and political events much larger than herself.

Well-spoken girls could sway even the highest ranking men, as in the case of Jacqueline Pascal, whose poetry and theatrical performances caught the attention of Cardinal Richelieu. Jacqueline, first discussed in chapter one, was born in 1625 as the youngest sister to Gilberte and Blaise Pascal. Their mother died shortly after Jacqueline's birth, and the children were raised by their father who moved the family to Paris when Jacqueline was only six years old.<sup>425</sup> Here the children gained access to exceptional education opportunities and salon society. In fact, by age eight, Jacqueline had published her first book of poetry, and by age eleven, she wrote and performed a complete five-act play with two other girls. These accomplishments drew the attention of several salonnières and gained her an invitation to court.<sup>426</sup> In May 1638, at age twelve, she performed her poem about Queen Anne of Austria's pregnancy, and followed this with several impromptu pieces for other courtiers.<sup>427</sup> These spontaneous compositions proved that she wrote all of the verses herself, verifying her status as a remarkable child prodigy.

Later that same year, Jacqueline's father fell out of favour with the court, over a financial dispute with Cardinal Richelieu.<sup>428</sup> While he went into hiding, Jacqueline used

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<sup>425</sup> Gilberte Pascal Périer, "Mémoire composé et écrit de la main de Madame Périer, touchant la Vie de la Soeur Jacqueline de Sainte Euphémie Pascal sa soeur," in *Lettres, opuscules et mémoires de Madame Périer et de Jacqueline Soeurs de Pascal et de Marguerite Périer, sa nièce, publiés sur les manuscrits originaux*, ed. Armand Prosper Faugère (Paris: Auguste Vaton, 1845), 54.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>427</sup> Jacqueline Pascal, "Vers," in *Lettres, opuscules et mémoires de Madame Périer et de Jacqueline soeurs de Pascal, et de Marguerite Périer, sa nièce, publiés sur les manuscrits originaux*, ed. Faugère M.P. (Paris: Auguste Vaton, Libraire-Éditeur, 1845), 125.

<sup>428</sup> Périer, "Mémoire composé et écrit de la main de Madame Périer, touchant la Vie de la Soeur Jacqueline de Sainte Euphémie Pascal sa soeur," 57.

her public image as a child prodigy for diplomatic purposes.<sup>429</sup> In 1639, she performed in a play for the Cardinal at the home of his niece, the Duchess d’Aiguillon. Her role was small, that of Cassandre in de Scudery’s *L’Amour Tyrannique*.<sup>430</sup> However, her performance earned the attention of the Cardinal and she used the opportunity to plead her father’s case. Twelve-year-old Jacqueline successfully negotiated with this middle-aged administrator, securing her father’s pardon. Furthermore, she acted as a mediator, arranging an interview for the two men at which the Cardinal granted her father the position of tax supervisor for Rouen.<sup>431</sup> Jacqueline continued to play a role in her father’s relationship with the Cardinal in the coming years. A few months after the performance, she wrote a poem celebrating the Cardinal. She begins the epigram “O incomparable Duke,” and goes on to describe the sadness that she had once experienced when she thought that she might never meet him. Then with great admiration, Jacqueline writes “but on that marvelous day—in that moment when I saw you and when you fulfilled my wish—my soul tasted greater happiness than one could ever desire.”<sup>432</sup> A year later, she wrote another laudatory poem, this time a sonnet in celebration of the Cardinal’s niece.<sup>433</sup> Jacqueline used poetry, an artistic expression appropriate for her gender, to strategically reaffirm the amicable ties between the families, thus playing an indispensable role in maintaining her father’s political alliances.

Jacqueline was able to influence social and political events beyond the reach of most girls her age because she was seen as a child prodigy who had a special relationship

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<sup>429</sup> Conley, “Introduction and Bibliography on Jacqueline Pascal,” 2.

<sup>430</sup> Jean Mesnard, *Pascal et les Roannez* (Bruges: Presses Saint-Augustin, 1965), 94.

<sup>431</sup> Conley, “Introduction and Bibliography on Jacqueline Pascal,” 2.

<sup>432</sup> Pascal, “A Rule For Children,” 24.

<sup>433</sup> Pascal, “Vers,” 129.

with God. In a family memoir, Jacqueline's sister, Gilberte, describes her as "very small in size," and as "having a very young face," looking no older than eight when she was actually thirteen.<sup>434</sup> Jacqueline's niece, Marguerite, also exaggerates Jacqueline's youth in her biography, writing that when Jacqueline performed for Cardinal Richelieu she was seven and her brother was eight, even though all of her readers would have known that Blaise was born in 1623 and therefore was fourteen, making Jacqueline twelve.<sup>435</sup> This exaggeration of youthfulness is typical in early modern writing about child prodigies.<sup>436</sup> Jacqueline was publicly acknowledged as a child prodigy when she received an award for her poetry at the recommendation of Pierre Corneille, and when the Cardinal Richelieu held her and kissed her while performing.<sup>437</sup> Goyet argues that such displays of affection would not have offended people if Jacqueline was considered a child prodigy, since this status would associate her more closely to her youth than to her femininity. Antoine Corneille, Pierre's brother, described Jacqueline as an exceptional girl, who was as young as she was wise, comparing her to the virgin Mary.<sup>438</sup> The fact that the Virgin was also the topic of Jacqueline's award winning poem indicates a blending of author and subject. Much like the Virgin, Jacqueline was seen as favoured by God and the bearer of a gift that she did not merit.

Jacqueline reaffirms the divine origins of her talents in a series of poems written between 1638 and 1641. The first of these poems, written a few months before her

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<sup>434</sup> Goyet, "Une poétesse de douze ans," 128. "fort petite de taille," "ayant le visage fort jeune."

<sup>435</sup> Ibid.

<sup>436</sup> Hélène Cazes, "La cérémonie de l'enfant prodige," in *Regards sur l'enfance au XVIIe siècle: Actes du colloque du Centre de recherches sur le XVIIe siècle européen (1600-1700)*, ed. Anne Defrance, Denis Lopez, and François-Joseph Ruggiu (Tübingen, Germany: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2007), 375.

<sup>437</sup> Goyet, "Une poétesse de douze ans," 128.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 129.

twelfth birthday, succinctly summarizes the themes found in the others. It reads: “I am not so very taken with the gifts of poetry that I would not humbly recognize before all, Great God! That it is not study that has given me this skill, but that not meriting it, I hold this power from you.”<sup>439</sup> In these verses, Jacqueline attributes her talent to God, and as the recipient of a divine gift, Jacqueline implies that she is in a close relationship to God. Her intimacy with God allows her to assert authority as a spokesperson for him. This inward facing bond between Jacqueline and God had outward implications for her family’s political and social position. Much like Anquelique Arnauld, Jacqueline’s alignment with God allowed her to exert authority and influence beyond her years.

While Jacqueline’s status as a child prodigy aided her efforts in mending her father’s public reputation, there were limits to her authority. For example, six years later, when she declared her interest in becoming a nun, her father and siblings forbade her from entering a convent.<sup>440</sup> This rejection of Jacqueline’s calling even after she had proved her close bond with God shows the complexity of girls’ claims to divine authority. While some girls such as Louise de Jésus, Jeanne Michel, and Marie-Madeleine managed to convince their parents to support or at least allow their pursuit of divine vocations, Jacqueline agreed to remain in the world and care for her father until after her father’s death.<sup>441</sup> Despite Jacqueline’s strong claims to divine inspiration, she did not act unilaterally. Rather she negotiated with her family, balancing her sense of calling with their needs. The stand-off between Angelique Arnauld and her father at the

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<sup>439</sup> Pascal, “Poetry,” 22; Pascal, “Vers,” 126. “Je ne suis pas si fort saisie, des faveurs de la poésie, que je ne reconnaisse humblement devant tous, Grand Dieu! Que ce n’est pas l’étude qui m’a donné cette habitude, et, sans la mériter, que je la tiens de vous.”

<sup>440</sup> Conley, “Introduction and Bibliography on Jacqueline Pascal,” 4.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid.

*journée du guichet* clearly pits father against daughter, but Jacqueline's situation reinforces the complex network of relationships that guided girls' discernment and pursuit of vocation. Even when girls could make a strong case for God's calling through their rejection of the world, their bodily proofs, and their verbal attestations, they made their decisions in a collaborative forum.

Elite girls in the seventeenth century who entered convents engaged in a dynamic process of vocational discernment. The evidence of these experiences was recorded in nuns' Lives, in which authors blended hagiographic and formulaic language with elements of the nuns' life story to craft an edifying and convincing narrative. Authors of these texts were especially interested in proving that the nuns in their community had received genuine and not forced vocations. Therefore, they focus on the strategies girls used to define themselves against family opposition and to actively collaborate with supporters. In each nun's Life, the body and the voice of the girl are central to the author's narrative. Vocation was proved in a girl's rejection of worldly pleasures, affinity for ascetic practices, experiences of conversion, or eloquent words of wisdom. Believing they had a divine calling, girls expressed themselves using their bodies and voices in ways that their communities could not ignore. Family, friends, mentors, and religious superiors noted and debated each of these pieces of evidence. While these influences shaped girls' discernment, they did not determine it. Girls actively sought advice from individuals outside of their immediate circles and garnered support for their vocations in the face of opposition. Therefore, nuns' Lives reveal elite girls as decisive historical actors, who collaborated with their communities and actively pursued their vocational choices.

## Conclusion

This study of vocational discernment highlights the ways in which girls in seventeenth-century France were historical actors. Obviously, girls who altered political events, like Jacqueline Pascal, Marguerite Périer, and Angélique Arnauld, actively transformed their communities and circumstances, but so did those whose actions did not attract fame and attention. Girls who supported the growth of female religious communities, and challenged patriarchal authority within their own families also shaped the unfolding of history. This thesis contributes to a growing body of research which recognizes girls as "historical actors who took up or rejected prescribed social roles, and who often challenged the limits placed upon them to venture into new places and new roles."<sup>442</sup> Rather than studying girlhood as a precursor to mature adulthood, this scholarship focuses on the contributions made by girls while they were still young. For example, historians of modern girlhood have shown that girl labourers helped to bring about the industrial revolution, child actresses became cultural icons, and young female delinquents challenged societal notions of femininity and morality.<sup>443</sup> Historians of early modern Europe have also begun to acknowledge the key role girls played in reshaping social and cultural events, especially during the Catholic Reformation when girls participated in the spread of new interiorized spiritual practices and played a vital role in the reformers' plans for religious education.<sup>444</sup> Yet in early modern European scholarship,

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<sup>442</sup> Mary Jo Maynes, Birgitte Søland, and Christina Benninghaus, eds., *Secret Gardens, Satanic Mills: Placing Girls in European History, 1750-1960* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 1.

<sup>443</sup> Mary Jo Maynes, "Age as a Category of Historical Analysis: History, Agency, and Narratives of Childhood," *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, no. 1 (2008): 115.

<sup>444</sup> Carter, *Creating Catholics*; Rapley, "Women and the Religious Vocation in Seventeenth-Century France"; Diefendorf, "Give Us Back Our Children"; Grell, "France et Angleterre."

girls' history remains a peripheral concern in larger social, cultural, or institutional histories.

One of the chief reasons for girls' understated role in early modern history is the scarcity of records written by them. Yet this source limitation is not insurmountable. Just as early modern historians have used literary and biographical sources to identify noble adults acting and thinking as individuals in pre-modern France, I have shown how these same interdisciplinary tools can be applied to identify girls as historical actors.<sup>445</sup>

Situating literary tropes within their historical context elucidates connections between the two. As demonstrated in chapter two, girls attending convent schools not only read about biblical heroines and medieval mystics but they also lived alongside nuns. Therefore, on a daily basis they were confronted with evidence for God's calling on girls and women. Likewise, as discussed in chapter three, the stories of girlhood recorded in nuns' Lives and Jacqueline Pascal's poems are shaped by narrative conventions, but they are also grounded in the plausible experiences of daily life. In particular, these accounts offer details about the people who influenced girls' discernment, and the various strategies used to prove religious vocation. The centrality of girls' bodies and voices in discussions about religious vocation, both in convent school interviews and in the memories recorded in nuns' Lives shows that only girls could determine the nature of their own religious conviction. Moreover, these findings align with the claims made in contemporary

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<sup>445</sup> For evidence of noble individuality in literary sources see: Crane, *The Performance of Self*; Aaron Gurevich, *The Origins of European Individualism*, trans. Katherine Judelson (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers Limited, 1995); Dewald, *Aristocratic Experience and the Origins of Modern Culture*; Scaglione, *Knights at Court*; Davis, "Boundaries and the Sense of Self"; Alan Macfarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism: The Family, Property, and Social Transition* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Limited, 1978).

prescriptive literature. As argued in chapter one, because of their virginity, girls had a special form of spiritual authority, and could legitimately claim that God had called them into religious life. Therefore, through the lens of vocational discernment, girls in the seventeenth century are framed as individuals who are capable of self-articulation and should be understood as historical actors who impacted their communities.

Seventeenth-century sources about girls' religious vocation, whether prescriptive, literary, or biographical, use the language of individual choice “since vocation is essentially a voluntary act.”<sup>446</sup> Yet girls are excluded from most studies on pre-modern individuality.<sup>447</sup> Perhaps this is because, as children, girls are still in the process of establishing their identities. The history of girlhood demands a more flexible definition of individuality that recognizes curiosity, experimentation, and uncertainty as facets of individual expression. While growing up, girls often experiment with contradictory identities. In the seventeenth century, girls like Armelle Nicolas, who became a nun at age thirty, explored both religious and secular activities during their childhoods, spending some days in solitary meditation and others dancing at festivals.<sup>448</sup> At Saint-Cyr, girls experimented with different adult roles in their games as they play acted as both noble women and nuns.<sup>449</sup> A more fluid understanding of individuality not only works to draw

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<sup>446</sup> Sauzet, “La vocation religieuse,” 21. “La vocation est donc essentiellement un acte volontaire.”

<sup>447</sup> See: Crane, *The Performance of Self*; Dewald, *Aristocratic Experience and the Origins of Modern Culture*; Gurevich, *The Origins of European Individualism*; Davis, “Boundaries and the Sense of Self.”

<sup>448</sup> Une Religieuse du monastere de Sainte Ursule de Vennes, *Le triomphe de l'amour Divin dans la vie d'une grande servant de Dieu nommée Armelle Nicolas décédée l'an de Nôtre Seigneur 1671* (Vennes: Chez Jean Galles, 1671), 12.

<sup>449</sup> de Maintenon, “Addresses to Faculty,” 151.

girls into the debate on pre-modern individuality, but also affirms that girls were historical actors who in some cases made conscious choices about their vocations.

Girls' self-articulation through religious vocation also challenges the well-established assumption that fathers in early modern France enjoyed supreme power within their own households. Both Lawrence Stone and Jean-Louis Flandrin's pioneering works on the history of early modern families argue that fathers had a monopoly on political, religious, legal, and economic authority within their families.<sup>450</sup> Likewise, in their comprehensive study of the history of fatherhood in the western world, Jean Delumeau and Daniel Roche argue that "perhaps never in the history of the west has the father had as many advantages as during the years 1500-1750," in fact they describe these years as "the golden age of fathers."<sup>451</sup> More recently, historians have challenged these assumptions, showing evidence that wives in both middling and higher status families used various strategies to contest patriarchy in their households. For example, Julie Hardwick argues that women used legal recourse and the threat of lawsuits to challenge their husbands' authority.<sup>452</sup> Similarly, Clare Crowston shows how merchant women gained access to their husbands' credit and participated in the economy despite legal restrictions.<sup>453</sup> Married noble women as well used a variety of strategies, including

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<sup>450</sup> Stone, *The Family Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*, 158; Jean-Louis Flandrin, *Families in Former Times: Kinship, Household and Sexuality*, trans. Richard Southern (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 130.

<sup>451</sup> Jean Delumeau and Daniel Roche, eds., *Histoire Des Pères et de La Paternité* (Paris: Larousse, 1990), 25, 71. "Jamais peut-être dans l'histoire occidentale le père n'a eu autant d'atouts en main que durant les années 1500-1750." "D'âge d'or des pères."

<sup>452</sup> Hardwick, *Family Business*.

<sup>453</sup> Clare Crowston, "Family Affairs: Wives, Credit, Consumption, and the Law in Old Regime France," in *Family, Gender, and Law in Early Modern France*, ed. Suzanne Desan and Jeffrey Merrick (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 66.

patronage and property management to assert authority within a system that favoured their husbands.<sup>454</sup>

The accounts of religious vocation discussed in chapter three reveal yet another way in which early modern fathers' authority was challenged from within their own homes.<sup>455</sup> Certainly, the life of Angelique Arnaud offers the most dramatic example of father-daughter confrontation around religious vocation, but there are also more subtle instances scattered throughout my sample of nuns' Lives. Lucrece Granian and Jeanne Ravault, for example, managed to convince bishops to talk to their fathers on their behalf and Louise de Saint Pierre overcame her father's opposition with logical explanation and pious behaviours.<sup>456</sup> In seventeenth-century French homes, not only adult women, but also young girls actively contested patriarchal authority and asserted their right to choose a religious life.

Girls who claim religious vocations today continue to struggle against patriarchal systems. Globally, women are underrepresented in leadership positions of major world religions.<sup>457</sup> Women cannot serve as clergy members in Orthodox Judaism, Islam, and several major Christian denominations including Southern Baptist and Roman Catholic.<sup>458</sup> Despite strong themes of equality in the Baha'i tradition, women are not

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<sup>454</sup> See Sharon Kettering, "The Patronage Power of Early Modern French Noblewomen," *Historical Journal* 32 (1989): 817–41; Barbara Diefendorf, "Women and Property in Ancien Régime France: Theory and Practice in Dauphiné and Paris," in *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, ed. John Brewer and Susan Staves (London: Routledge, 1996), 170–93.

<sup>455</sup> Rapley, "Women and the Religious Vocation in Seventeenth-Century France," 271.

<sup>456</sup> Debelay, *Chroniques de l'ordre des Carmélites Tome Troisième*, 412. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal MS 4993, 79; Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS 4992, 19.

<sup>457</sup> Paula Nesbitt, *Feminization of the Clergy in America: Occupational and Organizational Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 16.

<sup>458</sup> Béatrice de Gasquet, "La barrière et le plafond de vitrail. Analyser les carrières féminines dans les organisations religieuses," *Sociologie du Travail* 51, no. 2 (2009): 221.

eligible for election to their governing council, and in Buddhism and Hinduism women are rarely recognized as gurus or spiritual mentors.<sup>459</sup> Of course, much progress has been made in recent decades and women are now ordained in many Christian and Jewish denominations and are recognized as teachers, scholars, and theologians in most major world religions. Yet even religious communities that accept women's leadership continue to debate the legitimacy of women's spiritual authority.<sup>460</sup> Moreover, female religious leaders frequently face barriers to their career advancement and struggle to achieve similar status and opportunities as their male counterparts.<sup>461</sup> Recent sociology research has shown that religious communities respond differently to children's interests in religious careers based on gender. While boys are encouraged to attend seminary and pursue formal leadership positions, girls are directed towards teaching and caregiving ministries.<sup>462</sup> In fact, young women are more likely than young men to delay their religious vocations and to work in part-time, lower salary, or support staff positions.<sup>463</sup> This trend is reflected in the data for Christian churches in the United States, where women make up only fifteen percent of clergy, but constitute sixty-five percent of church employees.<sup>464</sup> Therefore women working in religious careers are much less likely than

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<sup>459</sup> Maureen Fiedler, "Introduction," in *Breaking Through the Stained Glass Ceiling: Women Religious Leaders in Their Own Words* (New York: Seabury Books, 2010), xvii.

<sup>460</sup> Gasquet, "La barrière et le plafond de vitrail," 221; Nesbitt, *Feminization of the Clergy in America*; Nesbitt identifies the Reformed Church and the Southern Baptist Convention as examples of Christian denominations that have seen a decline in support for female ordination over recent decades.

<sup>461</sup> Nesbitt, *Feminization of the Clergy in America*, 3, 18. Examples of work typically associated with female clergy include overseas missions, teaching Sunday School, directing gender-segregated committees, and organizing fundraising events.

<sup>462</sup> Gasquet, "La barrière et le plafond de vitrail," 228.

<sup>463</sup> Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair Lummis, and Patricia Chang, *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 83.

<sup>464</sup> Gasquet, "La barrière et le plafond de vitrail," 221.

men to hold clergy positions. Girls who feel compelled to pursue a religious career often face an additional stage of discernment. While boys may simply consider if they have a calling into religious ministry or not, girls must discern whether or not such a calling is permissible or even possible within the context of their religious tradition.

This examination of girls' religious vocation in early modern France contributes to our understanding of the societal and institutional constraints that continue to limit girls' opportunities in religious communities today. Yet their stories also offer an optimistic perspective. In the highly patriarchal context of the Catholic church, girls, marginalized by both their youth and gender, articulated their vocations and were heard. Theologians, convent school educators, and religious communities recognized that girls had a unique spiritual power and girls laid claim to this authority. Girls actively sought out individuals who could facilitate their vocations and convinced their communities with their bodies and voices that God had called them. Perhaps examinations of girls' religious vocation in other religions, times, and places may also reveal surprising ways in which girls articulated their spirituality. Such research can only work to validate girls' presence in religious communities and to support the ongoing effort to recognize young women's roles in religious leadership.

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