

Women, Gender, and Religion

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Women in the Crucible of Change

Women's Influence on the Church in The Years 1480 to 1700

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Introduction

[1] The European cultural climate of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was like no other era that preceded it in Western history. The artistic Renaissance of the Mediterranean countries was matched by a striking intellectual leadership from the northern countries of the continent. A strong biblical and spiritual reform in the Spanish Catholic Church set off an intense interest in the spiritual and emotional development of each human person as well as a great awakening to the insights of the classical Roman, Greek, and Jewish wisdom of the early Common Era. The University of Paris established a standard of education that would soon be spread widely through the work of the newly founded Jesuit order. The Protestant Reformation not only shattered the apparent unity of the Latin Christian Church in Europe, it laid the groundwork for the disintegration of the vestiges of the Roman Empire and movement toward nation states, with colonial empires already begun by the French and English. The printing press, invented at the dawn of the Renaissance in 1450, fueled a revolution of linguistic development, literacy and learning throughout Europe that was available to ordinary men in ways never seen before.

[2] In this period of epochal change in Western culture the fundamental theistic worldview of the medieval period gave way to the dawn of an anthropocentric pre-modernity. Newly

formed nations sent ambitious younger sons to unmapped continents where they claimed land and resources in the name of their monarchs, achieving both wealth and power. But what was the situation for women in ecclesial, economic, or political structures of the time? Were women able to enjoy the new opportunities for education? Did the status or role of women change?

[3] Throughout Europe and its new colonies, the role of women generally continued to be sharply curtailed by law and custom, but a number of talented women were enormously significant as powerbrokers behind the scenes, independently minded monarchs, activist nobility working for social or cultural change, or voices of religious influence. Within a context of public disapproval of and threats toward gifted women, tremendously intelligent and generous women leaders contributed significantly to altering the religious, political, and educational situation of Europe and its colonies throughout the world. This paper focuses on the lives of a small group of such leaders who used their family positions, personal wealth, extraordinary intelligence, sharpened leadership skills, and deep faith to initiate sweeping social changes and to raise serious questions about traditional gender roles and the anthropological assumptions that undergirded them.

A Time of Fear of Women and Violence against Women

[4] Few periods of Western civilization have been as dangerously violent as this two hundred year span. Seemingly at the core of the violence lay terrible fears caused by the disruption of the systems of meaning and authority that had been accepted for centuries. The Copernican discovery of the relationship between the planets, followed by the invention of the telescope, enabled the study of the cosmos, setting off a long period of advancing scientific knowledge that challenged all the philosophical and religious convictions of the time. New theories of the created order, of the meaning and purpose of human life, of the causes of illness and disease, of the right relationship among humans and between humanity and God were discussed in virtually every nation. Ideas about religious authority and the right of each person to follow the Spirit's guidance as affirmed by the Protestant Reformation undermined the hierarchical social and cultural order so that one's place in both religious and civil society was challenged. The discovery of tribes of people of color in the new worlds raised questions about the meaning of humanness. Religious wars among Christians tore at the fabric of European life and faith identity, depriving both the Christian Church and the European continent of any imagination of unity or common purpose for half a millennium. It is not surprising that, as the theoretical foundations of social order and the authority of the Christian Scriptures were challenged, the gender roles that left women of all classes somewhat oppressed would also be challenged. Each challenge to the fundamental social order, however, brought significant cost due to the various forms of reaction that are rooted in fear of change.

[5] In 1486, at the directive of Pope Innocent VIII, two Dominican members of the Inquisition of the Catholic Church,¹ Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, inaugurated a

¹ Initially the Inquisition was a Church court established to identify heresy against the Catholic Church. Established in the thirteenth century to counter Albigensian heretics, the ecclesial inquisition became a papal court with powers greater than local diocesan courts. In countries where being Catholic was required by civil law, heresy was also understood to be treason against the state. Thus, the Church courts became connected

tragic period of ecclesial and civil violence with the publication of a document that sought to explain the reasons for various illnesses and for an apparent drop in conceptions of children. Based on an assumption that women are to blame, they argued that women tend toward evil more easily than men and posited some suggestions why. They also established a method for the arrest, torture, trial, and condemnation of persons for “consorting with the devil to destroy others,” an offense not only against the ecclesial community but, as with so many other behaviors, defined as treason against the city, state, or nation, and punishable by death. The text they developed, *Malleus Malificarum* (*The Hammer of Evil*) claims that evil powers or demonic forces can and do forcefully invade the human spirit and subject humans to their evil intent. Further, it insists that human persons can sexually consort with demonic creatures, thereby acquiring a demonic power over other people. These claims were based on concepts and positions that flew in the face of classical Church doctrine, having been firmly rejected as heretical throughout Catholic history. Some of the text reads as follows:

Others again have propounded reasons why there are more superstitious women found than men. And the first is, that they are more credulous; and since the chief aim of the devil is to corrupt faith, therefore he rather attacks them. The second reason is, that women are naturally more impressionable, and more ready to receive the influence of a disembodied spirit; . . . The third reason is that they have slippery tongues, and are unable to conceal from their fellow-women those things which by evil arts they know; and, since they are weak, they find an easy and secret manner of vindicating themselves by witchcraft. All wickedness is but little to the wickedness of a woman. And to this may be added that, as they are very impressionable, they act accordingly.

There are also others who bring forward yet other reasons . . . they are feebler both in mind and body, [so] it is not surprising that they should come more under the spell of witchcraft. For as regards intellect, or the understanding of spiritual things, they seem to be of a different nature from men; a fact which is vouched for by the logic of the authorities, backed by various examples from the Scriptures . . . Women are intellectually like children . . .

But the natural reason is that she is more carnal than a man, as is clear from her many carnal abominations. And it should be noted that there was a defect in the formation of the first woman, since she was formed from a bent rib, that is, a rib of the breast, which is bent as it were in a contrary direction to a man. And since through this defect she is an imperfect animal, she always deceives . . . And it is clear in the case of the first woman that she had little faith; And all this is indicated by the etymology of the word; for *femina* comes from *fe* and *minus*, since she is ever weaker to hold and preserve the faith. And this as regards faith is of her very nature . . . a wicked woman is by

with civil courts. With the dawn of Protestantism this practice was not widely changed, since, generally speaking, the civil government of most territories or principalities defined which denomination was legal or tolerable for its people, and dissenters were driven out, underground, or killed.

her nature quicker to waver in her faith, and consequently quicker to abjure the faith, which is the root of witchcraft.

[6] Both the University of Cologne and the Holy Office of the Catholic Church condemned the work within a decade of its publication, and by 1550, the Church had generally reined in many of the excesses of its own inquisitorial courts. The damage had been done, however, and there seemed no stopping the work's influence. The tract, a best seller in Protestant areas of Europe, continued to be published and the witch hunt that it had nurtured spread beyond any ecclesial boundaries established by the Reformation, leaped the Atlantic Ocean and infected the New World, its influence continuing into the early decades of the eighteenth century. Mary Malone, in her three volume work on *Women and Christianity*, asserts that in the witch hunt the two most feared realities of the late medieval period, the image of "woman" as temptress and the personification of evil in a devil figure, were combined, resulting in the tragic practice of witch hunting that persisted for over a century and a half, largely, but not entirely, targeting women. Those most vulnerable to arrest were poor, had birth defects, skin diseases, or mental illnesses, raised gardens of medicinal herbs or had skill in nursing or caring for the sick, had not married or were widowed, or failed to participate in the local Church community, Catholic or Protestant. Over a century and a half some 200,000 people were tortured and burned at the stake for being witches. At its height and during most of its tenure, this witch-hunt was driven primarily by local courts and communities, especially in the German states where only regional governance was effective. For many ordinary women this irrational explosion of misogyny was the most immediate reality of the period of the Renaissance and Reformation (see Malone; Merriman: 46-220).

[7] During the last half century, scholarship has sought to find traces of the impact of ordinary women on each of the periods and major events of history. In this period, the witch craze, which was dominant in Northern and Western Europe, but not absent elsewhere, created an environment where few ordinary women wanted to be known or recognized. In most countries the lot of women in regard to education was only beginning to change. And yet, from a remarkable cadre of extraordinary women on whom scholarship has been able to shed light, it is possible to recognize some of the contributions of women during these years. In addition to the witchcraft literature that was rampant during this period, one finds evidence of a tremendous intellectual debate about the abilities of women. Much of this literature about women and their roles and/or abilities continued to be written by men, usually with the purpose of discounting, diminishing, or undermining women's contributions or distorting them for the purpose of propaganda. That was not universally the case, however, as we shall see.

[8] One of the most famous scholars of the period, Desiderius Erasmus, wrote a scathing critique of education for women, *The Abbot and the Learned Lady*. Written as a dialogue and aimed, perhaps, at Margaret Roper, the well-educated daughter of Thomas More, Erasmus' text argued against the education of women in the Greek and Latin classics, claiming that women were made for sexual pleasure and were unappealing if they manifested intelligence or learning, a sentiment not entirely absent from our own "enlightened" culture. Erasmus further insisted that in the service of love that is marriage, all authority was to be in the hands of the husband: "Nature requires the man to be dominant because the woman is always politically subordinate, and he is her natural superior" (Malone: 27-28).

[9] Despite the kinds of sentiments expressed by Erasmus, in practically every country of Europe there were scholarly women, spiritually powerful women, and women who changed the maps of Europe by their political and ecclesial decisions. The most obvious cultural “movers and shakers” were those of extraordinary personal and political power such as Isabella of Castile (1451-1504), the literal and figurative grandmother of half of the monarchs of sixteenth century Europe, who united Spain when she married Ferdinand of Aragon, and led the Spanish armies as they completed the *Reconquista* of Spain from the Moors (see Edwards; Elliot). Monarchs in the British Isles include the Tudor sisters of England, Queen Mary (1516-1558), the first woman monarch in English history (see Porter; Loades) and her half sister Elizabeth I of England (1533-1603), whose long reign established what was to become the British Empire, and Mary Stewart (1542-1587), tragic Queen of Scotland, cousin of the Tudors and victim of Elizabeth’s fears (see Fraser). In France there is Marguerite Angoulême (1492-1550), about whom more will be said below, and the common, but immensely wealthy merchant woman from Italy, Catherine de Medici (1519 – 1589), who was consort to Henry II, and mother and regent for three of her ten children who came to rule while still children (see Frieda. All of these women powerfully influenced the Church in their own times, and some of their decisions continue to influence it to the present.

[10] Another group of remarkably able and influential women were the rule breakers who reformed or founded new religious movements, nearly all of which became established religious communities over time. Teresa of Avila in Spain (1515-1582), Carmelite founder, reformer, and theologian is perhaps most famous, and her own writing has remained theologically and spiritually influential in the Church (see Medwick; Williams). Following the Second Vatican Council, Teresa was one of the first women to be named a Doctor of the Church (official teacher). Others such as the Italian Angela Merici (1474-1540) received papal approval for her Ursuline community in 1535 because it was perceived to be a pious laywomen’s sodality for caring for the sick and poor (see Mazzonis). From France came Louise de Merillac (1591-1660), a wealthy widow who worked with Vincent DePaul to develop the Daughters of Charity as a group of laywomen committed to nursing the sick and caring for the urban poor (see Rybolt and Ryan). Jane Frances de Chantal (1567-1641) another widow, and mother of six young children, worked with Bishop Frances de Sales to establish the Community of the Visitation that welcomed widows and allowed women enough social freedom to take care of children or aging parents and still live a holy life of prayer (see Power and Wright). Mary Ward (1585-1645), about whom more will be said below, is another of these talented, intelligent, and educated women who worked constantly against the grain of Church and civil structures to offer women greater freedom to love and serve the world. They had followers in the thousands who, down to the present day, have provided internationally effective, ecclesial ministry with little gratitude from and frequent struggles with the hierarchy.

[11] A third group of women who had great influence on the Church and culture of this period were talented and somewhat educated women of personal wealth who supported the work of men in reforming the Church. Representative of this category is Leonor Mascarenhas (1503-1584) of Portugal, companion to Emperor Charles V’s wife Isabel and later governess to Prince Philip until he reached his majority. She never married but lived within the royal family as a surrogate mother for the royal children after Empress Isabel died

in 1540 (see Rahner: 417-78). Two other women who led by influencing the powerful hands of the men they loved were Leonor de Osorio de Vega (1509-1550) and her daughter, Isabel de Vega de Osorio de Luna (1530-1558). These women were from powerful political families of Spain and Italy. They were married to men of wealth, power and influence and as wives and mothers also served as political players and devout Christian women who carried out a mission of reform of the local Church and active care for the poor while developing their own spiritual lives.

[12] A fourth group of powerful women includes those who served as missionaries in the Americas and those native women whose lives and work made a notable difference: the Ursuline Sister, Marie de l'Incarnation and her companions who went to Canada from France in 1639, where for four decades they resisted the efforts of Bishops to force them into enclosure while they brought an egalitarian education to the children of the French settlers and the native girls of the Algonquin and Huron tribes. Kateri Tekawitha (see Greer 2000, 2005; Malone: 141-43), the beatified Lily of the Mohawks in North America, and Sor Juana de la Cruz (see Rappaport; Paz), half Spanish, half native Peruvian poet and scholar who set Europe abuzz due to the extraordinary beauty of her poetry and the intellectual lucidity of her prose, stand out among Catholic women of the New World. Their stories afford insight into the ways that the ecclesial culture could barely cope with effective apostolic women, women as scholars, or saintly natives.

[13] Through lives marked by both astonishing successes and tragic failures in the love and service of humanity, all of these women defy the restrictive views of *Mallens Malificarum* and Erasmus. Due to constraints of space, I cannot do justice to the many talented and heroic women who deserve attention. But that we might celebrate some specific achievements of at least some of them, let me put a bit of flesh on four of women of the period: The Queen of Navarre, the foundress of the "Jesuitesses," the Spanish royal family's governess, and New France's founding mother.

Marguerite Angoulême, Duchess of Alençon and Queen of Navarre

[14] Marguerite Angoulême served as wife, mother, administrator, and counselor for her brother, Francis I, King of France in the early sixteenth century (information on Marguerite is drawn from Fabbri; Renaissance in Print; Delahoyd; Valentine). Beyond her competency in these challenging roles, Marguerite was a biblical scholar, theologian, poet, and storyteller who, remarkably for the time, published in her own name. Marguerite's mother, Louise of Savoy, insisted that her daughter be as thoroughly educated in the classics as her brother. In 1508, at the age of 16, she was given in marriage to Charles, Duke of Alençon. Shortly after her marriage, due to a series of deaths in the royal family of France, her brother Francis was crowned King, and Marguerite moved to the court to assist him. When Francis, engaged in a brief war with Charles V, suffered a defeat and was taken captive, Marguerite rode by horseback over 650 miles from Paris to Madrid, where she successfully negotiated her royal brother's release from captivity, then nursed him back to health before accompanying him home to France.

[15] A year later Marguerite married Henri d'Albret, king of Navarre, with whom she had a daughter, Jeanne d'Albret. At this time Marguerite shifted her focus from the political realm of her brother's and husband's courts to writing poetry, theology, and stories and to

influencing the reform of the Catholic Church in France. Under the spiritual guidance of Bishop Guillaume Briçonnet, she encouraged renewed Scripture scholarship and the reformation of convents and monasteries in the realms under her influence. She personally financed and took part in translating the Scriptures into French – a project that paved the way for a similar translation into English in Douay and Rheims (the standard Catholic Bible until well into the twentieth century in English speaking countries). Because of her own background in the classics, she encouraged careful study of the Greek and Hebrew versions of the Bible as the translation of the Latin Vulgate proceeded. In this regard she was supporting a work similar to that which Isabella, that most Catholic of Monarchs, had undertaken in collaboration with Cardinal Ximenes in Spain two generations prior on a massive polyglot translation of the Scriptures.²

[16] Marguerite's personal spirituality entered a highly mystical stage at this time. Her last book of poetry before her death contains a remarkable work that hints of an intense disappointment in unrequited human love that is transformed to ecstasy in the pursuit of Divine love. She asserts that she does not believe it possible to know the depths of divine love unless one has deeply loved another human being. Her most famous work, and one that for centuries was frequently not credited to her because she, a woman, dared to publish, is the *Heptameron*, published posthumously in 1559. Inspired by Boccaccio's *Decameron* and similar to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, the book is structured as if it were a collection of stories told by ten men and women – clergy, monastic, and lay – who are trapped for ten days in a mountain monastery due to a massive flood that does not permit them passage to their homes. Together they study Scripture in the mornings and pass the afternoons telling morality tales and engaging in discussions of morals. The situation provides a fruitful context for a debate of current sexual mores and theological opinions. Theologians at the University of Paris accused her of being sympathetic to Calvin's theology because of her strong desire for a return to personal reading of the Scriptures and her urgent demand for reformation of morals, doctrine, and practice that appears inconsistent with Scripture. But the work is critical of Calvin's thinking and also contains ideas that were frequently advanced in the Catholic reform movements of the day. Marguerite also published short essays on theological topics, which were highly controversial because of her leanings toward Calvin's anthropology. Her royal stature generally protected her from formal charges of heresy by the Catholic Church, but not from the verbal attacks of Catholic and Protestant clergy alike.

[17] Throughout her life, Marguerite was an activist, not only through her scholarly writing, but also in patronizing the arts and bringing some of the most important voices of the Renaissance to the French Court of her brother. She was responsible for extending direct material care to the poor, for demanding and securing education opportunities, especially for women across France and Navarre. She took great interest in the education of clergy and supported biblical scholarship as the basis of good preaching and a genuine spiritual life. Despite the controversy and criticism that swirled around her, Marguerite died a Catholic in

² This masterpiece in six volumes included a Hebrew, Greek, and Latin Old Testament, and a Greek and Latin New Testament, and further included a Chaldaic Targum of the first five books of the Old Testament. It served as scholarly resource in the work of reforming the education of the clergy in Spain and throughout Europe.

1549 at the age of fifty-eight. She is honored by many as “the mother of the French Renaissance.”

Mary Ward

[18] In this era, across Western Europe a remarkable group of talented, charismatic women emerged to found Catholic religious orders for women. Teresa of Avila in Spain, Angela Merici in northern Italy, Jane Frances de Chantal and Louise de Merillac in France became well known for the enduring work of the women who joined them and carried the banners of their important works across the oceans to the new worlds of North and South America, Africa, and Asia. Perhaps less well known, but nonetheless important for her work in establishing standards for educating women is the Englishwoman, is Mary Ward (information is drawn from Orchard; see also Kenworthy-Browne; Littlehales; Zagano: 54-62; Malone: 103-12). The Church benefitted greatly from her ability to translate Ignatius of Loyola’s seminal spiritual insights into a pattern of apostolic, communal life for women that enabled them to serve both the Church and the world outside the cloister. Born of English Catholic nobility in 1585, Mary was raised in an Elizabethan England increasingly hostile to Catholics. Shortly before her birth, acts of Parliament made it treasonous to be a Catholic priest or to hold the Catholic faith. Well-educated in the humanities in a Renaissance home, she was forced to flee to the European continent in order to follow a vocation to religious vows. Related by blood or marriage to most of the Catholic aristocracy of England, Mary attracted many of the daughters of these families to join her in the effort to establish a women’s community that was like the Jesuits “in all things except those reserved to Holy Orders,” according to the formula of the institute that eventually emerged. Consequently, the women of the community she founded were exceedingly well educated in theology, mathematics, language, the arts, rhetoric, and all humane letters. They served by educating girls and women not only to read, write, and guide a household, but also to run small businesses, nurse the sick, provide spiritual direction, care for the mentally ill, and comfort the broken-hearted. In their native England, the “English Ladies” also disguised themselves as maids, housekeepers, widows, and craft-makers to move through the households of both the wealthy and the poor, to go where priests could not linger, and to draw back into faith many who had fallen away.

[19] Mary’s spiritual journey was nurtured and guided by Jesuits as she grew wiser in the skills of discernment and more courageous in following what she discerned. But her life and work were also characterized by official rejection from the Jesuit order she sought to imitate. Worst of all, she suffered frequent, harsh persecutions by members of the Catholic hierarchy, even those who admired her and believed her call to be authentically from God.

[20] It was clear to Mary that the capacity to serve in every graced aspect of the human enterprise belonged also to women. In one of her frequently quoted talks to novices, she asserted:

Therefore I must and ever will stand for this verity: that women may be perfect and the fervor must not necessarily decay because we are women. Women may be perfect as well as men, if they love verity and seek true knowledge. . . . Some, thinking we are women and aiming at greater matters than was ever thought women capable of, they expect perhaps to see us fail,

or fall short, in many things. . . Yet you see many learned men who are not perfect because they practice not what they know, nor perform what they preach. But to attain perfection, knowledge of verity is necessary, to love it and to effect it (Orchard: 58-59).

By “verity” Mary means God’s truth, belonging neither to men nor to women exclusively, but given to all humans equally by God “to profit yourselves and others.”

[21] Unfortunately, neither the Church nor European society was prepared for women to take on “greater matters” by taking such an active role in the service of faith or development of culture outside the home or cloister. The competence and talent of her community of well educated women of diverse nationality and social strata, laboring together outside of the cloister, was shocking to both the Church and the states of early Modern Europe. Significant resistance from the political and social cultures across Europe brought great suffering to her throughout the remainder of her life and to those who were brave enough to cling to her vision and model of community well after her death. In 1630 Mary’s community was officially suppressed by “the harshest [papal] Bull ever to emanate from Rome” (Littlehales: 213). Mary was charged with (but never granted a trial or hearing for) heresy, schism, and rebellion, and her enemies in Rome passed the rumor that she had been, or was about to be, burned at the stake. In fact, she was imprisoned, without benefit of the sacraments and without heat, in the sick room of a Poor Clare convent outside of Munich for several months of a bitterly cold winter.

[22] Despite being suppressed by the Church, many of Mary’s community found a way to remain together as laywomen, and then to be recognized as a religious order some years later. The community continues to thrive on five continents under the title of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, but popularly known as the English Ladies. In 2004 the Roman branch was able to claim finally the name that Mary Ward had insisted was God’s will for her institute, the Congregation of Jesus. The educational and spiritual work of this congregation throughout the world continues as they prepare to celebrate their 400th Anniversary in 2009.

[23] Mary’s collection of writings is relatively small, but it demonstrates her command of language, history, theology, and spirituality. Her journals, retreat notes, letters, and instructions to her sisters, along with the formula for her institute, have been gathered, collected, translated, and commented upon in several languages. They afford a voice interpreting Ignatian spirituality of and for women from the early days of the Society’s history.

Leonor Mascarenhas

[24] Because of her political, financial, and spiritual support, Doña Leonor Mascarenhas d’Almada y da Veyga was given the title “Mother of the Society of Jesus” by the early fathers of that religious community. Born in Portugal in 1503, into a union of two of the most powerful houses of nobility in that land, and related to nobility throughout Europe, Leonor grew up as lady-in-waiting to Maria, consort to King Manoel of Portugal, and closest friend and lady-in-waiting to his daughter, Princess Isabel. She accompanied the latter to Spain at the time of her royal marriage to Emperor Charles V, grandson of Ferdinand and Isabella. As a young woman she made a decision not to marry, but she was not able to enter vowed

religious life as she originally wanted. Instead, she remained in the heart of one of the most “worldly” courts of Europe.

[25] Throughout her young adult life, Leonor served as royal governess. She first cared for the children of her friend Empress Isabel, winning the affection of Philip II, the eldest son, after his mother died in his early childhood. Then, a dozen years later, when Philip married and had children, not only was she responsible for the care of his younger siblings but eventually also his children, especially the mentally ill, Prince Don Carlos, after Philip’s young wife died in childbirth. All his life Philip remained grateful to her and “. . . even when she was old, he retained a tender devotion to her as long as she lived” (Rahner: 534, n. 9). The position of Royal Governess was hardly that of a lowly maidservant; rather in such a position Leonor was virtually a member of the royal family and enjoyed influence at court nearly equal to that of the Empress. She had access to material wealth from her own inheritance and received a substantial stipend annually from her position. Despite her personal wealth, there is evidence that she lived modestly in private and sought few favors for herself. She was not shy or retiring, however. She could be very assertive about values and about the various projects by which she sought to implement them. For Ignatius of Loyola and the Jesuits, Doña Leonor wielded her considerable political influence in both the Portuguese and Spanish courts.

[26] In the year that Philip II was born, Leonor met Ignatius of Loyola, a Spanish nobleman who was to become one of the most influential men of the age as the first leader of the new Society of Jesus, a Catholic religious order that was to transform education in Europe and establish an extensive educational system throughout the colonies of the Catholic European nations. A tradition among the Jesuits indicates that Leonor met Ignatius while he was imprisoned by the Spanish Inquisition in Alcalá. She accompanied another noble woman of the court who was a friend of the Loyola family to visit him. Hugo Rahner asserted, “We may presume that Ignatius at once made a deep impression on Leonor and that he recognized in her one of those courageous souls who can be asked to undertake many works of charity” (418). None of Leonor’s letters to Ignatius have been preserved, but six or seven letters from Ignatius to her have been catalogued with his huge collection of correspondence, and letters between Leonor, Francis Borgia, and other Jesuits have been retained in the archives. The letters reveal a somewhat impatient woman of compassion, who had a commitment to supporting the multiple good works of the Jesuits, while fulfilling her own vocations both personal and professional.

[27] In the early years of the founding of the Society, Rahner asserts, Leonor became something of a *chargée d'affaires* for them at the Spanish Court as she overcame the negative influence of the Archbishop of Toledo who was hostile to the Jesuits. She also re-established a gracious relationship with theologians at the University Alcalá, who continued to hold Ignatius in some suspicion. Due to her relationship with the young prince and princesses in her care she was also able to instill in them a very strong love and support for the Jesuits, with the result that in their later years, as rulers and consorts in various courts throughout Europe, they provided material and political support for the new religious order.

[28] Insistent that young people of the court be educated in more than courtly manners, Leonor sought tutors from the Jesuits, not only for her royal charges, but also for other

noble's children, both boys and girls, emphasizing the humanities curriculum for which the Renaissance was known and insisting that children should read Latin in order to read the Scriptures. With her own resources she founded a Franciscan convent for women in Madrid (to which she eventually hoped to retire), and underwrote the entire cost of a Jesuit college in Madrid that eventually became the *Colegio Imperial*. She encouraged Philip to lend his royal support to the college venture of the Jesuits at Messina, and urged Ignatius to help her found a house in Madrid for poor women who wanted to escape the life of prostitution to which they were often subjected. It is said that she particularly assisted young women in acquiring educations so that they could establish businesses and arrange worthy marriages.

[29] After Don Carlos was placed under the tutelage of a full time tutor and had his own household, Leonor wrote to Ignatius and asked his advice about retiring from the Court to take up the vocation of Franciscan poverty in a cloistered community, which greatly appealed to her. Ignatius encouraged her to consider the greater good she might be able to accomplish by remaining in her present state, then challenged her to ask King Philip what he wanted her to do and to follow his requests (Rahner: 430; Ignatius wrote to Leonor advising her in this regard during his own final illness – he died two months later). Philip was not desirous of her departure from the Royal Court and directed her to remain active in the care of various royal children and adolescents, especially the young princesses.

[30] After Ignatius' death in 1556 Leonor became more fully involved in promoting the larger missionary and local works of the Jesuits and in arranging permanent support for the Franciscan convent she founded. In her maturity she lived in a small apartment near the convent, offered spiritual direction and prudent political advice to visitors great and small. In her mid sixties she was asked to be a lady-in-waiting and royal advisor for Court of the Empress Maria who returned to Spain after the death of her husband, Emperor Maximilian II. Leonor remained in reasonably good health long enough to promote the educational and spiritual works of the Jesuits in Spain and Portugal up through the leadership of Fr. Mercurian, the fourth General of the Society. She died peacefully shortly before Christmas in 1584. Her estate was willed entirely to the support of the Franciscan convent that she founded and to the educational works of the Jesuits, especially the internationally important *Colegio Imperial* in Madrid. From this school hundreds of Jesuit missionaries went to serve in Latin America, North America, Eastern Asia, and throughout Europe. From this school, as well, numerous future lay leaders in government and business were intellectually and spiritually formed by the Jesuits for two hundred years.

[31] Four generals of the Jesuits and nearly all of the founders of that order referred to Leonor Mascarenhas as “Mother of the Society of Jesus,” revering her as a formidable and holy woman who recognized that her place in society permitted her to do great and lasting good for many persons of both genders and all social classes.

Marie of the Incarnation

[32] From among the missionaries who brought the Christian Gospel to the peoples of the new worlds of North and South America before 1700, the Catholic women of the Order of Saint Ursula stand alongside the Jesuits, especially in the service of evangelizing and educating the people of New France. Led by a practical mystic, Marie of the Incarnation (information is drawn from Maline: 126-36; Egan: 488-99; see also Disse; Chabot; Keller-

Lapp; Ursuline Religious), four Ursuline women and the Jesuit priest, who had contracted their participation in the mission to the native peoples of Canada, disembarked in Quebec in 1639 after a harrowing sea voyage from France. These women were later to be described in popular literature in the home country as

“Amazons” and “martyrs.” The director of the Jesuit mission in New France, Paul Le Jeune, proclaimed that the Amerindians “admired the noble constancy of these young Amazons,” who embarked on a voyage “longer than that of Aeneas,” and who, in spite of the Ocean, came to seek the salvation of these barbarians in these farthest confines of the earth (Keller-Lapp).

[33] Born Marie Guyard or Guyart, in the city of Tours, France, in 1599, the young woman felt drawn to religious life but also demonstrated a spirit of strength and joy that led her parents to contract a marriage for her with a silk weaver, Claude Martin, when she was 17. The couple had one son born the following year. When little Claude was only a year old, his father’s business bankrupted and he died shortly thereafter, leaving Marie a single mother and widow at the age of 19. The marriage was not a happy one for Marie, so to make ends meet and to keep from having to marry again for convenience, Marie worked for her sister and brother-in-law, keeping their home and managing his carting business for nearly ten years.

[34] Feeling a constant call to religious life, Marie left her son in the care of her sister when he reached eleven, and she entered the young Ursuline order that had been founded as an apostolic order for women educators in northern Italy less than a century before. In the early seventeenth century, following the decree of the Council of Trent, all orders of women religious were being forced either into cloisters or out of formal religious life. The Ursulines were particularly stifled by this move (as had been Mary Ward’s group), but most groups accepted a kind of cloister that allowed them to teach young women who came to them as boarding students, rather than be suppressed as were the English Ladies. However, some houses of Ursulines fought to retain their original *Institut* or rule, causing a fragmentation of rule among Ursuline houses. Marie was strongly convinced of the importance of the unity of the whole order under one rule. She was recognized in her community as unusually gifted both spiritually – there was clear evidence that she was receiving mystical graces – and practically. She was appointed director of the novices after only a few years in vows herself and then was chosen as a superior of her house.

[35] In 1633, she had a mystical vision in which she experienced Christ calling her, alongside a woman she did not recognize, to come to a new land and bring the Gospel to native peoples. Two years later she met the woman, Madame de la Peltrie, a widow who gave her entire fortune to underwrite a mission for apostolic women in Canada. French Jesuits were assisting Mme de la Peltrie in organizing her project, and they were instrumental in challenging the Ursulines to send women to Quebec to establish schools for both French and native girls, and to serve on a mission to the Iroquois and Huron Nations.

[36] For the next thirty-three years Marie educated native girls along with the daughters of French colonists and explorers. She served as superior of the mission for eighteen of those years, sending reports and letters to the home communities begging for women, money, and

supplies to keep the project alive. During periods of great financial hardship, of conflict among the native nations of Indians that put them in the middle and their lives in danger, and of efforts by both bishops and governors to curb the apostolic activities of the women, Marie remained a calm, steady, eminently practical leader who labored to keep her community from being forced into cloister or out of their mission to teach and guide both natives and colonists. She purchased a farm and ran it very successfully to feed the community, the students in the schools, as well as the poor and to provide income for the numerous practical essentials needed for the large “households” she led. She personally worked a large vegetable garden that provided opportunities for educating her students in horticulture.

[37] Marie was deeply involved in the practical issues of colonial relations with the Indians and publically criticized French merchants who purchased native goods with alcohol and weapons. Marie worked hard to make the colonial government just in their dealings with the native peoples, and she especially worked to protect the young women from being sold into a kind of sex slavery among the trappers and other French adventurers. She served as spiritual guide for more spiritually zealous lay leaders and was constantly sought out for her practical organization and planning skills that were universally recognized as valuable assets in the support of the leadership of the colony. Many of the founders of the colony counted her among their best friends (Chabot).

[38] Marie provided written contributions to the Jesuit *Relations*, the annual reports sent back to the Provincial leadership of the Society of Jesus and usually published for the edification of Christians in Europe. She also wrote numerous letters to wealthy patrons and supporters of the mission who had influence with the French government, with bishops, and even with the Pope. Marie’s mystical faith continued to thrive, and her letters and spiritual journals sent to her son, who became a Benedictine Monk, have provided both the early history of the colony and insightful theological wisdom into the spiritual life.

[39] In addition to her extensive correspondence (thought to be about 13,000 letters of which about 300 are extant) and two large spiritual autobiographical texts (called *Relations*), having learned to speak at least four of the languages of the Indian Nations of Canada, Maria wrote dictionaries for the Algonquin and Iroquois languages, catechisms, a story of sacred events, and books of prayers in Algonquin, as well as a catechism of instruction for novices and other young women interested in prayer. She also wrote several short commentaries on biblical passages and a book of instructional methods for young girls, all in French (for a list of extant titles, see Chabot).

[40] Heidi Kellar-Lapp, in her work on the Ursuline missions in the New World, has asserted that Marie’s writings, especially her letters, were greatly influential in France in preventing the government from a too excessive control of the Catholic Church: “. . . images of the Ursulines as *femmes fortes*, Amazons, and Jesuitesses were then used by French elites and Ursulines to shape a rhetoric of resistance against the Crown’s attempts to control the French Church, not to mention the Ursuline order.”

[41] In her last years, many of Marie’s hopes about unity in the Ursuline rule were not well understood even by her own sisters; thus it was not until many years after her death that her dream came to fruition in Canada (1953). The Canadian Catholic Church began the process

of requesting Marie's canonization in the mid-nineteenth century. She was named Venerable by Pope Pius IX in 1870, and her cause toward canonization remains open. She is referred to in Canadian historical literature as one of the founders of Quebec.

Conclusion

[42] Like their sisters in every era and culture, many of the women of the Early Modern Period were women of strength, courage, devotion, determination, and intelligence. Three significant contributions of women of that period to the Church and western culture are: 1) their recognition of the call to personal holiness for every person, of whatever gender, race, or culture; 2) the importance of competent use of political acumen to advance the mission of the Church; and 3) their recognition of the importance of a broad education in humane letters, coupled with a determination to open the doors of formal education to other women, both those of their social standing, and also to the men and women of the poorer social strata.

[43] Early modern women experienced the power of God's Spirit directing them personally within their own gendered experience, and they found ways to share their experience with others. In diverse cultural contexts, we have discovered women who learned to wield real political power – in both ecclesial and civil structures – to affect changes for the benefit of the voiceless, the poor, and those marginalized by economy, religion, or politics. These women and many of their sisters were willing to use their knowledge, experience, or position to collaborate with others in enhancing the human condition and bringing about essential moral reform. These women not only fought for education; they also struggled against the limitations of mind and spirit imposed on whole groups by social convention or ignorance. In doing so, they made remarkable contributions to culture, to the Christian faith, and to societal development for many generations. As the historical search for women's participation in and contributions to the human story continues, we will likely discover, as is evident in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, that behind, in the midst of, and in front of every meaningful project of human flourishing may be found the voices and talents of strong women shaping, guiding, instructing, leading, and encouraging the flourishing of their fellow men and women.

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