

***La vie voyageère* for Women: Moving beyond Cloister in Seventeenth-Century New France**

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Between 1659 and 1698 over fifty women came together under the leadership of Marguerite Bourgeoys to form what became the *Congrégation de Notre-Dame* of Montréal. In doing so, they were following the pattern of numerous similar congregations of women founded in France during the seventeenth century. Like those other groups, the secular sisters of Ville-Marie pursued the ideal of personal holiness while engaging in the work of education. And also like their counterparts in France, the sisters of New France insisted on remaining free of cloister in order to continue this work, and this insistence brought them into conflict with church leaders and existing church legislation.¹ The source of that conflict was two-fold: not only were they seeking to expand the sphere in which women acted, but they did so on the basis of a new understanding of holiness.

While the issues to be negotiated were the same as those in France, the Ville-Marie Congregation was geographically isolated from its French counterparts and moreover lacked wealthy and influential founders to guarantee its survival. This paper will consider two of the reasons why it did survive, maintaining to a large extent its uncloistered apostolic character. The first is its setting in the New World, and particularly the sisters' participation in the project of Ville-Marie. A major source for exploring the significance of this setting is the charter issued by the founders of Ville-Marie, *Les Véritables Motifs de Messieurs et Dames de la Société de N. Dame de Montréal*. However, as shall be seen, the missionary ideal of the Jesuits in New France, exemplified by *the Jesuit Relations*, also influenced the sisters' lifestyle and helped form their self-understanding as missionaries. It shall be argued that an even more significant factor in the Congregation's development was the theological justification for their way of life provided in the *Writings* of Marguerite Bourgeoys. At the center of that justification is her description of the *vie voyageère* of Mary, i.e., her life as uncloistered missionary and educator.

¹ In *The Dévotes: Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France* (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), Elizabeth Rapley traces the development of the French teaching congregations and places the early history of the *Congrégation de Notre-Dame* in that context.

Marguerite Bourgeoys' decision to go to New France involved the choice to participate in a project initiated by the Society of Notre-Dame of Montréal, a group of devout and wealthy Parisians inspired by the visions of the layman Jérôme le Royer de la Dauversière and of Jean-Jacques Olier, founder of the Sulpicians. In 1643, the year after the settlement was made, the members of the Society in Paris published a detailed description of their hope for Ville-Marie:

to assemble one people, composed of French and native peoples who have been converted, to have them make settlements, ... unite them under the same discipline in the exercises of the Christian life,... and to have the praises of God celebrated in a desert where Jesus Christ has never been named.²

This passage makes it clear that conversion of the indigenous peoples was only a first step, to be followed by the creation of a Christian society in which native and French would be integrated. The model for that society is the first Christian community as described in the Acts of the Apostles: “The associates hope by this means soon to behold, by the grace of God, a new Church imitating the purity and charity of the primitive one.”³

The aim of creating a new society of Christians was mirrored in the very composition of the Society of Notre-Dame; thirty-four of the forty-six known members were lay, and of that number twelve were women.⁴ Indeed, although most members of the Society were wealthy, it is noteworthy that two poor men, Claude Legay, an artisan, and Jean Blondeau, a servant, were invited to become associates simply because of their reputations for holiness.⁵ Thus, given the constraints of French society at that time, the Society was relatively inclusive, crossing divisions of social rank, gender, and ecclesiastical status. Furthermore, the associates' expressed intention was that the community of Ville-Marie be equally inclusive, crossing the barrier of race as well. In effect, *Les Véritables Motifs* presents a utopian vision in which there is a new kind of relationship among the members of the “new Church” in the New World. Their hope was that “there would be in all a very

² *Les Véritables Motifs de Messieurs et Dames de la Société de N. Dame de Monreal, Pour la Conversion des Sauvages de la nouvelle France [VM]*, pp. 25-6, in Marie-Claire Daveluy, *La Société de Notre-Dame de Montréal 1639-1663. Son Histoire. Ses Membres. Son Manifeste* (Montréal & Paris: Fides, 1965).

³ “Le dessein des associés de Montréal...,” (1641), Canada dossier 127, no. 6 Pièces historiques sur M. de Bretonvilliers, Archives of S.-Sulpice, Paris.

⁴ See the lists of members in Daveluy, pp. 25-7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 160, 207.

just equality, a sure foundation of their Christian society, without which there is nothing lasting.”⁶

In order to create such a Christian society, the first step was to convert the native peoples, and this was to be accomplished by education, particularly the education of children. The original plan for Ville-Marie proposed not only a hospital to care for the native people when they were ill, but also two *Seminaires*, one for the instruction of native boys and one, conducted by monastic women, to instruct both native and French girls.⁷ Apparently, the value of this sort of education was not universally recognized, for the author of *Les Véritables Motifs* found it necessary to argue against those who insisted that other works of charity were more important; on the contrary, he insists that “to teach the ignorant about their salvation is a more important work than only to feed them.”⁸ The Associates eventually modified their plan in a number of ways; for one thing, they came to recognize that Ville-Marie was too poor and unsettled to support a monastery of women. Instead, this work of teaching women and children was entrusted to a single lay woman, Marguerite Bourgeoys from Troyes, and to the women from France and New France who later joined her in order to share in that work.

It is interesting to note the way in which the author of *Les Véritables Motifs* sought to justify the participation of women in the Ville-Marie project. It is assumed that the first responsibility for evangelization rests with priests, but also that, as with all Christian missionary activity, the contribution of the laity, and even women, is essential. Once again, the argument is based on the experience of the first Christians:

[T]he Apostles and first disciples did not undertake so many voyages and missions all over the earth, nor [did] their successors up to the present, without having been assisted by the first secular Christians ... to the point that these divine ambassadors sometimes let themselves be followed and served by holy women, as much to yield to their devotion and allow them to participate in the virtue of their merits, as to be relieved of care for temporal necessities in their fatigues, for which this devout sex has a particular grace, skill and affection.⁹

The text makes it clear that in the battle for souls, priests are in the front lines, and the laity “keep themselves humbly in the camp so that they can assist the combatants, if need be.”¹⁰ Their participation was possible only because the priests were “quite certain the laity were not going there in order

⁶ VM, pp. 9-10.

⁷ See “Le dessein des associés de Montréal.”

⁸ VM, p. 46.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

to preach and were not meddling in the exercise of this divine faculty reserved to priests, for whom the seculars provided the necessities of life.”¹¹ The real difficulty in lay involvement was thus that it threatened the role of priests, particularly their preaching role. Even such an advocate of women’s ministry as Vincent de Paul felt it necessary to guard against the suggestion that his Ladies of Charity were usurping the priest’s role when instructing the poor. To avoid giving the impression that they were going to preach, he suggested that they carry with them a printed book written by him.¹²

There is considerable evidence that, not surprisingly, what came to pass in Ville-Marie fell far short of the utopian aims of the founders, particularly with regard to the inclusion of native peoples. The experiment of French and native people living and worshipping together was soon discontinued, in part because the new native converts were demoralized by their contact with the settlers and their alcohol. Even on their own mission, the native people were expected to abandon hunting and adopt farming as an occupation along with Christian practices, but in the end they were not even permitted to own the land on which they had been urged to settle and work.¹³ It would thus seem that the ideal which the Associates of Notre-Dame had proposed for Ville-Marie had failed.

However, one of those who adopted that ideal showed herself unwilling to relinquish it so easily. Marguerite Bourgeoys first became associated with the Ville-Marie project when Paul Chomedey de Maisonneuve invited her to join the 1653 expedition as a lay teacher. Her continued close association with him and with Jeanne Mance, both members of the Society of Notre Dame of Montréal, guaranteed that she would have been familiar with their hope for the creation of a new Church. And one element of the original plan, which could not be realized in the larger settlement, did come to pass in her Congregation: two native women, Marie-Barbe Attontion d’Onotais, of the Iroquois nation, and Marie-Thérèse Gannensagouas, a Huron, became members of the Congregation. It is significant that at the end of her life, Marguerite Bourgeoys urged her sisters to maintain the spirit which the founders of Ville-Marie had hoped would infuse the whole city: “Let us revive *at least among us* the true spirit of cordiality and love which formed the glory and the beatitude of the first Christians.”¹⁴

¹¹ Ibid., p. 8.

¹² Pierre Coste, *Saint Vincent de Paul et les Dames de la Charité* (Paris: Blond & Gay, n.d.), pp. 9-10.

¹³ Louise Dechêne, *Habitants et Marchands de Montréal au XVIIe siècle*, Collections Civilisations et mentalités (Pion: Montréal, 1974), pp. 34-5.

¹⁴ *The Writings of Marguerite Bourgeoys* [WMB], trans. Mary Virginia Cotter, C.N.D. (Montréal: Congregation de Notre-Dame, 1976), p. 187, emphasis added. Evidence for Attontion d’Onotais’ membership in the Congregation is found in WMB, 27. A contract for the admission of Gannensagouas can be found in S. St.

The fact that the Congregation was founded in the New World meant that Marguerite Bourgeoys was removed from regular contact with women in France who were seeking to form similar communities, and with such theologians as Vincent de Paul, who strove to justify the women's activity. She was therefore forced to improvise, both theologically and practically. At the same time, because they were in a settlement on the frontiers of what they considered to be civilization, she and her companions found room to explore an expression of consecrated life that differed from traditional monastic forms. The Congregation's form of consecrated life was profoundly affected by the Ville-Marie project's emphasis on education, and specifically education of and by women. Living in a city whose founders proposed that all live "for Jesus Christ with one heart and one spirit,"¹⁵ the Congregation sisters were able to imagine achieving holiness, not by withdrawing into a cloister, but by participating in the building of a new Church.

Clearly it was the task of building up the Christian community of Ville-Marie which focused the energies of the women from France and New France who joined Marguerite Bourgeoys during the Congregation's first forty years. But very early in the life of the group some of the women began to move out of that settlement, first to a mission among the native peoples outside the walls, and later to various missions along the St. Lawrence river as far as Château-Richer, beyond the city of Quebec. When she sent the sisters forth from their central house in Ville-Marie to missions throughout New France, Marguerite Bourgeoys exhorted them to

Consider ... that when you go on mission you go to gather up the drops of the blood of Jesus Christ, which are being lost. How happy a sister who is sent on mission will be if she thinks that she goes there at God's command and in His company. ... O, she will find nothing difficult nor burdensome. She will, on the contrary, wish to be in want for everything, to be despised by everyone, to endure all sorts of suffering, and even to die in disgrace.¹⁶

When Marguerite Bourgeoys described the Congregation's aim as "gather[ing] up the drops of the blood of Jesus Christ, which are being lost," she was making use of a phrase employed earlier by Paul Le Jeune, S.J., superior of the Jesuit mission in Canada. In his *Relation* of 1633, he attempted to persuade wealthy women in France to support the creation of a school for native women in New France, suggesting,

Henriette, C.N.D., *Histoire de la Congregation Notre-Dame de Montréal*, vol. 2 (Montréal: Congregation de Notre-Dame, 1913), p. 139.

¹⁵ VM, p. 36.

¹⁶ WMB, p. 78.

If they applied one part [of their income] to gather the drops of blood of the Son of God shed for so many souls which are lost every day for lack of help, they would not blush with shame on the day they appear before God to render an account of the goods for which he has made them responsible.¹⁷

Two years later, he renewed the request, exclaiming, “What glory in the sight of the Angels, to have gathered the blood of the Son of God, to apply it to these poor infidels!”¹⁸ In response to his call for a school for native women, Mme. de la Peltrie from Alençon came forward to provide the funds for an Ursuline monastery in Quebec, and she accompanied the founding sisters, including Marie de l’Incarnation, to New France.¹⁹ But given their wide dissemination throughout France, the influence of the *Relations* was hardly limited to this single project. It is most likely that Marguerite Bourgeoys read them while she was living in Troyes, and Paul Le Jeune’s image of gathering Christ’s blood probably influenced her directly. Moreover, she may also have been influenced indirectly by the Jesuits’ approach to missionary activity through her continued contact with them in Quebec city, even though there were no Jesuit institutions in Ville-Marie from the arrival of the Sulpicians in 1657 until the end of the century.

Although she very likely borrowed the phrase in question from Paul Le Jeune, there is an interesting difference between his phraseology and that used by Marguerite Bourgeoys. According to the passage in the *Relations*, the souls of the “poor infidels” for whom Christ’s blood has been shed are being lost. However, the Congregation sisters’ call to mission makes it clear that it is the drops of Christ’s blood themselves which are being lost. Nor should this be seen as mere metaphor. Since the writing of the first letter to the Corinthians, Christian theologians have often spoken of the baptized as constituting the body of Christ in a real, though mystical sense. For Marguerite Bourgeoys, those who needed to learn of Christ’s teachings are His blood in that same mystical sense. Thus, the sisters are to treat those who are

¹⁷ *Relation de 1633*, in *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791*, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites, trans. from French by John Cutler Covert and Mary Sifton Pepper, vol. 5: Quebec: 1632-1633, (New York: Pageant Book Company, 1959), p. 144, translation mine. The other citations from the *Relations* are from the translation by Covert & Pepper.

¹⁸ *Relation de 1635*, in *The Jesuit Relations*, vol. 7: *Quebec, Cape Breton: 1634-1635*, p. 261.

¹⁹ Marie de l’Incarnation asserts the direct influence of the 1635 *Relation* in the plans for the foundation. See Marie de l’Incarnation to Rev. F. Poncet, 25 Oct. 1670, cited in *Word from New France. Selected Letters of Marie de l’incarnation*, trans. and ed. Joyce Marshall (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 56, and 378, n. 2.

taught as sacred objects, and teaching as a holy activity, since it brings them into close contact with that which is sacred.

The sacred character of teaching is confirmed by Marguerite Bourgeoys' insistence that the sisters went on mission "at God's command and in His company." To go on mission was thus a way of being present to God, of participating in God's activity, and hence of becoming holy. Any deprivation suffered in and for a sister's mission could become a way to enter into Christ's mission, which was characterized by the shedding of his blood. That is why she would "desire to lack all things, to be despised by everyone, to endure all sorts of suffering, and even to die in disgrace." This description of the Congregation sister's attitude appears to echo a key passage in the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola, where those who seek "the most perfect kind of humility" are invited to pray to "desire and choose poverty with Christ poor, rather than riches; insults with Christ loaded with them, rather than honors; ... to be accounted as worthless and a fool for Christ."²⁰ Similarly, Marguerite Bourgeoys was convinced that because she was acting in imitation of Christ, the Congregation sister would travel anywhere she was sent and endure whatever was necessary for the mission rather than allow even one drop of Christ's blood to be wasted.

Such a theology of missionary activity is hardly remarkable, even if its expression is somewhat unusual. What is significant for the seventeenth century is its application to women. By suggesting that the sisters in some way handle the sacred blood, Marguerite Bourgeoys implied that they were entering the symbolic territory reserved to priests, a particularly troublesome notion for that time. Among lay persons, and especially women, a mystical devotion to the saving blood of Christ continued from the late medieval period into the seventeenth century and beyond.²¹ But the period after the Council of Trent was also marked by a new focus and emphasis on the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and that council confirmed that only priests had received the power to consecrate, and only they were permitted

²⁰ *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, trans. Louis J. Puhl, S.J. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1951), no. 167, p. 69.

²¹ Caroline Walker Bynum considers numerous examples of that devotion in *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). For a seventeenth-century example, see the Quebec Ursuline Marie de l'Incarnation's description of her initiation into the mystical way, during which she felt herself being washed in the Lord's blood. *Marie de l'Incarnation, Ursuline de Tours, fondatrice des Ursulines de la Nouvelle-France. Ecrits spirituels et historique*, ed. Albert Jamet (Paris: Desclée-De Brouwer, 1930), vol. 2. *Relation autobiographique de 1654*, p. 185.

to receive the sacred blood or even to handle the sacred vessels.²² Any suggestion that women could share in these or other priestly functions was viewed as dangerous.

Thus the founding vision of Ville-Marie and the Jesuit missionary ideal called forth and supported the Congregation sisters' educative work and their missionary lifestyle, in spite of the danger their way of acting posed to traditional understandings of ministry and holiness. But it can be questioned whether those approaches alone would have permitted them to sustain their unconventional lives, had they not seen what they were attempting to live imaged in the life of the holiest of women. Among the objections which those around them made to the Congregation's way of life were such questions as the following: "why [do] we prefer to be 'wanderers' rather than cloistered, the cloister being a protection for persons of our sex. ... Why do we go on missions which put us in danger of suffering greatly and even of being captured, killed or burned by the Indians?" Marguerite Bourgeoys' response is simply: "There are signs that the Blessed Virgin has been pleased that there be a company of women to honor the life she led in the world and that this company be formed in Montréal."²³

Her description of "the life [Mary] led in the world" reveals the influence of the theology of her day, notably that of the French school.²⁴ But its distinctive element is her presentation of Mary's *vie voyageuse*. Drawing on an approach which had first been presented to her many years before by Antoine Jendret, a parish priest in Troyes, Marguerite Bourgeoys suggested that women who wish to live a consecrated life can do so in one of three ways, which are epitomized by the lives of Mary Magdalen, Martha, and Mary, the mother of Jesus.

M. Jendret ... told me one day that Our Lord had left three states of women to follow Him and to serve the Church: the role of Magdalen was filled by the Carmelites and other recluses; that of Martha, by cloistered religious who serve their neighbor; but the state of life of the journeying Virgin Mary, which must also be honored, was not yet filled. Even without veil or wimple, one could be a true religious.²⁵

²² The increasing clericalization of the Eucharist, especially the sacramental wine, in the late Middle Ages is documented in Bynum, pp. 55-6, 64-5. For a description of Trent's limitation of all contact with the sacred blood to priests, see *Catechism of the Council of Trent for Parish Priests*, trans. and ann. John A. McHugh, O.P. and Charles J. Callan, O.P. (Rockford, Illinois: Tan Books and Publishers, 1982), pp. 252-4.

²³ WMB, pp. 49-50.

²⁴ See Lorraine Caza's discussion of the influence on Marguerite Bourgeoys of Olier and Bérulle in *La vie voyageuse, conversante avec le prochain* (Montréal: Bellarmin & Paris: Cerf, 1982), pp. 81-119.

²⁵ WMB, p. 142.

The key element of this presentation is the phrase rendered here as “the state of life of the journeying Virgin Mary.” The original phrase is “*la vie voyageuse de la Sainte Vierge*,” a phrase which is virtually impossible to translate accurately. The translation just offered does not make it clear that Mary’s state of life was itself *voyageuse*. Another suggestion has been “the outgoing life of the Virgin Mary,”²⁶ but this seems to describe a personality type more than a state of life, and furthermore, it fails to take into consideration that for Marguerite Bourgeoys, Mary always “preserved an interior solitude”²⁷ even and especially when engaging in missionary activity. Perhaps “pilgrim life” comes closest to the sense of the phrase “*vie voyageuse*,” which traditionally was used to denote the state of Christians who are still living on earth, as opposed to those who have passed on to glory or purification.²⁸ It was also used to refer to the earthly life of Jesus, but for many seventeenth-century spiritual writers, this earthly, transitory, active aspect of Christ’s or Mary’s life was less inspiring and worthy of attention than their enduring heavenly states.

By their attention to Mary’s *vie voyageuse*, then, Antoine Jendret and Marguerite Bourgeoys presented an alternative approach to one of the central symbols of holiness in the Christian tradition. Throughout Christian history, holiness has often been identified with separation from “the world.” In response to the threat of contamination by “the world,” ecclesiastical legislation over the centuries increasingly sought to protect consecrated women by insisting that they be cloistered. However, as Marguerite Bourgeoys pointed out, Mary “was never cloistered. She did indeed withdraw into an interior solitude, but she never excused herself from any journey on which there was good to be done or some work of charity to be performed. We wish to follow her in some way.”²⁹ The validity or value of life within a cloister is not being questioned here. Rather, it is suggested that for Mary and for those who “wish to follow her in some way,” love of neighbor can constitute a higher value, and that the absence of cloister can be compensated for by an “interior solitude.” The latter suggestion is reminiscent of Vincent de Paul’s instruction to his *Filles de Charité*, for whom “the streets of the city” had become their “cloister”: “your enclosure [is to be] obedience; your grille, the

²⁶ Rapley, p. 101.

²⁷ WMB, p. 47.

²⁸ See “voagier, -ager, veagier, voyagier, -ager” in Frédéric Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l’ancienne langue française et de tous ses dialectes du IXe au XVe siècle*, vol. 8 (Paris: Librairie des Sciences et des Arts, 1938), p. 279.

²⁹ WMB, p. 50.

fear of God; your veil, holy modesty.”³⁰ For the women who joined the French *Filles de Charité* or the Congregation in Ville-Marie, the external constraints of cloister walls were to be replaced by an internal dedication and submission to God.

For Marguerite Bourgeoys, the moment in Mary’s life which best illustrates her *vie voyageuse* is her Visitation to Elizabeth, as described in Luke 1. Its importance is apparent not from the amount of attention it receives in the *Writings*, but in the fact that it became the Congregation’s patronal feast, and the day when the sisters annually renewed their consecration to God and their commitment within the Congregation. The Visitation had only recently been established as a universal feast, and it was still considered relatively minor: even those in the newly founded Visitation Order renewed their vows on the more popular feast of the Immaculate Conception. Moreover, during the seventeenth century, this event in Mary’s life was not necessarily associated with women who remained free to move out in order to serve their neighbor. Thus, in a meditation first published in 1679, the Capuchin Louis-François d’Argentan interprets Mary’s journey into the mountains as referring to her ascent to God through contemplation and her willingness to share in God’s redemptive plan. For him, the ultimate fruit of reflection on the Visitation is making “powerful resolutions to love seclusion, silence and solitude, scorning all the rest so as to be attentive only to what is necessary, that is to say to God alone, and to the great affair of our eternity.”³¹ Such an interpretation of the Visitation was not foreign to Marguerite Bourgeoys’ thought. She too was convinced that Mary loved and was a model of solitude, attentive to the presence and action of God. But when she reflects on what Mary did during the Visitation, she concludes that her primary activity was not helping Elizabeth with household tasks, as d’Argentan suggests, but evangelizing Elizabeth and helping to sanctify John. She draws a direct parallel to the life of the sisters: “We go on mission to contribute to the education of children because the Blessed Virgin, when she visited Elizabeth, contributed to the sanctification of St. John the Baptist.”³²

This reflection on Mary’s *vie voyageuse* served to justify not only the Congregation sisters’ mobility for mission, but also the innovation that their form of community represented in the history of religious life. As has already been seen, Mary’s *vie voyageuse* constituted a third mode of life for

³⁰ Saint Vincent de Paul: *Correspondance, Entretiens, Documents* (Paris, 1920-25), 10: 661, cited in Pierre Coste, *The Life and Works of Saint Vincent de Paul*, trans. Joseph Leonard, C.M., vol. 1 (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1934), p. 345.

³¹ Louis-François d’Argentan, *Conferences theologiques et spirituelles sur les Grandeurs de la tres-Sainte Vierge Marie, Mere de Dieu* (Rouen: Vaultier, 1680), t. 2, conference 16, “Le voyage heureux,” p. 81.

³² WMB, p. 47.

consecrated women, in addition to the contemplative way modeled by Mary Magdalen and the active cloistered way typified by Martha. After acknowledging that, Marguerite Bourgeoys comments, “the Blessed Virgin, who was a teacher, included all the other things in her own person in an eminent degree.”³³ Noteworthy here is the suggestion that it was in her work as an educator that the contemplative and active dimensions of Mary’s life came together most clearly. To assert that this third way of life in some way included the other two appears to be a development of Thomas Aquinas’s description of the three types of religious life, the contemplative, active and mixed (*compositum*).³⁴ Aquinas presents the last type as a version of the active life which “proceeds from the fullness of contemplation” and involves preaching and teaching. This is the “highest” form of religious life; it “is preferred to simple contemplation, for just as it is better to illumine than merely to shine, so it is better to give to others the things contemplated than simply to contemplate.”³⁵ Because it included the function of preaching, the “mixed” life was reserved to men like the Dominicans, of whom Aquinas himself was a member. In the *Writings*, where the over-all schema has been adapted to women and where it is illustrated by the life of a woman, the preaching function is eliminated, and the text notes simply that Mary was a teacher.

However, in the continuation of the passage cited above, it becomes clear that Mary’s teaching role is not to be seen as inferior to that of the apostles:

[T]he Blessed Virgin ... was the mother and teacher to the new-born Church, which she formed and instructed in all kinds of good by her words and by her example. Instruction and edification were her principal characteristics. It was not her role to teach with brilliance – that was the function of the apostles – but to instruct little ones and particularly, [to teach] in a way that was all the more accessible to everyone, that the poverty and humility she professed were within everyone’s reach.³⁶

At first glance, this passage appears to distinguish Mary’s role from that of the apostles, but a closer reading reveals that the difference is primarily one of style, rather than content: Mary taught without “brilliance.” The original word is *éclat*, a word suggesting the great noise and brilliant light characteristic of the court of Louis XIV and reflected in the flamboyant oratory of preachers like Bossuet. In contrast, Mary’s style of teaching is “more accessible to everyone,” but it is none the less “apostolic,” for she, like the apos-

³³ Ibid, p. 77.

³⁴ *Summa Theologiae* (London: Blackfriars; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964) 2a, 2ae, vol. 46, q. 179, 2, pp. 6-11.

³⁵ Ibid., vol. 47, q. 188, 6, Responsio, p. 205.

³⁶ WMB, p. 77.

bles, was “teacher to the new-born Church.” And she fulfilled an additional role, in that she was its mother as well, among other things by advising the apostles and supplying them with what they needed for their journeys.³⁷ In fact, in describing her role in the first Christian community awaiting Pentecost, Marguerite Bourgeoys suggests that Mary exercised leadership even over the apostles:

The parish church represents for us the Cenacle where the Blessed Virgin presiding as a queen governs the state during the minority of her little prince, for her apostles were not yet capable of leading the Church. The Blessed Virgin sustained it from the death of her Son until the descent of the Holy Spirit.³⁸

It is significant that the parish church is presented as the contemporary expression of the Pentecost community. This idea echoes the founding vision of Ville-Marie, thus reinforcing the sisters’ opposition to a monastic life which tended to be parallel to, rather than integrated into the life and worship of the rest of the Christian community.

The image of Mary that emerges in the *Writings* is that of a woman whose holiness could be maintained without the protection of cloister because of her “interior solitude.” She was, in the words of the French Augustinian canon Pierre Oudin, “an accomplished model of the strong woman” whose example was enough to convince such women as the Ladies of Charity to “leave at times the sweetness of their house and the tranquility of seclusion in order to exercise their charity in the countryside, and in particular to give women and girls who are in ignorance, knowledge of the truths they are obliged to know.”³⁹ Marguerite Bourgeoys went even further than this in noting the parallels of this Marian activity to that of the apostles, and by implication, to priestly work. In the process, she offered justification for a new form of religious consecration for women, an uncloistered apostolic life modeled on Mary’s *vie voyageuse*. She remained convinced that if Mary’s work of building up the Church by educating its women was to continue, then it was not only possible but necessary for some women to follow her way of life.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 51.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 50-1.

³⁹ *Le zèle du salut des âmes, et la manière de s’y employer avec fruit. Ouvrage utile aux pasteurs, aux Prêtres Missionnaires, & à toutes les personnes qui travaillent par l’ordre des Supérieurs à l’instruction Chrétienne* (Paris: Jean Baptiste Coignard, 1669), Epistre. Marguerite Bourgeoys must have been familiar with the work since the copy in the Centre Marguerite-Bourgeoys in Montréal bears the inscription “Congrégation de Notre-Dame” in her handwriting.

The early modern period has been described as a time when “Church and world were ‘irreconcilable enemies.’ ... The two Reformations ... forced people who lived ‘in the world’ to choose between God and the world.”⁴⁰ And yet it was also a time when new forms of religious expression were burgeoning, notably among women who refused to make that choice but rather insisted on living lives of service outside cloister walls. To do so was often perceived as dangerous, both for the women whose religious consecration would no longer be protected, and for the church whose notions of ministry and holiness were being challenged. Conflict with ecclesiastical authorities was inevitable. Thus, although the Sulpicians of Ville-Marie accepted the sisters as co-workers and supported their experiment in uncloistered living in many ways, neither François de Laval, first bishop of New France, nor his successor Jean de S.-Vallier fully recognized the Congregation’s unique character. As a result, both bishops sought to incorporate the sisters into the monastic Ursuline community of Quebec, and when that effort failed, in 1694 Bishop de S.-Vallier presented them with Constitutions which they found unacceptable. The sisters appealed to Louis Tronson, superior of the Sulpicians in Paris, asking that he intervene with the bishop to obtain rules “more appropriate or necessary for the good order, preservation and advancement of our little congregation.” They justified the need for different rules by referring to “the nature of our establishment, our manner of living and the functions of our institute, and ... [our] long experience.”⁴¹ Eventually the bishop proposed modified rules which affirmed the uncloistered character of the Congregation and which responded in some measure to what the sisters had requested. When they accepted these rules in 1698, they became recognized as the first uncloistered congregation of women in North America.

For the Congregation sisters, “the nature of our establishment” was rooted in the founding vision of Ville-Marie and the missionary ideal of gathering the drops of Christ’s blood. However, by the end of the century, the city of Montréal bore little resemblance to the utopian Christian community envisioned in *Les Véritables Motifs*, and the sisters had come to identify gathering the blood of Christ more with teaching school than with evangelizing the native peoples. And yet, at a sermon preached at the time of Marguerite Bourgeoys’ death in 1700, the Sulpician François de Belmont,

⁴⁰ Jean Delumeau, *Catholicism between Luther and Voltaire: A New View of the Counter-Reformation*, trans. Jeremy Moiser (London: Bums & Oates; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), pp. 227-8.

⁴¹ *Remontrance qui est entre les mains de M. Belmont*, Archives of S.-Sulpice, Paris. The controversy over the rules is discussed in Mary Anne Foley, “‘We Want No Prison among Us’: The Struggle for Ecclesiastical Recognition in Seventeenth-Century New France,” *U. S. Catholic Historian* 14, 1 (Winter 1996): pp. 1-18.

echoing yet another of Paul Le Jeune's phrases, praised the Congregation sisters' zeal by referring to them as "a company of Christian Amazons."⁴² They hardly saw themselves in such a light, preferring rather to think of themselves as a company of ordinary women doing simply what needed in charity to be done. But their model for so doing was Mary's *vie voyageuse*, an image with the power to transform the way in which ministry and holiness were understood and lived by the church as a whole, and especially by women.

⁴² *Discours prononcé aux funérailles du Coeur de la vénérable Soeur Marguerite Bourgeois fondatrice de la congrégation Notre Dame*, xiv. Ms. 1234, Archives of SaintSulpice, Paris. Paul Le Jeune had written with respect to the monastic women who were to create his school for native girls: "Will not some brave Lady be found who will give a Passport to these Amazons of the great God, endowing them with a House in which to praise and serve his divine Majesty in this other world?" *Relation de 1635*, p. 261.