The Hearth, the Cloister, and Beyond: Religion and the Nineteenth-Century Woman

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In the nineteenth century, domesticity and maternity became the primary cultural expectation for French women. The new ideals, most of which could trace their roots back to Rousseauian rhetoric, supported the gendering of education and family life and consigned women to a "private sphere." But they also had broad public implications. Even as early as 1800, the idiom of domesticity was employed in France to demand better education for women and to justify the social relevance and even the radical nature of maternity. Women's private influence, through child-rearing, could have a dramatic impact on the world, whether for good or for ill. For this reason, political and social progressives demanded more egalitarian forms of girls' education and better ways to integrate women into civilized society. They argued, for example, that society would only improve when mothers were full participants in the creation of cultural ideals and values and not slaves to men's whims. Yet even as women saw their public presence as mothers increase, albeit indirectly, the ideological change eclipsed possibilities that had been open to women in previous eras. For, as the nineteenth century increasingly defined women by their private maternal roles, the public activity of celibate women in religious congregations

became increasingly problematic, especially when their activity was independent and not linked to child-rearing. A closer look at the philosophy underpinning domestic maternity and its conflicts with feminine roles that were not explicitly procreative will demonstrate the ways in which these two gendered trajectories were on a collision course.

In 1834, Louis-Aimé Martin, the author of the immensely popular treatise *Education of Mothers: or, the Civilization of Mankind by Women*, argued that domestic education was the key to changing the world. The book enjoyed multiple French editions, both expensive and cheap, between 1834 and 1883. It was also translated into English and again went through many editions (more than twenty in the United States alone), though its popularity in the Anglophone world appears to have peaked before 1870. The publication numbers and the longevity of the work indicate that Martin was speaking to an already-receptive audience and had a wide popular appeal.

Like Rousseau and many intellectuals of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Martin believed that true social change relied on women's power to inculcate virtue. While Martin, like other Catholic reformers in France such as Bishop Dupanloup or the Abbé Lamennais, had at one point harbored great hope for the possibility of reform driven by changing instructional practices, he soon became disillusioned with their goals and took his work in a different direction. Martin instead argued that "it is not from a law upon public instruction, even

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were it a good law, that we must seek the remedy for the evil [of social excesses].³ After all, "it is not the intellect which produces civilization."⁴ Rather, as his English translator put it, Martin's work demonstrated that the "maintenance of our liberties" relied on the existence of "mothers of our country" who would "train up good and faithful citizens."⁵ In this way, The Education of Mothers set political debates aside even as it argued for a wide scope of cultural and intellectual change driven by domestic ideals.

Martin's similarities with leftist thinkers attest that he was not a conservative or reactionary. The Romantic poet and political activist Lamartine was a close friend, and Martin considered himself a disciple of the pre-Romantic Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. Martin promoted strict gender divisions, but his work also argued for advancement in the treatment of all women. According to Martin, humanity would be happy, self-reliant, and politically independent only when, guided by mothers, it came to exhibit self-control. The legislator, who focused his efforts on instruction and industry, would not have a lasting impact, for he "neglects to develop the heart, this divine essence of humanity. Instead of a happy people, he will see around him only one anxious multitude, driven by passions, without a brake."⁶ This agenda sidestepped the usual divide of secular Republicanism versus Catholic monarchism and argued that only when the regeneration of the family had taught self-control to individuals could any development of the nation begin.

⁴ Martin, Mothers, 117. Please note: I have generally used the English translation from 1843, though I refer to the 1838 French edition for material that is unique in content or tone. In that case, the translations are my own. To reduce confusion, the short titles are always used in subsequent citations and abbreviated as "Mothers" or "Mères" for the English and French versions respectively.
⁵ Edwin Lee, translator's preface, Martin, Mothers, xxxii.
The demand for a changing family dynamic that existed outside of politics had practical applications for the treatment of women. If only mothers could teach virtue through their unique attachment to children, then all women needed to be prepared to become nurturing mothers who could foster freedom and self-control. Since the exercise of virtue was a direct result of the mother's influence, as contemporary ideology held, "[w]hatever be the customs or the laws of a country, it is the women who give the direction to its manners . . . Here then is a law of eternal justice; man cannot debase women without becoming himself degraded; he cannot elevate them without becoming better." Martin explained that, historically, European women had not been treated as equals, with disastrous results.

Our political and moral indifference, the ignorance of our interests and of our duties, the forgetfulness of our country, our petty vanities, our faults, our evils, all this is the work of women. Their character is become the national character. We have been obliged to receive from them what they had obtained from us. But let our mothers become citizens and all will be changed; instead of disputing, like nurses as to which has the prettiest and best dressed children, they would emulate each other as to which should best sow . . . the seeds of virtue in the soul, and of vigour in the mind.

Yet Martin believed that indifference and neglect was already happily giving way to an emphasis on the development of women's minds. "Since the period of Fénelon and Rousseau there has been progress among men . . . We now no longer discuss the question, whether they should be instructed, or the amount of the instruction which should be allowed them. We agree to develop their intelligence." Now rather than merely discussing whether or not women had intellectual needs, one might even emphasize their liberation from men's tyranny and oppression in order to improve all of society. Martin wished for a

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7 Martin, Mothers, 42.
8 Martin, Mothers, 50.
9 Martin, Mothers, 55.
10 Martin, Mothers, 56-57.
training that would "lead [women] to think with their own thoughts." In "barbarous times women were slaves or servants"; at "the first glimmerings of civilization they became our housekeepers, then our companions"; still later, "they were less restricted to their houses, and were more closely united to the world by their agreeable talents, and to their husbands by the development of their intellect." Martin wished to see women take a leading role in the creation of a profoundly idealistic new society. In a better world, society, "having arrived at a more perfect state of civilization, without losing its courteous forms, recognized the rights of men, and woman assumed her position in the state; she was at once a housekeeper, a companion, and a citizen." Education would allow women to be fully free so that they would be part of a society that was also fully free.

Despite this rhetoric, Martin's ideal society, existing outside of politics, meant neither a move away from gender differentiation nor the possibility of a public role for women. Women's roles were circumscribed within a domestic sphere precisely because of the importance of marriage and domestic life. In fact, as Martin himself emphasized, "Returning, then, to the principal points dealt with in this chapter, we say that . . . the usual work of the woman should be to focus on the care of the house and the education of children." Women's education might be broader than home economics, but their actual sphere of action would not be. When making corrections to his second French edition, Martin also noted that "the most useful notations can be found in Book Three [which deals with the education of the soul and the search for truth]; in effect, this is the central book of this work. It imposes upon mothers the obligation of training their children's souls, and guides them in the search for the truth that underlies morality and religion." Women's central

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11 Martin, Mothers, 56-57.
12 Martin, Mothers, 61.
13 Martin, Mothers, 61.
14 Martin, Mères, 310.
15 Martin, Mères, 10-11.
obligation was to develop their own hearts and minds so that they might, as mothers, found the new society, not so that they could help legislate or take another active role outside the home.

Perhaps even more importantly, the religious rhetoric emphasizing women's maternal obligation to "train souls" was not secondary to the new landscape. Other reassessments of modern Christianity, like that of Abbé Lamennais, often included a stress on an egalitarian order.\textsuperscript{16} Martin instead emphasized that free societies, whether monarchical or republican, demanded a marriage of spiritual ideals with political ones, all developed by a nurturing mother. "You want happiness, you want power, it is there [in the heart] that God has placed it. The most educated people, if they are not also the most religious, will never be kings of themselves."\textsuperscript{17} Only a mother could create the peuple-roi. Martin averred that only she, through her domestic example, could teach her children how to properly value the things of this world. If, in the end, young men failed to take command of themselves, to exhibit the self-sacrifice that was the foundation of the new society, it would not only be a political or social failure, but also a spiritual one and, fundamentally, a failure of women. He sounded a rousing call to arms:

> What more alarming vision is there than that of an active and vigorous people, struggling without hope, behind the bronze walls of false glory, of personality and selfishness! We give this spectacle to the world because we are lacking in religious thought, because mothers neglected to place it in the cradles of their children [emphasis added].\textsuperscript{18}

The mother might be the hope of the future, but that also meant that she could be its downfall. When she failed to inculcate the


\textsuperscript{17} Martin, Mères, xviii.

\textsuperscript{18} Martin, Mères, xix.
proper ideals, she did not just fail her fellow-citizen; she also failed God.

Given the fact that this rhetoric limited women to a private role and did so by invoking divine assistance, one might wonder what spiritual plan could be in store for women who did not marry and have children. If women's maternal roles allowed them to change the world for the better, how was one to understand women who refused to enter into maternity? Martin had no problems answering that question. He emphasized that the Bible itself demonstrated that man was created for marriage and nothing else. "The principle, the fact: man was created male and female. The precept: this is why he will leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and they will no longer be two, but now one flesh." If one was not persuaded by the message from the Scriptures, Martin added the authority of nature:

God does not cease in publishing, proclaiming, and demonstrating to us this triple law of creation, nature, and morals, so often ignored since the beginning of the things. Each year he gives to the earth as many girls as boys; giving a woman to each man; never leaving an incomplete half, animating all of them with the same desires, covering them all in decency, grace, and beauty, and lavishing on these children from heaven the charms of innocence, illusions of youth and raptures of love.

Men and women were both made for marriage and incomplete without it.

Not surprisingly, a married priesthood was, in Martin's view, a fundamental necessity. But while a married priesthood meant that men could serve God as clerics and have a family, women's religious vocations could be nothing other than maternity. God had called women to fulfill their religious destiny within the home as wives and mothers. If the greatest commandment was to love God above everything and to love your neighbor as yourself, then this mandate could not, Martin believed, be met in a celibate life. "The Gospel and nature have the same language:

they summarize everything in love. . . . [but] a life of penitence condemns the work of God. . . . The god of monks, like the god of the pagans, still wants the sighs of the virgins and the sacrifice of maternal joy. 21 Single womanhood was a natural impossibility; "[v]irginity does not require only the death of the senses, it goes still further and demands the death of the heart! It breaks the work of God twice!"22 For all these reasons, Martin argued that a celibate religious life "murder[ed] in one's breast the generations to come. The living and thinking being will neither communicate nor think of life."23 A true understanding of the Gospels, Martin argued, cast women's celibacy as a suspicious, selfish, and decidedly non-religious vocation. Celibate Catholic women defied both social and religious norms and, as a result, the "renunciation of marriage and motherhood put women religious into an even more suspect category than celibate men."24

Furthermore, as the nineteenth century increasingly defined women by their maternal role and their privacy, the public activity of celibate sisters became increasingly problematic. Not only did they have, it seemed, freedom from domestic responsibilities, but they also led public lives in their roles as administrators of schools, hospitals, and other institutions. Both components of their lives made the female religious suspect by contemporary standards, for the only acceptable way that women could really participate in society was by marrying, giving birth, and nurturing children.25 If Martin was right to argue that mothers improved society, by extension, those who refused to be mothers seemed intent on damaging social relationships. In the end, the picture was clear. Only "marriage establishes the man in

21 Martin, Mères, 429.
22 Martin, Mères, 435.
23 Martin, Mères, 429.
his rights, society in proper order and humanity in virtue." In order to be true Christians and to participate fully in society, women must marry, establishing their husbands' legal positions and their own moral authority.

Officially, the Catholic Church opposed this apotheosis of domesticity and instead presented women's consecrated celibacy as a positive, not a negative, choice. From the point of view of Church documents, many of which derived from the Council of Trent, consecrated celibacy was actually a higher religious calling than marriage was. In the same way that domestic life tended to emphasize the private role of women, understanding the life of a female religious meant, fundamentally, understanding life apart from society, as "Church law sought to preserve the virtue of cloistered nuns devoted to prayer and penance—concerns in opposition to the demands for active ministries." Yet even as the ever-heavier importance placed on domesticity and procreation made the "higher calling" of celibacy suspect in the middle of the nineteenth century, the Church itself offered little in the way of guidance for women's social and moral roles. Almost all official statements on marriage as a vocation were directed at reinforcing church marriages in opposition to secular ones. Other documents defended the practice of priestly celibacy. In addition, the words in the papal bulls and encyclicals emphasized Church law and clerical tradition and were, as a result, almost entirely applicable only to men.

26 Martin, Mères, 136.
27 Catechisms used for preparation for First Communion throughout the nineteenth century frequently indicated that, while marriage was a sacrament, there was a higher calling still, that of celibacy. See Ludwig Mehler, Catéchisme pratique: ou, doctrine chrétienne en exemples, courtes explications, textes, paraboles et comparaisons (Bruxelles, 1861); J. Gaume, Catéchisme de persévérance, ou, exposé historique, dogmatique, moral et liturgique de la religion depuis l'origine du monde jusqu'à nos jours (Paris, 1845); Du Clot, Explication historique, dogmatique et morale de toute la doctrine chrétienne et catholique contenue dans le catéchisme de l'ancien diocèse de Genève (Lyons, 1843).
On the one hand, this is not surprising; the Catholic Church is hierarchically organized, and papal bulls and letters were overwhelmingly directed to clerics. Yet, given the popularity of domestic principles and their clear relationship to social change, one might think that the Catholic Church would increasingly emphasize the importance of maternal education. For example, in the papal encyclical *Diu Satis* (published in 1800), Pope Pius VII, like Locke and Rousseau, noted the importance of training young minds. "The young are like soft wax and can easily be drawn in any direction, bent and molded . . . they firmly retain a form once they have received it and it has been hardened by advancing years."29 However, the pope's solution to the problem of Christian education centered on clerical training. He noted that "Christ has given pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints," and he emphasized that, in order to properly guide the shapers of the future, clerics must "[c]arefully investigate the directors given charge of boys and young men in seminaries and colleges, and the courses they are to follow, the teachers chosen for secondary schools, and the schools which are to be run."30 In 1846, Pius IX repeated this refrain in *Qui Pluribus*, admonishing his readers to "strive to ensure that young clerics are properly molded even from their earliest years."31 To be sure, he also recognized that primary schools would educate "the young, both male and female,"32 but the answer to proper formation was reasserting the authority of the Church and exhorting "the watchfulness of its holy pastors,"33 not the training of women.

Other than invocations of Mary's example, women's presence in these documents was generally limited to discussions of the threat posed by "mixed marriages," that is, marriages between a Catholic and a non-Catholic Christian. In an era where such marriages were increasingly common, the Church

30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Pius IX, *Nostis et Nobiscum*, in ibid., 301.
33 Ibid.
reasserted that mixed marriages were forbidden without advance permission because of the danger for the Catholic party's religious belief and, equally importantly, "because the Catholic education of the children of both sexes has always been proven to be uncertain and doubtful" in such situations. Pius VIII, sounding a bit like Martin, noted that the purpose of marriage was "not so much to generate offspring as to educate children for God and religion," which made mixed marriages especially dangerous. However, unlike Martin, Pius still emphasized the paternal aspect most of all, which made women's entry into mixed marriages particularly problematic, for, when women wished to wed non-Catholic men, "education will depend completely on the will of a non-Catholic father." From the hierarchy's perspective, marriage was indeed for the spiritual formation of children, but education remained paternal and clerical.

As seen through the eyes of the Catholic Church, the official perspective on education and marriage, then, had little to do with women, social engagement, or service to God and society, but primarily concerned itself with clerical responsibilities and the problem of "mixed" marriages. Both of these areas were logical places for the papacy to emphasize, as they involved clerics, but they had little to offer the Catholic woman seeking to find a place in the world, except insofar as they affirmed the importance of marriage for the promulgation of the faith. Following this logic, a Catholic woman of a religious bent could choose domesticity and marriage to a fellow Catholic, which would relegate her to the home, or she could choose celibacy for Christ, which would relegate her to the cloister. Each option had its own persuasive force, but one might reasonably wonder how active women outside of an "obvious" domestic sphere,

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35 Pius VIII, Traditi humiliati, in The Papal Encyclicals, 223.
36 Pius VIII, Litteris altero (1830 letter to the archbishops of Cologne), in Matrimony, 86.
especially those who were unmarried, reconciled these conflicting messages.

A number of Catholic women saw their path to salvation pointing a different way than either domesticity or the cloister. The explosion of new women's orders, the majority of which intended to provide active service in the community, along with the ever-increasing number of nuns in France, demonstrates that the discourse outlined above could not have been as monolithic as it might at first seem. The work of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, which began long before the nineteenth century, offers a tantalizing example. The order, founded by the Jesuit Jean-Pierre Médaille in Le Puy in 1650, was fully an expression of Counter-Reformation Catholicism. The sisters followed Jesuit spirituality and intended "to be a congregation of the great love of God and of service to the neighbor without distinction . . . They were challenged to be alert to the disorders and evils in society and to remedy them, as far as possible, by any work of which woman is capable." The original sisters of Saint Joseph were public, not private, women, ones who "met and prayed together and ministered without the traditional supports of the cloister or even of religious garb. They dressed simply, 'adopting the clothes worn by widows in their locality, which varied from country to country.'" Despite the contemporary emphasis on cloisters and the dangers of sisters out in the community, they received papal approval for their constitution, which institutionalized their


public approach. In other words, they lived unconventional, but orthodox, lives even in the seventeenth century.

While their order was suppressed during the French Revolution, it was refounded under Napoleon, who, like Martin, decried the uselessness of nuns. Unlike Martin, however, Napoleon saw a great deal of potential in the active presence of ministering sisters, especially those like the SSJs, who had a flexible approach to service. "Sisters of St. Joseph did what was needed in the parish; they operated primitive grade schools, catechized the women, took care of the sick and orphans in small local 'hospitals,' visited homes of the needy, and were sacristans for the parish church."\textsuperscript{40} Napoleon's approval of the sisters tells us that, in at least one instance, pragmatic concerns overrode general principles. Female celibacy, problematic or not, allowed for a mobile—and inexpensive—work force.\textsuperscript{41}

However, official willingness to accept the inexpensive service of active women in necessary roles only begins to address the question of how women themselves constructed public positions in opposition to the prevailing discourses of domestic or cloistered life, both of which emphasized private behavior. Ideologically, the problem remains: More and more women sought out celibate sisterhood and active service to God despite a growing rhetoric that valorized domesticity and even condemned consecrated virginity, along with a hierarchy that offered little guidance beyond canon law. What allowed religious women to devote their lives to virginity and public service?

In many ways, the types of things that the sisters did matched the work of their non-celibate counterparts. In the later nineteenth century, "Catholic sisterhoods . . . operated under the same gender prerogatives that gave them space in the public area

\textsuperscript{40} Patricia Byrne, "Sisters of St. Joseph: The Americanization of a French Tradition," \textit{U.S. Catholic Historian} 5, no. 3 (1986): 244.

\textsuperscript{41} It is interesting to note that, while Napoleon approved a number of active women's orders, he and French legislators throughout the nineteenth century consistently refused to offer approval for the creation or refounding of men's non-diocesan service orders.
to emulate woman's 'divinely ordained' domestic role in the home." Both then and now, people drew logical connections between gender expectations and the public work of nuns. Some said that social work, nursing, and education were public occupations that sprang from women's "natural" roles. Additionally, as nurturing education of the young was increasingly the domain of women, correspondingly, "[t]he training of children, once a task performed by the clergy, became increasingly sisters' special domain. In both urban and rural areas they staffed different kinds of schools: elementary, academies, free and paid, night, industrial, parochial, private and public." Active nuns became "mothers" to the poor and underprivileged.

They were not only mothers to the poor in their home countries. With little institutional or external support, nuns packed up and traveled across the ocean in order to serve the people of other countries or, often, the emigrants from France. The SSJs, for example, not only continued their work in France throughout the early nineteenth century, but even became so well-known for their pragmatic ability to respond to the needs of the surrounding community that they were asked to send sisters to the western frontier of the United States. Shortly after the first appearance of Martin's treatise, a missionary organization, the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, published narratives of American "savages" and appeals for help from American bishops. At that point, the Countess de la Rochejacquelin, a faithful reader of the narratives, sold her jewels to pay for the passage of six Sisters of Saint Joseph from France to St. Louis, Missouri, the frontier of the time. These women's original mission, as it stood in 1836, was the establishment of a school for the deaf, but they soon ministered in hospital settings and among the poor. In her old age, one Sister of Saint Joseph, Sister St. Protails Déboille, "recalled in still-broken English that the

people of Cahokia had venerated the sisters as women 'come from the same mother as them, the Catholic France, to have care of their sick, their poor, their children . . . they think of them as their mother.' 44 Father Zephyrin Engelhardt of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, who appealed to the SSJs to expand farther into the west, also used maternal language, comparing the sisters' work to a "mother, tenderhearted and soothing." 45

Despite this maternal imagery, a philosophical tension remained between the sisters' public activity and the contemporary adulation of domesticity. While Martin was fairly radical in his conception of both marriage and celibacy, his logical conclusions were not shocking and found their echo in the language of others. French women who entered into a life of active service and became missionaries on the American frontier were likely to hear cultural messages devaluing celibacy and women's religious vows. For example, American Catholic reformers also charged that insanity resulted from female celibacy and that "[t]he natural position of a woman is to marry—have a family—and be surrounded by blooming children . . . To be shut up in a convent, and restricted from the happiness of a husband, is enough to drive any woman out of her senses." 46

If anything, American rhetoric was heightened by proximity to Protestant ideology, which had long complained that "nunneries and the conventual way of life, are altogether contradictory to the Divine appointments respecting the order of nature, and the constitution of mankind and human society," 47 and that "the popish doctrine of celibacy . . . opens the way for the corruptions that would be expected." 48 Female missionaries raised in France and then sent to the United States would have found both American and French rhetoric hostile to the notion of a religious

45 Coburn and Smith, "Community and Identity," 99.
47 Ibid.
vocation that demanded female celibacy. Given a new emphasis on domesticity as the source of social improvement, French women learned at home and abroad that there could be no higher calling—and really, no other calling at all—for women.

In order to resolve this tension, some Catholic thinkers responded directly to those who had foregrounded feminine self-control, but decried celibacy. They interpreted the sisters' public actions within the context of self-sacrificing maternity as the "aim of life" for woman and emphasized the continuity between the self-sacrifice of the nun and that of the domestic mother, who modeled the self-control that modern men needed. As Saint-Foi writing in an 1853 issue of *The Metropolitan* put it, "If to follow a higher vocation, she renounces the joys which the maternity derived from the flesh and blood imparts, it is to consecrate herself to the functions of a more holy and sublime maternity, which is entirely of the spirit in its nature and in its end."\(^{49}\)

Submission to the divine will, they argued, was simply a higher version of the self-sacrificing benevolence expected of domestic mothers. Perhaps the missionaries to America could see themselves as both heroic and domestic, changing society by their self-abnegating and nurturing lives.

These practical and philosophical comparisons with domestic ideals offer us the opportunity to resolve any intellectual conflict between domesticity and virginity. Yet to explain the popularity of women's orders—including their willingness to endure great hardship, privation, and permanent separation from their communities—primarily with respect to the reinforcement of domestic discourse misses important components of the women's own motivations. Neither the Countess de Rochejacquelin nor the SSJs who travelled to St. Louis made particular reference to woman's "natural" nurturing tendencies or even to their examples of self-control. Rather, when the Countess responded to the call for sisters to travel to the Louisiana Territory, she was responding to contemporary religious fervor and saw her mission as "activist in color and

\(^{49}\) Quoting Sainte-Foi, Mannard, "Maternity," 316.
missionary in scope. Both her impulses and the congregation's work can be better seen in the context of the contemporary "emergence of the individual as an independent entity exercising a basic right to shape a personal ideology and vie with others" on an international stage. The Countess, like the original Sisters of Saint Joseph, responded primarily to what she saw as a religious mission that centered on individual and community public service, all but ignoring the conflict over maternity, celibacy, and nature. Thus, while the activism of the nuns could be cast in a light that did not upset gendered norms, it was hardly likely, in their own lives, to have been domestic in inspiration or intent. Similarly, Father Engelhardt, who had described the SSJs as involved in the work of a mother, also appealed to the nuns' independent minds by promising the Mother Superior that, should she send some of her women out West to found a school, they would "not have to work under 'some narrow-minded man.'" He explicitly subverted traditional gender roles when he assured the nuns that he knew "it would be a decided blessing if no priest were in charge. . . . The priest is not necessary to carry on the school work there." The celibate women who engaged in active service, as well as those who supported and worked with them, recognized that Catholic sisters occupied an independent, not supporting, role.

Spiritually, the nineteenth-century vision of service, including the missions to American Indians, immigrants, and orphans, also reflected this independence. Missionary sisters such as the SSJs found spiritual direction and satisfaction in a Christian vision that "emphasized the special role of the 'journeying Virgin Mary' who pondered and responded to her Son's mission, ready to tell others to do whatever he asked of them." In this sense, the nun was feminine and maternal, but hardly domestic. Instead, she uprooted herself and directed her

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51 Cohen, "Conversion in Nineteenth-Century France," 49.
52 Quoted by Coburn and Smith, "Community and Identity," 99.
53 Coburn and Smith, "Community and Identity," 99.
54 Liptak, "Full of Grace," 632.
own life—and that of others—in accordance with a higher calling. "Sometimes the spiritual emphasis related to the Mary of the 'Martha and Mary' story."\textsuperscript{55} It is significant that, in these instances, the nuns modeled themselves on Mary, who, according to the Gospel of Luke, had "chosen the better part" in remaining close to Jesus, listening and learning, rather than being bogged down in household details.\textsuperscript{56}

Certainly, both the journeying Virgin and Mary, Martha's sister, were feminine models of vocation, but neither image affirmed traditional private domesticity. Gender was important and even central to these women's understanding of their public action. However, it was not, in the end, limiting in the ways that opponents of female celibacy in France and America envisioned, but opened up new ways of interpreting individualist activism that led women away from both the cloister and the hearth.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Luke 10:38-42.