

Article

Catholic Nuns and Convents in Early Modern Era: Identities, Relationships and Mediations

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Abstract

When history of religion intersects with that of Europeans in Early Modern Age, it is inevitable to analyse the reality of consecrated Catholic women in convents. This is the subject of the present text, which is structured around four key questions: What does ‘female religious enclosure’ mean? What are its consequences? What does the society in which it exists think of it? How do the two interact? Drawing on normative texts and practices documented in the abundant archival sources and bibliography, this paper constructs an original synthesis that aims to highlight all the characteristics of the female monastic condition during this period across all Orders. The presentation begins by analysing the values and behaviours advocated by ecclesiastical authorities for the construction of the identities of the ideal nun and her community. It then examines situations of adoption or rejection of aspects of this model and of the orders received, concluding that while individual rebellion constitutes a transgression, collective rebellion may constitute a struggle for justice and for the fulfilment of sworn vows. There are multiple points of convergence between nuns and laypeople (spirituality, the exercise of freedom and powers, family policies, mutual aid), demonstrating they belong to the same society.

Keywords: nuns; monasteries; nunneries; female convents; cloistered life; identities; mediations; religious women; Early Modern Era; monastery-society interactions

1. Introduction

During the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, in what is known as the ‘Early Modern Era’ of European civilisation, the highest number ever recorded of consecrated Catholic women and nunneries was reached. What were the reasons for this? And what collective identities—of society and of these religious communities—are revealed by this fact? Finding the answers to these questions in primary sources and in research studies is the first aim of this article. In addition, two further questions arise, though as hypotheses whose validity will be confirmed or refuted in light of all the information presented here: (a) Do the religious identity and the secular identity we are about to examine have opposite values? (b) Does the shaping of professed nuns by the monastic institution result in a threefold absence of freedom, individuality and diversity of behaviours?

It is well known that this period was marked by the Catholic Reformation, which began in the late 15th century and early 16th century within some religious Orders committed to greater rigour, and it developed profoundly and irreversibly from the 1560s onwards. Its guiding principles, approved at the Council of Trent, remained in force until the liberal and anti-clerical revolutions that, from 1789 to the 1830s, brought an end to the ‘Ancien Régime’. Five characteristics stand out in the new regulations for women’s monasteries:



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fundamental among these is compulsory and perpetual enclosure¹, which is now intended to apply universally to all institutions, starting with the individual profession by each nun of the solemn vows of obedience, poverty and chastity; a return to the original rigour of each Order or Congregation; the requirement of an oath regarding the free choice of the consecrated life; the obligation to hold triennial elections for the office of abbess and other principal offices; preferential subordination of the religious houses to bishops regarding admissions to new foundations and some existing ones, with the members of the regular clergy remaining the sole confessors and spiritual directors of the nuns (except in houses with the privilege of choice) and with regular inspections falling to one or the other, as the case may be. In this context, it is natural that the second objective of this article should be to understand what constitutes, both in legislative texts and in practice, the concept of 'seclusion', a term that denotes three distinct realities: (a) the inseparable facts that nuns live apart from the world around them and have their own rules; (b) the prohibition on leaving the monastery and the existence of restrictions on the entry of outsiders; (c) in a more specific sense, certain areas within the house, which are referred to as 'strict enclosure' or 'cloisters'. On the subject of terminology, it should be clarified that in this text, alongside the general terms 'cloister', 'seclusion', 'enclosure', 'consecrated', 'professed', 'religious', 'house' and 'community', the words 'nun' and 'monk' are used interchangeably, as well as 'convent' and 'monastery' are, although strictly speaking they usually vary according to the type of Order and its activity.

To speak of enclosure is to acknowledge the existence of two distinct realities: that of the religious community and that of the secular society that hosts and fills it. Whether consider separately or in their interrelations, both have received much attention from historiography². Until the mid-1980s, the preferred themes were analyses of economic and artistic heritage (in addition to built heritage, from an archaeological perspective), literary production, readings and spirituality in monasteries, remarkable actions of abbesses, the reputation for holiness of certain individuals, and the high social and family origins of some of the nuns. These were joined, during the transition to the 21st century and in its early years, by studies on the composition and amounts of dowries, the importance of the spiritual revitalisation of Catholic society through the dynamic action of some nuns and religious movements, the practices within convents in the artistic field in general and in music in particular, the close and unbreakable ties between the professed nuns and their families of origin, the reciprocal influences between both these worlds, the effective exercise by the nuns of power within the monastery despite their apparent total passive subordination to the decisions of their parents or eldest brothers regarding their entry into the convent and, after professing, to those of the abbesses, other internal authorities, confessors, spiritual directors and other male hierarchical superiors regarding everything. Over the last fifteen years, in-depth investigations into virtually all of these subjects have continued, with the novelty of approaching them more frequently than before from the perspective of women's history, their freedoms and personal and collective achievements, their relationship with male authorities, and their powers both within and outside convent walls. Given the impossibility of developing all these subjects here, this list is provided so that they are present in the readers' minds whilst we endeavour to fulfil the third major objective of this article: to provide a reliable synthesis of current knowledge about Catholic women's conventual life from the Council of Trent to the beginning of the 19th century, with particular emphasis on the identity of these religious women and their communities, their relationships and mediations with society and with society's identity. It is very important to highlight the internal agreement of the abundant number of studies on the realities of nuns and monasteries of this period, in the European continent but also in the American and Asian ones: the characteristics of previously unstudied houses and those of their

occupants, revealed and discussed by a new research, have always consistently confirmed and reinforced the general picture already known and established with certainty, even as they enrich it with small novelties or clarifications of situations.

2. The Monastery as a Construction of Community and of an Ideal Female Religious Identity

A special closeness to the divine and a clear distinction from the practices of the secular world are the goals of those who choose the life of a consecrated nun. If she wishes to strive for holiness, after death and following a life of proven virtue, a nun must successfully follow a path of learning that is at once doctrinal, spiritual, introspective, and one of self-control and penance. The first aspect of this learning is knowledge of Christian doctrine and the rules of the house. The norms defining desirable and unacceptable behaviour, as well as punishments, are determined by the need to encourage cloistered nuns to internalise and fulfil the specific nature of their situation. This internalisation rests on two pillars, both the subject of normative texts approved by the Supreme Pontiff: in terms of identity, the specific values of monastic existence, which are service to God and the practice of the precepts of Christian doctrine in accordance with the charism and Rule of communal life specific to the Order or Congregation to which they belong; in terms of operation, the practical aspects of the internal hierarchy and the organisation of the running of the house and the rules governing relations between its inhabitants.

From the mid-16th century onwards, spurred on by successive Popes, the Reformation of the Catholic Church took place systematically (having seen sporadic manifestations in previous decades, particularly on the part of the Regular Orders), based on the decisions taken by the Ecumenical Council of Trent, held between 1545 and 1563 (with interruptions of several years). At the final session of the Council, on 3 and 4 December 1563, its “*Decretum de regularibus et monialibus*” was approved, concerning the whole of consecrated religious life. Its immediate and universal observance was there enjoined upon bishops and male religious authorities, to whom “all Kings, Princes, Republics and Magistrates” were exhorted and commanded “to lend assistance and authority whenever required” (*Decretum [...] 1564*, chap. XXII). With this decree, the Council sought to correct certain practices that had been diverting monastic life from its original rigour, to firmly implement others, and to attempt to standardise the various female religious orders. Here are its main provisions:

- (a) To restore the discipline (respect for all rules and vows) with which the monastic houses were founded and to which each monk or nun has sworn to adhere (*Decretum [...] 1564*, chap. I).
- (b) To prohibit each member of an Order from owning any property and from making unnecessary personal use of it (*Decretum [...] 1564*, chap. II); to permit and encourage convents to own real estate and to ensure that they are inhabited only by “that number of people who can be comfortably supported by the monasteries’ own revenues or by the alms customarily received” (*Decretum [...] 1564*, chap. III).
- (c) “thoroughly restore the cloister of the nuns”, for which the support of the secular authorities is requested where necessary and princes are urged to provide assistance, which “obliges [...] all secular magistrates, on pain of excommunication”; furthermore, female communities located outside a settlement and subject to possible attacks by intruders are to be moved into an urban area (*Decretum [...] 1564*, chap. V).
- (d) To make the election of superiors of the houses (abbots, abbesses, or others) by secret ballot compulsory and universal (*Decretum [...] 1564*, chap. VI), and to define the requirements for becoming an abbess (*Decretum [...] 1564*, chap. VII).

- (e) To require a minimum age of 16 years and one year of novitiate before taking vows (*Decretum [...] 1564*, chap. XV).
- (f) To guarantee the freedom of personal choice regarding monastic life or its refusal, in the chapters with the clarifying titles “The Ordinary shall examine the will of a maiden over twelve years of age, if she wishes to take the religious habit, and again before the profession of faith” (*Decretum [...] 1564*, chap. XVII) and “No one shall oblige, except in cases provided for by law, a woman to enter religious life, nor shall anyone hinder her who wishes to enter” (*Decretum [...] 1564*, chap. XVIII).
- (g) Greatly reinforce the authority of Bishops over religious communities; references to the Ordinary appear in 17 of the 22 Chapters of the document.

In the normative texts (Constitutions, Rules, Definitions) of the various religious Families following the changes decided by their highest governing bodies (and validated by the Pope) after the incorporation of the precepts in “De regularibus et monialibus,” there are sometimes articles with the same wording in different Rules. From the comparison between them it follows that, in fundamental aspects, the similarities visible between Orders are more numerous and structuring than the particularities of each. Let us illustrate this with regard to enclosure, since its universality is one of the great demands of the Tridentine reform of consecrated life for women. Chapter V of the decree begins as follows: “This Holy Council, renewing the Constitution of Boniface VIII, which begins: “Dangerous”³, orders all bishops—calling upon divine justice as their witness and threatening them with eternal damnation—to take the utmost care to restore in every detail the seclusion of the nuns where it is broken, and to preserve it where it exists”; and it continues: “No nun shall be permitted to leave her monastery after her profession of faith, not even for a short time, under any pretext, unless she has a legitimate reason approved by the Bishop, and no privileges or indulgences shall avail in this matter. Nor shall it be lawful for any person, of any lineage, sex, or age, to enter the cloisters of the monastery, on pain of excommunication, unless they have written permission from the Bishop or the superior”.

These injunctions are thus set forth in the General Constitutions for all religious women outside the Italian Peninsula who are obedient to the Franciscan Order, that is to say, Poor Clares of the Rule of Saint Clare (absolute poverty, without personal property), Poor Clares of the Rule of Urban IV (mitigated poverty, with property), Monks of the Most Pure Conception of Our Lady (Conceptionists), and Third Sisters of Penance: “Considering how the Holy Council of Trent so strictly enjoins, with the attestation of Divine Judgement and the threat of eternal damnation, the observance of the seclusion of the Monasteries: therefore, so that this may be inviolably observed, we command by holy obedience that no Abbess, nor any other Nun, Blessed, or Donata, shall dare to admit within the enclosure of the first gate of the Monastery, nor into any other part whither the Nuns may have access, any man or woman, of whatever condition or rank, for any cause, reason or occasion, on pain of deprivation of her office [...]. No secular person may enter the cloister of the Nuns without permission from the Apostolic See [...], seen and examined by the Superior, and [with] the consent of the majority of the Nuns”; “If any Convent of Third Order Nuns remains that does not observe enclosure, the Prelates of the Religious Order shall notify them of the determinations of the Holy Council of Trent, and other Apostolic Decrees, which command them to observe enclosure, and that the Nuns may not leave their Convents, nor admit lay people of any condition or quality whatsoever into them”, a provision that omitted the reference to prior authorization and the procedures set out in the same Chapter for “any time a person enters the Monastery for a necessary reason, such as a Confessor, Doctor, Surgeon, Bloodletter, or for the purpose of bringing in wheat, wine, olive oil, firewood, flour, and [mechanical or construction] workers” (*Constituções geraes [...] 1693*, pp. 101–3, 105)⁴. It is curious that the Order of the Immaculate Conception, which is

mentioned in these Constitutions alongside that of Saint Clare, adds an important provision to its own Rule: “[she who wishes to receive the habit of this Order] shall take a vow to live always in obedience, without personal property, and in chastity, in perpetual enclosure, and shall be warned that the transgression of these four things is a mortal sin” (*Regla, y ordenaciones [...] 1635*, chap. I, 1v). In turn, the Rule of Saint Augustine, adopted by the Augustinian, Dominicans, Visitation Nuns and others, commands all prioresses, “by virtue and merit [because of] holy obedience, and on pain of major excommunication incurred *ipso facto* [if such should occur], not to admit or permit within the cloister any person of any kind, condition, sex or age whatsoever without a licence granted *in scriptis* by the Prelate [...], which licence [...] may only be granted in cases where there is a need for it on the part of the nuns. And if any Prioress breaks this precept, she shall be deprived of her office. [...] It is strictly forbidden for any nun [...] of whatever state, rank, condition, dignity or pre-eminence, even [if] she is a descendant of Royal generation, daring to leave the cloister on any occasion”, except in the rare situations foreseen and requiring specific written permission from the Bishop or the Provincial (*Constituições das religiosas [...] 1734*, chap. III, pp. 214–16). In a commented and annotated version of this Rule, a clear delimitation of the enclosure is found, referred to in different texts as ‘intrinsic’, ‘interior’, ‘strict’ or ‘of the Religious’: “all that space to which they may freely enter and to which it is not lawful for secular persons to enter”. So, this commentator clarifies, “neither the Church, nor the Sacristy, nor the courtyard between the street door that is closed at night and the main door and the carriage door, nor the guesthouses, parlours and others that have doors to the same courtyard, are included in the enclosure”⁵. Therefore, we conclude that the spaces for prayer (including the lower choir and, if there is one, the upper choir, both inside the church but separated from it by grilles that do not open and whose thick curtains prevent them from being seen from the outside), work, reading, meals, treatment, recreation, punishment and rest are exclusive to the nuns.

Active enclosure (the entry of secular people or male clergy into specific parts of the convent building) is therefore restricted but not prohibited, is well regulated for the different female Orders and Congregations (explicitly stating, for example, the ways of acting so that those coming from the outside only see the spaces and people essential for the purpose of their visit) and applies not only to the various categories of visitors already mentioned but also to relatives of the nuns, to friars or priests of the Order in charge of periodic inspections and to the episcopal authority if he is the guardianship of the house. In the binding texts of various female Orders, there are instructions regarding the location and characteristics of the ‘enclosures’, the designation for the areas through which people and objects pass from the outside, all guarded by nuns who ensure absolute compliance with the rules (they hold the offices of ‘listeners’, ‘gridkeepers’, ‘wheelkeepers’, ‘turnstile attendants’, ‘lathekeepers’, ‘gatekeepers, doorkeepers’): the ‘wheel’ or ‘turntable’, where communication is only by sound and by passing, on a rotating plate inside a cavity in the wall, small volumes, oral or written messages to be transmitted to nuns, and, when necessary, a meal for the vicar of the house; the doors (the ‘rule door’ and the ‘carriage door’, with different users), for people, provisions and what does not fit in the wheel; and the grilles of the so-called ‘locutory’ or ‘parlour’, which separate the cloistered women from those who come to visit them. Between the church (where male monks, priests and lay believers enter) and the lower choir (exclusively for the consecrated nuns and other cloistered women), only the aforementioned bars and curtains are noted, and, for communion, a small wicket with doors on both sides of the wall.

The conciliar decree “De regularibus et monialibus” is neither exhaustive nor particularly detailed regarding the matters of monastic life for men and women on which it legislates: it clearly identifies its objectives but is deliberately flexible and non-committal

(owing to a lack of unanimity among the voters) regarding conceptual definitions and the means of achieving them. Here are some examples of decisions to be taken by those who will implement the reform: Should the maintenance of those who take vows be provided by the house's income, or, instead, by an admission dowry? Are there situations in which it is permissible for a friar or nun to have personal income, to inherit and to transact property? Do 'seclusion' and 'cloister' refer to the entire conventual space, or only parts of it? Are female communities of active life, dedicated to assisting the poor and sick or to external teaching, those who have taken simple vows, and those who live on alms they must go out to collect, also obliged to observe total enclosure? Must written permission from the male guardian of a convent exist even for every visit by a very close relative? The answers have been provided inconsistently over the following years, in some cases by each Family gathered in General Chapter, by the Sacred Congregation of Regulars or (as we have seen) through the interpretation and comparison of this updated jurisprudence, in other cases they were vigorously imposed by ecclesiastical authorities, particularly bishops, and in others they were negotiated by some of these authorities with convents and even with local rulers and elite families in the areas where the nunneries were established, depending on the standing and influence of each abbess, bishop, monastery, local civil authority (Pérez Vidal 2022, pp. 105–6; Novi Chavarria 2004, pp. 40, 43). In the papal bull "Circa Pastoralis" of 1566, Pius V justifies absolute female enclosure on the grounds of the obligation arising from the profession of the three vows, compliance with the Rules, and the long-standing nature of this practice. In "Decori et honestati", in 1570, the same Pope decrees, for professed nuns of any Rule (including the Third Orders, whose sisters moved about freely and took simple rather than solemn vows) and regardless of previous practice, that: all nuns are obliged to total seclusion; temporary leave (which various bishops have continued to grant) shall be granted only in the rarest of cases of grave danger (fire, plague and leprosy) and, even then, with the permission of a superior⁶; prior acceptance of perpetual enclosure is an essential condition for taking vows; communities that do not accept this will be prohibited from admitting new members, which, in the long run, will lead to their extinction. In 1572, Gregory XIII, in the bull "Deo Sacris Virginibus", legislated on the so-called 'open communities'. In 1586, Sixtus V established in Rome the Sacred Congregation of Regulars, henceforth the supreme authority over the institutes and members of Catholic religious orders. Despite this consistent drive to impose absolute cloistering, in 1610 the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary, the 'Visitandines', was founded in France, initially conceived as a Congregation of active life "without the need for a vow of enclosure (it was intended [...] for women who, for reasons of health or advanced age, could not enter into seclusion and were consequently excluded from a life of perfection), in which the contemplative life would be accompanied by visits to the sick in their own homes with the aim of caring for and comforting them"; six years later, however, the local Archbishop "concluded that, in accordance with the provisions of the Council of Trent, it would be impossible for a true community of nuns to exist without solemn vows and strict enclosure. The Visitandines then received their definitive Constitutions from Pope Paul V, becoming a religious order devoted to contemplation and teaching" within the convent, and being obliged to "take solemn vows, recite the Office of Our Lady, and live under papal enclosure" (Dias 2010, p. 545).

It is therefore only within the cloistered regime that each religious woman swears to fulfill, until death, her three solemn vows⁷: poverty, obedience, and chastity⁸. Although these vows are also taken by friars and male monks, they entail different implications for nuns due to the fact that they are women and, unlike friars, are prevented (except on the rare occasions of danger) from practising passive enclosure, that is, from leaving the convent⁹. With regard to poverty, whether a religious may possess property and income sufficient to

ensure her own survival (rather than this being the sole responsibility of her community and the dowry that is compulsorily required and handed over to the house at the time of profession), or whether she may inherit, use, increase, dispose of and bequeath such property, varies according to the Order: for the Poor Clares, the Dominicans and the Cistercians, this remains as possible as in previous centuries (provided the house does not follow a Rule of absolute poverty), it being sufficient for the applicant to present a licence to that effect, written by the male guardian, and to receive the consent of the majority of the voting nuns for that request (*Constituições geraes [...] 1693*, p. 95); for the Conceptionists, rents and property may only be held in common, and their disposal requires episcopal authorisation and the consent of the majority of the community (*Regla, y ordenaciones [...] 1635*, p. 10). Decisions regarding the management of rural or urban real estate (sale, purchase, exchange, emphyteusis, change in tenant or amount of rent) and money (loans at interest, one of the sources of income for various communities and nuns) are the responsibility of those who own them: each nun who owns property regarding her individual property, the abbess and other principal officers regarding household property (with the aforementioned limitation in case of sale, and with periodic inspection by a male religious of the expense books kept by the scribe nun). Procedures requiring the execution of a notarial contract take place either in the convent, with the bars of the parlour separating the cloistered nuns from the notary, the other contracting parties and the witnesses (as is always the case with letters of promise of dowry for nuns and those concerning its delivery), or (as is more common in the private affairs of nuns) at a notary's office where the nuns, being prevented from leaving the community, are represented by a proxy, who must not belong to the clergy and may be the community's one¹⁰. Obedience, in turn, is due to all internal female authorities, including the religious of senior status who constitute the group of 'discretas' (necessarily heard by the abbess in many of her decisions), but also to confessors, the local bishop and/or the general prelate, the provincial of the male Order (depending on the houses) and to the member of this Order ("prelate", "vicar", "prior", "superior") who oversees the community and its highest internal authority ("abbess", "prioress", "superior", "prelate"), in an extra submission to the male religious; in effect, there is a "total dependence of the women's houses on the male religious of the same Family for spiritual guidance, the administration of the sacraments, confession (and the granting of absolution), the Eucharist and the anointing of the sick or dying, the control of all writing and expenditure, the inspection of behaviour and compliance with all the rules" (*Conde and Lalanda 2020a*, p. 166). Regarding chastity, its absolute safeguarding is vehemently stated in the normative texts, which meticulously regulate the ways and places of access for men to the convent and determine severe punishments in case of non-compliance, since the nuns are "special spouses of Jesus Christ, and as such must remain faithful to him"¹¹. In the annotations to the Rule of Saint Clare, it is stated that the voluntary breaking of this third vow is a mortal sin and a sacrilege (*Primera, y segunda regla [...] 1688*, pp. 146–47). And the Constitutions of the Augustinian nuns establish three degrees of punishment for those who do so, the lightest being (for those who receive love letters from a man or write them) "the penalty of the most serious guilt for fifteen days, and be deprived of active and passive voice for three years¹², and for the same time also deprived of reaching the gates or wheel [...], and thus may not be a doorkeeper or wheel attendant until she is over fifty years of age" (*Constituições das religiosas [...] 1734*, p. 239).

Even after the Council of Trent, people who were not professed nuns with black veils continued to live in monasteries. At this time, there was a wide range of statuses and ages at which a laywoman could be authorized to live in delimited areas within the 'strict enclosure' of a community of consecrated female life, with her (or someone on her behalf) being responsible for paying for her upkeep (by giving grain and coins): as a 'pupil' from

the age of 7 (or, in special cases, even younger if she was a close relative of a nun already living in the monastery and in whose cell she stayed); as a ‘student’, from the age of 12; as a ‘novice’, that is, attending the year and a day of intensive and demanding apprenticeship called ‘novitiate’ (with total subordination to the respective mistress, who raises them “in prayer, silence, humility, mortification, and obedience” (*Constituições geraes* [...] 1693, chap. I, p. 69) and contacting the community only in the church choir during moments of common prayer and in the refectory during meals and the beginning of confessions), provided she is 15 years old; as a ‘maid’, a ‘servant’ or a ‘slave’, of a nun or the convent, if it is for manual labor; as a ‘donata’, ‘lay nun’ or ‘white-veiled nun’, a professed religious but with a dowry and status inferior to that of black-veiled nuns, who receives orders from all of these because she serves the community, sometimes even in menial work, and cannot sing in the choir; as ‘sheltered’, regardless of age or marital status, if it falls under certain circumstances¹³.

Some of the girls never become nuns, either due to a lack of willingness (on their part, on the part of family members with authority over them¹⁴, or on the part of the monastic community) or because they fail to meet one of the many essential requirements for profess: completing the novitiate, passing a final oral examination by two nuns appointed by the abbess, to recite Christian doctrine in front of the entire assembled consecrated community, obtain a simple majority of the secret votes (expressed by white broad beans for acceptance and black broad beans for rejection) of the nuns eligible to vote who have been professed for more than two years, publicly and solemnly declaring her will and free choice (as required by the Council of Trent) to be a nun and follow the Rule adopted there, not yet having reached the age of 26, the existence of a vacant place already allocated to her by male ecclesiastical authority, and owe nothing to the convent regarding her food (since she entered) or her dowry (which we shall develop later).

“The profession constitutes the milestone of the definitive entry into the monastic world: only from that date is the time of religious life counted, which is necessary for determining both seniority and precedence [hierarchical], as well as the ability to participate in elective community acts” (*Lalanda and Gonçalves* 1988, p. 972). This issue of elections and voting by nuns is very important, a situation in which the Council of Trent makes a clear break with medieval times and with the possibility of having abbesses for life. From then on, only new houses remain under the rule of the initial abbess, appointed by the regional male religious authority, for twenty years, until the community becomes properly accustomed to the Rules and begins to hold the triennial elections that are mandatory in all houses and whose compliance is monitored and presided over by male authorities and recorded by the clerk nun. In the numerous archival collections preserved to date abound chronological series of Election Books for the various elective positions within the community. All offices have a term coinciding with the abbess’s three-year term, regardless of whether they are filled by her decision with the vicar and four ‘discreet’ nuns (with age, seniority and experience in positions) or by secret ballot in a common vote (with broad beans) or, like the abbess, in a canonical election (with the eligible names written on ballots), in the case of the Poor Clares (*Constituições geraes* [...] 1693, chap. IX); for the Cistercians, the situation is slightly different with regard to the abbess: “in this election, all the nuns wearing the black veil shall vote, and by secret ballot they shall elect three from the whole convent, whose names they shall place in three separate boxes; and voting with black and white broad beans, she shall be approved for whom the majority of the community votes” (*Diffinições* [...], 58v; *Diffinições da Ordem de Cistel [sic] e Congregação de Nossa Senhora de Alcobaça* 1593).

The fundamental values of women’s monasteries are embodied in the three perpetual vows. Poverty is presented as the virtue of renouncing all that is material and mundane and,

therefore, as an element that facilitates a more resolute belonging to the world of spirituality. Obedience to religious authorities is understood as an unmistakable sign of humility, in addition to permanent penance (symbolised by the black veil of professed nuns), and in the Constitutions it is 'holy' (just like poverty and prayer). Chastity is valued as the supreme form of choosing purity (symbolised by the white veil, worn from the novitiate onwards). In turn, cloistered life (which goes hand in hand with chastity) emphasises, on an individual level, personal retreat for prayer, meditation, contemplation and work¹⁵, and, on a collective level, the sharing of goals, behaviours, rules and values as a clearly identified religious community, set apart and protected from the temptations of the world.

In the course of individual religious progress, there are different stages of learning and, therefore, of improvement. Prudence (understood as common sense) and virtue or 'praiseworthy life' (understood as behaviour that respects all rules, demonstrating full inner adherence to them) are particularly important, as they are acquired gradually along the path to salvation. For this reason, seniority and age are crucial in the assignment of positions of responsibility, in elective and eligible capacities, as well as in the determination of hierarchies. Following the same line of thought, monastic communitarianism is never understood as egalitarian (even if the word "Sisters" is used), but rather as something necessary and deeply hierarchical: as sociologist Guy Rocher states, "in the religious world, the habit can simultaneously signify belonging [to a specific community] and status [internally differentiated]" (Rocher 1968, p. 98).

Penitential humiliations and mortifications are considered a sure way to achieve the necessary detachment that leads to the abandonment of all that is worldly and non-spiritual. In terms of physical suffering, the usual companions of consecrated women are cilices (self-mortification) and fasting (sometimes excessive), which guarantee bodily pain and discomfort through food deprivation. In the psychological field, a similar function is performed by the 'Chapters of guilt' held periodically by the local male authority in a communal area (usually the refectory or the chapter house): these are individual confessions made aloud (except for the last two, that of the vicar and that of the abbess, each of which is done alone with the friar) in the presence of all the Sisters¹⁶, thus being publicly exposed to the whole community, acknowledging and confessing their own faults and weaknesses, and receiving the resulting rebuke and exhortation to follow the right path. All religious women are aware of their sinfulness and know that the path leading to the state of grace to which they aspire is fraught with obstacles that can only be overcome with constant individual effort, through meditation, prayer and persistence in self-control.

In the context of building collective belonging, it is no coincidence that only two characteristics of secular society are valued and encouraged in monastic texts: family spirit and work. Regarding the latter, the Rule written by Saint Clare in 1253 states: "the Sisters to whom the Lord has given the grace to work should work, after the Third hour [9 a.m.], with fidelity and devotion, in an honest and useful occupation for the community, so as to ward off idleness, enemy of the soul, and without killing the spirit of holy prayer and devotion, to which all things must serve"¹⁷. It is therefore advisable that there be a common space called the 'work house', where silent individual activities are carried out while an edifying book is read aloud, similar to what occurs in the dining room during meals. In turn, efforts are made to foster a sense of family through the requirement-set out in the binding texts-that all members use the main communal areas at the same time: the church choir, the refectory and, where available, the chapter house and dormitories.

A monastery is a 'total institution', according to sociologist Erving Goffman: "[it] may be defined as a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life" (Goffman 1961, p. XIII). Unlike other

types of total institutions that developed with the growth of the State (such as prisons and psychiatric hospitals), monastic life, especially the female one, fits into a Christian perspective and a social and symbolic logic of relinquishing individuality in favour of assuming a communal consciousness, with the goal of individual and collective salvation (including that of the family of origin, the religious family and a sinful secular world).

In light of all the above, we can affirm that it is with a clear definition and knowledge of the objectives and norms of communal life that the socialization of the contents of conscience on the part of religious women necessarily leads to the creation of barriers of different types, which foster the indispensable conditions for the development of an ideal model of behaviour.

3. Living the Condition of a Professed Nun

The behaviours prescribed by normative texts, such as the General Definitions, are the ideal ones, the goals to be pursued by each professed Sister and by the community of consecrated women. These may or may not coincide with the real experiences, that we know today in writing through direct accounts (the nuns involved and those who witnessed the situations or recorded their statements) or indirectly (people who heard or read the account of what happened), in unpublished or published sources, such as biographies (auto and hetero), correspondence, history of an Order or convent and its most prominent members, episcopal or regular inquiries and hearings of witnesses about the reputation for virtue of deceased nuns, mandatory inspection visits by male religious authorities. Some experiences unfold within the bounds of respect for the rules, while others involve clear transgression. Let us begin with these, in order to properly contextualize them and thus contribute to demystifying and reducing the audience for a certain historiographical production that attempts to present them as if they were the only and universal practice.

The main sources of information about transgressions by some nuns are the Visits or Visitations, reports of inspections carried out on monasteries by friars of the same religious Family or by the local bishop. They contain the breaches that were reported to the visitor, but without data that would allow the identification of the offenders or their number, nor the corrections and punishments that were imposed and whose fulfillment he strongly entrusts to the abbess. The repeated invocations, over the years, of what is established in the Constitutions, of the values and practices inherent in the service to God and of the need to punish those specific deviations mean that the censures have to be renewed not out of ignorance of the rules (that are loudly and periodically read to the whole community) but because there are prohibitions that repeatedly attract a disturbing minority of professed nuns. These practices are distributed across “three or four basic categories, as seems to be concluded [...] from the penalties awaiting offenders. In descending order of importance, according to the number of references they receive [in the *Constituições geraes*], the following categories are found: firstly, the values proper to monastic life, with chastity occupying the most prominent place; secondly, the internal organization of spaces and competencies; finally, the rules for good community life and, in particular, the importance of authority and obedience” (Lalanda and Gonçalves 1988, p. 982). The same reality is confirmed, with complementary words to these, in different religious Families: “when we consider the hierarchy of faults, it is noteworthy how among the most serious are those that undermine enclosure. It is particularly enlightening to note that, among these, are those offenses that jeopardize the very reason for religious life, since they call into question the fundamental pillars of Dominican spirituality: charity, penance, enclosure” (Moiteiro 2018, p. 34). Here are the behaviours most frequently mentioned and condemned in these Visits (and profusely documented¹⁸ in Caeiro 2006): unauthorised access to places of contact with secular people, such as the bars of the parlour; disrespect for times and spaces of

communal prayer, by using the choir for mundane and futile conversations; failure to observe silence; the non-use by transgressors of the common spaces intended for eating, working, resting, or even praying; not complying with obedience; participation in divisions and conflicts within the community, among Sisters and with maids or servants; wearing secular clothing and displaying jewellery or other objects inappropriate for nuns; organising profane celebrations (bullfights, theatres) in the convent, in which secular people participate or attend. Some of these situations can be explained by the following conclusions from a recent comparative study on this issue and the punishments foreseen for non-compliance by Dominicans and by Poor Clares: “Possibly many of these instances of mismanagement are the consequence and cause of the almost complete absence of communal life except during the obligatory choir times, given that (as also proven by other sources¹⁹) many nuns, if not almost all of them in the 17th and 18th centuries, have individual cells—or even houses within the convent walls—where they eat, sleep and spend most of their time. In the orders written at the end of the Visits and in other documents, there are numerous punishments that deprive offenders of what they show they value above all else: access to the grilles, participation in internal decisions, and the exercise of certain triennial offices” (Conde and Lalandá 2020a, p. 201). The desire to reconnect with the secular world and its social interactions and models, replacing the specificities of professed and cloistered religious women, seems to be the most defining characteristic of these transgressive nuns. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, some nuns voluntarily and overtly begin to behave systematically contrary to all the identity values they had sworn to uphold; although they remain a minority, situations like these occur in many female convents in different geographical areas, which is understood as a consequence of an excessive accumulation of young women in convents due to stronger motivations (personal or from relatives) in terms of social status and preservation of economic and symbolic family assets than of a religious nature, clear signs of the end of an era.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, the forced imposition of the restrictive post-tridentine norms gave rise to strong opposition in various monastic communities and regions, most notably in those where there was a greater number of nuns from the most privileged social groups who controlled the convents. This occurred in several cities of the Italian Peninsula, where the initial enclosure was being replaced by a practice of ‘open houses’ and the absence of vows. In Naples, the site of the harshest and most prolonged confrontations, as early as 1566 several nuns refused to comply with the bull “*Circa Pastoralis*”; the reason “was not so much the introduction of the explicit profession of vows, even in those monasteries where, due to an already ingrained custom, this had fallen into disuse, but rather what the vows of poverty and obedience would imply in the organization of religious life and in the forms of communal life [. . .]: expenses for the [architectural] restructuring of the [houses. . .], renouncing conversations with family members, freedom of movement and frequent outings claimed for health or family reasons, the privileged company of sisters and nieces, the exchange of gifts, the private use of kitchens, cells and furniture, the personal assistance [. . .] of servants and maids, thus obliging them to deprive themselves of those signs of distinction proper to aristocratic female life” (Novi Chavarria 2017, pp. 169–70). When the ecclesiastical authority forced those who did not swear the three vows and enclosure to return to their families’ homes (who would have to pay a heavy fine if they did not receive them), several of them left and affirmed that their monastery “had never been a cloister, but rather a congregation of ladies and women secluded by their relatives”; however, not all were well received by their families, so some returned to the convent and swore the vows, and others, in order to have something to support themselves, resorted to civil and ecclesiastical courts to try to recover their inheritance rights or have their dowries

returned to them (*ibid.*, p. 173), which proved fruitless due to collusion between family members, witnesses, and judicial authorities.

For some two and a half centuries after the conclusion of the Council of Trent, the central authorities (monarchical, episcopal and papal) continued their efforts to subjugate institutionalised women's religious life. In 1664–1665, the King of Spain provoked a widespread conflict with nuns in the territories of Aragon by obtaining written orders from the Nuncio and, subsequently, from the Pope to reinforce the cloistered regime “by limiting visits and contact with the outside world, introducing mechanisms for greater control and surveillance both in parlours and in correspondence” and in other situations, on the grounds that “in most convents of non-discalced and non-reformed nuns [...] serious corruption is evident, arising from the immoderate licence to converse freely at the grides and in parlours [...] with people of all kinds” (*Atienza López 2018*, pp. 129–30). The refusal to obey is very much alive and expressed in writing by numerous houses (which demonstrate that they communicate with one another and are aware of the rejection also by those at the Court's headquarters)—beginning with the Discalced (considered the most strict in their observance)—for three reasons. The first is the mistaken understanding, on the part of civil and ecclesiastical legislators, of the reality of women's convents as homogeneous and of the need to apply uniformly to all the ‘Calzadas’ (non-Discalced) a tightening of behavioural controls, whether the nun in question is exemplary or a transgressor; this purported identification between ‘discipline’ and ‘women's monasteries’ (alleged and publicised by those authorities to increase their control over them) and the insinuated universal existence of scandals are entirely rejected by the nuns, who regard them as false, unjust and slanderous (*ibid.*, p. 143). The second reason lies in the innovation (something usually ill-received, and even worse when imposed) of now seeking to demand more than what was defined at the time of taking their vows; rejecting this outright, the consecrated women in various monasteries declare that they cannot obey a Brief that runs counter to their Constitutions and to the good faith with which they became nuns, and so “they will not obey more than what they professed, and which they would not have done [professed] had they been warned of the austerity with which they would have to live”, and so they will leave the convents if that order is enforced (*ibid.*, pp. 139, 136). The third reason for the protest has an economic dimension and one of social representation and status, and is supported in its arguments by the families and the civil and military authorities of the localities where communities of consecrated women exist. In economic terms, the severe general decline in income and the rise in debt, due to financial crises, wars and epidemics, have greatly delayed the payment of rents due, impoverished the convents and the nuns, and made them dependent on extraordinary financial support from relatives (who too now have less income); without them, those with fewer resources would already be suffering from food and clothing shortages, and those from the elites would have to perform menial work with their hands (because it would not be possible to employ maids) during their free time from religious obligations. “Communication and relations with the outside world were for many an essential support for their subsistence”, as stated by members of one of the communities: without “the manual labor they did [and sold, it is understood] and the charities done for them by some relatives and pious people [...] they could not live at all” (*ibid.*, p. 149). If the Brief were applied, there would be two more very negative consequences: (1) the dialogue within the walls with the outside world could only occur with the closest relatives—and even then not as frequently as now—which would prevent the nuns from continuing to deal there with the matters they had to resolve with many people (*ibid.*, p. 147); (2) the scarcity of goods and income and the new rules would remove from the convents not only the servants and all their labor but also the wealthy ladies who wished to be sheltered there and paid for it, and all this could lead to the extinction

of the communities, due to the lack of economic sustainability or by making the choice of monastic life much less appealing to young people and their families: “the daughters of Citizens²⁰ who had to enter Religious life would be reluctant to do so because of this novelty; with which, in this way, [they] would find themselves deprived of the placement of their daughters [...] with the decency that befitted their state” (ibid., pp. 135, 147). In the end, many of the “members of the diocesan hierarchies seem to have accommodated their interventions to the manifestations of resistance and the arguments of the nuns”, probably because they realized that it was impossible “to maintain obedience and observance of religious enclosure and vows [...] without a conventual economic situation that would support them”; as a Cistercian visitor to the Canary Islands wisely recognized in 1691, “observance is often lacking where the necessities for sustenance are lacking” (ibid., pp. 150, 151, 154).

Let us now turn to some practices²¹ that are clearly consistent with the model of life that the nuns have decided to follow. It is important to begin by highlighting this act of will that they all carried out, because the affirmation made by each postulant to become a nun (and which is presumed to be true because it occurs under a publicly taken oath), that it is in the full use of her freedom and will that she will profess the solemn and perpetual vows, is essential for the transition to this state to take place. Thus, “the certain and proven fact that many professions [of perpetual religious vows] were predetermined by the decisions of the head of the family does not contradict the idea that women who knew their destiny accepted it-consented-and did not reject it” (Atienza López 2013, p. 99). For too many years, a large part of historiography valued the decisions of nuns’ parents so much that it almost prevented the nuns’ own voices from continuing to be heard and almost made invisible the many young Catholic women of the Modern Age who truly chose the contemplative life in cloistered monasteries because it was their genuine desire; and, according to biographies, there were many who had to overcome great opposition from their families to do so, even though female monastic forms of devotion and spirituality were then valued as the best model of life to follow.

Nuns are seen, in particular, as setting an important example for lay women, also through their writing and the works they read. “After the Council of Trent, there was [...] a vast biographical production, which sought to glorify religious orders and, at the same time, to propose model and ideal images of the conventual world. Autobiographies written by nuns at the behest of their confessors also became common practice throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. [...] The] population outside the cloister [...], from the mid-17th century onwards, created a real orbit of curiosity around women’s convents, encouraging them to write, requesting maxims, advice, rules and models. This gave rise to a vast amount of printed material” (Morujão 2011, pp. 41, 51–52). Furthermore, “noblewomen had the same spiritual directors or confessors as the nuns, who advised or even prescribed reading material (and sometimes also the writing of personal texts) for both groups” (M. S. N. Lalanda 2014, p. 74), so it was possible-and did happen-a “manual of mental prayer and contemplation” originally created for nuns to have “a second edition [...] for everyone [including lay people of both sexes], changing [only] the words that referred to cloistered and consecrated life” (ibid., p. 75). Despite these facts, this other reality is also interesting, equally true and documented in some autobiographies commissioned by confessors and read and approved by them: the main aspiration of several nuns who thus became writers not of their own volition but in fulfillment of the vow of obedience is not to be an example to anyone but rather to pray well in their intimacy with God, in quiet and alone. In an age of such frequent outbursts and lapses of sentiment that provoked mistrust and punishment by ecclesiastical authorities and the Inquisition, they sought mystical love and the assurance that their relationship with God was correct; some even

express a constant fear of not receiving from their spiritual fathers (confessors and spiritual directors) the wise guidance that would firmly set them on the right path to the solid and well-founded spirituality they wish to have, and to be certain that this is indeed theirs²².

In the time not taken up by religious duties, tasks arising from their roles, presence in the locutory or private prayer, many other kinds of individual activities may take place, depending on each person's choices, such as reading religious or edifying texts (previously approved by the abbess or confessor), writing (always understood as useful and necessary work rather than recreation), practising musical instruments or singing, useful or artistic and creative crafts using various materials, gardening, cooking, and tending to the spaces and images associated with particular devotions (M. S. N. Lalanda 2008; Conde and Lalanda 2020b; Conde 2026), musical composition, and the planning and funding (whether self-funded, by lay people, or by 'Sisters') of chapels and artistic works (Lowe 2003). Some of the fruits of the crafts and confectionery works, and others, are intended to be offered to benefactors or sold as a means of contributing to the financing of the house.

Exercising an "office" (a term for any position in the convent) is valued (although the degree varies according to the office and the person performing it), as can be seen both from the mandatory skills for each function and from the frequency of punishments that lead to suspension or loss of the three-year mandate. In general, a nun being able to elect and be elected internally, that is, in the decision-making and definitions of the community, with an increase in rights directly proportional to age and seniority, and deserving the trust of her 'Sisters' seems to compensate for the period of lack of privacy and autonomy that every religious woman had to endure during the novitiate. Being the custodian of a key that allows the use of a means of communication (the wheel, the bars of a locutory, or another) with the outside world; controlling the access of people and objects on a case-by-case basis; being in charge of the education of the youngest girls or the formation of the novices; being responsible for the functioning of the sacristy or the infirmary, or for the preparation of the choir songs; to write the record of the expenses and property of the community and the record of its members; being a guardian or promoter of one worship or one devotion that is recognized inside or out of the nunnery's walls—all these attributions are permitted and specific legitimate forms, sought or not, of active religious participation for the common good and for the fulfillment of perpetual vows also by those to whom these actions are directed, of receiving obedience instead of merely giving it, of necessarily participating in the internal organization of spaces and daily experiences.

At times, community life was made difficult by friction between some nuns, whose differing personalities, social backgrounds, ages, aspirations, life experiences, social networks and links to the outside world, amongst other factors, were exacerbated by the necessity of daily coexistence over many decades in seclusion. "Certain situations led to the community splitting into two or more antagonistic 'factions' or 'parties': rivalries between promoters of different devotions, obedience to confessors who did not agree with one another, family loyalties towards candidates for positions of civil power, and elections for abbesses" (Conde and Lalanda 2020a, p. 184).

The existence within the monastery of effective powers, distributed across various levels of activity and areas of personal influence, is a notable feature of female monks in this era, setting them apart from ordinary women remaining in the secular world. Several other unique characteristics reinforce the importance and prestige that a cloistered nun, regardless of her initial social status, could attain in Catholic societies at that time: freedom to devote herself to spirituality, unencumbered by other occupations and tasks; in some cases, being regarded as a good interpreter of signs of the divine will or an example on the path to holiness, with recognition also in the secular world; the ability to influence, or even act as an intermediary, in bringing others closer to God. The strength of a women's

monastic community is also built upon all these factors and the relationships it develops with the society in which it is established and from which it originates. This is why we find convents challenging orders from the Church itself and arguing against them in the name of justice and truth, as happened when measures were taken to excessively reinforce absolute cloistering. And such strength can even be almost unbeatable if one combines the advantages inherent to the monastery with those of belonging to a family within society: when, in 1642, there was a major economic, social and political crisis in Macau²³, the Poor Clares who were daughters of influential parents in the city and made up the majority in the only existing convent felt at liberty to speak out publicly against a conflict between the two male religious authorities (a jesuit and a franciscan) and even to threaten them that they would write letters of complaint to their relatives (Penalva 2011, pp. 103–4). Even without any important relatives nearby, certain nuns manage (thanks to their position or personal prestige) to assert their will with secular authorities regarding what they consider to be best for their own initiative or for the convent, in matters of devotion, relationships with entities, or others. Here is an example, relating to this same house and date: “To the demand by the merchants with access to power [that] they accept [in that monastery] women without dowries,” the abbess “responded with reticence. To the desire, on the part of the mercantile elite in power, to control the nuns [. . .] she responded negatively,” thus: “The city wants to be our patron, and offers us an [. . .] alms; but asks for some conditions, which do not befit our state, because they want to receive some girls without dowries, which we need for the upkeep of the convent, and they want to enter separately into our government: I told them [. . .] that the government and obedience of my order could not be given to anyone other than the prelates, to whom we promised it” (ibid., p. 102).

It is now necessary to ask: of all the characteristics of the life proper to consecrated women in cloister, which ones are known to lay society? And what behaviours do these give rise to in it?

4. In the Eyes of Society

The general characteristics of Catholic nunneries from the second half of the 16th century to the early 19th century (religious devotion, strict enclosure with rules, the emphasis on chastity and obedience, and, to a variable extent, poverty, the requirement of a dowry in order to profess²⁴) are known to society. There are various means of disseminating what is lived within the convent walls, both written (biographies, autobiographies, letters, poetry, memoirs, edifying accounts, loose papers, books), which are the most lasting and still available for consultation today, and oral (as reports from maids and other workers or collaborators of the monastery and conversations in the parlours between nuns and their family members), the fastest to circulate and the most volatile and adulterable. In Early Modern Age there is great porosity²⁵ between a female cloistered monastery and the city or town where it is located, as seen in this text and has been demonstrated over the last forty years by numerous studies covering various geographical areas (M. M. d. S. N. Lalande 1987 for the Azores, Portugal; M. E. M. Fernandes 1992 for Porto, Portugal; Zarri 2000 for Italy; Henneau 2004 for Europe and Canada; Novi Chavarria 2004 for Naples, Italy; Penalva 2011 for Macau; Evangelisti 2012 for Europe, Mexico and Canada; Atienza López 2013 for Europe and Mexico). Not even the new post-Trent architectural regulations²⁶, with the increase in walls, fences, grides and locked doors, managed to put an end to the contacts, mutual influences and exchanges between these two types of inhabitants of the same urban space. Visitors to a convent, particularly confessors and family members who go to the visiting room (‘locutory’), play a significant role in the circulation of information, ideas, letters, books and other objects between the inside and the outside of the monastery walls. Secular maids, whether employed by the convent or by individual nuns, move about the city as

freely as anyone who does not live in the convent, making them an important channel for communication, exchange of news and the passing of objects between the religious community and the surrounding society.

The fact that all kings and other lay Catholic rulers were expressly ordered by the Council of Trent to use their authority in all matters requested of them by the male clergy to ensure the implementation of the Decree on Regulars and Nuns constitutes unequivocal proof that the actions of regular religious, both male and female, are not confined to their convents and internal authorities: they are known within the lay society, and those within that society who hold the greatest political, administrative or judicial power are even obliged by the highest ecclesiastical authority to intervene in their resolution or correction. A religious community, and especially a female one, is an entity fully integrated into the surrounding society from which all or most of its members originate; helping it is, therefore, everyone's duty. And throughout the centuries, without interruption from the Middle Ages to the 18th century, convents for women are founded by kings and queens, by nobles, by private individuals of various social categories, and many of the houses have a perpetual obligation to pray for the founders and reserve a certain number of places for professed nuns for their relatives. In fact, "spiritual intercession was a resource that guaranteed the survival of cloistered communities" (Evangelisti 2012, p. 62).

From what it knows (as is clearly evident in the inquiries made by bishops and male religious orders into the lives, deaths and virtues of nuns considered especially exemplary), society attributes distinction to consecrated life and monastic communities as a whole, and, in individual terms, reinforces it with regard to each monk who is said to be a model in matters of faith and religious practice, to have appreciated personal qualities, enjoy a reputation for holiness or for intercession with God through some private devotion or public worship, or the exemplary nature and rigour of her daily life, or someone's perception of the miraculous accomplishment by her of something. "There were various means and countless opportunities to promote the image of strict observance and the good reputation of the community. In the 17th century, the patron saint's festivities, which were celebrated with great solemnity, with services accompanied by polyphonic chants and indulgences, were above all an opportunity to involve the nuns in the life of the city, thereby mitigating the separation imposed on them by the cloister. [. . . Furthermore,] a nun's reputation for holiness, and especially the presence of a miraculous image, enhanced the importance of a convent in its town" (Zarri 2007, para. 29). And "thanks to such extensive integration of women's monasteries into the urban space in which they are situated, the city's elites have a constant presence within them, indirect yet equally direct: the former through the "lessons" (texts, readings, examples and insights) and through shared prayers and devotions, and the latter through the family ties of many of the nuns. Neither of these worlds is alien to the other: they know and influence one another" (M. S. N. Lalanda 2014, p. 76). This interweaving of cultural and spiritual ties between consecrated and secular persons (both female and male), which reinforces common identities (and in many cases pre-existing ones, because they are within the same social or family group), can help us to understand certain choices and attitudes: "[It is necessary to study] the problems related not only to spiritual guidance, but also to family networks—so complex at the time and which often determine many 'family' devotions (which are, on a social level, also forms of solidarity), with cultural formation and with the readings of both religious and clerical figures and lay people, especially the nobility, whose *filter* of knowledge, virtue, and power—can be decisive in understanding the *success* or *failure* of both currents of spirituality and religious sentiment in a given historical period or in certain geographical areas" (M. d. L. C. Fernandes 1994, p. 153).

In this context, family solidarity is a deeply felt value in the act of entrusting a young woman and her dowry to the convent, without which it becomes almost impossible to be a professed nun with a black veil in a monastery. Let us dwell a little longer on this important matter. As the number of nuns authorized by the Pope to each community depends on the amount of its annual income (in order to provide for the sustenance of all its inhabitants and the various expenses necessary for the house), monasteries are obliged (no longer just “encouraged”, as in the decree of 1563) to own real estate that guarantees them perpetual income. Here is a summary of what is already known for certain about the dowry for (female) entry into religious life, thanks to various research works (such as [M. M. d. S. N. Lalanda 1987](#); [M. E. M. Fernandes 1992](#); [Novi Chavarria 2004](#)): the values of the dowry and those of its secondary elements, as well as their composition²⁷, are high and varie according to the Order, the determinations of the local bishop, the authorities of each convent, the era²⁸, the geographical area, the people involved²⁹; the most common situation involves a certain amount of money and/or land and income from land or houses, in addition to other diverse components. In the agreements negotiated between the dowry givers and the conventual authorities, before entry, the value and composition of each dowry are established, which may vary depending on whether or not family inheritances will include the future nun or the house. Each dowry is formally promised, in a notarized document, upon admission and is similarly ratified and delivered one or two months before the profession of perpetual vows of consecration to God within the framework of the monastery rules. With the receipt of the money and the titles of real estate or income, the convent becomes the sole owner of the land and/or the stipulated income and enjoys it until the end of time (“as long as the world lasts”), even after the nun’s death; if this income diminishes, even due to natural causes, the dowry providers or their heirs must replace it by another of the same amount or oblige its fulfillment with better lands, so that the conventual community is not harmed.

In the vast majority of cases, the dowry givers are the young woman’s parents; but if they do not have the necessary assets, or if they have already died, other relatives or friends may act as their substitutes. In some situations, close relatives undertake to guarantee the payment of the dowry, even if they are not the ones offering it; in others, the siblings or other heirs of the future professed monk expressly declare their renunciation of any inheritance related to the dowry, and even provide guarantors in case they act differently in the future. Among the donors who are not the parents there are priests, administrators of specific charitable funds, brothers, sisters, brothers-in-law, uncles, grandparents of the future nuns, and sometimes even a sister who, being already a nun, uses for this purpose the assets and income she may have through inheritances, donations or purchases. It also happens that someone donates a property or a sum of money to help a particular girl become a nun, or a private individual sets up a fund of assets and income specifically to enable a poor or disadvantaged relative of his, present or future, who wishes to embrace religious life. These practices are what make possible the existence, albeit in the minority, of nuns who do not come from the middle and upper strata of society in terms of prestige, influence, economic capacity and political power. There are some monasteries that are intended only for “poor and honourable maidens”, others accept postulants from all social categories, sometimes with quotas, and in the same city, even within the same Order, houses of these two types may be located next to one or more of the many that receive only female members of the local elites.

All this effort reveals the importance attributed by the most prestigious families, by those who become connected to them, and by those who imitate them when they become richer or increase in status—to the possibility of a daughter, sister, niece, granddaughter, or even a less close relative, becoming a cloistered nun. What are the reasons for this help?

First, the conviction that the condition of a consecrated woman will bring a greater chance of salvation for her own soul and for those of her relatives, through prayers and practices, according to the spirit of solidarity characteristic of Christianity. Thus, to empower a family member to become a nun is to help someone of one's own blood to consecrate her life to serving God with greater perfection and purity than in the secular world, to practice highly valued sanctifying virtues-obedience, penance, humility-and to intercede with God, through prayers, for her family and for society.

A second reason would be "quietude", that is, the tranquillity and security of a family, from which this member is no longer subject to the "dangers of the world". In other words, we are faced with the question of the importance of women's virginity and chastity, which are better guaranteed by monastic seclusion than in the secular world. But we must add a more subtle reason, rarely expressed: for society too, especially for the stability of marriages and the good name of families, it is safer not to have a large surplus of girls of childbearing age without the possibility of marriage, at a time when many young men (especially Portuguese and Spanish in Europe, the East, Latin America and Africa) are responding to numerous demands for geographical mobility for military, religious, commercial, naval and administrative reasons. An unwanted abundance of unmarried maidens in families with higher social and economic status also constitutes a danger to their world. By becoming a monk, whether by her own free will, by family decision, or for both reasons, a young Catholic woman in the Modern Era ceases to be a potential competitor to her blood sisters in the (reduced) "marriage market" appropriate to her family's status, thus increasing the chances of them forming worthy marital alliances and, therefore, of increasing the material and symbolic patrimony to be enjoyed by future generations.

A third set of reasons for the strong family solidarity demonstrated in establishing the dowry essential to religious profession is generated by the combination of matrimonial policies and strategies of patrimonial indivisibility (certain sets of assets passed down as a whole from generation to generation to the eldest son, according to the inheritance system) that equate, in terms of increasing or maintaining its prestige, the family as a whole and not each member in isolation. In this vision of family cohesion and value, the head of the lineage can manage both assets and individual destinies in a balanced way (for example: combining the entry of a girl into a convent with the marriage of another).

Another important feature is the policy of placing daughters, sisters, nieces and even granddaughters in monasteries, with a view to achieving the objectives already mentioned, as well as their future progress in the exercise of conventual responsibilities and the establishment or expansion of a network of contacts and influence in the ecclesiastical world for these nuns and their families. In towns and cities where there is more than one convent for women, the prestige of each Order and of each house also weighs in on the choice. It is not unusual for a couple to send one or more daughters to a monastery where a close relative is already a professed nun. Strategies varie: some families choose to concentrate their various young women destined for religious life in the same cloistered house, while others prefer to distribute them among two or more convents (M. M. d. S. N. Lalanda 1987)³⁰. It is therefore understandable that elections for the position of abbess were sometimes particularly contested, with groups of 'Sisters' in religion (but many also united by kinship) supporting candidates who almost always belong to specific families and networks of power; it is equally understandable that aunts and nieces, blood sisters and cousins are elected, in the same term or sequentially, to important positions in a community³¹. Outside the walls and over decades, male relatives of the nuns from the most important and wealthy families locally hold positions of power and prestige as political, judicial, religious, or other, authorities, and frequently attempt to interfere in conventual elections in a way that favors their relatives.

These European realities are transposed with some specificities to the American and Eastern territories. Portugal, the first country to expand from Europe to three other continents, from the 15th century until the mid-17th century only allows the creation of two shelters³² in Brazil, one for Franciscan tertiaries for widows and other women and one for the education of orphans, followed by others there and in India; its first female convent on non-European soil is founded in 1606 in Goa, for Augustinian nuns, the second in 1633 in Macau by Poor Clares, both during the period (1580–1640) in which the Portuguese and Spanish empires are ruled by the same king but remain separate. After decades of systematic refusals by the Crown to requests from individuals and institutions in Brazil, only from 1677 onwards is there a monastery, run by Poor Clares, in Salvador da Bahia, a city that also has, since 1744, one of Conceptionists (but with Poor Clares as the abbess and the initial vicar and mistress), in addition to two of Ursulines (from the 1730s, but only later formalized as such), and in Rio de Janeiro a Poor Clare's one is founded in 1750 and a Carmelite one in 1751. Spain adopts an opposite position to that of Portugal: as early as 1540 (only about 30 years after the beginning of its presence in the territory and 20 years after the conquest) it has its first female monastery on the American continent, of Conceptionists, in Mexico City³³; after it, a Poor Clare monastery in 1552 and a Dominican one in 1560, both in Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic), and one of Augustinian nuns in 1561 in Lima (Peru), each originating from a shelter, and to these are added one of Augustinian nuns in 1564 in Santiago (Chile), one in 1574 in Mexico and one in 1580 in Lima, both of Poor Clares, plus three of Conceptionists in 1578 in Guatemala, in 1598 in Panama and in 1599 in Cuzco (Ecuador)—one in 1609 in Lima and one in 1613 in Córdoba (Argentina), both of Dominican nuns, one of Poor Clares in 1625 in Santa Fé de Bogotá (Colombia), one of Carmelites in 1628 in Córdoba (founder in 1745 of the first in Buenos Aires), and others (Lavrín). In the East, in the Philippines, since 1621 there is a Poor Clares' monastery in Manila (from where some nuns will found the one in Macau in the following decade). During this period, France founds, in addition to a non-cloistered Congregation of active life (in 1658 in the city of Montréal, Canada), four cloistered convents for women in North America: in the city of Quebec (Canada) in 1639, one of Ursulines, to educate indigenous girls (the only initial recipients) and French girls, and one of Augustinians (of the mercy of Jesus), to care for the health of all (colonists and natives, poor and rich) in its hospital; in Trois-Rivières (Canada) in 1697 an Ursuline monastery (whose nuns come from the one in Quebec) for the instruction of girls and treatment of the sick, as there were few children there; in New Orleans, Louisiana (now in the United States) in 1727 an Ursuline convent, intended for the education of girls of all social, economic, and ethnic origins, both free and enslaved, which also had the functions of an orphanage and a hospital. In summary: (a) In the 16th to 18th centuries, in the non-African overseas territories of the two Iberian empires, female monasteries are authorized, all with strict enclosure and contemplative life; (b) Both in the Americas and in the East, Portuguese and Spanish entities have to resolve a completely new situation: acceptance or rejection as nuns, by each monastic house and by the kings, of young indigenous women and those born to Europeans with natives; (c) The policy of the Spanish Crown consists of providing, as soon as possible, with at least one of these communities the main city of each region, in order to evangelize the native female populations, attract and settle its European colonists and their families, provide training and a dignified social position for their descendants (both those who would become nuns and others), and encourage the reproduction of the same practices (of connection to monasteries and of a patrimonial and matrimonial system concentrated on a male heir to the detriment of several daughters) of the urban elites of Spain; (d) Over three hundred years, the Portuguese Crown authorizes in Brazil only six convents for women (four in the first capital and two in its future successor), six exceptions to its policy

of repeatedly prohibiting these houses (despite their strong demand from local residents); it claims these are the reasons for it: initially, a demographic shortage of European settlers, especially women from good families, for whom the Crown defines as a priority that they marry in the colony and become mothers and stabilizing elements in the families of the colonists, since “the settlement policy depended on a marriage policy” (Silva 2000, p. 206); later, on the one hand, the existence of many female convents in Portugal mainland, to which several young women residing in the colony went, so that there should only be houses for missionaries in the colony, and, on the other hand, the Crown did not want these communities to accumulate many properties through dowries and inheritances, in addition to tax exemptions that were detrimental to royal interests, which led it to legislate more restrictively in Brazil (Santos 2011); (e) French kings choose to have in their extra-European territories, located only in North America, female monasteries which, although cloistered, are dedicated to instruction and health care, both for the native populations and for all types of colonists.

From all known actions, it is clear that the higher social groups see the convent as a space of protection and security for their girls and young women, some of whom are interned there from a very young age. Education and training are two attractive functions of the monastery, in three dimensions of learning: reading, writing and arithmetic; Christian doctrine and practices of prayer and action, including Gregorian chant for liturgical celebrations; initiation into sewing, embroidery and other crafts or artistic practices. There may also be lessons in a musical instrument (organ, viola, harp) or singing, as is the case for students and professed nuns. The female monastery shapes character and educates. It is thus seen as very useful, even for those who will not become nuns; therefore, there are parents who choose it solely for the formation of their daughters, who leave before applying for the novitiate because becoming professed nuns was never their goal. On the contrary, for many of the young women, the shaping environment of their families will help them to relate more intimately to religious life and to choose it for themselves, which in some cases, and possibly very frequently (which we can assume but not measure), corresponds to the prior wishes of their parents. And thus arises another mediation and adoption by the secular world of characteristics of the consecrated world: there are residences of families from high and middle strata of secular society in which girls and young women are being prepared to become nuns in the future. In addition to common religious practices, they are taught to write, to read (independently or by listening to others read aloud), first catechisms and then books on spirituality and biographies of saints, and even, in a more advanced education, to sing or play a musical instrument (which can be a positive differentiating factor when intending to enter the monastery for the novitiate, at a time when these houses are usually overcrowded), thus becoming accustomed and fond of both prayer practices and the idea of becoming cloistered nuns. In many dowry promise contracts (note that in these documents and in those of ratification and delivery the presence of the young women is only mentioned in the very rare cases in which they self-dow because they are emancipated or of legal age) the parents (the couple or just the father) state that they raised their daughters with this very objective; and even more: “so that in the said state [of nuns] they may more securely serve God Our Lord, free from all hindrance and occasions that could hinder their service in the world”, and “with this creation [they] were inclined to become professed nuns in that said convent” (M. M. d. S. N. Lalanda 1987, pp. 125, 128).

5. Final Considerations

The worldview and construction characteristic of contemplative Catholic female monastic communities from the 16th to the 18th centuries is rooted in a higher order of behaviour: adherence to the salvific model of Jesus Christ. The level of commitment

of the group to this construction depends on each nun's identification with this project, already present in the normative system. The result is a doctrinal and power system whose general orientation is based on the acceptance of the rules and norms constituting the different religious Orders and whose effective direction, facilitated by the vow of full obedience pronounced by all members, is ensured by an abbess, assisted by several other nuns in the decisions and actions considered most important. The primary purpose of the walls of a cloistered female monastery is to delimit the religious space, so that the consecrated community can concentrate all its individual and communal efforts of self-analysis and spiritual improvement, defend itself from external dangers, and preserve its identity, distinct from the worldly one, guided by the written rules of its Order. Avoiding contamination by other models of behaviour and values is a fundamental function of the abbess and various internal authorities of the house. To ensure that the entry of lay people and friars into the monastic space, often necessary for various reasons, will not be a potential threat to sanctification and a possible corruption of essential values, especially the vow of chastity, one of the hallmarks of the 16th-century Catholic Reformation is to demand absolute enclosure (no exits for those enclosed, nor, except for specific authorizations, entry of outsiders) as an inseparable condition of the status of a consecrated woman, whatever the type of vows or charism of her religious community; the analysis now made of normative texts and documented practices allows us to perceive the limits encountered in the implementation of this measure as universal and the spaces encompassed in the designation "enclosure".

Several situations observed in convents during the Early Modern Age and mentioned here prove that, even after the reinforcement of external control since the Council of Trent, living within a strong collective feminine identity does not generate passivity or lack of personality: sometimes individually and other times as a community, these religious women act and react freely, argue against ecclesiastical decisions they consider unjust or detrimental to the vows they have sworn, find varied ways to practice activities they enjoy, and, simultaneously, many of them exercise power and influence inside and outside the monastery. They demonstrate a full awareness of their identity as nuns and also as mediators in relation to people in society outside the walls, with whom there is a great permeability of contacts. Some of these interactions are even consciously encouraged by religious authorities, such as the readings and practices of spirituality in which the nuns act as models on the path to secular holiness, and sometimes not only feminine holiness. Complementing this picture, such particularities and specificities of female monastic life and formation are highly valued by the surrounding secular society: many young women aspire to be nuns, and the elites, whose example is followed by the middle classes, place several of their daughters in monasteries to be educated there and, for the most part, to become professed nuns. After all, in these times, religious identity and secular identity are not constructed solely through reciprocal opposition.

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Notes

- ¹ On the important and divisive subject of enclosure as required by the Council of Trent and subsequent legislation, see the cases discussed in [Novi Chavarria \(2017\)](#), ‘Voci di dissenso [...]’ and, including the bibliography cited therein, [Atienza López \(2013\)](#), ‘El mundo de las monjas [...]’, [Atienza López \(2018\)](#), ‘Los límites de la obediencia [...]’, [Evangelisti \(2012\)](#), *Storia delle Monache* [...], [Henneau \(2004\)](#), ‘La Femme et le cloître [...]’, [Moiteiro \(2018\)](#), ‘Obedience and enclosure [...]’, [Novi Chavarria \(2004\)](#), ‘Nuns and noblewomen [...]’, [Zarri \(2000\)](#), ‘Enclosures [...]’ and [Zarri \(2007\)](#), ‘The cloister [...]’.
- ² There are references to topics covered, questions raised or studies from various fields in [Atienza López \(2013\)](#), ‘El mundo de las monjas [...]’, [Atienza López \(2018\)](#), ‘Los límites de la obediencia [...]’, [Evangelisti \(2012\)](#), *Storia delle Monache* [...], [Henneau \(2004\)](#), ‘La Femme et le cloître [...]’, [Henneau \(2008\)](#), ‘Regard historiographique [...]’, [M. S. N. Lalanda \(2020\)](#), ‘Problemas e bases [...]’ and [Lavrin \(1990\)](#), ‘Female Religious’.
- ³ “Periculoso” Decree, in 1298, with which this Pontiff intended to make enclosure and the three solemn vows universal for nuns.
- ⁴ (*Constituições geraes [...] 1693*, chap. VIII, pp. 101–2, 105). In the Catholic world from the 15th to the 18th centuries, the Franciscan Family was the most numerous in houses and members, and the same is true of its Order of St. Clare in the context of all female Orders and Congregations.
- ⁵ *ibid.*, Notas ao Capítulo III [Notes to Chapter III], p. 219; this same note mentions on p. 221 the positions of the Sacred Congregation of Regulars on this matter.
- ⁶ By omitting or disregarding essential circumstances requiring departure (such as enemy attacks, or the need to go and found or reform another community, or to hold office within it)—circumstances already provided for centuries ago in the original Rules—we think this provision has not been observed: this is the conclusion drawn from the commentary of 1688, recalling the six legitimate cases of leave for Poor Clares and Conceptionists, in (*Primera, y segunda regla [...] 1688*, pp. 156–59).
- ⁷ Some non-normative texts also refer to total closure as a “vote”.
- ⁸ According to Gilberto Moiteiro, a specialist in the history of the female monks of the Order of St. Dominic, “the only promise that Dominican nuns make at the moment of their profession [is] the vow of obedience”, which is directly related to “the principle of enclosure”; “the vow of obedience seems not to need any other, since the fulfillment of the others depends on it”. ([Moiteiro 2018](#), ‘Obedience and enclosure [...]’, pp. 28, 34).
- ⁹ Let us pay attention to the abysmal different way in which male enclosure is understood in the oldest form of monastic life, the Rule of St. Benedict, here in an edition subsequent to the Council of Trent: “Our Father St. Benedict says that going out was not fitting for salvation; but because if in no case were they not allowed to go out, temporal things would suffer detriment, without which it is very difficult to live, we establish and declare that, according to what Pope Martin V commanded [...], they may go out” to attend to matters of the Order, the house, personal health, “& in addition to these necessary outings [...] they shall be given some recreations” (*Constituições [sic] da Ordem [...]*, chap. XXXXXIII, 138–138v°).
- ¹⁰ Monasteries always have a proxy (procurator), called ‘syndic’, who carries out the extramural procedures that allow the abbess’s decisions to be fulfilled, with the assistance of the vicar and some “discreet”, in what concerns the management of assets.
- ¹¹ (*Constituições geraes [...] 1693*, chap. VII, p. 100); obedience is dealt with in Chapter VI, and poverty in Chapter V. In the texts of some other Orders the three vows are also linked, although the sequence may be different.
- ¹² To have an “active voice” means being able to vote on community decisions and its offices; having a “passive voice” means being eligible for these offices.
- ¹³ In [Lalanda and Gonçalves \(1988\)](#), “Rule and Community: the Powers [...]”, the requirements for this are indicated and these examples are given: being the founder or patroness of that house (976), attending choir with the students, occupying a vacant place as a pupil of the choir, absence of the husband (989); the latter may be temporary or due to death.
- ¹⁴ See Section 4.
- ¹⁵ Examples of activities can be found in “3. Living the condition of a professed nun”.
- ¹⁶ (*Constituições geraes [...] 1693*, chap. VI, pp. 98–99). In addition to the professed nuns, the novices are present at the beginning; they leave with their mistress nun after speaking one by one and having heard the advice given to them by the male authority. “On Obedience” is the elucidative title of this chapter 6 of these Constitutions.
- ¹⁷ Chapter VII of the Rule, translated from Latin by ([Capela 1983](#), p. 176).
- ¹⁸ In 49 fully transcribed Visits, with the original spelling of the 17th and 18th centuries, on pp. 397–489 of vol. II of *Clarissas em Portugal [...]*.
- ¹⁹ Among these, we highlight, due to their abundance and widespread dissemination (many were published immediately), the autobiographies, ordered by the confessors, and the biographies/hagiographies; all of them extensively reveal the daily lives and practices of these nuns considered exemplary, and sometimes also refer to those of others. Indications of various other types of useful sources for studies on nuns can be found in [Atienza López \(2013\)](#), ‘El mundo de las monjas [...]’, [Henneau \(2004\)](#), ‘La Femme et le cloître [...]’, [Henneau \(2008\)](#), ‘Regard historiographique [...]’ and [M. S. N. Lalanda \(2020\)](#), ‘Problemas e bases [...]’.

- ²⁰ The term ‘citizens’ at this time refers to the men of the so-called ‘local nobility’, that is, those from the highest social strata in urban areas, who governed the city.
- ²¹ The references made here and in points 2 and 4 to other real, documented, experiences of the nuns are not intended to be an exhaustive list.
- ²² It is with this sincerity that, amongst others, some 18th-century nuns express themselves; we currently have a text at the printer’s on their biographies, which were published at the time.
- ²³ Macau was a city under dual jurisdiction: Chinese sovereignty over the Chinese population and the entire territory, and Portuguese autonomous administration over the Portuguese. In their interactions with this one, several nuns have distinguished themselves by taking public stance on political, social and economic issues, as illustrated.
- ²⁴ The requirement of a dowry is intended to ensure compliance with both Chapter III of the Decree “De regularibus et monialibus” and its stipulation that each monastic house must possess sufficient income for its entire population, as well as subsequent decisions making a dowry mandatory for each applicant for a position as a professed nun. Communities bound by Rules of absolute poverty or by sustenance through alms from others and the sale of objects made by them, such as the Poor Clares of the First Rule, the Discalced Conceptionists and the Discalced Carmelites, have always been few, and are becoming even rarer at this time.
- ²⁵ In recent years, the expression most commonly used to describe this characteristic is “permeability”, the one adopted in 2005 by [Lehfeldt \(2005\)](#).
- ²⁶ A summary of the architectural changes decided upon by the Catholic Reformation, especially by the powerful Archbishop of Milan, Carlo Borromeo, in 1599, can be found in [Evangelisti \(2012\)](#), *Storia delle Monache* [...], pp. 51–52.
- ²⁷ The composition depends on variable factors, such as the region (dowries include its main agricultural production), the characteristics of each land and income, the amount of currency in circulation, the preferences of the convent or of the family: see ([M. S. N. Lalanda 2020](#)), “Problemas [...]”, p. 126.
- ²⁸ In the 17th century, various economic or financial crises led, in some cases, to an increase in the usual value of the dowry, or, as in Naples, to the requirement of an annual life annuity paid to each nun by her family ([Novi Chavarria 2004](#), *Monache e Gentildonne* [...], pp. 113, 115).
- ²⁹ Examples found of variations in the dowry amount depending on the people involved: reduction, or even total exemption from payment, because the applicant is a good performer of a musical instrument or because her father habitually provides services (health or other) to the religious community.
- ³⁰ We think that [M. M. d. S. N. Lalanda \(1987\)](#), *A Admissão* [...] was the first study to demonstrate the existence of these different family practices simultaneously in the same town.
- ³¹ This situation is documented for various geographical locations. It has been studied most extensively in Italian cities, where a candidate’s entry into religious life could depend on the decision of the noble family with power over the desired female monastery or on the decision of the city’s rulers.
- ³² A shelter does not house nuns or female monks, but rather sheltered, women who may be in any state except that of professed religious.
- ³³ All of these designations are those of today, not those of that time.

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