

Religious Institutes and Catholic Culture in 19th- and 20th-Century Europe

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THE SCANDINAVIAN MISSION OF THE SISTERS OF SAINT JOSEPH

A FEMALE COUNTER-CULTURE IN NORDIC SOCIETY

YVONNE MARIA WERNER

It is well known that Catholic nuns and sisters played an important role in modern society, and that they in many ways paved the way for the entrance of women into professional life within the social sector. Modern research has also pointed out their social achievements as missionaries in the Third World.¹ But it is less known that female Catholic congregations also gave leadership to schools, hospitals and other social institutions in Protestant countries in northern Europe. These religious institutes accompanied the re-establishment of the Catholic Church in Scandinavia in the mid-nineteenth century. This article will examine the Scandinavian missionary activities of one of these institutes, a French congregation named *La Congrégation des Sœurs de Saint-Joseph* from Chambéry in Savoy. The Sisters of St Joseph started their missionary work with a small community in the Danish capital Copenhagen in 1856. Sixty years later there were around eight hundred St Joseph Sisters living in communities spread across the Nordic area. The Chambéry congregation, which developed

¹ In international research, there is an increasing interest in female religious institutes and their contribution to church and society in the modern period. In his monumental work *Le Catholicisme au féminin*, Claude Langlois highlights this subject, as does Mary Peckham Magray in *The Transforming Power of the Nuns*, Giancarlo Rocca in *Donne religiose*, Yvonne Turin in *Femmes et religieuses au XIX^e siècle*, Relinde Meiwes, in *Arbeiterinnen des Herrn*, and Jo Ann Kay McNamara in *Sisters in Arms*; De Maeyer, Leplae and Schmiedl, eds., *Religious Institutes in Western Europe*. See also the article by Patrick Bircher in this volume.

a broad range of activities within health care and education, was the most successful of the female religious institutes at work in Scandinavia.²

Up until the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), regulated religious life was an integral part of a comprehensive Catholic worldview, which stood in sharp contrast to the liberal ideology that served as a basis for the constitutional development of the modern state. Catholicism, as a result, developed into a counter-culture with obvious anti-modern characteristics.³ The religious were at the forefront of this Catholic system, and monastic life was regarded as the most accomplished expression of Catholic piety. It represented the Catholic counter-culture in its most radical form, which explains why the harsh conflicts between church and state in many countries at that time chiefly affected religious orders.⁴ In the Nordic countries, where Protestantism was an integral part of national identity, Catholicism appeared as a counter-culture in a double sense; it not only represented a foreign and superstitious religion, but also a different world view and culture. Catholic religious institutes were believed to be particularly dangerous, especially the female ones, which were seen as tools of 'Roman propaganda'.⁵

These anti-Catholic sentiments were for a part due to the traditional Nordic view on women's role in society. The Lutheran doctrine of vocation and the household (Haustafel), which strongly emphasised the reproductive and domestic duties of women, still functioned as a generally recognised social ideology in Nordic society. Marriage was given prominence, while at the same time lifelong and celibate monastic life was condemned as unnatural and unethical. Many of the pioneers of the early women's movement were influenced, directly or indirectly, by this Lutheran gender ideology. To legitimise their socio-political engagement in society, they tried to enlarge the domestic sphere to include social activities.⁶ The subordinated role of women was also stressed within the Catholic tradition. But here the regulated religious life offered an alternative to marriage that was not only accepted, but was also regarded as having superior worth. According to classical Catholic doctrine, vocation only refers to clerical office and regulated religious life. The calling is achieved through individuals consecrating their lives wholly to God, which in practice implies placing oneself completely at the service of the church. Prior to the reforms of Vatican II, it was common to speak of regulated religious life as a 'state of perfection'

² This article connects to results presented in my monograph *Kvinnlig motkultur*. See also Werner, ed., *Nuns and Sisters in Scandinavia*. A rich quantity of material exists that describes the Nordic work of the St Joseph Sisters. In this article, information from the following archives has been used: the congregation's former French motherhouse in Chambéry (ASSJC), the provincial archives in Copenhagen (SJSK), the congregation's collection at the National Archives in Stockholm (SJSAS, RA), *L'Œuvre de la Propagation de la Foi* (EPF), located in the central archives of the *Œuvres Pontificales Missionnaires* in Lyon (AOPM), and *Archivio Storico de Propaganda Fide* in the Vatican (ASPF).

³ Gabriel, *Christentum zwischen Tradition und Postmoderne*, 69-119; Blaschke, "Der Dämon des Konfessionalismus".

⁴ For example, Sorrel, *Les Catholiques Savoyards*, 111-119.

⁵ Werner, *Kvinnlig motkultur*, 167-177.

⁶ Baumann, *Protestantismus und Frauenemanzipation*; Hammar, *Emancipation och religion*; Hill Lindley, ed., *You Have Stepped Out of Your Place*; Markkola, ed., *Gender and Vocation*; Norseth, 'La os bryte over tvert med vor stumhet'.

and the monastic life-style served as a model also for Christian laity.⁷ These features re-emphasised the position of Catholic women religious as a counter-culture in Nordic society.

In the period after 1850, the Catholic Church's position in Europe was strengthened both in the political and cultural spheres. This development grew out of the ultramontane revivalist movement, which from the 1830s onwards had an increasing influence in the Catholic world.⁸ The success of ultramontanism contributed to the renewal of Counter-Reformation confessionalism, and led to an upswing in missionary activity across the world, also in Protestant countries. The Catholic ecclesiology of the period laid great emphasis on the Catholic Church's claim to be the one and only true church. Consequently, even officially Christian, but non-Catholic, countries were regarded as mission fields.⁹ The Nordic countries, which until 1953 had the status of Apostolic Vicariates under the supervision of the Roman *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*, were thus subject to Catholic missionary activity.¹⁰ Catholic sisters played a significant role in this missionary activity, and in many ways were the vanguard of Catholic counter-culture in the Nordic countries.

Several studies have shown the importance of religion both as a hindrance for the emancipation movement and as an instrument of empowerment used by women. It has been noted that religious engagement, not least in missionary movements or in female religious orders and congregations, offered women an alternative to their confined, domestic sphere.¹¹ Hence, it is interesting to discuss the Nordic apostolate of the St Joseph Sisters in this perspective, and the question of whether these religious can be regarded as an alternative emancipation movement in Scandinavia.

SPIRITUALITY, CONSOLIDATION AND MISSION ACTIVITIES

The Chambéry congregation, which was founded in 1816 and granted papal approval in 1861, represented the new form of female apostolate that had developed after the Reformation. This was characterised by the absence of solemn vows and strict enclosure; instead, the sisters lived according to so-called simple vows with restricted enclosure, which enabled greater involvement in working in schools, nursing, and welfare.¹² In the 19th century, such religious institutes became the dominant forms of regulated female religious life in the Catholic world, and they played an important role both in the Catholic revival and restoration linked to the ultramontane movement and in the expanding Catholic missionary work across the globe. Consequently,

⁷ Dander, "Berufung zum Priester- und Ordensstand", 284-285.

⁸ Lönne, "Katholizismusforschung", 29-170. For a theological reflection, see Pottmeyer, *Die Rolle des Papsttums*, 30-94.

⁹ Gadille and Zorn, "Der neue Missionseifer", 133-155, 162-164. See also Prudhomme, *Stratégie missionnaire du Saint-Siège*.

¹⁰ About Catholic mission and conversion in the Nordic countries, see Werner, *Nordisk katolicism*.

¹¹ See for example: Götz von Olenhusen, "Die Feminisierung von Religion", 69-88; Busch, "Die Feminisierung der ultramontanen Frömmigkeit", 203-220; Meiwes, "Arbeiterinnen des Herrn"; Okkenhaug, ed. *Gender, Race and Religion*.

¹² Sastre Santos, *La vita religiosa*, 848-852.

women religious received a 'quasi-clerical' status, and bishops and parish priests began to refer to them as co-workers and missionaries.¹³ Catholic sisters contributed to building up a modern, but at the same time thoroughly Catholic, educational system, and they were in many ways pioneers in the fields of nursing and health care. Through their schools, orphanages, old people's homes, and other institutions, they contributed to the creation of the specific 'milieu Catholicism' that characterised the Catholic Church from the 1850s onwards.¹⁴ France took a leading role in this development, and many of the most expansive female congregations were of French origin. One of these was the Chambéry congregation, which already in the 1840s had started a mission in India.

The life and work of the St Joseph Sisters were governed by the congregation's rule, with its many regulations and detailed instructions for daily life. Contact with the outside world should be avoided, if practicable, and the sisters were urged to cultivate their inner religious life. Through retreats and collective spiritual exercises, the sisters nurtured and affirmed this ascetic spirit. Letters, reports, and not least obituaries give unequivocal testimony to the immense efforts made by the sisters to attain this ascetic ideal, especially in retreats of various kinds and in the face of death. In the noviciate, the sisters received practical training in the congregation's social, educational, or nursing outreach. Yet, the emphasis was on religious and ascetic formation. The rituals of consecration and the taking of vows signified the different steps towards full membership of the congregation. The habit, which had a symbolic function, was further an indication of ecclesiastical status. It showed that the wearer belonged to the 'state of perfection' and accordingly, was pledged to live a Christian life in a more radical way.¹⁵

According to the congregation's rule, the superiors were to act as mothers to the subordinate sisters, and these in return were required to show them reverence and respect as well as to obey their instructions without murmur. Regular and repeated visitations existed to maintain discipline and strengthen the primacy of spiritual life in the convents. These visitations were particularly important when there was discord within a community. Many of the disputes documented that have been examined involve national antagonism between German and French sisters. By the end of the 19th century, the number of German sisters was growing, and by the beginning of the 20th, they were in a majority.¹⁶ However, the provincial superior and her assistants continued to be recruited from the French group; by the 1910s, this gave rise to protest from the German sisters. The issue came to a head in connection with a Roman visita-

¹³ McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, 600-627; Sastre Santos, *La vita religiosa*. 805 ff.

¹⁴ Altermatt, "Katholizismus. Antimodernismus mit modernen Mitteln", 33-50. See also Langlois, *Le Catholicisme au féminin*, 628-648. Regarding the concept of 'Milieu Catholicism', see Blaschke and Kuhlemann, "Religion in Geschichte und Gesellschaft", 7-56.

¹⁵ Werner, *Kvinnlig motkultur*, 229-237.

¹⁶ Werner, *Kvinnlig motkultur*, 58-72, 222-229.

tion in 1920.¹⁷ The antipathy between French and German sisters was later resolved by strengthening the province's Danish character.¹⁸

In many ways, the history of the Chambéry congregation is typical of its time and reflects the general trend within charitable female congregations in the 19th century. Under its first superior general, the congregation was a diocesan-related religious institute, administered by the bishop and his vicar general.¹⁹ A new phase began with Marie-Félicité (Veyrat). During her forty-two years as superior general, the Chambéry congregation evolved from a religious society of pious women, to a modern, centralised congregation with total female leadership. An important instrument in this development was the congregation's constitution, which was designed for a diocesan-related religious institute and was thus hardly suitable for the mission that the congregation now assumed. Marie-Félicité succeeded in revising the constitution, transforming the congregation into a supra-diocesan religious institute, divided into provinces, and placed directly under the jurisdiction of the Holy See. This was a great victory for Marie-Félicité and also a recognition of the congregation's missionary efforts, which were explicitly mentioned in its decree of confirmation.²⁰ Here, the sisters' activities in Scandinavian mission played a central role, particularly in the growing Danish mission.

ESTABLISHMENT IN SCANDINAVIA

Denmark was the first Nordic country to introduce complete freedom of religion. Through the bloodless revolution of 1849, the country gained a new constitution and was transformed from an absolute monarchy with strict legislation on religion, into a liberal state, governed by law and with religious freedom – in principle, at least. In Sweden, the dissenters' laws of 1860 and 1873 made it possible for Swedish subjects to convert to officially recognised denominations, but there were still strict limitations on withdrawing from the established Church of Sweden. Similar conditions existed in Norway. Since 1783, the Catholic mission in Sweden, which after 1814 also included Norway, had been organised as an apostolic vicariate directly under the Holy See. Denmark was part of the Nordic missions that since 1841 had come under the aegis of the Catholic Bishop of Osnabrück. Norway became an independent apostolic prefecture in 1869, while Denmark only gained autonomy from Osnabrück in 1892; in the same year, the Norwegian mission was upgraded to an apostolic vicariate.²¹

Female religious convents, joined later by monasteries, accompanied the return of the Catholic Church. The religious institutes that came to the Nordic countries were

¹⁷ ASPF, N.S. 1921/105; Marie-Geneviève to Bishop Diepen, 27 June 1920; Diepen, *Rapport de la Visitation Apostolique de Danemarc et Island*, 6 January 1921.

¹⁸ This is reflected in the chronicle of the Danish province: SJSK, *Den danske Provinces Journal*, 1922-1939.

¹⁹ Bouchage, *Chronique de la Congrégation des Sœurs de Saint-Joseph de Chambéry*, 57-339; Silvestre, *Sœurs de Saint-Joseph de Chambéry 1650-1985*, 29-30.

²⁰ Demain, *Mère Marie-Félicité*, 123-126, 132-139. This decree is included in all editions of the constitutions until the 1960s.

²¹ Werner, *Nordisk katolicism*, 49-61.

mostly so-called active orders or congregations, who helped in parishes or ran private schools, orphanages, or nursing homes. At the beginning of the 20th century, more than a thousand such women were at work in Scandinavia.²² The Catholic Church faced strong opposition in Nordic society. Public opinion was concerned with the 'Catholic danger', and many considered Catholicism to be a threat to their country's integrity and national identity. Here the so called 'monastic issue', i.e. the question of Catholic religious communities and their right to settle down in the country, played an important role, and this was seen as being above all a women's question. The Catholic religious institutes, of which the majority were female, were regarded as dangerous instruments of Catholic propaganda, insidious in their attempt to lure Scandinavian women into the Catholic Church.²³

Marie-Félicité was the driving force behind the Chambéry congregation's Scandinavian project. During the initial period the sisters faced many difficulties and became enmeshed in all kinds of conflicts, partly due to misunderstandings about their work, and partly to national antagonism.²⁴ The Catholic clergy in Copenhagen were all German in origin. In this particular dispute, the St Joseph Sisters received decisive support from Rome, and in a letter of 1859, Pope Pius IX expressed his support for the sisters' apostolic mission in Denmark. This settled the matter, and the papal declaration was put into effect in a formal decision by the Bishop of Osnabrück a few weeks later.²⁵ Another important factor was the subsidy that the Nordic missions received from the French *Œuvre de la Propagation de la Foi*, the largest of all Catholic mission organisations at the time. Bestowed with a variety of papal privileges, the Œuvre had the official task of supporting missionary work without regard for nationality.²⁶ Nevertheless, bearing in mind the nationalistic sentiments of the time, one can assume that the Œuvre would have been less willing to give grants to the German-led Nordic missions, if the French sisters had been forced to withdraw from Denmark.

The next step was to consolidate the position of the Chambéry congregation in Sweden and Norway. Conflict abounded during the initial period in Stockholm, and here, too, antagonism derived from xenophobic suspicions and misapprehensions about the work of the sisters. When in 1862 the St Joseph Sisters founded a community in Stockholm, the city was already host to another female congregation, namely the French *Filles du Cœur de Marie*. Relations between the two congregations were often strained, as both ran French girls' schools and were thus competitors. The St Joseph Sisters also came into conflict with the local clergy. Relations deteriorated further when Italian Barnabites, a clerical fraternity founded in Milan in 1530, arrived in Stockholm and the Norwegian capital Christiania on the initiative of Marie-Féli-

²² Malchau and Nilsen, "Appendix. Tables and Figures", 420-428.

²³ Werner, *Kvinnlig motkultur*, 167-177. There are many similarities with the situation in Great Britain. Also here, the female religious institutes, not least the French ones, played an important role. See O'Brien, "French Nuns in nineteenth-century England".

²⁴ There are photocopies of the complete correspondence between Chambéry, Copenhagen and Osnabrück regarding these matters in SJSÅK.

²⁵ AOPM, ŒPF, D1: Marie-Félicité to L'Œuvre, 10 February 1860.

²⁶ Rivinius, "Die Entwicklung des Missionsgedankens", 222-223.

cit . She pushed for the Barnabites to take responsibility both for the entire Swedish-Norwegian mission and for co-operation between the two congregations active in the Nordic mission. The Barnabite general had similar aspirations. However, their plans met with resistance from the apostolic vicar in Stockholm, and with the reorganisation of the Nordic mission in 1869, the Barnabites gradually withdrew from Scandinavia.²⁷

These conflicts have created a large amount of source material that reflects contemporary mentalities and relationships. What is particularly striking is that the Catholic sisters behaved as if they were the equals of vicars, of members of male orders, and – to a certain extent – even of prelates and bishops. A vicar could not, for example, order sisters to take on any work without first discussing a contract with the superior concerned, which was then approved by the motherhouse in Chamb ry. Marie-F licit  conducted negotiations in her own name with Rome. When facing opposition, she appealed directly to the Roman Curia, and generally gained the improvements she sought.²⁸ Her strong position is also shown in the way that she obtained permission from the Holy See to be re-elected as superior general even when she had exceeded the constitutionally prescribed period of twelve years.²⁹ She successfully appealed to Rome for the continuation of the sisters' work in Denmark, and she used her (male) Roman contacts to counter criticism from local authorities.

In the period after 1870, the Chamb ry congregation steadily expanded its activities in the Nordic countries, particularly in the Danish mission. This was motivated not only by missionary concern, but also by the political development in France after the Franco-German War of 1870. The increasingly anti-clerical politics of the new French republic necessitated the securing of possibilities for withdrawal to other countries, should the situation become too precarious.³⁰ A cautionary example was provided by events in the newly established German empire, where the 'culture war' (Kulturkampf) between the Catholic Church and the state forced many congregations to abandon their work and leave the country.³¹

The Catholic mission in Scandinavia thus offered a welcomed working field for the Chamb ry congregation. In Norway, several new Catholic parishes were established, and at the beginning of the 1920s there were fifteen parishes and approximately 300 Catholic sisters in the country. Among them were around 230 St Joseph Sisters, who ran seven hospitals and nursing homes, and six Catholic schools.³² In the Swedish mission, there were only six Catholic parishes with permanent clergy in

²⁷ Werner, *Kvinnlig motkultur*, 63-72.

²⁸ Examples are given in Werner, *Kvinnlig motkultur*.

²⁹ ASSJC, Historique et Proc s-Verbaux pour l' lection de la Sup rieure-G n rale 1868-1946: Decree 7 December 1874 and 21 January 1880. See also Demain, *M re Marie-F licit *, 173-174.

³⁰ ASSJC, R gistre 559: Marie-F licit  to the Congregation for Bishops and Regulars, 19 August 1880. About the development in France, see Sorrel, *Les Catholiques Savoyards*, 111-119.

³¹ Schatz, *Zwischen S kularisation und Zweiten Vatikanum*, 123-134; Schmiedel, "The Social and Legal Conditions in Germany", 255-260.

³² Nilsen, "Ordenss strenes virke i Norge", 447-468. By the beginning of the 1930s, the number of Catholic sisters in Norway had increased to 460, out of which 234 were Sisters of Saint Joseph. Female members of religious congregations constituted nearly 17 percent of the total Catholic population of the country.

1920; the number of Catholic sisters was 84, most of them belonging to the German Congregation of St Elizabeth. The St Joseph Sisters, 23 in all, had communities in Stockholm and Gothenburg. Despite their missionary efforts, the number of Catholics in the two countries remained low: 3,000 in Norway and around 4,000 in Sweden. The situation was quite different in Denmark, which at that time had more than 20,000 registered Catholics, most of them Danish converts. In this expansive period, the German-born Johannes von Euch, who was appointed apostolic vicar in 1883, led the Danish mission. When he died in 1922, Denmark had no less than 32 Catholic parishes with 86 priests and more than 600 sisters, of whom 407 belonged to the Chambéry congregation. Of the sixteen Catholic hospitals and 32 schools, the St Joseph Sisters ran, respectively, ten and sixteen.³³

In 1885, Marie-Félicité died after a long illness. Her assistant, Marie-Hyacinthe (Berthoud), was elected in September 1885 as the new superior general. Like her predecessor, she was re-elected several times and received permission from Rome to lead the congregation until her death in 1903. This was also the case with both of her successors as superior general: Marie-Léonide (Breffaz), who had been the assistant general before being elected superior general in 1903, and Marie du Sacré-Cœur (Revil), who led the congregation from 1919 until 1946.³⁴ These three subsequent superior generals did not actively intervene in the internal affairs of the two Nordic provinces as Marie-Félicité had done. Instead, the provincial superiors, as well as the superiors of the larger establishments, gained greater influence. All these superiors belonged to genuine, Catholic, Savoyard, middle-class families, a fact that contributed to bestowing a distinctive imprint on the sisters' work in Scandinavia. During the first phase of the St Joseph Sister's Nordic presence, Scandinavia was organised as one province. After 1874, it was divided into a Danish and a Swedish-Norwegian province. In 1895, the two Swedish convents were placed directly under the mother-house in Chambéry. One of the most successful provincial superiors in this region was Marie-Geneviève (Girard), who led the Danish province from 1887 to 1922. She took the initiative in founding no fewer than 26 new establishments, while at the same time the numbers of St Joseph Sisters in Denmark increased from around 90 to 450.³⁵

SCHOOLS AND HEALTH CARE IN THE SERVICE OF THE CATHOLIC MISSION

The Scandinavian work of the St Joseph Sisters was concentrated in two areas: education and health care. For the first twenty years, they focused primarily on teaching; later, they devoted considerable resources to develop their health care work. These activities were not ends in themselves, but part of the Catholic Church's mission. The goal was to bring the Nordic people to convert to the Catholic Church. The missionary

³³ Werner, *Kvinnlig motkultur*, 85-92.

³⁴ ASSJC, *Historique et Procès-Verbaux pour l'Élection de la Supérieure-Générale 1868-1946*.

³⁵ Werner, *Kvinnlig motkultur*, 91-92, 191-194.

character was demonstrated also by the fact that the sisters' work was supported by Catholic missionary organisations, especially by the aforementioned L'Œuvre.

Beginning with Copenhagen, the St Joseph Sisters started primary schools connected to the Catholic parishes. Some of these schools developed into so-called French schools, a kind of secondary school for girls, specialising in languages, particularly French, and the humanities. The majority of the pupils were fee-paying Protestants, while many of the Catholic children were accepted without payment. These schools were especially successful in Denmark, where the 1855 law on private schooling gave parents the right to decide themselves on their children's education. In Sweden, the restrictive legislation on religion forced the sisters to be more circumspect than in Denmark, and to dispense with wearing the habit. There was a great interest in French culture in the upper classes and therefore also a high demand for the type of education for girls that the French schools offered. In the 1920s, these schools had acquired a good reputation, and they provided a considerable income that the sisters used to improve the schools and to finance other activities.³⁶ They also took care of teaching girls and smaller children at the Catholic parish schools. The founding of Catholic parishes and schools was closely linked. Considerable resources were devoted to developing Catholic elementary education in accordance with the principle that Catholic children should attend Catholic schools. As soon as a parish was created, a Catholic school was founded, but equally, the opening of a school could provide the basis for the establishment of a new parish. When the sisters set up in a new locality, there was usually already a Catholic parish school in that area.³⁷ The purpose of the Catholic schools was to communicate knowledge of a Catholic perspective and to raise children as good Catholics. They thus played an important role in developing a Catholic identity and in creating a separate Catholic society.

In Denmark, the Catholic parish schools were used for missionary purposes, and up until 1900 the St Joseph Sisters had a large number of Protestant children in their classes.³⁸ Protestant parents sometimes sent their children to Catholic schools because Catholicism attracted them, but also for other reasons. These Protestant pupils acted in one way or another as transmitters of Catholic faith and traditions to their families, and the conversion of pupils was often followed by conversion also of parents and relatives. In their reports, the St Joseph Sisters gave many examples of this phenomenon.³⁹ The Catholic parish schools generally did not attain a high standard, and local conditions were often unsatisfactory. However, before 1900 the standard of municipal elementary schools was not much better. Thereafter, there was a rapid development in the Danish educational system, which received increased funding and thus successively raised its standards.⁴⁰

That children of members of the established church attended Catholic schools naturally caused concern in Protestant circles, and the Lutheran pastors and school

³⁶ *Ibidem*, 93-116.

³⁷ AOPM, ŒPF, D1 & D6: Reports to L'Œuvre, 10 January 1869, 16 December 1871, 30 November 1875 and 14 January 1882; SJSK, *Abrégé Historique*.

³⁸ Information about the schools is given in the reports to L'Œuvre: AOPM, ŒPF, D6.

³⁹ ASSJC, 6G5: Thérèse de Jésus to Marie-Félicité, Easter Sunday 1869; AOPM, ŒPF, D6: Reports to L'Œuvre, 10 January 1869, 3 January 1885 and 31 December 1888.

⁴⁰ Rerup, *Danmarks Historie*, 269-276.

boards involved used all means to remove the children. Some Catholic school teachers were reported to the police, and Catholic priests and sisters were accused of using the schools as a tool for the dissemination of ‘Catholic propaganda’. In one instance, a St Joseph Sister was taken to court, but she was acquitted.⁴¹ However, the interventions by the authorities generally achieved the opposite of what had been intended. Parents protested against the violation of their rights, and they had the law on their side.⁴² At the beginning of the 20th century, most of the sisters’ parish schools, as well as other Catholic elementary schools, received a state or municipal grant, but in the following decades, it became increasingly unusual for Protestant parents to send their children to Catholic parish schools. When they did so, it was because they intended to convert, and thus found it natural to send their children to a Catholic school. Like the wider Catholic population, many of these converts came from the poorer classes.⁴³

The desire to use teaching as a means to propagate Catholic faith and practice was also evident in the respected French schools, particularly in Denmark.⁴⁴ Because of restrictive laws and anti-Catholic press campaigns, the Stockholm French School chose another path, and developed into a formally non-confessional secondary school for girls with a marked French character. The situation in Norway was similar, but in this case, the French school was changed into a Catholic parish school.⁴⁵ In Denmark, the sisters’ French schools were wholly dedicated to the service of Catholic mission, but in the 1890s, the government authorities forced the French schools to arrange separate Lutheran religious instruction for their Protestant pupils. Nevertheless, their popularity remained undiminished and the number of pupils continued to increase. In her annual report of 1913, the provincial superior, Marie-Geneviève, declared that the restrictions had made the children more interested in the Catholic faith, and that the Protestant parents had nothing against their children observing the faith of Catholic pupils.⁴⁶ Some of those pupils became Catholics, and at the start of the 1920s, the majority of the around fifty Danish-born St Joseph Sisters were converts and former pupils of the French schools.⁴⁷

⁴¹ AOPM, ŒPF, D6: Marie-Geneviève to L’Œuvre, 31 December 1888.

⁴² Examples are given in reports to L’Œuvre: AOPM, ŒPF, D1 & D6: 7 January 1868 and 24 April 1869.

⁴³ AOPM, ŒPF, D6: von Euch to L’Œuvre, 28 July 1889; ASPF, N.S. 1921/105: Bishop Diepen, Rapport de la Visitation Apostolique de la Suède, 19 November 1920.

⁴⁴ In a report to L’Œuvre of 14 January 1892, the provincial superior Marie-Geneviève described the missionary strategy at the French schools in the following way: “Ces dernières aspirent l’esprit catholique, l’on peut dire, à pleins poumons, dans ces Écoles [...] Celles-ci se montrent ouvertement pieuses et font, à l’imitation des élèves catholiques, leurs compagnes et amies, les mêmes pratiques extérieures, telles que à ce temps-ci, une crèche dans leur classe respective, un oratoire à St Joseph, à la Vierge, au Sacré Cœur aux mois de mars, mai et juin, avec lampes, cierges, fleurs, etc. Elles prient à genoux en particulier et en commun, et cela très sérieusement, sans respect humain et spontanément. Elles font des neuvaines, et à leur grande surprise, en obtiennent des grâces, ce qui leur donne occasion de faire ensuite une excellente propagande auprès de leurs parents sur l’efficacité de la prière, le culte de la Ste Vierge et des Saints, sans que ceux-ci pour l’ordinaire, se trouvent heurtés dans leurs opinions religieuses.”

⁴⁵ Werner, *Kvinnlig motkultur*, 143-152.

⁴⁶ AOPM, ŒPF, D6: Marie-Geneviève to L’Œuvre, 10 January 1914.

⁴⁷ ASSJC, Lettres II: Marie du Sacré-Cœur to Pius XI, March 1924 (copy).

Catholic schools were in many ways successful tools for missionary work, but Catholic health care proved to be an even more effective missionary instrument. In 1875, the St Joseph Sisters opened their first hospital, the Saint Joseph Hospital in Copenhagen, which was later extended and developed to become one of the leading hospitals in the capital. An important factor in its success was that the hospital offered medical and nursing care at a lower charge than other hospitals in Copenhagen. The poor were given free treatment or had to pay a much-reduced fee. All social groups and classes were represented among the patients, including Lutheran clergy.⁴⁸ Soon a Catholic parish grew up around Saint Joseph Hospital; the sisters' hospital chaplain provided pastoral care. According to a report from 1909, most of the parishioners were converts who had first met the Catholic faith in the sisters' hospital. In 1892, thirty-five of the patients cared for at the hospital joined the Catholic Church. The total number of Catholic converts in Denmark that year was 220.⁴⁹

Interest in the Catholic faith was mainly stimulated by the physical and spiritual care given at Saint Joseph's Hospital. Yet, the sisters' reports and their chronicles reveal that other, less discreet methods were also used. There was a crucifix in all the hospital wards, and the sister responsible for a department read aloud morning and evening prayers. When a patient was seriously ill, the sister on duty prayed on her knees beside the sickbed. Patients were usually asked if they had anything against being prayed for, which in general they had not, and for many prayer became a habit. Even the Protestant clergy admitted to the hospital appreciated this ministry through prayer, and some asked for a copy of the prayers.⁵⁰ The sisters paid particular attention to the incurably sick and dying, in what today is usually termed palliative care. Their aim was not only to support patients before death, but also to help with making Christian preparations for – as it was articulated – a good death. The idea was to persuade the patient to accept death as an expression of God's will, bring them to repent their sins, and to trust in the grace of God. According to the sisters' reports, nearly all patients who were dying accepted this Christian preparation.⁵¹

Starting in the town Fredericia in 1879, the St Joseph Sisters established hospitals in nearly all the Danish areas where there were Catholic parishes or mission stations. They also expanded their health care activities in Norway, and by the beginning of the 1920s, seven of the fifteen Catholic hospitals were run by the St Joseph Sisters.⁵² The Catholic hospitals in the Nordic countries had many distinctive features. Firstly, the sisters themselves owned the hospitals, which meant that the management consisted

⁴⁸ AOPM, CEPF, D6: Petite notice sur l'hôpital des Sœurs de Saint-Joseph de Copenhague, 1890. See Malchau, "Women Religious and Protestant Welfare", 117-122.

⁴⁹ AOPM, CEPF, D6: Marie-Geneviève to L'Œuvre, 10 January 1909; ASPF, Germania, vol. 25 & N.S. 1898/7, vol. 124: Neuvel to Propaganda Fide, 7 July 1884, 16 November 1885 and 20 October 1898; AOPM, CEPF, D6: Statistics for 1893.

⁵⁰ AOPM, CEPF, D6: Marie-Geneviève to L'Œuvre. Petite notice.

⁵¹ AOPM, CEPF, D6: Reports to L'Œuvre, 2 December 1905, 6 January 1904, 13 January 1912, 10 January 1914; SJSK, *Abrégé Historique; Chronique [...] province danoise*, 144-145. The sisters assumed that the Protestant patients were 'bona fide' and thus would receive grace before God. It also happened that individual patients converted on their deathbeds. See Werner, *Kvinnlig motkultur*, 127-133.

⁵² Nilsen, "Ordenssøstrenes virke i Norge", 447-468.

of trained nurses, not of doctors as in state hospitals and private hospitals connected to the deaconess institutes. The doctors were thus subordinate to the mother superior and her staff. Secondly, the spiritual dimension of health care was clearly prominent, which was evident not least in the high priority given to the care of seriously ill and dying patients and in the interweaving of nursing care with prayer and spiritual exercises. However, the most notable feature was that health care was a component of Catholic missionary activity. Inevitably, the vast majority of patients were Protestant.⁵³

Catholic expansion within the health care sector met at times with sharp criticism, and the daily press occasionally warned of the danger of Catholic propaganda spread under the cover of health care. However, this often prompted responses from grateful patients, who praised the considerate care provided by the Catholic hospitals.⁵⁴ As early as the 1890s, the Danish authorities had begun to co-operate with Catholic congregations, making contracts for the provision of health care. The reason seems to have been the need to save money, since the Catholic hospitals offered cheaper health care than municipal hospitals.⁵⁵ A similar change in attitude was shown when representatives from national and municipal authorities participated in the opening of Catholic hospitals and other charitable institutions, and in the media's positive, detailed reports of the formal opening ceremonies, which were usually performed by the Catholic bishop. Meanwhile in Norway there was some co-operation between the public authorities and the Catholic sisters providing nursing.⁵⁶

This co-operative approach from public authorities was a sign that the Catholic Church was becoming an accepted part of society. Conversely, it may also be interpreted as an expression of the continuing secularization of public life, in the sense that religion was increasingly regarded as a private matter. It does not mean, however, that anti-Catholicism had disappeared, but rather that it had changed character. When, at the beginning of the 1930s, the Catholic hospitals were once again attacked in the Danish press, it was not their confessional status or proselytising activities that were criticised. Instead they were singled out for being part of an alien ideological system, and not subordinate to complete state control. It was also pointed out that doctors working in the Catholic hospitals were in a significantly weaker position than was otherwise the case. In response to the criticism, the majority of Protestant doctors at the eighteen Catholic hospitals in Denmark formed a 'Central Council', with the Catholic bishop as patron, to give them more influence in the management and organisation of the hospitals.⁵⁷ In the long term, this strengthening of the doctors' influence was part of the increasing medicalisation and technical specialisation of health care, which led to a successive weakening of the religious dimension in medical treatment and nursing care. This made it more difficult to use the hospitals in the service of Catholic mission. It was, however, only with the Second Vatican Council's new theological direction that this vision disappeared once and for all. By this

⁵³ Malchau, *Kærlighed er tjeneste*, 85-86.

⁵⁴ Schmiegelow, *Smaa bemærkninger*, 45-50.

⁵⁵ Malchau, "Women Religious and Protestant Welfare", 120-133, 136-138.

⁵⁶ Werner, *Kvinnlig motkultur*, 172-177; Nilsen, *Nonner i storm og stille*, 202.

⁵⁷ Schmiegelow, *Smaa bemærkninger om St. Joseph's Hospital*, 84-120.

point, the dismantling of the Catholic health care system in the Nordic countries had already begun.

CONFESSIONALISM, NATIONAL IDENTITY, AND POLITICS

Most modern historians accept that religion has played a vital role in recent history. Nevertheless, as the German historian Olaf Blaschke has pointed out, the confessional perspective has often been overlooked.⁵⁸ This omission is noticeable also in research on the charitable work of Catholic female congregations and Protestant deaconess institutes, where the emphasis, instead, is on a common Christian belief and ethos.⁵⁹ Like the Catholics, the nurses amongst the Protestant deaconesses regarded their nursing vocation as working for the glory of God and for the salvation of humanity. Furthermore, the Lutheran deaconess movement was in certain respects undoubtedly inspired by the Catholic orders, as demonstrated by its hierarchical organisational structure, its motherhouse principle, and its uniform attire. Nevertheless, the deaconess institutes had a completely different position in the Lutheran ecclesiastical system than that of a religious congregation in a Catholic context.⁶⁰ While the missionary task of the nursing deaconesses was connected to the Lutheran doctrine of vocation, and was thus a more indirect factor, for the St Joseph Sisters it had the character of an obligation. This is evident in the constitutions, and is shown clearly in their reports and letters.⁶¹

The nursing ideology of the St Josef Sisters embraced missionary elements which, with few exceptions, were not found to the same extent in that of the nursing deaconesses, and this ideology was completely absent from the work of the secular nurses. Another important difference was that the Catholic sisters not only carried out their charitable work for God's glory and for the benefit of fellow humans, but also for personal redemption.⁶² God's love was the motivation, the goal was salvation, and the means were good works. This view of good works, which played a central role

⁵⁸ Blaschke, "Das 19. Jahrhundert: ein zweites konfessionelles Zeitalter", 38-75. According to Blaschke, the period from 1830 to the beginning of the 1960s could be regarded as a second confessional age, characterised by church consolidation and confessional conflicts. The word 'confession' is understood in a broad sense, comprising not only a community based on Christian belief, but also the cultural context shaped on this foundation.

⁵⁹ See for example Malchau, "Kaldet - et ophøjet ord for lidenskab".

⁶⁰ Markkola, "Promoting Health and Welfare", 109-114; Baumann, *Protestantism and Frauenemanzipation*, 39-56. See also Brodd, "A Female Face of the Church", 355-371.

⁶¹ A good example is given in a letter from Marie-Geneviève to L'Œuvre, 31 December 1901 (AOPM, ŒPF, D6). Here she writes: "Notre seul et unique but est de faire du bien aux malades que le bon Dieu nous envoie. [...] Cette sorte de prédication est vraiment la meilleure que nous puissions employer envers nos chers Danois: Elle leur fait peu à peu estimer ce qu'ils ont méprisé, c'est-à-dire l'Eglise et la religion catholique. Et grâce à Dieu, un bon nombre chaque année se font instruire de la religion et l'embrassent".

⁶² This is clearly demonstrated in the congregation's constitutions. The distinctive features of Catholic nursing ideology were highlighted in a series of articles in the Danish Catholic magazine *Katholsk Kirketidende* from May 1880, 296-307. Here the lifelong monastic vows and the Catholic doctrine of grace are described as preconditions for high-quality nursing.

in the ultramontane interpretation of the doctrine of justification, permeated the St Joseph Sisters' constitution, and was a vital factor of their nursing ideology. However, the most pronounced difference was more tangible. The deaconesses were nurses and missionaries in their home countries and, like the majority of their compatriots, belonged to the established Lutheran Church, unlike the St Joseph Sisters, who mostly originated from foreign, Catholic countries, while the religion they professed was, from a Nordic perspective, unfamiliar, even alien.

As already mentioned, Catholic schools were used as missionary tools. Although the sisters did not openly proselytize, they still endeavoured to interest the non-Catholic children in the Catholic faith. This was especially evident in the St Joseph Sister's French schools, where most pupils were Protestant. Recent research into cultural history has underlined the significance of educational institutions in shaping national identities. Religion played an important role in this process of identity construction. Although the modern nation state was officially neutral in religious matters, confessional identity and nationality continued to be connected in public rhetoric and in popular mentalities. In the Nordic countries, the heritage of the Reformation was regarded as an obvious and important part of national identity, while Catholicism appeared foreign and minatory.⁶³ The public educational system was of central importance for the maintenance of this perception and for the spread of the new ideologies that challenged Christian belief.⁶⁴ This was one of the main reasons why Catholics devoted a great deal of time, effort, and money to establishing their own Catholic school system, which would be used as an instrument to create a Catholic counter-identity also in the Nordic countries.

The decisive significance of schools in forming national identity is illustrated not least by the situation in France, where there was a drawn-out struggle between the governing republicans and the Catholic Church over the educational system. Anti-clerical measures prompted a mobilisation of the Catholic population, which in the long term contributed to a revitalisation and strengthening of the Catholic Church's position in France.⁶⁵ Yet, for the St Joseph Sisters in France, the repression of Catholic schools was nearly a disaster, even though the congregation – unlike many other religious orders – avoided complete abolition. Most of the congregation's schools in Savoy were closed, and many sisters had to leave the country. This meant that the Chambéry congregation's Nordic provinces took in sizeable numbers of French sisters, which helped to satisfy the need for a larger staff necessitated by the congregation's expanding work.⁶⁶

The St Joseph Sisters were, however, not always able to use their French schools as tools in the service of Catholic mission. As mentioned above, as a result of the

⁶³ See for example: McLeod, *Secularization*, 216-247; Altermatt and Metzger, eds., *Religion und Nation*; Haupt and Langewiesche, eds. *Nation und Religion in Europa*. About the Nordic countries: Blücker, *The Church as Nation*; Thorkildsen, "Religious Identity and Nordic Identity", 138-160.

⁶⁴ McLeod, *Secularization*, 69-85.

⁶⁵ Lapiere and Levillain, "Laïcisation, union sacrée et apaisement", 14-127. See also Moulinet, "La législation relative aux congrégations religieuses en France", 218-230.

⁶⁶ ASPF, N.S. 1907/13, vol. 379: Marie-Léonide to Cardinal Ledóchowski, 30 March 1907. See Sorrel, *Les Catholiques Savoyards*, 111-119, 176.

restrictive Swedish legislation on religion, the sisters' French school in Stockholm developed into a formally non-confessional secondary school with a pronounced French character. The Stockholm school thus differed from the congregation's French schools in Denmark, where the teaching sisters wore their habit, crucifixes adorned the classrooms, and non-Catholic children participated in Catholic worship. In the 1920s, when the situation in Sweden seemed to allow a change, the newly appointed apostolic vicar, Bishop Johannes Müller, together with the general superior in Chambéry, decided that the school should again be given a more Catholic profile.⁶⁷ Yet, the French school's headmistress, Joséphine (Roullier), stubbornly refused to accept these new guidelines. A prolonged conflict ensued, with both the Swedish and the French governments supporting the 'rebellious' leadership of the school. In summer 1933, Bishop Müller declared the two religious excommunicated, and the general superior in Chambéry considered excluding them from the order.⁶⁸

The case was discussed in the Swedish parliament, and it gave rise to sensationalist newspaper headlines in the press. Both liberal and social democratic newspapers were unanimous in their sympathy for Roullier, who was presented as a victim of the Catholic hierarchy's power abuse, and Bishop Müller was exposed to fierce attacks and demands for his resignation. The conflict ended with the French school keeping its confessionally neutral character, and 'Madame' Roullier, as she was called, remained headmistress. That it came to this end was due to the hard pressures applied by the two governments involved and also to the specific situation of the religious institutes in France. The French government had threatened to withdraw the Chambéry congregation's authorisation to work in France if it did not accept the demands of the Swedish authorities, and the French Dominicans, serving as confessors at the sisters' convent, were subjected to similar pressures. The fact that the Swedish apostolic vicar was a German, and that German Jesuits exercised strong influence in the Swedish Catholic mission, made the question even more urgent for the French government.⁶⁹

Although France was formally a secular state, the government supported French Catholic mission, especially missionary activities through schools and other cultural activities, in order to promote France's political interests. In return, the religious institutes engaged in mission received certain privileges and licenses for their activities at home.⁷⁰ The St Joseph Sister's school in Stockholm, which had developed into a high status school for upper class girls, was regarded as a very useful instrument in this respect. Thus the French government was very keen that the school should continue in its current form, particularly as became known that there were plans to let either a German congregation, or French Dominican sisters with their motherhouse outside France, take over the school. The Swedish Social Democrat, church minister Arthur Engberg, was also eager to prevent such a development and, together with the French

⁶⁷ ASSJC, 6G13: Müller to Marie du Sacré-Cœur (superior general), 4 February 1924, 16 January 1926 and 10 March 1933; ASSJC, Draft of a petition to Pius XI, 1933; ASSJC, Lettres II: Marie du Sacré-Cœur to Propaganda Fide, Marchetti, March 1924 (copy).

⁶⁸ An overview of the conflict is given in Werner, *Kvinnlig motkultur*, 152–172, 219–222.

⁶⁹ Werner, *Kvinnlig motkultur*, 165–172.

⁷⁰ Prudhomme, "Les Missions catholiques", 31–56.

envoy in Stockholm, Engberg drew up new regulations that strengthened the governmental control of the school. An interesting factor is that both the Swedish church minister and the French envoy in Sweden, a Calvinist, had daughters in the French school. Later on also, the Swedish royal family even chose this educational institute for their three daughters, the sisters of the present king of Sweden.⁷¹

It should be noted that Roullier, who was in her way a very pious religious, justified her actions, arguing that the leadership in Chambéry was misled and that she only wanted to prevent a development that either would doom the school or transform it into a German-led institution. According to her, the present direction of the school helped to reduce the anti-Catholic bias in the country, whereas a more confessional character would undermine the school's reputation and damage the position of the Catholic Church in Sweden. Roullier organised school trips to Catholic countries. In 1933, she made a journey with her pupils to Rome, where a Holy Year was celebrated. She also managed to obtain an audience with the pope, whose support she intended to obtain.⁷² Yet, the fact that she was able to keep her position as headmistress was rather the result of the interventions of the French government in the Vatican. The excommunication was lifted, and Roullier and her assistant were also able to evade the act of submission demanded by the Catholic leadership in Sweden.⁷³ The conflict concerning the French school or the 'Roullier affair', as it was called, clearly demonstrates not only the importance of the educational system for modern society, but also the continued interference between religion and politics, and last but not least, the central role played by women religious.

FEMALE CONGREGATIONS - AN ALTERNATIVE EMANCIPATION MOVEMENT?

Current Nordic research on welfare systems has shown the importance of the health care and school sectors in establishing the modern welfare state. Through its contribution in the social sector, the state has fostered, indoctrinated, and controlled its population, but also acquired legitimacy and an assurance of loyalty from its citizenry.⁷⁴ In the same way, the Catholic Church tried to obtain legitimacy and public support in its missionary activities, while simultaneously using its social and charitable work as instruments to promote the Catholic faith.

The St Joseph Sisters played a significant role in the Catholic Church's missionary activities in Scandinavia, and together with clergy and representatives of other Catholic orders and congregations, they served as 'parish builders'. Their communities in the Nordic countries consisted partly of foreign sisters sent by the motherhouse in Chambéry, and partly of indigenous, Scandinavian sisters. Women religious entrusted with leadership came mostly from the upper classes, while women from

⁷¹ Werner, *Kvinnlig motkultur*, 153-164.

⁷² SJSAS, RA: Jeanne Roullier, *Memoires* (unpublished manuscript), Stockholm, 1957; ASSJC, 6G13: Roullier to Marie du Sacré-Cœur, 7 November 1930 and 9 February 1933.

⁷³ Werner, *Kvinnlig motkultur*, 162 ff.

⁷⁴ This is illustrated in Rømer et al., *Frihed, lighed og velfærd*.

lower social strata were often restricted to the subordinate status of lay sisters.⁷⁵ One may draw comparisons with the philanthropic work that developed contemporaneously in the Lutheran churches. Here too it was women from the upper classes who held leading positions. The difference between the philanthropy of Lutheran women and that of Catholic women religious, apart from the fact that the latter belonged to a religious institute, was the confessionally determined ideology of their engagement. For Lutheran women, the ideology of domesticity, now remodelled as middle-class 'familyism', served as an ideological foundation.⁷⁶ Marriage was the norm, and attempts to hold up female philanthropists and deaconesses as models for a celibate alternative for women met with little success.⁷⁷

In the Catholic value system, the celibate religious life was not only an acceptable alternative to marriage, but was considered to be of higher worth. In comparison with the Lutheran deaconesses, the female Catholic orders and congregations were led at all levels, from the top down, by the sisters themselves, and this female hierarchy was endorsed and approved by the Catholic Church's highest authority. Many scholars, among them Yvonne Turin, have drawn attention to the strong position occupied by the general prioresses of the larger female congregations in the Catholic Church during this period.⁷⁸ True, the female congregations were subject to stricter controls than were their male counterparts, but interestingly, the motivation for this was not a lack of confidence in the competence of women's leadership, but a fear that the female superiors might develop an excessively autocratic style of administration.⁷⁹

The two Nordic provinces of the Chambéry congregation operated as large organisations, with the sisters themselves in charge; the superiors signed commercial contracts, negotiated bank loans, and discussed these and other affairs with government officials. They thus held a position that the women's emancipation movement aspired to attain. Yet, the Catholic sisters could not be used as models for the liberal emancipation movement. The rights that they enjoyed were tied to their status as religious, not to their gender, and women who joined religious orders quested after holiness rather than equality. From a Nordic point of view, these female religious congregations represented an alien culture that in essential matters conflicted with prevailing norms. This may perhaps have attracted young Nordic women to this form of religious life. By choosing to become a Catholic sister, they entered a female world that in many ways constituted an alternative both to Lutheran domestic ideology with its emphasis on marriage, biological motherhood, and domestic duties, and to the middle-class liberal and socialist feminist movements. The Catholic sisters, in

⁷⁵ Werner, *Kvinnlig motkultur*, 181-195.

⁷⁶ Wammen, "Ambiguous Performances", 91-136; Lützen, "The Cult of Domesticity in Danish Women's Philanthropy", 147-176. Perhaps it is more suitable to compare the Catholic sisters to Protestant female women who went as missionaries to 'pagan' countries. These too were women who had the ability to lead and organise, and who, similar to Catholic sisters, went beyond the boundaries of prevailing middle-class gender system, although without questioning this gender structure. See for example Seland, "Called by the Lord", 69-112.

⁷⁷ Hammar, *Emancipation och religion*, 20-78.

⁷⁸ Turin, *Femmes et religieuses*, 93-97. See also Meiwes, *Arbeiterinnen des Herrn*, 247-309.

⁷⁹ Sastre Santos, *La vita religiosa*, 866-868.

other words, embodied a female counter-culture within modern society, a third way between Protestant 'familyism' and feminist women's movements.

Today, the Chambéry congregation has given up most of its social institutions in Scandinavia. This development, which started in the 1950s and accelerated in the following decades, was due to the lack of vocations and to the expansion of the public social sector in Scandinavia. But the theological reorientation and reforms initiated by the Second Vatican Council also played an important role in this respect. With the council, the Catholic Church renounced its claim to be the one true church and entered into ecumenical co-operation with other Christian churches. This change removed the *raison d'être* for Catholic missionary work in Protestant countries and for using Catholic schools and other social institutions for missionary purposes. In the 1960s, the Chambéry congregation, which was now led by the Danish-born convert Benedicte du Sacré Cœur (Ramsing), was subjected to radical reforms, and thereby also changed its focus from the Western to the Third World.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Malchau, *Kærlighed*, 154-193, 254-291. In the new constitutions of the congregation from 1984, the former detailed instructions have been superseded by a more general description. The former strict hierarchical leadership has been replaced by a more democratic organisation. Practical work is prioritised, and worship and devotions now have a more private and concealed character.