

# Women and Religion in Eighteenth-Century France

Ideas, Controversies & Representations



**Keynote Speaker: Prof.  
Mita Choudhury  
(Vassar College)**

Symposium | 24 June 2022

Queen Mary, University of  
London

## CALL FOR PAPERS

Deadline: 21 January 2022

In the decades since Peter Gay argued that religion occupied no place in the French Enlightenment, scholars including Dale Van Kley, Suzanne Desan and Mita Choudhury have shown how religious beliefs and controversies informed philosophical ideas, political practices, social relations and cultural identities in eighteenth-century France.

Owing to this scholarship, it has also become clear that women of faith – from the Jansenist nuns forcibly removed from Port-Royal to the Carmelites guillotined during The Terror – played an important role in French social, cultural and political life in the period. Representations of convents took on new and urgent meanings amidst mounting political and financial pressure on the *Ancien Régime*. Influential women on the peripheries of religion were instrumental in the dissemination of controversial beliefs and new philosophical ideas, like the Protestant *salonnière* Mme Necker who hosted celebrated writers and academicians at her home and Mlle de Joncoux, known as *l'invisible*, who devoted her life to defending the nuns of Port-Royal. In the revolutionary period, nuns challenged the suppression of religious orders while Catholic women became symbols of resistance in the religious riots of the late 1790s.

Drawing on new approaches and sources, this interdisciplinary workshop will consider the identities, controversies, ideas, experiences and representations of religious women in eighteenth-century France. What role did these women play in the political and intellectual culture of the Ancien Régime and the French Revolution? How did they and their supporters or enemies navigate a period of extraordinary social change and political upheaval? In what ways did they adopt, challenge or subvert the religious canon, cultural norms and societal conventions as the understanding of religion, politics and power shifted rapidly throughout the eighteenth century?

We invite proposals for twenty-minute papers from scholars in History or related disciplines such as Art History, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Literary Studies and Theology. We especially welcome proposals from Graduate and Early Career researchers. Proposals for papers may wish to consider the following themes:

- Devotional and liturgical practices
- The circulation of religious ideas, books and objects
- Representations of women religious in art, literature and material culture
- Education
- Charity and nursing
- Interdenominational relations
- The relationship between religious orders and the state
- Marriage and motherhood
- Popular and lay religion
- Emotions and bodies

To apply, please email your abstract and a brief bio to [m.s.giraud@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:m.s.giraud@qmul.ac.uk) and [c.i.mair@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:c.i.mair@qmul.ac.uk) by the deadline of **21 January 2022**. Abstracts should be no more than 250 words for papers of 20 minutes in length. Please specify whether you would prefer to present in person or online.

The symposium will take place in hybrid format, meaning speakers can attend in person or virtually via Microsoft Teams. The symposium will be free to attend and all speakers will be invited to dinner. Travel grants will be available to support PhD and ECR scholars speaking at the workshop.

For more information, please visit [womenandreligionfrance2022.wordpress.com](https://womenandreligionfrance2022.wordpress.com)