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Mar. 10, St. Marie Eugenie Milleret, Founder

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NCR Today

Today is the feast of St. Marie Eugenie Milleret, founder of the Religious of the Assumption.

She was born in Metz, France, in 1817. "When she was fifteen, Marie Eugenie's parents separated and she moved to Paris with her mother and brother, only to see her mother die of cholera shortly afterwards. Her father then sent her to live with relatives whose great interests proved to be money and pleasure."

"Our Beginnings," Religious of the Assumption

In 1836 she attended the acclaimed Lenten sermons delivered at the Cathedral of Notre Dame by Abbe Henri Lacordaire, who would later enter the Order of Preachers and re-establish the Dominican Order in France.

"His words touched Eugenie's heart, answered her many questions, and aroused her generosity. Eugenie envisaged Christ as the universal liberator and his kingdom on earth established as a peaceful and just society. *I was truly converted, she wrote, and I was seized by a longing to devote all my strength or rather all my weakness to the Church which, from that moment, I saw as alone holding the key to the knowledge and achievement of all that is good.*"

-- Vatican Biography

The following year, she met another preacher at another Lenten series, Abbe Theodore Combalot. Under his direction, she founded the Religious of the Assumption in 1839.

"Marie Eugenie's long life covered almost the whole of the 19th century. She loved her times passionately and took an active part in their history. Progressively, she channeled all her energy and gifts in tending and extending the Congregation, which became her life work. God gave her sisters and many friends. One of the first sisters was Irish, a mystic and her intimate friend whom she called at the end of her life, 'half of myself.' Kate O'Neill, called Mother Therese Emmanuel in religion, is considered as a co-foundress."

--Vatican Biography

Mother Marie Eugenie died on March 10, 1898. She was canonized in 2007 by Pope Benedict XVI.

From The Salon To The Schoolroom: Educating Bourgeois Girls In Nineteenth-century France, by Rebecca Rogers, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005, contains information about French women's religious life: who entered the convent; what kind of candidates did the orders want; what did it cost to enter; how many left during the novitiate; how many left after profession; how were they trained for the teaching profession; and how did Marie Eugenie Milleret and the Religious of the Assumption differ from other orders in their approach to educating girls? (Search terms: Milleret, Assumption.)

"The Dames de l'Assomption represent an unusual exception in their effort to promote more serious studies. Founded in 1839, this congregation was associated with the religious reform movement around such figures as Henri Lacordaire, Charles Forbes, comte de Montalembert, and Felicite Robert de Lamennais. Lamennais in particular emphasized the importance of girls' education in efforts to re-Christianize French society, an idea that founding mother Eugenie Milleret took particularly to heart. As a member of the liberal aristocracy, she had the advantages of an excellent classical education but one that lacked religious depth. Her specific concern was to reach women, such as herself, members of the upper middle-class or the liberal aristocracy, and offer them a challenging intellectual and religious plan of study."

Milleret "defended the idea of giving girls a rigorous intellectual curriculum that included Latin and theology."

For information about the Religious of the Assumption in the United States and their locations around the world, click here.

For some images of St. Marie Eugenie Milleret, click here.

A very happy feast day to all Religious of the Assumption, their students, their alumnae and alumni, their Volunteers, and their Friends!

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