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*Sœur Marie de S.-Maximilienne
élue supérieure générale en 1940*

MERE MARIE MAXIMILIENNE, CSC

1870—1958

**EDUCATOR, WRITER, HISTORIAN, POET and LEADER:
HER IMPACT ON HOLY CROSS**

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MOTHER MARY MAXIMILIENNE, CSC,
EDUCATOR, WRITER, HISTORIAN, POET AND
LEADER: HER IMPACT ON HOLY CROSS

OUTLINE – 1870-1958

1. Childhood and youth
2. Teaching Career
3. Founder of Normal School in Mont Laurier, Pr. Quebec
4. Her mission as Superior General of the Sisters of Holy Cross, Canadian Province, Saint-Laurent, Pr. Quebec
5. Her impact on the Congregation of Holy Cross
6. Her death and legacy

MOTHER MARY MAXIMILIENNE, CSC; EDUCATOR, WRITER, HISTORIAN, POET;

LEADER – HER IMPACT ON HOLY CROSS

If in the eyes of the Lord, “a thousand years seems like but a day”, there is a reason to believe that the short span of a human life seems to expand between dawn and dusk. As a poet would say, when we think of Sister Marie Maximilienne, her life seems to come directly from the “heart of God”.

Born at the end of October, 1870, Sister Maximilienne, was given the name “Lumena...” at her baptism. How appropriate, since “Lumena” means “light.” All of her life, she served as a beacon of light for all who had the opportunity to know and to work with her. Her place of birth was a small, progressive town by the name of Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pocatière, a town where tourists and residents discover beauty, and its scenery is like that of a dream.

Lumena’s father, Etienne Lizotte, a peaceful and gentle man who always projected good humor, was a carpenter by profession. His ancestors had emigrated from France in the second half of the seventeenth century. He and his family were considered as pioneers and founders of Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pocatière. Her mother, Marie Tailhardin, was also of French descent, but the emigration of her family was more recent than that of her husband’s. The family tradition had ties to the family of Teilhard de Chardin. An adept of his writings, Sister Maximilienne shared the same qualities of Teilhard – namely, his love of truth, his courage, his humility, his depth in dealing with the infinite. She took pride in mentioning that his family was part of her family. After his death, in 1955, she was given a biography of his life and his writings. That book was a treasure of hers and she kept it preciously with her belongings...

As a child, Lumena was brought up in a household of adults, where she matured intellectually much faster than other children her age. Her great-aunt Sara particularly loved Lumena and she took great pleasure in training the child so that she would be efficient in all subjects and was able to converse with members of her family and friends as an adult would. It stands to reason that Lumena, when starting school, was much more advanced than most of her classmates. She showed talents of leadership even at this young age. She enjoyed organizing plays with her siblings, family and friends, audacious enough to choose these productions from the plays of the French writers such as Lamartine and LaFontaine.

Lumena was about fourteen years of age when the family moved to the big city of Montreal, the parish being that of Saint-Joseph that had been founded in 1868. Arriving in this new parish, the young woman did not hesitate to offer the services of her many talents and getting involved in parish ministry as well as that of the many opportunities offered by her new environment. In her younger years, at Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pocatière, she studied with the Sisters of Charity, better known as the “Grey Nuns.” She deeply appreciated her teachers and loved them dearly. In Montreal, she studied at Pointe-Saint-Charles where she met the Sisters of Holy Cross and in no time, she came to love them as well. Excellent student, she often made friends with those who were judged difficult to cope with, but with her love of people and her personality, she won their friendship and helped them change their attitudes, which in turn, made them happier.

As a young woman, Lumena had many interests. Having a terrific sense of organization, she invited people to reunions, to card parties, to concerts, etc. She saw the poverty of so many and her heart went out especially to the children who had so little. Being a seamstress “par excellence”, no one ever knew for how many children she put clothes together, often using some of her own, measuring, adjusting, the result being a wonderful little dress for some child be it for a First Communion or many another occasion. For all of her life, she had a special place in her heart for the poor.

When she reached the age of 23, she was a bit confused because she was uncertain of what she was to do with the rest of her life, questioning if she had a religious vocation. So, on Easter Sunday, 1893, she donned her best Easter outfit and went to Saint-Laurent to visit her younger sister Rose, who had already entered the Sisters of Holy Cross. As it was the custom, the Mistress of Novices always came to greet the families of the Novices. Having met her and also having had the opportunity to speak with Mother Marie Basile, the first elected Superior General of the Canadian community, she decided that she was going to stay because this was where she knew she wanted to spend the rest of her life.

According to the records, Lumena took the Habit on July 16, 1893 and received the name of Sister Marie Maximilienne. She took her first vows on July 29, 1896. Very few details are found concerning her final commitment, but It was on August 15, 1901 that she and her 17 companions pronounced their final vows. The ceremony was very simple but deeply meaningful for these young women.

Sister Marie Maximilienne, the Educator (1896-1908)

“To teach is to touch a life forever” – Chesterton

As a novice, Sister Marie Maximilienne had the opportunity to experience the art of teaching. She was sent to Our Lady of Angels’ Academy – the students there would profit of the expertise of Sister Maximilienne as their teacher. In no time, already recognizing her ability as an educator, she was given the responsibility to be the one to open other schools, and to be the “one in charge” meaning that she had to see to the arrival of the students, set up rules for them to follow, organize a curriculum for the students to learn, to prepare the teachers for the courses they were called to teach, make up a schedule that would be feasible for each one to follow. She also made sure that everyone would experience joy and happiness in whatever they were called to do.

In no time, Sister Maximilienne, as the one in charge of the senior class, was soon given the responsibility as Director of the boarding school; this meant that she had to maintain discipline, see to the organization of the recreational periods, preside over meal time, prepare meetings with parents and develop social skills making sure the students knew the necessity to be polite with everyone, students as well as teachers, always experiencing joy, reciprocal friendship and availability. Endowed with a wisdom beyond her twenty-five years, she used her talent for art and creativity to the benefit of the school, such as establishing a museum so that the students could learn from the study of artifacts, preparing exhibits of art works produced by the students, organizing celebrations for every occasion, etc. etc...

Albert Einstein once wrote: **“Education is not learning facts but to train your mind to think”**. Sister Maximilienne abided by the same principle. It was about the year 1900, borrowing the thought of Hippolyte Taine, that she wrote: **“The goal of education is to open the mind of the student, to give her/him ideas and to develop in the student the love of research.”** To succeed in this endeavor, the teacher must follow these three principles:

1. Give the students a solid education
2. Give them an adequate pedagogical formation
3. Develop a sense of responsibility

Good teaching brings about the collaboration of the student. I believe that she shared the idea of Benjamin Franklin who once wrote, and I quote: “Tell me and I forget; teach me and I remember; involve me and I learn.” The teacher must speak

as little as possible so that the student herself can strive to discover the possibilities, involving the subject discussed. “Let them THINK” she would say. Some of her principles are very clear. For example, she would say:

1. Develop the memory in a child so that it may be at the service of the intelligence.
2. Train the student to understand beauty, appreciate it, and discover it in nature, in art and in the world.
3. Get the student to fight against his aversion toward effort, encourage him to be creative and to persevere.
4. Develop their sense of curiosity in studying.
5. Finally, learn how to lose time...adapt yourself to the intelligence of the child – “to think” is profitable – it is not a loss of time...

In the same context, she also felt that certain subjects in the curriculum needed special attention, namely:

1. **History** – it should be presented as a link to the reality that a child is living. What would be boring for the student is to study it as an abstract science.
2. **Geography** – this is made easier for the student to study the phenomenon of his/her own area before anything else.
3. **French** – Know the language perfectly well – thus you will be able to express your thoughts - making it possible for you to converse intellectually and with finesse.

Sister Maximilienne’s teaching career lasted for about twelve years – in that period of time, she used her talent for producing plays giving students the opportunity to express themselves on the stage. In a boarding school, there are many occasions for celebration – for every celebration, a performance was called for. In thinking of what she wanted to present, she would choose students to participate, working with them, studying the characters, making sure they understood what they were called to do – especially to do away with stage fright. Many of her students remembered her fondly because of the confidence she inspired. For presentations, she chose works of the great French Masters such as LaFontaine with his Fables, Racine and Corneille with their Dramas and Moliere with his Comedies. These were highly appreciated by audiences attending these productions. This is easy to understand and to realize how and why this woman was so well known and so well loved.

All along her teaching career, Sister Maximilienne bore responsibilities greater than she could have foreseen. She was often called to initiate teachers. She was consulted regarding the responsibilities of teaching in boarding schools. Her experience in successfully producing plays was sought out and through it all she knew a joy that made all worthwhile.

In 1906, at Our Lady of Angels' Academy, Father Gilbert Français, CSC, Superior General of the Fathers of Holy Cross, (1893-1926), came for a visit and met with Sister Marie Maximilienne. During the summer of 1911, Father Français was in residence at the University of Notre Dame and became ill. He came to recuperate at College Saint-Laurent in Montreal. He often spoke of Father Moreau to the sister who was his nurse. In turn, this sister shared the pearls of wisdom with Sister Maximilienne and suggested she speak with Father Français who often spoke about Father Moreau whom he considered as a saint. Without any further ado, Sister Maximilienne went to meet with him. She then suggested to Sr. Gabriel, who was our Superior General at the time, to invite Father Français to speak to the community. Was Father able to do this as he was not feeling that well? It was up to him to decide if he could accept the invitation or not. Without hesitating one moment, Father was delighted to accept the invitation. It was with veneration for the Founder that he could share with the community the admiration he had for Father Moreau whose life had impressed him so. Father Français suggested that a book should be written on the life of Father Moreau – in his estimation, it should be written by a Sister of Holy Cross. Maximilienne's work as Prefect of studies at that time did not allow her the leisure to undertake such a task.

In 1921, being freed from her task as Prefect, she was able to assume the privilege and responsibility of writing this book. It was very difficult for her to do the work as there was so very little information that had been preserved or set aside. Every chapter she wrote was then revised by Father Français. His words of encouragement gave her the incentive to continue researching the life, work and vision of Father Moreau. By the end of 1921, she had been able to cover the entire subject concerning Father Moreau, his life, his spirituality, his love of education and the vision he had for the development of the Congregations of Holy Cross. At a certain point, Father Français assured her that when the cause of Father Moreau's beatification would be introduced in Rome, her book would serve to prepare the minds, hearts and souls of the members of the Holy Cross family. She was grateful to Divine Providence for having inspired her to accept this task that she thought was beyond her capacity. She was assured that the book was read with avidity, and awakened the curiosity and general interest, that lead to the publication of the

Circular Letters of Father Moreau, and later, his Sermons, his Meditations as well as his book on Christian Pedagogy. It set aflame the fire in the ashes of our deep love for Father Moreau. She certainly had a terrific impact on the entire Family of Holy Cross.

Sister Maximilienne, Prefect or Masters of Studies – 1908-1920

“To whomever understands the real meaning of happiness, the days are always cheerful and the hours are great” ...Sister Maximilienne wrote after being elected to this position of responsibility. When she accepted this task, a great pedagogical movement arose in the city of Montreal and the community of Holy Cross had already started to improve its own schools and to give a better formation to its teachers. At the Chapter of 1890, it had been decided that an extra year would be added to the Novitiate so that the young sisters could have a little more time to study for whatever they were to teach when they were sent on mission. With Sister Maximilienne as Prefect of Studies, summer courses were also organized so that the sisters had the opportunity to perfect themselves in the major field of their choice or according to their strength in certain subjects. Father Français shared his expertise by teaching courses in Pedagogy.

Music, singing, elocution, painting, all that pertained to the arts received extra encouragement from Sister Maximilienne. Lay professors were also called upon to teach our sisters. One of her duties as Prefect of Studies was to visit our schools in the United States as well as in Canada. The influence she had on education was not merely within our congregation. Whenever there was a meeting for Professors in the Province of Quebec, Sister Maximilienne was there to offer her words of wisdom concerning education. In the Province of Quebec and beyond, she was considered as a beacon of light for all educators. She would always reward the efforts or success of another by her smile, a word of encouragement or, at times, she would write a poem in honor of the person whose work she so appreciated.

In 1927, to help the cause of education, she founded the Normal School in Mont-Laurier, a city in the northern part of the Province of Quebec. I always questioned why such schools were called Normal Schools – they were really Teacher-Training Institutes. There, young women had the opportunity to study the art of teaching and how to deal with all kinds of students. When they graduated with their Bachelor’s degree of Education, they were prepared to face the rewards

and the challenges of the teaching profession. The school functioned until 1968 when it closed its doors because of the current trend of studying at universities or other institutions closer to home.

We cannot speak of Sister Maximilienne without mentioning her poetic ability. She never missed an occasion to write a poem. In boarding schools, there were many celebrations that called for something special – her pen was always ready to help someone or to celebrate a feast. Quite a few of her poems were set to music by her dear friend, Sister Leonide, CSC as well as by Sister Cecilia, CSC who was well known for her musical ability throughout Canada, the New England states as well as in Europe. Some of Sister Maximilienne’s poems have been preserved in our Canadian Archives, but many have unfortunately been lost through the years.

Mother Marie Maximilienne: the Leader

At the General Chapter of the Canadian Holy Cross community, April 26, 1940, Mother Marie Maximilienne was elected Superior General. It was Mgr. E.A. Deschamps, Auxiliary Bishop of Montreal who proclaimed the good news to the community. “Yes, my dear Sisters” he said – “your newly elected Superior General comes to you with her openheartedness, her great compassionate heart, her desire to work with all her strength for the good of the community. The Diocese of Montreal is proud of the Sisters of Holy Cross, we thank you for all that you do for the education of young people.”

1940 reminded Holy Cross of the anniversary of religious profession of Father Moreau. 1941 also marked the centenary of the foundation of Holy Cross at Le Mans, France. It was also the Anniversary of the first four Marianites of Holy Cross who had made their commitment to serve as the first Sisters of Holy Cross. 1941 was a year of celebrations, and celebrate we did. Mere Marie Maximilienne was in her glory to see the community coming together to remember its first meager beginnings.

It is rare that we are given the opportunity to celebrate two centenaries in the same decade – but in Canada, we did. 1947 was the hundredth anniversary of the Marianites setting foot at the Port of Montreal in April of 1847 - the sisters had left France from the port of Le Havre and travelled for at least two months in the dangerous waters of the Atlantic. Their destination was Saint-Laurent, a suburb of Montreal, a small village of farmlands. They received a warm welcome from the

pastor of the parish, Father Saint-Germain. Their mission there was to educate the young people of the area, to the pleasure of parents and students. Thus 1947 was a year of celebration, you can imagine.

Mère Marie Maximilienne, who in 1920, by her research and the book she had written, had brought forth the memory of Father Moreau as the founder of Holy Cross, took upon herself to make sure that all of us learn more about his life, his spirituality and his dedication to the cause of education. All of her circular letters carried a thought of the Founder from his own writings, inviting us to live by his exhortations.

For the celebrations of 1947, Mere Marie Maximilienne had invited Sister Rose-Elizabeth, CSC, Superior General of the Sisters of the Holy Cross in Indiana and Sister Odile, Superior General of the Marianites from Le Mans, France. I believe that this was the first time the three Superiors General of the communities of women of Holy Cross met. It was a very special moment, you may be sure. After the celebrations, the three Superiors General left for Le Mans, France, where they would be able to explore the country where Father Moreau was born and what he had accomplished as far as ministry was concerned. To commemorate this meeting, a stained glass window was installed in back of the altar at the Church of Sainte-Croix with a picture of the these three great women.

To add to the celebrations of 1947, it is to be noted that Mere Marie Maximilienne was also celebrating her Golden Jubilee. After the performances honoring the Community, Bishop Limoges from the diocese of Mont-Laurier stood up because he had a very special message from the Archbishop of Montreal and Rector of the University. Mere Marie Maximilienne was being granted a Doctorate "Honoris Causa" honoring her for all the remarkable services she had rendered to society, especially in the field of education in the Province of Quebec and beyond. One person who rejoiced greatly at the wonderful news was Mother Rose Elizabeth who herself was to receive a Doctorate in Bible Studies from the University of Notre Dame, Indiana. These were happy moments to remember...

In conclusion, we feel that her call to Holy Cross was really the inspiration of a lifetime, her services rendered with such grace were the song of her life. I'd like to compare her direction to that of a Maestro Conductor of an Orchestra. She knew every member of that orchestra by name – she appreciated all the talent they displayed in whatever section of the orchestra they performed be it the Percussion Section keeping the beat, the beautiful melodies of the String Section, the

sympathetic voice of the Woodwinds or the thundering blast of the Brasses. Her leadership was one of love, kindness, understanding, compassion, courage – and when the orchestra performed it was a masterpiece of a Holy Cross Symphony.

On January 4, 1958, at two o'clock in the afternoon, she passed on. Among the comforting words of sympathy received from all over the world were those of Cardinal Grente, Archbishop of Le Mans, France, Reverend Father O'Toole, Superior General of the Holy Cross Institute in Rome, His Excellency, Mgr. Albert Cousineau, CSC, Bishop of Cap Haitien, Haiti, Father P. Gagnon, CSC, Provincial Superior in France and the Reverend Sister Marie Odile, Superior General of the Marianites at Le Mans, France. Sister Odile also assured the community that a special service would be held for Mere Maximilienne at the "Solitude du Sauveur" in France, honoring the one who had written the first biography of Father Moreau. Mother Rose Elizabeth also sent her message of sympathy, remembering that she and Mere Maximilienne had gone to France and to Rome in 1946 in order to introduce the cause of Father Moreau's Beatification. Mere Maximilienne was indeed a very special woman, a leader "par excellence." I am so proud to have been privileged to have her as a mentor in my very young years as a Sister of Holy Cross.

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