

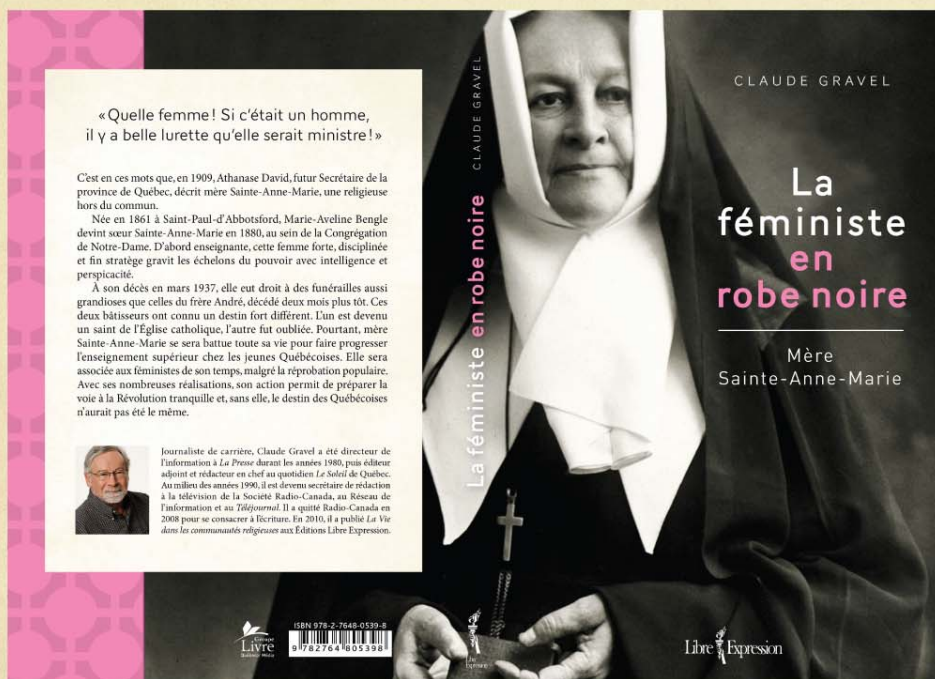
Mother Sainte-Anne-Marie, Pioneer in Higher Education for Young Women

Marie-Aveline Bengle was born in 1861 in Saint-Paul-d'Abbotsford in Quebec's Montérégie region. After her primary instruction in a one-room school, she continued her studies at Mont Notre-Dame Boarding School in Sherbrooke where she obtained a teaching certificate. Her first teaching experience was in a one-room school in her village. In 1880, she made profession in the Congrégation de Notre-Dame and took the name Sister Sainte-Anne-Marie. Her first teaching mission was at the convent in Iberville until 1883. From then, she continued her ministry at Mont Sainte-Marie in Montreal. In 1903, she began a five-year term as local superior. In 1913, she was named Directress General of Studies for the Congregation, a position she occupied until her death in 1937.

In 1908, she established École d'enseignement supérieur pour jeunes filles (Superior School), the first female classical college in Quebec. In 1926, it took the name Collège Marguerite-Bourgeoys (The English section retained the name Notre Dame Ladies College) and moved to a new building specifically constructed to meet its needs, the Institut pédagogique. After many years of intense negotiations on the part of Mother Sainte-Anne-Marie, this new institution for the formation of teachers was able to offer university diplomas.

It is noteworthy that at that time the role of women was limited to that of wife and mother. They did not have the same access to education as men. Diplomatic, progressive and persistent, Mother Sainte-Anne-Marie was able to work with the slow and reluctant civil and religious authorities until she achieved the Congregation's objectives to give women access to higher education. This is why her name is associated with the feminists of her time. She was a loyal ally of Marie Lacoste-Gérin-Lajoie, militant for the promotion of women's rights.

Mother Sainte-Anne-Marie had a very big impact in the sphere of education. In 1928, she became the first woman member of the Montreal Catholic School Commission. When she died in March 1937, she was given a magnificent funeral at Notre-Dame Basilica. Like Marguerite Bourgeoys, the foundress of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame, who was known as "Mother of the Colony," Mother Sainte-Anne-Marie was known as "Mother of Our Schools."



«Quelle femme! Si c'était un homme, il y a belle lurette qu'elle serait ministre!»

C'est en ces mots que, en 1909, Athanase David, futur Secrétaire de la province de Québec, décrit mère Sainte-Anne-Marie, une religieuse hors du commun.

Née en 1861 à Saint-Paul-d'Abbotsford, Marie-Aveline Bengle devient sœur Sainte-Anne-Marie en 1880, au sein de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame. D'abord enseignante, cette femme forte, disciplinée et fin stratège gravit les échelons du pouvoir avec intelligence et perspicacité.

À son décès en mars 1937, elle eut droit à des funérailles aussi grandioses que celles du frère André, décédé deux mois plus tôt. Ces deux bâtisseurs ont connu un destin fort différent. L'un est devenu un saint de l'Église catholique, l'autre fut oubliée. Pourtant, mère Sainte-Anne-Marie se sera battue toute sa vie pour faire progresser l'enseignement supérieur chez les jeunes Québécoises. Elle sera associée aux féministes de son temps, malgré la réprobation populaire. Avec ses nombreuses réalisations, son action permit de préparer la voie à la Révolution tranquille et, sans elle, le destin des Québécoises n'aurait pas été le même.



Journaliste de carrière, Claude Gravel a été directeur de l'information à *La Presse* durant les années 1980, puis éditeur adjoint et rédacteur en chef au quotidien *Le Soleil* de Québec. Au milieu des années 1990, il est devenu secrétaire de rédaction à la télévision de la Société Radio-Canada, au Réseau de l'information et au *Téléjournal*. Il a quitté Radio-Canada en 2008 pour se consacrer à l'écriture. En 2010, il a publié *La Vie dans les communautés religieuses* aux Éditions Libre Expression.



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