

**THE MYSTICAL WRITINGS OF
MADELEINE DE SAINT-JOSEPH
DU BOIS DE FONTAINES**

(1578-1637)

by

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submitted in accordance with the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF THEOLOGY

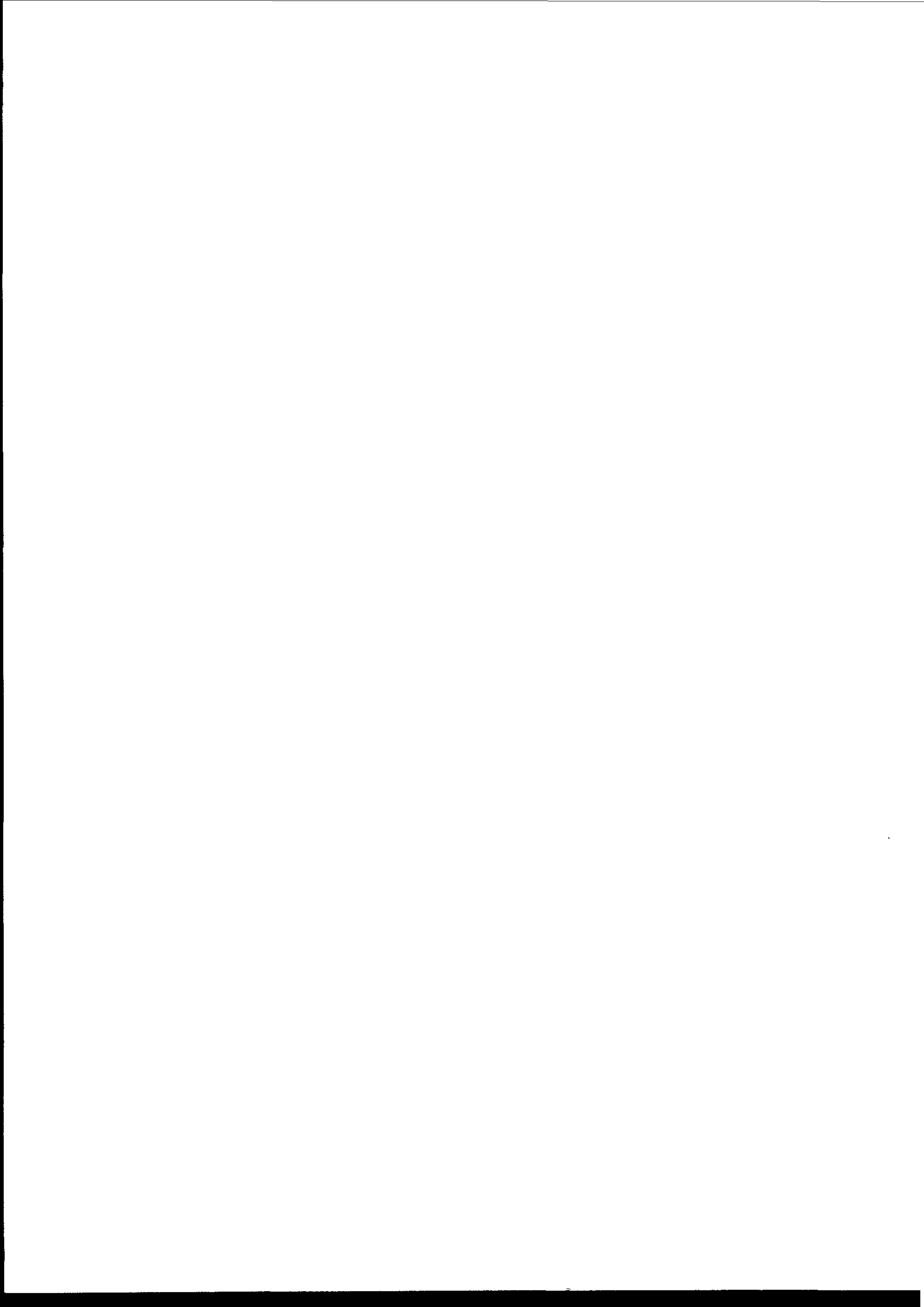
with Specialisation in Christian Spirituality

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

PROMOTER: PROFESSOR C E T KOURIE

JANUARY 2002

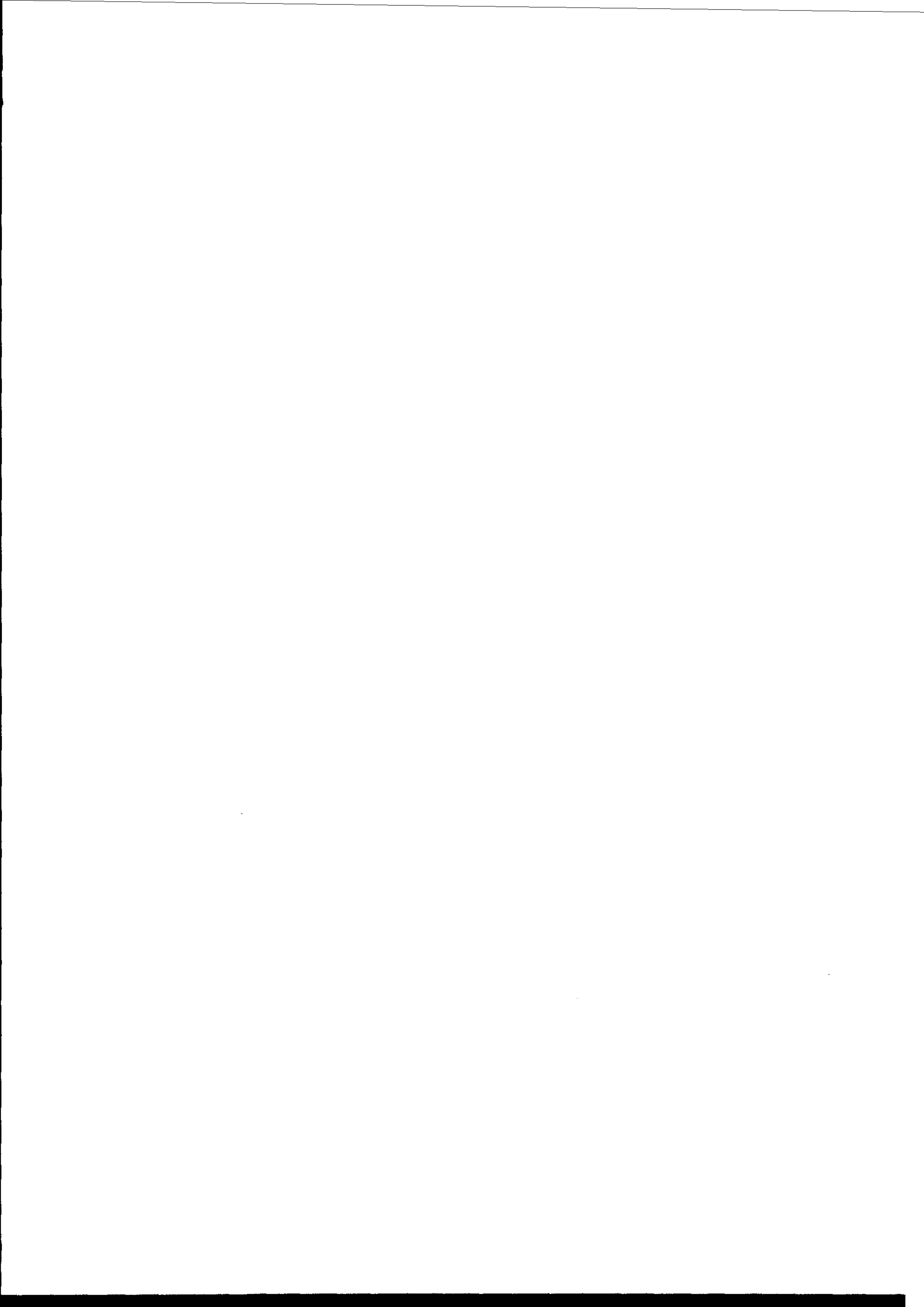




Portrait de la V. M. Madeleine de S^t Joseph, Religieuse de L'Ordre de Nostre Dame du Mont Carmel de la réforme des S^t Terrence dans lequel elle a vécu en France pendant l'espace de plus de 50 ans, et qui fut honorée d'une canonisation par le pape de puis son mort, qui arriva le 20^e April 1637, étant âgée de 59 ans.

LA VÉNÉRABLE MADELEINE DE SAINT-JOSEPH (1578-1637)

fut la première Prieure française du monastère des Carmélites Déchaussées fondé à Paris, au faubourg Saint-Jacques, en 1604 par les filles de Sainte Thérèse d'Avila. Ce Carmel est aujourd'hui fixé à Clamart (Seine)



**ABSTRACT: THE MYSTICAL WRITINGS OF MADELEINE DE
SAINT-JOSEPH DU BOIS DE FONTAINES (1578-1637)**

Madeleine du Bois de Fontaines (1578-1637) was the first French prioress of the Teresian Carmelites in France. During a period of over thirty years as a Carmelite nun, Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph served as mistress of novices and was elected prioress for two terms in the Carmel of the Incarnation, Faubourg St. Jacques in Paris. She established and was elected prioress of a second Parisian Carmel at the rue Chapon; and helped to establish and stabilise the Carmels in Lyon and Tours.

Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's contribution to the development of Carmelite life and French spirituality was a significant one due to many factors. Among these were: her leadership of the Carmelite community in Paris; her association with Pierre de Bérulle; her influence on the members of the French aristocracy; and her deftness at spiritual direction. Within the corpus of her writings, there is significant evidence of what may be called theistic mystical experience. An analysis of the writings of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph also indicates mystical practice and doctrine that Mère Madeleine developed during the course of her life.

The present study introduces the study and presents a survey of relevant literature written by or about Madeleine de Saint-Joseph. Secondly, it explores the notions of mystical consciousness, knowledge, experience, offers a working definition of mysticism, relating these to Lonergan's cognition theory and work on religious experience, and to the feminist critique of philosophy of religion. Thirdly, the study contextualises the life and work of Madeleine du Bois de Fontaines within sixteenth and seventeenth century French civil and ecclesiastical society. Fourthly, it determines by theological, phenomenological, and philosophical analysis that Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph is a true mystic; and finally, it presents the mystical doctrine and teachings of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph within a theological context. Thereby, it is hoped that this study recognises the valuable contribution to mystical literature of this relatively unknown and unrecognised woman.

Key Words:

adoration Bérulle Carmelites *Cercle Acarie* feminism France Lonergan
Madeleine de Saint-Joseph mysticism phenomenology

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge with gratitude the assistance of Patricia O'Callaghan, librarian at the Carmelitana Collection, Whitefriars Hall, Washington, D.C., Patrick McMahon, O.Carm., and to Joachim Smet, O.Carm whose scholarly pursuit of all things Carmelite has created a marvellous collection of books and resources at Whitefriars Hall, and to Emmet Gavin, O.Carm for the welcome received at Whitefriars in August 2000. Thank you to Judy Cannon, RSM for her hospitality during my stay in Washington.

Gratitude is also extended to Sœur Thérèse, archivist at the Carmel de l'Incarnation, Clamart (Paris), France for her assistance and encouragement, to Sister Mary of St. Philip from the Carmel in Notting Hill, England, to Sisters Anthony, Frances, and Sally at Carmel Dysart, Scotland for their interest, prayers and loan of materials.

Thanks are due also to Ms Natalie Thirion, UNISA subject librarian for her help in researching aspects of this thesis. To Professor Celia Kourie go special thanks for her on-going encouragement and advice during the past three years.

I acknowledge with gratitude the grant received from the William James Committee of the Council for Spiritual Practice, and the kindness of Professor Ralph Hood, Jr. of the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga.

Thanks to Anne, Eileen and Marian of Loreto, Pretoria for their hospitality and encouragement during my stay with them. Sincere thanks go to Immaculata Devine, RSM for her help in correcting the manuscript. To Francis Sheehy, RSM and to Louis Blondel, MAf., I owe gratitude for their help with the French texts. Thanks to friends and my community members in Mmakau particularly, who gave support during this endeavour and to those who helped and encouraged me especially at the *eleventh hour!*

To the Sisters of Mercy, Burlingame, California I owe deep gratitude for inculcating in me both a love of study and an appreciation for the richness of the mystical life. Thank you for the challenge to "walk the mystical path with practical feet".

Finally, I wish to thank the Sisters of Mercy, Province of South Africa, whose generosity enabled me to pursue sabbatical studies at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley in 1997. It was during this period that I first encountered Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph.

Jean Evans, RSM

Mmakau, South Africa

To the One who is our way,
our truth, and our life.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Study

In his work on *Post-Reformation Spirituality*, Louis Cognet places Mère Madeleine among the mystics of Carmel, “a holy woman whose holiness irradiated the whole world of the devout” (1959:140). Delville concurs with Cognet’s view that Mère Madeleine made an important contribution to French spirituality:

Mother Madeleine, the first French prioress of the first monastery of Discalced Carmelite nuns in France, exercised a most significant influence. She is actually quite unknown and deserves more attention than she has ever received, because of her role and her spiritual doctrine, marked by the teachings of both Teresa and Bérulle (1994:220).

Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph du Bois de Fontaines (1578-1637), the first French prioress of the Carmelites in France, was a woman endowed with gifts for leadership and for the spiritual formation of others. Her mystical insights were the fruit of her own God-experience and became the source of spiritual teachings for members of her Carmelite community, clergy, and lay persons in seventeenth century France. Mère Madeleine’s spiritual teachings are confined primarily to her letters and to other shorter works.

It is the purpose of this study to make the life, mystical writings, and doctrine of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph more accessible to a wider audience. In view of the forthcoming four hundredth anniversary of the founding of Carmelite life in France in 1604, it is hoped that this study will make a worthwhile contribution to the literature already available on Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph.

1.2 Biographical Sketch

Madeleine du Bois de Fontaines, the daughter of a retired ambassador of the French government, Antoine du Bois de Fontaines and his wife Marie Prudhomme, was born in Paris in 1578. As a young woman she was drawn to prayer and the cultivation of an interior life of recollection. It was her intention to become a religious by joining the Capuchines, an enclosed order of women following the spirit of Saints Francis and Clare. However, a chance encounter with a young cleric, Pierre de Bérulle during the spring of 1603 changed the course of Madeleine du Bois de Fontaines's life.

As a result of her meeting with Bérulle, Madeleine du Bois de Fontaines was one of the first French women to enter the Carmelites of the Teresian reform in 1604. Most of her life was spent in leadership roles within the Carmelite congregation. Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was appointed the first French novice mistress and later elected the first French prioress of the *Grand Couvent* of the Incarnation in the Faubourg, rue St Jacques in Paris. Subsequently, she helped to establish foundations in Lyon and Tours, and served as prioress at rue Chapon and again at the *Grand Couvent* until two years before her death in 1637.

1.3 Theological Significance of this Study

Contemporary feminist theological criticism has given impetus to the work of scholars in discovering and/or recovering the works of women theologians and mystics. These writings offer a wealth of insight and their availability gives the church what is her rightful inheritance. The religious experience and theological reflection of women, long ignored or given scant attention for the most part, play a vital role in expressing what is the fuller experience of the believing church's reflection upon the Word of God. This reflection forms an essential portion of the

church's legacy to its members and establishes "living contact" with the Word¹ (Rahner 1965: 50). The insights uncovered serve to broaden the perspectives of the Christian community and to probe more deeply the fundamentals of Christian belief.

With the preponderance of works of theology having been written by males, the community of faith has been deprived of another viewpoint--both valid and authentic² --, which mediates the Word to that community (Johnson 1997:97). Hence, as Johnson states, "The christological question 'Who do you say that I am?' receives a response with yet another dimension when answered from the experience of believing women" (1997:97).³

God's self-revelation transcends the limits imposed by gender, age, nationality, tradition or culture, is *semper major*,⁴ and yet, even more mysteriously, it unfolds within the limitations of persons living in poor circumstances and who are members

¹ Rahner's comments (1965:50) about the apprehension and unfolding of faith within the believing church are pertinent here: "... her [believing church's] hearing of the Word and her reflexion upon the Word are not *merely* a logical activity, an attempt to gradually squeeze out all the logical virtualities and consequences of the Word heard as though it were a numerical sum of propositions; they are a reflexion on the propositions heard in living contact with the thing itself". Rahner's views reflect a holistic and relational sense characteristic of feminist thought.

² Fischer (1988:6) claims that women's experience is important for understanding God's revelation. "In the past women have been excluded from shaping the theological tradition; it has, in fact, been used against them. Scripture and theology have been formed by male experience, not human experience".

³ Fischer (1988:8) relates another relevant example: "Consider, for example, the way sin and salvation have been defined by men according to their experience. Over two decades ago Valerie Saiving made this point. Contemporary theology, she contends describes the human predicament as arising from separateness and the anxiety it occasions. Human freedom then brings with it the fear for the survival of the self and its values. Sin is the attempt to overcome this anxiety by magnifying our own power and knowledge. Love, on the other hand, is complete self-giving. Setting aside our own interests, we seek the good of others. Within this perception of the situation, sin is identified with self-assertion and love with selflessness. Saiving challenges the validity of this definition for women, whose closeness to nature and cultural role of nurturing lead to a different kind of sin: lack of a clear sense of self, too much self-abnegation, diffuseness, and preoccupation with the trivial. However, spiritual literature is filled with a repetition of the traditional schema on sinfulness, and women's perspective is lost."

⁴ God is always greater.

of despised cultures.⁵ God's love calls human beings regardless of gender, race or personal circumstances into relationship (Rahner 1965:20). Salvation history is the records of God's personal and collective call to relationship with the *people* of Israel culminating in the birth of Jesus Christ, the Word Incarnate⁶ in the flesh of the Virgin Mary, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Salvation history is likewise the record of the response to that call: a response in which the invitation to mutuality was spurned for superiority, inclusivity rejected in favour of exclusivity, self-transcending love cast aside for self-aggrandizement.

The feminist critique of theology calls for an end to patriarchal structures and androcentrism. It calls for a paradigm of mutuality between women and men, not merely complementarities. The feminist critique presses for values of inclusivity over exclusivity, and relatedness and diversity as against separation and uniformity. It posits each person as a unique creation who is called to communion with God. Indeed, "personal interrelationship indicates the manner of God's relationship with the world, and diversity among the divine persons is a principle of affirmation of the diversity within creation." (La Cugna 1973:269).

The character of one's personal relationship with God--in its light and shadow--is shaped by experiences of paradox, mystery and transcendence as one is led gradually into the fullness of baptism to participation in the life of the Trinity. (English 1978:60). It is also shaped by the experience of one's gender. Likewise, the expression of one's experience is conditioned by the expectations that society places

⁵ Palmes (1996:173) presents a synthesis of the theological foundation for inculturation that is found in the John Paul II's address at Santo Domingo. In 1992 the Holy Father launched a campaign for the New Evangelisation as a preparation for the Conference of Latin American bishops and the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Christianity to the "new world" and subsequent conquest and decimation of the indigenous population. "Of these three mysteries (incarnation, paschal mystery, pentecost) the one which most directly pertains to inculturation is the Incarnation of the Word. There is no way to consider it an abstract act in the light of history: the Word assumed this natural, human, concrete form, belonged to a social group (the poor), within a specific culture (held in contempt by the Greeks), in a geographical location (a corner of the world). The inculturation of the Gospel can not follow other ways different from that which Jesus followed" (translation mine).

⁶ Pierre de Bérulle, the French founder of the Oratory who was influential in introducing the Carmelite reform into France was given the title, "Apostle of the Word Incarnate" by Pope Urban VIII (Thompson 1989:16).

upon one because of her/his gender. With these factors in view, we examine the mystical writings of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph. She is someone who has been given little recognition in the English-speaking world for her contribution to spirituality and theology.

Mère Madeleine de St-Joseph du Bois Fontaines was the first French prioress of the Carmelite women in France. Thompson writes, "much of the contribution of women to theology and spirituality in general is only now beginning to receive the attention it has always deserved" (1989:22). As Thompson has asserted, women played a critical role in the development of the French school of spirituality. For that reason investigation into what he calls the "rich amount of theology and spirituality" emanating from Madeleine de Saint-Joseph is well warranted (1989:22).

While numerous letters of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph are included in the biography by Louise de Jésus (1935) and in Morgain's thesis (1987),⁷ no significant study in French or English has been made of Mère Madeleine's letters. The mystical form of her Berullism in its originality and attractiveness, as Cognet puts it, has not been probed; nor has her religious experience and spiritual doctrine been recognised as Cognet (1959), Delville (1987, 1994); and Thompson (1989) have all noted. Feminist theological criticism calls for attention to the wisdom of women whose contributions have been excluded from many dimensions of life in the church (Johnson 1993:22). In the case of Madeleine de Saint Joseph, it is her theological reflection and mystical experience that has been kept hidden.

Thompson (1989) invites scholars to explore the riches of Mère Madeleine's writings and to discover their contribution to the French school, but also to theology and spiritual doctrine in general (1989:22).

⁷ Morgain published a thesis in 1987, "Madeleine de Saint Joseph, accomplissement d'une vocation". This utilises many extracts from letters, but does not study them *per se*.

Such an exploration will contribute toward a more authentic and inclusive appraisal of theological developments:⁸ This is the challenge of Thompson, taking his cue from feminist theologians such as Elizabeth Johnson and Rosemary Reuther.

This study proposes to confirm that Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph is an authentic mystic, to identify some of her mystical insights, and to present certain aspects of her spiritual teachings. Thus it is hoped that the wealth of her experience and mystical insights will be more accessible to the whole church.

1.4 Methodology and Demarcation of Chapters

The methodology is broadly phenomenological. Philosophical, linguistic, historical, and theological analyses are employed in order to situate Mère Madeleine's experience and writings within the context of the study of mysticism, to establish an understanding of the historical-cultural context of France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and to evaluate her mystical writings from a theological perspective.

Chapter one introduces the purposes of the study and presents the literature survey of works written by and/or about Madeleine de Saint-Joseph.⁹ Chapter two explores the nature of mysticism. First, a general overview of twentieth and twenty-first century study of mysticism is presented in Section 2.2. Section 2.3 sets out a working definition of mysticism and discusses the need for an integrated approach to mysticism. This is followed by reflections on the relationship of mysticism to the body, (Section 2.4) to consciousness (Section 2.5), and to knowledge (2.6).

⁸ That a female mystical tradition exists is well documented, but a female theological tradition of "faith seeking understanding" seems more difficult to trace. To date, there have been three women declared doctors of the church: Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila and Thérèse of Lisieux. Women theologians, as such, have only been recognised in the last quarter of the 20th century, e.g. Rosemary Haughton, Sandra Schneiders, Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, Rosemary Reuther, Elizabeth Johnson, Margaret Farley, Catherine La Cugna, Ivona Gebara, Janet Ruffing, Maria Clara Lucchetti Bingemer, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Sallie McFague, Elsa Tamez, Sr. Vandana, Christine Amjad-Ali.

⁹ The French quotations from Madeleine de Saint-Joseph are directly from Séroutet (1965) or Louise de Jésus (1935). There has been no attempt to alter or correct the texts to bring them into conformity with modern usage.

Within the context of this philosophical investigation, the cognitive theory of Lonergan (1958) as well as Lonergan's explanation of religious experience and conversion from his work *Method in Theology* (1971) are presented. This is followed in Section 2.7 by a discussion of the idea of mediation¹⁰ in mystical experience as related to mysticism and culture. Section 2.8 looks at mysticism from a feminist perspective and offers a critique of the philosophy of religion and mysticism. Section 2.9 explains various types of linguistic responses to mystical experience. A summary and conclusions complete the work of Chapter two.

In Chapter three, we present a contextualisation of the life of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph. We begin with an analysis of the political, social and cultural situation of sixteenth and seventeenth century France. Then the situation of the Catholic Church in post-reformation France—its shadows and lights—is presented.

Chapter four discusses the context and content of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's mystical writings. It presents her linguistic responses to mystical experience, and introduces a feminist critique of her use of metaphor. To ascertain whether selected texts of Mère Madeleine can be considered mystical utterances, a phenomenological analysis is performed on three texts. Texts are examined against a framework of indicators of theistic mystical experience to determine whether or not they meet the criteria given for authentic mystical utterance/experience. There is an analysis of the theological content of the texts, and conclusions are drawn.

Chapter five presents a thematic study of the spiritual teachings of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph. The spiritual teaching or doctrine of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph is derived from her experience of God, her knowledge of scripture and the fathers of the church, her familiarity with the writings and spirit of Teresa of Avila, and her association with Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle. Themes such as prayer, humility,

¹⁰ In this context *mediation* means how a person perceives a mystical experience: does it come contextualised by culture and religion or is it a non-contextual experience of transcendence.

adoration¹¹ and love, detachment/adherence, spiritual direction, discernment of spirits, and the humanity of Christ are presented with examples from Mère Madeleine's works.

Within the context of Madeleine's devotion to the humanity of Christ, the issue of illuminism in prayer will be presented. Those who followed this doctrine in Spain were referred to as "alumbrados".¹² The illuminist tendency manifested itself during Mère Madeleine's lifetime and was a great cause of concern. This chapter concludes with a summary and presentation of conclusions.

Chapter six presents a final assessment of the life and mystical writings of Madeleine of Saint-Joseph. What follows is a survey of literature that has been written by or about Madeline de Saint-Joseph du Bois de Fontaines.

1.5 Literature Survey

1.5.1 Works by Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph

There is not a large body of literature written by Madeleine du Bois de Fontaines, (Fontaines—Maran) the Venerable Madeleine de Saint-Joseph. Her legacy remains confined to one volume of 300 letters and a life of Sœur Catherine of Jesus, a French Carmelite nun, who experienced extraordinary graces and sufferings in the course of her short life as a Carmelite. This work was called *La vie de Sœur Catherine de Jésus, religieuse de l'Ordre de Notre Dame du Mont-Carmel, établie en France, selon la réformation de notre Mère sainte Thérèse de Jésus, décédée à Paris le dix-*

¹¹ According to Thompson (1989:23), Mère Madeleine's theology of adoration influenced the work of Bérulle, is significant, and is worthy of study.

¹² "Their method of procedure consisted in abandonment to the love of God. Vocal prayer, meditation on the passion, fasts, penances, rites and ceremonies, the use of images, and the religious life were all considered to be hindrances or useless. Abandonment to the love of God placed one at the summit of perfection. It was the quickest and safest way to union with God. Flowing from this practice and these ideas came a certitude and a self-confidence that resulted in an aggressive contempt for tradition. The problem seems to have developed out of a misunderstanding of the meaning of pure love" (Kavanaugh 1989:73).

neuviesme février 1613 (Toulouse, 1625 ; Paris, 1626 ; 1628 ; 1631 ; 1656 ; reprinted in Paris 1929). Commenting on Mère Madeleine's literary skill and suggesting that Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was privy to mystical knowledge herself, Bremond writes, "Never, I believe, have the secrets of the higher Mysticism been more felicitously presented" (1930:244). Bremond attributes this clarity of explanation to Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's connatural¹³ knowledge. He writes:

The private papers of Catherine de Jésus, which are quoted at length, and the narrative itself with its short explanations, are both stamped with celestial simplicity and sincerity, and with extraordinary transparency. There is not a drop of that unctuous sweetness which too often irritates us in books of this nature, not a suspicion of pious rhetoric; it embodies the idea of perfection as conceived by the great masters....It is all this and still more; Madeleine could not so admirably have understood and described the graces of Catherine had she not herself received the same and even higher gifts (1930:244-245).

After Mère Madeleine's death in 1637, a collection of her instructions to novices was published as a booklet: *Avis de la Vén. Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph pour la conduite des novices* (Paris, 1672). This was re-published by the Carmel, Clamart in 1939 and in 1949 as *L'oraison à l'école de la vén. Madeleine de Saint-Joseph*.

In 1965 Pierre Sérout¹⁴ O.C.D. published a collection of Mère Madeleine's letters, *Lettres spirituelles de Madeleine de Saint-Joseph* (Bruges-Paris : Desclée de Brouwer). Sérout's collection is based primarily on copies from the seventeenth or eighteenth century. Though he searched in archives of Carmelite convents and in church archives in Rome and Paris, Sérout was able to locate few originals. Original letters, fragments and a collection of over 327 pages were sent to Rome for the process of beatification and received by Pope Pius VI in 1785; but unfortunately, the

¹³ This is knowledge obtained by experience rather than study.

¹⁴ Sérout subsequently published a volume of Madame Acarie's letters (1993).

documents disappeared completely.¹⁵ The collection edited by Sérouet is divided into two parts: letters which indicate the approximate date and name of the receiver (127), and those which have neither date nor receiver's name. Many of these letters showed signs of being altered or erased (173). This latter group has been arranged thematically. These letters are an excellent source for a study of Mère Madeleine's spirituality.

In 1989 William Thompson published a work on the writers of the French school of spirituality, *Bérulle and the French School* (New York: Paulist). This collection contains sixteen of Mère Madeleine's letters which were translated into English by the late Lowell Glendon, S.S. These letters as well as those contained in Sérouet's collection serve as the source for this study of Mère Madeleine. Thompson contends that Mère Madeleine's "letters are the particularly critical sources for her developing thought and work. Given the critical role of the Great Carmel in the renewal taking place in France, and given her own contribution to the French school, Madeleine de Saint Joseph deserves to be considered one of the great initiators" of the French School (1989:25).

1.5.2 Works written about Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph

There were two biographies of Mère Madeleine written in 1645 by Oratorian priests, G. Gibieuf and J. Senault.¹⁶ The first of these biographies, *Vie de la Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph* was primarily the work of Gibieuf and is well over four hundred pages in length. The original manuscript is housed at the Carmel de l'Incarnation,

¹⁵ «...cette précieuse collection a tout entière disparu, peut-être au cours du transfert à Paris, sous l'Empire, d'une partie des Archives de la Sacrée Congrégation des Rites» *This precious collection entirely disappeared perhaps during the transfer from France under the Empire, and one part to the Archives of the Sacred Congregation of Rites* (Sérouet 1965:10).

¹⁶ Holmes (1981:108) writes: "The Oratory, named simply for the room in which a group of priests met with Philip Neri for religious renewal, is a congregation of secular—as opposed to religious priests (i.e. those in a religious order much as the Benedictines, Franciscans, Cistercians, etc.) living without vows. The Oratory emphasizes the witness of prayer, preaching, and the sacraments. They loved beautiful liturgy, with magnificent music. We get the term *oratorio* from the Oratory. Bérulle founded the Oratory in France, especially for the renewal of clerical life".

Clamart, Paris. Pere Gibieuf knew Mère Madeleine well and after the death of Pierre de Bérulle was both Mère Madeleine's spiritual director and superior. Gibieuf was a strongly interior man, a respected theologian and a better-than-average writer (Louise of Jesus 1935:2). However, his biography is incomplete. It was used as the source of a second biography by Gibieuf's confrère Père Senault.

The second biography *La vie de la Mere Magdelaine de S. Joseph, religieuse Carmelite deschaussee, de la premier Regle selon la reforme de Ste. Therese* was published in 1645 and is considered the first official biography of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph. In 1647, the process of beatification for Mère Madeleine was begun. The text was augmented with many new accounts of Madeleine's virtue. Senault had contributed in a minor way to the first volume and according to Morgain (1987:42) the second book added some complementary traits to the description of the "Bienheureuse".¹⁷

In 1665, Filippo della Trinità, included a brief biography of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph in Vol. III (106-109) of *Décor Carmeli*.

In 1670 a third biography by Père Talon, also a priest of the Oratory, published biography of Mère Madeleine. This was a reprint of Senault's work, with the same title, and added memories of Carmelites who knew Mère Madeleine. While Talon's biography is more complete than the other two and presents an historical and spiritual portrait of Mère Madeleine, Talon did not respect the original sources that he cited in the text. He omits some dates, proper names and other details that would have enlivened the text (Louise de Jésus 1935:4). Commenting on the style of these biographies, Fischer (1989:12) writes: « Elles sont donc très elogieuses et restent beaucoup trop discrètes sur certains événement.... »

Volume I of *The Chronicles of the Carmelite Order*, (Troyes: 1846) treats details of the life of Mère Madeleine and how it impacted on the spread of the order in France.

¹⁷ The author obtained a copy of Senault's biography through the kindness of Fr. Joachim Smet, O.Carm. Director of the Carmelitana Collection, Whitefriars Hall, Washington, D.C.

Her tenure as prioress at the rue Faubourg St. Jacques, as foundress of the Carmel in Lyon, at the Rue Chapon convent and again at rue Faubourg St. Jacques is discussed uncritically.

No single work was published about Venerable Madeleine for a long period of time after these seventeenth century biographies. However, in one of his monumental works on Pierre de Bérulle, *M. de Bérulle et les Carmelites de France*, (1872) the Abbé Houssaye devoted one chapter to Mère Madeleine. Works published in the nineteenth century such as Houssaye's are more apologetic in style, but more explicit in detail (Fischer: 1989:12).

Perhaps the most authoritative biography of Mère Madeleine appeared in 1935. It was the work of Sœur Louise de Jésus, OCD, and was published by the Carmel de l'Incarnation, Clamart. This monumental work *La Vénérable Madeleine de Saint-Joseph: première prieure française du premier monastère des carmélites déchaussées en France* is considered by Thompson (1989: 339) as the best biography available, with ample selections from Mère Madeleine's writings. The author used letters—some originals and copies from the Carmel de l'Incarnation archives, depositions from Carmelite sisters that were used in the process of beatification, unedited pieces of correspondence, as well as writings that described Mère Madeleine's devotion and the cures that took place as a result of her intercession (1935:6). This work presents in great detail and with precision the events in the life of Mère Madeleine from her childhood. Drawing on Talon, Senault and Gibrieuf's works and depositions from community members close to Mère Madeleine, the author portrays Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's character, life experiences, trials and interior states. Letters are augmented with the presentation of four interior *relations* of Mère Madeleine. These were either written or dictated to a confidante and form an important source for understanding the religious experience of the French prioress.

In 1936 Jacques Madaule published an article in *La vie spirituelle* « La première prieure française du carmel réformé la vénérable Madeleine de Saint-Joseph ». This

article highlights the saintly qualities of the prioress and her spiritual contributions to the life of the church in seventeenth century France. Madaule characterises Mère Madeleine as “la parfaite fille de sainte Thérèse” (1936:503) and goes on to show how she inculcated the teachings of Teresa in the young French Carmelites. He attests to her strength of character, her understanding of the Carmelite vocation and her deep interior life.¹⁸

Not only is Madeleine a perfect daughter of Teresa, but also she is a second St. Augustine, albeit a feminine version. Madaule writes: “One thing above all distinguishes the Venerable: the wisdom and firmness of a manly spirit in the body of a woman. One of her friends, a bishop, claimed that were it not for her sex, she would have been a second Augustine.”¹⁹ Together with the seventeenth century bishops who praised Mère Madeleine’s character and gifts, Madaule also shares their dismay that such intellectual and spiritual prowess would be housed in a woman’s body. At the same time Madaule also describes some of the graces that Mère

¹⁸ « ...je voudrais extraire, avant de terminer, des rares écrits de la Vénérable, quelques textes qui nous permettent d’entrevoir l’ineffable mystère de son union à Dieu : ‘Les opérations de Dieu en mon âme sont si intimes, et l’amour—au moins ce que j’appelle ainsi—est si secret, que je dis quelquefois : Amour, vu que vous êtes si puissant, comment opérez-vous avec qui peu de bruit ? Comment êtes-vous si caché ?...’(1936 :514). See English translation in Chapter four.

¹⁹ « Un évêque de ses amis prétendait que, si elle n’eût pas été du sexe, elle aurait été un second Augustin. Avec cela, la plus extrême humilité et la plus grande douceur. » (1936: 503). Discussing the misogyny of the counter-reformation period, Alison Weber (1990: 17) writes: “A virile woman, a manly soul,” “She endured all conflicts with manly courage.” These are some of the most reiterated encomiastic expressions to appear in the documents related to Teresa’s beatification and canonization. Teresa as a “virile woman” was the central conceit in many of the poems produced for contests in her honor: “You well deserve this name, because your deeds are not those of a woman but of glorious man.... A sage said (since it seemed impossible) that to find a strong woman, one must search to the ends of the world. Therefore it is appropriate that you were found among us, oh rare and divine miracle, since Spain was always thought to be at the end of the world.” When Teresa was proclaimed co-patron saint of Spain, a Carmelite friar declared in the celebratory sermon that she had succeeded in transcending the congenital inferiority of her sex altogether: “This woman ceased to be a woman, restoring herself to the virile state to her greater glory than if she had been a man from the beginning, for she rectified nature’s error with her virtue, transforming herself through virtue into the bone [i.e. Adam’s rib] from which she sprang”.

Madeleine received in prayer (1936:512) demonstrating the “adequacy” and genuineness of Mère Madeleine’s religious experience.²⁰

In 1953 Maria Winowska published « Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph première prieure du Carmel de France » in *La vie spirituelle*. This article is biographical and attempts to highlight Mère Madeleine’s natural and supernatural gifts—gifts largely ignored in the 19th century.²¹

In the 1959 edition of Cagnet’s *Post-reformation spirituality*, there is a very positive appraisal of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph’s contribution to spirituality:

“Warmly attached to Berullian spirituality, she fought untiringly to defend it, to extend it to the Carmels and to lessen the influence of the abstract school. But her Berullism assumes a mystical form in many respects original and very attractive” (1959:140). Concluding his comments on the Carmelite prioress, Cagnet laments the fact that with the exception of small fragments, Madeleine’s writings remained hitherto unpublished.

“ Présence au monde d’une carmélite”, by Elisabeth Rimbaud in *Carmel* (1966 :48-66) presents another aspect of Mère Madeleine’s character and graced abilities that was her apostolate to the world outside the cloister on the rue Faubourg St. Jacques. Rimbaud discusses such things as Madeleine’s relationships with members of

²⁰ “The belief in feminine spiritual inadequacy is perhaps best summarized in Kramer and Sprenger’s 1486 handbook on witchcraft, *Malleus Malleficarum*. According to the fantastic etymology proposed by these authors, *femina* is derived from *fe minus*—lacking in faith. Nevertheless, at various times in church history women have been permitted to express their religious experience in writing. Thomistic theology, while essentially androcentric, did concede the possibility of a prophetic role for women. The explosion of female piety in the late medieval church is recorded in the visions of women mystics such as Julian of Norwich, Mechtild of Magdeburg, and Catherine of Siena. Such literature was not only a socially sanctioned activity for women; as Caroline Bynum has argued, women’s visionary writings propagated new forms of late medieval Christian piety and created a religious language inspired by uniquely female experiences” (Weber 1990:20).

²¹ « Pour situer Mère Madeleine parmi les grands spirituels de son siècle, Bremond ne disposait que d’une documentation restreinte et de seconde main. ‘Les quelques lettres que je connais d’elle—ajoute-t-il—paraissent moins révélatrices qu’on ne le voudrait.’ Bien plus encore que Madame Acarie, l’insigne carmélite fut victime d’un injuste oubli, et le XIX^e siècle semble ‘avoir complètement ignorée » (1953: 57).

Parisian society and royalty, her care for the poor, her support of seminarians from England and Ireland, and her interactions with ordinary people²² who benefited from her spiritual direction.

Again, there is a brief treatment of Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph in Cognet's *La spiritualité moderne I*, published in 1966 by Aubier in Paris (326-367). In this section Cognet discusses Madeleine's contribution to the spread of Carmelite life in France, her spirituality and her links with Pierre de Bérulle.

Valentine Macca includes a short biography of Madeleine of Saint-Joseph in the volume, *Saints of Carmel: a compilation of various dictionaries*. Rome: Carmelite Institute, 1972. This volume gives biographies of Carmelite men and women. Included also are Marie de l'Incarnation (Madame Barb Acarie) and her daughter (Marguerite du Sainte-Sacrament).

In 1980, Pierre Sérouet wrote a brief article for the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*. This article summarises the events of her life and highlights her doctrine and spirituality—“comme celle de Bérulle, est nettement théocentrique” (1980:58). Significantly, Sérouet refers to the mystical element in the writings of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph, and he includes a written comment of her spiritual director, Pierre de Bérulle.

Three unpublished theses have been written on Madeleine of St. Joseph. Morgain's was written in 1987 for his “memoire de licence” in the area of church history at the University of Fribourg: “Madeleine de Saint Joseph, accomplissement d'une vocation”. Subsequently, Morgain edited the contents for publication at Clamart as an issue of *Vivres flammes*, (1987:168), “Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph o.c.d.” This booklet, like Morgain's thesis, presents the principal themes of Mère Madeleine's spirituality and her particular devotions. It suggests that her spiritual

²² « L'apostolat de Mère Madeleine connu mieux que ces tardifs triomphes. Agnès de Saint-Michel se souvenait d'une boulangère qui fit de grands progrès en l'oraison sous la conduite de Mère Madeleine » (Rimbaud 1966 :65).

legacy is based on a synthesis of teachings from Teresa of Avila and Pierre de Bérulle.²³

In 1989 Anne Fischer wrote a thesis (Mémoire de maîtrise) for the history department of the University of Paris, Sorbonne on « Les relations du Carmel de l'Incarnation et de la société parisienne sous les priorats de la Mère Madeleine de Saint Joseph (1608-1615/1624-1635). » This study focuses on the interactions between Mère Madeleine and members of the royalty/aristocracy during her two terms as prioress at the Carmel de l'Incarnation. It sheds light on Madeleine's role in French society—from praying for a victory against the English in the siege of La Rochelle, to giving spiritual counsel to members of the aristocracy such as the Queen Regent Marie de Medici, the Princess de Condé, Charlotte Montmorency, and the Duchess de Longueville.

Tracing the history of efforts to beatify Madeleine du Bois de Fontaines, Pierre Menant's thesis (1992) "Sainteté et procédure canonique la beatification de la Vénérable Madeleine de Saint-Joseph 1644-1789" (Mémoire pour la maîtrise d'Histoire, Université de Paris, IV Sorbonne) is the most recent work dedicated completely to Mère Madeleine. The thesis examines the difficulties that surrounded the process, explains the sources of the depositions and accounts for the halt in the process. Menant, a layman living in southern France, continues to be involved in promoting the beatification of Vénérable Madeleine de Saint-Joseph.²⁴ The title *foundress* of Carmel in France is reserved to Madame Acarie—Marie de l'Incarnation (Menant 1992:68), but it is Mère Madeleine whom biographers refer to as the "Propagatrice du Carmel déchaux en France" (1992:1).²⁵

²³ Morgain discusses the Bérullian themes: adoration, l'adhérence and l'anéantissement. He concludes from his study of Madeleine of Saint-Joseph that she is faithful to the thought of Bérulle (1987:119).

²⁴ Sœur Thérèse, archivist of Carmel de l'Incarnation, Clamart interview on 12 September 2000.

²⁵ "Les hagiographies de la Vénérable Madeleine de Saint Joseph la disent 'propagatrice du Carmel déchaux en France' ce qui lui convient bien puisqu'elle fut la principale ouvrière,

in 1994 Delville, published *The French school of spirituality*. The original French version (1987) did not allude to the contribution of women to the development of the French school of spirituality and thought. The second edition, however, published in English includes a section devoted to the role of women in the development and propagation of the French school of spirituality. Delville writes:

Too much can never be said about the astonishing role and the extraordinary influence of certain women in the Church in seventeenth century France, and many studies could be devoted to this topic. In depth research ought also to be pursued on the place of Mary Magdalen and, especially, of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, in the spiritual and apostolic movement we have been following (1994:226).

Quite significantly he also mentions the division in France of Carmels of Bérulle and those of Teresa. The origin of this split is possibly the Holy See's appointment of French priests--not Carmelites, to be superiors of the new order of nuns. It is likely that such an appointment was more politically than spiritually motivated. Henry of Navarre would not tolerate the presence of Spanish Carmelite priests²⁶. The situation created out of political necessity had a far-reaching effect on the foundation of the Carmelite women in France. Not long after the initial foundation was made, the Spanish foundresses were keen to travel to Flanders to begin another Carmel owing to the ideological and cultural differences between the Spanish foundresses and Pierre de Bérulle. Subsequently, the fledgling community was left in the hands of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph, as the novice mistress and later prioress of the *Grand Couvent*.

A further difficulty arose in relation to Pierre de Bérulle's interpretation of the Carmelite charism and vocation. Bérulle, who understood the importance of Mary as patroness of the Carmelite order, considered that a vow of servitude to her would be an appropriate expression of Carmelite piety. When Bérulle introduced the vow

entre 1608 et 1637, de l'extraordinaire développement du Carmel thérésien dans la royaume" (Menant 1992 :1).

²⁶ "Ce serait un couvent de carmélites et non de carmes.... Henri IV considerait les carmes comme: 'Plus espagnoles que Christians'" (Morgain 1987:29).

of servitude a controversy, fueled possibly by the aggravation of Carmelite priests, grew into a schism that split the Carmels of France and regrettably caused a great rift between Bérulle and his cousin, Sœur Marie de l'Incarnation (Madame Barb Acarie). The controversy is presented in detail in Morgain's *Pierre de Bérulle et les Carmelites* (1995).

It is hoped that this thesis will contribute to making the mystical writings, doctrine and personality of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph more widely known and appreciated.

Chapter 2

AN EXPLORATION INTO THE NATURE OF MYSTICISM

2.1 Introduction

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.²⁷

Entering the third millennium with the apocalyptic words of W.B. Yeats ringing in our ears, watching chaos and destruction²⁸ play out before our eyes, more than ever before the quest for union with the divine, with Ultimate Reality is a quest for a centre that *will* hold. The mystic way is above all a way to the centre. It is the purpose of this chapter to explore the nature of the mystic way.

An exploration into the nature of mysticism entails a brief historical overview of the study of mysticism in modern times (2.2). Following that, a working definition of mysticism is offered that provides the necessary framework for the study (2.3). As mysticism is a phenomenon that engages the whole person, the investigation concentrates upon some aspects of mysticism's relationship to the body, to consciousness, and to knowledge. Some attention will be given to the cognitive theory of Lonergan and its relationship to mystical consciousness and knowledge (2.4).

²⁷ W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming," in Malan (1986:58).

²⁸ The reference is to the catastrophic events that took place in New York, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania on the 11th of September 2001.

Since no human activity occurs outside the ambit of culture, we treat the relationship of mysticism to culture, focusing particularly on the notion of mediation, and whether or not mystical experiences are perceived directly or are the conditioned result of language, culture, or religion (2.5). Mystical experience is genuine *human* experience, neither culture nor gender specific. This study takes into account, therefore, the feminist critique of philosophy of religion and mysticism (2.6). Following that, the role of language is examined noting how it both shapes and expresses mystical utterance (2.7). A summary and conclusion brings the work of the chapter to a close (2.8).

2.2 Historical Overview of the Modern Study of Mysticism

The Gifford lecture series (1901-1902) delivered by James over a century ago in Edinburgh introduced the analysis of the data of consciousness to the study of mysticism. From his study of numerous mystical texts, James concluded that there are four identifying marks of mystical consciousness: ineffability, noetic quality, transiency, passivity (1902/[1929]:371-372). Since James's time, philosophers of religion have designated two streams of mystical experience: monist and theist. The former represents the experience in which a person senses merging and identification.²⁹ The latter expresses the experience of someone who identifies with an Other and perceives a type of closeness.

The work of Otto in *The Idea of the Holy* (1950) brought to the fore the concept of the *sacred*. Guardini (1962:89) notes that Otto used three terms to characterise the religious element: "Totally Other," and therefore, different from every other fact which is intrinsically mundane or earthly; the "sacral" denoting a religious, not moral meaning; and finally "numinous" or divine from the Latin word *numen*. According to Almond (1982:122), "numinous" is used by Otto as a category into which he placed both theistic and mystical experiences.

²⁹ In Hinduism, the essence of the self is identified with the godhead (Almond 1982:120).

Stace (1960:131-132) concludes that there is a common group of characteristics in extrovertive and introvertive mystical experiences. This core group is trans-cultural and trans-historical (Price 1998:111).

Under the first heading of extrovertive falls so-called “nature” experiences. Within the ambit of the introvertive experiences are those that result from meditation, personal introspection, and spiritual practice. According to Stace, all mystical experiences share the following in common: sense of objectivity or reality, feeling of blessedness, peace, awareness of the holy, sacred, or divine; paradoxicality, ineffability (1960:131-132). Stace comes under fire for “incompatibility between his phenomenological analysis and his conceptual claims concerning the truth of pantheistic interpretations of mystical experience” (Alston 1992:124).

Zaehner (1969) regards theistic experience, nature or panenhenic, and monistic, as types of mystical experience (Almond 1982:123). Donovan (1979:4) considers mystical, paranormal, charismatic and regenerative experiences as types of religious experience.

Smart (1983; 1984) distinguishes between monist mystical experience; and theist, numinous, and points out the nuanced links between the two (Almond 1982:122). Concerning himself with interpretation, Smart analyses types of interpretation, e.g. auto and hetero-, and shows the ways in which interpretation becomes incorporated into accounts of mystical experience (McGinn 1991:318). Smart’s classification aims at producing a phenomenologically clear report, unmixed by the ramifications of interpretation. However, according to Alston (1992:123), Smart is “caught in a conceptual bind since his conceptual framework depends in large measure on factors external to the experience, and also that if we are to find religious truth, we should look to religious experience”.

As described by Proudfoot, the term “numinous” acts like a placeholder (1985:131) “Though purportedly descriptive, they [placeholders] are lifted out of their original

contexts and employed in ways that empty them of their original meanings and suggest that they are indefinable". He finds Otto's *numinous* the most obvious example. And terms such as "*mana, tabu, baraka, and wakanda*, untranslated, communicate a sense of mystery" (1985:131-132).

A so-called third wave approach to mystical experience is represented by Perennial psychologists such as Forman, Price, Perovich (1998) who posit the existence of a PCE (Forman 1998:3-41), that is a Pure Consciousness Event. They draw on the writings of Rhenish mystics Eckhart and Ruusbroec to propose the possibility of an unmediated consciousness event, an experience influenced neither by language, culture nor belief system.

Phenomenologists such as Pike (1992) use descriptive narrative to set out the parameters of the experience and to separate the experience from its perception and interpretation. The phrase "phenomenological characteristics" is, according to Proudfoot (1985:244), the way of designating what remains of the experience, that is its felt quality, after the subject has bracketed questions of theory and explanation. The phenomenological approach's suspension of judgement allows attention to be focused upon the explanation of the participant such that the subject's claims are neither accepted nor rejected by the investigator (Barbour 1974: 174).

Feminist philosophers of religion and theologians have called attention to the evident lack of reference to women's experience of the phenomenon (Jantzen 1999: 118). They find themselves somewhat more sympathetic to the work of Katz and constructivists because of the emphasis on cultural and other types of conditioning that is of its nature part of mystical experience. However, Pike's (1992) analyses of Teresa of Avila's experiences of spiritual union have been criticized because of evident lack of contextualisation and the assumption that union with God is necessarily a private, subjective state (Jantzen 1995:5). McGinn's focus on the direct experience itself also comes under fire (1995:6). The assumption by most writers

that mysticism is merely a subjective state with no apparent connection to political and or/social realities is a prime concern of Soelle, (2001) whose ideas are discussed later in this chapter.

2.3 Working Definition and Integrated Approach

In his work on the philosophy of the mind, *The Mystery of Consciousness* (1997), Searle discards traditional dualism in favour of a more integral approach to human consciousness:

What I am trying to do is to re-draw the conceptual map: if you have a map on which there are only two mutually exclusive territories, the “mental” and the “physical,” you have a hopeless map and you will never find our way about. In the real world there are lots of territories—economic, political, meteorological, athletic, social, mathematical, chemical, physical, literary, artistic, etc. These are all parts of one unified world. This is an obvious point, but such is the power of our Cartesian heritage that it is very hard to grasp (1997:195).

What Searle says about the study of human consciousness, applies equally well to the study of mystical experience. To discuss mysticism is to embark on a journey in which one sets foot upon many different territories. This is because mysticism is a complex, but unified set of perceptions in which the interplay of bodily sensation, consciousness, and knowledge contributes to what Carmody and Carmody (1996:10) call the “direct experience of ultimate reality”. Mystical experience presents a new³⁰ and unified way of conceiving and perceiving reality, defying the divisive “power of our Cartesian heritage”. The exploration into the nature of mysticism is a venture into some of the territories to which Searle refers, as well as a necessary and fruitful foray into other fields—philosophy, language, religion, and theology.

³⁰ The word *new* is used in the sense of novel, fresh. It is like a *new* song that is composed.

2.4 Mysticism and the Body

Human beings experience all reality through the medium of their bodies. Hence, the body is the locus of mystical and religious experience as well. In his collection of writings from the patristic period, Spidlik, (1994:57) expresses this view, “My body is where God plans to meet me” and he continues by citing the works of Cyril of Jerusalem: “Look within yourself. From your own nature you can learn something of your Maker”.

Long before any differentiation into body and soul, the centre of a physical-spiritual person was considered the heart. It is the place “where the human being in its own source borders on the mystery of God” (Rahner quoted in Tobin 1998:xxvii). Bynum’s collection of essays on gender and the human body in medieval religion³¹ (1992) elucidates the essential role of the body in medieval mysticism and piety—whether it was the mystic’s body or the body of Christ (1992:173). Finally, while mystical experience is usually associated with such bodily phenomena as ecstasy or stigmata, contemporary studies have shown that experiences in sport or other interactive experiences in nature such as surfing, provide opportunity for the experience of unity with ultimate reality.

2.4.1 Mysticism and Sport

Pettersson and Åkerberg (1981:165) present a classification of mysticism that was developed by Söderblom as early as 1892. In this theory there are two “poles” of mystical experience: mysticism of the infinite and mysticism of personal life. Those experiences in which a person finds him/herself in unity with a force or essence that is suprahuman fall within the range of mysticism of the infinite. There is a sense of being lifted beyond ordinary life while at the same time experiencing an oneness with nature. Mysticism of personal life includes experiences that occur within an “I

³¹ “Late medieval spirituality abounds in examples of women emphasizing their physicality in order to join with Christ. For example, Ida of Louvain in the thirteenth century and Dorothy of Montau in the fourteenth century experienced mystical pregnancy as a preparation for or a result of the eucharist” Bynum (1992: 173).

– Thou” relationship with the suprahuman (1981:165) and usually occur within the context of a faith commitment.

The experiences of athletes (Thomas 1996:516) provide several examples of “mysticism of the infinite”. In the case of a surfer, it is a solitary experience that creates a personal sense of challenge: “Surfing is just you and the ocean, you against the waves or with the waves....It’s a basic, primitive thing. It’s just you and the ocean”. The sight of hang gliders, parachutists, and bungee jumpers unnerves many people and creates admiration in others. As the following quote from Thomas indicates, there is an exhilaration at experiences which define and defy the finite quality of life (1996:517): “Free fall is free being, man diving is man alive,...the exhilaration of sinking to the world of nothingness, or at least to stillness, and thereby creating the self as ALL”. A final example from a runner typifies the experience of the infinite combined with a sense of one’s limits, of transiency, and ineffability:

In the last mile something happened which may have occurred only one or two times before or since. Furiously I ran; time lost all semblance of meaning. Distance, time, motion were all one. There were myself, the cement, a vague feeling of legs, and the coming dusk. I tore on....My running was a pouring feeling. Perhaps I had experienced a physiological change, but whatever, it was magic. I came to the side of the road and gazed, with a sort of bewilderment, at my friends. I sat on the side of the road and cried tears of joy and sorrow. Joy at being alive; sorrow for a vague feeling of temporalness, and knowledge of the impossibility of giving this experience to anyone (1996: 517).

The runner would never be able to communicate the nature of his experience to anyone else. For him it was ineffable.³² The experience of running when distance, motion and time became one exemplifies James’s characteristic of transiency. His state of consciousness was changed as a result of bodily exertion.

³² This is one of four characteristics of mystical consciousness: noetic quality, transiency, and passivity as described by James (1902/[1929]:371-327) in the Gifford lectures.

In the examples above, there was a sense of identification or unity, accompanied by a feeling of self-transcendence and inner transformation. Bodily experiences such as these exemplify Söderblom's "mysticism of the infinite" and are examples of natural experiences that occur outside normal waking consciousness (Pettersson and Åkerberg 1981:164).

2.4.2. Mysticism and the Brain

The quest to understand the origins and nature of mystical experience—a seemingly perennial search—has led most recently to the claims of two scientists that there is a link between the structure of the brain and the potential capacity for mystical experience. Heffern reports that d'Aquili and Newberg in their 1999 study, *The mystical mind: probing the biology of religious experience*, posit that the brain's structure not only compels the urge, but has the capacity to make spiritual experiences real (2001:14). Through their research the psychiatrist d'Aquili and the physician Newberg conclude that the process of *deafferentation*, i.e. when the brain structure is cut off from sensory input called afferents, is responsible for the experience of a unitary state.

Drawing on their knowledge of ancient religion and techniques employed by shamans and teachers of prayer and spirituality, the two scientists hypothesise that practices such as chanting and meditation, for example, act as catalysts for the process of *deafferentation* and as such, are responsible for the experience of unitary states. Such participation in ritual causes a diminishment in the activity of what is called the *orientation association area* (OAA). Basing their conclusions on research conducted upon Franciscan nuns and Tibetan monks, d'Aquili and Newberg noted the diminished activity of the OAA during periods of meditation—centering prayer and chanting, respectively. In this case, they argue, "the brain has no choice but to perceive the self as endless and intimately interwoven with everyone and everything the mind senses" (Heffern 2001:15). Newberg contends that their findings are not meant to be reductionist, but are affirmations "that the brain has quite naturally developed the mechanisms for religious experiences" (2001:16). This

information is precisely what Searle (1997:195) has called for. Searle requests the scientific community to provide “an explanation of exactly how neurobiological processes in the brain *cause* our subjective states of awareness or sentience; how exactly these states are *realized* [sic] in the brain structures; and how exactly consciousness *functions* in the overall economy of the brain and therefore how it functions in our lives generally” (1997:192). Though Newberg and d’Aquili do not answer Searle’s query, they do maintain that the functions of the brain provide the context for religious experience. “The only place God can manifest God’s existence is in the tangled neural pathways and physiological structures of the brain” (Heffern 2001:16).

Having established the position that the body is the locus of mystical experience and that the encounter with ultimate reality occurs *via* the physiological network of brain cells that enables consciousness of reality, we turn our attention to the characteristics of ordinary and mystical consciousness.

2.5 Mysticism and Consciousness

Perovich (1998:215) claims that mystical consciousness³³ is “strikingly different from ordinary awareness.” In this section, we present features of normal daily consciousness³⁴ (Searle 1992:128ff). Then using a text from Weil (1950) as a point

33 Payne (1982:253-254) gives a generalized description of mystical consciousness as follows: “There are certain intentional, perception-like states in which the subject is aware of something (or someone) ultimate which nevertheless cannot be seen, heard, tasted, touched or smelled. In some of these experiences there is evidently no awareness of the external world, whereas in others natural objects appear unified and transfigured by the underlying “ultimate” which they seem to disclose....these experiences typically involve a sense of blessedness, joy, satisfaction, and a feeling that what is encountered is somehow holy, divine, and supremely valuable....Among Western mystics the object of such states is usually apprehended as personal, loving, creative, powerful, transcendent, and so on”.

34 It is not our purpose to determine whether or not the absence of these features indicates pathology. Staals writes: “What mystical and pathological states have in common, of course, is that both are distinct from the normal state. Beyond that, we know little. It has been argued that particular exercises and the nonordinary states of mind to which they give access must *eo ipso* be pathological. But a gymnast may also acquire nonordinary skill: by the same argument many sports must be pronounced pathological” (1975:133).

of reference, we note the presence or absence of the features of ordinary consciousness and draw conclusions about the validity of Perovich's claim.

2.5.1 Features of Ordinary Consciousness

Searle proposes that ordinary consciousness is pervaded by a sense of *viewpoint*³⁵ and *intentionality*. He writes: "My conscious experiences, unlike the objects of the experiences, are always *perspectival*. They are always from a point of view" (1992:128). Ordinary consciousness exhibits what Searle calls *aspectual shape*.

A second feature of ordinary consciousness is the awareness of events and objects as being extended temporally and spatially. *Temporal and spatial extension*, however does not extend to consciousness itself (1992:127), but rather to the object of one's perception.

Searle (1992:127) refers to the experience of the five senses, bodily sensations experienced as pleasant/unpleasant, stream of thought, or sudden insight as expressive of *finite modalities*.

A fourth aspect of ordinary consciousness, *familiarity*, is the most pervasive of the aspects of consciousness. It makes possible the grouping and organising of conscious experiences. Because perceptions are organised according to categories, unfamiliar experiences are assimilated into categories of the familiar (1992:128).

Next, conscious states are normally *unified*. Experiences happen either sequentially and are organised horizontally over short stretches of time; or they occur simultaneously presenting an awareness of various features at once, similar to Kant's "transcendental unity of apperception" (1992:130). Searle distinguishes between horizontal and vertical unity. Horizontal unity is the sequencing of events into a "remembered present"; while vertical unity is the drawing together of diverse and

³⁵ In "stream of consciousness" writing of authors like James Joyce, there is an absence of a continuous and consistent point of view.

simultaneous awarenesses into a unified column of understanding. To make sense of our experiences, both forms of *unity* are essential.

Another of the features of ordinary consciousness is what is termed *centre and periphery* (1992:139). In ordinary consciousness, there are differing levels of attention, for example, to background noise. In a crowded noisy room one may not hear the noise of a clock, but might be aware of music in the background or of a dog barking outside. These noises are on the periphery. One may be conscious of them, but may not attend to them. However, if all the other noises were removed from the room and the radio were left on, the sound of the radio would possibly move from the periphery to the centre of one's conscious awareness. Or, perhaps if there were no one present and no radio playing, the noise of a clock ticking or a tap dripping would move from periphery to centre.

Overflow is another interesting characteristic of consciousness. It refers to the phenomenon that occurs when conscious experiences refer beyond their immediate content and connect with previous experiences, awareness, or thoughts. This is the feeling of *connection* that happens when one experience triggers an awareness and memory of another of a similar kind of content in which the thoughts are somehow connected as part of the content, but in another sense not part of it (1992:139).

The last of the features of consciousness to be discussed is *subjective feeling*. This involves the sense of what the conscious state "feels like" (1992:131). When it is reported, the "what-it-feels-like" is expressed in real or metaphorical terms. Sometimes feelings are named; sometimes they are merely alluded to, or described in some detail.

In conclusion, Searle's presentation of elements of consciousness highlights the structured nature of perceptions, the quality of perceptions, the Gestalt of conscious experience, aspects of unity, intentionality, familiarity, feeling, mood, tone, colour, organisation of consciousness, and spatial-temporal aspects.

2.5.2 A Narrative of an Experience of Mystical Consciousness

The following extract is taken from the writings of Simone Weil, (1909-1943) the French philosopher and champion of workers' rights. This is Weil's account of a theistic mystical experience that occurred in September 1941 and is recorded in her spiritual autobiography, dated 15 May 1942. Weil describes her experience of working in the vineyards during harvest time. The repetition of the Greek text of the Our Father seems to have catapulted her into a mystical consciousness of the presence of Christ. Weil sent this account and others, to her spiritual advisor. Weil writes:

Until last September I had never once prayed in all my life, at least not in the literal sense of the word. I had never said any words to God, either out loud or mentally.... Last summer, doing Greek with T.,... I went through the "Our Father" word for word in Greek. We promised each other to learn it by heart. I do not think he ever did so, but some weeks later, as I was turning over the pages of the Gospel, I said to myself that since I had promised to do this thing and it was good, I ought to do it. I did so. The infinite sweetness of this Greek text took hold of me that for several days I could not stop myself from saying it over all the time. A week afterwards I began the vine-harvest. I recited the "Our Father" in Greek every day before work, and I repeated it very often in the vineyard.

Since that time I have made a practice of saying it through once each morning with absolute attention....The effect of this practice is extraordinary and surprises me each time, for although I experience it each day, it exceeds my expectation at each repetition. At times the very first words tear my thoughts from my body and transport it to a place outside space where there is neither perspective nor point of view. The infinity of the ordinary expanses of perception is replaced by an infinity to the second and sometimes the third degree. At the same time, filling every part of this infinity of infinity, there is silence, a silence which is not an absence of sound but which is the object of a positive sensation, more positive than that of sound. Noises, if there are any, only reach me after crossing this silence. Sometimes also, during this recitation or at other moments, Christ is present with me in person, but his presence is infinitely more real, more moving, more clear than on that first occasion when he took possession of me (Weil 1950:37-38).

Within Weil's account of her repetition of the "Our Father," it is possible to identify features of consciousness that Searle elucidates. The first feature that is noticeable is *limited modalities—pleasant/unpleasant*. Weil expresses it this way: "The *infinite sweetness* of this Greek text took hold of me that for several days I could not stop myself from saying it all the time" (1950:37). In this first instance, the modality of *pleasant/unpleasant*³⁶ is operative. However, there is a difference in the experience of consciousness. The term *infinite sweetness* takes the experience from its finite modality to another unlimited dimension. Secondly, the *sweetness* of the text actually acted upon the subject in such a way that she says that it "took hold of me...I could not stop myself from saying it over all the time".

Ordinarily a conscious state is directed at something or someone by the decision or *intentionality* of the subject. In this situation, conversely, Weil becomes a passive recipient of the object's intention, and her consciousness is absorbed³⁷ by the text of the prayer. Effectively, Weil's agency and act of intentionality are taken from her in this experience.

In the next instance, Weil describes the experience of repeating the text. She writes: "At times the very first words tear my thoughts from my body and transport it to a place outside space where there is neither perspective nor point of view" (1950:38). As was noted earlier, ordinary consciousness is characterised by *point of view*. Here Weil describes an interior state in which "there is neither perspective nor point of view". Again, there is evidence of non-ordinary consciousness with regard to temporality and spatial extension. In ordinary consciousness, the object or event is spatially extended. On the contrary, in this case Weil reports that her *thoughts* are *transported* to a "place outside of space" (1950:38).

³⁶ Weber (1990:113) writes that according to Teresa of Avila it is the combination of pleasure and pain that assures the soul that the experience of spiritual marriage is genuinely from a divine and not a diabolical origin.

³⁷ Ward discusses Teresa of Avila's description of *absorption* as one of the characteristics of contemplation. He refers to the *Interior Castle* (4,2,6): "The faculties are not united but absorbed and looking as though in wonder at what they see" (1999:118).

Weil continues: "The infinity of the ordinary expanses of perception is replaced by an infinity to the second and sometimes third degree." For Weil, her ordinary perceptions are surpassed by a spatial-temporal modality that is beyond ordinary consciousness and measurement. Her present conscious state is located outside her ordinary spatial-temporal boundaries (1992:139). Hence her consciousness cannot be characterised as ordinary. The next portion of the text indicates something about the quality of the "infinity" to which Weil's consciousness has been transported. She writes: "At the same time, filling every part of this infinity of infinity, there is silence, a silence which is not an absence of sound but which is the object of a positive sensation, more positive than that of sound" (1950:38).

There are several features of ordinary consciousness that are evident in this section. First, there is mention of silence and sound, aspects of the *limited modalities* of the five senses. Secondly, there is mention of "positive sensation" which illustrates the pleasant/unpleasant feature of ordinary consciousness. Third, there is the aspect of *familiarity* exhibited by the ability to distinguish qualities of both the silence and the sound. There are some differences between ordinary consciousness and what Weil reports having experienced. Though there is an element of *familiarity* about the silence and the sound, there is a distinct aspect of *unfamiliarity*. Secondly, Weil uses paradox to explain the non-ordinary nature of the sound and the silence.³⁸

The last lines of the text illustrate the aspect of *centre/periphery*. In these lines, Weil again uses paradox to explain the relationship of noise to silence as examples of *centre/periphery*: "Noises, if there are any, only reach me after crossing this silence" (1950:38). Evidently, the silence is at the centre and the noise is peripheral. Because of the nature of noise and silence, it is possible to say that Weil's conscious experience of *centre/periphery* was not ordinary.

³⁸ The explanation of Weil's experience approximates the paradoxical language used by John of the Cross in the *Spiritual Canticle*, 15 : "My Beloved...the tranquil night/ at the time of the rising dawn/ silent music,/ sounding solitude,/the supper that refreshes, and deepens love" (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991:473).

At the end of the extract, Weil says the presence of Christ was “infinitely more real” than it was when he had first taken possession of her (1950:38). This illustrates a final aspect of Searle’s features of consciousness: *overflow*. (1992:137). In a case of *overflow*, one’s conscious experience refers beyond the immediate context. For Weil, her consciousness of Christ present “spilled over” to connect with her thoughts and her sense of a previous experience and she connects the two experiences by comparing the intensity of felt presence.³⁹

After a careful examination of elements of consciousness in the text of Weil’s experience during the days of harvesting in 1941, it is possible to conclude that while the features of ordinary consciousness appear in the narrative, the experience of those features is predominantly non-ordinary or extra-ordinary. According to Weil’s narrative, her experience surpassed the ordinary *limits of ordinary modalities* of consciousness, *spatial and temporal extension*, sensations of *pleasant/unpleasant*, *familiarity*, *centre/periphery*, *intentionality*, *point of view*, and *overflow*. By using paradoxical language Weil attempts to express the unlimited and extra-ordinary quality of her experience. Hence, Weil’s consciousness during her experience may be called “mystical”. It is essentially an experience of mystery: the unfolding of the “known unknown” (Lonergan 1958:315). Therefore, we conclude with Perovich that mystical consciousness is “strikingly different from ordinary awareness” (1998:215).

2.6 Mysticism and Knowledge

Earlier in this study, it was stated that mysticism is a complex, but unified set of perceptions in which the interplay of bodily sensation, consciousness, and knowledge contributes to what Carmody and Carmody (1996:10) call the “direct experience of ultimate reality”. The first part of this section studies the notion of knowledge as it relates to mysticism by examining discursive and non-discursive types of knowing. The second part of this section examines the concept of mystical knowledge: firstly, from the perspective of Lonergan’s cognitional theory, and his

³⁹ Poulain considers the experience of “God’s felt presence” to be one of two fundamental characteristics of mystic union (1912:64 ff).

reflections on the nature of religious conversion (1958; 1971); and secondly, from the works of Johnston (1978, 1987, 1990).

2.6.1 Discursive vs. non-discursive knowledge

In a strict sense, knowing is identified with cognitive operations (Morelli 1994:74). First, there is conceptual knowledge or *knowledge-about*. This is knowledge that is brought through the senses and includes some perception of colours, size, shape and so forth. This kind of knowledge is analytical, comparative, explicit and articulate, conceptual and representational (Barnard 1998:163). It is acquired by human effort—observation, study, and reflection. Discursive knowledge is the product of reasoning, not intuition.

In contrast to discursive knowledge, non-discursive knowledge arises from sources other than reason and study: intuition, experience, or “innate capacity” Perovich (1998:217).⁴⁰ This second kind of knowing is more immediate or intuitive (Barnard: 1998:162). It is generally the result of direct sensory impressions (Forman 1998:20). By contrast with discursive knowledge, this form of knowing is generally pre-verbal, inarticulate, and unmediated⁴¹ (1998:163). *Knowledge-by-acquaintance* is characterised by a *noetic* quality, in which there is “insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect” (James [1902]/1929:371). It is not the result of hard work, but according to James, may have existed in some way before its discovery (Barnard 1998:168).⁴²

Another form of non-discursive knowledge referred to as *knowledge-by-identity* is non-intentional and non-dualistic. It is a “contentless consciousness”. Eckhart refers

⁴⁰ Perovich, an Experientialist and neo-Perennialist philosopher (1998:213) basing his writings on the works of Plotinus and Eckhart, suggests that there is within human beings an “innate capacity” for mystical union which includes an “innate capacity” for mystical consciousness and knowledge.

⁴¹ “Feelings are the vehicles of acquaintance and thoughts are the vehicles of knowledge” (Myers quoted in Forman 1998:20).

⁴² The availability of *knowledge-by-identity* to the knower forms the basis of the Experientials’ view of “innate capacity”. See Forman (1998:34).

to this kind of knowledge as a power “flowing from the spirit” and in which God gives birth to his son or word in the soul. All powers are drawn into a unity, previous images that were absorbed are forgotten and this other power or knowledge is accessible (Forman 1998:30). *Knowledge-by-identity* expresses what it means to be conscious by being conscious (Forman 1998:19). In an analogous way, *knowledge-by-identity* is to consciousness what *connaturality* is to virtue.

Connatural knowledge is knowledge that is not obtained from study, but it is real knowledge. For example, one knows what justice is because one has the experience of being just. The knowledge that is the domain of the mystic is knowledge that is noetic and connatural, not intellectual or acquired.

A more popular form of intuitive knowledge is known as *women’s intuition*. Morelli (1994:72-87) treats the issue of non-rational, noetic knowledge as exemplified in women’s intuition. Historically, the perception of women’s inferior or non-existent cognitive powers has been common place and generally accepted:

“For women, only what is intuitive, present, immediately real truly exists; what is knowable only by means of concepts, what is remote, absent, past, or future cannot really be grasped by them” (Schopenhauer quoted in Morelli 1994:75). In addressing the concept of women’s intuition, Morelli makes a clear case that the idea of a woman’s specialized knowledge of what may or may not happen is more a case of “pre-reflective or unobjectified conscious acts of perception, intelligence, affectivity, and reason” (1994:81).⁴³ While Morelli’s study clearly indicates that the origins of the notion *women’s intuition* are very likely the result of limiting and sexist appraisal of women’s cognitive abilities, the study also points to a certain form of non-discursive or “pre-reflective” knowledge that does exist.

⁴³ Morelli concludes: “Just as there is no such thing as women’s intuition, so there is no universalising faculty attributable only to men” (1994:82). Her comments form part of an on-going feminist critique of philosophy of religion (to be taken up later in this chapter) regarding issues such as the universalizing of the male experience (Jantzen 1999:114).

This section presented examples of discursive and non-discursive types of knowledge. It is clear that these types of knowledge differ from each other in the following ways: In discursive knowing, the knower gathers data, reflects upon it, and comes to some judgement about its meaning and worth. The process of thinking may be inductive or deductive, but the results can be quantified, analysed, or compared. In discursive knowing the emphasis is on the knower, his/her cognitive processes, and validity of one's claims.

In non-discursive knowing the data is not always observable. The cognitive processes are not of their nature rational or logical.⁴⁴ Non-discursive knowledge cannot be quantified, nor easily analysed and compared. In non-discursive knowing, there may not be an object *per se*. The emphasis shifts from the knower to the new knowledge that comes in the form of insight or validation of previously held knowledge or beliefs. Finally, non-discursive knowing is not generally mediated through the physical senses. While both discursive and non-discursive are valid modes of knowing, the following section shows that mystical knowledge is a non-discursive form of knowledge that derives from a received experience of ultimate reality. Furthermore, as Keating writes (1995:63), mystical knowledge is attained "through love rather than by intellectual reflection".

2.6.2. Lonergan's Cognition Theory and Mystical Knowledge

The writings of the transcendentalist Thomist, Lonergan (1958; 1971) are an attempt to come to terms philosophically and theologically with the pace of change in the modern world.⁴⁵ His monumental work *Insight* (1958) presents Lonergan's cognitional theory and was based on what he called "a long and methodical appeal to

⁴⁴ Staals (1975:31) contends that while mystical experiences are not themselves rational, they may be studied rationally.

⁴⁵ During a question and answer period after a lecture on the relationship between the philosophy of God and the functional specialty, systematics, Lonergan was asked to clarify what he meant by the cultural shift that was occurring in the early 1970's. "What I'm talking about is a crisis in the Church, the crisis in the Church that involves radical change in theology brought on by the inadequacy of the philosophy and the scholarship and the notions of science that we had in the past" (1973: 63).

experience” (1973:12). His later work, *Method in Theology* (1971) offers a transcendental methodology for dealing with the question of God’s existence and attributes by taking as a starting point a subject’s religious experience: breakdown and religious conversion. It is religious conversion that leads to a knowledge based on love, a mystical knowledge.

2.6.3 Four Levels of Consciousness Within the Act of Knowing

The act of knowing is a series of operations that occur at differentiated levels of consciousness. In the first level, one gathers data from experience—sense data, ideas, emotions, subjective feelings. All is gathered together in an activity of awareness of one’s experience. The first step, not particularly easy and therefore often overlooked, is to be attentive to one’s experience. It is an essential part of education, according to Weil (1950:66):

Although people seem to be unaware of it to-day, the development of the faculty of attention forms the real object and almost the sole interest of studies...every time that a human being succeeds in making an effort at attention, with the sole idea of increasing his grasp of truth, he acquires a greater aptitude for grasping it, even if his effort produces no visible fruit.⁴⁶

The effort to attend to experience, to notice patterns, to omit nothing from one’s gaze is essential if the act of knowing is to be an authentic one. *Be attentive.*

Once the data of experience is amassed, the knower is able to enter another level of consciousness, that is, understanding. At this point, the knower needs to ask questions which assist in understanding the data of one’s experience. “Experience does not become significant and is often not even noticed except insofar as we approach it with a view to understanding it” (Dunne 1985:14). While the task of attending to experience does not admit of questioning or evaluation, the task of the second level of consciousness is to query and to wonder why. How did it happen?

⁴⁶ In this same essay, “Reflections on the right use of school studies,” Weil (1950:66) actually begins by linking the quality of attention that one gives to studies with the development of one’s capacity to be attentive in prayer to God.

What were the reasons? One is not, to use Eckhart's phrase *sunder warumbe*, acting without a why or wherefore (Soelle 2001:49). All the questions asked are for understanding and in asking questions, the knower is *being intelligent*.

At some point, when there are no more relevant questions about details and motivations, the knower enters the next level of consciousness. Here the questions are more for reflection on the correctness of what one understands. The task at this level is verification of what one has perceived and understood. Am I right? Is it so? Are my thoughts true? Lonergan speaks about the humbling and necessary exercise of self-correction. It is a process that is a part of the exercise of reflecting, weighing up the evidence, and judging. In his own style, which is at times surprisingly colloquial, Lonergan writes: "Insights are a dime a dozen and most of them are wrong...a second one complements the first, qualifies, corrects it...it is only after you have had a hundred that you begin to get a grip on some subject and to gain some light on the matter" (1958:217) The self-corrective process involved in knowing—testing our insights, weighing them, adding another idea and amending others—this phase of self-correction anchors one's knowing in genuine reality. *Be reasonable*.

In Lonergan's critical realism, there is a fourth level of consciousness that calls for decision/action. In the previous level, the question was asked as a way to validate the truth or validity of one's understanding of the data of experience. The next level calls for a moral response by asking the questions "should" or "ought" (Dunne 1985:61). Based on the worth or goodness that presents itself, the task is a responsible decision. *Be responsible*. This is the level of moral transcendence, Lonergan says, where there "is the possibility of benevolence and beneficence, of honest collaboration and of true love, of swinging completely out of the habitat of an animal and of becoming a person in a society" (1971:104). This "swing out of the animal habitat" is precisely the result of a more profound consciousness as one experiences, questions, verifies and values. "Consciousness, then, is a mirroring of knowing in the sense in which we all know: experiencing, understanding, and

judging” (1958:220). The four moments within the act of knowing: experiencing, understanding, judging and deciding are guided by Lonergan’s transcendental⁴⁷ precepts: *Be attentive. Be intelligent. Be reasonable. Be responsible.*

2.6.4 Self-appropriation and Interiority

Two concepts become important when dealing with Lonergan’s systematic approach to knowing: self-appropriation and interiority. Lonergan writes that “the aim in *Insight*, self-appropriation, is a movement to the world of interiority” (Croken, et. al. 1996:114). As the term implies, self-appropriation means taking responsibility for the conscious and intentional operations that are implicit in the act of knowing (Shute 1994:167). The world of interiority to which Lonergan refers is the world of *connatural* knowledge.⁴⁸ Self-appropriation moves a person from academic knowledge to heart-felt, interior knowledge. The development of interiority occurs concomitantly with endeavours at self-appropriation at each level of consciousness, including the necessary self-corrective process of validating one’s judgements. Unlike theoretical or discursive knowledge, mystical knowledge comes through the self-appropriation that moves one from the world of theory to the world of interiority. Mystical knowledge is knowledge of ultimate reality that is mediated through one’s interiority; “...and the outstanding example in that field is of course the life of the mystic, in which interiority develops and constitutes, as it were, a means through which God’s presence ceases to be an unidentified undertow in one’s living” (Croken, et. al. 1996:116).

2.6.5 Interiority, Authenticity, Conversion

The movement within an individual toward greater interiority necessarily includes a growing awareness of one’s inability to live according to the transcendental precepts.

⁴⁷ According to Dunne (1985:61), transcendental precepts transcend specific content and refer directly to the metaphysical elements of reality.

⁴⁸ Lonergan writes: “Thomas à Kempis said that he would sooner feel compunction than define it. To define compunction is an operation in the world of theory. To feel compunction is something that occurs within one whether one can define it or not” (Croken, et.al. 1996:114).

The presence of bias easily creates blindness as opposed to attentiveness; dullness in place of intelligence; rationalization rather than reasonableness; and inaction instead of responsibility (Kidder 1994:43). Genuine efforts at self-appropriation and self-correction lead to greater authenticity. At each level of consciousness, there is the possibility of breakdown or conversion: intellectual, moral, or religious.

Intellectual conversion to greater attentiveness and intelligence means abrogating the myth that one can be objective, to see what is real, not just what is immediate (Lonergan 1971:238). A moral conversion requires that decisions be made on the basis of value rather than preference or satisfaction; living authentically by rooting out bias and opting for the truly good (Lonergan 1971:240). Religious conversion is “being grasped by ultimate concern. It is other-worldly falling in love” (Ibid).

Unlike intellectual and moral conversions, the impetus for religious conversion does not come from an individual’s self-awareness or reflection. Religious conversion is a received moment of self-transcendence, a self-transcendence that is neither cognitive nor moral, but personal. It is a response from a human person with an “intrinsic openness to the infinite” (Rahner 1997:2). The experience of religious conversion calls for a “total and permanent self-surrender” and it leads to an overwhelming experience of the free and unconditional gift of love.⁴⁹ The religious experience of unrelenting and unrestricted love constitutes one as a *Being-in-love*. With the realisation that one is a *Being-in-love* comes a new and mystical knowledge as well as a new basis for valuing and acting.⁵⁰ The individual is gifted with a whole new sense of and relation to reality that is no longer notional. Describing the difference between a metaphysician and a mystic, Lonergan says: “The

⁴⁹ A favourite text of Lonergan’s seems to be: “God’s love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us” (Romans 5:5).

⁵⁰ Lonergan writes: “Such being-in-love has its antecedents, its causes, its conditions, its occasions. But once it has blossomed forth and as long as it lasts, it takes over. It is the first principle. From it flows one’s desires and fears, one’s joys and sorrows, one’s discernment of values, one’s decisions and deeds” (1971:105)

metaphysician thinks of reality in its totality; the mystic *experiences*⁵¹ it” (Croken, et.al. 1996:104).

Religious conversion leads to the living of a fifth transcendental precept: namely, *Be-in-love*.⁵² Conn (1987:262) takes Lonergan’s dynamic at this level of consciousness to mean an affective conversion of desire. Feelings in this context are a source of value and personal commitment. In the same way that falling-in-love renders a person swept away by feelings of concern and care for another, so the nature of affective conversion translates in a radical movement away from self-absorption to a passionate commitment to others expressed in action (1987:270). However, the gift of love is not reserved for others alone, but is given in total self-surrender⁵³ to the “unknown beloved” (1971:109).

The cognitive theory of Lonergan presents a way of understanding the movements within a person that lead to authentic living—attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, responsibility, being-in-love. Though living authentically certainly does not guarantee a life free from oversights, or misunderstandings, mistakes, or sins (1971:252), it does open a way toward interiority. This is the door to mystical knowledge. It is knowledge that love floods one’s entire being in an unconditional and unrestricted manner (Romans 5:5).

⁵¹ *Italics* are Lonergan’s.

⁵² Although Lonergan did not develop a mystical theology based on the transcendental precepts, Johnston’s *Being in love* (1988) uses the transcendental precept, particularly *Be-in-love*, as the basis for teaching on the practice of Christian prayer.

⁵³ Lonergan explains the expression of religious experience in a way that he thinks accommodates the differences in world religions: “It is not difficult to see how these seven common features...transcendent reality, immanent in human hearts, supreme beauty, truth, love, mercy, etc. who is found by repentance, love of neighbour, self-denial, prayer, love...When someone transcendent is my beloved, he is in my heart, real to me from within me...loving him means loving attention to him, it is prayer, meditation, contemplation. Since love of him is fruitful, it overflows into love of all those that he loves or might love. Finally, from an experience of love focused on mystery there wells forth a longing for knowledge, while love itself is a longing for union; so for the lover of the unknown beloved the concept of bliss is knowledge of him and union with him, however they may be achieved”(1971:109).

2.7 Mysticism and Culture: The Issue of Mediation

Mediation is a key notion in understanding the difference in the approaches of the perennialist school of philosophy and the constructivist school. Whether or not an experience of ultimate reality happens unbidden and unconditioned by previous cultural, linguistic, or religious information is the issue at stake. Based on a comparative study of mystical texts, Stace who can be considered a member of the perennialist school set out characteristics of what he has called extrovertive and introvertive mystical experiences (1960:131-132). While the former type of experience is characterised by a sense of unity amid a multiplicity of material objects, the latter experience is an imageless sense of pure consciousness, of the One “devoid of all plurality” (1960:62).an unmediated pure consciousness experience.⁵⁴

An opposing view of neo-Kantian constructivists,⁵⁵ best represented by the works of Katz (1978, 1983), proposes that there is no unmediated mystical experience:

Neither mystical experience nor more ordinary forms of experience gives any indication, or any grounds for believing, that they are unmediated. That is to say, all experience is processed through, organized by, and makes itself available to us in extremely complex epistemological ways (1983:4)

Mystical experiences are the conditioned result of culture, language or belief. As varieties of culture, doctrine, and context of the mystic’s religious tradition strongly influence the shape of the mystical experience, so they also influence the multiple expressions of mystical experiences throughout the world (Penner 1983:89).

⁵⁴ In his critique of Stace’s work, Stinessen points out that it can be dangerous to carry a comparison too far. For him the crucial issue revolves around the anthropological question of whether there is a similar view about human nature, and it is quite evident that Buddhism and Christianity have very different views on that issue (quoted in Pettersson and Åkerberg 1981:161).

⁵⁵ “I have been of late, referred to as a ‘constructivist,’ but given the meaning attached by my critics, I reject this term, preferring to describe my approach as ‘contextualist’ (Katz 1992:34).

In recent years a new wave of existentialists or perennial psychologists as they have called themselves--Price, (1998), Forman (1998), and Perovich (1998) have challenged the neo-Kantians. Rather than focusing on the similarities or differences of content as the constructionists do, this group argues for a phenomenological analysis of the operations of mystical consciousness (Price 1998:112). Using the writings of Ruusbroec, Price argues that in mystical consciousness, human consciousness is mediated by the divine activity, but without mediation or object. "There occurs a meeting and a union that is without intermediary and supernatural" (1998:113). The perennial psychologists make the case that there is within the human being an innate capacity for consciousness. What mystics experience is not necessarily the direct effect of their practices, but "rather like uncovering something they have been all along" (Forman 1998:31). Through case-by-case cross-cultural analysis, the perennial psychologists say that there is an in-built or innate capacity for suffusion of divine light that leads to pure consciousness.⁵⁶

The works of Lonergan offer another perspective on the question of mysticism, culture, and mediation. Basing his reflections on the cognitive theory of Lonergan, Dunne suggests "the primary transcultural question is not whether all mystics saw and heard the same thing. It is whether they all experience the same inner movement from attention to intelligence to reason to responsibility and to a transcendental love whose brilliance at times can obscure everything else" (1985:115).

In a similar fashion, Price (1987:187) addresses the issue of typologies and cross-cultural analysis of mysticism by suggesting an alternative to analysing the data of mystical experience and the doctrinal language that it expresses. The use of doctrinal language does not advance the case of dialogue. Price favours an assessment made on the basis of Lonergan's concept of interiority. The question becomes: in what ways certain texts reveal the presence or absence of operations of knowing—

⁵⁶Forman defines consciousness as "what persists when the human being persists without content" (1998:16).

experiencing, understanding, judging, acting (1987:188). This establishes a common ground of consciousness that opens the way for a more fruitful cross-cultural dialogue. The issue of mediation remains a major point of variance between the perennialist and constructivist schools.

2.8 Mysticism and the Feminist Critique

Feminism is a movement to end sexist oppression and the marginalisation of groups within society. Feminists are well aware that oppressed groups are without options.⁵⁷ They struggle to make their voices heard, but often “their perceptions are either ignored or their roles codified in accordance with male perceptions or wishes” (Jantzen 1995:159). Two factors responsible for the continued oppression of women in society are: patriarchal ideology that views women as inferior to men (Stiver 1996:187); and the persistence of dualism that expresses itself in such binary oppositions as:⁵⁸ theist vs. atheist; male vs. female; body vs. soul; self vs. nature.

Feminist philosophers of religion and theologians are taking positive steps to challenge patriarchal dominance and to offer alternatives to dualistic approaches to issues such as sexuality, ecology, and morality. Affirming the validity of women’s experience and challenging the belief that male experience, symbols, and metaphors are normative (Jantzen 1999:114) is a first step. Working to “unmask androcentrism” (Christ 2001:574) by the careful examination of language and bias is another step forward. Still another way to challenge patriarchy is by offering alternate paradigms to dominance and isolation, such as mutuality and relatedness. Lastly, the feminist critique advocates an integrated approach to mysticism and social concern in reaction.

⁵⁷ “Being oppressed means the absence of choices” (hooks [sic] 1984:5).

⁵⁸ The term “binary oppositions” taken from the post structuralist thought of Derrida. Jantzen utilizes the deconstructive strategies of Derrida to evolve “creative alternatives” to the metaphors and symbols that are purely androcentric (1999:61).

Fischer's treatment of feminist principles in *Spiritual Direction* (1988:6) takes as its first tenet the necessity of using women's experience as an authoritative starting point. The feminist view posits the authority of women's experience and establishes that experience as a new encounter with the divine. The authority of the experience becomes a credible norm for the truthfulness of the tradition (1988:6). bell hooks [sic] (1984:57) squarely grounds feminism in the belief that women must focus truthfully on their own experiences without comparing them with others. Comparisons quickly degenerate into competitive behaviour that seeks power. For feminists and in particular, feminist philosophers of religion like Jantzen, the issue of power is crucial to the discussion of liberation. The struggle, according to hooks, becomes power as domination vs. power as creativity (1984:84).

Perhaps one of the first tasks suggested by a feminist critique of the philosophy of religion (or mysticism) is to recover women's experience of the divine. As regards the past, this effort includes the recovery of long ignored mystical texts. In the present, the task is to equip women with the self-confidence, motivation, means, and opportunity to articulate their religious experience. Fischer's (1988) book on *Spiritual Direction* establishes several points quite clearly that although women have not contributed to the formation of theological traditions, women's experience is "important for understanding God's revelation" (1988:6).

A second major task that the feminist critique proposes is what Christ (2001:574) calls "unmasking androcentrism". The phenomenon of androcentrism is embedded in Western culture (Paper 1997:256) and has exercised a profoundly oppressive influence on religion, spirituality, and worship. Androcentrism affects the language that is used about God, making it exclusively language of the male gender. Turner (1995:25) citing the theology of Denys the Areopagite, points out the fallacy of using gender exclusive language about God. First of all, God does not have a gender. Secondly, for every ground we have for describing God as male there is another for describing God as female.

Androcentrism also shows itself in philosophical and theological writings as well. To give an example, Christ (2001:571ff) used the feminist critical approach to critique the history of religions as told by Eliade (1978-1985). She has found his work “distorted by dualism, idealism, and false universalisation of male experience (2001:589). This example shows the necessity of revisionist efforts in philosophy of religion and in theology.

A third task of feminist philosophers of religion is the creation of alternative paradigms of connection and inter-relatedness (Purvis 1989:507). New paradigms, and new metaphors must address the dualisms related to sexuality, ecology, and morality. Women are increasingly uncomfortable with “religion’s fixation on transcendence, including ecstasy, which is said to be just another attempt by patriarchal culture to abandon the body” (Soelle 2001:47). Hence there is a very strong emphasis on the erotic in spirituality and embodiment as a way of reclaiming what has been lost by the patriarchal teachings of the bible related to human sexuality. Purvis writes:

Women’s experience does not suggest that sexuality is an overwhelming force that if left to its own devices will run amok, destroying all order and values. Rather, the erotic is a source of power for new life, whether that life is a new human being or new energy for persons already embodied....feminist spirituality retrieves both biblical eroticism (as with the Song of Solomon) and that of medieval mysticism (as with Teresa of Avila). Finally, Christian feminist spirituality openly acknowledges that the power of prayer reaches to every part of the human person; intimacy with God does not leave our sexuality aside (1989:512).

The task is to develop images and symbols that present a truly universal *human* experience. McFague (1987) presents metaphors of the Trinity as mother, friend and lover and the earth as God’s body (Stiver 1996:132-133). Jantzen (1999:145) suggests another image: *natality*, a metaphor understandable to all and one that symbolizes freedom and “fresh starts”.

Christian feminist spirituality calls for a re-conception of divine transcendence and looks toward a divine immanence that is present within the “web” of life (Purvis 1989:509). In consequence of developments in the ecological movement and in eco-theology, there can be no spirituality divorced from an appreciation of creation, as nature is often the locus of mystical experiences, and of a corresponding obligation to preserve it (Soelle 2001:108).

Eco-feminist theologians such as Gebara work toward a re-formulation and new non-patriarchal understanding of doctrine. For example, in her essay on eco-feminism and the Trinity, Gebara suggests that if people can leave behind the patriarchal, class-biased, materialistic and highly individualistic understanding of God, it may be possible to opt for a spiritually transformative inner journey guided by the Spirit, who creates the “path of God as *relatedness*, the breath of life in each and every one of us” (1999:167).

The desire to move away from a dualistic mentality pervades the writing of Soelle who decries the absence of any examination of the relationship between mystical experience and social and political behaviour. Soelle, a Protestant theologian, calls her latest work *Silent cry: Mysticism and Resistance* (2001) an effort to overcome the growing separation between ethics and religion. For her, mystical experience ought not to be separated from praxis. “There is no experience of God that can be so privatized [sic] that it becomes and remains the property of one owner, the privilege of a person of leisure, the esoteric domain of the initiated” (2001:3). Jantzen (1995:20) says it is important to note how the writings of medieval women mystics have been domesticated for a privatised spirituality. “Feminists have every reason, both historical and current, to be suspicious of an understanding of mysticism which allows that women may be mystics, but which makes mysticism a private and ineffable psychological occurrence and which detaches it from considerations of social justice” (1995:326)

Soelle sees the need to bridge the gap between the internal and the external. However, a major obstacle to a holistic and integrated understanding of life and

mystical consciousness is what she calls the *trivialization* [sic] of life. *Trivialization* is a way of cutting oneself off from experiences by devaluing them, considering them irrelevant because they have no cash value (2001:13). For Soelle, *trivialization* is the strongest anti-mystical force in the world at the moment. She critiques the first world mentality that relativises experiences of diminishment or oppression, and diminishes the value of women's experience.

However, in recent years women have acquired a heightened awareness and/or conscientisation to the violence they experience within patriarchal social and ecclesial structures. Women are more aware of their rights within society, but their experience of this new awareness has frequently been ridiculed, according to Soelle (2001:14). On the one hand, trivialization robs people of attentiveness to the mystical in their ordinary lives; it creates a cynical attitude that not only blocks openness but also entrenches them in polarities, e.g. male/female; body/soul. On the other hand, conscientisation increases awareness and attentiveness, and it ultimately leads to liberation.

The work of feminist philosophers of religion, theologians, and spiritual writers is necessarily a work of creating awareness, of countering androcentrism, of thinking and writing in alternative ways about religion and religious experience (Jantzen 1999:74), and of calling for a living and definitive connection between the mystical life and the social concern.

2.9 Mysticism and Language

Language both succeeds and fails to express the reality of mystical experience. Its success is based on its ability to portray some aspect of mystical experience in a lively, open-ended, and provocative way. Teresa of Avila is a master at using figures of speech to describe spiritual realities. Her work, *The Interior Castle* is an extended metaphor speaking of the relationship of God with the soul. The Spanish mystic often uses simple comparisons to express truths about prayer in a very clear way: For example, writing about those who suffer from distractions in prayer she says:

“There are some souls and minds so scattered they are like wild horses no one can stop. Now they’re running here, now there, always restless” (*Way of Perfection*, 19,2. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1980:107).

At the same time, the opposite is true. Language does fail to express the depth and beauty of mystical experience. “The mystic knows that all language is too impoverished” (Katz 1992:4). The experience defies expression. It cannot be explained or imparted, shared or transferred to others (James 1902/[1929]:371). As a result, the mystic is reduced to silence.

The first part of this section discusses some general functions of language as it is used in the mystical context. In the second part, four linguistic responses to mystical experience are given consideration: silence, *via negativa*, paradox, and positive or symbolic characterisations.

2.9.1 The Functions of Language in a Mystical Context

Within the context of mysticism and religion, language serves at least five functions: It expresses, interprets, performs, contextualises, and transforms. The metaphorical language is descriptive, not prescriptive. Although “all metaphors which we use to speak of God arise from experiences which cannot be adequately described” (Soskice 1985:160), they assist in resolving the speaker’s dilemma: how to describe the indescribable.

Metaphorical language is *expressive*. It gives shape, colour, tone, and texture. It conveys nuance and hue, shadow and tint. It not only expresses the poet’s experience, but also evokes the reader’s (Barbour 1974:14). In the following example, the words of the psalmist both express and evoke the desire for God:

“God, my God, you I crave; my soul thirsts for you, my body aches for you like a dry and weary land” (Ps. 63:1).⁵⁹

A second function of metaphorical language is *interpretive*. Barbour (1974:166) suggests that language interprets the religious and corporate history of a community. A case in point is the use of the extended metaphor of the journey in the old testament. When the people of Israel strayed from monotheism, their experience of losing direction was characterised as purposeless *wandering* in the desert wilderness (Ps. 95:8-10). The return to ethical monotheism is expressed through the image of purposeful and joyous *pilgrimage* to the temple of God in Jerusalem: “With joy I heard them say, ‘Let us go up to the Lord’s house!’ And now, Jerusalem, we stand inside your gates” (Ps. 122:1-2). The use of metaphor conveys the shadows and lights of religious history in a convincing and evocative manner.

A third characteristic of metaphorical language is its *performative* nature. Language becomes an event. It is dynamic. The declaration of U.S. President John F. Kennedy, “Ich bin ein Berliner” before the spectre of the Berlin Wall is a moving example of the dynamic power of language. By identifying himself as a Berliner, Kennedy turned the world’s attention to the plight of those under Communist domination in the divided city. The literal sense of the metaphor was untrue.⁶⁰ The truth conditions of the assertion however, were not determined by sentence itself, but rather by the audience’s awareness of the conditions of the statement (Searle 1979:85). Everyone knew Kennedy was an American, but the use of the metaphor established in a dynamic and forceful way the truth of the American president’s and the free world’s solidarity with the people of West and East Berlin.

Katz (1992) provides a fourth understanding of language. It *contextualises* and conditions mystical experience. His explanation of language and contextualisation is

⁵⁹ The English translation of the psalms used is taken from *The Liturgical Psalter: Text for Study and Comment*. 1994, International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc. All rights reserved.

⁶⁰ All metaphors are literally untrue. Their meaning is governed by the context in which they appear (Jones 1993:120).

at the heart of the constructivist school's understanding of the relationship of language and culture to mystical experience. According to Katz (1992:5), mystical experiences "themselves are inescapably shaped by prior linguistic influences such that the lived experience conforms to a pre-existent pattern that has been learned, then intended, and actualised in the experiential reality of the mystic". The words of Mechtild of Magdeburg about the Eucharist illustrate Katz' argument:

Yet I, least of all souls,
Take Him in my hand,
Eat Him and drink Him,
And do with Him what I will!
Why then should I trouble myself
As to what the angels experience?⁶¹

Had she no prior experience of the meaning the Eucharist as bread that becomes the Body of Christ, would Mechtild's experience of identifying the bread as "Him" been possible? Her familiarity with the ritual of the Catholic Eucharistic Service, her religious understanding of the sacrament, her intention to see in the bread the Body of Christ all provided her with the context in which mystical experience could occur. In Katz' view, all mystical experience is conditioned by previous patterns and lived experience.

The fifth function of language is *transformative*. Language, in particular, mystical language has the potential to transform consciousness. Katz cites examples from Buddhism. The koān is an unintelligible sentence that a Zen master gives to an aspiring Zen practitioner. The purpose of a koān is not to provide information, but to "revolutionize [sic] the student's consciousness" (1992:6). The frequent repetition of the sentence sometimes for days on end provides a means by which the person repeating it breaks through from ordinary to mystical consciousness. This passage is called enlightenment.

⁶¹ Quoted in Bynum (1992:126).

The experience of erupting into a new consciousness is apparent in the citation from Weil (p. 30). Repeating the Greek version of the Lord's Prayer over and over again brought Weil to a mystical consciousness. She was able to experience that which transcended her understanding: namely, the "infinite sweetness" of the text.

Language is powerful, whether it expresses, interprets, performs, contextualises, or transforms. This is particularly true of mystical language that as Katz says, "directly aids mystical ascents to other worlds and realms of being" (1992:20).

2.9.2 Linguistic Responses to Mystical Experience

Despite claims that mystical experience is ineffable, there are linguistic responses to the mystical (Jones 1993:111). Among these responses are: silence, *via negativa*, paradox, and positive and symbolic characterisations.

Silence is one form of response that has many facets. Firstly, silence prepares for mystical encounter. The practice of not speaking or engaging in trivial chat frees the mind to focus its attention or to remain in an open, uncluttered state. It is considered an ascetical practice that seems common to all religions (Soelle 2001:71) Jones (1993:111) believes that silence actually induces mystical contact.

Silence is a response to mystical experience. It is an appropriate response to the inexpressible. Angel (1983:43) suggests that silence may be the means by which the mystic preserves his/her freedom not to speak. "There is something in the nature of mystical experience that demands secrecy" (Hillman quoted in Angel 1983:51). Silence, may not necessarily be interpreted as inability to articulate one's experience, but as a way of guarding a revelation that is not ready to be made known.

There are qualitative differences in silence. While on the one hand, silence may be a wordlessness that comes from lack of ideas or expression; on the other hand, it may also be a wordlessness "that arises from abundance" (Soelle 2001:71). Silence is one type of linguistic response to mystical experience and acts as the gateway to other types of expression.

Via negativa refers to mystical utterance that is negative. It is metaphorical utterance just as much as positive language (Searle 1979:87) and expresses the fact that Ultimate Reality is “neither this nor that” (Stiver 1996:15). All words about God must be negated or denied in order to have an accurate understanding of the mystery of the Divine Being. Classic among *via negativa* writings are the works of Dionysius the Areopagite that deny concepts about God in order to show that God is beyond them (1996:18).

Paradox provides a link between the negative expressions of *via negativa* and the positive descriptions of metaphor and symbol (Jones 1993:113). The terms of a paradox reveal the contradictory nature of the reality to which they are applied. Since the mystical experience is often contradictory to conventional logic, paradox is often used to express the nature of the experience and its meaning. Psalm 139 provides a good example of paradoxical language: “I find darkness is not dark. For your night shines like day, darkness and light are one” (Ps. 139:12). Frequently, paradoxical language employs the use of oxymorons in which opposite ideas are juxtaposed as in *fertile desert*, *silent cry* (Soelle 2001:69). Eckhart frequently uses paradox to explain his teachings; he speaks of going from *knowing to unknowing* (Woods 1986:64). Paradox does not provide synthesis, but it does express very powerfully the tenuous nature of human comprehension of ultimate reality.

The last form of linguistic response to mystical experience is *positive or symbolic characterisation*. Positive statements made about mystical realities are for the most part expressed by means of metaphor. Searle (1979:78) says that “metaphors enable people to understand metaphysical utterances which go beyond their knowledge of the literal meaning of words and sentences”. Metaphors act by associating a known object with an unknown one. In the case of mystical language, Jones notes that a normal term is emptied of its ordinary connotation and filled with a new one given by a mystical insight” (1993:121). Teresa of Avila speaks of those who have “heard their shepherd’s whistle” (*Interior Castle* IV:3. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1980:328) when referring to people who are called to the prayer of recollection.

There is still another form of positive response to mystical experience, the *symbol*. A symbol is not a metaphor, but it relates to metaphor in the same way that literary relates to non-literary. The language of symbol is not verbal. A symbol actually participates in the reality to which it points (Stiver 1996:121). Symbols point to another reality and some of them are transformed into something other than they appear to be (Jones 1993:119). This is the case of the symbol that is, as Lonergan refers to it, *incarnate meaning*.

Alluding to the study done by Morel in 1960, Lonergan says that a person's life—all that prepared for it—the most decisive gesture of that life, is incarnate meaning. "L'homme est essentiellement symbole: telle est sa definition" (Morel quoted in Croken et.al. 1996 : 101). Symbolic language alone has the capacity to express the transcendent because it is not limited by words. As Morel writes: "the symbol is not just *one* possible manner of speech among others, but the Logos in its plenitude" (Ibid.). Positive characterisations of mystical experience include the use of metaphors and symbols, though each differs in means rather than content.

The varied forms of linguistic expression--silence, *via negativa*, paradox, and positive characterisation—each have their own unique way of portraying the ineffable nature of what is perceived in a mystical experience. Each form of expression—verbal or non-verbal—communicates some aspect of mystical experience.

2.10 Summary and Conclusions

As was stated earlier, a mystical experience is the result of a complex, but unified set of perceptions in which the interplay of bodily sensation, consciousness, and knowledge leads to an awareness of what may be called, ultimate reality; the Holy; transcendental value and goodness, or God.

Mystics, scientists, athletes, theologians, and philosophers seem to agree that the body is a vehicle for "direct experience of ultimate reality" (Carmody and Carmody

1996:10); it is the locus of mystical experience. Moving away from Cartesian dualism leads to an integrated sense of authentic reality and to a renewed appreciation of the interfacing and overlapping of the “territories” of consciousness. Although it is not considered ordinary by some scholars, mystical consciousness exhibits many of the same features as ordinary consciousness though differing in intensity, absorption, and in the lack of a sense of boundaries and limits.

Mystical knowing is non-discursive and has the character of intuitive or poetic knowledge. It is knowledge that is the result of gift not labour. However, the effort taken to live the transcendental precepts in an authentic fashion—*Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible. Be-in-love*—moves one to a greater depth and interiority. Self-appropriation at every level of consciousness makes it possible to become authentic despite one’s human flaws and weaknesses. It is precisely this movement toward interiority that renders one available to the experience of “other worldly falling-in-love” (Lonergan 1971:240). This experience, however fleeting, is one of reality in its totality and is experienced as unrestricted love.

Mystical experience, it is posited by Katz (1983) and others, is conditioned by religion, language, and culture. Feminist philosophers of religion stress that mystical experience is also affected by another factor: gender. The language used to express religious experience is predominantly androcentric. Metaphors are male-dominated. Language is sexist. And paradigms are patriarchal. To counteract the dualistic, limited, and oppressive nature of patriarchy, feminist theologians look for the reformation of experience, metaphor, and models to reflect and celebrate values of relatedness and connection. Furthermore, they issue a prophetic call: Do not privatise or trivialise mystical experience. Let the silent cry (Soelle 2001) of mystical experience be a clarion call to social action.

If Katz is correct, mystical experience is not only shaped by language, but it also gives birth to language—the language of paradox, of negative value, of silence, and of symbol. Mystical experience testifies in verbal and non-verbal ways to the

transcendent value of the human person and to the possibility of experiencing ultimate reality—as unity, as the personification of Love, or both.

Chapter 3

THE CONTEXT OF THE LIFE OF MADELEINE DE ST-JOSEPH

3.1 Introduction

The adult life of Madeleine du Bois de Fontaines was shaped primarily by the spirit and rules of the Carmelite Order that she entered in 1604. With that fact in mind, we begin by presenting a brief overview of the history and spirituality of the Carmelite Order. Next, the circumstances surrounding the introduction of Carmelite life to France are explained. Section 3.4 treats the political and social reality of sixteenth and seventeenth century France. This is followed by Section 3.5 which discusses the situation of the Catholic Church in sixteenth century France and the need of clerical reform. Section 3.6 examines the seventeenth century as France's age of saints giving particular attention to: Louise de Marillac, Jeanne Frances de Chantal, Madame Barb Acarie, and Madeleine du Bois de Fontaines. Section 3.7 presents a summary and draws conclusions.

3.2 The Carmelite Vocation

Although there is no particular person responsible for its foundation, the inspiration for the Carmelite order goes back well before the origins of Christianity to the prophet Elijah who lived on Mount Carmel in Israel. His life personified the spirit of the Carmelite vocation: "to stand before the face of the living God" (Stein 1992:1). The first Carmelites were pilgrims to the Holy Land who lived as hermits on Mount Carmel during the middle ages. St. Albert the Patriarch of Jerusalem formulated a rule of Carmelite life between the years 1206 and 1214 (Egan 1988:51). The rule was designed to give a structure and present the ideal to which hermits were to strive: "All are to remain in their own cells..., meditating on the Law of the Lord

day and night and watching in prayer, unless otherwise justly employed” (Stein 1992:2). The monks on Mount Carmel lived a life of prayer and solitude within a communal setting (Egan 1988:51).

With the movement of Islam into the Holy Land in 1291 and the religious wars that followed, the quiet life style of the hermits of Mount Carmel was disrupted. Many of the Carmelites migrated to Europe and began to exercise a public ministry of preaching, teaching, and administering sacraments in the manner adopted by the mendicant friars of the Dominican and Franciscan orders. Certain mitigations of their rule, with regard to fasting and abstinence were permitted to accommodate their new situation (Smet 1989:118). The ideal of their life—living as hermits in a communal setting—remained a key element in the Carmelite spirituality. Yet, in practice the Carmelites moved away from their original inspiration. As superior of the order from 1451-1471, John Soreth did much to renew the spirit of recollection that was the hallmark of the early hermits of Mount Carmel (Egan 1988:57).

Through Soreth’s initiative, Papal approval was given for women to embrace the Carmelite life and to live under the Carmelite rule (Egan 1988:56). Not much is known about early Carmelite women before 1535 when Doña Teresa de Ahumada entered the Convent of the Incarnation in Avila, Spain. Teresa of Jesus, as she was called, introduced a deeply mystical dimension to the Carmelite life of prayer and contemplation (1988:53). The publication of her writings on prayer, “her consciousness as a woman, her feminine style, her presence to the world even in a non-religious sphere” (Kavanaugh 1990:74), and the efforts that she made to reform Carmelite life brought many women into contact with the Carmelite ideal.

The main elements of Carmelite spirituality are related to their origins: that is, a life of solitude lived in common (Egan 1988:59). While the men have to balance the demands of ministry against their call to contemplative life, Carmelite women live the spirit of the rule within their communities. For cloistered women particularly, life is organised around prayer and meditation upon God’s word. Edith Stein the

Jewish philosopher, convert to Catholicism and Carmelite nun, expressed it thus: “To stand before the face of God continues to be the real content of our lives” (1992:4).

Another key element in Carmelite spirituality is devotion to the Mother of God. According to tradition, the Virgin Mary appeared to the general of the order, Simon Stock in 1251 and presented him with a sign of protection for the members of his order—the scapular with an image of the Mother of God on it, to be worn around the neck. According to legend, Our Lady would have liked to stay with the hermits on the top of Mount Carmel, with the men who called themselves “brothers of the Blessed Virgin” remaining with those who had from the time of Elijah been devoted to the Lord (Stein 1992:3). Stein describes how the Virgin would have lived on Mount Carmel and in doing so, depicts the essence of Carmelite life:

Released from everything earthly, to stand in worship in the presence of God, to love him with her whole heart, to beseech his grace for sinful people, and in atonement to substitute herself for these people, as the maidservant of the Lord to await his beckoning—this was her life (1992:3).

The Carmelite vocation, drawing as it does on the spirit of the prophet Elijah and informed by a life of solitude and prayer, fasting and communal living has proved over the centuries to be a life style that leads people to great holiness and mystical heights. Beside the holy mother Teresa of Avila, stands John of the Cross, whose spiritual writings illuminate the ascent to the mount of God, and Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection whose life was lived quite simply in the presence of God. More recent examples of Carmelite mystics are Thérèse of Lisieux and Elizabeth of the Trinity. Thérèse of Lisieux’s pathway was one of spiritual childhood, while Elizabeth of the Trinity lived to be the praise of God’s glory (Ephesians 1:1-10).

3.3 Carmel in France

The Carmelite reform of Teresa of Avila was introduced into sixteenth century France through the instrumentality of a middle-aged woman, Madame Barb Acarie,

later beatified as Marie de l'Incarnation. Cognet calls her an incomparable woman, the "centre et foyer de tout le monde religieux d'une époque" (1949: 26). The success of her venture is due to the interplay of a number of factors. First, Madame Acarie was engaged in a spiritual search. Secondly, because she was literate she was able to read Teresa of Avila's works⁶² in translation. Thirdly, the unfortunate fact that her husband was a political exile gave her relative freedom to open her home to like-minded persons in order to discuss topics such as contemplation. Fourthly, she was a mystic to whom Holy Mother Teresa appeared on two occasions. First in late 1601 and again eight or nine months later Barb Acarie received visions of Teresa of Avila in which she was told that God wanted her to bring the Carmelite order to France (Louise de Jésus 1935:54). Fifthly, despite the inferior position of women in church and society in this era, women in French society were generally well travelled, at ease in conversation, and, given the constraints of their society, freer than their counterparts in other European countries (Delville 1994:215).

This situation allowed Madame Acarie to interact with a number of persons who would work with her in making the necessary arrangements to bring Spanish Carmelites to France and to house and prepare candidates for religious life before the foundresses' arrival. The combination of these historical, social, and religious factors, all beyond Madame Acarie's control provided the necessary conditions for the introduction of Teresian Carmelites into France.

To understand the context into which Carmelite life was introduced into France, is of necessity to appreciate the complex inter-relationship between political-social movements and religious-spiritual developments.

In the same way that the development of literature, art or music cannot be separated from the social milieu, the constraints or freedom of the times, or the individual genius of an author, artist or musician, neither can religious history be separated

⁶² In autumn 1601, Madame Acarie heard of a translation of the works of Teresa of Avila. This was the work of Jean de Bretigny (Sheppard 1953:89).

from the history of the world. As evidenced in the art and architecture of the times, the Baroque spirit in theology expressed extremes: it exclaimed over the grandeurs of God and the Virgin Mary; and at the same time lost itself in quibbling over details in theological treatises (Gannon & Traub 1969:229).

Baroque spirituality evinced the sense of God's unspeakable grandeur perceived by the spectre of iniquity: man. The great divides between humanity and divinity, the old world and the new world pervaded the Baroque consciousness. Gannon & Traub (1969:230) discuss the "tendency of Baroque spirituality which attempts to create a complete inner world, mirroring the outer world except that all disharmony is suppressed". While Baroque spirituality stressed the difference between the spiritual and the natural worlds, it offered those affected by the change and disintegration of social structures in the renaissance, a way of surviving in a world that would be dominated by scientific discovery. "Perhaps it is this Cartesian longing for an oversimplified world which pushed the Spanish imagination toward mysticism; no fewer than three thousand 'mystical' writings can be counted during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" (1969:230-231).

Analysing the position of the Roman Catholic Church vis-à-vis history since the time of the Second Vatican Council, Sheldrake observes a shift away from using history for apologetic purposes to seeing history itself as a way of interpreting the signs of the times. In the case of Madame Acarie, one could interpret her personal history and the circumstances of life in Paris under Henry IV, as the means through which faith was deepened in France. In this view, faith and history interface rather than oppose each other.

To explore the interplay of these dynamics is to uncover the context within which on-going revelation occurs and to facilitate the "renewal of true historical memory" (Sheldrake 1992:29). Capturing within the Christian community a sense of such an "historical memory" requires not only a fidelity to sources, and a critical sense with regard to biases or omissions, but equally important, an entry into the *sensus fidei*

(sense of the faithful) of the Catholic community in sixteenth and seventeenth century France.

Conscious of the possible limitations of an overview approach to the social, political and religious history of France in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, we propose to establish the historical context for the *mystical invasion*, (Buckley 1990:30) that occurred within a small group of French Catholics in the late 1500's. Within the context of the post-reformation church of France, Teresa of Avila's Carmelite reform was introduced into France, several new religious congregations were founded, and reforms in seminary training for secular clergy were initiated.

3.4 The Political and Social Reality of France in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

European society of the sixteenth century was an admixture of political and religious conflict and compromise. The church-state unity that in former days may have served good purposes, at its worst, created a dynamic of intrigue and repression.⁶³ In this drama of European and ecclesiastical politics,⁶⁴ France was a leading protagonist.

The seventeenth century saw the rise of a middle class. The bourgeoisie consisted of civil servants, merchants, manufacturers and townspeople. French kings "carefully cultivated an alliance with the rising class of merchants and financiers. These wealthy bourgeoisie paid taxes into the royal treasury, and in return, the kings protected their businesses" (Fenton 1968:145).

⁶³ Madame Acarie's husband, Pierre was exiled and despoiled of a portion of his possessions in 1594, because of his membership in the League of Catholics united against the Huguenots. In 1599, Madame Acarie obtained his liberation (Delville 1994:219).

⁶⁴ "During the late Middle Ages, a succession of French monarchs had halted Church interference in government affairs and weakened papal control of the Church in France. They had also subdued several of the more powerful members of the nobility, who competed with them for power. The lesser nobility did not join forces with the gentry and townspeople to challenge the increasing authority of the kings, as they did in England" (Fenton 1968:145).

Not content with her own political boundaries, France joined Spain, England and the Netherlands in the quest for colonial territories and the riches that were to be found there. Early explorations into the area known as New France—Canada—brought fur traders, missionaries, representatives of the monarchy into the Canadian hinterland who changed forever the lives of the native peoples.⁶⁵ French exploration of the American continent extended her sphere of influence as far north as Hudson Bay and as far south as the mouth of the Mississippi River. “New France” and “New Orleans”—in the Louisiana territory—would become French Catholic strongholds in the “new world”.

However, this was not merely an era of new worlds, but also of new heavens (Leclerc 1993:13). Reversing the Ptolemaic conception of a universe revolving around the earth, Nicolas Copernicus shattered the contemporary worldview⁶⁶ and

⁶⁵ “The Jesuit mission to New France began in 1611 when Pierre Biard and Ennemond Massé arrived to proselytise the Abnaki in the vicinity of Port Royal. The mission, short-lived and fraught with misadventure, ended with the priests’ capture by a Virginian expedition in 1613. Only in 1625 did Jesuits return to the colony, joining a small contingent of Recollets who had labored in their stead during the intervening years...Paul Le Jeune, superior of the reopened missions, described what disturbed him about native marriage when he related an incident in which he tried to persuade a headman to enrol his son in mission school. When the man deferred to his wife’s wish that the child remain at home, the priest complained that the women have great power here. ‘A man may promise you something, and if he does not keep his promise, he thinks he is sufficiently excused when he tells you that his wife did not wish to do it. I told him then that he was the master, and that in France women do not rule their husbands.’ By the good father’s standards, gender relations in New France were definitely askew. He and others therefore encouraged male converts to assert their wills and exact obedience from recalcitrant spouses” (Devens 1992: 7-30). This very interesting chapter discusses native women’s situation and consequent resistance to the imposition of Christian values and gender roles in this missionary era. According to some scholars “male converts, along with priests, brooked no opposition from women at the missions and succeeded in undermining women’s status by 1640.”

⁶⁶ An extract from Copernicus’s book, *On the revolutions of the heavenly bodies* describes his search to understand the orbital paths of the planets, moon and sun. He went to classical authors such as Plutarch, Philoaus and Phythagoras: “They did not teach that it [earth] revolves around the sun but that it rotates upon its axis as a wheel rotates about its hub. After learning of these theories that contradict the doctrine, I myself began to think about the motion of the earth. And although my theory might contradict the accepted doctrine, I knew that others who had come before me had been allowed to change the paths of the planets to account for inaccuracies in the doctrine. They had been allowed to suggest that other circles should be added to the basic path of a planet, so that the course of a planet consisted of one basic path about the earth and a number of loops or secondary orbits. I believed, therefore, that I would be allowed to suggest a theory for the motion of the earth in order to give a more satisfactory explanation for the movements of the other planets” (Fenton 1968:174-175).

deeply influenced philosophers and theologians alike.⁶⁷ His conception of the earth rotating like other planets, around the sun, was to become a key metaphor in the writings of Cardinal de Bérulle.⁶⁸ While Frenchmen were engaging in forays within the new world beyond the Atlantic Ocean to add to their country's resources and wealth, the political intrigues and extravagant lifestyle of the French monarchy were steadily diminishing those resources.

During the sixteenth century, while under the reign of France's last and worst of the Capetian kings, Henry III,⁶⁹ French people experienced years of civil war sparked by the religious reform movements similar to those of France's neighbours⁷⁰ on the continent and in England.

Wars of religion did little to help the economy, creating strife and misery; and the war with Charles V of Spain that lasted from 1552 to the Peace of Le Cateau-

⁶⁷ Eloi Leclerc in *Recontre d'immensities* (1993:10) situates Blaise Pascal in this new world as a man of science, one who defends himself with the power of reason; yet a man who was led by this modernity to a faith that is stripped, more interior, more respectful of the secret of God and the grandeur of mankind.

⁶⁸ Anne Marie Ferrari (1997) of the Université de Bourgogne published *Figures de la contemplation* as study of the divine rhetoric of Bérulle and his fascination with the image of the sun. Bérulle uses the images of the sun and the phoenix to describe Jesus Christ.

⁶⁹ "Henry III was for many years very helpless. He hung on, protected by assassins, surrounded by a web of plots, while the real authority over Catholic France was wielded by the League. How weak he had become was shown on the Day of Barricades (May 12, 1588) when Paris, obedient to Henry, Duke of Guise, denied the royal troops an entry into the city, and again when the States-General, meeting at Blois under Jesuit influence, passed a series of enactments which, if carried through, would have drained the treasury of its resources and robbed the government of its last vestige of authority. From these humiliations the wretched king, 'the worst ruler of the worst dynasty that has ever governed,' sought relief by murder. On the approach of Christmas, 1588, the Duke of Guise and his brother the Cardinal of Lorraine were cut down in the Castle of Blois by the king's Gascon bravos. The old queen [Catherine de Médicis] was lying on her deathbed when her favourite son brought the news, 'Now I am King of France,' he is reported to have said, 'I have killed the King of Paris.' 'God grant it may be so,' was the answer; 'but have you made sure of the other towns?' (Fisher 1944:577).

⁷⁰ "The closest parallel to the French experience was in Germany, where Charles V waged a protracted war against the Lutheran princes from 1530-1555. These were not truly civil wars, however, as the fighting was waged primarily by soldiers. Despite some singular exceptions like the Peasant Revolt of 1525, the German Reformation experienced nothing like the protracted civilian involvement and popular violence that was so characteristic of the French Wars of Religion" (Holt 1995:192).

Cambrésis in 1559⁷¹ added to the chaos and destruction. France's common people suffered⁷² from the incessant fiscal demands of the monarchy. They were particularly angry at the clergy's refusal to pay toward the upkeep of the poor (Heller 1996:194). Increasing numbers of people in urban areas—artisans, merchants,⁷³ manufacturers and mechanics had already turned to Calvinism⁷⁴ dissatisfied and harassed by their servitude and inability to cope with the burdens of taxation. The Calvinist revolt was not only doctrinal, but as Heller (1986) says in the title of his study, it was a revolt to conquer poverty. Sixteenth century Protestantism has been called an 'urban religion' (Greengrass 1987: 54). By the 1560's towns such as La Rochelle, Montpellier and Nîmes were overwhelmingly Protestant; while in Lyon,⁷⁵

⁷¹ According to this treaty, France retained bishoprics in Calais, which had been captured from the English, and also was able to continue administering bishoprics in Metz, Toulouse and Verdun (Rowen 1970:727).

⁷² The Peasant Revolts took place in 1579 in the regions of Toulon, Vivarais, west of the Rhône, and in the town of Dauphiné. "Catholic parishioners in Langentièrre had been provoked by soldiers from both sides in the fifth and sixth religious wars. They had been 'burned alive in heaps of manure, thrown into wells and ditches and left to die, howling like dogs; they had been nailed in boxes without air, walled up in towers without food, and garrotted upon trees in the depths of the mountains and forests; they had been stretched in front of fires, their feet fricasseed in grease; their women had been raped and those who were pregnant had been aborted; their children had been kidnapped and ransomed, or even roasted alive before the parents... There had been burnings, ransoms, sackings, levies, *tailles* [taxes], and tolls together with seizures of goods, grain, and livestock.' In one year impositions placed upon them first by the Catholic and then by the Protestant garrisons had exceeded the amount of the *taille* in [the last] thirty years" (Holt 1995:112-113).

⁷³ "As they had for generations, the people of Rouen celebrated the end of the winter of 1542 with a Mardi Gras carnival. That year, 1542, the organizers of the festival chose an extraordinary theme—the death of trade. War had brought the commerce and industry of the town to a standstill, had forced thousands of craftsmen out of work and brought many merchants to the point of ruin. The society of fools, or as it was called the Abbey of 'Conards', chose to make these calamities an occasion of celebration. Accordingly, the theme of the festival became 'the death of trade', and the Mardi Gras parade transformed into a mock funeral" (Heller 1986:1).

⁷⁴ "In less than twenty-five years between Calvin's arrival in Geneva and the outbreak of the civil wars in France, more than a million French men and women had been converted to Protestantism, with pastors sent from Geneva playing a significant role in the process" (Holt 1995:192).

⁷⁵ "In Lyon, the financial capital of France before 1560, Italian bankers remained loyal to catholicism and the monarchy, while the merchants veered toward protestantism.... Antoine de Marcourt, in his *Book of the Merchants*, had compared the catholic clergy with their money-changing tables in the temple to financiers; by implication, the protestants were true merchants, their work sanctioned by diligence and purity. The red-letter days of the protestants were evenly spread throughout the year at Christmas, Easter, Pentecost and September, 'like the fairs of Lyon' as a catholic from the city remarked maliciously" (quoted in Greengrass 1987:56-57).

Paris and Amiens the protestant population was estimated at between one-third and one tenth respectively (1987:54).

By and large, it was the merchant class that embraced Protestantism, though in some rural areas a Huguenot peasantry was created by the conversions of the local landlords or due to growth of trade networks among the artisans (1987:61). However, the exodus from the Catholic Church was not limited to members of the developing middle class or the lower classes. On this point, Greengrass writes, "Noble support for French protestantism has been called the 'keystone' of the French reformation" (1987:49). Numerous members of the nobility, such as Marguerite of Navarre and Louis of Bourbon, Prince of Condé converted to the protestant faith (Holt 1995:222).

The motives for acceptance of protestantism by the nobility were varied: While some nobles may have attended universities where they encountered Calvinist or Lutheran doctrine; others may have been influenced by their military service⁷⁶ in Italy or in Germany during the Habsburg—Valois wars. Greengrass (1987:51) argues in favour of another factor—that is, the "networks of blood, kinship, feudal and service ties—in short the whole range of noble sociability—which linked the provincial nobility to the court and the high aristocracy. Protestantism grafted itself on to these networks like a new vine on to old stock—newly expressed faith reinforcing old-established fidelities".

With each successive war and subsequent peace-making effort, Huguenots were given privileges to worship, and while such privileges were subject to limits, they were nonetheless, evidence of royal tolerance. The duty to enforce the edicts of toleration fell to the ruling élites who were Catholics, a situation which created more than a few difficulties.

⁷⁶ Gaspard de Coligny (1519-1572), after whom a small town in the Western Transvaal was named, was admiral of France and a leading French nobleman who converted to Calvinism. He was a nephew of (The Duke) Anne de Montmorency, one of the three Châtillon brothers, and the leader of the Huguenots after the death of Condé in 1569. It was his assassination in August 1572 that sparked off the St Bartholomew's massacres (Holt 1995:222).

Noble houses aligned on each side of the "confessional divide"--the House of Guise supporting militant Catholicism and the House of Bourbon, the Huguenot faith. The Duke of Montmorency, himself a catholic (and called "Anne"), led the Politiques, who were especially strong in central France. According to Fisher (1944:570), these were men who while adhering to the old faith had little love for the queen mother (Catherine de Medici) or for the Guises, and therefore occupied an intermediate position between the extreme groups. Holt maintains another view: that there never was a party as such, but rather persons whose intent was to remain moderate—"champions of neither a permanent peace settlement of religious toleration nor any modern notion of reason of state"⁷⁷ (1995:168). Generally, the Politiques did not favour a policy of religious toleration, nor did they support the League. Whatever the case, the vested interests of the various groups within the society were promoted through an intricate web of alliances and power ploys.

The question of alliances⁷⁸ was not solely related to orthodoxy, but to national dominance—Spain vs. France—and to the independence of the Gallican church—France vs. the Papacy.⁷⁹ The situation is summed up as follows:

⁷⁷ Holt states that the Politiques rallied to support the King against extremists in the Catholic League: The figures usually categorised as 'politique' supporters of Henry IV in the 1590's—men like Achille de Harley, First President of the Parlement of Paris; Jacques-Auguste de Thou, historian and also a member of the Parlement of Paris; Etienne Pasquier, another *parlementaire*; and the diarist Pierre de l'Estoile, a clerk in the Parlement—were certainly moderate Catholics, enemies of the League, as well as ardent supporters of Henry IV's cause. So whatever else the 'politiques' were, they clearly did not favour a policy of permanent religious toleration nor any concept of putting the state above religious unity; they were deeply religious Catholics who championed the cause of 'one king, one faith, one law'. One of the reasons Henry IV was able to defeat the League after his abjuration, in fact, was that these 'politiques' shared so much in common with many moderates of the League. Both groups shared many common goals, and it was upon this broad base of support—moderate Leaguers, 'politique' Catholics, and peaceful and loyal Huguenots—that the polity of Henry IV's authority rested" (1995:168-169).

⁷⁸ It took seven years before the catholics and Huguenots in France were able to come to terms with each other's demands. During that time catholics turned to Spain for support and the Huguenots appealed to protestants in England. However, there was never any alliance between protestants in France and in Germany. German Lutherans fought in French wars, but on the side of the catholics (Fisher 1944:571).

⁷⁹ The author is indebted to Frank Houdek, SJ for his treatment of the history of the reformation and renaissance spirituality in lectures presented at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley in April 1997.

In France, too, the Church was engaged in a struggle for existence, which was not conducive to the progress of Catholic Reform. Like the revolt of the Netherlands, the Huguenot Wars (1562-98) were never purely a religious conflict, even while Catherine de Medici was regent for Charles IX (1560-74), and under Henry III (1574-89) they become more and more a power struggle between the Houses of Bourbon and Guise, with Spain intervening on the side of the Catholics, England and the States General of the Netherlands on the side of the Calvinists. Correspondingly, the papal policy was straightforward when the preservation of Catholicism and the suppression of Calvinism was or seemed to be in question, but cautious vis-à-vis the political power groups, especially the League of Henry of Guise, Charles of Bourbon, and Philip II, established in 1576 and revived in 1584 (Iserloh, et. al. 1980:513-514).

With the assassination of Henry III on August 1, 1589 France found herself confronted with the problem of royal succession, a problem that would "end the Valois dynasty in France and open the way to the direct struggle between Navarre and the League" (Fisher 1944:577). The conditions of the Salic Law required that an heir to the throne be sought from the male descendants of the royal line. "The myth of the Salic Law, by removing female inheritance, operated to prevent, it was believed, the French crown from falling into the hands of foreigners" (Ravitch 1990:4). While it protected the French throne from outsiders, and simplified one aspect of succession, the Salic Law caused a complication in another way, for its observance would bring to the throne of France a man who was "biologically but not theologically fit to rule the God-favored dynasty of the Capetians" (Ibid.). Henry of Navarre, a protestant, would become the King of France.

The accession of Henry of Navarre to the throne was profoundly significant for the French people. After he abjured his protestant faith, Henry was granted absolution by the French bishops in July 1593. His consecration as King of France followed on 27 February 1594 at the Cathedral of Chartres. One month later, on the 29th of March, Henry's triumphal march through Paris from the Louvre to Notre Dame Cathedral would mean that "all good Leaguers became good Royalists and all good Royalists became good Leaguers at the festivities attending this great day of peace" (Holt 1995:159-160) His reign would unite France with "one king, one faith, one

law," would usher in a period of social stability,⁸⁰ take France out of its long period of chaos and civil disruption and spell the end of the League⁸¹ and its terrorist practices. Henry's defeat of the League and his coronation in 1594 established him as king, but it did not mean that Leaguers would readily accept his authority. For their plottings and their obstinate refusal to co-operate, many members of the League were exiled. Such was the case of Pierre Acarie, husband of Madame Barb Acarie. As Bremond notes, "King's councillor and master-in-ordinary of the Chamber of Finance of Paris, like his father-in-law Avrillot and several of the Luillier family, Pierre Acarie had played his part in general history, having been one of the forty Parisians who had formed the council of the 'valiant Prince d'Aumale,' and with this chief had suffered a fairly long exile after the victory of Henry IV" (Bremond 1930:151).

For four years, Monsieur Acarie was in exile; his punishment was mitigated due to Madame Acarie's appeal to Henry IV. During this period, the Edict of Nantes (1598) was accepted reluctantly by the Parlement du Paris and its settlement spelled a period of social stability in France. As Holt says, it did not mandate beliefs or practices, but rather "focused on religious co-existence and attempted to deal with the very real

⁸⁰ "The Edict of Nantes did not introduce a systematic policy of religious toleration...it allowed for temporary religious co-existence, but its ultimate goal was religious concord—that is, unity—rather than toleration of differing confessions. This was Henry IV's clear intention and served as his *modus operandi* for the rest of his reign, though he clearly hoped this religious unity could be achieved peacefully and he vowed to protect the rights of the Huguenots in the meantime" (Holt 1995:163).

⁸¹ "The Committee of sixteen who governed Paris for the League under the supervision of the Duke of Mayenne, the young brother of Henry of Guise, ruled like the Committee of Public Safety in 1794, by a system of terror" (Fisher 1944:577). Holt argues that the League fulfilled an important role in French society: "For all its political and internecine wrangling, the League was still very much a Holy Union. Its religious role was significant, as the League was the conduit between the Tridentine spirituality of the Catholic Reformation and the seventeenth-century *devôts*. Often overlooked is the emphasis the League placed on the internal and spiritual renewal of the earthly city. Moving beyond the communal religion of the Middle Ages, the League focused on internalising faith as a cleansing and purifying agent. New religious orders and confraternities were founded in League towns, and the gulf separating clergy and laity was often bridged as clerics joined aldermen in the Hôtel de Ville where both became the epitome of godly magistrates. To overlook the religious side of the League is to overlook the one bond that did keep the Holy Union holy as well as united" (1995:150).

problem of trying to integrate a corporate body of Huguenots into a Catholic state" (1995:164). The goal of the edict was to restore the wholeness to a disordered and broken society.

3.5 The Catholic Church in Sixteenth Century France

Catholics believe that human nature, though created in the image of God, has been impaired and flawed as a result of the fall from grace recorded in Genesis 3. The lives of old testament characters, the first disciples, Paul, and early Christians are replete with instances of sinfulness and repentance. Similarly, the life of Catholics within the church has consistently exhibited signs of weakness and signs of strength throughout history. There is a continual need for purification and conversion in what the Second Vatican Council has called, the "pilgrim" church.

The experience of the need for conversion has evoked varied responses throughout history. Church councils were called to address issues of doctrine and discipline that threatened Catholic life from within or without. Some responses came in the re-formulation of dogma, others in the imposition of discipline and regulations.

The Church of the Middle Ages and Renaissance was a monolith of power in all realms of life. At various moments, efforts were made to call the church back to the simple and clear dedication to the gospel. The mendicants—Dominic and Francis—spoke out by life and example that the church was to be a servant of the people. However, the allure of wealth and power, was not easily overcome.

As a result of the clerical abuses, a desire to purify the church or to change ecclesial policy regarding divorce, for example, a number of reform movements began. These were led by Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Henry VIII and their followers and these movements eventually split the church and seriously diminished her hegemony over European political and social life. To address this crisis, a council of reform was convened in 1545, the Council of Trent. The Council of Trent lasted until 1563 and was under the direction of five popes. Its main purposes were to examine and

condemn the errors promulgated by Luther and to address the need for discipline within the church. However, the directives of the Council were not promulgated in France for over thirty years after their formulation, something that was to cause grave concern to Pierre de Bérulle.⁸²

3.5.1 The Need for Reform in the Clergy and Hierarchy

The Church has no worse enemies than her priests. Heresies have come from them...and it is through them that heresies have prevailed, that vice has reigned, and that ignorance has established its throne among the "poor" people; and this has happened because of their undisciplined way of life and refusal to oppose those three torrents now inundating the earth with all their might (Thompson 1989:11).

These words of condemnation come from the mouth of Vincent de Paul⁸³ and they sum up in great measure the situation of the Catholic Church in France during the sixteenth century. Like the church in Spain and Italy, the Gallican Church was called to implement the reforms of the Council of Trent.⁸⁴ Principally, the reforms

⁸² The decrees of the Council of Trent were accepted at the Assembly of the Clergy in 1614 under the leadership of Bishop Zamet (Louise de Jésus 1935:242).

⁸³ Vincent de Paul was born in Gascony, southwestern France in about 1581. As a young man he was Queen Marguerite de Valois' aumonier, dispensing food and money to the poor. Marguerite was the ex-wife of Henry of Navarre (Henry IV) who annulled their marriage in 1599 when he married Marie de Médici of Tuscany. Vincent de Paul was a tutor of the de Gondis. Originally a banking family from Italy, they settled in Lyon and later in Paris, where the wealth of the House of de Gondi earned them prestigious positions in the French court. The eldest son became the General of the Galleys and the second son, the Archbishop of Paris. Pierre de Gondi, one of the sons, plotted against Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin. His brother Jean-François later became the Cardinal de Retz (Purcell 1963:65).

Vincent de Paul also frequented the *Cercle Acarie* where he met Pierre de Bérulle who became his confessor. Later, Vincent de Paul would apply to Rome for permission to begin a new religious congregation for men, the Congregation of Mission. This was approved, after a long delay, in 1633. "Curiously, it was Cardinal de Bérulle himself who was behind opposition in Rome. Perhaps he felt that his follower's undertaking was in some way in competition with the Oratory" (Purcell 1963:118).

⁸⁴ Cognet writes: «A l'égard du clergé séculier, les décisions du concile de Trente sont, en notre pays comme presque partout ailleurs à l'exception de quelques diocèses d'Italie, demeurées lettre morte, ou à peu près. Pas la moindre tentative n'est faite pour donner aux prêtres un minimum de formation intellectuelle ou spirituelle. Aucun contrôle même n'est exercé en réalité sur les ordinations: est ordonné pratiquement qui veut. Le système de la commende est couramment appliqué aux évêchés, et certains ont pour titulaire des femmes ou des enfants au berceau» (Cognet 1966:234).

were meant to correct abuses in the praxis of Catholic life particularly with regard to the clergy and hierarchy.

Generally, the abuses were related to the formation and life style of clergy and to the appointment and financial gain of bishops. Members of the secular clergy who served in the poor, rural dioceses far from Paris and the life of the Court, received little or no education either in secular subjects or theology. Most priests did not know Latin, and officiated at worship with practically no comprehension of the texts. In fact, many were illiterate. "The country clergy were sunk in penury, ignorance, concubinage and drunkenness" (Cognet 1959:56).

Since the church and state were inextricably linked in a system of governance originating in medieval society, the hierarchy of the church in France, like that in other European countries such as Spain and Italy, was drawn primarily from the ranks of aristocratic families. The commendatory system in place since the Concordat of 1516⁸⁵ (benefices bestowed in *commendam*) put much of the church's wealth in the hands of persons neither suited nor qualified to be priests or bishops. Episcopal appointments were made by the king; and the majority of bishops were courtiers, men of letters, soldiers or diplomats:

It would be difficult to think of any period in the history of the church when the cure of souls in the conventional sense of directing a parish was regarded as a prime qualification for episcopal office. The more aristocratic the origins of bishops the less likely service of a parish would have appealed to them (Bergin 1996:269).

Though for the most part they governed *in absentia*, bishops managed to collect their revenues from these benefices regularly.

Another form of financial gain came through pensions on bishoprics. Retiring bishops would retain a portion of diocesan revenues through their old age. This practice, one that originated among members of the Roman Curia, was a way of

⁸⁵ The Concordat of 1516 gave the French crown the right to appoint archbishops, bishops, abbots and other religious officials (Cognet 1949:7).

supporting a life style of affluence at the expense of the poor.⁸⁶ Bergin (1996:141) writes:

With both French bishops and absentee Italian cardinals frequently exchanging or resigning dioceses in rapid succession, the practice of 'reserving' a major part, or all, of their revenues, with the exception of a modest stipend for the incoming bishop, became familiar from at least the reign of Francis I onwards. Taken to extremes, it clearly subverted the normal bishop-diocese-pensioner relationship, and threatened to reduce serving bishops to the status of poorly endowed pensioners, dependent on opulent and well-connected patrons who remained the real 'lords' of their bishoprics.

Similarly, with regard to the appointment of abbots and abbesses in religious orders, the king, Henry IV exercised complete control. The newly elected abbess of Maubuisson was removed from office by Henry IV and Angelique, the sister of his mistress Gabrelle, was installed in her place. The result of this appointment was scandalous. Not only were benefices given to youngsters, as in the case of Henry de Guise, who was given six abbeys, but also even Sully, the Huguenot minister of finance, was the beneficiary of four abbeys and received 45,000 livres per year as a perquisite (Purcell 1963:64).

While the Edict of Nantes, stopped sectarian violence until the death of Henry IV, the aftermath of the many wars of religion and with the burden of taxation, left the masses of French people desperately poor. Their clergy were not well prepared to serve them, and their bishops were more concerned with personal wealth than the conditions of their flocks. Reform in the institutional church was imperative—especially with regard to the training of priests, the life style and practices of the episcopacy, and attention to the spiritual and temporal needs of the common people.

⁸⁶ "It was not until well into the seventeenth century that it could be assumed that the titular *curé* of a parish was *actually* serving in the parish rather than, as had been common in previous centuries, treating it just as a benefice to be collected like other benefices, and then traded up when better opportunities came along. Nicolas Briroy of Coutances was *curé* of his native parish from the age of sixteen onwards, but it is uncertain whether he ever served in it as an ordained priest before migrating to the cathedral chapter of Countances" (Bergin 1996:269).

3.6 Seventeenth Century France: The Age of Saints

The very clear needs of the Catholic Church in France in post-Reformation France called forth a response from a number of Christians: Vincent de Paul, aumonier of Queen Marguerite of Navarre was moved to work for the relief of the poor. Pierre de Bérulle began an order with the expressed purpose of renewing the life of secular clergy through seminary reform. François de Sales offered spirituality to lay people as he worked among the Christians in the Diocese of Annecy.

It is often said that the charismatic element in the Church—that aspect of the life of the Church, which as a balance to the institutional, most clearly evidences the action of the Spirit in renewing the face of the earth—is most often manifested in the founders and founding of new religious societies. This is certainly verified in the Post-Reformation Church by de Paul, La Salle,⁸⁷ and many other religious founders (Gannon and Traub 1969:242).

Not only were men active in renewing the life of the church, but also women were equally so. Baroness Jeanne de Chantal was co-founder with François de Sales of the Visitation Order. Louise de Marillac, niece of prominent layman Michel de Marillac founded the Daughters of Charity with Vincent de Paul. Marguerite de Beuve brought the Ursuline Sisters to New Canada. Madame Barb Acarie introduced the reform of Teresa of Avila to French catholic women, and Madeleine du Bois de Fontaines, became the first French prioress of the Carmelites in Paris. All these people—men and women—contributed to the renewal of the life of the church. It is no wonder then, that this era in French history has been called by Daniel-Rops “the great century of souls”.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ “John Baptist de la Salle (1651-1719), founded the Christian Brothers and devoted himself to educating poor boys and training teachers in modern educational methods (Gannon and Traub 1969:242).

⁸⁸ « Les soixante premières années du XVII^e siècle marquent pour l’Eglise un temps fort, une époque d’une beauté, d’une fécondité rares, aussi riche certainement que les plus grands moments de la chrétienté médiévale, un ère de jeunesse, d’éclatant renouveau. Monsieur Vincent est là, dominant ce temps de sa silhouette cassée, de son regard aigu où la bonté pétille. Près de lui, par dizaines, se dressent ceux que l’histoire tient pour ses émules, qui

In this section we shall turn our attention to four women who played an important role in the development of spirituality in France during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Each of these women contributed to the life of the church in France and to the establishment of religious congregations of women: the Filles des charité, the Order of the Visitation, and the discalced Carmelites of the Teresian reform from Spain. They are: Louise de Marillac, Jeanne Frances de Chantal, Barb Avrillot Acarie, and Madeleine du Bois de Fontaines whose mystical writings we shall examine in some depth in chapter four.

3.6.1 Louise de Marillac

Louise de Marillac was a member of an illustrious French Catholic family. Born in Paris on August 12, 1591, she was the niece of Michel de Marillac, Keeper of the Royal Seals⁸⁹ and Louis de Marillac, the Maréchal of France. Not unlike Madame Acarie, Louise de Marillac, as a seventeen-year-old teenager, wished to enter the Poor Clare convent. However, she was persuaded not to enter the penitential order by her confessor. The austere life of fasting and penance, he said, would ruin her

labourent le même sol, creusant d'autres sillons, pour que lève la même moisson des âmes. Des vies tout ordonnées à Dieu, des œuvres dont le seul but est de faire avancer son règne : il est peu de siècles, parmi ceux qu'a vécus l'Eglise que en comptent tant (...) Pourtant c'est la France qui, plus d'un demi-siècle durant, va être à la tête de la Réforme catholique. Les fidèles de son Eglise ne sont pas meilleures que ceux des autres ; il y a autant d'abus et de scandales qu'ailleurs. Pourtant, la foi, parmi eux, se renouvelle ; les principes se trouvent de nouveaux moyens d'application ; la charité s'affirme en œuvres innombrables. Et quel climat de sainteté ! Voilà l'essentiel ! Ce ne sont pas les ordres royaux ou ministériels—encore que Louis XIII et Richelieu soient gagnés à ces intentions—, ce ne sont pas des arrêt du Parlement, ni même des décisions votées par l'Assemblée du clergé de France qui suscitent l'étonnant mouvement de renaissance. En ce printemps spirituel, la sève qui jaillit de partout monte de ce sol où des générations de bons chrétiens ont vécu durant des siècles. Des équipes d'hommes et de femmes sont là, que ne pressent d'autres exigences qu'intérieures, qui veulent, par toute leur vie, porter un témoignage et faire rayonner la Parole.. Pourquoi sont-ils si nombreux, en ce lieu et en ce temps ? Mais pourquoi aussi bien l'Italie de la Renaissance a-t-elle compté tant de grands artistes ? Questions sans réponse. L'historien peut deviner dans les faits une œuvre de la Providence, mais ses intentions lui demeurent obscures. Il voit seulement que cette première montée du XVII^e siècle est authentiquement le Grand Siècle des âmes. Et que la France est alors la patrie des saints » (Delville 1987:8).

⁸⁹ Michel de Marillac was both a spiritual and financial supporter of the Carmelite convent in Faubourg rue St. Jacques (Louise de Jésus 1935:55-57).

already fragile health. In 1613, Louise de Marillac was married at the age of twenty-two to Antoine Le Gras, who was secretary to Marie de Medici, the Queen Regent.⁹⁰

On Christmas Eve 1625, Le Gras died and Louise de Marillac was a widow. She carried on works of charity, visiting prisoners and bringing them food. And it was after the death of her husband that she met Vincent de Paul who became her spiritual director. Over twenty years earlier, Vincent de Paul had been a member of the *Cercle Acarie*, had collaborated with Pierre de Bérulle in seminary reform, and prepared for the foundation of a congregation that would preach the Gospel to the people of France. Louise de Marillac was in many ways a child of Bérullian spirituality (Delville 1994: 224) and was perhaps influenced by Vincent de Paul's association with Bérulle. Louise's spiritual writings reflect Bérullian themes such as: adherence to Christ in his mysteries, devotion to the Incarnate Word, to the infancy of Christ, to the Eucharist,⁹¹ and to the sacred humanity of Jesus.

After some years of prayer and planning, Louise de Marillac and Vincent de Paul founded a congregation of religious women, the Daughters of Charity whose main aim would be works of charity among the poor.

It is interesting to note that Louise de Marillac availed of the spiritual counsel of Mère Madeleine de St Joseph and was a friend of the Carmelites in rue Chapon. It

⁹⁰ By this time Henry IV was dead, having been assassinated in 1610.

⁹¹ "On the feast of Saint Genevieve, in 1660, as I was receiving Holy Communion, I felt, upon seeing the Sacred host, an extraordinary thirst which had its origin in the belief that Jesus wanted to give Himself to me in the simplicity of his divine infancy. When I was receiving Him and for a long time afterward, my mind was filled by an interior communication that led me to understand that Jesus was bringing not only Himself to me but also all the *merits of His mysteries* [Italics mine]. This communication lasted all day. It was not a forced, interior pre-occupation. It was rather a presence or a recurrent recollection, as sometimes happens when something is troubling me. I felt that I was being warned that, since Jesus had given Himself entirely to me, laden with the merits of all these mysteries, I must make use of this occasion to participate in His submission to humiliations. One means to attain this end is to be found in the fact that, without any cause in me, I appear to others as having received some graces from God. This both humbles me and gives me courage" (quoted in Delville 1994:233).

was this convent that one of Louise de Marillac's cousins had entered⁹² some time earlier.

In 1634, a year after the congregation was formed, Louise de Marillac made her vows as a Daughter of Charity. The congregation, one of the first not bound by rules of enclosure is dedicated to works of mercy and charity among the poor. "As one of the secular daughters who lived without cloister or solemn vows, she is a model of that form of consecration known in the church today as the Societies of Apostolic Life" (Delville 1994:224).

3.6.2 Jeanne Frances de Chantal

In assessing the contribution of women to the church in France, Delville (1994:214) quotes an historian who refers to this era as the "feminization of the church in France". Another very significant woman in the development of spirituality in this era is Baroness Jeanne Frances de Chantal (1572—1641). Cognet writes of her: "At the head of these early Salesians we must naturally place St. Jane Frances de Chantal, a restless and tormented soul, who through agonizing interior trials experienced very high mystical states" (1959:67).

Jeanne Frances Frémyot was born in Dijon in 1572. Her life was marked by tragic loss—of her mother when she was eighteen months old, of two of her six children, and of her husband who died in a hunting accident two weeks after her child Charlotte was born (Wright and Powers 1988:25). She met François de Sales in March 1604 when she attended a Lenten sermon which de Sales preached in Dijon.

⁹² « Louise de Marillac était niece et, croit-on, pupille de Michel, ami dévoué des Carmélites et de Madeleine de Saint-Joseph en particulier. D'autre part, Louise avait pris soin pendant quelque temps de ses cousines d'Attichy, devenues orphelines ; or l'une d'elles entra au Carmel de la rue Chapon en 1619. De là des relations nécessaires entre la Sainte et la prieure du Petit Couvent. Relations qui devinrent vite assez intimes et assez confiantes de côté de Mme Legas pour que vers 1623, l'évêque de Belley ait pu l'engager à suivre, à propos d'une retraite, les avis de la Mere Madeleine. Ces deux âmes étaient du reste bien faites pour se comprendre. Et d'après Mgr Baunard, sainte Louise fit ainsi plusieurs fois, à l'époque de son veuvage (1625), les exercices spirituels sous la direction de son amie Carmélite. Nous ne savons malheureusement rien de plus sur l'influence que celle-ci put exercer sur celle-là, à ce moment douloureux et décisive, alors que la future fondatrice se trouvait, pourrait-on dire, en pleine crise d'évolution vers la sainteté » (Louise de Jésus 1935:190-191).

From that time on, Jeanne de Chantal received spiritual direction from the Bishop of the Annecy diocese, de Sales. Most of the direction took place through the medium of correspondence.

Jeanne Frances also availed herself of opportunities to visit the Dijon Carmelites and to hear Mère Anne de Jésus speak about prayer (Bremond 1930:232). One of the first French Carmelites, Marie de la Trinité (Hannivel) became a good friend⁹³ of the young widow and also advised her on prayer. François de Sales refers to this advice in the following letter dated June 8, 1606 which clearly states his teachings on meditative prayer and perhaps his bias:⁹⁴

.... I have been thinking about what you wrote me concerning the advice Father X had given you about not using your imagination or your understanding in prayer, and the similar advice regarding imagination that Mother Marie de la Trinité gave you.⁹⁵ On this latter point if your imagination is very vivid and you spend a lot of time this way, you undoubtedly needed this correction; but if you use your imagination briefly and simply, only as a means of helping your mind be attentive and bringing it back to the subject of your meditation, I don't think that there's as yet any need to give up all use of it. You

⁹³ On one occasion Jeanne Frances de Chantal, was permitted to visit the Carmel in Dijon. She left a gift for Sœur Marie de la Trinité, a picture of the child Jesus within a rose which François de Sales had given to her. The writing on the back of the card, according to Bremond said, "Mother mine, this wondrous rose/All our life doth safe enclose" (1930:232).

⁹⁴ On the differing prayer experiences of Francis de Sales and Jeanne Frances de Chantal, Cognet (1959:67): "In many respects, one must admit, her experiences surpassed those of her director. She was attracted to a very simple, non-conceptual form of contemplative prayer, which she describes under a definitely passive aspect and calls the prayer of "simple committal (remise) to God.

Often she seems to see it as the type of prayer that should be attained by her Visitation Sisters. On the other hand, her crucifying experiences of passive purifications enabled her to write some magnificent, poignant passages of this subject. In all this there is no question of disloyalty to her director. But there are very often subtle nuances, the tendency to abstractness, the emphasis on passivity, which give the impression that we are in another atmosphere, nearer to Canfield and his "supereminent life." Was there in this, perhaps, some shadow of misunderstanding, which might explain why in his later years Francis seems a little estranged from Madame de Chantal? Perhaps he felt himself rather superseded. In fact, if the Visitation Order has on the whole followed the impulse given it by its founder, its first generations were still imbued with the spirituality of St Jane Frances de Chantal".

⁹⁵ Marie (née d'Hannivel) de la Trinité was a young Carmelite then in Dijon, and the Annecy editors suggest the priest in question was likely Jacques Gallemand, who was active with Bérulle and others in bringing the Carmelites into France. (Cf. *Œuvres*, XIII, 183 and XII, 118).

must neither linger over your images, nor totally disregard them. Neither should you imagine in too much detail, for instance, wondering about the colour of our Lady's hair, the shape of her face, and the details of that sort; but simply and in a general way, imagine her longing for her Son, or the like, and only briefly. I say the same thing about using the understanding.

If without forcing itself your will moves right along with its affections, there is no need to linger over considerations. But, because that doesn't ordinarily happen to less than perfect people like us, we may still have to make use of considerations for a while yet.⁹⁶

In 1610, Jeanne Frances de Chantal became co-founder with François de Sales of the Convent of the Visitation of Holy Mary in Annecy. This religious congregation of women was designed for those who felt a call to live a religious life, but whose physical constitution, age or family ties would preclude them from the austere life in one of the existing orders like the Carmelites or Capuchines. Jeanne Frances envisioned that the Visitation would be "daughters of prayer" who followed a simple prayer programme and engaged in ordinary work and in the visitation of the poor. The foundress died in 1641 and during her lifetime over eighty houses of the institute were established.

The letters of Jeanne Frances de Chantal show her decisive spiritual influence and leadership not only of her own congregation, but of other persons—clerics and lay—who sought spiritual direction. It is also likely that the superiors of the Visitation engaged in spiritual direction as is indicated by a letter from the Bishop of Belley to Louise de Marillac (Mme Legas), « Quant à votre retraite, suivez-en l'avis de quelque bon Père spirituel, comme le P. Menard, de l'Oratoire, ou bien de la M.

⁹⁶ De Sales continues: "From all this, I would summarize that you should abstain from long periods of prayer (for I don't consider three-quarters or half an hour long), and from very detailed and long, drawn-out imaginings; for the latter should be simple and short, serving only as transitions from distractions to recollection. The same goes for the use of the understanding, for this too should serve only to move the affections; the affections then move us to resolutions, resolutions to action, and action to the accomplishment of God's will, in which our soul should dissolve and be transformed. This is all I can tell you about it. If I told you anything to the contrary, or if you understood me otherwise, it should, no doubt, be revised" (Wright & Power 1988:145).

Madeleine, ou de la M. Supérieure de la Visitation et là-dessus allez avec confiance »
(Lettre du 26 juillet vers 1623, quoted in Louise de Jésus 1935 : 191).

Both Louise de Marillac and Jeanne Frances de Chantal made significant contributions to French spirituality. They made possible an alternative form of religious life for women—through a life style that resembled in some aspects that of the Beguines⁹⁷ in Belgium several centuries earlier. Living a life in common, but without strict enclosure,⁹⁸ the *Filles de Charité* and the Visitandines engaged in prayer, work and visitation and relief of those in need.

The contributions of Barb Acarie and Madeleine du Bois de Fontaines to spirituality in France lay more directly in the introduction of enclosed Carmelite life to French Catholic society and in the mentoring of those seeking to develop an inner life of contemplation and prayer.

Of the women who played an important role in the development of spirituality in seventeenth century France, Madame Barb Acarie and Madeleine du Bois de Fontaines are particularly interesting. Both became Carmelite nuns. Both women worked closely with Pierre de Bérulle⁹⁹ in his efforts to renew catholic life—clerical

⁹⁷ Bowie's work on the Beguines (1989) gives a clear indication of their lifestyle and spirituality.

⁹⁸ "As early as 1615 when the Visitation first flowered on French soil—in Lyons—major obstacles were encountered. The bishop of the diocese, de Marquemont, following the directives of the Council of Trent to the letter, perhaps not in their larger spirit, felt, among other things, that he could not allow a community of women who did not observe strict enclosure to reside under his jurisdiction. In a long and eloquently debated correspondence he and de Sales went back and forth. The original plan for the Visitandines had been to exercise the two arms of charity—the love of God in prayer, and in service to others. Now the community structure had to be modified to adapt to changing circumstances. With the Lyons foundation the congregation became a formal order observing permanent and solemn vows and the excursions out of the cloister were curtailed in favor of practicing charity within the house itself. Nevertheless, the essential purpose and spirit of the community remained unchanged—to establish a place for women to be 'daughters of prayer' and cultivate a deep interior intimacy with God even if, by temperament, age, or constitution, they might be prevented from joining an already established women's foundation" (Wright & Power 1988:30).

⁹⁹ "What Madame Acarie had been for his [Bérulle's] youth, Mother Madeleine was in his years of maturity" (Houssaye 1874:214).

and lay—in seventeenth century France. Both women were recognized by the Catholic Church for their heroic virtue.¹⁰⁰

While one woman—Madame Acarie—was instrumental in transplanting the Teresian reform to France, the other woman—Madeleine du Bois de Fontaines—was both leader and practitioner¹⁰¹ who tended the growth of Carmelite life among the newly formed French communities from 1604 until her death in 1637. Madame Barb Acarie is remembered for her *Salon Acarie*, the birthplace and model of inclusive theological and spiritual enquiry and conversation. And though not a member of the *Cercle Acarie*, Madeleine de Bois de Fontaines has been assigned a place in the constellation of theologians and spiritual writers who belong to the French school of spirituality (Thompson 1989:22).

¹⁰⁰ The beatification process for Madeleine of St Joseph “was begun in 1645 [eight years after her death]; in 1650 the cause was introduced at Rome. When the degree of heroicity of her virtues seemed imminent, various contingent historical circumstances, extrinsic to the cause itself, halted it. This was until July 16, 1789 when Pius VI promulgated the decree that recognised such heroicity. The French revolution completely halted the cause, which seemed to be progressing again with success, as a result, too, of the graces that were attributed to the intercession of the venerable (Macca:1972:184). In 1992 Pierre Menant wrote a thesis for his Maîtrise d’Histoire at the Sorbonne, « *Saintete et procedure canonique la beatification de la Vénérable Madeleine de Saint-Joseph 1644-1789* ». Menant, a layman living in France, continues to be involved in the process of Mère Madeleine’s canonization.

Barb Acarie, Sœur Marie de l’Incarnation died on April 18, 1618. According to Sheppard 1953: Appendix I: “The process for Madame Barb Acarie was introduced in Rome in 1627, after the proper formalities had been carried out in France. Pierre Acarie, her son, ...was one of the first to act ; in 1622 he wrote to his archbishop praying for steps to be taken for his mother’s beatification....At this point occurred Urban VIII’s decree ordaining that all causes for beatification must wait until fifty years have elapsed since the death of the person concerned. The cause was not taken up again until towards the end of the eighteenth century; in 1782 the clergy of France, supported by Madame Louise de France, daughter of Louis XV, then prioress of the Carmelites of Saint-Denys, and Louis XVI, then King, petitioned Rome for the reopening of the cause. Pius VI authorized the congregation of rites to proceed with the cause, and finally on June 5, 1791, Barb Acarie was declared blessed. Her feast, which is kept in France and in the Carmelite Order, occurs on April 18, the day of her death.”

¹⁰¹ William Thompson referred to Mère Madeleine as “foundress, leader, practitioner” (Telephone conversation with author 5 September 2000).

3.6.3 Madame Barb Acarie

According to Michel de Certeau a profoundly new consciousness¹⁰² emerges in the late sixteenth century. This awareness is expressed, not in scientific terms but in practical terms by Teresa of Avila who at the threshold of the *Interior Castle* presents her fundamental idea—the soul as a human dwelling place, God as the unique and sole resident, and the importance of being able to enter into oneself to discover God within (de Certeau 1982:197). Such an inward journey was to spawn a revitalisation in the lives of Christian people in France.

Barb Avrillot was born in 1566. As a young woman, she felt a deep attraction to prayer. Bremond recounts the young woman's early attraction to religious life and the difficulties that she had with her parents when she expressed this desire. Barb Avrillot wanted to enter a convent and give her life to God; her parents wanted her to marry well. In the end, she was betrothed against her will and at a young age to Pierre Acarie. A devoted wife, she bore him six children and managed the affairs of the household. For some time after their marriage, Barb seems to have lost the spark of her early childhood relationship with God. Pierre took it upon himself to provide his wife with spiritual books in place of the *romances* with which she entertained herself. Little did he realise that a collection of religious books would mark the beginning of a change in both of their lives. In 1588, when she experienced her first ecstasy, according to Bremond (1930:53) Barb heard the words, “trop est avare à qui Dieu ne suffit”.

In the intervening years, even before her husband's exile, Barb Acarie experienced and suffered from various mystical phenomena. Completely misunderstood, these experiences caused concerned family members to call on physicians to “bleed” Madame Acarie in order to cure her mysterious ailments. She sought counsel but no

¹⁰² Williams' article, “Lear and Eurydice—religious experience, crisis and change,” (1998:75-84) discusses the modern concept of search for the self using as a basis de Certeau's (1992) writings in *The mystic fable*. Williams puts the question: Who is it that will tell me who I am?

one seemed to understand what was happening to her. It was only when she shared her plight with the Carthusian priest, Dom Beaucousin that she began to have some peace. Dom Beaucousin introduced Madame Acarie to the works of the Rheno-mystics such as Tauler, Ruysbroek and Eckhart. Reading the works of these writers¹⁰³ and listening to the Carthusian priest's explanations of dark contemplation opened new vistas for Barb Acarie. She desired to deepen her understanding by inviting other interested persons to come and speak about spiritual matters. For those who came to *salon Acarie*¹⁰⁴ Père Benoit de Canfield and Beaucousin provided inspiration, understanding, and teaching that initiated more people into the spiritual quest through the meetings in the Acarie home.

The strength of Madame Acarie's faith was put to the test as her husband grew more politically involved in the opposition activities of the Catholic League.¹⁰⁵ His participation frequently took him from home and also drained the family's fiscal resources. Bremond (1930) and Sheppard (1953) have differing views on the relationship between Madame Acarie and her husband Pierre. Bremond paints him as an irresponsible, naïve, yet good-hearted man¹⁰⁶ whose ambition for a political

¹⁰³ "Printing began in France in 1470 when, six years before Caxton introduced the new invention to Westminster, three German printers were brought to Paris and installed in the Sorbonne. Soon more printing-shops were set up in the capital, and they rapidly spread to a great many provincial centres. Lyons which for almost a century was to prove a serious rival to Paris, acquired its first printer in 1473; between 1500 and 1599 15,000 books were printed in Lyons against 25,000 in Paris" (Lough 1978:31).

¹⁰⁴ "Second only to the influence of the King in literary affairs was that of the *salons*. Of these, by far the most famous and influential was the so-called *hotel de Rambouillet*, founded by Catherine de Vironne, daughter of a French ambassador at Rome and wife of the Marquis de Rambouillet. From 1608—1660, the *marquise* received in her celebrated *salon* the most distinguished members of society and the greatest writers of the time. Refinement in manners and purity of language appear to have been the chief aims of the *salon*—dangerous aims since they were later to degenerate into the exaggerated affectation or *préciosité* so often ridiculed by Molière" (Wilson 1963:xv).

¹⁰⁵ Monsieur Acarie was a member of the Catholic League, defenders of the Papacy and Catholic succession to the French crown in opposition to the Huguenot pretenders to the throne (Henry of Navarre).

¹⁰⁶ Bremond writes that Pierre Acarie spent his family's money supporting the activities of the League and infers that Monsieur Acarie's naiveté made him the victim of some unscrupulous persons. Says Bremond, "His exile in 1594 came at a lucky moment for him and his, permitting Madame Acarie to intervene in this troublesome business which had hitherto been carefully concealed from her. The pleasant conditions of the exile were due,

career practically ruined his marriage. In one incident Madame Acarie was condemned from the pulpit of the parish church for supposedly neglecting her wifely duties.¹⁰⁷

Sheppard presents a more positive image of the relationship between Pierre and Barb Acarie. Indeed, he finds Bremond's appraisal quite prejudiced against Monsieur Acarie and refutes many of Bremond's criticisms. Whether these allegations are true or not, it remains clear that for a number of reasons, marital relations between the Acaries were strained.

At the time of her husband's exile, Madame Acarie continued to manage the household, rear her children, and to carry the financial burdens of her husband's ineptitude. In addition, she was physically limited. She walked on crutches, the result of having broken her leg three times. However, despite financial and physical limitations of a severe nature, at the same time she enjoyed a freedom that, for women of her culture and times, was unusual.

The *salon* of Madame Acarie became a gathering place for the spiritual energies of French Catholicism (Buckley 1990:30). The conversations at the Acarie *salon* covered a wide range of topics—from mysticism to monastic reform, from the foundation of religious orders to the formation of secular clergy and from the political to the religious policies of the recently converted Henry of Navarre (Delville 1994:28).

Among those who frequented Hôtel Acarie¹⁰⁸ were Capuchins, Jesuits, Carthusians, and secular clergy: Pierre Coton, the Jesuit confessor to the king was joined by

we are told, to the esteem which Henri IV had for Madame Acarie, or rather, I should say, to the political insignificance of the person concerned" (1930:158).

¹⁰⁷ Madame Acarie suffered the humiliation of having the parish priest, M. Guincestre accuse her from the pulpit of Saint-Gervais of not fulfilling her marital duties to her husband (Bremond 1930:162).

¹⁰⁸ Buckley writes: "Here the Rhineland mystics would intersect the growing spirit of Spanish Carmelite reform, a reform which the members of this circle would eventually

André Duval, professor at the Sorbonne and later one of the superiors of the Carmelite women; Dom Beaucousin, the Carthusian who exercised a great influence on the group; Pierre de Bérulle, a young cousin of Madame Acarie; and François de Sales, later bishop of Geneva residing in Annecy.

Spiritually, Madame Acarie was drawn to the dark way of Pseudo-Dionysian mysticism as elucidated by Rhenish-mystical writers such as Tauler, Eckhart, and Ruusbroec and explained to her by Dom Beaucousin. The spiritual pathway marked out by Pseudo-Dionysius would be her guide and inspiration: a spirituality “that explored into the nature of the soul’s surrender to God as the person passed beyond sign and concept to be fully grasped by the mystery of love and so transformed” (Sheldrake 1992:39).

In the midst of marital trials, her husband’s political difficulties and exile, Barb Acarie experienced intense mystical encounters—raptures, ecstasies, the stigmata, and visions of St. Teresa of Avila who requested her on several occasions to establish the Spanish Carmelite reform in France (Bremond 1930: 215).

In selecting an appropriate venue for the new Carmelite convent, Senault (1645:39) reports that Madame Acarie chose the site of Notre Dame des Champs, where it was held by tradition that “Saint Denis the Areopagite, disciple of Saint Paul and the first apostle of France made his dwelling and offered the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to the Eternal Father, for the conversion of the whole of idolatrous France”.

introduce into France. Here the universal spirituality of Francis de Sales would confront in his occasional visits to France the lay spirituality of the chancellor Michel de Marillac and René Gaultier. Here finally the finest reaches of Catholic mysticism would engage in active social compassion that embodied itself in the foundations of charity now spreading throughout the nation. Madame Acarie had made this as possible as the salonières of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment would enable the genius of Denis Diderot to meet that of Jean le Rond d’Alembert and mingle into this same stream Bernard de Fontenelle and Claude Helvétius. Madame Acarie also nourished the life of conversation which both expressed the religious hunger of the nations... with resources that lay within the experiences and reflections of men and women so different” (1990:31).

Prospective candidates lived for a time in the Acarie home¹⁰⁹ as members of the *Congregation of St Geneviève*. There Madame Acarie trained the young women for the Carmelite life until the Duchess de Longueville bought a house¹¹⁰ on the Place Sainte-Geneviève to better accommodate the group of pious women. During this period, Madame Acarie supervised the building of the convent walking along the foundations aided by her crutches, continued the work of running her household, and offered spiritual direction and training to the young women. When the Spanish Carmelites arrived in Paris on October 15, 1604, Madame Acarie would continue to advise Pierre de Bérulle and Pères Duval and Gallament, the ecclesiastical superiors of the newly formed branch of Carmel. The duties of religious formation were entrusted to the Spanish Carmelites.

Subsequent to the death of her husband Pierre, Madame Acarie entered the Pointoise Carmel where she would live, work and pray until her death in 1618. Three of her daughters became Carmelites and one, Marguerite du Sainte-Sacrament was noted for her profound mystical states. Though Madame Acarie expected to remain a lay sister,¹¹¹ this was not the case and she was admitted as a choir nun to the Pointoise Carmel where her daughter was prioress. A great sadness to Barb Acarie was the rift that occurred between herself and her cousin Pierre de Bérulle. They disagreed profoundly over the vow of servitude to the Virgin Mary that Bérulle introduced into the Carmelites' spiritual practice.

¹⁰⁹ Bremond writes that Pierre Acarie, returning from exile, "found all transformed, the *salon* almost a convent parlour...He was perplexed, writes Duval, 'by the fact that a great number of people of every description, great and small, men, women and girls, religious and secular, came to his house to speak to his wife, and letters came to her from every quarter.' ...As he [M. Acarie] remarked to an ecclesiastic of his acquaintance: 'It is uncommonly inconvenient to have such a saintly wife and one so skilled in giving advice'" (Duval in Bremond 1930:190).

¹¹⁰ This house was closed in 1607 (Bremond 1930:191).

¹¹¹ Until the latter half of the twentieth century, many monastic orders of women had distinctions between the choir sisters and the lay sisters. The former group were generally literate, able to read the Divine Office, and brought a dowry with them when they entered. The lay sisters were from a lower social class, entered with no dowry, and were not educated. Or, they were older women. This would have been the case with Madame Acarie.

3.6.4 Madeleine du Bois de Fontaines, first French Carmelite Prioress

Antoine de Bois, whose ancestors were originally from Flanders, had been in the employ of Henry III and his predecessor Charles IX in several ambassadorial posts. He had served in England, Germany, and the Netherlands and, finally as ambassador to Flanders before he retired to Fontaines after a distinguished career (Senault 1645:5). While Du Bois was on his way to Flanders in the service of the king, his wife Marie Prudhomme,¹¹² pregnant with their sixth child, received from God "le pressentiment qu'il lui naîtrait une fille et qu'elle serait avantagée due ciel par-dessus ses autres enfants" (Louise of Jesus 1935:10). Accordingly, the young woman went to stay with her aunts near the church of Saint Nicolas-des-Champs, where her daughter Madeleine, was born on Pentecost Eve, the seventeenth of May 1578.

Madeleine grew up in a pious household and one in which she and her brothers and sisters were given the opportunity of education. At an early age she showed signs of spiritual precocity, when she was struck by the thought of eternity and the judgements of God after seeing the funeral cortege carrying the small coffin of a young child (Senault 1645:7). When Madeleine was about seven years old, the family moved to Touraine. Madeleine used to spend time in the family chapel and one day Madeleine could be found nowhere. When evening came, her parents searched everywhere for her and finally went to the oratory where they discovered her there weeping over her sins (Louise de Jésus 1935:19).

As a young woman, she decided to separate herself from the "world" and to shun its allurements. The life of the royals held no fascination for her. Instead, Madeline devoted herself to prayer and the pursuit of pious activities, while she managed her widowed father's household and cared for her younger brothers and sisters. Madeleine had plans to join the Capuchines, a very strict religious order of

¹¹² Antoine du Bois and Marie Prudhomme, daughter of the lord of Fontenay-en-Brie, were married in 1571, one year prior to the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre of the Huguenots (Louise of Jesus 1935:14).

Franciscan women and to live a life of prayer and penitence. At the same time, she involved herself in works of charity among the poor (Senault 1645:23).

Madeleine's life, while comfortable, was not without trials. The death of her mother left the twenty-two year old with seven young children to look after, and the responsibilities for the house. Her father Antoine, depended on Madeleine and when she told him of her decision to enter religious life, he reacted very negatively.

As Madeleine matured, so did the gift of prayer. With tears in her eyes, she once told her sister Catherine, "Oh! qu'il fait bon aimer Dieu! Qu'il fait bon aimer Dieu!" (Louise de Jésus 1935:44). However, Louise de Jésus records that she also suffered interior trials (1935:23).

Madeleine du Bois de Fontaines made decisions about living modestly, not engaging in the frivolous life of court, and she continued the practice of personal prayer. She discovered how good it is to love God and from that time her fears began to be replaced by love. Madeleine experienced consolation in prayer¹¹³ and grew in her deepening relationship with God. Through the help of her spiritual director, Père Laurent, a Capuchin Franciscan priest, (1935:42) she was led to consider a calling to the religious life. Madeleine planned to enter the enclosed order of the Capuchines, a penitential order for women that follows the spirit of St. Clare of Assisi.

¹¹³ In the Rules for the First Week, No. 316, Ignatius describes spiritual consolation: "I call it consolation when an interior movement is aroused in the soul, by which it is inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, and as a consequence, can love no creature on the face of the earth for its own sake, but only in the Creator of them all. It is likewise consolation when one sheds tears that move to the love of God, whether it is because of sorrow for sins, or because of the sufferings of Christ our Lord, or for any other reason that is immediately directed to the praise and service of God. Finally, I call consolation every increase of faith, hope, and love, and all interior joy that invites and attracts to what is heavenly and to the salvation of one's soul by filling it with peace and quiet in its Creator and Lord" (Puhl 1951:142).

3.6.5 Madeleine de Saint-Joseph and Pierre de Bérulle

By the year 1603, at the age of twenty-five, Madeleine du Bois de Fontaines had decided to enter the Capuchines. She had recently lost her mother. Her father, Antoine was particularly aggrieved and sought some consolation by attending a Lenten sermon in Tours. It was there that he met the young priest, Pierre de Bérulle, a young aumônier of the king. Bremond recounts the circumstances which introduced Pierre de Bérulle into the life and future of Madeleine du Bois de Fontaines:

During the Lent of 1603, M. de Bérulle went to Tours to negotiate with the Benedictines of Marmoutiers for the Priory of Notre-Dame-des-Champs, wanted for the future Carmelites. A meeting took place which was to have as splendid results as the famous meeting the next year 1604, between François de Sales and the Baronne de Chantal.... Living in retirement on his Fontaines property, he [Antoine du Bois de Fontaines] set there a rare example of a life devoted to God and the service of the poor. The death of Mme de Fontaines deepened his taste for solitude, and he only left home to come into Tours for the great occasions of the Church's life. On this occasion the Lent sermons had drawn him....M. de Bérulle, learning that he was in town, went to visit him at his *hôtel*, and found him in the company with his daughter Madeleine (1930:239).

The results of this encounter with Bérulle were several. First, Madeleine decided not to enter the Capuchines, but rather to come to Paris in November of 1604 and to enter the Carmel de l'Incarnation. Secondly, it began a relationship of mutual spiritual influence that lasted for over twenty years. It is my contention that Madeleine de Saint-Joseph, while a close associate of Bérulle, was authentically her own person, that she maintained a sense of her own goals and vocation, and was able to help Bérulle clarify the direction of his life.

3.6.5.1 Pierre de Bérulle

Pierre de Bérulle was born in 1575. As a young man, he attended the Jesuit College in Clermont in 1592. He wrote his first work in 1597, *Bref discours de l'abnégation intérieure*. In 1599 he was ordained a priest. He was still searching trying to determine whether he should join a religious order or remain a secular priest when he decided to make a retreat with the Jesuits in Verdun who had been expelled from France in 1595. Prior to this retreat, Bérulle was very taken with the spirituality of the Rhenish mystics, but with the experiences of the spiritual exercises of Ignatius Loyola,¹¹⁴ Pierre de Bérulle took a significant step toward embracing the Word Incarnate.

Bérulle was a cousin of Madame Acarie and went to her home for discussions of spirituality. At the *Cercle Acarie* young Pierre became acquainted with Madame Acarie's desire to bring the Carmelites of Teresa of Avila to France. When the plans were made to bring the Spanish Carmelites to Paris, it was Bérulle who offered to accompany the women and to negotiate with the Carmelite Fathers for the transfer of six sisters to France. Bérulle impressed the Spanish women initially. Bremond records Anne de Jésus remarking: "That little Don Pedro had more strength and vigour than all the rest!...Our holy Mother would have loved him well" (1930:219). Though she admired Bérulle, Anne de Jésus regretted that the order had been placed under the jurisdiction of French priests and not under the discolored¹¹⁵ Carmelite Fathers.

¹¹⁴ The Spiritual Exercises were the fruit of his meditation and prayer over a long period of time in Manresa, Spain from March 1522-February 1523. They were revised and published in final form between 1539-1541. The goal of the Exercises is personal freedom from any disordered inclinations and to order one's life. The period of prayer covers a period of four weeks (thirty days) in which the subject meditates and contemplates on various themes related to one's existence as a creature, a loved sinner, a follower of Christ, a sharer his death and resurrection (Ganss, 1991:26,129).

¹¹⁵ This is the name of the reform group that did not wear sandals.

Relations between Spain and France were not good during the reign of Henry of Navarre. Political considerations prevented either Spanish or Italian Carmelite priests from assuming a role of ecclesiastical superiors for the Carmelite women, and the Holy See appointed three French priests ecclesiastical superiors for the Carmelite women. While Duval, Gallement, and Bérulle were priests in good standing, Duval was a lecturer at the Sorbonne and quite deaf, Gallement was involved in parish work, and that left the young Bérulle very much involved in the foundation of the Carmelite women (Dupuy 1964:12). The appointment of the French clergymen caused consternation to the Carmelite men in the area (those in Italy and in Spain).

Spanish Carmelite men were banned from France until 1610. When the first male discalced Carmelites arrived in France, it was deemed fitting to review the appointment of ecclesiastical visitor for the Carmelite women. Pope Paul V ruled on the question in 1614 and decided that Bérulle would be named perpetual visitor. This enraged the Carmelite men who denounced the proceedings in Rome. In 1619, Père Denis de la Mère de Dieu, organised a group of about fifteen Carmelite women in Saintes and in Bordeaux to formulate an opposition to the superiors: Gallement, Duval, and Bérulle (Dupuy 1964:21). The incident led to a papal intervention affirming the powers of Bérulle. Later, the parliament of Bordeaux and the King became involved in the unfortunate situation (Dupuy 1964:21).

As ecclesiastical superior, Bérulle visited the Carmelite houses and gave instruction in prayer and spirituality. His own biases, particularly his devotions were passed on to the Carmelite women. A case in point is the vow of servitude. In the Congregation of the Oratory that Bérulle founded, the priests made a vow of servitude to Jesus Christ (Dupuy 1964:111). This was in keeping with Bérulle's theology of the servitude of the Incarnate Word in the self-emptying act of becoming a human being. Consulting with a few Carmelite women, Bérulle shared his thought that a vow of servitude to the Virgin Mary would be of spiritual benefit to the Carmelite women. Madeleine de Saint-Joseph found the idea personally helpful

and made the vow privately while she was staying at the second Parisian Carmel on the rue Chapon.

The vow of servitude proved to be a contentious issue among the many other Carmelite women and one that ruined Bérulle's reputation and caused untold suffering to the nuns. In what Morgain calls an "imprudence" (1995:293), Bérulle imposed a vow of servitude in honour of the Virgin on members of the Carmelite monastery in Chalon-sur-Saône in June 1615 (Delville 1994:44). Morgain (1995:282) writes that Bérulle communicated to several of the Carmelites—Madeleine de Saint-Joseph, Marie de la Trinité (d'Hannivel), Marie de la Trinité (Sevin), Catherine de Jésus (Nicolas)—his thoughts about the vow of servitude in spring of 1614. In June of 1615, while on an official visit to the community in Chalon, he made an official statement that the vow would be mandatory and perpetual. Understandably, Bérulle's mandate was met with opposition from the women in Chalon.

Though he meant to introduce the Carmelites to a mystical initiation through the Virgin Mary, Bérulle's proposed vow caused division among the religious, who felt that an imposed vow was not in keeping with Teresa of Avila's spirit. Bérulle's misguided insistence that the Carmelite women embrace this personal devotion caused untold difficulties within the Carmelite communities and to Bérulle himself. He clashed with Duval and Gallemant, the other two ecclesiastical superiors and with Madame Acarie (Marie de l'Incarnation) as well.

He was discredited falsely by theologians at the Sorbonne, and was a broken man as a result. Morgain (1987:118) notes that Mère Madeleine supported the idea of the vow, but suggested it be taken privately. Her own reaction to trouble showed her realism and trust in the Mother of God. "There will be much suffering," she said, "but the Holy Virgin will reach down and help us". « Ceci fera beaucoup souffrir. Mais la Sainte Vierge prendra le dessus et nous assistera » (Louise de Jésus 1935:147).

The underlying issue of ecclesiastical jurisdiction was very likely a factor in the whole affair, as Morgain has convincingly shown (1995:478-481). For many reasons, Bérulle's influence over the development of French Carmelite life is considered controversial. Morgain's study, *Bérulle and the Carmelites of France* (1995) presents the situation in great detail. His assessment of Bérulle's relationship with the Spanish foundresses Anne of Jesus and Anne of St. Bartholomew is quite fair, and he points out the prejudice of nineteenth century authors against Bérulle (1995:483).

3.6.5.2 Mutual Influence

Dallet makes a comment that is relevant as we look at the relationship of Pierre de Bérulle and Madeleine de Saint-Joseph: "With rare exceptions, the drive for men and women to become fully functioning human beings distinct from one another, is brand new" (quoted in Anderson 1991:135). With this in mind, we examine some examples from the life of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph that show her sense of her own goals as well as the mutual support and influence that they extended to each other.

The first example comes from the early days of the new Carmelite foundation in Paris. On November 11, 1604, Madeleine's reception day as a Carmelite novice, she was able to choose a new religious name to signify her new life in the Carmelite convent. Bérulle enthusiastically suggested to her, "Madeleine de Jésus" and tried to persuade Madeleine with the argument that "Madeleine est inséparable de Jésus!" However, Madeleine replied *humbly* [*Italics mine*] that she had promised St. Joseph that were she to enter Carmel she would take his name (Louise de Jésus 1935:68). Her name became Sœur Madeleine de Saint-Joseph.

The second example shows Mère Madeleine's ability to clarify and influence Bérulle in a positive way. Bérulle had spent time at the Jesuit House in Verdun in 1602 to discern the true meaning of his vocation—whether or not he should become a Jesuit or retire to a contemplative order. For some time he was unsure of the direction his

priesthood should take. He had spoken to a number of experienced spiritual guides—François de Sales, Marie de l'Incarnation, Anne de Saint Bartholémey, and Madeleine de Saint-Joseph—about his desire to “give God priests worthy of the name”. By 1610, for some reason, perhaps humility or lack of self-confidence, Bérulle seemed unable to execute any plan. One day while speaking to Madeleine de Saint-Joseph he was some how touched by the Spirit and exclaimed, “Announce his designs to the nations!” During his interview with Madeleine de Saint-Joseph, God seemed to reveal to Bérulle the plan for his new congregation of priests. He told Mère Madeleine what had transpired interiorly and she replied and said, among other things, “What are you waiting for?” (Louise de Jésus 1935:128). Bérulle took Mère Madeleine’s advice and made the necessary plans for the formulation of the Congregation of the Oratory. Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was an inspiration to and confidant of Bérulle, and “no doubt influenced the evolution of the great spiritual master” (Cognet 1959:104).

Later on, after the controversy of the vow of servitude had died down somewhat, Bérulle wrote to Madeleine de Saint-Joseph of the condition of his own spiritual life. He writes to her from Rome on the 6th of November 1624. He does not know why he has been sent to Rome¹¹⁶ and “cannot penetrate what is the plan of God for him in this journey” (Letter 514. Dagens 1937:529). He appeals to Madeleine de Saint-Joseph for prayers as he experiences a state of interior poverty and desolation: “...je suis partout en même état de pauvreté, et d’incapacité des choses divines” (Letter 514. Dagens 1937: 530). Mère Madeleine continued to support Bérulle and remained a loyal friend.

It is not within the scope of this study to determine to what extent Bérulle influenced the spirituality of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph¹¹⁷ or her life in the Carmelite community. What we can say, based on the little evidence that is available, is that

¹¹⁶ Bérulle was involved in obtaining the papal dispensation for Henriette of France to marry Charles I of England. He went in August 1624. (Dupuy 1964:26).

¹¹⁷ Morgain’s thesis (1987) gives a very clear indication of the influence through his presentation of the Berullian themes of adoration, adherence, and *l’anéantissement*.

they spoke very often about spiritual matters and that Madeleine de Saint-Joseph had great admiration for him:

I think he spoke more than five-hundred times of his dispositions, but it was always in simple, ordinary terms, which indicated on the one hand how much he valued the grace and on the other how much he despised himself...however this very humble, holy man, who thought so little of himself, who spoke of himself only with such fear and so little esteem, never stopped believing that the person of our Lord Jesus Christ dwelt in him in a special way and that he was present in such an extraordinary manner that it could be easier believed than articulated. It seemed that he could only act for Jesus Christ... (Letter 45. Thompson 1989:193).

Morgain seems to see Bérulle in a similar light and sums up his personality as follows:

Le plus saillant est l'unité d'être à laquelle il est parvenu. Il n'y a pas de distance chez lui entre ses actions les plus ordinaires et sa recherche continuelle d'une communion intime avec Jésus-Christ. Qu'il soit supérieur des Carmélites, fondateur de l'Oratoire, diplomate, homme de loi, conseiller, prêtre ou cardinal, Bérulle est habité par un désir constant d'orienter toute sa vie vers Dieu» (1995:478).

Whether Bérulle was a superior, a founder, a diplomat, a lawyer, counselor, priest or cardinal, he was occupied by one constant desire to orient his whole life toward God. His desire to live in intimate communion with Jesus Christ was shared equally with Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph.

It is clear that Madeleine de Saint-Joseph and Pierre de Bérulle had a relationship of mutual influence. What is also obvious is that patriarchal structures, along with rivalries among male religious orders accounted for much suffering of Carmelite women in France, of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph and of Bérulle himself.

3.6.5 Madeleine's Gifts and Tasks

The day after her profession as a Carmelite nun, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was appointed novice mistress at the *Grand Couvent* in Paris. Her biographers say that her spiritual acumen and understanding of the Carmelite way of life were the factors responsible for this appointment by the Spanish superiors (Senault 1645:73-74). After her term as novice mistress, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was elected the first French prioress of the Carmel de l'Incarnation. She served two terms as prioress, and in 1615 Mère Madeleine was sent to Tours to help stabilise the newly formed foundation there. The following year 1616, she established the Carmel in Lyon and was called back to Paris to found the *Petit Couvent* on rue Chapon in 1617. In 1624 she was called back to the *Grand Couvent* on rue Faubourg St. Jacques and served another term as prioress.

Early in her noviciate experience, Madeleine experienced herself being detached from all created things (1935:84). This same theme re-appears though now she is “dead” to all created things in an entirely new way. In addition she is drawn into a participation in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to God. She sees herself an unworthy recipient of divine mercy and at the same time one privileged to see the loving relationships of Father and Son within the Trinity. These themes especially: self-offering, *l'anéantissement* of her soul—her creaturehood, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, his centrality in her life, and the relationships of Father and Son within the Trinity continue to form a consistent and major portion of the content of Mère Madeleine's extant mystical writings.¹¹⁸

The grace to unite herself to Jesus' “*Fiat voluntas tua*”¹¹⁹ was a continual challenge throughout the rest of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's life. In the period immediately following her profession of vows, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was called upon to

¹¹⁸ It is unfortunate that many of her letters were destroyed after the death of Pierre de Bérulle while many others were lost at the time of the French Revolution.

¹¹⁹ Latin phrase from the gospel: *Your will be done.*

exercise responsibility for the formation of candidates for the Carmelite life. It was apparent to the Spanish foundresses, Anne of Jesus and Anne of St. Bartholomew that Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was equipped with the necessary judgement and understanding of Carmelite spirituality to form candidates as future Carmelites. Evidently, she possessed both a natural affinity for and a divinely given gift for guiding souls.¹²⁰

The Spaniards had great regard for Madeleine's talents and abilities. And they also had a strong desire to expand the foundations of the Carmelite order. It was the intent of Anne of Jesus to begin a foundation in Dijon as soon as possible. Another convent in Amiens was followed by a proposed move to Flanders. Impressed by the way in which Madeleine dealt with the novices—women of varied ages and experience (including the mother of Pierre de Bérulle), Anne of Jésus proposed that Madeleine de Saint-Joseph accompany her to Flanders to begin a foundation under the aegis of the Flemish Carmelite men's order. However, the ecclesiastical superiors refused to accede to this request, and Madeleine de Saint-Joseph remained in Paris.

The decision was evidently a good one, for it gave the French Carmelite the opportunity to inculcate the charism of the Spanish foundresses. For three years Madeleine de Saint-Joseph exercised the role of novice director. The candidates who presented themselves to be trained were from various backgrounds and age groups. In addition to attending to the spiritual formation of the novices, Mère Madeleine was given the task of communicating with the builders and overseeing their work of completing the new convent structure in the Faubourg St. Jacques by the Spanish Carmelites. The many activities of her life did not end when she completed her three-year term as novice director. Rather, she was given another three years in leadership--this time as prioress. On the feast of the Good Shepherd,

¹²⁰ Anne of St. Bartholomew told Monsignor du Val, one of the three ecclesiastical superiors of the Carmelites, that the Virgin Mary had revealed to her that Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was generously gifted by God to serve the Order and that she had great ability and talent for the guidance of souls (Louise de Jésus 1935:89).

April 20, 1608 Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was unanimously elected prioress of the *Grand Couvent*.

What fell to the new prioress was the task of inculturating the Carmelite charism into French culture. When Anne of Jesus, Anne of St. Bartholomew and the four other Spanish foundresses¹²¹ arrived in France on October 15, 1604, their task was to appropriate the message and charism of Teresa of Avila in a new context. They had no idea that they were entering a culture that was deeply Catholic and were happily surprised at the reception they received from the French people (Bremond 1930:226). The Spanish Carmelite women were met with the differences in language, culture, and spirituality¹²² that challenged their misconceptions about the French and encouraged them to see the wealth in the culture of which they were afraid.¹²³

Palmes (1996:172) explains inculturation as the gradual process of evangelisation that recognizes and critically assumes the values of a culture so that the culture embraces the gospel to make it the expression and constitutive principle of inspiration. Applying this definition in an analogous sense to the inculturation of the charism of a religious order, it is clear that the essence of the charism needs to be identified. Then, in a dialogic process, it can be re-formulated, re-created, and re-expressed within the context of the new culture (1996:173).

The responsibility for this task was Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's. She and her sisters set about accommodating the essence of the Teresian charism to their own situation.

¹²¹ Others were Isabelle des Anges, Isabelle de Saint-Paul, Béatrix de la Conception, and Éléonore de Saint-Bernard (Louise de Jésus 1935: 71).

¹²² Bremond (1930:229) records Anne de Jésus' reactions when she met the first French candidates: "I am careful that they meditate on and imitate Our Lord Jesus Christ, for he is often forgotten here. All devotion is concentrated upon the abstract idea of God: I do not know how it is done.... It is a strange affair. I can as little comprehend it as the language in which they seek to explain it; nay, I am unable even to read it".

¹²³ Anne de Jésus wrote to her Spanish sisters during her travels: "Nearly all the inhabitants are heretics; that could be seen by their faces—truly they looked like lost souls...[of the bishops of France] they are not all Catholics" (Bremond 1930:226. The Spanish Carmelites were greatly impressed at the depth of spirituality of Madame Jourdain and the other French women who prayed at the Carmelite church with the Spaniards before the journey to France

Morgain writes: « Il faudra surtout laisser aux Français la possibilité de donner au écrits de la sainte Mère [Teresa] une interprétation conforme à leur culture, à leur histoire, à leurs aspirations » (1995:58). The efforts of the fledgling community proved successful. French Carmelite life developed rapidly, and within forty years of founding, there were fifty-five Carmels in France (Buckley 1990:45).

Given responsibility for the running of a large convent at a young age, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph called upon God for help. Her responsibilities ran the gamut from arranging domestic affairs¹²⁴ to providing spiritual direction. On several occasions she experienced the presence of Christ speaking to her about the community (Louise de Jésus 1935:118), and in one incident she received divine assurance¹²⁵ while the community was awaiting papal confirmation from Clement VIII. Later on in her life when she was in her first term as prioress¹²⁶ of the *Grand Couvent* in Paris, Mère Madeleine experienced other consolations directly related to her community. It is recorded in *Les Petits Papiers*, intimate recollections of Mère Madeleine that were collected by Gibieuf (Louise de Jésus 1935:118):

Notre-Seigneur me montra un jour ce qu'il voulait donner aux âmes de cette maison ; et me semblait que c'était un lieu où devaient reposer sa gloire et son esprit. Et je vis une si grande perfection qu'il n'y a langue qui la puisse exprimer. Je voyais tant de choses toutes en une que je disais : Bienheureuses âmes à qui doit [sic] arriver de si grandes grâces ! (Louise de Jésus 1935 : 118).

Our Lord showed me one day what he wants to give to the souls in this house; it seems to me that it is a place where his spirit and his glory can repose. And I live a great perfection that no tongue can

began. They spoke with difficulty because of language, but with great interest and fruit about the workings of God in the soul (Bremond 1930: 218).

¹²⁴ Arranging timetables, ensuring that there was enough food to eat were part of her duties. The Carmelites lived on alms and members of the aristocracy sponsored their houses; but there were still many concerns about providing food for a large community.

¹²⁵ Our Lord appeared to her and said, "I will not abandon you" during the time the order was awaiting confirmation by Pope Clement VIII. (1935:200)

¹²⁶ The term "prioress" means the person elected by the community to see to its domestic and spiritual affairs. In the Carmelite convent, the position carried with it the responsibility for counselling and advising the women in their spiritual development, i.e. ways of prayer, correction of faults, development of virtues, etc.

express. I see so many things in one that I may say: Blessed are the souls who may arrive at such great graces!

During most of her life, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was plagued with illness and in the final years before her death in 1637, she was troubled with an on-going eye inflammation. She wrote to a prioress a little after 8 July 1628, when she was in her fiftieth year:

Car il est vray que c'est un chose estrange d'estre chargée d'un si grand nombre de filles avec si peu de santé, ...mais quand je le regarde, je ne puis que luy représenter mes raisons et mes miseres,...Tout ce que j'ay à faire, c'est de prier et de patienter (Letter 37. Sérout 1965:45).

For it is true that it is a strange thing to be in charge of such a great number of daughters with so little health...but when I look at him, I can only represent my motives and my miseries.... All that I have to do is to pray and be patient.

Despite ill health, she was noted for her gentleness and sweetness of manner with the sisters, her understanding of the interior life and ability to offer spiritual direction to so many of her community members. She was conscious of being a burden to the community in her declining years and did not want to inconvenience them in any way. Mère Madeleine writes:

Je cache tout ce que je puis de mes infirmités, tant pour ne pas donner de la peine à mes Sœurs ... I hide all that I can of my infirmities in order not to give trouble to my Sisters (Letter 95. Sérout 1965:91).

Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was deeply devoted to the presence of Christ in the Blessed Eucharist and would often be found at prayer in the chapel. Her counsels and advice were widely sought out,¹²⁷ members of the French Court, and peasants

¹²⁷ Louise de Jésus recounts this anecdote (1935445): « Deux Jésuites parlant ensemble [à Bordeaux], l'un desquels venait de Paris, l'autre lui demanda s'il avait vu la Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph; il répondit que non. Et l'autre lui dit: 'Vous n'avez donc rien vu, puisque vous n'avez pas vu la Mère Madeleine. C'est la merveille de Paris; c'est une personne excellente et merveilleuse.' » *Two Jesuits were speaking together in Bordeaux, one of them had come to Paris. The other asked him if he had seen Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph. He*

came to her for help and for prayer. She maintained an interest in French exploration in the colonies, praying and doing penance for the sake of the Jesuit missionaries in Canada. Her patriotism and concern for the fate of *La Belle France* caused her to organise all-night adoration before the Blessed Eucharist during the time of the Siege of La Rochelle in 1627.

In all of her correspondence, she did her best to counter the trend toward abstract mysticism that expressed itself in a tendency to by-pass the humanity of Christ. Her final words at the hour of her death on April 30, 1637 were: "Jésus, Fils du Dieu vivant, Jésus, Fils de David, ayez pitié de moi!" Not long after her death, there were reports of miracles attributed to her intercession. The process of beatification was begun and Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was declared worthy of veneration in 1789 (Macca 1972:186). Unfortunately, the French revolution interrupted the process, documents were lost and her case was put aside.¹²⁸ It is hoped that someday Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's sanctity will be universally recognised within the Roman Catholic Church.

3.7 Summary and Conclusions

The period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in France was marked by political, social and religious upheaval. Just as France was keen to extend her borders by expansion into the New World that lay beyond the Atlantic, she was also anxious to extend her sphere of influence throughout Europe. Her alliance with the Church made this possible. However, the excesses of the royalty, the agitation of the growing and over-taxed peasant and middle classes, and the religious wars on the continent caused turmoil within civil society and within the Catholic Church.

responded that he had not. The first one said, "You have seen nothing, then, seeing that you have not seen Mère Madeleine. She is the marvel of Paris. She is someone who is excellent and marvelous.

¹²⁸ At the moment, Menant (1992), who wrote a thesis on the canonisation process of Venerable Madeleine de Saint-Joseph, is actively promoting the cause of her canonisation.

The church itself was in need of reform within the ranks of its hierarchy and clergy as the result of the many abuses related to benefices, lack of proper clerical training and general immorality. The Council of Trent called for a reform, but even the decrees of that Council had not been publicised in France until 1614. Reform and renewal came through the initiatives of a group of devout and concerned people who gathered at the home of Madame Barb Acarie. Attracting people almost like a magnet, the *Cercle Acarie* was the birthplace of religious orders and congregations, the renewal of Catholic seminary training and clerical life, and of a necessary and long-overdue outreach to the poor and marginalised. The spirituality that began to permeate French society and which has influenced spirituality over the last four centuries developed mainly from the reflection and devotion of François de Sales and Pierre de Bérulle. However, as has been shown, a number of women made important and perhaps undervalued contributions to spirituality and to the evolution of religious life within and beyond France's borders: Louise de Marillac, Jeanne Frances de Chantal, Madame Barb Acarie, and Madeleine de Saint Joseph to name a few.

Madeleine de Saint-Joseph is the particular concern of this study. As the first French prioress of the Teresian Carmelites in France, she exercised an enormous influence. The success and rapidity with which the Carmelite life spread throughout France gave testimony to her leadership and fidelity to the spiritual practice of her foundress Teresa of Avila. An associate and friend of Pierre de Bérulle who was appointed superior of the Carmelites, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph inculcated his teachings vis-à-vis devotion and adherence to the person of Christ. Their relationship was one of mutual influence and support.

Mère Madeleine's talents and spiritual acumen made her especially valuable to the Spanish foundresses who entrusted her with the formation of new novices not long after her own profession. She worked at inculturating the Teresian charism among her French community. Madeleine encountered difficulties especially related to the issues of ecclesiastical jurisdiction and the vow of servitude, but apparently enjoyed

great support from her Carmelite communities who elected her prioress several times—even when she considered herself too ill to continue. Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was remembered for her devotion to the Blessed Eucharist and her gentle manner with her community members. Her image, like that of her holy Mother Teresa appears on the cupola of the Church of Val-de-Grâce in Paris.

Chapter 4

MADELEINE DE SAINT-JOSEPH: MYSTICAL WRITINGS

4.1 Introduction

As mentioned earlier in this study, Fischer (1988:6) argues that women's experience is the authoritative starting point within the context of spiritual direction. Obviously, that is the case when dealing with women's mystical literature as well. The experience of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph is narrated, partially described, or alluded to within the body of letters, papers, biographical works about her, and in her own biography of Catherine de Jésus.

Works presenting the theology of the French school of spirituality, mention Mère Madeleine's contribution to the growth of Carmelite life in France and her propagation of the teachings of Pierre de Bérulle, but they pay little attention to the content of her mystical experience. With the exception of Thompson's study (1989),¹²⁹ there is no English version of her letters or analysis of their theological content. Morgain's thesis (1987) presents Mère Madeleine's vocation and spirituality as a synthesis of elements from Bérulle and Teresa of Avila. He analyses her spirituality as expressed in her instruction on prayer written for novices. Morgain notes the presence of Bérulle's concepts of adoration, adherence, and *l'anéantissement*¹³⁰ and also indicates where Bérulle and Mère Madeleine differ¹³¹ (1987:104-159). Cognet (1959:104) finds Mère Madeleine's expression of Bérulle's

¹²⁹ Thompson (1989) includes English translations by Glendon of sixteen of Mère Madeleine's letters. These appear to be the only translations of any of her works into English.

¹³⁰ *L'anéantissement* connotes the idea of nothingness in the presence of God's grandeur (Buckley 1990:49).

¹³¹ This is presented in Chapter five.

themes attractive and original, and bemoans the fact that in 1959 only fragments of her letters had been published.¹³² Krumenacker's (1998) appraisal of Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's contribution to the French school of spirituality is rightly placed under the heading "L'influence de Bérulle" (1998:222). Characterised as an austere religious by Krumenacker, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph is acknowledged for her role as first French prioress of Carmelite women in France. She is also recognised as figuring prominently in the development of the French school of spirituality contributing to Bérulle's spiritual development as well. Krumenacker considers her as both a disciple and an inspiration to the founder of the Oratory, Pierre de Bérulle (1998:223).

Describing Mère Madeleine's spirituality, Krumenacker claims that Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's writings indicate her attempt to preserve what appeared essential in Bérulle's thought and to remove elements that she considered too mystical or abstract¹³³ (1998:224). What are we to conclude from this statement?

One possible hypothesis is that the Carmelites would not understand theoretical and mystical notions because there were "only women" and uneducated. There is some evidence to suggest this was Bérulle's perception of the Carmelite women. As spiritual advisor to the Carmelites, Bérulle sent them letters and gave conferences on spiritual topics. Ferrari (1997) notes that Bérulle did not use technical or metaphorical terminology in his letters and instructions to the Carmelites. He reserved abstract concepts for the Oratorians, the order of male clergy for whom he was religious superior:

Il est clair que Bérulle, s'adressant à des femmes, pense nécessaire d'expliquer plus longuement, de façon plus simple et plus concrète, en s'appuyant beaucoup plus fréquemment sur des comparaisons

¹³² Sérout's collection on Mère Madeleine's letters was published in 1965.

¹³³ «Madeleine de Saint-Joseph tente de préserver ce qui lui paraît être l'essentiel de la pensée de Bérulle, dont elle retranche les aspects les plus mystiques et les plus abstraits » (Krumenacker 1998: 224).

développées, et en se référant plus souvent aux événements concrets de la vie de Jésus (Ferrari 1997:78).

Did Madeleine de Saint-Joseph concur with Bérulle's perception, and to what extent? In this connection, we refer to a letter of Mère Madeleine written to a Carmelite prioress. She writes:

You are no doubt astonished at the length of this letter, since you are not used to it from me. Furthermore, I have written it several times. The importance of the subject and the great desire you have shown to be enlightened obliged me to try to satisfy you as well as I could. You will pardon me, I hope, if I have not done better. *You know that ignorance is proper to our sex and particularly to me who is yours...* (Italics mine. Letter 144. Thompson 1989:203).

Referring to the last two lines of this extract, Thompson notes, "This appears to be an indication of a misogyny that the French School did not always transcend" (1989:213). Did Madeleine de Saint-Joseph understand herself in this way? Or is her claim to feminine ignorance used as a necessary ruse?

The last two lines of this text may exhibit what Weber (1990:81) calls the "rhetoric of irony". Weber discusses Teresa of Avila's use of phrases such as "a book by a *weak woman* and for *weak women*" as a way to accommodate a dual audience: Carmelite women who needed instruction and inspiration, and male confessors and advisors whose approval she required. "She still needed to avoid the appearance of appropriating the male apostolic privilege" (Weber 1990:78). It may be possible to conclude that Mère Madeleine used irony in an attempt to ensure that her words would be interpreted properly by both her audiences: the French Carmelite women and their male ecclesiastical superiors and confessors.

There are two other possibilities: first, that Madeleine herself was not a mystic, did not understand mystical experience, was frightened that her sisters might surpass her in achieving the heights of contemplation and therefore, omitted mention of mystical heights; or secondly, that Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's grasp of the essentials

of mystical prayer drove her to clarify and guide her sisters lest they lose themselves in abstractions that would impede their union with Jesus Christ.

It is my contention that Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was a mystic in her own right and that her writings, notwithstanding the influence of Bérulle, give voice to her *own* intimate experience of the life of the Trinity. Furthermore, I believe that she did understand the heights of mystical prayer, and though she may have been concerned about the approach to prayer taken by some of her Carmelite sisters, she was not personally fearful or threatened by their progress. I believe Madeleine de Saint-Joseph did have a very clear grasp of the essentials of growth in prayer based on her experience of and knowledge of the Carmelite charism and the teachings of Teresa of Avila. As a Carmelite woman she wished to accommodate the teachings of Bérulle on the Incarnate Word of God to the spirit of the Carmelite charism and to mirror in her own culture and through her own temperament, the fundamental teachings of Teresa of Avila about the way of divine union.

It is the work of this chapter to analyse the mystical writings of Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph with a view toward establishing that she was a mystic, who enjoyed visionary experiences as well; and that she understood the “heights of mystical prayer” but steered clear of abstract contemplation of the divine essence and focused on God experienced through the presence of Jesus Christ.

To begin this examination, we discuss the context and content of Mère Madeleine’s mystical experience, and the linguistic responses that she made to her mystical experience. McGinn (1991:63) identifies the context of Christian mystical prayer as ecclesial, scriptural, and sacramental.¹³⁴ For Madeleine de Saint-Joseph the context of her mystical experience is her meditation upon scripture and the mysteries of

¹³⁴ The designation of these specific elements serves as an affirmation of the theories of constructivists such as Katz (1983) who as we noted earlier, insists on the fact that all mystical/religious experience is mediated by one’s cultural and religious background.

Christ--that is, the events in the life of Jesus Christ and their presentation throughout the year through the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church.

The content of Christian mysticism is the experience of God, whether God is perceived as transcendent or as immanent.¹³⁵ It is a content based on what revelation—scripture and tradition—teaches about the nature of God and how God wishes to communicate and share life with people. In the writings of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph, the content is determined in large part by the context of her prayer—the mysteries of the life of Christ, with particular attention devoted to the relationship of Christ to the Father and to the redemptive sacrifice that Jesus Christ offered, and to personages associated with the gospel, for example Mary Magdalen.

After examining the elements of context, content, and linguistic responses to mystical experience as they refer to Mère Madeleine's mystical experience, we shall engage in a phenomenological analysis of selected texts. It is the purpose of this analysis to examine some autobiographical texts from Madeleine de Saint-Joseph with the view toward determining their mystical content.

The methodology requires the formulation of indicators of theistic mysticism. Next, we establish the phenomenological method to be used. Then, several selected texts from Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph are presented and analysed in terms of the phenomenological framework. The texts are examined in order to ascertain the presence of the indicators of theistic mystical experience. A brief theological reflection on each text is given, and conclusions are drawn from the data that has emerged. The chapter ends with summary and conclusions.

¹³⁵ The sign of the immanent encounter with God is Jesus Christ (Schillebeeckx 1963:1).

4.2 Context of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's Mystical Experience

According to McGinn (1991:63), the context of Christian mystical experience is shaped by relationship to three elements: ecclesial setting, scriptural matrix, and sacramental practice. We examine these elements in terms of Mère Madeleine's experience and writings.

4.2.1 Ecclesial Setting

The primary context for Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's mystical experience comes through her relationship to the Catholic Church, its sacraments, especially baptism and eucharist, and the celebration of the mysteries of Christ within the liturgical cycle. Senault (1645:67) writes:

Elle m'a dit encore, qu'elle leur recomandoit de s'appliquer d'avantage aux graces que Dieu fait en general à son Eglise, qu'celles qu'il fait à chacun en particulier, & qu'ell luy avoit expliqué ces veritez par ces paroles. « Les lumieres & les faveurs extraordinaires que JESUS-CHRIST nostre Seigneur nous depart ; n'egalent presque jamais celles qu'il nous donne par les Sacremens, specialement par le Baptesme, & par l'Eucharistiè. C'est par la vertu du premier que nous sommes incorporez avec luy, que nous devenons ses membres, qu nous vivons de sa vie & son esprit, & que nous sommes regardez par le Pere Eternel, comme faisant parties de son Fils unique. C'est par l'Eucharistie que JESUS-CHRIST est rendu réellement, & veritablement present in nos corps, qu'il conserve, nourrit, & perfectionne la vie où nous sommes entrez par la vertue de Baptesme.»¹³⁶

Senault, a member of the Oratory and along with Gibieuf, was one of the first biographers of Mère Madeleine. He describes Mère Madeleine's conviction about the graces that God makes available through the church and through its explanations of the truth of the words [of God]. Mère Madeleine says that the extraordinary lights

¹³⁶ No attempt has been made to alter the orthography in the texts. In most cases, the French version will be followed by an English translation, either from Thompson's collection (1989) or by me. There will be some occasions when the French text is presented and an English paraphrase of summary is given before or after the text.

and favours that Jesus Christ distributes to us are almost never equal to those that he gives through the sacraments, especially baptism and the Eucharist. It is by virtue of baptism that we are incorporated with him, and we become members, that we live in his life and his spirit, and that we are looked upon by the eternal Father as united with his unique son. She continues by saying that the eucharist renders Christ real and present to us in our bodies, that he preserves, nourishes, and perfects the life we have entered by virtue of baptism.

There is no doubt about Mère Madeleine's understanding of theology. She is quite clear about the importance of baptism and eucharist, sacraments by which the life of Christ is communicated to those who believe (*Constitution on the Church*, No. 5. in Flannery 1981:355). Madeleine de Saint-Joseph is well aware of Paul's theology which says that baptism makes believers members of the one body whose head is Christ (1 Cor. 12:12; Col. 1:18). Furthermore, those who are in Christ are acknowledged by the Father. They are children of God, heirs of God and heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17).

Intimately connected to the sacramental life of the church is the celebration of the liturgical cycle. According to Keating (1991:5):

The liturgical year was developed in the course of the first four centuries under the influence of the contemplative vision of the Gospel enjoyed by the Fathers of the church. It is a comprehensive program designed to enable the Christian people to assimilate the special graces attached to the principal events of Jesus' life.

In Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's experience the celebration of the liturgy was a means by which she entered into the *mystery* of Christ. The term *mystery* in Greek is *mysterion* and it denotes a sacred sign or symbol that points beyond itself to a spiritual reality, one that Keating says, "transcends both the senses and the rational concepts that depend on them" (1987:2). The celebration of the liturgy of the eucharist is the means by which one enters into contact with the redeeming activities of Christ: his death and resurrection. The cycle of Christ's life-giving mysteries

begins with the season of Advent approximately one month before the celebration of Christmas on December 25. The feast of Christmas celebrates the incarnation of the Word of God: when the Word of God became a human being (John 1:14). "Because of his infinite power, the Eternal Word has taken the entire human family into his divine relationship with the Father," writes Keating (1987:5). This is the heart of the Incarnation mystery and was a source of profound inspiration for Bérulle and Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph.

The Incarnation of the Word was central in Bérulle's thought. In the human nature of Jesus Christ the divinity is hidden in humanity (Dupuy 1964:51). The Incarnation becomes the "sacrament of l'anéatissement", self-emptied nothingness (Morgain 1987:124). It evokes a response of adoration and surrender to the Word of God made flesh. Therefore, the celebration of the nativity of Christ was a particular devotion of Bérulle. Mère Madeleine was probably influenced by Bérulle. She had great devotion to the mystery of the nativity. In a letter to a priest, she records an experience that occurred less than six months before her death. It happened at the Christmas crèche in January 1637:

Je vous diray encore une vuë que Dieu m'a donnée aujourd'huy, étant à la crèche: il m'a montré que la Vierge avait une prérogative d'adorer son Fils en tous les lieux où il est en même tems. Et je luy ay demandé qu'elle nous y donnât quelque petite part et que nous puissions l'adorer partout avec elle... (Letter 122. Sérout 1965: 115)

I will tell you again of an insight that God gave me today being at the crèche. He showed me that the Virgin had the privilege to adore her son in all places at the same time. And I have asked that she give us a small share that we can adore Him everywhere with her.

Throughout the calendar year, the church remembers in a way which makes present,¹³⁷ the reality of Christ's birth, infancy, his baptism, temptations, entry into

¹³⁷ According to Keating, the liturgy of the eucharist makes Christ present in five different ways (1987:9-11): Christ is present in the gathering of two or three in his name. He is present when the gospel is proclaimed. In the eucharistic prayer, Christ is made present. In the reception of communion, Christ becomes present to the believer. Finally, God is present supremely in the world through Christ.

public ministry, his gift of self in the eucharist, his betrayal, suffering, crucifixion, resurrection from the dead, ascension into heaven, sending of the Spirit, and the promise which he makes to dwell with people until the end of time (Matt. 28:20):

Thus recalling the mysteries of the redemption, she [the church] opens up to the faithful the riches of her Lord's powers and merits, so that these are in some way made present for all time; the faithful lay hold of them and are filled with saving grace (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* V. 102. Flannery 1981:29).

The celebration of each of these mysteries ritualises by the use of performative language¹³⁸ the presence of Christ and allows the faithful to access the graces of God, particularly as they are expressed in the mystery celebrated.

The life of Christ is the context for Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's mystical experience, not just Christ's life, but the *mystery* by which one is able to participate in the events of Christ. It is this aspect of participation which is integral to understanding the nature of Mère Madeleine's experience and why she urges one of her sisters to *belong* to Christ in order to enter into his mysteries:

J'ay eu une joye particulière en lisant sa lettre, en laquelle je vois une vraye et sincère liaison avec vous, ce qui m'oblige à vous prier de luy parler pleinement et ouvertement de l'avantage qu'il y a d'appartenir à Notre Seigneur Jésus Christ et à ses misteres, et des dispositions intérieures où les âmes doivent entrer pour se disposer à cette grace (Letter 35. Séroutet 1965:44).

I had a particular joy in reading your letter, which I saw as a true and sincere connection with you, this obliges me to you, praying him to speak plainly and openly of the advantage there is of belonging to our Lord Jesus Christ and to his mysteries, and of the interior dispositions where souls ought to enter to be provided that grace.

¹³⁸Based on what Barbour (1974:14) says about the dynamic nature of metaphors, it is possible to say that through their use language becomes event. For example, in the celebration of the eucharist, catholics believe that in the repetition of Christ's words, "This is my body" the bread becomes the body of Christ. This is the performative nature of language.

For Madeleine de Saint-Joseph, the primary context for the reception of graces is connected to the participation in the mysteries of Christ's life through the celebration of the liturgy or through personal contemplation and prayer. On Easter Sunday in 1631 or 1632, Mère Madeleine writes to Michel de Marillac sharing her reflections upon the feast: "La grandeur de nos mysteres me semble nouvelle chaque année... *The greatness of the Easter mysteries seems new to me with each passing year* (Letter 65. Sérout 1965: 69). Each new year gives another opportunity to deepen one's capacity to revere God and praise the divine goodness.

Mère Madeleine enjoyed a personal relationship with Saint Mary Magdalen, after whom she was named. Madeleine writes again to Michel de Marillac, who is in prison¹³⁹ at the time:

Nous vous avons bien recommandé à la grande sainte Magdelaine le jour de sa feste, me souvenant que vous y avés une particuliere devotion, dont elle est tres digne à la verité, veu ce qu'elle est au Fils de Dieu. Je pensois hier, entendant lire l'Evangile, à la grandeur de cette ame, que Jesus Christ loüe de son amour et de sa foy et à laquelle il donne sa paix dès le premier moment de sa conversion. Je luy ay demandé pour vous part à ces graces si grandes et si rares qu'elle a receües, ce que je croy qu'elle a pouvoir d'obtenir de celuy qui les luy a données (Letter 66. Sérout 1965: 70).

We have recommended you to the great saint Magdalen on her feast day, reminding me that you have a particular devotion, to her who is very reliable seeing she is near the Son of God. I was thinking last evening hearing the Gospel read, of the greatness of that soul whom Jesus Christ praised for her love and her faith and to whom he gave his peace in the first moment of her conversion. I have asked him for your share in the graces so great and so unusual that she received; whom I believe has the power to obtain from him who gave them to her.

From this passage, it is clear to see that Madeleine de Saint-Joseph took the gospel as her guide and source of inspiration. Hers is a "liturgical spirituality"; informed by

¹³⁹ Michel de Marillac, a friend of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph and benefactor to the community in the rue Faubourg St. Jacques, and his brother Louise were both imprisoned after the Day of the Dupes in 1630 when Marie de Médicis tried to unseat Richelieu.

the celebrations of the events of Christ's life throughout the year. In this letter Mère Madeleine entrusts the cause of Marillac to the holy woman Magdalen, a truthful witness of the resurrection. Mère Madeleine was confident of that Magdalen would intercede for Monsieur de Marillac and that God would extend to de Marillac the gifts of love and peace that he needed at the time.

Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was well aware of the church's tradition and history. Again, Mary Magdalen figures in the tradition of the hermits who went to the desert to seek God. Mère Madeleine refers to the apocryphal legend that after Jesus' ascension into heaven, Mary Magdalen spent the next thirty years of her life as a hermit in the desert. In a letter in which she encourages her sisters to abandon themselves to the providence of God, Mère Madeleine gives her Carmelite sister encouragement to take example from the saints who lived in the desert:

Voyés ces grands saints dans les déserts: ils n'avoient que sa providence. Sainte Magdeleine, saint Paul premier hermite et le grand saint Antoine, Dieu leur pourvoyoit de moyens conformes à la grandeur de son conseil sur eux pour les faire arrive à une si grande sainteté (Letter 203. Sérout 1965: 203).

Look at the great saints of the desert: they had only his providence. Saint Magdalen, saint Paul the first hermit and the great saint Anthony, God provided for them by means in conformity with the greatness of his counsels for them to arrive at a great sanctity.

At this juncture, it is interesting to note that Bérulle published his work on *L'Élevation à Jésus-Christ Notre-Seigneur sur la conduite de son esprit et de sa grâce vers sainte Madeleine* in 1625 as a gift for Henriette of France who was marrying the Anglican Charles I of England (Dupuy 1964: 62-63). It is quite likely that Bérulle received inspiration from Madeleine de Saint-Joseph. In a letter written sometime between 1621 and 1623, at the height of the controversies over the vow of servitude and the Italian Carmelite men's claims to ecclesiastical jurisdiction, Mère Madeleine wrote to Bérulle:

...J'ay esté dans un estat de souffrance extraordinaire depuis vostre depart, et dans un rejettement fort grand de celuy qui reçoit tous ceux qui vont à luy....La grande sainte Magdeleine, qui me semble avoir daigné ces jours estre present à mon esprit, quoy qu'il soit tres miserable et comble de douleurs, m'oblige à vous assurer qu'elle vous assiste, quoy que vous ne le voyiez peut estre pas, le temps de tenebras estant venu et non de lumière ; mais toutes choses se reverront en leur saison, selon les limites que Dieu y a mises et non selon les pensées et les conseils des hommes. Il faut soutenir celuy de Dieu avec force, avec humilité, avec benignité : car il nous demandera compte du temps à sa visitation (Letter 14. Sérouet 1965: 25).

I have been in a state of extraordinary suffering since your departure, and of the very great rejection by the one who receives all who go to him.... The great saint Magdalen, seems to have deigned these days to be present to my spirit, and whoever may be miserable and full of sorrows, obliges me to assure you that she assists you, even though you do not see perhaps, the time of darkness is come and not of light, but all things respect their seasons, according to the limits that God puts and not according to the thoughts and advice of men. It is necessary to endure this season with strength, with humility, with kindness because he will ask an account at the time of his visitation.

Mère Madeleine experienced the presence of her patroness and the assistance that she could offer to those in difficulty. Despite the darkness of the time, she assured Bérulle that God's plan and timing must be respected and that human thinking does not always perceive God's designs.

However, human beings are not left alone and unaided. The doctrine of communion of saints teaches that those who have died in Christ are with God. The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (V, 104. Flannery 1981:29) states:

The Church has also included in the annual cycle memorial days of the martyrs and other saints. Raised up to perfection by the manifold grace of God and already in possession of eternal salvation, they sing God's perfect praise in heaven and pray for us.

The saints' role of intercession is an important one and as Madeleine de Saint-Joseph believed, her patroness would offer help in time of need.

As Madeleine de Saint-Joseph entered into meditation upon the mysteries of Christ's life and at the same time opened her life with all its exigencies to God, she experienced the entry of God into all the aspects of her life. For her, there was a growing interpenetration of interest and concern, a growing communion and sharing of life experiences. The life of Christ in the mysteries of the liturgy in particular, was the point of entry to contemplation for Madeleine de Saint-Joseph.

4.2.2 Scriptural Base

A second element of Christian mysticism is its scriptural base. Johnston (1990:154) writes, "the Bible is the source of Christian mysticism, as the sutras and the Hindu scriptures are the source of Buddhist and Hindu mysticism." As scripture is the source of divine revelation, so it also provides images and metaphors by which the mystical experience of God is expressed and interpreted. In the prayer experience of monks of the Benedictine tradition, the practice of meditating on a scriptural text is common. Monks such as Anselm of Canterbury began writing down meditations on scriptural passages or lives of the saints, complete with exclamations and sighs, to help people express their needs, desires and love in prayer to God (Ward 1985:202). Such devotional texts were meant to enable the reader "to ponder more deeply those things that make him want to pray" (1985:203). The use of scriptural texts assists one in the practice of prayer and contemplation, as scripture is a source of inspiration and contact with God.

In the case of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph, the scriptures were a constant source of inspiration. The bible remained open on her table (Louise de Jésus 1935:206). Her correspondence refers to a variety of texts from both the old and the new testaments indicating her familiarity with the scriptures. In the Sérouet's (1965) collection of three hundred of Mère Madeleine's letters, it is obvious that Mère

Madeleine was familiar with both old and new testaments. There are at least one hundred and eighty references to scripture within the context of the letters. Old testament references comprise nearly one-third of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's use of scripture. She quotes from the books of Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, the First Book of Kings, Proverbs, Wisdom, the Psalms, Ecclesiasticus, Job, and the Psalms. Her use of new testament texts includes frequent references to the synoptic gospels—Matthew, in particular—and to John's Gospel. She shows her familiarity with Paul's letters—Romans, Galatians, Philippians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Colossians, Hebrews; and she quotes from the epistles of John and James, and the Book of Revelation.

Many of the scripture texts chosen by Mère Madeleine are used for purposes of instruction. The first example comes from an instruction on prayer that she gave to a novice. Mère Madeleine advises her to use the *persona* of gospel characters to enter into dialogue with God:

Présentés vous quelquefois à Dieu avec l'enfant prodigue, luy confessant que vous avés tout dissipé les biens que vous aviés reçus de luy et que vous n'êtes regardée comme sa fille. D'autrefois avec le publicain, luy disant : *Seigneur, soyés propice à moy pécheresse,...*

Now and then present yourself to God with the prodigal son confessing to him that you dispersed all the assets that you received from him and that you are not worthy to be looked upon as his daughter. Another time, say to him with the publican: Lord, look kindly on me a sinner... (Letter 152. Sérout 1965:161-162).

Her instruction aids the recipient to assume a correct stance toward God and to engage her human situation and her own frailty with the mystery of God's forgiving love.

In another case, when asked about the possibility of praying while walking (Letter 17. Sérout 1965:29), Mère Madeleine quotes from the prophet Isaiah 56:7, "My

house shall be called a house of prayer". She wants to remind the person of the value of praying in a church in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

There are a number of other passages that are instructive and are used to guide practice. To another correspondent, the marquise de Mignelay, Mère Madeleine's instruction is theological in nature: that the thoughts and plans of God are far from the thoughts of creatures. She writes:

Il y a un passage in Isaye, que je croy vous avoir montré aultrefois, qui dict à Dieu: *Vraiment tu est un Dieu caché et qui conduis tes voies selon la diversité de tes œuvres* Vous sçavez que je vous disois hier que Dieu cache possible ses conseils sous le desordre et les vains desseins des hommes....(Letter 27. Sérout 1965:38).

There is a passage in Isaiah, that I believe has shown you in the past that says of God: Truly you are a hidden God and you conduct your ways according to the variety of your works. You know that I said to you yesterday that God possibly hides his counsels under the disorder and vain designs of men.

In the midst of difficulties and confusions in life, it is important to seek comfort from the Good Shepherd. Mère Madeleine wrote to a prioress that was newly re-elected. The burden of authority is a heavy one, but it is not we who carry the burdens on our shoulders, but the Good Shepherd:

Ce n'est pas nous qui portons les grands fardeaux, mais c'est le saint Pasteur des âmes qui les a chargées sur ses épaules et qui porte tous les élus qui doivent être avec luy en son royaume, après qu'ils auront souffert icy et travaillé pour luy (Letter 218. Sérout 1965:230)

It is not we who carry the great burdens, but it is the good Shepherd of souls who takes them on his shoulders and who carries all the elect who ought to be with him in his kingdom, after they have suffered here and worked for him.

Numerous other texts are used to give instruction or to describe theological and mystical realities. The table below includes samples of texts that are used more than

once in Mère Madeleine's letters. Angel (1983:28) explains that mystical doctrine generally functions to express experience (*expressive*), metaphysical concepts, empirical realities; and to instruct or guide spiritual practice. In an analogous way, this is true in the use of scripture. Some passages are *expressive* of experience; others are metaphysical or in our context *theological/mystical*; still others are *practice guiding* or instructional.

The table below is a tabulation of scripture references that are used more than once. Next to passage headings are designated terms: expressive, theological/mystical, and practice guiding. A number of passages designated *practice-guiding* show incidents from the life of Jesus as a *model* for practice. Abbreviations are as follows: T/M = theological/mystical; Prac-Guide = practice-guiding.

Letter	Reference	Quotation	Type
39	Col. 2:9	In his body resides the fullness of divinity	T/M
39	Heb. 1:3	He is the radiant light of God's glory and the perfect copy of his nature.	T/M Similar to above
144 148 261	Heb. 10:5-7	This is what he said, on coming into the world: You who wanted no sacrifice or oblation, prepared a body for me...then I said," God I am coming to do your will."	T/M
13 49 131 140 173 174 218 245	John 14, 6	I am the way and the truth and the life.	T/M
131 139	John 10:9	I am the gate of the sheepfold.	T/M
169 218	John 10:11	I am the good shepherd.	T/M
142 245 252	John 17:3	And eternal life is this: to know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.	T/M
147	1 John 1:3 (used 2 times)	So that you too may be in union with us, as we are in union with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.	T/M

Letter	Reference	Quotation	Type
13 188 242	Matt. 26:42 Luke 22:42	Father if this cup cannot pass by without my drinking it, <i>your will be done!</i> Father, your will be done.	Expressive & Prac-Guide
170 172	Matt. 27:46	My God, my God, why have you deserted me?	Prac-Guide
17 143	Matt. 14:23	He went up into the hills by himself to pray.	Prac-Guide
68 137	Matt. 7:7	Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you.	Prac-Guide
143 147	Phil. 3: 20	Our homeland is in heaven.	T/M
147 170 210 252	Col. 3:1-3	Since you have been brought back to true life with Christ, you must look for the things that are in heaven, where Christ is, sitting at God's right hand. Let your thoughts be on heavenly things, not on the things that are on the earth, because you have died, and now your life is hidden with Christ in God.	T/M
139 142 143 144	John 4:23-24	This is the kind of worshipper the Father wants. God is spirit, and those who worship must worship in spirit and in truth.	T/M & Prac-Guide
187 264	Matt. 9:13	What I want is mercy, not sacrifice.	Prac-Guide
183 210	Matt. 18:20	For where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them.	Prac-Guide
189 202 203	Matt. 10:30	Why, every hair on your head has been counted. So there is no need to be afraid.	Prac-Guide
31 49 78 197	Rom. 8:21	To enjoy the same freedom and glory as the children of God	T/M
31 219	1 Cor. 9:22	I made myself all things to all men.	Prac-Guide
75 144	Ps. 39:13	I am your guest, and only for a time, a nomad like all my ancestors. *	T/M
172 266	Isaiah 53:3.8	A man of sorrows and familiar with suffering	Prac-Guide

*"wayfarer and pilgrim on the earth"

While the table does not present an exhaustive listing of scripture references used, it does show where there is a pronounced emphasis. From this we are able to draw some conclusions about Mère Madeleine's doctrinal and practical concerns.

First, it is evident from the repetition of certain passages that Mère Madeleine's verses are predominantly *theological/mystical*, and with only one verse that refers to her own mystical experience. The predominant emphasis is placed on the *theological/mystical* with the most references to John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth and the life." Jesus is the only way, the door, the gate (John 10:9). In accord with the Carmelite lifestyle of prayer and contemplation, there is another emphasis on a life hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:1-3).

Second, there is a notable absence of passages of an *expressive* nature. Angel (1983:34) concludes that in the case of prominent mystics, where there is a predominance of *expressive* material, there is usually less doctrinal or instructional material. We may take Angel's conclusion and apply it to this situation. Mère Madeleine's use of scripture to describe her own interior state is minimal; her *theological/mystical* use is much more extensive. However, although she does not use passages that refer to her experience *per se*, she does include many that could be interpreted as implicit of her experience of God: "I am the way and the truth and the life"; "Eternal life is this: to know you the true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent"; "Your will be done"; "I am the gate"; "because you have died, and now your life is hidden with Christ in God". The latter reference is descriptive of what Mère Madeleine says happened in her own experience—a death to all things (Letter 13. Sérout 1965:24)

Third, there is an emphasis placed on the correct way to worship, that is, "in spirit and in truth". (This theme is treated in Chapter five.). What is clear from other passages is the importance of living as "citizens of heaven" (Phil. 3:20); that we are only pilgrims on the earth (Ps. 39:13); to live detached from all things so as to "enjoy the freedom of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21); and to enter into the eternal

life that is begun on earth through communion with the Father and his son, Jesus Christ (John 17:3; 1 John 1:3).

Lastly, Mère Madeleine gives practical guidance based on the teachings and life of Christ. What is required is trust in God's providence (Matt. 10:30), persevering prayer (Matt. 7:7-8); surrender and abandonment to God's will (Matt. 26:42; Hebrews 10:5-7); confidence in the presence of Christ where two or three are gathered in his name (Matt. 18:20). Attention to Christ is key: he often went off to pray by himself (Matt. 14:23), he suffered and felt abandoned by God (Matt 27:46; Isaiah 53: 3-8); he asked for "mercy and not sacrifice" (Matt. 9:13), while at the same time he was the Son of God, the "radiant light of God's glory" "in whom the fullness of the deity resides" (Heb. 1:3; Col. 2:9). The data seems to capture some main themes in Mère Madeleine's spirituality. Other themes are presented in Chapter five.

4.2.3 Sacramental Practice

A final element that McGinn contends is integral to the context of Christian mysticism is sacramental practice. The sacraments are the means by which a person is initiated into the divine life. The sacrament of the eucharist is particularly important in this regard. The reception of the Body and Blood of Christ is a source of spiritual nourishment and of spiritual and bodily union with Jesus Christ. Restrictions on the frequent reception of the Eucharist¹⁴⁰ remained in force well into the twentieth century. Hence the reception of the Blessed Eucharist was a very special occasion. Often, after receiving Holy Communion, mystics would experience ecstasy¹⁴¹ or visions of the Lord. The reservation of the Blessed

¹⁴⁰ The situation in the church during the barbarian invasions of the sixth and seventh centuries—marked by the upheaval of war and the disappearance of a strong laity—contributed to a diminished understanding of the life of the church and the importance of the eucharist for the community. Clément (1995:123) writes: "The eucharistic celebration was transformed into a sacred spectacle performed in the presence of an 'ignorant' people by clergy who effectively reserved the communion for themselves. The Eucharist was thoroughly 'sacralized', in a setting of reverence and fear, and approach to it became an individual matter, no longer communal".

Host in the tabernacle and its exposition for worship also became a significant experience for many mystics. Mère Madeleine writes:

Mais ce qui me touché encore plus sensiblement, c'est de voir qu'il réière encore sans cesse et d'une manière encore plus commune dans le Très Saint Sacrement ce grand don qu'il nous avoit fait de luy même. (Letter 145. Sérouet 1965: 147).

But what touches me quite deeply is to see that he reiterates without ceasing and in a way again more ordinary in the Most Blessed Sacrament the great gift that he has made of himself to us.

Morgain's short life of Mère Madeleine (1987:28) notes that between 1629 and 1630, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was institutionalized at the *Grand Couvent* from Thursday night through Friday evening. Also, during the siege of La Rochelle, Mère Madeleine established adoration to pray for peace during the religious wars between the Catholics and the Huguenots. For Madeleine de Saint-Joseph, the Blessed Sacrament was a sure source of strength in trial, protection in attack, a source of insight and consolation.

The context of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's mystical experience is her life in the Roman Catholic Church. The sacraments, the liturgical cycle which celebrated her entry into the events of Christ's life. The sacred scriptures, and the reception and veneration of the Blessed Eucharist all formed the context for Mère Madeleine's experience of God in Jesus Christ.

¹⁴¹ Keating (1992:145) defines ecstasy as the "temporary suspension by the divine action of the thinking and feeling faculties, including at times the external senses, which facilitates the experience of the prayer of full union". Bynum (1992: 125-129) presents numerous examples of this phenomenon.

4.3 The Content of Mère Madeleine's Mystical Experiences: Transcendence and Immanence

In discussing mystical life within the church, Underhill (1975:25) presents theocentric and Christo-centric mysticism as two currents that together make up the mystical consciousness of the church. Each one reveals different aspects of the experience of God. The former--theocentric—is an experience of transcendence. The latter—Christo-centric—is an incarnate or immanent manifestation of God.

Madeleine de Saint-Joseph experienced God as both transcendent and immanent. She knew from experience God's grandeur and her littleness. At the same time she knew intimacy with the Father and the Son, sharing in the love of both. We shall examine the content of mystical experience: God's transcendence and God's immanence, and the way that Mère Madeleine experienced both aspects of God.

4.3.1 The Experience of Transcendence

The experience of God's *otherness* and of human *nothingness* is summed up in the term *l'anéantissement* which lies at the heart of Mère Madeleine's spirituality. The sense of God's transcendence evoked a deep respect in Madeleine de Saint-Joseph. Varillon (2000:69) writes that «Ce respect de Dieu implique *le sentiment de notre néant, de notre radicale insuffisance, ce que les philosophes appellent 'la contingence'*»¹⁴² Mère Madeleine was convinced by her personal experience, but also through the theological writings of Bérulle,¹⁴³ and her meditation upon scripture.

¹⁴² The respect for God implies the feeling of our nothingness, of our radical insufficiency, what the philosophers call "contingency".

¹⁴³ Bérulle writes: «Voilà notre néant et notre tout en peu de mots, voilà notre mal et notre remède, voilà notre force et notre faiblesse: notre néant en nous, notre tout en Jésus, notre mal et faiblesses en nous, notre force et remède en Jésus, et en ce Jésus auquel nous honorons les grandeurs et les petitesse, les forces et les faiblesses, en ce saint temps ici dédié aux mystères de l'Incarnation et de l'Enfance de Jésus» (Letter 409. Dagens 1937:341. *Behold, our nothingness and our all in few words, behold our ill and our remedy, behold our strength and our weakness: our nothingness in us, our all in Jesus, our evil and weakness in us, our strength and our remedy in Jesus, and Jesus in whom we honour the grandeurs and pettiness, strengths and weaknesses, in this holy time herein dedicated to the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Infancy of Christ.*

The old and new testaments record numerous experiences of God's transcendence. Yandell counts the monotheistic experiences recorded in the old and new testaments, such as Moses' encounter with God in burning bush (Exodus 3:3-6); Isaiah's vision of the Lord of hosts (Isaiah 6:1-9); or John's description of the son of man in Revelations 1:10-18 as religious experiences of transcendence (1993:25-26). That God is so completely other, does not however mean that a relationship based on love is not possible. In each of these experiences cited above, the person who at first was frightened by the otherness of the One encountered, is drawn into a close relationship, a friendship with God that bridges the gap between creature and Creator.

Thomistic theology explains that God is in all things not as a constitutive element, but as a cause. All life derives from God, and "God is most intimately present in everything that exists pouring out its whole actuality at every moment (1 q.8, a.1, c. as quoted in Dubay 1967:443). The creative presence of God abides within a human being. As God is the source of all being, it is Rahner's view that human beings are fundamentally oriented toward the transcendent. God, who is goodness and truth as well as incomprehensible mystery, is "nonetheless present to the human person in his or her intrinsic openness to the infinite" (Rahner 1997:2).

Rahner posits that persons by their spiritual faculties, their freedom and their human history are immanent to themselves and in that way, transcendent. In the depths of human nature God has placed the gift of God's self. This grace is a gift that is offered to all people, says Rahner, who cites 1 Tim. 2:4 that God wills that all persons be saved (1973:34). Therefore, the transcendent drive within each human being communicates an orientation to an "absolute future" through the power of grace. By its nature, transcendence "establishes a reference to the absolute being, to that which cannot be constructed, cannot be developed into something beyond itself" (Rahner 1973:278). For Rahner, the nature of human beings is of itself an orientation to transcendence.

One of Mère Madeleine's reflections recorded in *Les Petits Papiers* (Louise de Jésus 1935:120), expresses another element in her experience of God's transcendence: that is, love. Madeleine de Saint-Joseph recounts an experience of unconditional love:

Et comme un jour je demandais à Dieu, dans la vue de mes bassesses et de mes misères, comment il m'aimait ainsi, il me montra par une vérité qu'il n'y avait point d'autre raison en l'amour sinon qu'il était Amour pur, qu'il aimait à cause de lui-même.

And as one morning I asked God, that in view of my baseness and my miseries how he could love me thus, he showed me as a truth that there was no other reason for love except that he is Pure Love, he loves on account of himself.

God has no reason to love except that God is pure love. In Lonergan's understanding, the dynamic state of being-in-love is the result of God's love that floods the human heart (1971:105) and is available to every person. It is the dynamic state of *being-in-love* which is a result of God's initiative, and it is "being in love in an unrestricted fashion" that fulfils within a person his/her capacity for self-transcendence. It is that same initiating love that creates within people an intrinsic openness to the infinite. Discussing Lonergan's understanding of religious experience, Carmody writes of the variants of Lonergan's own portrait of unrestricted. "Like his love without limits, they stress the personality's openness, acceptance of mystery, willingness to plunge into the dark depths of the creature-Creator relationship where a God too vast and good for our comprehension takes us into divine interiority" (1988:62).

Human beings are constituted with a capacity for transcendence (possibly similar to what Forman and others have called "innate capacity"). When they undergo mystical experiences of transcendence people are often overwhelmed by sense of God's otherness, power and holiness (Lonergan 1971:106). Yet, it is precisely in this experience that people are offered an opportunity to respond to transcendent value—goodness, truth, kindness and so on (Gregson 1988:101). Religious

experience¹⁴⁴ is for Lonergan a moment of decisional openness. It is an awareness or consciousness of human beings to decide whether or not to be in a loving relationship with One who loves them unconditionally. For Lonergan, religious experience is primarily a movement in which a person is simply borne up by love into a love that is entirely transcendent, yet personal at the same time.

4.3.2 The Experience of Immanence

The second aspect that we address is God's immanent presence. Experiences narrated in Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's letters describe the relationship of Jesus to the Father; they focus on the nativity, the cross of Jesus, and on Mary Magdalen. The principal theme emerging from Mère Madeleine's letters is her sharing in the relationship of Jesus with the Father. This is a key reality in the life of Jesus as Keating (1987:6) explains:

The divine plan according to Paul is to share with us the knowledge of the Father that belongs to the Word of God by nature and to the man Christ Jesus who was united to that Word. This consciousness is crystallized in Jesus' remarkable expression "Abba," translated "Father." "Abba" implies a relationship of awe, affection and intimacy. Jesus' personal experience of God as Abba is the heart of the Mystery that is being communicated through the liturgy.

During the early years of Mère Madeleine's term as prioress of the *Grand Couvent*, she experienced a period in which she was initiated into a sharing in Jesus' offering of himself to God. She writes to Bérulle in 1624:

Je voy que Dieu attire mon ame à quelque chose d'amour, et cela je le voy fort puissant, et de toute autre façon que je ne puis exprimer. Je voy aussy que c'est la fin à laquelle tend ce qui est de la volonté de Dieu sur mon ame. Je sens grande devotion à l'amour que Jesus

¹⁴⁴ Lonergan's philosophy of God and his understanding of systematics are based on the common denominator of origin and objective: religious experience. The common goal is the development of persons. This is in contrast to "the traditional view [that] was a product of trinitarian and christological problems as these were conceived with the systematic differentiations of consciousness as originated by Aristotle and transposed to Christian soil by Thomas Aquinas" (1973:58).

Christ porte à son Pere. Il y a plusieurs choses qui se passent en mon ame sur ce sujet et plusieurs autres que je n'ay pas facilité de dire. Je vous supplie de me donner à la Vierge pour me conduire en tout (Letter 23. Sérout 1965: 34)

I see that God draws my soul to something of love and I see that very powerfully and in such a manner that I cannot express. I also see that it is the end to which it tends to what is the will of God for my soul. I experience a great devotion to the love that Jesus Christ bears toward his Father. There are several things that occur in my soul on this subject and many others that I cannot easily speak about. I ask you to give me to the Virgin so that she may guide me in all things.

Mère Madeleine is attracted by love in a powerful fashion and finds herself unable to express what has happened. The experience introduces her into the conscious love of Jesus for the Father. She gains a sense of God's will for her life. As Keating expresses it, she is drawn into Jesus' personal experience of God.

Jesus Christ became God's way of touching humankind in an intimate way. God became *Emmanuel*, God-with-us through the incarnation of the Son of God as a human being. The immanence of God is therefore experienced through encounter with Jesus Christ. According to Lonergan, the essential element that distinguishes Christian religious experience from other types of religious experience is what he calls intersubjectivity, or interaction with the person of Christ. It is the result of God's gift.¹⁴⁵

Roman Catholic theology teaches that at baptism every person is endowed with an outpouring of the God's love through the Holy Spirit and in Christ (Romans 5:5). This outpouring is said to change people metaphysically.¹⁴⁶ Their *being* is altered so

¹⁴⁵ As Lonergan writes: "It's not only this gift of God's love, but it has an objective manifestation of God's love in Christ Jesus. That inter-subjective component creates a difference and because it creates a difference, insofar as you advert to that intersubjective element in your love with Christ, you're proceeding from experience" (1973:67).

¹⁴⁶ Rahner writes that this change is wrought by the grace of Christ. "...we only have a Christian understanding of grace when it is conceived of not only in the most metaphysical way possible, as a divinisation, but rather as assimilation to Christ...grace is the unfolding within human nature of the human with the Logos..." (Rahner 1965: 199-200).

that they become children of God (1 John 3:1) and co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17) with a destiny that means participation in the life of God for eternity. They partake of the divine nature by grace, however, and not by virtue of their own human nature.¹⁴⁷

By the indwelling of the Trinity in the soul of the Christian, God is present as three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit according to the new testament teachings. Aumann (1980:75) writes:

Scripture uses various formulas to express the truth that God dwells in the soul by grace. The indwelling is attributed to the Holy Spirit, not because there is any special presence of the Holy Spirit that is not common to Father and the Son, but because this is a work of the love of God, and the Holy Spirit is essential love in the bosom of the Trinity.

Aumann (1980:76) concedes that theologians are not in agreement on how God dwells within the human soul, but he concludes that they do agree on the importance of the divine indwelling presence, its purpose and consequences for a human being. The indwelling presence of God by grace is the gift of God's self to an individual. God becomes immanent within the soul bridging the gap between creature and Creator and making available an experience that is profoundly intimate. Hassel (1983:94-95) describes the reality of indwelling prayer:

Indwelling prayer is, therefore, the discovery of the three persons living in one's depths and the painful gradual Copernican revolution of one's active life. This discovery begins when one admits that Jesus is God and then proceeds to live out all the implications of that belief. For Jesus is very clear: all he is and has comes from the Father, and all he is and has is given to the Holy Spirit. The Christian must admit that in his or her depths all three divine persons are to be

¹⁴⁷ In the introduction the 1997 edition of Rahner's work on the Trinity, LaCugna writes: "The indwelling of the divine persons in grace makes the graced person as close to God as possible without erasing the ontological difference between God and creature. Grace is truly God as such, and does affect the creature ontologically, but grace does not remove the creatureliness of the human being" (1997:xiii).

met and eventually loved with all the loyal sacrifice of which he or she is capable. (Hassel 1983:94-95).

The experiential knowledge of God's indwelling presence is the subject of Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle*. Teresa is engaged primarily in a Christo-centric relationship with "His Majesty" as she refers to the Son of God, Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁸

Through the indwelling by grace, God is immanent to a human person. Rahner describes the immanent Trinity as the "economic" Trinity (1997:23), the Trinity as revealed in salvation history: God lovingly creating the world, sending the Son who died and was raised up for the forgiveness of sins, and together missioning the Spirit to dwell within the faithful and to restore all creation to the headship of Christ to the glory of God the Father—this is the work of the self-communicating God.

In Lonergan's terms, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph experiences a mystery of love and awe that pertains to the realm of transcendence (1971:114). At the same time, she gains a new and intimate knowledge of God that is born of religious love¹⁴⁹ (1991:115). She asks Bérulle to confide her to the Virgin Mother's care so that she will be guided throughout.

¹⁴⁸ Aumann (1980:76) provides some references to the divine indwelling: John 14: 23—God coming to make God's home within one who loves Jesus; 1 John 4:16—those who love God abide in God and God in them; 1 Corinthians, 3:16-17—you are the temple of God and God's Spirit dwells in you; 1 Corinthians. 6:19—do you not know that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit?). Each of these texts focuses upon God—Father, Son and/or Spirit coming to dwell within a person who loves and believes in God.

¹⁴⁹ Père Talon's text, a later version and possibly less reliable (1670), reads as follows: Dieu m'a fait voir qu'il attire mon âme dans une grande participation de son amour, que c'est la fin où tend sa divine volonté sur moy, & qu'estant efficace elle fait des operations en mon âme, conformes à la grandeur de son conseil. Je le voy & je le sens d'une maniere si puissante qu je ne la puis exprimer. Nostre Seigneur JESUS CHRIST me fait connoistre qu'il me lie à l'amour qu'il porte à son Pere. Il y a plusieurs choses qui se passent en mon âme sure ce sujet, lesquelles je ne puis dire, n'ayant point de termes propres pour les expliquer. Je vous supplie de me donner à la Vierge pour me conduire en tout (Sérouet 1965 :34) This letter differs from the version above of the line which says, « Nostre Seigneur JESUS CHRIST me fait connoistre qu'il me lie à l'amour qu'il porte à son Pere ». Literally, it reads : "He *binds* me to the love that he bears for his Father".

The text of Letter 13 gives more insight into this experience of love between Jesus and the Father. This letter speaks about Jesus' sacrificial death. From a theological point of view, Mère Madeleine's mystical experience related in this letter is possibly described or interpreted in terms that reflect the dominant theology of the times. Speaking about Christian spirituality and mystical experience, Buckley (1990:31) says it is important to ask what theology or aspect of hermeneutics is used as a vehicle to describe, critique, and interpret the experience. Otherwise, there is no deeper understanding of the process by which values are developed and expressed.

The theology of satisfaction that developed in the Latin Church emphasized the death of Christ as a sacrifice of reconciliation (McGinn 1985:254). That particular theology is apparent in the following letter of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph. The use of *immolation* and *sacrifié* are terms indicative of a tendency toward the theology of satisfaction for sin that is expressed in Letter 137 where Mère Madeleine refers to Christ's interior and exterior acts endured for "our sins" and thereby satisfying the Father's justice (« pour satisfaire à sa justice » (Letter 137. Sérout 1965:132).

The letter, addressed to Père Bérulle reads as follows:

Nostre Seigneur m'a fait voir qu'il m'a mise dans l'estat de son immolation et que l'ame de Jesus Christ a sacrifié la mienne à la divinité par une nouvelle mort à soy mesme et à toutes le choses créées. Il me semble que mon ame est entrée en participation du sacrifice que l'ame de Jesus a fait d'elle mesme à Dieu et j'ay veu que sa tres grande bonté et misericorde vers moy il me donnoit part à sa resignation quand il dit: *Fiat voluntas tua*. J'ay veu aussy le delaissement qu'il a porté de la part de son Pere et, quoy que ce n'ait pas esté en sa totalité, il m'a semblé tres extreme ; es il a fait en moy une operation qui tend à une mort à tout choses (Letter 13. Sérout 1965: 24).

Our Lord made me see that he put me into the state of his sacrifice and that the soul of Jesus Christ has sacrificed mine to the divinity by a new death to self and to all created things. It seems to me that my soul entered into sharing the sacrifice that the soul of Jesus made to God, and I saw that in his great goodness and mercy towards me, he gave me a share in his surrender when he said: Your will be done. I also saw the abandonment that he experienced on his part by the

Father; and although I did not experience it in its totality, it seemed to me that it was very extreme. He has performed in me an activity that tends to a death to all things.

Looking at the text of this letter no. 13, we see that Madeleine de Saint-Joseph again shares in the love of Jesus for the Father, but there is a new element. She also enters into an awareness of the extent of Jesus' abandonment by the Father during the crucifixion. At the same time, she sees that her own abandonment is not total. She senses that her soul has been sacrificed to the Father by the soul of Jesus Christ. It seems to her that the result is death to all created things. John of the Cross describes the meaning of such a phenomenon by which Madeleine enters the "abyss of wisdom":

...This secret mystical wisdom has the characteristic of hiding the soul within itself. Besides its usual effect, this mystical wisdom occasionally so engulfs souls in its secret abyss that they have the keen awareness of being brought into a place far removed from every creature.... Souls are so elevated and exalted by this abyss of wisdom, which leads them into the heart of the science of love, that they realize that all the conditions of creatures in relation to this supreme knowing and divine experience are very base, and they perceive the lowliness, deficiency, and inadequacy of all the terms and words used in this life to deal with divine things (Dark Night 17, 6. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991:437-438).

In the previous extract, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph describes an activity that God has performed in her soul that has tended toward her being invited to live as if dead to all created things. Writing in the *Spiritual Canticle*, John of the Cross refers to the wisdom which the soul drinks in the state of spiritual marriage: "The drink of highest wisdom makes her forget all worldly things" (*Spiritual Canticle* 26, 13. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991:577). This seems to be the case for Madeleine de Saint-Joseph.

In Letter 13, we encounter the term *l'estat de son immolation*. The word "l'estat" *état* or *estat* (an older spelling for *état*) is explained by Thompson (1989:213) as a

Berullian term that refers to “permanent conditions or aspects of the life and mysteries of Jesus”. Madeleine de Saint-Joseph finds her soul put into the state of immolation or self-offering that is within the soul of Jesus Christ. She shares in the perpetual and on-going surrender of Jesus to the Father.

In both Letters 23 and 13, we see Mère Madeleine experiencing a union with Jesus Christ that draws her into the redemptive posture of Jesus Christ—that of love for the Father. Christ prays: “The world must be brought to know that I love the Father” (John 14:31). This love is communicated to Madeleine de Saint-Joseph.

Throughout the letters of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph, there is a marked absence of references to the Song of Songs or metaphors containing bridal imagery. Are we to conclude from this lack that Mère Madeleine did not experience mystical union or the mystical marriage? The teachings of John of the Cross on the spiritual marriage describe the transformation of love that occurs in one who is in the state of spiritual marriage. The Holy Spirit accomplishes in the soul a participation in the life of God. John of the Cross writes:

The Father loves them [transformed souls] by communicating to them the same love he communicates to the Son, though not naturally as to the Son, but as we said, through unity and transformation of love...the soul will participate in God himself by performing in him, in company with him, the work of the Most Blessed Trinity because of the substantial union between the soul and God (*Spiritual Canticle* 39,5.6. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991:623-624).

Although no one can be sure, it is conceivable after examining Letters 13 and 23 in particular, that Madeleine de Saint-Joseph did experience mystical union and participation in the work of the persons of the Godhead.

4.4 Madeleine de Saint-Joseph: Linguistic Responses to Mystical Union

One of the several striking differences between the mystical writings of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph and those of Teresa of Avila is found in their linguistic responses to

the experience of mystical union. A glance at the index of Volume II, of Teresa of Avila's collected works (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1980: 515-520) reveals over four hundred examples of figures of speech—analogy, allegories, metaphors, similes—used in the *Interior Castle*, *Meditations of the Song of Songs*, and *Way of Perfection*. By contrast, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph uses metaphors quite sparingly and is altogether more reserved in her mystical reportage than is Teresa of Avila.

Differences in culture and temperament cannot be discounted. Bremond gives two examples of perceived differences between Spanish and French cultures. In the first instance, Madam Jourdain, a pious widow who accompanied the Spanish foundresses from Spain to Paris, "detected a very sweet and pleasant fragrance, which helped her to a state of unusual recollection" while the company stopped at a wayside church. Madam Jourdain discreetly reported her experience to the Spanish women. They told her that it was the presence of Teresa of Avila welcoming them to France (1930:225). Bremond remarks on Louise Jourdain's discreet reporting of the experience: "This is France's way, when she is mystical, even when she is simply Christian. She keeps her secret" (*Ibid.*).

In the second example, Bremond narrates an incident that took place in the Carmel in Dijon in 1605. One of the French Carmelites delighted Anne de Jésus by learning Spanish and reciting some verses for her. The result touched the Spaniard so much that she led the way to the chapel and danced before the tabernacle like David did before the ark (1930:231).

The examples may be construed as indicating bias on the part of Bremond ("France's way"), or they may point to the fact that cultural backgrounds differ, as do personalities and that reactions to mystical experience are tempered and molded by culture as Katz (1983) has observed (and which has been discussed earlier in this work). Therefore, in examining the mystical writings of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph we keep in mind that hers is a more introverted and reserved approach to expressing her interior experiences than that of Teresa of Avila who uses a more extroverted and highly autobiographical style of expression.

As was noted earlier in this study in Section 2.9.2 on linguistic responses to mystical experience, there are four modes of linguistic expression: silence, *via negativa*, paradox, and positive and symbolic expression. It is the purpose of this section to examine the modes of linguistic expression that are used by Mère Madeleine and to give examples of them from her writings.

4.4.1 Silence

The first mode of linguistic response is silence. As we noted earlier, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph does not give detailed phenomenological reportage. In the few examples that are available, several aspects of silence can be detected: first, there is the silence that means an inability to articulate an experience; second an unwillingness to do so (to keep the secret); and thirdly, there is an emphasis on the practice of silence with respect to experience in prayer.

In her letter to Bérulle written around 1624, Mère Madeleine says: "Je voy que Dieu attire mon ame à quelque chose d'amour, et cela je le voy fort puissant, et de toute autre façon que ne ne puis exprimer" *I see that God draws my soul to something of love and I see that very powerfully and in such a manner that I cannot express.* (Letter 23. Sérout 1965:34). In this case, she experiences something that is beyond her ability to put into words.

Toward the end of the letter Mère Madeleine says, "Il y a plusieurs choses qui se passent en mon ame sur ce sujet et plusieurs autres que je n'ay pas facilité de dire". *There are several things that happened in my soul on this subject and several others which I do not have the readiness to speak of.* Here it seems the silence is not an issue of ineffability of what is experienced as much as a choice about what can be appropriately expressed. A comparison shows slightly different nuances of "je ne puis exprimer" and "je n'ay pas facilité". In the first case, it seems to be a matter of *not being able to express*. In the second, there seems to be a lack of ease or readiness to speak about what happened to her.

Another example of silence/inability to articulate is expressed in a slightly different fashion, "je ne puis expliquer" *I cannot explain* (Letter 174. Sérouet 1965:179). In this example, Mère Madeleine writes to a Carmelite and says:

Je me réjouis des bénédictions que sa divine main verse sur votre âme et particulièrement de qu'il la lie à luy même souffrant et attaché au bois de la croix, où je vous regarde d'une façon que je ne puis expliquer.

I rejoice at the blessings with which his divine hand inundates your soul, and especially because he unites you to himself suffering and nailed to the wood of the cross, where I behold you in a way that I cannot explain (Thompson 1989:206).

In this case, beholding the person at the wood of the cross is tantamount to a visionary experience. What Mère Madeleine is unable to explain is *how* she is able to perceive the sister at the cross of Jesus. It is not an issue of silence *per se*, but it is a silence resulting from an experience that cannot be explained.

The last example of Mère Madeleine's use of silence is taken from one of *Les Petits Papiers*. These were collected by Gibieuf and recorded by Louise de Jésus (1935:119). They record some of her experiences during the first years of her term as prioress at the *Grand Couvent* 1608-1615. Mère Madeleine writes:

L'état de mon âme est quasi toujours de pareille sorte que ce que j'en ait dit. Mais je ne puis dire combien ce que je ressens est éloigné de toutes mes paroles; et c'est pourquoi, le plus souvent, je me retiens d'en parler (Louise de Jésus 1935:119).

The state of my soul is nearly always the same way as I have said, but I cannot tell you how distant what I experience is from all my words; and because of this I more often than not refrain from speaking.

In this last example, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph seems to experience a profound discontinuity between what she experiences and what she is able to articulate. Words are inadequate and because of that, Mère Madeleine refrains from speaking. John of

the Cross explains the cause of one's inability and/or reluctance to speak about prayer experience. He says that when God speaks, his [sic] language silences the soul:

The language of God has this trait: Since it is very spiritual and intimate to the soul, transcending everything sensory, it immediately silences the entire ability and harmonious composite of exterior and interior senses (*Dark Night II*, 17, 3. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991:436).

In the extracts cited silence is practiced as a result of being unable to articulate, not ready to articulate, one's being unable to explain, or being rendered speechless because the nature of the experience confounds its recipient. As John of the Cross says, the language of God silences the soul.

The other aspect of the use of silence is in regard to the use of discretion in talking about one's prayer experiences. Mère Madeleine expresses her difference of opinion over the practice of speaking about one's interior life in a letter to a cleric:

Ma pensée est bien différente de celle de ces bonnes âmes dont vous m'écrivés, qui croient qu'il est nécessaire pour leur perfection de beaucoup parler. Je leur conseillerois plutôt de prendre ce tems là pour s'élever en Dieu en silence et en humilité que de s'amuser dire tant de choses. Les âmes qui parlent beaucoup se dissipent facilement et je tiens que dans les grandes communications il y a bien de la recherche de soy même, de l'amour propre et de l'inutilité....Je pens quelquefois à ces Pères du désert, dans lesquels une seule parole de l'Evangile a produit de si grands effets... (Letter 240. Sérouet 1965:256-257).

My thought is different from that of the good souls about whom you write to me, who believe that it is necessary for their perfection to speak a great deal. I would counsel them instead to take the time in order to lift themselves to God in silence and humility rather than amusing themselves in many things. Souls who speak a lot dissipate themselves very easily and I maintain that in these grand communications there is a quest for oneself, self-love, and lack of profit.... Sometimes I think of the fathers of the desert and how a single word of the gospel produced such great effects.

Clearly and directly, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph addresses the issue of discretion with regard to one's prayer life. She seems to detect a kind of spiritual élitism that leads to pride, the dissipation of one's sense of recollection, to an exercise in self-absorption, and a waste of time. Authentic spirituality finds the practice of silence a source of great fruit; it invites contemplation and can free one from useless self-centredness.

Silence is one way in which Madeleine de Saint-Joseph responds to mystical experience. It is sometimes a way to express what she finds overwhelming; it is sometimes a protection from speaking too soon. It is sometimes an expression of a profound sense of one's wordlessness. As help for prayer, silence is essential. It protects people from their own self-love and provides a means of entering into a spirit of recollection. Mère Madeleine's use of silence is varied; her appreciation of its value is undeniable.

4.4.2 *Via negativa*

The next form of linguistic response is through *via negativa*. There does not seem to be any expressions of this kind within the body of Mère Madeleine's writings. Thompson (1989:33) writes that in Madeleine the "Dionysian dimension constitutes a deep context within which the Paschal or Pauline aspects are rather more heavily accented." However, the use of *via negativa* to express her God-experience, as it is in Pseudo-Dionysius, is not apparent.

4.4.3 Paradox

Use of paradox is a third mode of linguistic response to mystical experience. In the mystical teachings of Mère Madeleine there are some examples of her use of paradox in relation to the image and reality of "light" in prayer. John of the Cross explains the dark night as "an inflow of God into the soul which purges it of its habitual

ignorance and imperfections, natural and spiritual...in which God teaches the soul secretly" (*Dark Night II*, 5, 1. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991:401). In a letter to a Carmelite woman, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph writes to encourage a sister who is experiencing darkness in her prayer. This condition is "painful and afflictive" as John of the Cross might say, because of the nature of God's purifying light.¹⁵⁰

Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph writes that God's ways are hidden in life and unknown until we die and because we are not worthy here to know God's ways:

...nous operons à l'aveugle, en humilité et en ignorance...selon sa sapience et selon sa conduite secrete et inconnuë, jusqu'à ce que nous soyons el la vraye et parfaite lumiere, où nous verrons ses saints et divine conseils. ...*we operate in blindness and in humility and in ignorance; according to his wisdom and according to his secret and unknown guidance, until we may be in the true and perfect light where we shall see his holy and divine counsels* (Letter 194. Sérouet 1965:199).

The paradox that Mère Madeleine describes is summed up thus: *the secret light is darkness*. She reflects the teachings of John of the Cross: faith darkens and empties the intellect preparing it for divine wisdom (*Dark Night II*, 10, 2. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991:417). Matthew (1995:72) discusses the grace of the dark night echoing the words of John of the Cross. He writes of dark contemplation:

It is an inflow of God. It is a painful darkness, that is, suffering, with the accent on bewildering suffering. It calls for a creative response—faith, acceptance.

This is what Mère Madeleine encourages—a faithful response to God's design in one's life because what appears as darkness is in fact a secret and unseen light of purifying love.

In the second case Mère Madeleine teaches using a paradox based on the gospel injunction of Jesus in Luke 11:35 to take care that the light within one is not darkness.

¹⁵⁰ Matthew (1995:72-85) discusses the dark night in terms of "healing darkness".

In Letter 237 Mère Madeleine addresses a cleric's query about extraordinary enlightenments. She writes as follows:

Je vous dirai, Monsieur, pour vous obéir, que selon ce que je puis juger par le rapport qu'il vous plaît de nous en faire, ces âmes là, que se repaissent ainsy des lumières sans se mettre autrement en peine de travailler à vaincre leurs passions et à pratiquer les vertus, sont bien avant dans l'erreur et l'illusion et que toutes leurs lumières sont ténèbres. Vous savés ce que dit Notre Seigneur: que nous prenion garde que la lumière qui est en nous ne soit ténèbres. Je pense donc que c'est part défaut de lumière qu'elles ont tant de lumières, parce que, si elles étoient vrayement éclairées et avoient les vrais fondements de la vie intérieure et parfaite, elles sauroient bien que le tems de la vie présente n'est pas un tems de lumière, mais d'obscurité; que ce n'est pas icy où l'on voit, mail où l'on est en ignorance; qu'il y faut être en perpétuel abaissement et porter tout en ténèbres, jusqu'à ce que nous soyons dans la vraye vie et dans la vray lumière, où toutes choses se verront vrayement comme elles sont et comme Dieu les voit, c'est à dire par une participation de sa lumière (Letter 237. Séroutet 1965:253).

I tell you, in order to respond, that according to what I can judge, the souls whom it has pleased you to tell us about, those souls who feast themselves upon their illuminations without putting themselves to the trouble of conquering their passions or practicing virtues, are well on their way to error and illusion because all their lights are darkness. You know what our Lord said: be on guard that the light within you is not darkness. I think then, it is by lack of light that they have such light because if they were truly bright and the true foundations of the interior life and perfection, they would be at this present time in their life, not in time of light, but in obscurity; it is not here where one sees, but where one is in ignorance; that one must be in perpetual abasement, to carry all in darkness, until we may be in the true light when all things will be seen as God sees them, that is to say, through participation in God's light.

This rather lengthy extract illustrates the paradoxical teaching that what one considers to be light actually may be darkness. The presence of multiple enlightenments in prayer is very likely an indication of illusion and not illumination. Mère Madeleine uses this letter to affirm the Teresian principle that the subduing of one's passions and

disordered emotions and the practice of virtue¹⁵¹ are clear signs of genuine enlightenment. She notes as well, that there may be a certain amount of pride associated with claiming to have lights, favours, and illuminations from God. She refers to Teresa of Avila's teaching that "at each new degree of prayer, as a mark of progress, the soul's humility is more profound" («A chaque nouveau degre d'oraison, sainte Thérèse signale, comme marque du progress accompli, qui l'humilité de l'âme est plus profonde» Note 2, on Letter 239. Sérout 1965:394).

Though Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's use of paradox is not extensive, it is a clear attempt to explain the doctrine of *mystical* or dark contemplation and to rectify mistaken notions of contemplation. One can assume that Mère Madeleine's teaching is experience-based. Her knowledge of the principles of spiritual growth, particularly in contemplation, is not only accurate, but is very much in the mainstream of the teaching of John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila.

4.4.4 Positive and Symbolic Characterisation

The last form of linguistic response to mystical experience comes through the use of positive characterisation and symbol. Positive expressions are couched in language that uses metaphor, parallelism, oxymoron, and what Ferrari (1997:335) refers to as "chiasme" which is literally a style of writing that employs a double movement. Unlike Teresa of Avila, Mère Madeleine is very reserved in her autobiographical comments. However, there is one very clear use of metaphorical language given in *Les Petits Papiers* (Louise de Jésus 1935:120). Mere Madeleine was about thirty years old at this time and prioress at the *Grand Couvent*. She writes describing the state of her soul:

¹⁵¹ For Teresa of Avila one of the ways in which union with God is expressed is through love of one's neighbour (*Interior Castle* V, III, 8. 12. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1980:351-353).

Il me semble le plus souvent que mon âme se sent comme la boue de rues ou chose très immonde, sur laquelle repose une très grande pureté¹⁵²

It seems to me that most often my soul feels itself like the mud of the streets or a thing that is very foul, on which repose a great purity.

Mère Madeleine describes the sense of her own sordidness in the face of the purity and goodness of God. She uses a simile comparing herself to sewerage running in the Parisian streets. It is an extreme comparison, but it shows her utter conviction of her unworthiness and foulness in contrast with the experience of God's purity, love and goodness. In Letter 221, she refers again to sordidness but acknowledges that it is washed clean by the blood of Jesus. She asks the superior of a religious order to remember to pray for her at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and to ask the Son of God: «...demandes au Fils de Dieu qu'il daigne laver dans son sang toutes mes souillures et me pardonner toutes mes infidélités» *ask the Son of God who deigns to wash with his blood all my sordidness, and to pardon me of all my infidelities* (Sérouet 1965:235).

To another person, Mère Madeleine uses the same image when writing to a new convert: «.Demandés luy qu'il lave votre âme de ses larmes et de son sang et qu'il vous fortifie par ses mérites...» *Ask that he [Jesus] wash your soul by tears and by his blood and that he strengthen you by his merits* (Letter 264. Sérouet 1965:293).

In her ordinary correspondence, Mère Madeleine uses similes (comparisons using *like* or *as*) and metaphors in her writing. Most of them are drawn from scriptural sources. She writes often that we live in a valley of tears (Letter 84 and 278. Sérouet 1965:82.308), and that the life of the elect is a bed of thorns (Letter 75. Sérouet 1965:76).

¹⁵² "The text had be restored after a comparison of the two texts of Gibieuf and (p. 359) and that of M. Agnès" (note in Louise of Jésus 1935:120).

For the most part, Mère Madeleine draws on scriptural metaphors to express her response to mystical experience. As we noted earlier in this chapter, the most frequently used expression in her letters comes from John's Gospel and appears ten or more times directly or indirectly in the collection edited by Sérouet. It is Jesus' saying: "I am the way and the truth and the life" or simply, "I am the way". This is an example of Madeleine's mystical insight into the relationship of Jesus to the Father and of the infallible means of being drawn into relationship with the Father—through Jesus Christ, who is the way. Mère Madeleine also emphasises this teaching in order to obviate the problem of people becoming "inutile" in prayer and removing themselves from consideration of the life of Jesus Christ and interacting with him. She says, «Il nous faut bien souvenir que c'est le Fils de Dieu incarné qui est la voye et qui est seul digne de porter ce nom». *It is necessary to remind ourselves that it is the Son of God incarnate who is the way and who is the only one worthy to bear that name* (Letter 245. Sérouet 1965:265-266).

The master of antithetical and metaphoric expression is Pierre de Bérulle. Ferrari (1997:359) writes that Bérulle plunges himself into the contemplation of the mystery of the Incarnation and uses of "chiasme" or double movement quite often to express the extremes of grandeur and baseness; "glorie dans l'humilité" (1997:358). This same literary device is employed by Madeleine de Saint Joseph in one of her letters that describes Christ as the door (John 10:7). In Letter 139 (Thompson 1989:198), Mère Madeleine employs the same double movement—"entering into the divinity and going out into the humanity of Jesus Christ". Morgain (1987:124) notes that if Bérulle and Teresa of Avila were discussing the life of Christ, Bérulle's point of departure would be the divinity, whereas Teresa of Avila's would be the humanity of Christ. In this letter, Mère Madeleine reflects the bias of Bérulle by beginning with the divinity in her reflection. The letter to a Carmelite prioress follows:

Entrer donc et sortir par cette porte qui est Jésus Christ est aussi une manière de parler qui signifie accomplir librement tout ce que Dieu demande de nous, entrant à la divinité et sortant à l'humanité de Jésus Christ; entrant à sa vie intérieure et occupée avec son Père et sortant

à sa vie extérieure et conversante avec les hommes; montant à l'exemple des anges par application et par adoration à ses grandeurs, dans lesquelles *il est en tout égal à son Père* et descendant par amour et par imitation à ses abaissements, dans lesquels il dit par son prophète *qu'il est un ver et non pas un homme, l'opprobre des hommes et le mépris du peuple*; entrant avec Marie et sortant avec Marthe; demeurant quelquefois retirés au dedans de nous mêmes et uniquement occupés à l'adorer en esprit et en vérité et écouter en silence les paroles de vie qu'il dit à notre cœur; d'autres fois sortant par la pratique de la charité et de toutes les vertus extérieures dont il nous a donné un si parfait exemple (Letter 139. Sérouet 1965:134-135).

To enter then and leave through this door who is Jesus Christ is a manner of speaking that means to accomplish freely everything God asks of us, entering into the divinity and going out into the humanity of Jesus Christ. We enter into his interior life where he is occupied with his Father. We go out into his exterior life where he lives familiarly with men. We ascend in imitation of the angels through attention and contemplation of his grandeurs, in which he is in all things equal to his Father (Jn 10:30). We descend through love and the imitation of his humiliation, by which he says through his prophet that he is a worm, not a man, a disgrace among men and a scorn of the people (Ps 22:7). We enter with Mary and go out with Martha. At times we remain recollected within ourselves and occupied solely in adoring him in spirit and truth, listening in silence to the words of life he speaks to our hearts. At other times we go out through the practice of charity and all the exterior virtues of which he gave us such a perfect example (Thompson 1989:199).

What Mère Madeleine created was a double movement of parallelisms that in each case moves from one level of existence to another: divinity / humanity; interior life / exterior life; ascend in imitation to his grandeurs/ descend through love and imitation to his abasements; enter with Mary / go out with Martha; remain recollected within ourselves / go out through the practice of charity. The parallelisms follow a symmetrical pattern: in/out; in/out; up/down; in/out; in/out. In true Berullian fashion, the movement is from divinity and things of God, to humanity and things of earth. Parallelism is also reflected in the dual movements

of adoration and love¹⁵³ to which Mère Madeleine refers in Letter 144, though not to the same extent as in Letter 139 (Thompson 1989:202).

The symbolic characterisation of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's mystical union is eucharistic adoration. It is not without good reason that any engravings or pictures of Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph show her at prayer before the Blessed Eucharist. This devotion to Christ¹⁵⁴ present in his humanity and in his divinity was paramount in the life of the French Carmelite nun. The image of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph at prayer before the Blessed Sacrament shows her in serene adoration.¹⁵⁵ Angels are looking on, and an image of a dove overhead depicts the presence of the Spirit. Eucharistic adoration was the way in which Madeleine de Saint-Joseph experienced and expressed *incarnate meaning* in her life. As Lonergan explained it, quoting Morel "the symbol is not just *one* possible manner of speech among others, but the Logos in its plenitude" (Croken, et.al. 1996:101). The Blessed Eucharist was for Madeleine de Saint-Joseph the Incarnate Word of God, "Logos in its plenitude" whom she adored "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

4.4.5 In Search of New Metaphors: *Société Ensemble*

One significant metaphor that is found twice in Letter 147 (Sérouet 1965:148) and which incorporates other Johannine references used by Madeleine de Saint-Joseph is what she calls *société ensemble*. This is translated into English as *fellowship* (Thompson 1989:204-205). However, with sensitivity to the call of feminist

¹⁵³ The theme of adoration and love is treated in more detail in Chapter five.

¹⁵⁴ In her community Madeleine de Saint-Joseph inaugurated exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and all night adoration on Thursday evenings through the night into Fridays in order to pray and expiate for the ingratitude of people, and to pray for deliverance from war (Letter 141. Sérouet 1965:137).

¹⁵⁵ The text on a prayer leaflet published by Carmel, Clamart in 1931 reads: « Si Dieu me fait miséricorde après ma mort, vous me trouverez devant le Saint-Sacrament, adorant Jésus-Christ en son état d'hostie et d'adoration » *If God has mercy on me after my death, you will find me before the Blessed Sacrament adoring Jesus Christ in his state as victim and adorer.*

philosophers to re-think metaphors that are androcentrically¹⁵⁶ based or expressed, we look more closely at what Mère Madeleine says and suggest an alternative wording. Letter 147 very beautifully describes the intimacy of God with people. It draws on the old testament mentioning Moses and Elijah who lived in God's presence, aware of God and experiencing God in their lives. Mère Madeleine writes:

Or, si dès lor l'entretien des saints étoit continuellement avec Dieu, combien plus le doit il être maintenant que Dieu s'est fait homme, s'est fait notre frère et notre compagnon, s'est mis en état que nous nous puissions adresser liebrement à luy, nous approcher de luy et luy tenir compagnie, qui sont des grâces et des avantages que nous avons par le mistère de l'Incarnation. Ce mistère établit une société sainte et divine de Dieu et de Jésus Christ son Fils unique avec nous et saint Jean dit *que nous avons société ensemble et que notre société est avec le Père et son Fils Jésus Christ* (Letter 147. Sérout 1965:150).

Now, if even then the fellowship of the saints was continually with God, how much more should it be so now that God has become a man, our brother and our companion, and become available so that we can freely address him, approach him and keep him company, which are the graces and advantages we have through the mystery of the Incarnation? This mystery creates a holy and divine fellowship among God and Jesus Christ, his only Son, and us. Therefore, Saint John says that we have fellowship together and our fellowship is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3) (Thompson 1989:204-205).

If figures from the old testament enjoyed companionship with God, how much more ought we in these times, says Madeleine de Saint-Joseph. Mère Madeleine's use of *société ensemble* from 1 John 1:3 may also be translated as *partnership* or *communion*. The *Traduction Œcuménique de la Bible* (1988) renders the passage from John's epistle as follows: «...nous vous l'annonçons, à vous aussi, afin que vous aussi vous soyez en *communion* [Italics mine] avec nous. Et notre *communion* est *communion* avec le Père et avec son Fils Jésus Christ» (1 John 1:3).

¹⁵⁶ It is not within the scope of this work to deal with the "paternity" of God as part of the feminist critique of the mystical experience of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph.

The use of the word *communion* expresses in a more inclusive manner what *fellowship* intends. Both terms *société ensemble* or *communion* give expression to a sense of mutuality that is introduced when Mère Madeleine speaks of Jesus as brother and companion. It also seems to communicate the sense of familial intimacy that Mère Madeleine experiences in her relationship with Jesus and the Father. As the persons of the Trinity are persons in communion any interaction with them is personal (LaCugna 1973:243). La Cugna writes:

Greek theology situates the mystery of communion in the economy of redemption and deification. Jesus Christ *is* the true union of divine and human and therefore the means of our own communion with God and with one another (1973:249)

In terms of the feminist critique that calls for metaphors that address a sense of connectedness and relatedness, I find that Mère Madeleine's use of *société ensemble* or its translation, *communion*, is an image that better describes the values of persons—unity in diversity, mutuality, inclusivity, freedom, and self-transcending love—than the word *fellowship* does. The notable absence of bridal mysticism may be due to the content of her own mystical experience of union, not as a bride, but as a sister, friend, or companion of Jesus Christ in his self-offering to the Father. As La Cugna expresses it, "Jesus Christ *is* the true union of divine and human" (1973:249), and Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was utterly convinced of this.

Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph expressed her mystical insights through various linguistic forms—silence, paradox, metaphorical language, and through the symbolic language of her life. Neither extroverted, nor given to the use of highly metaphorical language, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph articulates her experience and the mystical doctrine which emanates from it, even creating an alternative metaphor to describe union with God and each other in Christ.

4.5 Phenomenological Analysis of Selected Mystical Texts of Mère Madeleine

To determine whether or not writings fall under the general rubric of "mystical" requires that texts be examined and matched against some general criteria of mystical union. In the case of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph, where there are so few autobiographical texts, a close analysis of a few texts may be helpful in assessing the extent to which she experienced mystical states. In this process, it is necessary to specify certain indicators of theistic mystical experience. After this is done, a framework for phenomenological analysis is prepared. After this, some texts are analysed according to the questions in the framework and then assessed in terms of the criteria. Finally, conclusions are drawn from the data concerning Mère Madeleine's mystical experiences.

4.5.1 Determining Indicators of Theistic Experience

Poulain (1910) cites as many as twelve characteristics of Christian mystical union. For the purposes of this study, six indicators of theistic mystical experience are presented. The first indicator is *differentiated unity* (Egan 1984:7). The one who is united with God retains his or her identity and human nature. This is not the case in the monist mystical experience where there is a sense of merging. Johnston distinguishes between *differentiated* and *undifferentiated* consciousness which is sometimes considered pantheistic: "Undifferentiated consciousness can only be labelled pantheism or monism if the subject passes from the psychological inner experience to the other world, affirming that in the objective order the self and the world do not exist" (Johnston 1990:183).¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Johnston cites Bede Griffiths, the Benedictine priest who lived in an Indian ashram for many years. Griffiths' narrative sounds like a monist experience of God. Johnston reference to Griffiths' experience makes it clear that mystical experiences of either kind—theistic or monist—are not respecters of persons or religious affiliations: "There is an experience of being in pure consciousness which gives lasting peace to the soul. It is an experience of the Ground or Depth of being in the Centre of the soul, an awareness of the mystery of being beyond sense and thought, which gives rise to fulfilment, of finality, of absolute truth....It is an experience of the undifferentiated ground of being, an abyss of being beyond thought, the One without a second" (quoted in Johnston 1990:182).

Teresa of Avila uses the example of a candle in explaining the betrothal that occurs before the spiritual marriage. She writes that God is at the centre of the soul:

Let us say that the union is like the joining of two wax candles to such an extent that the flame coming from them is but one, or that the wick, the flame, and the wax are all one. But afterward one candle can be easily separated from the other and there are two candles (*Interior Castle* VII: 2:4. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1980:434).

In another example John of the Cross describes the way in which a transformed soul participates in God. The soul is compared to a window pane and God's being is likened to the rays of the sun. The cleanliness of the window determines the brilliance of the rays that pass through the glass. While the two may seem identical—the glass and the sun's rays—it is possible to say that the ray is the light of the sun by participation:

When God grants this supernatural favor to the soul, so great a union is caused that all the things of both God and the soul become one in participant transformation, and the soul appears to be God more than a soul. Indeed, it is God by participation. Yet truly, its being (even though transformed) is naturally as distinct from God's as it was before, just as the window, although illumined by the ray, has being distinct from the ray's (*The Ascent of Mount Carmel* II, 5, 7. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991:165).

Dubay (1989:176) explains the union of the soul with God is an “oneness of likeness, a likeness of love”.

A second indicator of theistic mysticism relates to the *object* of union, a personal and loving object (Egan 1984:8). The object of union is neither a thing nor a principle, but what Payne (1982:250) calls “an intentional object, which is usually perceived as *personal and loving*”. Whereas experiences of monistic mysticism indicate a merging with a universal principle such that subject-object duality is eliminated, in the Christian context, subject and object unite, but do not merge. Guardini (1962:91)

writes that within the varieties of religious experience that exist there is always a specific *object*:

In all this variety, however, both in the object and in the act that grasps it, something stands out which remains identical and differs from other acts and objects of the life of the spirit. There is always “the Other,” distinct from all other empirical realities, and incapable of being expressed in corresponding terms.

Thus, the second theistic indicator relates to the nature of the *object*. Mystic union is experienced with an *object* which is perceived as personal and loving, as “the Other,” or as Guardini says, “Something or Someone that has the character of the sacral, full of mystery” (1962:91). In specifically Christian mysticism, that Someone is God, or God revealed in Jesus Christ.

A third indicator of theistic mysticism is the *presence of love, both as a felt, motivating and energizing force*, and as object of the mystical quest (Egan 1984:10). Speaking of the spiritual marriage, Teresa of Avila says, “For it is all a matter of love united with love, and the actions of love are most pure and so extremely delicate and gentle that there is no way of explaining them, but the Lord knows how to make them felt” (*Interior Castle V*: 4,3. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1980:354). The love that the mystic experiences and expresses is met by the love that God offers. It is a completely fulfilling and engaging love. In *The Spiritual Canticle*, stanza 28 (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991:474), John writes of the transformed soul that its life is now solely engaged in the work of love:

Now I occupy my soul
And all my energy in his service;
I no longer tend the herd,
Nor have I any other work
Now that my every act is love.

In the life of the mystic, love becomes the driving force, the main activity of the soul and the object with whom the mystic is united. Dubay (1989:180) writes: “In the

transforming union the person is now 'all love', and all her actions are love". The primacy of love as motivation and way of being is then, the third indicator of theistic mystical union. The presence of love leads the person to live virtuously and authentically. It also means the transformation of desire and a reduced need for self-gratification. Authentic mystical experience places love at the centre of human desire. Its presence purifies and transforms the one who prays.¹⁵⁸ Love leads the seeker away from self-occupation and the desire for *experience* of God, to seek God for God's sake. It is the desire to be united with God, to achieve a "total surrender in love to the God who wishes us to be united with him" (Egan 1984:21).

The fourth indicator of theistic mystical experience is the presence of a *profoundly new and intimate knowledge of God*. It may be confused and obscure (Poulain 1910:114), but it is an insight into God nonetheless. Teresa of Avila writes about the suspension of faculties in the fifth mansion: "When the soul is in this suspension, the Lord likes to show it some secrets, things about heaven, and imaginative visions" (*Interior Castle* VI, 4,5. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1980:380).

The fifth indicator of theistic mystical experience relates to the *inability of human agency to produce mystical experience* (Poulain 1910:115). Poulain notes that since the experience cannot be produced there are several other consequences: mystical experience cannot be foreseen, intensified, or changed. It comes unexpectedly and goes as quickly it comes (1910:116). These consequences are similar to two of the characteristics of mystical experiences as outlined by James (1902/[1929]: 372) passivity and transiency.

¹⁵⁸ Conn (1987:261-276) discusses the affective conversion that is at the heart of Lonergan's writing on religious conversion. Such a conversion is actually a transformation of desire that leads to self-giving, commitment and service. Conn develops his argument based on Haughton's analysis of conversion as a radical breakthrough of love in *Transformation of Man* (1967).

The final characteristic of theistic mystical union can be described as a *sense of personal integration*. It is a self-acceptance of one's human nature with its grandeur and its limitations. Johnson (1997:29) expresses it this way:

Experience shows that the closer we become to God, then the more fully our own true selves we become, rather than less ourselves. As Karl Rahner challenges us to think, "Nearness to God and genuine human autonomy grow in direct and not inverse proportion." The more fully human one becomes, the more God is taking hold.

An example from the life of Gertrud [sic] of Helfta illustrates another aspect of the sense of personal integration, integration of one's affective life. She narrates her experience of receiving a wound of love from the crucified Christ. The result of his wound was an integration of her affective life. Gertrud says:

Suddenly you were there unexpectedly, opening a wound in my heart with these words: 'May all your emotions come together in this place; that is may the sum total of your delight, hope, joy, sorrow, fear and your other emotions be fixed firmly in my love' (Barratt 1991:113).

Theistic mystical experience does not eliminate human affectivity, but transforms it. Mystical experience does not diminish the capacity for human enjoyment nor does it ensure invulnerability to physical, intellectual, or moral frailty. However, it does have the potential to be an integrating influence in the human personality¹⁵⁹ by promoting an acceptance of life and an enhanced sense of reality, and a true perception of oneself. Varillon (2000:69) speaks of accepting the contingency of

¹⁵⁹ Union with God is not a merging with a universal principle, but a union with the divine that ensures likeness with God but not at the cost of one's own individual identity. "It is true, of course, that all mysticism leads to oneness or unity; but there is a union of love in which far from losing my personality I become my true self, hear myself called by name and cry out: 'Abba, Father!'. This is the experience in which I become the other while remaining myself" (Johnston 1990:183).

human beings and limitations as a way leading to true humility.¹⁶⁰ The daily acceptance of life's limits whether physical, intellectual, psychological, whether it is sadnesses, failures or insufficiencies, is the sign of true humility. It is also indicative of mystical experience.

To summarize, six indicators of theistic mystical union have been presented: differentiated unity; the perception of a personal and loving object; the presence of love as a motivating and energizing force; a new and intimate knowledge of God; inability to produce, intensify or preserve any experience of a mystical nature; and lastly, personal integration and acceptance of reality.

4.5.2 Phenomenological Analysis: Setting up a Framework

Phenomenological analysis of a text examines the text from the *within* the experience (Yandell 1993: 24). Using Husserl's phenomenological model, Pellauer (1983:140) notes three terms: the *object term*, that is, what is experienced; the *intentional term*--how something is intended or experienced, and the *subject term*, who or what does the experiencing. This model is consistent with and indicative of the complexity of any experience, religious experience included (Yandell 1993:141). As Pellauer sees it, the phenomenology of religious experience gives most clarity about the *intentional term*. This includes the perceiving, knowing, remembering of the agent, the effective aspect that includes moods, emotions, feelings of the subject, and the evaluative component.

In contrast to Pellauer, Guardini (1962:91) emphasizes the subject and the object. "That which feels the encounter with the reality is still the subject in its own concrete reality" (1962:91). Within this context, Guardini considers the object of any religious experience, "the Other" (Ibid.).

¹⁶⁰ «Le chemin qui conduit à cette humilité est l'expérience quotidienne de nos limites. Acceptons nos limites physiques, intellectuelles, psychiques, peut-être les plus douloureuses, nos échecs, nos insuffisances...» (Varillon 2000:70).

Angel (1983:34) posits that mystics either emphasise phenomenological reporting or doctrinal explanation, but not both. He compares Augustine and Teresa as follows:

In Augustine's **Confessions** there are phenomenological reports, and elsewhere, of course elaborate doctrinal concerns, but the mystical autobiography of the **Confessions** is spare and veiled. On the other hand, in St. Teresa's writings there are passages of autobiographical phenomenology, whereas it is the doctrinal side that is not concerned or original. Eckhart had much trouble defending his mystical doctrine against the accusation of heresy, and thus had a motive to refrain from explicit phenomenology, if he needed one (1983:33)

In a similar way, we see the difference between Teresa of Avila and Madeleine de Joseph. Teresa of Avila's phenomenological reportage is voluminous; Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's is less plentiful and much more reserved. Therefore, it is not difficult to isolate several passages from the writings of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph in order to study them more closely.

Before beginning an analysis of texts, it is useful to consider components that are part of a phenomenological analysis. Cox (1992:158-160) has developed a paradigmatic model for the comparative study of religion. While the components in this model are intended for use in comparing several religions, there are very useful features in the schema that can be employed in the analysis of texts from Madeleine de Saint-Joseph. Among the components that are foremost in a phenomenological analysis is the task of the observer to perform and maintain epochē.¹⁶¹

The next components include these outlined by Cox for the process:

1. Describing the phenomena: observe the actual practices of the adherents
2. Naming the phenomena: divides it into categories: myth, ritual, art, etc.

¹⁶¹ Cox defines epochē as “suspending pre-conceived or academic ideas about religion; performing empathetic interpolation: inserting what seems foreign or strange to observer into the observer’s experience in order to have a “feel for” what is outside the observer’s experience; maintaining epochē: suspending truth verdicts about what is derived from the phenomenon, perception of faith, truth of unrestricted value suspending pre-conceived notions” (1992:159).

3. Describing interrelationships and processes: list dynamic relationships and developments among the classifications of phenomena
4. Identifying beliefs: recording thoughts, ideas, opinions about the unrestricted value and cognitive meaning of manifestations derived from the phenomena (Cox 1992:159).¹⁶²

In the analysis of a mystical text, the issue of language must be addressed. Alston (1992:80-102) treats the issue of literal and non-literal language used in reporting mystical experience. His conclusion based on a study of texts from Suso and Teresa of Avila is that some terms can be used both literally and metaphorically. Alston emphasizes the importance of recognising the literal in reports of mystical experience “so as to free ourselves of the indiscriminating view that everything in such reports is to be understood analogically, metaphorically, or symbolically” (1992:100).

In studying the reportage of theistic mystical experience, Alston uses four questions to approach an analysis¹⁶³ of the text:

- 1) referring to mode of consciousness: what is it like to be directly aware of God?
- 2) referring to the subject’s conscious reactions: what is the subject’s affective state?
- 3) identification of object: what attributes or actions can be conceivably attributed to God?
- 4) specification as to how the object appeared to the subject: was God present as Being or Doing? (1992:87-88)

With the help of Cox’s framework and Alston’s questions on reportage of mystical experience, it is possible to examine several texts from Madeleine de Saint-Joseph, to

¹⁶² Cox presents six additional steps to be used in comparative analysis of religion: experiencing faith; defining the unrestricted value; affirming the sacred; constructing the paradigmatic model; achieving the eidetic intuition; testing the intuition (1992:159).

¹⁶³ Questions 1 and 2 deal with subjective side; 3 and 4 with the objective side.

describe the phenomena reported and to determine whether they exhibit characteristics of theistic mystical experience.

4.5.3 Presentation and Analysis of Selected Texts

Three texts will be analysed in this section. Two are taken from correspondence of Mère Madeleine and the third is taken from the *relations* found in Louise de Jésus (1935:118-123).

Text 1

The first text is from a letter addressed to Pierre de Bérulle, and was written sometime between 1621-23:

Nostre Seigneur m'a fait voir qu'il m'a mise dans l'estat de son immolation et que l'ame de Jesus Christ a sacrifié la mienne à la divinité par une nouvelle mort à soy mesme et à toutes le choses créées. Il me semble que mon ame est entrée en participation du sacrifice que l'ame de Jesus a fait d'elle mesme à Dieu et j'ay veu que sa tres grande bonté et misericorde vers moy il me donnoit part à sa resignation quand il dit: *Fiat voluntas tua..* J'ay veu aussy le delaissement qu'il a porté de la part de son Pere et, quoy que ce n'ait pas esté en sa totalité, il m'a semblé tres extreme ; es il a fait en moy une operation qui tend à une mort à tout choses.

Our Lord made me see that he put me into the state of his sacrifice and that the soul of Jesus Christ sacrificed mine to the divinity by a new death to self and to all created things. It seems to me that my soul entered into sharing the sacrifice that the soul of Jesus made to God, and I saw that in his great goodness and mercy towards me, he gave me a share in his surrender when he said: Your will be done. I also saw the abandonment that he experienced from his Father; and although my participation was not total, it seemed to me that it was very extreme. He has performed in me an act that tends to a death in all things.

In analyzing this text we make use of steps outlined by Cox (1992) and questions posed by Alston (1992). These are presented in table form:

Analysis: Text 1

1. Description of the phenomena	The phenomena is a letter which reports an interchange that seems to have taken place between the subject, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph and the object, our Lord (Jesus Christ).
2. Naming the phenomena	The mode of interchange that is described between the subject and the object is known as prayer.
3. Describing interrelationships and processes	The subject describes two dynamic relationships: that of the subject, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph with the object, our Lord; and that of the object, our Lord Jesus Christ, with his Father. There are four processes that are alluded to in this report. First, there is what is called the sacrifice of the soul of Jesus Christ to the divinity. There is the sharing of the subject's soul in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. There is the surrender to the Father by Jesus Christ. There is the "new death to self and to all created things" that the subject reports have occurred within her soul.
4. Identifying beliefs	First, the subject believes that there is a person, Jesus Christ who has sacrificed himself. Second, the subject believes that she her soul has participated in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to God and that it has been sacrificed to the divinity through Jesus Christ. Third, she believes that by sharing in the surrender of Jesus Christ something has happened in her soul that means a death to all created things.
5. What is it like to be directly aware of God?	The subject says that she <i>sees that our Lord put her in a state of sacrifice</i> . The subject perceives, or understands in a type of intellectual vision the status of her soul in relation to that of Jesus Christ's sacrifice.

6. What is the subject's affective state?	The subject does not describe how she feels except to say that she gain <i>has seen</i> God's great goodness and mercy toward her.
7. What attributes or actions of God can be attributed to God?	God is described as having <i>grande bonté and misericorde</i> towards her. Jesus Christ is described as having surrendered and said, <i>Fiat voluntas tua</i> .
8. How is God present in this phenomenon, as Being or as Doing?	Jesus Christ was present as 1) placing the soul of the subject in a state of sacrifice or immolation 2) the soul of Jesus Christ sacrificed the subject's soul to the divinity 3) God was present as good and merciful to the subject.

Presence of Theistic Indicators of Mystical Experience

1. Differentiated unity

First, there is evidence of differentiated unity because there is a named subject and a named object. Secondly, the subject identifies her *self*, her *soul*, and the *soul* of Jesus Christ. Although her soul shares in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the subject does not merge with Jesus Christ, but retains her own soul.

2. Perception of a personal and loving object

Jesus Christ is described as a personal and loving object. Madeleine experiences God's goodness and mercy toward her.

3. Love as a motivating force

There is no specific reference to in this text.

4. New and intimate knowledge of God

The subject receives insights into the relationship of Jesus Christ in his humanity to the divinity of God. She understands something about the sacrifice of Jesus Christ

and that her soul has been sacrificed in his to the divinity. She understands something about the surrender and abandonment Jesus Christ when he says, “Your will be done.” She experienced his abandonment by the Father, but not in its totality. She realizes that God has brought her to a new relationship with created things. She is “dead” to them.

5. Inability to produce the experience

The presence of the fifth indicator is implicit in the experience by the passive experience of the subject. “Our Lord ...put me in a state of his sacrifice...”

6. Personal integration and acceptance of reality

The subject has a new sense of her relationship to created things. She has a new sense of her alignment vis-à-vis Jesus Christ and his sacrifice to God. Her reality is now changed and she shares in his sacrifice and surrender. She also becomes aware of the goodness, kindness, and mercy of God toward her.

Theological Reflection on the Text

Madeleine de Saint-Joseph describes her experience and perception of herself as sharing in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to the divinity and of her soul being sacrificed or offered with that of Jesus to the Father. She gains experimental knowledge of the activities of the persons within the economic Trinity—the way that Jesus Christ relates in his humanity to the divinity. She enters into a sense of the mystery of Christ’s sacrificial death, experiencing to some degree his abandonment and surrender.

In the report of her experience, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph says that our Lord has “placed her into the state of his sacrifice” (*dans l’état de son immolation*). For Bérulle, adoration of God is accomplished through a personal adherence to Jesus Christ in his mysteries. “Through adherence, adoration becomes no longer a series of discrete moments, but a state (*état*), no longer a succession of acts, but a constancy

of being in a depth of adherence that can only be effected by God” (Buckley 1990:52). Detachment or “death to all created things” is a radical gesture that is complemented by an equally radical attachment or adherence to Christ in his mysteries. Death to all that is created inaugurates a new and intimate union with Christ. This union is characterised by a participation in the state of Christ’s own consciousness¹⁶⁴ and self-offering. Generally, it is an intimate experience of the Trinity. (Detachment and adherence are treated in more detail in chapter five.)

Text 2

The next text is taken from a letter to Bérulle, who was Mère Madeleine’s spiritual director. It is dated 1624. At this time Madeleine de Saint-Joseph would have been about forty-six years of age. Sérout’s text of Letter 23 (1965:34) is taken from Père Gibiefuf’s (1645) biography of Mère Madeleine:

Je voy que Dieu attire mon ame à quelque chose d’amour, et cela je le voy fort puissant, et de toute autre façon que je ne puis exprimer. Je voy aussy que c’est la fi à laquelle tend ce qui est de la volonté de Dieu sur mon ame. Je sens grande devotion à l’amour que Jesus Christ porte à son Pere. Il y a plusieurs choses qui se passent en mon ame sur ce sujet et plusieurs autres que je n’ay pas facilité de dire. Je vous supplie de me donner à la Vierge pour me conduire en tout.¹⁶⁵

I see that God draws my soul to something of love and I see that very powerfully and in such a manner that I cannot express. I also see that it is the end to which it tends to what is the will of God for my soul. I experience a great devotion to the love that Jesus Christ bears

¹⁶⁴ « Nostre Seigneur JESUS CHRIST me fait connoître qu’il me lie à l’amour qu’il porte à son Pere » *Our Lord made me aware that he binds me to the love that he bears for his Father.* Letter 23. Sérout (1965: 34)

¹⁶⁵ Père Talon’s text, a later version and possibly less reliable (1670), reads as follows: Dieu m’a fait voir qu’il attire mon âme dans une grande participation de son amour, que c’est la fin où tend sa divine volonté sur moy, & qu’estant efficace elle fait des operations en mon âme, conformes à la grandeur de son conseil. Je le voy & je le sens d’une maniere si puissante qu je ne la puis exprimer. Nostre Seigneur JESUS CHRIST me fait connoître qu’il me lie à l’amour qu’il porte à son Pere. Il y a plusieurs choses qui se passent en mon âme sur ce sujet, lesquelles je ne puis dire, n’ayant point de termes propres pour les expliquer. Je vous supplie de me donner à la Vierge pour me conduire en tout (Sérout 1965 :34)

toward his Father. There are several things that occurred in my soul on this subject and many others that I cannot easily speak about. I ask you to give me to the Virgin so that she may guide me in all things.

Analysis: Text 2

1. Description of the phenomena	A letter from the subject, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph, about an experience that took place between her as subject and God as object.
2. Naming the phenomena	The phenomenon is an experience of God's love attracting the soul toward God by a powerful love.
3. Describing interrelationships and processes	The relationships within the experience are: the subject and God; Jesus Christ and His Father; the Virgin Mary to whom the subject is to be entrusted for guidance by the recipient of the letter.
4. Identifying beliefs	It is the nature of God to attract with love. Jesus Christ is greatly devoted to His Father. It is possible to experience that devotion. There are several other things about the relationship with God that the subject experiences, but they cannot be expressed verbally or in writing.
5. What is it like to be directly aware of God?	The subject is aware of something like love that is attracting her. She feels devotion to Jesus' love for the Father.
6. What is the subject's affective state?	The subject does not describe her affective state. She only mentions her inability to speak about what she has experienced.
7. What attributes or actions of God can be attributed to God?	God's first action is to attract the soul of the subject by powerful love. The attribute of God loving God's self in the Trinity is expressed by subject's perception of Jesus Christ's love for the Father.
8. How is God present in this phenomenon, as Being or as Doing?	In the first part of the extract, God is present as Doing, i.e. drawing the soul. In the second part, God is present as receiving devotion of Jesus Christ.

Presence of Theistic Indicators of Mystical Experience

1. Differentiated unity

The extract indicates that the subject, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph, is separate from the object, God.

2. Perception of a personal and loving object

God is perceived as attracting her soul with love.

3. Love as a motivating force

The subject experiences the attraction of God's love. The subject also feels great devotion of the love of Jesus for the Father.

4. New and intimate knowledge of God

It seems that the subject has so much new knowledge that it can hardly be expressed in words. One particular new insight is the intensity of the love that Jesus Christ has for his Father.

5. Inability to produce the experience

The passivity of the subject is implied in the report where she says that she was "drawn".

6. Personal integration and acceptance of reality

It appears from the text that this experience is not personally integrating by the nature of its power and by the fact that its effects render the subject unable to express herself. She asks the recipient of her letter to entrust her to the care of the Virgin to guide her. This indicates a possible sense of inadequacy, insecurity, or confusion as a result of the experience.

Theological Reflection

“If the light of the sun is a mind-stunning darkness, so is the reality of the divine, language-defeating silence” (Turner 1995:23). In this extract there is a clear example of an ineffability claim. However, the reason for Mère Madeleine’s silence is not disclosed.

The experience of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph is a profound one of being drawn to God by love. “No one can come to me unless the Father draw them” (John 6:44). As in the previous extract, Madeleine de Saint Joseph experiences something of the love which Jesus Christ bears toward the Father. Madeleine de Saint-Joseph is invited to enter into the reality of Jesus’ relationship with God the Father. She encounters Jesus as human being and God who, as Rahner says “can pray, adore, be obedient, feel in a creaturely way to the point of abandonment by God, can weep, receive the wonderful gift of ‘being heard’, experience the claims of God’s will upon him as something authoritative and alien’ and so on,” (1965:73). She is drawn to God’s love and she enters into the love of the Father and the Son through the humanity of Jesus Christ.

Text 3

The last text to be analysed forms one of the collection of texts in *Les Petites Papiers* that supposedly were written by Madeleine de Saint-Joseph during the years of her first term as prioress at the *Grand Couvent* 1608-1615 (Louise de Jésus 1935: 118-123).

Les opérations de Dieu en mon âme sont si intimes, et l’amour au moins ce que j’appelle ainsi—et si secret, que je dis quelquefois : Amour, vu que vous êtes si puissant, comment opérez-vous avec si peu de bruit ? Comment êtes-vous si cache ? Comment est-ce qu’on ne vous peut nommer, sinon que vous-même formiez dans l’âme ce nom d’amour, sans qu’elle ait autre connaissance ? Mais il la laisse bien peu parler, parce qu’il faut qu’elle meure. Et il semble que sans cesse mon âme ne fasse autre chose, et que tout me serve à cela, c’est-à-dire à mourir. C’est pourquoi, quand j’entends dire qu’on est consolé ou qu’on affectionne quelque créature, je pense : Hélas ! comment se pourrait-il faire ? Les bons et les mauvais doivent tous

mourir en moi. Comment pourrait mon âme rechercher ce qu'il lui faut à l'heure même perdre ? Mais Dieu, pour maintenant, a soin de m'en donner l'usage nécessaire. Et lorsqu'il me vient la vue de quelque besoin de communication, je le laisse à Dieu, ne m'en changeant la mémoire ni la pensée, mais je me souvient seulement qu'un *seule chose est nécessaire*.

The actions of God in my soul are so intimate and the love, at least that is what I call it, is so secret that I sometimes say, Love, considering that you are so powerful, how do you work with so little noise ? How are you so hidden? How is it that you cannot be named except that you yourself form within the soul the name of love, without her¹⁶⁶ knowing it. But it allows me little to say because it is necessary that she die. It seems that without ceasing my soul does nothing else and that all serves to that end—which is to die. It is because of this that when I hear of consolation or affection from some creature, I think: Alas! How can it be possible? The good and the bad ought all to die in me. How can my soul continue seeking for what it needs to lose at almost the same time? But God, for now, takes care to give me the necessary experience. And when some need of communication comes in view, I leave it to God, changing neither memory nor thought of it, but remembering that only one thing is necessary...

Analysis: Text 3

1. Description of the phenomena	The subject describes the way she experiences her soul after an encounter with the love of God. She perceives God's presence as hidden and yet active in her soul.
2. Naming the phenomenon.	The subject is engaged reflecting on her experience as well as dialoguing with God whom she refers to as Love.
3. Describing interrelationships and processes	The subject is engaged with her own consciousness, and with God whom she refers to as Love.
4. Identifying beliefs	The subject believes that God is active within her soul in a secret, hidden way. She believes that God is transcendent ("unnamable"). Quoting Luke 10:42,

¹⁶⁶ *her*: referent seems to be the "soul".

	the subject believes that "there is only one thing necessary".
5. What is it like to be directly aware of God?	The subject seems to be aware of God's absence: "Love, considering that you are so powerful, how can you work with so little noise?"
6. What is the subject's affective state?	The subject cannot verbalize feelings, but expresses her perception of herself through the use of a metaphor. She feels love, but unworthy. There is no sense of being depressed by this but rather a sense of how could I be loved so unconditionally?
7. What attributes or actions of God can be attributed to God?	God is unnamable. God is hidden. God is pure love. God is purity.
8. How is God present in this phenomenon, as Being or as Doing?	The subject perceives God as not doing, e.g. so quiet, so hidden. The subject perceives God as Being an essence of pure love.

Presence of Theistic Indicators of Mystical Experience

1. Differentiated unity

What God is, what the subject is not.

2. Perception of a personal and loving object

God is perceived as love, powerful, hidden.

3. Love as a motivating force

The subject perceives God's love is secret, but real.

4. New and intimate knowledge of God

The subject believes, that contrary to what she senses, God is present and active within her soul. She experiences a paradox: How can my soul continue seeking what it needs to lose? (She realises she needs to stop seeking created things.)

5. Inability to produce the experience

This is not mentioned.

6. Personal integration and acceptance of reality

The presence of love in her life, despite God's seeming silence, is very real for the subject.

Theological Reflection

The subject, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph, is describing an experience of the dark contemplation which John of the Cross calls "mystical theology" (*Dark Night*, II, 17, 2. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991:436). "The contemplation is called 'secret' not only because of one's inability to understand but also because of the effects it produces in the soul...the wisdom of love". Despite the darkness of her contemplation, the subject is also experiencing a sense of being loved in a most profound way. Of this experience, Rahner writes: "The experience of personal *love* and encounter, suddenly noticed, startled and blessed in this both at once, the fact that he [she] has been accepted with a love which is absolute and unconditional even through, when he [she] considers him/herself alone in his/her finitude and frailty, he/she can assign no reason whatever, find no adequate justification, for this unconditional love that reaches out to him/her from the other side" (1973:157-158). Madeleine de Saint-Joseph describes her discovery of an elusive, but altogether engaging God of love.

4.6 Summary and Conclusions

Based on the analysis of the three texts, it is evident that in all cases a majority of the theistic indicators of mystical experience were present in the narratives chosen for analysis. The passages indicate a low level of articulation of subjective feeling.

However, there is inferred in the passages what could be described as a sense of awe and unworthiness. In one instance, text number 2, Mère Madeleine expresses her inability and/or unwillingness to explain what she had experienced. This form of silence or ineffability is also a linguistic response to the phenomenon, but it is not possible to explain why she chooses silence.

From a theological standpoint, the content of the three texts indicates a level of familiarity with the role of Jesus Christ in the redemption, of his relationship of love with the Father, of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's sharing in that relationship by virtue of God's love for her. She experienced both a sense of God's transcendence and of God's immanence.

The work of this chapter has been to establish that Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was a true mystic and that her voice is an authentic one. What Letters 13 and 23 and the passages from *Les Petits Papiers* reveal is someone who experienced the love between the Father and the Son. Madeleine de Saint-Joseph felt the love of Jesus for the Father. She experienced a sense of God's absence, and she had several visionary experiences of Saint Mary Magdalen.

Through an exposé of the context and content of Mère Madeleine's mystical experience, the sources of her faith became evident: the sacraments of the church, meditation upon the Word of God, contemplation of Christ in the mysteries of his life on earth, and adoration of the Son of God present in the Blessed Eucharist.

The point of entry for Madeleine de Saint-Joseph is always Jesus, who is the way to God. A literary analysis of some of her writings bears witness to her mystical experience, but it also indicates her ability to offer instruction and to guide the spiritual practices of others. As Cistercian monk Pennington writes: "There is the absolute centrality of Christ....there is no contemplation for those who are, by their own fault, divided from Christ" (1996:21).

Although there is a glaring absence of bridal imagery (only one reference in *Les Petits Papiers*, Louise de Jésus 1935:120), the reality of what she experienced of the inner life of the Trinity gives evidence of profound spiritual union as the writings of John of the Cross attest.

The exercise of selecting criteria for theistic mystical experience and then analysing texts according to a phenomenological framework was a valuable one. The questions in the framework provide information about both subject and object. They objectify elements of the phenomena and make it easier to look at different aspects of the narrated experience. The issue of "death to all things" emerges from the analysis as a radical and self-negating concept, but it is seen in relation to an ongoing and life-giving relationship to God in Jesus Christ. I found the framework a helpful one. It allows for comparison and I think the exercise showed that according to the six indicators of theistic mystical experience, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph could easily be considered a mystic.

Chapter 5

MADELEINE DE SAINT-JOSEPH: SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS

5.1 Introduction

Throughout her life as a Carmelite, Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was engaged in offering spiritual teaching. Whether it was during her time as a novice directress or prioress, in her contacts with clergy and laypersons that came to the convent parlour, or through her correspondence and other writings; Madeleine de Saint-Joseph imparted clear and valuable spiritual insights.

Her spiritual teachings were shaped by a number of factors: her family,¹⁶⁷ her early religious experiences, her encounter with the spirituality of Madame Acarie, her first years as a religious in the presence of Anne of Jesus,¹⁶⁸ one of Teresa of Avila's foremost protégées; and her association with Pierre de Bérulle as spiritual director and one of the order's three ecclesiastical superiors. In the world outside the monastery, other factors affected the *milieu* in which the young Carmelite lived: the strained relations between France and Spain, the religious conflicts in France between the Huguenots and the Catholics,¹⁶⁹ intrigues in the French court between

¹⁶⁷ Mère Madeleine's father Antoine du Bois de Fontaines, a pious widower, was inconsolable at the loss of his daughter to the Carmelite convent. Subsequently, he entered Bérulle's Congregation of the Oratory and was ordained priest in 1605. He was involved in finding a house for the Carmelites in Tours in 1608, but his efforts were flawed and unsuccessful. Unfortunately his indiscretions caused much trouble for the Carmelites, Anne of St. Bartholomew, and for his own daughter as well (Morgain 1995:203). Some time after that he became confessor for Blessed Marie de l'Incarnation (Madame Acarie) at the Carmelite monastery in Pontoise (Poulain 1910:172).

¹⁶⁸ Morgain (1995 :156) writes of Anne de Jésus Lobera: « La Mère Thérèse la dirige, la former, l'entraîne dans les profondeurs de la vie contemplative. Jean de la Croix lui dédiera son *Cantique spirituel*. Anne de Jésus connaît les intuitions de Thérèse, elles les intègre, les fait siennes, les incarne en quelque sorte ».

¹⁶⁹ The spread of Calvinism, and with it the horror of the religious wars, was a tremendous sadness for Madeleine: "How many innocent people are slaughtered, devoured like dogs and wolves, how many souls are damned, how many churches are razed, and how many other disasters..." until there is peace in the church (Letter 98.1965:94). In one of the earliest letters in Sérouet's collection, records Mère Madeleine's upset at her aunt, Marie du Bois de

Marie de Medici and Cardinal Richelieu which ended in the imprisonment and subsequent death of Michel de Marillac, the situation of clerical and religious life in France, the propagation of Illuminism (Alumbrados)¹⁷⁰ in Spain and its subsequent spread; and finally, the on-going influence of counter-reformation measures taken by church authorities—the Inquisition in Spain, and the Council of Trent.

Section 5.2 presents formative religious experiences in the life of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph. Section 5.3 explores some key aspects of Mère Madeleine's spirituality by a close examination of her letters. Section 5.4 addresses her counsels on the topic of spiritual guidance and discernment. Section 5.5 introduces some facets of Mère Madeleine's teachings on prayer.

5.2 Formative Religious Experiences in Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's Life

“A Christian mystic,” writes Underhill (1975:10) “is one for whom God and Christ are not merely objects of belief, but living facts experimentally known at first-hand; and mysticism for [her] becomes, in so far as [she] responds to its demands, a life based on this conscious communion with God.” This was surely the case for Madeleine du Bois de Fontaines. Experiences throughout her life testify to her conscious communion with God. From childhood, adolescence, and into young

la Follaine's conversion to Calvinism. She asks how her aunt could forsake her membership in the true and ancient church of Jesus Christ. Madeleine asks if she has chosen this “false religion” because of social class or status (Huguenots were involved in business and became a wealthy class of merchants). Knowing the weakness of human nature and the malice of the enemy (the devil), Madeleine tells her aunt how much she desires “de vous oir rentrée dans la bergerie de Jesus Christ et de voir le ciel mener joye pour vostre ame retrouvée” (Letter 1. Sérouet 1965:15).

¹⁷⁰ “...we can discern among most devout people in this period a pervasive feeling that a life of contemplation was the only path to Christian perfection. If for many the contemplative life did offer an environment for heeding a genuine call of the Spirit, it also provided a pretext for ‘mystical’ heresy. The Spanish Inquisition, then at the height of its power, was continually hunting suspected adherents of a doctrine known as Illuminism. The Illuminata (or Alumbrados) propagated views similar to those of the Brethren of the Free Spirit: the impeccability of the person who has left behind the evil things of earth and achieved mystical union, and his independence of all authority except that which comes through his own private illumination by God (Gannon and Traub 1969:231).

adulthood, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was clearly gifted in prayer and in a sense of personal relatedness to God.

Entry into the religious life brought Madeleine du Bois de Fontaines into contact with Madame Acarie in an initial orientation period at Sainte-Geneviève. After their arrival in France in October 1604, the Spanish Carmelite foundresses assumed the work of training their young candidates. To those who observed her, Madeleine du Bois de Fontaines was reserved, humble and clearly a leader. She was generous, faithful and convinced of her vocation—so much so that she made a vow never to leave her choice of lifestyle or to deviate from her desire to attain spiritual perfection (Louise de Jésus 1935:80).

Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was no beginner in the practice of prayer. Long before her entry into Carmel, she engaged in prayer and meditation and was in all likelihood a prime candidate to experience the trials of one who is considered proficient. During the year of noviciate training, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph experienced the contrary movements of desolation and consolation with some vehemence.¹⁷¹ Her experience of desolation comprised aridity in prayer, an overwhelming sense of inner oppression, and torment from evil spirits. A deposition by Marie de Jésus recounts a time when Madeleine de Saint-Joseph experienced a severe spiritual attack when demons in hideous forms surrounded her while she was trying to sleep. Though frightened, she recovered and offered herself generously to God to endure all that he would permit the evil spirits to do to her. Immediately, those spirits fled and ever

¹⁷¹ Spiritual warfare is a phenomenon that takes its origins from the temptations and struggles of Christ with Satan as recorded in the gospels. Desert fathers such as Anthony of Egypt record experiences in which they apprehended and struggled with evil spirits who tempted and frightened them with extreme ferocity (*Life of St. Anthony* quoted in Keating 1995:80). Diadochus of Photike describes diabolical apparitions in contrast to dreams full of light and peace: “Dreams appearing to the soul in the love of God are sure signs of a healthy soul. They do not skip lightly from one image to another. They do not alarm the senses....They fill the soul with spiritual happiness. Even after awakening, the soul seeks with an ardent desire the joy of the dream. Diabolical apparitions behave in contrary fashion. They change rapidly...they speak loudly, utter great threats, overwhelm the soul with their cries. Then the spirit, if it has been purified, recognizes them and awakens the body...It may happen that good dreams do not bring joy to the soul but cause it sadness and tears without pain. That is the case with those who are making great progress in humility” (quoted in Clément 1995:169).

after she felt a great strength against them (Louise de Jésus 1935:80). "The genuine Christian mystic will certainly have to do battle with the evil spirits in his [her] mystical ascent," writes Egan (1984:251). This was true in Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's case.

Perhaps a more disturbing trial came from the interior desolation that she felt in prayer: « Il me semble, disait-elle une fois à Marie de Jésus, que Dieu a mis mon âme entre le ciel et la terre, et qu'il m'a détachée de toutes choses, ce qui me cause une extrême dureté de vie » *It seemed to me, she said one time to Marie de Jésus, that God had placed my soul between heaven and earth, and that he has detached me from all things.* (Louise de Jésus 1935: 84). According to depositions, there was a further deepening of the abyss. In one instant God had turned toward Madeleine de Saint-Joseph and opened a way in which she would lose herself in God and would experience an inner death to all desire. She was being reduced to ashes, in a state of death and nothingness into which God had invited her to enter within her own soul. However, in this state of "anéantissement et de mort" she also experienced tremendous light, peace and sweetness something like the grace of transforming union described in the seventh mansion of the *Interior Castle*.¹⁷²

Near the end of her novitiate, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was examined by her superiors and found ready to profess vows. During a retreat to prepare for vows, she was completely absorbed in God. The Spirit's activity within her was so intense that physically she could hardly endure it (Louise de Jésus 1935:87). Admitted to profession on the feast of St. Martin of Tours, on the twelfth of November 1605, Madeleine de Saint Joseph received the black veil of a professed Carmelite nun.

A few months later, on the second of February--the Feast of the Purification of our Lady, when vows were customarily renewed, Madeleine wanted to imitate St. Teresa and make a vow to choose always the more perfect. She was tempted under the

¹⁷² Teresa of Avila (*Interior Castle*, VII:2) says that the union of the soul with God in this mansion is sublime. The Lord appears in the centre of the soul not in an imaginative vision, but an intellectual one, quite delicate. God enters not through the senses and faculties, but secretly in the very interior of the soul (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1980:433).

aspect of the good in an example of what Ignatius calls “afterglow” of consolation. In this case, the impulse comes at a time when the person is still feeling the effects of the consolation of God. Ignatius advises in Rule 336 that certain resolutions that one wishes to take may come from the person themselves, or the good or evil spirit. The consequences of these fervent desires or resolutions must be carefully examined before action is undertaken (Puhl 1951:150). Bérulle assisted the newly professed to become more discerning about the origin of interior movements¹⁷³ and she was advised against making this additional vow.

Throughout her novitiate experience Madeleine de Saint Joseph experienced the alternations of consolation and desolation. However, it is important to point out that some forms of desolation actually promote a deepening of faith, hope and love. Withstanding the temptations and attacks of the evil spirit, Madeleine grew in faith, hope and love. Other good effects include a growth in genuine humility and a conviction that one is powerless to produce any good works apart from the grace of God. Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was able to offer herself freely and generously to God and to experience great joy, light and peace as a result of God’s consoling love.

Her experiences of consolation and desolation and the help she received to discern the movement of spirits would stand Madeleine de Saint-Joseph in good stead as she took responsibility for the formation of the French Carmelite novices soon after her own profession of vows.

5.3 Madeleine de Saint-Joseph: Teacher of Prayer

In many ways, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph can be considered a *guru*,¹⁷⁴ a true teacher of prayer and meditation. She taught, assisted those who called upon her, and also

¹⁷³ In discerning his vocation—whether or not to become a religious priest or to remain as a secular priest, Pierre de Bérulle engaged in the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius, the 30-day retreat at Verdun in 1602. During this time, he would have become familiar with the rules for discernment (Dupuy 1964:11).

¹⁷⁴ Speaking about the *guru*, Staals (1975:143) writes: “It is unlikely that meditation can be properly learned without what most traditional mystics consider essential: the guidance of a competent teacher”.

perseveringly practiced the art and discipline of prayer and meditation. The goal of prayer and meditation is for Madeleine a loving union with Jesus Christ. Mère Madeleine writes: "Prayer is a communication of the soul with God, ...what St. Paul calls, *The fellowship of Christians in heaven* (Phil. 3:20) whose treasure, which is our Lord Jesus Christ, is in heaven" (Letter 147. Thompson 1989:204).

What emerges primarily from the extant letters of Mère Madeleine is her formative instruction to Carmelite nuns. In their life of total dedication, so newly introduced to France, the Carmelite women needed strong and positive tutoring in the development of their interior life of prayer and dedication. She drew on the teachings of Holy Mother Teresa, the instructions of the Spanish foundresses, the guidance of Pierre de Bérulle,¹⁷⁵ and on her own authentic religious experience. Morgain (1987:23) writes in *Vivre Flammes* that Mère Madeleine combined two great insights into Christ. She borrowed from Saint Teresa the idea of Christ as friend and companion, and from Bérulle the idea of Christ adoring the Father.

Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph centered her spiritual instruction on themes related to prayer: humility and *l'anéantissement* (human nothingness before the grandeur of God); detachment and adherence; adoration and love, and the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ. Morgain (1987) ably shows the Berullian influence on Madeleine de Saint-Joseph with regard to her expression of the concepts of adoration, l'adhérence (adherence), and *l'anéantissement*.

5.3.1 Teachings on Prayer: Who We Are and How to Address God

Mère Madeleine's teachings on prayer can be understood by looking at her understanding of human nature. Madeleine de Saint-Joseph has a very highly developed sense of her creaturely unworthiness. Certainly, the theology of the times held a pessimistic view of human nature (Delville 1994:4). Mère Madeleine herself

¹⁷⁵ Bérulle was one of three ecclesiastical superiors of the Carmelite women. He was also Mère Madeleine's spiritual director for some period in her life.

often spoke about the sordidness of human nature. Advising one of her sisters, Madeleine said they must submit to the captivity of this life and its trials, for they are “*enfants d’Adam et d’iniquité, qui ne doivent ester nourris que de viands ameres et à qui toutes choses doivent ester dures pour estre proportionnées à la dureté du peché et des pecheurs, du nombre desquels nous sommes...*” *for they are children of Adam and of sin, who ought to be nourished only on bitter meat and all things ought to be hard for them in proportion to the duration of their sin and sinners the number among whom we are.* (Letter 162. Sérouet 1965: 170).

On another occasion, she spoke realistically and yet hopefully, about the human condition : “*Maintenant nous voyons les choses dans l’obscurité et selon la bassesse où nous vivons ; mais un jour viendra que nos yeux seront éclairés et rendus capables de voir les choses invisibles de Dieu dans leur vérité et dans leur grandeur* » *Now we see things in darkness and according to the baseness of where we live, but the day will come when our eyes will be clear and rendered capable of seeing the invisible things of God in their truth and their greatness.* (Letter 163. Sérouet 1965:162).

In another letter, Mère Madeleine expresses her hopes that one of her Carmelite sisters would experience herself « *une nouvelle créature en luy ; que vous receviés en vous les effets que son cœur sacré y veut opérer ; qu’il vous regarde de l’œil de son amour, qu’il vous donne courage et qu’il soulage votre bannissement en cette vie de larmes et de tribulations* » *a new creature in him, who welcomes you and in you wants to work the results of his sacred heart; he who looks at you with the eye of his love; that he gives you courage and that he relieves you of your banishment in this life of tears and of trials* (Letter 137. Sérouet 1965 :132). For Madeleine, prayer comes from a person who is not only a child of Adam and a sinner from birth, but one who is also a potentially new creature in Christ and who is looked upon by a glance of his love.

With this anthropological and theological viewpoint in mind, it is clear to see why Madeleine de Saint-Joseph places great emphasis reverencing the greatness of God, especially as prayer is begun. She writes:

La première partie, que est la préparation, est, comme chacun sait, pour se mettre en la présence de Dieu ; et il leur faut beaucoup parler du grand respect, de la grande révérence et du profond abaissement dans lequel elles doivent être en la présence de Celui devant qui les anges tremblent....Il leur faut enseigner qu'elles doivent bien se souvenir de traiter toujours avec Dieu dans une humilité la plus profond...qu'elles doivent se regarder comme un néant devant Celui qui est par essence la grandeur infinie, et comme des pécheresses devant Celui qui est la sainteté même (Madeleine de Saint-Joseph 1949 :11-12).

The first part [of prayer], which is preparation, as each one knows, is to put oneself in the presence of God. They [novice mistresses] must speak much of the great respect, and great reverence and deep abasement they [novices] should have in the presence of him before whom the angels tremble. ...It is important to teach them [novices] that they ought to remember always to deal with God in very deep humility, and to look upon themselves as mere nothing before him who by his essence is infinite greatness, and as sinners before him who is holiness itself.

In this text, Madeleine refers to *néant* before God. This term is actually connotative of more than “nothingness”. It appears in the theological writings of Bérulle and forms an integral part of his spirituality. According to Buckley (1990:49), *anéatissement* is the recognition in faith of the grandeur that God is. It includes the surrender of oneself to the greatness of God. In fact, *anéatissement* is personified in the Virgin Mary’s acclamation of praise: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord...he has looked upon his servant in her nothingness” (Luke 1:48). It is in prayer where the attitude of *l’anéantissement* is important. One does not approach God in prayer in order to receive favours or lights. One comes to prayer in an attitude of humility--aware of personal “nothingness” before the goodness and greatness of God. It is the entire acceptance and acknowledgement of our nothingness before God, Madeleine writes, that allows us to adore God in the

experience of our nothingness and to offer homage to the self-emptying of Jesus Christ for us¹⁷⁶ (Letter 157. Sérouet 1965:167) John of the Cross writes:

The more individuals desire darkness and annihilation of themselves regarding all visions, exteriorly and interiorly receivable, the greater will be the infusion of faith and consequently of love and hope, since these three theological virtues increase together (*Ascent of Mount Carmel* II, 24, 8. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991:243).

For Mère Madeleine, *l'anéantissement*, sometimes rendered *annihilation* is before all else, a preparation for prayer (Morgain 1987:124). In prayer one exercises the virtues of faith, hope, and love as she/he seeks to adhere to God. For Bérulle, *l'anéatissement* is the expression of interior abnegation. However, as Morgain points out (1987:124), Mère Madeleine never speaks about abnegation, but about *l'anéantissement*. It is inextricably linked to humility.

5.3.2 Humility

In a beautifully constructed hymn in praise of the humble soul, Mère Madeleine extols the virtues of humility to a Carmelite nun. Relating humility with *l'anéatissement*, Mère Madeleine writes:

Dans l'humilité vous trouverez repos. Dans l'humilité vous trouverez Dieu. Dans l'humilité tout est compris. L'humilité porte annéantissement de tout. Soyez humble à tout moment, c'est à dire : soyez neant à tous moment. L'ame humble n'a point de raisons, l'ame humble n'a point de volonté, l'ame humble n'a point de propre jugement...l'ame humble se voit indigne des graces de Dieu, mais est disireuse de Dieu mesme et mediante continuellement des ses misericordes, l'ame humble se plait aux abaissements, l'ame humble attire Dieu à elle, l'ame humble est tousjours courageuse et desireuse de Nostre Seigneur Jesus Christ, en qui elle mest toute sa confidence...(Letter 195. Sérouet 1965:199-200).

¹⁷⁶ « ...portés humblement et acceptés entièrement l'expérience et l'aveu de votre néant devant Dieu...appliqués la toute à Dieu pour l'adorer en l'expérience de votre néant et pour y être entièrement réduite et rendre ainsy hommage à l'anéantissement de Jésus christ pour nous » (Letter 157. Sérouet 1965 :167).

In humility you will find repose. In humility you will find God. In humility all is included. Humility inclines to nothingness in all things. Be humble at every moment. That is to say: Be nothing at every moment. The humble soul does not have reason. The humble soul does not have a will. The humble soul does not have her/his own judgement....The humble soul sees itself unworthy of the graces of God, but is desirous of God himself and the continual mediation of his [sic] mercies. The humble soul is pleased with abasements. The humble soul attracts God to herself. The humble soul is ever courageous and eager for our Lord Jesus Christ in whom she places all her confidence.

Much of what Mère Madeleine writes in this letter would hardly be acceptable today. People are encouraged to appreciate their gifts of intellect and judgement, and to use their will to choose the good. However, the repetition of the expression *L'ame humble* with each of the faculties of the mind is possibly one way of emphasising the necessity of letting go of all the hindrances to assuming a posture of profound reverence and respect before the majesty and mercy of God.

In quite a different style, Teresa of Avila speaks of humility as one of the indispensable virtues for growth in prayer. In *Way of Perfection* (17.1. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1980:99), Teresa of Avila discusses the importance of humility:

Prepare yourself so that God may lead you along this path if He so desires. When He doesn't, you can practice humility, which is to consider yourself lucky to serve the servants of the Lord and praise His Majesty because He brought you among them and drew you away from the devils in hell where you deserved to be a slave of these devils.

In very strong terms, Teresa establishes the truth of who we are before God. But as Teresa also says, humility is a sure way to get anything from the Lord:

...humility! Humility! By this means the Lord allows Himself to be conquered with regard to anything we want from Him. The first sign for seeing whether or not you have humility is that you do not think you deserve these favors and spiritual delights from the Lord or that

you will receive them in your lifetime (*Interior Castle* IV:2, 9. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1980:326).

Mère Madeleine counseled her daughters to pray for the gift of humility, for *the humble soul attracts God to itself* (Letter 195. Sérout 1965:200). Madeleine experienced humiliations and abasement at prayer. However, these humiliations surprisingly gave her great joy:

Je sense un extrême joie qu'on m'abaisse par toutes sortes d'humiliations et d'abaissements, et j'ai grand dévotion à un passage des *Cantiques* qui dit : *Si tu te méconnaiss, ô très belle, va paître tes troupeaux*, c'est-à-dire retourne à ta première condition, à la connaissance de toi-même, à la vue de tes misères et du peu que tu es devant Dieu.

I feel an extreme joy when all sorts of humiliations and abasements humble me, and I have great devotion to a passage from the Song which says, if you would refuse to recognise yourself, O beautiful one, graze the flocks. That is to say, return to your original condition, to the knowledge of yourself, to the sight of your miseries and of your smallness before God. (Louise de Jésus 1935:120).

In Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's spiritual sense, the weight of her sinfulness is a constant pull on her. She expresses the experience of those who encounter the transcendence of God. The result is an enlightenment that gives a correct view of one's true self with its limits and potentialities. Rahner writes that the mystery of God continually calls a human person to the limits of her/his finitude and "lays bare his guilt, yet *bids him approach*; the mystery enfolds him in an ultimate and radical love" (1972:122).

John of the Cross writes that as one enters more deeply into contemplation, one climbs the ladder of secret wisdom that leads to profound humility (*Dark Night*, II, 18, 2. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991:439):

Communications that are truly from God have this trait: They simultaneously exalt and humble soul. For on this road, to descend is

to ascend and to ascend is to descend, since those who are humble themselves are exalted and those who exalt themselves are humbled [Luke 14:11]

To be humbled before God is to experience oneself on level ground, to invite the attentions of God, and to experience the continued merciful love of Jesus (Letter 195. Sérout 1965:200). Mère Madeleine writes to a Carmelite prioress insisting on the importance of welcoming the Holy Spirit into her heart to receive light and love from the Spirit whose presence helps one progress in the ways of the Son of God. “Now the disposition we should have in order to welcome him is a very great and profound humility, as these words from scripture teach us: *Upon whom will my spirit rest, if not the humble?*” (Letter 129. Thompson 1989:196). Humility is the foundation of spiritual growth and the attitude which allows one to “welcome” the Spirit.

On one occasion Mère Madeleine received a letter from a novice in which she described the spiritual fruit she derived from meditating and praying on Christ’s passion, and how she preferred praying on the passion to meditating on the infancy of Christ. In her reply, Mère Madeleine mentioned the novice’s remarks and she speaks of the benefits of spiritual childhood:

Je suis d’avis pourtant que vous vous occupiez de ce dernier mystère, puisque nous sommes dans le tems auquel l’Eglise... Il faut que vous vous rendiés enfant avec le Fils de Dieu, qui a bien voulu entrer en cet humble état, quoiqu’il fût la Sagesse éternelle. L’homme et l’ange se sont perdus par l’orgueil, c’est pourquoy Dieu veut que nous nous humilions. Il se plaît pour abbaïsser notre esprit à nous faire venir à ses pieds, petits et humbles comme des enfans. Et vous voyés qu’il dit à ce docteur de la loy qu’il luy falloit naître de nouveau ; ce qui vous marque que sans l’humilité et la docilité de l’enfance nous ne pouvons aller à luy (Letter 151. Sérout 1965 :159)

I am advising you to concern yourselves with this last mystery because we are in that time of the Church.... You must return as a child before the Son of God who wanted to enter in that humble state which was made by Eternal Wisdom. Men and angels were lost because of pride; it is for this reason that God wants us to humble ourselves. It is pleasing to him that we abase our spirits, coming to his feet, small and humble as children. And you see what he said to

*the doctor of the law for whom it was necessary to be born again;
those of you who lacking, without humility and docility of children,
we cannot go to him.*

Two key points emerge from this letter: First, Mère Madeleine's is a liturgical spirituality. She considers it important that one undertake meditation on the mysteries of Christ's life at the time of the year in which they are celebrated; secondly, she emphasizes the importance of humility and docility in the spiritual life and finds in the contemplation of Christ's infancy the grace of spiritual childhood.¹⁷⁷

5.3.3 "Ask and You Shall Receive"

Consequent upon a sense of one's spiritual childhood is the attitude of trust that prompts prayer of petition. Mère Madeleine expressed a conviction about the efficacy of prayer of petition. She was a firm believer in prayer of intercession and she encouraged her Carmelite sisters to ask, seek, and knock in the words of the gospel injunction of Jesus (Matt. 7:7). In their seeking of Jesus Christ the Carmelites would not go unrewarded: « ... si nous le cherchons fidèlement, nous le trouverons, car il a dit: 'Qui cherche, il trouve' » ...*if we search faithfully for him, we will find him, because he says, 'The one who searches, finds'* (Letter 137. Sérout 1965: 133). Prayer of petition also expresses concern for the world. Mère Madeleine reminds her sisters of Holy Mother Teresa's words: "We are daughters of the Church" and she tells them to pray to the infant Jesus to ask him who was born for us to intercede and deliver those suffering from the attacks of the Ottoman Turks (Letter 98. Sérout 1965:94).

Moreover, the Carmelite women are counseled to bring their own needs and troubles to the Son of God. Madeleine, knowing by experience the attitude of the Son of God

¹⁷⁷ "Cochois also identifies devotion to the infancy of Jesus as part of Bérulle's legacy to Carmel in France. This devotion, which was so dear to him, was spread throughout France, due to the Carmel of Beaune. The spirit of childhood, that essential gospel value, has been admirably demonstrated by another demonstrated by another French Carmelite closer to our own day, Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897) Delville 1994:222).

toward sickness, prayed to him for the sister's recovery (Letter 105. Sérout 1965: 101). Madeleine de Saint-Joseph writes in late September or early October in 1630 suggesting prayers be offered for the recovery of the king : « Je ne puis croire qu'il nous veuille tant affliger que de ne pas donner ce que nous demandons » (Letter 56. Sérout 1965:63). Surely God hears the prayer of those who are afflicted. Madeleine de Saint-Joseph knew this from experience.

5.3.4. Difficulties in Prayer

To engage daily in two hours of mental prayer as well as in the recitation of vocal prayers such as the divine office, can be a difficult undertaking when there are distractions or dryness in prayer. Mère Madeleine reminded a sister who was having difficulty in prayer that distractions are a result of human sinfulness—“Si nos péchés ne nous avoient envelopés en de si grandes et si profondes ténèbres...” *If our sins had not enveloped us in so great and so deep a darkness* (Letter 190. Sérout 1965:197). The best course of action seems to be the practice of patience, submission to God's will and other virtues. In another letter, Madeleine encourages a sister who has felt deprived of consolation in prayer advising her to not to give way to impatience or agitation of spirit:

...demeurés toujours humble, douce et patiente dans votre épreuve et soyés fort fidelle à user de tous les moyens, soit intérieurs, soit extérieures, que Dieu vous donnera pour vous rendre à luy, en attendant le tems auquel les richesses succéderont à la pauvreté, la lumière aux ténèbres et la jouissance à la souffrance (Letter 158. Sérout 1965: 166).

...Remain always humble, sweet, and patient in your trial, and be very faithful in using all the means, be they interior or exterior that God will give you for to abandon yourself to him and await the time in which riches will follow poverty, light will follow darkness, and bliss will follow suffering.

One of the reasons why there might be difficulties in prayer comes from a style of praying that encouraged inactivity in prayer. Mère Madeleine asks a Carmelite

novice why she is having trouble in prayer. Difficulties in prayer are not extraordinary, but there are means to obviate them. She counsels the novice: “Mais à quoy vous devés prendre garde, c’est de préparer votre âme devant l’oraison, afin de ne pas tenter Dieu, comme dit l’Ecriture ; et puis, de ne pas vous laisser divertir par negligence...(Letter 151. Sérout 1965: 160). Prayer must be prepared. One cannot sit idle and tempt God, says Mère Madeleine.

5.3.5. Adoration and Love

Morgain (1987:106) suggests that Mère Madeleine assimilated Berullian doctrine, especially with respect to her understanding of adoration, adherence, and *l’anéantissement*. To examine Mère Madeleine’s understanding of adoration, it is helpful to look briefly at Bérulle’s notion. In his critical assessment of Bérulle’s spirituality, Buckley (1990:48) describes Bérulle’s understanding of adoration:

It is the critical experience, the human response to the God who is the Incarnate Word. Jesus is at the same time the one who is adored, the means of adoration, and the paradigm of what it is to adore.

In that same spirit, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph describes to a Carmelite prioress, what she understands by the mystery of the Incarnation: “God wanted to choose a worshipper as great as himself and as little capable of failing as he would be” (Letter 144. Thompson 1989:200). The mystery of the Incarnation made it possible for a God to adore God. Taking upon himself human nature, the Son of God became both lamb and victim. This, says Mère Madeleine, placed him in a state of adoration, “for it is through sacrifice that adoration is offered” (Letter 144. Thompson 1989:200.).

Quoting from the Letter to the Hebrews, Madeleine reminds her reader that the first action of the Son of God upon entering this world was to offer himself to the Father. “He consecrates to his Father the body he gave to be sacrificed to him in place of all

the former victims and by which he continues to assure him that he welcomes his law and places it in the center of his heart" (Letter 144. Thompson 1989:200.) Schillebeeckx puts it this way: "As man, Christ is the supreme worship of the Father...In its actual content his human life becomes the religious expression of his abiding submission to the holy will of the Father, in spite of everything, in spite of death itself" (1963:34).

Madeleine makes a significant christological statement: that God adores God in the Incarnation. She probes the mystery of the incarnation asserting that as high priest Jesus Christ gives us the bread that transforms us into himself. And it is this act that makes human beings capable of adoring God with him. As far as Mère Madeleine is concerned, the Incarnation gives God someone worthy to adore God, but it also empowers ordinary people to adore God with God. She writes: "He makes us what he is so that we may do now what he does and will do eternally, which is to adore the Father" (Letter 144. Thompson 1989:200).

Thompson (1989:43) considers that Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's greatest contribution to the French school of spirituality "is to have emphasized the love dimension of the moment of adoration". The two aspects of one prayer: adoration and love—express the Other-centered nature of true prayer. Love leads the seeker away from self-occupation and the desire for *experience* of God, to seek God for God's sake. It is the desire to be united with God, to achieve a "total surrender in love to the God who wishes us to be united with him [sic]" (Egan 1984:21). As Madeleine says, God "does not see adoration and love as two different duties, but as one and the same" (Letter 144. Thompson 1989:202).

As surely as love is the truest motivation behind entering into marriage, so it is also the basic intention for the practice of Christian prayer, meditation and contemplation. The practice of prayer and contemplation as a spiritual pathway calls for forgetfulness of self as an on-going pre-requisite, and love of God as a sole

motivation as spiritual writers testify.¹⁷⁸ Mère Madeleine expresses that self-forgetfulness finds its expression in giving complete attention to Jesus. She writes in April 1637 to Mère Françoise de Jésus:

...à l'imiter, à l'adorer, et à le suivre, et en la vie et en la mort, qui est la seule chose à quoy nous devons penser et tout le reste nous doit estre indifferent (Letter 126. Séroutet 1965: 118-119)

...To imitate, to adore, and to follow him in life and death—that is the only thing to think about—and to all the rest we ought to be indifferent.

What Mère Madeleine advises, not long before her death, is an asceticism of thought and a purification of motivation. The great Carmelite John of the Cross teaches that motivations for engaging in prayer are purified through entry into the dark nights. The movement that leads a person to deeper faith and more genuine love is the result of Spirit's work of purification. It is the work of the night of the senses to wean people from the comfort and satisfaction they derive from their prayers and spiritual exercises so that they seek God for God's sake (Steuart 1934:71-72). The night of the spirit achieves a further purification of motivations and intentions. It renders a person more deeply humble with regard to spiritual gifts received.

Another benefit of the night of the spirit is emotional integration. According to Keating (1992:97-98), the night of the spirit frees a person from the dominance of any single emotion. It purifies and changes one's image of God. It renders one reliant solely upon the theological virtues of faith, hope and love. Finally, the dark night purifies the last vestiges of self-centeredness that prevent the full reception

¹⁷⁸ Clément (1995:271) cites this story of John Climacus: "One day I saw three monks insulted and humiliated in the same way at the same moment. The first felt he had been cruelly hurt; he was distressed but managed not to say anything. The second was happy for himself but grieved for the one who had insulted him. The third thought only of the harm suffered by his neighbour, and wept with the most ardent compassion. The first was prompted by fear; the second was urged on by the hope of reward; the third was moved by love".

and expression of divine love¹⁷⁹ within the soul. The primacy of love is seen in all phases of the spiritual journey. Love is the beginning and the end of the journey as well as the surest guide along the way. The Christian mystical journey is one in which a believer is led by love to a knowledge of God dwelling in the soul through Christ and in the Holy Spirit.

For Madeleine de Saint-Joseph love is imperfect without adoration and adoration is imperfect without love. She quotes from Is. 29:13 who castigates people who serve God with their lips and not their hearts. The two moments of prayer—adoration and love—are inextricably linked.

Mère Madeleine draws upon texts from the old testament showing that the first commandment given by God to the Israelites is the injunction to love the Lord God alone and to keep God's commandments. The essential commandment since the coming of Christ is the observance of the law of love. Hence, God does not see adoration separate from love, nor love from adoration. They are "one and the same" (Letter 144. Thompson 1989:202). Those who worship in spirit and in truth abide by the commandment to love. The Son of God gave an example of undivided love of God through his self-offering. "When he said that his law was in the center of his heart, that shows the burning love with which he fulfilled his duty" (Letter 144. Thompson 202.).

How is one to adore? Madeleine insists on the importance of adoration "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23) as Jesus said in his conversation with the Samaritan woman (Letter 144. Thompson 1989:203). If people are open to Christ, then he can teach

¹⁷⁹ John of the Cross describes the ten degrees of the mystical ladder of divine love: the first degree of love makes the soul languish and lose the taste for all pleasure in earthly things. The next step finds the soul anxious to seek and find the Beloved in all things. The third step renders the soul active and fervent, convinced of its own worthlessness, aside from God's grace. Next, the soul seeks neither consolation nor any of God's gifts, suffering only because it cannot return enough thanks for God's goodness. The fifth rung finds the soul impatient to be united to the Beloved--longing for union. Ascending the six step, the soul runs with great speed to God. At the seventh step, the soul is emboldened by an intense love and exaltation. On the eighth step, the soul embraces the Beloved and holds him fast. Hurrying on, the soul burns sweetly. Finally, at the tenth step, the soul is wholly assimilated into God in the beatific vision (Steuart 1934:111-112).

them and can put his law into their hearts (Letter 143. Sérout 1965:140). To adore God in spirit is to adore with Jesus Christ and with his spirit. Mère Madeleine continues: "...et personne ne peut adorer avec Jésus Christ, si déjà il n'est vivant avec Jésus Christ. Il faut être dans sa vie pour être dans son adoration » (Letter 143. Sérout 1965: 141). *A person can only adore with Jesus Christ, if already he/she is not living with Jesus Christ. One must live in his life in order to be in his adoration.* The key for Madeleine de Saint-Joseph is the Holy Eucharist in which the Son of God is both food and victim.¹⁸⁰ She believes moreover, "...que c'est afin que vivans de la vie de cette divine viande, nous entrons dans son adoration. C'est l'adoration de l'éternité... » (Letter 143. Sérout 1965: 141.) *...So that living the life of that divine food, we enter in to his adoration.* One adores with the adoration of Christ. One lives in Christ and adores with Christ.

For Mère Madeleine, adoration is even more important than gratitude because it is entirely devoid of self-seeking. She writes to a Carmelite prioress: "I continue to have the same thought that I had: to prefer the act of adoration to that of thanksgiving, because it is more extensive and it exposes us less to the danger of too much self-preoccupation even under the pretext of thanking God for the blessings he has given to us, especially when they are unique to us" (Letter 144. Thompson 1989:200).

Writing to the prisoner and former keeper of the royal seals, Michel de Marillac toward the end of July 1631, Mère Madeleine expressed her personal views about how she would like to end her days in adoration of all the many facets of the life of the Son of God:

Je trouve avec vous, Monsieur, de grandes richesses dans la vie, dans les paroles et dans les mysteres du Fils de Dieu. C'est à quoy je desire m'occuper le reste de mes jours, adorant jusques à ses pas et jusques aux plus petites particularitez de sa vie, s'il y a quelque chose

¹⁸⁰ The Son of God exists in two *états*.

de petit en celuy qui est la grandeur mesme (Letter 67. Sérouet 1965: 71).

I find with you, M. great richness in the life, in the words, and in the mysteries of the Son of God. It is that with which I desire to occupy myself for the rest of my days—adoring even to his steps and the smallest details of his life, if there is anything small in him who is greatness himself.

For Madeleine de Saint-Joseph, adoration and love form the centre of her response to God and the key to living a life in truth and authentic worship.

5.3.6. Detachment/Adherence

Detachment is a spiritual practice found in many different religions.¹⁸¹ It is generally understood to mean the act of leaving behind whatever distracts one from the spiritual journey. It is an act of letting go of needs, relationships, and ideas in order to achieve spiritual freedom. It opens one to the innate “hunger for transcendence” (Miceli 1980:6). Detachment is an integral part of the traditionally Christian ascetical practice and a fundamental part of the teaching of apophatic mystics such as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Meister Eckhart. The teachings of Rhenish mystics such as Meister Eckhart¹⁸² formed an integral part of Madame Acarie’s spirituality. Eckhart places strong emphasis on detachment as part of his mystical theology. For Eckhart detachment is an act of annihilation of desire (Turner 1995:179), for in the annihilation¹⁸³ of desire, one is freed of the destructive desire to possess objects (1995:183). Detachment renders one able to love freely and non-

¹⁸¹ Staals (1975:138-139) considers it an essential pre-requisite for methods undertaken by those in search of mystical experience. It is an aspect of most of the techniques that are used to train and discipline the mind.

¹⁸² Barb Acarie received much understanding and spiritual guidance from the English Capuchin, Benet of Canfield (Huxley 1945/[1989]: 356-357) who was spiritual director to her and her cousin, Pierre de Bérulle.

¹⁸³ The concept of annihilation was a part of the teachings of Benet of Canfield as quoted in Huxley (1945/[1989]: 356) “...one must live continuously in the abyss of the divine Essence and in the nothingness of things; and if at times a man finds himself separated from them (the divine Essence and created nothingness) he must return to them, not by introversion, but by annihilation”.

possessively because it restores objectivity. "If I truly possess detachment, then there is nothing which I desire, not even God, in that way in which the attached person desires anything (Turner 1995:182).

The spiritual value of detachment is very prominent in the writings of Carmelite John of the Cross, and is expressed in his doctrine of "nada". Essentially, detachment is a form of poverty of spirit that frees one from inordinate appetites so that the heart may be surrendered entirely to God in faith, hope and love (Kavanaugh K and Rodriguez, O. 1991:768). John of the Cross writes:

It makes little difference whether a bird is tied by a thin thread or by a cord. Even if it is tied by thread, it the bird will be held bound just as surely as if it were tied by cord; that is, it will be impeded from flying as long as it does not break the thread. Admittedly the thread is easier to break, but no matter how easily this may be done, the bird will not fly away without first doing so. This is the lot of those who are attached to something: No matter how much virtue they have they will not reach the freedom of divine union. (*Ascent of Mount Carmel I*, 11, 4. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991:143).

The purpose of detachment is to create the freedom to adhere to Christ. The idea of detachment is expressed in a number of ways in the writings of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph. She speaks of detachment as: renunciation, forgetting oneself, continual separation from all created things, leaving oneself behind. All these activities are undertaken with the belief that when one detaches from all things it is in order to have the liberty of the children of God: "Dieu veut que les âmes qui sont à luy marchent dans la liberté de ses enfans, sans tant de retours sur elles mêmes" (Letter 197. Sérout 1965:201). It is this sense of liberty that John of the Cross speaks of in the *Ascent of Mount Carmel III*, 20 (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez 1991:303): "Cares do not molest the detached, neither in prayer nor outside it, and thus, losing no time, such people easily store up an abundance of spiritual good."

In the letters of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph the reality is clear: detachment from all created beings and adherence to the Son of God, Jesus Christ, are two aspects of one

flowing movement toward God. In nearly every instance where there is a reference to detachment (*séparer*) or stripping (*dépouillement*), Mère Madeleine follows it immediately with an exhortation to hold fast, to adhere (*adhérence*) to Christ: « Il faut qu'ils vivent dans le dépouillement d'eux mêmes, dans le renoncement de tout ce qu'ils sont et dans l'adhérence à Notre Seigneur Jésus Christ » (Letter 143. Sérout 1965:140).

Detachment from created things sounds like a vague term. Certainly, it includes physical things—goods, food, and pleasures of all kinds. It also means a level of freedom in personal relationships and friendships. For contemplatives who spend most of their day in quiet activities of work and prayer, detachment is essential in one's affective life. Detachment from feelings is a key in contemplative growth. Mère Madeleine writes:

Je vous supplie donc, ma Mère, quand vous écrirés à ces bonnes Sœurs qui sont sorties d'avec vous, de les fortifier et d'essayer de faire qu'elles se séparent de leur sensibilité, élevant leurs esprits à Dieu pour ne chercher ni ne désirer que luy, et leur montrant qu'elles peuvent le trouver en tous lieux (Letter 26. Sérout 1965: 37).

I ask you then, my Mother, when you write to the good sisters who are leaving with you, to strengthen them and to try and make them separate themselves from their feelings, lifting their spirits to God, neither searching for nor desiring but him, and showing them that she can find all things in him.

Detachment gives a clear perspective about what is important in life. It allows for a vision of what is essential in the following of Jesus. Mère Madeleine writes, “ It is necessary to have a spirit lifted above human things and only to look at them as shadows” (Letter 63. Sérpuet 1965:68). The presence of difficulties and crosses in life calls for even more detachment and renunciation. Mère Madeleine writes to Mère Anne de Saint-Joseph: «...sa divine Majesté ne vous envoie point de croix particuliere, il faut porter celle qui est commune et, ce me semble, la plus penible de toutes, qui est renoncement à soy mesme et l'assujettissement à toute creature » *his divine Majesty does not just send us a special cross, you must carry one that is*

common and it seems to me the most troublesome of all, which is renunciation of yourself and dependence on all creatures (Letter 80. Sérout 1965: 81).

Detachment, in a Christian context, is exercised solely for the purpose of being more closely attached to Christ. It seeks an alignment with his will, his person, and his cross:

C'est chose precieuse que la croix de Jesus Christ et, quoy qu'il luy plaise de nous en departir, il la faut tenir chere et ne chercher à nous en deffaire. Je prie Dieu vous en faire tout la part qu'il vous a ordonnée pour honorer celle que son Fils a portée (Letter 81. Sérout 1965: 81).

How precious is the cross of Jesus Christ. Although it pleases us to be free of it, it is to be held dear and not rejected. I pray God to give you the part of the cross ordained for you in order to honour the cross that his son carried.

The opposite movement of spirit is described as *adherence* to Christ. Buckley (1990:52) describes it as a Berullian concept. Simply put, adherence is adoration as continuous and daily offering of self—in daily choices, actions, moments of prayer. The term adherence appears in much of Mère Madeleine's spiritual advice. For her, it seems to be an entry into the life and person of Christ, an engagement that is sustained by the faithful practice of virtue. She writes to her sisters and friends encouraging them to enter into Christ: "...entrer dans la force de sa voye et dans l'establissement de l'humilité, de la fidélité et de l'adherence à luy" ...*enter into the strength of his way and into the establishment of humility, of fidelity and of adherence to him* (Letters 46. Sérout 1965:54).

In a letter written at Christmastime in 1629, Mère Madeleine describes the nature of adherence in more depth. She offers the recipient of the letter her prayers and good wishes. Then she adds: « ... je le supplie de naître en vous et de vous faire naitre en luy par une vie sainte et adhérence à la sienne » *I ask of him to be born in you and you to be born in him by a life holy and adhered to his.* (Letter 47. Sérout 1965: 55)

Writing to Mère Agnes de Saint-Michel in October 1632, Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph prays that Mère Agnes may remain in the life of Jesus Christ, “que vous receviez sur vous les effets de son cœur et qu’il vous regarde de l’œil de son amour, qu’il vous donne courage et qu’il soulage vostre privation et vostre bannissement en cet vie de larme et de tribulation » (Letter 84. Sérout 1965: 83). By holding fast to Christ, one receives the blessings and love that emanate from his heart; one will be looked upon with love, and given courage and consolation in facing the inevitable trials of life.

The exhortations of Mère Madeleine regarding the importance of adherence are numerous: « Or nous entrons en luy par une perpetuelle adherence à luy » *Now we enter into him by a perpetual adherence to him* (Letter 49. Sérout 1965: 58); «...je vois que Dieu par sa bonté tire vostre ame à luy et continuë à demander de vous cette adherence interieure de laquelle » *I see that God draws your soul to himself by his goodness and I continue to ask of you that interior adherence to him* (Letter 76. Sérout 1965: 79). She encourages a perpetual adherence to Christ and prays that her Carmelites sisters will receive the deeply interior attachment to Christ for which she prays.

Though it is considered a Bérullian concept (Buckley 1990:52) the use of the term *adherence*, so often found in the letters of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph, is not inimical to the teachings of Teresa of Avila. Castellano (quoted in Huguenin 1997:20) writes: «L’expérience mystique de Thérèse consiste essentiellement à revivre les mystères du Christ avant de s’abîmer dans le mystère de la Trinité » . To re-live the mysteries of Christ in order to plunge oneself in the Trinity seems to be the end for which adherence is intended.

5.3.7 Prayer: Concluding Remarks

When asked by a mistress of novices how to begin, continue, and complete prayer, Mère Madeleine told her simply: “I tell you wholeheartedly that we must always

begin, always continue and never end” (Letter 147. Thompson 1989:204). Carmelites whose inspiration was the great prophet Elijah, ought to remember “he experienced God as always present and that he accomplished his every action in the awareness of that divine presence” (Ibid.) Furthermore, if Moses “spoke intimately with God as one friend speaks with another,” how much more ought the Carmelite women speak intimately with God “since God has become a man—our brother and our companion—and become available so that we can freely address him, approach him and keep him company” (Letter 147. Thompson 1989:204). The intimacy of God-with-us, the mystery of the Incarnation creates what Madeleine calls a *société ensemble*, a communion. She cites 1 John 1:3 and challenges her sisters to recognise the gift to which God has called them—to live always in God’s presence.

Not only is prayer to be humble, grounded in a sense of anéantissement, adoring and loving, but prayer must also be personal and familial:

Let us approach him, joining with him as a brother, since that is what he willingly humbled himself enough to be. His word teaches us *that he was not at all ashamed to call us his brothers* (Heb. 2:11). Bring all our concerns to him as to our best, truest and most intimate friend who has not spared his life to rescue us from an infinite misfortune and make it possible for us to rejoice eternally with his own happiness (Letter 147. Thompson 1989:205).

Communion with God in Jesus Christ makes it possible to share fully in the mysteries of his life, death, and resurrection so that one rejoices “with his own happiness” (Letter 147. Thompson 1989:204). As children of God and heirs of Christ, all are invited by Madeleine to adore the Father with Christ and with his own adoration, and to love God with Christ and with Christ’s own love (Ibid). This is the meaning of *communion* with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, (1 John 1:3) Madeleine de Saint-Joseph understands the mystery of the Incarnation.

5.4 Spiritual Direction

During most of her life, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was asked to give spiritual direction. Prioresses wrote to her asking how to assist their sisters in prayer. Clerics and laypersons came to her for advice. She points out quite clearly that spiritual direction is not an easy task or one that just anyone can do. “One must be constrained to it and be called to it by God...It is very dangerous to meddle in it” (Letter 236. Thompson 1989:208). There are two major points of emphasis in her writing on spiritual direction: First, a spiritual director must be gentle with directees; second, needs of directees are different. Her advice is wise and has a contemporary ring to it.

5.4.1 Guidelines for Spiritual Directors

“Ne craignés pas de montrer quelque tendresses à ces âmes; il faut prendre par où elles sont prenables et ne point regarder ni dire les manières à nous même » she writes to a prioress (Letter 31. Sérouet 1965: 40). It is important take people where they are in a gentle, accepting way. Directors should not be afraid of doing this. Especially when working with novices, advising them or correcting faults, one must be gentle and humble: Il faut une grande douceur, et quand vous leur parlerez, parlez à vous premierement. Quand nous reprenons les fautes, il faut aussy parler à nous mesme... *You must have great gentleness and when you speak to them speak to yourself first of all. When we criticize faults, it is necessary to speak to ourselves...* (Letter 69. Sérouet 1965: 73).

Mère Madeleine instructs spiritual directors to give directees “some words from sacred scripture, particularly from Jesus Christ, either to strengthen them if they have some difficulty or weakness, or to confirm them in what God is doing in them” (Letter 236. Thompson 1989:209). Writing to a clergyman who asked for advice about spiritual direction, Madeleine writes adamantly about respecting persons:

There are directors who, when they undertake the care of a soul, totally turn it upside down in order to form it in their mode. This is not my approach. Rather, it seems to me that if we find a soul who has made some progress in grace, we should simply follow what we see God has done for it, since there is not question of leading everyone along the same path (Letter 236. Thompson 1989:208).

When asked to give some general rules for prayer, Mère Madeleine responded that the more she had learned from experience in spiritual direction, the more she realized that it is extremely difficult to give general rules for prayer because people are so different. What may be helpful to one person may not be to others. Giving a general rule may be useless and even cause damage (Letter 148. Sérout 1965:153). For this reason, she counsels those who would engage in spiritual direction, to devote themselves very carefully to noticing how God has worked in the souls of their directees during their prayer (Letter 148. Sérout 1965:153). They ought to approach their directees with great respect and engage in praying for those whom they counsel. Lengthy sessions are not necessary, except in the case of beginners who need instruction and “it is possible at times to find in the others certain needs that require more communication, but we must be careful,” Mère Madeleine writes, “to give them only the necessary time” (Letter 148. Sérout 1965:153).

Prayer is never a human endeavour alone, but relies on the power of God. Madeleine de Saint-Joseph knows quite well that teaching people about prayer “n’est pas l’ouvrage de la nature, mais celui de la grâce et qu’elle ne se doit pas faire par l’effort de l’esprit humain, mais par la puissance et par la conduite de l’Esprit de Dieu (Letter 148. Sérout 1965:153). She counsels that learning methods and rules will not help to acquire the treasure of prayer. Rather, one must ask humbly and perseveringly to the One who is rich in mercy and who will not refuse the good spirit those who ask.

5.4.2 Discernment of Spirits

One of the major tasks of a spiritual director is to help a person discern the movement within her soul, what Ignatius of Loyola called discernment of spirits. Madeleine's own experience of discernment of spiritual gave her sensitivity to the struggle that directees encounter in prayer.

Madeleine de Saint-Joseph is well aware of the tactics of the evil spirit. The activity of the evil spirit is manifold. It can cover a soul with pettiness and render it vile in the eyes of others (Letter 83. Sérout 1965:82). That spirit plans the attack while people are not aware and then surprises us: "... l'esprit malin veille toujours pour nous surprendre" (Letter 44. Sérout 1965:50). The evil spirit will intimidate, but a wise director will advise the person to take shelter in the Lord. "L'esprit malin vous veut intimider et espouvanter, mais soyez forte en la force de Jesus Christ et passez le temps que vous avez à estre où vous estes selon sa sainte volonté » (Letter 89. Sérout 1965: 86-87).

An example of Madeleine's teaching on the spirits comes from her experience of those who consider themselves proficient in the spiritual life, but who neglect the practice of solid virtue—the hallmark of holiness according to Madeleine de Saint-Joseph. She writes to a priest:

Un des principaux artifices dont l'esprit malin se sert pour tromper ces personnes, c'est de leur faire croire qu'elles sont dans un état qui est fort élevé au dessus des usages intérieurs et des pratiques extérieures d'humilité, de mortification et des autres vertus qui sont ordinaires aux bonnes âmes; et ensuite il leur montre que s'y appliquer seroit se trop rabaisser et sortir de cette élévation où il leur semble que Dieu les a mises » (Letter 241. Sérout 1965: 258-259).

One of the artifices that the evil spirit sets up in order to deceive these people is to make them believe that they are in a state elevated high above the interior usages and exterior practices of humility, of mortification and of other virtues that are common among good souls,

and next he shows them that devoting themselves may be too humbling leaving that elevation where it seems to them that God has put them.

Another common deception of the evil spirit is to convince souls that their sufferings are impossible to bear (Letter 241. Sérout 1965:259). The evil spirit prevents them from seeing that unless they renounce themselves, take up the cross and follow the Lord, they cannot be true disciples (Ibid). The way out of deception of the evil spirit is through fleeing to Christ wounded on the cross. Madeleine encourages directees to meditate on the passion of Christ¹⁸⁴ and to find their peace beneath the cross:

I rejoice at the blessings with which his divine hand inundates your soul, and especially because he unites you to himself suffering and nailed to the wood of the cross, where I behold you in a way that I cannot explain. I beg his infinite goodness to make you worthy of adoring his agony and sharing his interior and exterior sufferings (Letter 174. Thompson 1989:206).

It was Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's intention to form true disciples of the Lord who shed his blood so generously for their redemption. She offered all directors and directees the important advice: "Look often at the Son of God as the model that the Father has given us" (Letter 231. Sérout 1965:245).

Madeleine was well aware of the trials that come to someone earnestly seeking the Lord. She writes to one gentleman not to be surprised at hardships and temptations, for the evil spirit always fights against the work of God in a soul:

Ne vous étonnés pas, Monsieur, si dans ce commencement vous y trouvés des contrarieties. L'esprit malin, qui combat toujours les œuvres de Dieu, vous cachera, s'il peut, le prix de vostre vocation, afin de vous tirer des bras de Jésus Christ, mais persévérés et vous souvenés avec combien de miséricorde sa divine bonté vous a appelé depuis un si long tems à son service...(Letter 263. Sérout 1965: 292).

¹⁸⁴ Mère Madeleine found the passion of Christ a source of personal meaning and inspiration. "Don't look at anything but the Son crucified for you and for us all" [*Ne regardés aucun objet que son Fils crucifié pour vous et pour nous tous.*] Letter 183. Sérout 1965:178).

Do not be surprised, Monsieur, if in the beginning you find contradictions. The evil spirit, who always battles against the works of God, will hide from you if he can, the prize of your vocation so that he can pull you from the arms of Jesus Christ, but persevere and remember how much mercy and divine goodness you have been called to after so long a time in his service.

Discernment of spirits is essential for those who live in a contemplative monastery. Living in an enclosed setting can make one especially susceptible to emotional volatility. For this reason, the evil spirit is able to capitalize on the vulnerability of human emotion as the following example shows:

J'ay reçu votre lettre et vous prie de n'être point en peine de la tristesse que vous sentés. L'esprit malin vous veut intimider et se sert de cette mélancolie pour vous faire croire que Dieu ne vous vouloit pas au lieu où vous êtes. Il faut vous soumettre à porter ce sentiment, mais n'y pas adhérer (Letter 182. Séroutet 1965: 187).

I have received your letter and pray that you may not be in pain of the sadness that you feel. The evil spirit wants to intimidate you and use this melancholy in order to make you believe that God does not want you in the place where you are. You have to submit yourself to bearing that feeling, but not adhering to it.

Through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, one is able to discern between the activities of the spirits. The gifts of the Spirit “give us a certain spiritual or rather divine sensitivity to the breath of God, for hearing the voice of the Beloved, feeling his presence, for having presentiments of his secret comings” (Philippe 1981:60). Particularly important in this regard is the gift of wisdom. Wisdom gives a taste for God and spiritual things. The delicacy of this gift of the spirit “makes me taste the divine tenderness that stoops to my creaturely nothingness and my sinful misery” (Philippe 1981:64). It is this gift of the Spirit in particular which operated in the life of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph and assisted her in the subtle and important task of discerning the call of God's Spirit in the lives of those who were entrusted to her care.

In a letter to one of the Carmelite prioresses, Mère Madeleine speaks about the two kinds of light from God. There is the light of pleasure, enjoyment [jouissance] and the light of instruction. The light of pleasure is reserved for heaven. While we are here on earth, it is the light of instruction that leads us to God. It is important, she writes, that those who follow God do not stop on earth to enjoy its pleasures. It is important to remember where our homeland is because the greatest lights on earth are merely nothing once we know the reality of what heaven will be (Letter 254. Sérout 1965:276). Discernment is essential if one is to walk by the light of instruction toward heaven.

5.5 The Humanity of Christ

Standing firmly in the spiritual tradition of her Holy Mother Teresa, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was convinced that Jesus Christ is the pre-eminent way God. Both Teresa and her daughter Madeleine knew from experience that the humanity of Christ is the way through which God's graces are communicated:

...la sainte Humanité du Christ est la porte par laquelle le Seigneur lui communiqué ses graces. Tant par la meditation que par la contemplation mystique, elle perçoit avec intensité que la cause de l'Incarnation et de la Passion du Christ est la miséricorde divine (Huguenin 1993:14).

...The holy humanity of Christ is the door through which the Lord communicates his graces. As much by meditation as by mystical contemplation, she perceives with intensity that the reason for the Incarnation and the Passion of Christ is divine mercy.

5.5.1 Withdrawing from the Humanity of Christ

Of great concern to Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was the withdrawal (*desappliquer*) from Jesus Christ that she saw happening among some religious and their growing tendency to look for a vague "divine essence" in their prayer. Mère

Madeleine also encountered this type of thinking in members of the clergy. She writes to one priest citing the wisdom and experience of Teresa of Avila:

Notre sainte Mère Thérèse, qui avoit tant de lumière, et de lumière si solide, et tant d'expérience de voyes de Dieu, entendoit parfaitement cette vérité dont nous parlons, comme il paroît par tout ce qu'elle en a dit dans ses livres. Vous voyés quel regret elle témoigne d'avoir suivi pendant quelque tems des avis qu'on luy donnoit de laisser l'application à l'Humanité sainte de Jésus Christ, comme si elle eût un empêchement à la plus haute contemplation, et qu'elle regarde cette créance comme une des plus grands erreurs qu'elle eût pu avoit et une des plus grandes pertes qu'elle eût faire. Et dans le *Château de l'âme*, où elle écrit l'état intérieur le plus élevé qu'elle connoisse en la terre, elle le fait consister dans une union très intime de l'âme avec Jésus Christ, ce qu'elle appelle le mariage spirituel (Letter 238. Sérout 1965: 254).

Our holy Mother Teresa, who had such light, and light so reliable, and such experience in the ways of God, understood perfectly that truth we speak of now, as it appears to all as she said in her books. You see she testifies to the regret she had at following the advice that she was given to leave behind devoting herself to the humanity of Christ as if it would hinder her from the heights of contemplation and at taking the advice (for so long) that she sees that one of the greatest errors she could have made and the greatest loses she would have ever had. In the Interior Castle, she wrote that the interior state that she knows is the most elevated on earth consists in the very intimate union of the soul with Jesus Christ that she calls the spiritual marriage.

Madeleine de Saint-Joseph noticed a disturbing trend that seemed to be leading people away from the humanity of Christ. She writes to a prioress in January 1630 and insists that there is no other way more perfect than Jesus Christ:

Je vous diray donc, ma Mere, que je ne voy point d'autre voye pour les ames que celuy qui a dict qu'il se donnoit à l'homme en cette qualité, qui est Le Sauveur du monde, qui s'est nommé nostre voye quand il a dict : « Je suis la voye le la vie » Qui donc est la plus parfait ? C'est celuy qui est le plus en Jesus Christ, qui est nostre voye (Letter 49. Sérout 1965: 58)

I say to you then, my Mother, that I see no other way for souls than the one that he said he gives himself to the man in excellence who is the Saviour of the world, who is named our way when he says, 'I am the way and the life. Who then is more perfect? It is the one who is more in Jesus Christ, who is our way.

After years of experience in prayer and contemplation, she is amazed at the rapid progress of some beginners. She is even more upset that anyone could leave Jesus Christ behind in search for an ethereal "divine essence". Mère Madeleine recalls that similar difficulties with abstract mysticism¹⁸⁵ were encountered in the early days of Madame Acarie (Blessed Marie de l'Incarnation) and Pierre de Bérulle:

Since you believe that I am in possession of both great and ordinary realities all at once, I want to speak about that freely with you. I have none of these subtleties, but it is true that I, like the others, may have some of this and some graces in prayer. However, in my experience these things are more like something toward which I reach, rather than something I have achieved. I am amazed at those souls who have immediately accomplished everything. For my part, I am fifty years old, but I do not seem to have yet begun. Those other souls are in the divine essence. They no longer exist. They have lost their being in Jesus Christ. They are intimately with God, to hear them tell it. Indeed there is nothing more beautiful in the world. My approach is quite different.

One of the greatest sorrows I bear is to see that the evil spirit has been able to detach so many good souls from the blessed person of our Lord Jesus Christ on the pretext of attaining more sublime realities and thus leading them along paths of illusion. O my God, what is more sublime than Jesus Christ? Is he not the splendor of the Father and the image of his substance? Is he not his beloved Son in whom he is well pleased? Is he not the one in whom the fullness of the divinity resides? Has not the Father commanded that everyone should honor Jesus Christ as himself and offer him the same homage?

¹⁸⁵ Orchibal (1959:2-17) presents the encounter of Teresian Carmelite spirituality with Rhineland mysticism and discusses in particular the reaction of Anne de Jésus Lobera, one of the Spanish foundresses to the phenomena: « Quant aux extases, insensibilités, et à ces unions déifiques, élévations, transformations et semblables vertus, et qu'on estime distraction de servir Notre-Seigneur en son humanité et membres d'icelles, et ne s'amuse plus qu' à la contemplation de l'Essence divine, il les faut laisser pour les âmes rares, élevées et qui en sont dignes. Nous ne méritons pas tel rang au service de Dieu; il le faut servir premièrement ès bas offices avant que d'être attirée à son cabinet » (1959:15).

What better thing can we do than to honor his holy person and all the mysteries of our salvation he has accomplished? Why have we been created, if not for that? Our blessed father [Bérulle] and our blessed Sister Marie of the Incarnation [Madame Acarie], when I first knew them thirty years ago, expressed great sorrow to see the beginning of this development. They told me that it was one of the great problems of the church (Letter 39. Thompson 1989:191-192).

Written sometime between 1628 and 1634, this letter conveys a well-seasoned contemplative's attitude toward prayer and toward what she sees around her that masquerades as genuine contemplation. It expresses her sadness and frustration with those who have abandoned a true way for what she considers to be a path of illusion. In the first part of the letter, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph seems to establish her credentials: "I, like the others, *may* have some of this and some graces in prayer". Careful to maintain modesty about her spiritual experience, she adds that she is still reaching and struggling. "For my part, I am fifty years old, but I do not seem to have begun," she says, humbly grounding the whole issue in reality. The tone of the next few lines betrays her dismay at some many souls leaving Jesus Christ behind. "Those souls are in the divine essence. They no longer exist," writes Mère Madeleine. The Mother is quite saddened at what she sees happening: «Hé ! mon Dieu, qui y a il de plus élevé que Jesus Christ ?» *Alas, my God, who is more elevated than Jesus Christ?* (Letter 39. Sérouet 1965:47).

This letter outlines the major concerns of Mère Madeleine: Jesus Christ is the only mediator with the divine Father. He is the way by which we go to God and the only way to get there in perfect freedom (Letter 139. Thompson 1989:197-198). To leave him is to for something more "godly" is illusion. Again, she writes about the "certain souls" who seek to travel to the Divine Essence by spiritual paths that lead to possible deception (Letter 296. Thompson 1989:212) in which they simply adore the Trinity. However, she counsels "that by ourselves and through our own choosing we should always take the simpler way" (Ibid). The simpler way is "through the door who is Jesus Christ" (Letter 139. Thompson 1989:197-198).

5.5.2 Engaging in Faith with the Human Christ

Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was very conscious of women's role in the life of Jesus and in the salvation story. She was particularly devoted to Mary Magdalen, her patroness, and found the faithful women who accompanied Jesus a source of encouragement. As a spiritual teacher, Mère Madeleine makes it very clear that affective engagement in faith with the person of Christ is essential for spiritual growth. She writes to one of the prioresses advising her to request from the Virgin the grace to be a disciple:

Demandés à la sainte Vierge qu'elle vous admette en sa compagnie, comme ces saintes femmes qui suivoient Jésus Christ allant à la croix. Considéres leur patience à souffrir tant d'opprobres, de coups et de paroles outrageuses pour approcher de luy ; et par dessus tout cela, voyés leur grande force et constance, voyant souffrir celuy qu'elles savoient être le Fils unique de Dieu et la vie de leur vie » (Letter 174. Sérouet 1965: 179).

Ask the holy Virgin to admit you to her company, like the holy women who followed Jesus to the cross. Consider their patience and suffering so much opprobrium, of blows and outrageous words for approaching him, and above all else, look at their great strength and constancy, look at their suffering for him whom they know to be the only Son of God and the life and their life.

There is a sense in Madeleine's writings that she is aware of herself as woman before God, and she challenges her Carmelite sisters to relate affectively with Christ. Although there is little evidence of bridal imagery in her writings, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph finds herself quite at home with Magdalen at the feet of the Lord and she encourages others to engage their affectivity in prayer. It is not just a matter of imaginative prayer. What Madeleine de Saint-Joseph suggests is a personal entry into the mystery of Jesus with Magdalen. This entry into the mystery is facilitated only by faith and good will:

Mettés vous donc souvent à ses pieds [Christ's] avec sainte Magdeleine, comme une très grande pécherese ; suppliés le de permettre que vous y demeurés et qu'il daigne vous donner quelque

part à la profound humilité et à l'ardent amour de cette sainte qui, depuis sa conversion, ne chercha ni n'aima jamais que Jésus Christ...Jettés vous entre ses bras avec confiance et amour et il vous recevra telle que vous êtes, pourvu que vous ayés bonne volonté (Letter 187. Sérouet 1965: 193).

Put yourself often at his feet [Christ's] with holy Magdalen, as a great sinner. Pray that he permits you to remain and deigns to give you some part in the profound humility and ardent love of this saint, who after her conversion, looked for, nor loved no one else, but Jesus Christ. Place yourself between his arms with confidence and love and you will receive much more than you have, provided you have good will.

The world of Jesus Christ is accessed through the loving entry into the mysteries of his life, death, and resurrection. Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph finds in the life of Jesus Christ the true way to the Father. She offers that way to those who walk in the Carmelite spirit as true daughters of Teresa of Avila.

5.6 Summary and Conclusions

Mère Madeleine taught convincingly about prayer and believed in the power and efficacy of prayer of petition. Madeleine de Saint-Joseph knew the importance of humility, a virtue most important in the teachings of Teresa of Avila. And she had an understanding and appreciation of human nature that was shaped by the theology of the times.

Madeleine's experience and personal struggles gave her insight into the discernment of spirits and created in her a wealth of expertise of which many persons availed. Her deepest concern throughout her spiritual teachings seems to be the trend that moved away from the humanity of Christ as a source of spiritual enlightenment. In this she showed herself an authentic daughter of Teresa of Avila and a most devoted follower of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 6

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

6.1 Introduction

In this study, it has been our purpose to investigate the writings of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph du Bois de Fontaines in order to assess their mystical content, and to present elements of her spiritual teaching. To achieve this goal, it has been necessary to explore the nature of mysticism in general. This has meant a review of the elements that interact in the mystical experience—body, consciousness, and knowledge—in which a presentation of Lonergan's cognitive theory and explanation of religious conversion has linked mystical consciousness with cognition.

We have surveyed the thinking of philosophers of religion vis-à-vis mystical experience regarding types and characteristics. The critique of feminist philosophers of religion has been presented. Along with this, we have examined the relationship of culture to mystical experience focusing on the issue of mediation, within the context of an exposé on the relationship of language to mysticism.

Through an historical approach, we have presented the historical, cultural, religious, and ecclesiastical aspects of life in France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This has provided a context for the life and writings of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph.

Next, through the use of a phenomenological methodology, certain selected texts from the writings of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph were examined and assessed for their mystical content. Through a process of study and comparison, it was concluded that the texts exhibited certain theistic indicators of mystical experience, and that it is possible to infer that Madeleine de Saint-Joseph experienced certain mystical states. Though she spoke very little of it herself, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was

undoubtedly favoured with mystical graces and insights as her biographers testify (Senault 1645:186-194). Themes in Mère Madeleine's spirituality were identified based on an examination of her letters. Finally, we addressed Madeleine's role as a teacher of prayer and a spiritual guide.

During the course of over thirty years as a Carmelite nun, Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph du Bois de Fontaines made a significant contribution to the life of the Catholic Church in France and to the development of the French school of spirituality. As a novice, she was noted for her keen interior grasp of the essentials of the Carmelite vocation. As a prioress, her gentleness to all the sisters was remarkable. She was remembered for her devotion to prayer before the Blessed Sacrament and her insistence upon the faithful practice of the spiritual exercises of the Carmelite rule. Lastly, as a teacher of prayer and spirituality, she will be remembered for her devotion to Jesus Christ and her one desire: "d'avoir une petite place en la terre et au ciel aux pieds de Notre Seigneur" adoring the one whom she had loved and adored while on earth (Letter 110. Sérouet 1965:106)¹⁸⁶

I have shown that Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's was a mystical voice, influenced by Teresa of Avila and Pierre de Bérulle, but authentically her own. Furthermore, I believe that Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was not an exuberant mystic in the style of Teresa of Avila, but rather someone who followed the dark way to God as is described in the writings of Carmelite mystic, John of the Cross.

Madeleine de Saint-Joseph experienced a relationship with Pierre de Bérulle of mutual influence. Finally, I apply to Madeleine de Saint-Joseph, the term used by Lonergan, *incarnate meaning*. Her life, her prayer, her instruction was an authentic symbol of the human call to transcendence.

Bynum (1992:32--35) suggests that women's stories are much less *processual* than men's—with turning points, dramatic twists, conversions, re-integrations, and

¹⁸⁶ "to have a small place on earth and in heaven at the feet of Our Lord".

triumphs. Women's stories are generally less dramatic and much more characterised by consistency and *continuity*. It is this latter characteristic that seems foremost in the life and religious experience of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph. For the most part, her life consisted in the fulfilment of the duties assigned her by the Carmelite rule and the fulfilment of the responsibilities that fell her lot as choir sister or prioress.

Mère Madeleine's daily life was circumscribed the rule,¹⁸⁷ the horarium,¹⁸⁸ the needs of her community members, the calls from French society for her advice and prayer despite the restrictive nature of papal cloister.¹⁸⁹ Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's enduring friendship with Pierre de Bérulle was characterised by loyalty and a keen mutual interest in developing an interior life that adhered to Christ in his mysteries. The interior attitude is to be built upon a deep sense of one's nothingness (*l'anéantissement*) before God. It was Madeleine de Saint-Joseph who encouraged the hesitant Bérulle to carry out his dream of founding a congregation of priests of Jesus Christ in 1611 (Louise de Jésus 1935:128).

Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was sought after for advice and spiritual direction by religious, clerics and laypersons. The life of the enclosed Carmelites captured the interest of many young royals in Paris, including the Queen, Marie de Medici, who sought out Mère Madeleine not only for her wise counsel, but also for the Carmelite community's intercessory prayer. Even Cardinal Richelieu appealed to Mère Madeleine for the prayers of the Carmelite nuns at the time of the siege of La Rochelle. Within the milieu of Parisian society and beyond, Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph exercised an important influence.

¹⁸⁷ Torres Sánchez writes that the Constitutions are the spinal column of the monastic life. They regulate all aspects of life: the timetable, the prayers, the feasts and the fasts, the habits and dispositions, the meals and the domestic work. The Constitutions are the nexus of union with the Order, the law before which all in the convent are equals (1990:121).

¹⁸⁸ This is a Latin term meaning *timetable*.

¹⁸⁹ Nuns were not allowed outside the confines of the convent property without permission of their ecclesiastical superiors. Their privacy was protected by church regulation. Visits with outsiders were held in parlours behind grilles. Nuns wore veils covering their faces. These practices emphasized the nuns' removal from the world, *per se* and were intended to protect them from its frivolity and allurements.

6.2 The Feminist Critique

We have identified patriarchal ideology and the persistence of dualism as two factors responsible for the oppression of women in society. How does the story of Carmel in France, and the life and writings of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph stand up to the feminist critique?

The beginning of Carmelite life in France came from the inspiration of two women: Barb Acarie and Teresa of Avila. Barb Acarie had gathered a circle of spiritual élites around her to discuss prayer and spiritual growth. Not long afterwards, Teresa of Avila appeared twice to Madame Acarie and requested that she establish a Carmelite foundation in France (Louise de Jésus 1935:54). Other women helped to advance the cause. Catherine d'Orléans, the princess of Longueville, wrote to Pope Clement VIII expressing the desire to found a monastery of reformed religious of Teresa of Avila in the city of Paris or one of its suburbs (Morgain 1995:105). A young widow, Madame Louise Jourdain volunteered to be among a group to go to Spain and accompany the Spanish Carmelites to Paris. Madame Acarie secured the assistance of Pierre de Bérulle and Jean de Brétigny to accompany the group on the journey to Spain and back to Paris. Throughout the saga of the establishment, initiatives were taken by women and responded to by men.

While the beginnings of Carmelite life in France may have been dominated by the inspiration of women, the rest of the story was affected by patriarchal structures and religious territorialism. This is evidenced by several facts: the constitutions of the Carmelite women require a male superior. The Father General in Spain refused to allow the Spanish women to go to France so the nuns' journey had to be undertaken secretly. In the absence of French Carmelite priests to be ecclesiastical superiors for the women religious, the Holy See appointed three French priests who were not Carmelites.

In evaluating the life and contribution of Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph from a feminist perspective, the question can be asked: How much was Madeleine du Bois de Fontaines influenced by Pierre de Bérulle? How authentically personal were Mère Madeleine's expressions of spirituality?

As we have shown, a number of factors, including correspondence, lead to the conclusion that Bérulle and Mère Madeleine had a relationship of mutual influence.¹⁹⁰ Throughout their association, they spoke together, prayed for and supported each other. Bérulle's ideas of devotion did influence Mère Madeleine. Values such as autonomy and independence of thought were not yet part of the consciousness of ordinary people in the seventeenth century. However, *imitation* was considered an important activity.¹⁹¹ Spiritual writers, especially those of the reform "devotio moderna" movement encouraged people to *imitate* the lives of the saints, to *imitate* the life of Christ, to practice virtues and become holy through *imitating* holy people: "The way to God is a life of struggle, of contempt for the world, and of self-denial. In order to attain the goal, one must imitate the humanity of Christ, especially Christ's passion, through meditation, prayer, and humble self-dispossession" (Grundler 1988:180). Imitation of the virtues of Christ is part of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's message, and indeed, imitation itself may also have been a mode of her expression of spiritual truths.

Morgain (1987) contends that Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's spirituality is a synthesis of the spiritualities of Bérulle and Teresa of Avila (1987:104). Her spirituality is an outgrowth of the interplay of her religious experience, reflection on

¹⁹⁰ Another perspective on the relationship of Madeleine de Saint-Joseph and Bérulle comes from Bruneau's research. Bruneau (1998:17-18) makes the case that female mystics wrote for male clerics because the latter were in a position to be guarantors of their legitimacy. Such practices also protected women mystics from being rejected as heretics or criminals, as was the case of Marguerite Porete (Petroff 1986:291-294). Even more pertinent in this case is her remark about female mystics: "Although they sometimes counselled their own spiritual directors, female mystics first had to establish credibility by believing, and causing others to believe, that their authority came directly from God" (1998:18).

¹⁹¹ Huijben quoted in Morgain (1987:111) presents three ways of expressing Christocentrism. Imitation of Christ's actions is one form.

scripture and the teachings of Teresa of Avila, her training by the Spanish Carmelite women, and her associations with Bérulle who was her spiritual director. Madeleine de Saint-Joseph seemingly integrates the two influences of Teresa of Avila and of Bérulle in her own person. Mère Madeleine's contribution to spirituality, according to Delville ensured that "Bérulle's doctrines of adoration, of mystical christo-centrism through 'adherence' to the states and mysteries of Jesus, and of particular devotion to the Mother of God were spread through the Carmelite monasteries in France" (1994:221).

6.3 Incarnate Meaning

The meaning in Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's existence is summed up in this image: worshipping the Living God in spirit and in truth.¹⁹² In her person, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph became a symbol of the end of human life: adoration and love. She exemplifies the *incarnate meaning* of which Lonergan speaks: "meaning that one lives in one's life and manifests in one's activity" (Croken, et. al. 1996:102). Madeleine de Saint-Joseph was a symbol of the human call to transcendence.

In terms of Lonergan's schema on human knowing, Mère Madeleine lived a life of attentiveness to the workings of the Spirit. Reflecting upon her experience, she countered dullness and spiritual inertia. She discovered ultimate value in the human heart of Jesus and from that reference point she judged the value of all created things. In her mystical experience, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph sensed that the soul of Jesus Christ sacrificed her soul to the divinity. She testifies that Jesus Christ performed in her an act that tended to a death to all things (Letter 13. Sérouet 1965:24). This divine act seems to have detached her from all that is created. Her response was to adhere with all her might to the Son of God. Despite dryness in prayer, and at times a pervading sense of abandonment in which her soul seemed

¹⁹² Mère Madeleine mentions the importance of worshipping in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24) in at least three letters: ' 142, 143, 144. It is an important theme and indicates the manner in which one is to pray and adore.

stretched between heaven and earth (Louise de Jésus 1935:84), Mère Madeleine chose to remain faithful to God. Prayer was an expression of her love and a response to God's unrestricted love for her. Mère Madeleine was truly an adorer "in spirit and in truth" and she exemplified the authenticity of which Lonergan writes:

Human authenticity is not some pure quality, some serene freedom from all oversights, all misunderstandings, all mistakes, and all sins. Rather it consists in a withdrawal from unauthenticity [sic], and the withdrawal is never a permanent achievement. It is ever precarious, ever to be achieved afresh, ever in great part a matter of uncovering still more oversights, acknowledging still further failures to understand, correcting still more mistakes, repenting more and more deeply hidden sins (1971:252).

Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's life was not without difficulties and human failings. Despite that, it is possible to say that her life was lived in authenticity. Mère Madeleine felt herself a sinner, weak, and imperfect. Thompson (1989:42) recounts Mère Madeleine's strong awareness of sin that came to the Mother during her great dark night. He quotes from Louise de Jésus (1935:508): "God made me see the malignity of the human being corrupted by sin; ... I have seen with trembling what would become of me were God to leave me to my sinful being". Such an awareness of her human condition continued to mark Madeleine de Saint-Joseph's relationship with God. In the last agony before her death, she spoke the words three times, "Jesus! Jesus, son of the living God. Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!" (Louise de Jésus 1935:559) and died commending herself to God's mercy.

6.4. Conclusion

The story is told that there was a document found in the archives of the Carmelite monastery in Compiègne that narrated a "mystic dream" (Bush 1999:39). The document dated back to 1693 and was discovered by the prioress of the Compiègne community sometime after her election in 1786. The document became a source of inspiration to the young prioress and to the community. It was, in fact, a prophetic

call to martyrdom for a community of women who, not many years later, would lose their lives at the guillotine during the French Revolution.

The document tells the story of a partially paralysed woman who had stayed for over fifteen years as a paying guest of the monastery and who hoped, at the age of twenty-nine to enter the community: Sometime around 1693 the woman had a significant dream:

In the mystic dream Sister Elisabeth Baptiste (as she became known) had seen her bloody, scourged Divine Bridegroom enter her cell, accompanied by four women, each a direct historic link between him and the Compiègne monastery. First there was his Virgin Mother who, as our Lady of Mount Carmel, was patroness of their order. Next came St. Teresa of Avila, its foundress. In third place was the great French prioress of the first monastery, Mother Madeleine of Saint Joseph. Finally there came Mother Madeleine of the Annunciation, late of that monastery. These four women thus formed a specifically Carmelite escort for the suffering Christ (1999:39-40).

After hearing the mystic dream, the prioress was convinced of the authenticity of the young woman's call, and soon after received Sœur Elisabeth into the community and admitted her to professed of vows.

In its own way the dream has many levels of significance: it recognises the Carmelite vocation to be spouse of the suffering Christ; it traces the matrilineal ancestry of the congregation from Our Lady of Mount Carmel, through Teresa of Avila, Madeleine de Saint-Joseph, and down to the previous prioress at Compiègne, Madeleine de l'Annunciation; and it encourages the prioress and Compiègne community to go forward and "follow the Lamb" (Bush 1999:39) in martyrdom. For the purposes of this study, the dream also confirms the position of Mère Madeleine de Saint-Joseph as a true daughter of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, of Holy Mother Teresa, and a model and encouragement to future generations of Carmelite women in France.

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