

“*Surrender to Christ for Mission* is a masterful guide to the extraordinarily rich, though sometimes underappreciated, French spiritual traditions of the 17th through the 19th centuries. This collection of well-written and reader-friendly essays, authored by a team of distinguished specialists in the field of Christian spirituality, offers a fresh, timely, and judicious introduction to these traditions’ major figures and themes that makes this book an essential resource for both the scholar and the general reader.”

— Joseph F. Chorprenning, OSFS
President, International Commission for Salesian Studies (ICSS)

“This helpful collection makes available in straightforward style the many dimensions of traditional French spirituality for today’s reader. Through both historical and thematic approaches, and with special attention to mission to the marginalized, it lays out the unity and diversity within the movement.”

— Carolyn Osiek, RSCJ
Archivist, Society of the Sacred Heart
United States-Canada Province

Surrender to CHRIST for Mission

French Spiritual Traditions

Edited by
Philip Sheldrake



LITURGICAL PRESS
Collegeville, Minnesota

www.litpress.org

Cover design by Tara Wiese.

Excerpts from documents of the Second Vatican Council are from *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations; The Basic Sixteen Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery, OP, © 1996. Used with permission of Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota.

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Sheldrake, Philip, editor.

Title: Surrender to Christ for mission : French spiritual traditions / edited by Philip Sheldrake.

Description: Collegeville, Minnesota : Liturgical Press, 2018. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018010482 (print) | LCCN 2018036201 (ebook) | ISBN 9780814687871 (ebook) | ISBN 9780814687864

Subjects: LCSH: Catholic Church—France—History. | Spirituality—Catholic Church—History. | Spirituality—France—History. | Spiritual life—Catholic Church—History.

Classification: LCC BX1528 (ebook) | LCC BX1528 .S87 2018 (print) | DDC 282/.44—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2018010482>

CONTENTS

Contributors vii

Preface xi

Introduction 1

Philip Shel Drake

Part One

Chapter One

Abandoned for Love:

The Gracious Legacy of French Spiritual Traditions 15

Wendy M. Wright

Chapter Two

Surrendering to Christ for Mission:

The Transformation of a Young Enthusiast 32

Frank Santucci, OMI

Chapter Three

A Distant Mirror:

Is the French School of Spirituality Still Relevant? 49

Ronald D. Witherup, PSS

Part Two

Chapter Four

Captured Yet Free:

The Rich Symbolism of the Heart in French Spirituality 71

Wendy M. Wright

Chapter Five

**Oasis of Gentleness in a Desert of Militancy:
François de Sales’s Contribution to French Catholicism** 90

Thomas A. Donlan

Chapter Six

Women and the French School of Spirituality 109

Mary Christine Morkovsky, CDP

Chapter Seven

Saint Vincent de Paul: The Practical Mystic 127

Thomas F. McKenna, CM

Chapter Eight

**Sanctification, Solidarity, and Service:
The Lay Spirituality of Antoine Frédéric Ozanam** 143

Raymond L. Sickinger

Chapter Nine

**Abandonment and Apostolic Charity in Thérèse of Lisieux,
Daughter of the “French School”** 161

Mary Frohlich, RSCJ

Chapter Ten

Our Perennial Fascination with Thérèse of Lisieux 181

Ronald Rolheiser, OMI

Epilogue:

Fragments of Our Conversation—Some Poignant Echoes 197

Ronald Rolheiser, OMI

Index 201

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PREFACE

The purpose of this multiauthor book is partly to celebrate the Bicentenary of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (1816–2016), founded by St. Eugène de Mazenod, and an important expression of French spirituality—particularly its emphasis on mission to the poor. The chapters of the book are mainly based on contributions to an international conference on French Spiritual Traditions held at Oblate School of Theology, San Antonio, Texas, in November 2016 to mark this Bicentenary. I had the great honor to be asked to chair this conference.

However, equally importantly, this book also aims to make accessible to the increasing numbers of people interested in Christian spirituality the riches of the important family of French spiritual traditions that appeared between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries. This family of spiritual traditions has been significantly underestimated in conventional histories of Christian spirituality and deserves to be better known.

The intended audience for this book is both an intelligent general readership and also students who wish to understand better the wisdom and resources of Christian spirituality.

In particular I wish to express my gratitude to Fr. Ronald Rolheiser, President of Oblate School of Theology, for inviting me to chair the international conference and then to edit the book that arose from this. I am also grateful to the conference speakers for their stimulating presentations and for subsequently turning their spoken presentations into written chapters. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Wendy Wright, a notable scholar of French spirituality, who advised me extensively on this book and on my introduction to it. Thanks are likewise due to Benjamin PowerGriffin, a current doctoral student in Christian spirituality at Oblate School of Theology, for his assistance with the creation of an Index for

this book. Finally, I want to thank Hans Christoffersen of Liturgical Press for agreeing to publish the conference proceedings and then for overseeing the project.

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INTRODUCTION

Philip Sheldrake

The origins of this book lie in an international conference focused on French spiritual traditions held at Oblate School of Theology, San Antonio, Texas, in November 2016. This celebrated the Bicentenary of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) founded in 1816 in the aftermath of the French Revolution by Eugène de Mazenod, French noble, priest, bishop, and ultimately canonized saint. The conference underlined the great variety, significance, and depth of the French spiritual traditions between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. However, it was also clear that these rich traditions have been underestimated within the wider history of Christian spirituality.

One of the most striking features of French spiritual traditions is their strong emphasis on mission to the poor. As the French Jesuit scholar of mysticism and spirituality, Michel de Certeau, underlined this was not merely a question of serving the poor or ministering to deprived people but also involved solidarity with them and a process of learning from them. De Certeau suggested that any ambition by the Catholic Church after the Reformation and the Council of Trent to recover its position as the dominant social and cultural force in the Western world ultimately failed. He spoke of how, as a result, “a prophetic faith organized itself into a minority within the secularised state.”¹ Christian spiritual and mystical traditions moved prophetically to the margins. One aspect of this was the way that some members of social and religious elites (for example, the circle of Cardinal de Bérulle in seventeenth-century France) actively

¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, vol. 1, English trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 299.

sought to associate themselves with “the little people”—the poor and the illiterate. In de Certeau’s words, many people of spiritual and mystical depth sought to leave behind the traditional sources of authority “to turn to the exegesis of ‘wild’ voices.”²

It is perhaps partly as a result of this shift of perspective and move away from conventional centers of religious power that the French spiritual traditions placed such an emphasis on the themes of “abandonment,” “self-emptying,” and “surrender.” As the chapters in this book will richly illustrate, in addition to service of the poor and the theme of “surrender,” French spiritual traditions also manifested a Christ-centered mysticism, often focused on the theme of “the heart,” as well as an increasingly important role for communities of women, an emphasis on the importance of the education of young people, and the development of an active lay spirituality.³

Seventeenth-Century Foundations

I wish briefly to try to place French spiritualities in context and to outline significant schools of thought and practice within the tradition. As a foundation, seventeenth-century France witnessed a striking range of Catholic spiritual reform movements. Some of this was influenced by aspects of Ignatian spirituality and Carmelite mysticism. However, French spiritual traditions also had their own particular flavors. It should be emphasised that there was not a single “French School” of spirituality but several distinctive trends. The three best-known traditions were associated with François de Sales (1567–1622) and Jeanne de Chantal (1572–1641), with Pierre de Bérulle (1575–1629), and also with Vincent de Paul (1580–1660) and Louise de Marillac (1591–1660).

François de Sales was partly inspired by the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola. In his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, de Sales wrote one of the most popular spiritual classics of all time. Its influence spread beyond the confines of the Roman Catholic Church—for example to the

² See Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, English trans. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), chap. 6, “Mystic Speech,” esp. 86–87.

³ For summary overviews of the spiritual writers and figures that follow, see Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality: A Brief History*, 2nd ed. (Oxford/Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), esp. chap. 5, 137–40; chap. 6, 148–50, 159–61; and chap. 7, 176–77.

seventeenth-century Church of England. A Savoyard aristocrat, François originally trained as a lawyer before becoming a priest. Although he became Bishop of Geneva (1602) he was never able to reside in that resolutely Calvinist city. He encouraged Catholic renewal by means of popular preaching, by reforming the clergy, and by developing a thoughtful lay spirituality. De Sales had a deep friendship with Jeanne de Chantal, a widowed baroness, who went on to found the Order of the Visitation. Together they developed a spiritual vision suited to women and men in every context, not least the everyday world. De Sales encouraged spiritual direction for lay people and, while he appreciated the contemplative tradition, he also taught the service of neighbor, particularly the poor. Salesian spirituality emphasised God in creation and God's love for all humanity and desire to forgive. An important theme was "the heart" where the heart of Christ mediated God to human hearts. The spirituality of François de Sales and Jeanne de Chantal was warm while avoiding sentimentality. Also, despite the focus on humility, the Salesian approach was somewhat different from the austerity of Pierre de Bérulle's notion of "servitude."⁴

In the mid-nineteenth century there was a major revival of Salesian spirituality, expressed in a new family of male and female communities plus lay associates founded by or inspired by the Italian priest Giovanni Bosco, popularly known as Don Bosco. There was a particularly strong concern for work with disadvantaged youth.

On a different note, Pierre de Bérulle founded the French Oratory (inspired by the Italian Philip Neri) which consisted of communities of priests under an overall superior who engaged in preaching, running schools, and reform of the clergy. Bérulle was also a sophisticated theologian who developed a Christ-centered, incarnational spirituality.

While Bérulle was educated by the Jesuits and his spirituality echoed the Christocentrism of Ignatius Loyola, his spiritual teachings need to be distinguished in important ways from the Ignatian tradition. His mixture of Dionysian mysticism and Trinitarian theology led him to teach that Christians are drawn into the glory of God-as-Trinity through the

⁴ See Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1982); also P-M Thibert, ed., *Francis de Sales & Jane de Chantal: Letters of Spiritual Direction* (New York: Paulist, 1988); and Wendy M. Wright, *Heart Speaks to Heart: The Salesian Tradition* (London: Darton Longman & Todd/Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004).

“servitude” or self-emptying of Christ. By God-in-Christ’s “humiliation” in becoming human and then by suffering death, humans were granted access to the life of God. The appropriate human response was self-abasement or an abandonment of self before God’s majesty. This developed into a notion of “spiritual servitude” to God’s will.⁵

One of the most notable disciples of Bérulle was Jean-Jacques Olier (1608–57) who founded the Society of St. Sulpice (or Sulpicians), a voluntary company of priests who ran seminaries and sought to improve the spiritual formation of diocesan clergy. Less austere than Bérulle, Olier emphasised personal experience of Christ and the role of the Spirit in uniting us to Christ. He encouraged frequent communion, promoted affectivity in prayer, and had mystical sensibilities.

In passing, other important figures in seventeenth-century French spirituality include Jean Eudes, Louis Grignon de Montfort, and Jean-Baptiste de la Salle. De la Salle, another nobleman, was ordained, gained a doctorate in theology and, influenced by aspects of Christian humanism, founded the teaching institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (De la Salle Brothers).

The third well-known French spiritual tradition originated with Vincent de Paul (1580–1660) and Louise de Marillac (1591–1660). Unlike de Bérulle and de Sales, Vincent de Paul came from a poor background. However, he was ordained and became a royal chaplain. Eventually, some challenging experiences, not least being captured by pirates and being enslaved for a time, as well as the spirit of François de Sales, led Vincent to identify with the poor and to dedicate his life to them as well as to slaves and victims of war. At the heart of his socially engaged spirituality lay union with God through serving Christ in the poor. The medium for spreading this spirit was a community of priests, the Congregation of the Mission (or Vincentians), and a community of women founded with Louise de Marillac known as the Daughters of Charity. Vincent’s vision was also expressed in the development of lay confraternities dedicated to helping the poor in their homes.

These lay confraternities were the forerunners of the famous Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SVP) founded in the nineteenth century by the scholar and Sorbonne professor of Jewish ancestry, Frédéric Ozanam

⁵ See William M. Thompson, ed., *Bérulle and the French School: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist, 1989).

(1813–53). The Society continues to flourish today as a large international voluntary organization of women and men dedicated to offering material assistance to the poor and needy. Basically Ozanam was a key figure in the emergence during the nineteenth century of a distinctive lay spirituality of ministry and service. In recent times, the SVP has accepted members from beyond the Roman Catholic Church.⁶

An Eighteenth-Century Expression? Jean-Pierre de Caussade

In terms of the eighteenth century, while French Catholicism during this period was often influenced by rigorist tendencies, the inspiration of seventeenth-century spiritualities still lingered on. For example, the Jesuit Jean-Pierre de Caussade was assumed for many years to be the author of *L'Abandon à la Providence Divine*, variously translated as *Abandonment to Divine Providence* or *The Sacrament of the Present Moment*. De Caussade was relatively unknown during his lifetime. From 1728 he acted as chaplain to a community of Visitation nuns in Nancy. In 1739 he left Nancy to become a Jesuit superior and ended his life as a spiritual director at the Jesuit house in Toulouse. In recent years a series of scholars have reassessed the attribution of *Abandonment to Divine Providence* to de Caussade. The 2005 critical edition by the French Jesuit Dominique Salin is clear that de Caussade did not write the work. That said, the book has remained a popular spiritual classic. It teaches a kind of mysticism of the everyday based on self-giving (“abandonment”) to God in the course of daily life. Prayer is one of simple attentiveness and waiting on God. There are some echoes in the work of Ignatius Loyola, the Carmelite mystics, and François de Sales.⁷

⁶ See F. Ryan and J. Rybolt, eds., *Vincent de Paul & Louise de Marillac: Rules, Conferences and Writing* (New York: Paulist, 1995).

⁷ For an up-to-date review of the debates about authorship see Wendy M. Wright, “Abandonment to Providence and the ‘Caussadian Corpus,’” in *A Companion to Jesuit Mysticism*, ed. Robert A. Maryks (Leiden: Brill, 2017). Available English translations still tend to attribute the work to Jean-Pierre de Caussade. See, for example, the translation by Kitty Muggeridge, *The Sacrament of the Present Moment* (San Francisco: Harper, 1982, reissued 2009).

CHAPTER FOUR

Captured Yet Free: The Rich Symbolism of the Heart in French Spirituality

Wendy M. Wright

It was an era of the heart. Not simply in the sense of an emerging focus on human emotion or affections. Rather, the period in Western Europe spanning the early to late modern periods was an era in which the heart as symbol and as sign was utilized in myriad ways. Casting a wide gaze upon the denominationally diverse early modern European world, the predominance of the heart image is captured in the phrase “the religion of the heart” coined by historian Ted A. Campbell to describe those approaches to the Christian life, including Pietism, Methodism, Jansenism as well as the Moravian and Hasidic movements that shared a concern with experience as a source of knowledge and emphasized an affective relationship with God.¹ This certainly was also true of Roman Catholic spiritual currents of the same era—the Ignatian and Salesian specifically—that took a decidedly humanist stance when considering the relationship between human and divine and the extent to which human beings were intrinsically oriented toward God through a reciprocal bond of love. All these spiritual schools, movements, or denominations made liberal use of both the language and the visual image of the heart: a heart strangely warmed, a converted heart, the knowledge of the heart, the discernment of the direction of desires of the heart, the exchange of

¹ Ted A. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart: A Study of European Religious Life in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (University of South Carolina, 1991).

hearts, the wounds of the heart, a universe of conjoined hearts, the Sacred Heart, the Immaculate Heart. These and many other visual and verbal images of the heart proliferated in Christian discourse and appeared in material devotional artifacts of the period.

Moreover, during this era the physical heart itself was revered as the distilled essence of a person: among relics of venerated Catholic deceased, the heart was most treasured. This had long been true for European royalty: Richard the Lionheart of England (d.1199), for example, had instructions that upon his death his heart be separately embalmed and entombed in Rouen, and Robert the Bruce of Scotland (d.1329) requested that his disembodied heart be taken on a tour of the Holy Land before being returned to his natal land. The tradition continued, especially in Catholic countries, into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: James II of England/James VII of Scotland (1633–1701), a convert to the Roman church and promoter of religious liberty in his Protestant realm, fled to the continent after being overthrown by his successors. Upon his death James's heart was placed in a silver-gilt locket and enshrined in a reliquary in the Visitation of Holy Mary Monastery in Chaillot, France. The heart of his widowed queen, Maria di Modena (1633–1701), was also enshrined there as was the heart of Henrietta-Marie of France (1609–1669), the convent foundress, daughter of French monarch Henri IV (1553–1610), and wife of England's Charles I (1600–1649), who sought refuge within the monastic walls after the execution of her husband during the English Civil Wars.

Promoters of the Catholic cause throughout the centuries of our concern gloried in the practice of venerating the physical heart of saintly figures. During the Catholic reformation those deemed saints were promoted as witnesses to the prestige and spiritual vitality of the Church of Rome. Defenders of the Catholic faith and the *ancien régime* during the turmoil of the French Revolution also clung to the practice of venerating the relics of revered figures. Savoyard bishop François de Sales's (1567–1622) heart, which along with other body parts had at his death been fought over by devotees, had been enshrined in the monastery of the Visitation in Lyons when, threatened with extinction during the Reign of Terror (1793–74), the monastic community fled and embarked on a perilous journey across the Alps to Mantua in Italy. They carried with them their founder's heart, stripped of its valuable golden reliquary that had been seized by the functionaries of the revolutionary forces. The

lengths to which the possession-less community went to abscond with and secrete away their “treasure of inestimable value” is worthy of a detective thriller.² A less dramatic but not less venerated story concerns the adulation of the revered Vincent de Paul’s (1581–1660) incorrupt heart that was, as custom dictated, separated from the remainder of his body. It resides to this day housed in a much-visited reliquary in the historic motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity at Rue de Bac in Paris.

France

Narrowing focus to French spirituality of the seventeenth to the long nineteenth centuries reveals a rich profusion of heart symbolism in the main Roman Catholic spiritual currents. Special devotional attention was paid to the hearts of the seminal figures of the faith: Jesus Christ and his mother Mary. But there was also focal attention paid to the human heart in the spiritual literature and practice of the time, the heart being seen as central in the drama of spiritual transformation and maturation. For the most part, the term “heart,” when used at this time in reference to the human heart, was firmly rooted in its biblical meaning and connoted the whole person where the intellect, memory, and their attendant capacities including the affections or desires converged. It did not merely refer to the human affections or emotions or passions.

Scriptural images of the human heart and of allusions to the hearts of Jesus and of Mary and of the divine heart had, of course, long been part and parcel of the language of Christianity. One thinks, for example, of late traditional meditations on Mary’s “pondering” or “keeping” things in her heart” (Luke 1:29, 2:19, 2:51) or the Lukan prophecy (2:35) voiced by Simeon that the mother’s heart would be pierced as a sign of the shared destiny in which Mother and son participated. These were part of the “Joyful Mysteries” prayed as part of the Rosary. But something new was emerging in early modern Catholic spirituality that would give nuance and depth to the symbol of the heart. Historian Donna Spivey Ellington has described the significant cultural transition from an oral to a literate

² *I Leave You my Heart: A Visitandine Chronicle of the French Revolution: Mère Marie-Jéronyme Verot’s Letter of 15 May 1794*, ed. and trans. Péronne-Marie Thibert, VHM (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph’s University Press, 2000).

society that was taking place in the early modern world.³ This, she claims, gave rise to a new type of spirituality. In oral culture, knowledge derives from the concrete, and religious expression tends to the bodily and externalized, while literacy in contrast fosters a mindset that favors inner awareness and individualism. Spivey Ellington chronicles the gradual replacement of a medieval, exteriorized, concrete piety with a more “spiritualized,” inward faith that accorded with the more privatized and individual piety that is bred in a literate culture. She links this to the early modern era’s increased ecclesial attention to private sacramental confession, privatized devotion, the popularity of spiritual direction, as well as the acquisition of virtue as being hallmarks of an increasingly literate society. A parallel idea is advanced by historian Mosche Sluhovsky who holds up the era’s popular practice of “general confession,” an introspective recounting of one’s entire life dispositions for the purpose of spiritual renewal and regeneration, as evidence of the emergence of modern notions of the self.⁴

This inward turn was of great interest to all the reformers of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Catholic and non-Catholic alike. The capacity for self-reflection, for interiority, was key to their understanding of the reformed and well-lived Christian life. The new inward, reflective, and thus the idealized human person is glimpsed, in Spivey Ellington’s narrative, through images of the Virgin Mary. If in the medieval (oral) culture, she argues, Mary was honored for her bodily contribution, her motherhood, and for her objective role in the history of salvation, in the early modern period the Virgin became first and foremost the self-controlled, silent contemplative whose humility and obedience were her virtuous crown. Her inner life, the qualities of her heart, now commanded attention.

Newly stressed was Mary as role model, someone whose piety and receptivity to God’s word could be imitated by all Christians. Certainly, for monastics in the medieval era the Virgin had functioned as a model of contemplative receptivity but what was new in the early modern world

³ Donna Spivey Ellington, *From Sacred Body to Angelic Soul: Understanding Mary in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001).

⁴ Mosche Sluhovsky, “General Confession and Self-Knowledge in Early Modern Catholicism,” in *Knowledge and Religion in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Honor of Michael Heyd*, ed. Tamar Herzig, Michael Heyd, Asaph Ben-Tov, and Yaacov Deutsch, 25–46 (Brill, 2013).

was the emphasis on her as an imitable model of the virtues for everyone including the laity. Especially important were the virtues of humility and obedience that were virtues the Church urgently wanted to cultivate in the Catholic people of Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These were traditional virtues associated with the contemplative life as well as virtues or qualities of heart that would well serve a reforming ecclesial community bent on uniformity of practice and belief.

In the same vein, it is interesting to note that devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary would flower as the seventeenth century unfolded and captured the collective Catholic imagination. This newly expanded devotion focused on Mary's interior virtues, on the *quality* of her heart. In the early and medieval church it had been primarily Mary as God-bearer (*Theotokos*), the cosmic Throne of Wisdom, the intercessory Queen of Heaven and Queen of saints that captured the loyalty of the faithful. While devotion to Mary's heart was not utterly new in the early modern era—Anselm of Canterbury and Bernard of Clairvaux are credited with prayers to her as the human contemplative ideal who disposed self to become Mother of God, and Bernardine of Siena preached rapturously of the fiery heart of the Virgin—it was not until the late seventeenth century that a formal devotion to the Heart of Mary gained momentum and took on a distinctively early modern cast. The devotion is one that clearly owes its existence to the era's shift toward interiorized piety. The same could be said of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and spiritual reflection on the interior life lived in *imitatio Christi*. The new reflexive piety led to new conceptualizations of the nature of divine love revealed through the crucified heart of Christ, a devotional focus on the qualities or virtues of the Savior's heart, and new understandings of the process of incorporation into the life of the grace.

A World of Hearts

Of the Catholic spiritual reformers from the early modern “century of saints,” Savoyard François de Sales's spiritual vision is most steeped in the imagery and language of the heart. As a young man de Sales was trained in the Christian humanist curriculum taught by the Jesuits at their Parisian college of Clermont. Thus he was conversant with literature, rhetoric, and the sciences as well as with the depth of scriptural, patristic, and medieval theological and spiritual reflection and devotional practice.

The Jesuits had already inherited the ancient popular devotion to the heart of Christ that had taken visual, poetic, and prayerful forms in the medieval European Christian world and they passed this on to their students. From patristic times the Savior's pierced heart (John 19:34) had been allegorized as the salvific fountain from which flowed the sacramental streams of baptism and Eucharist. The medieval monastic world had explored the Savior's heart as the source of divine wisdom that a contemplative disciple might lean upon in intimate union (John 13:23). Devotional poetry rhapsodically celebrated the side of the Savior as the bridge to heaven bowered with herbs and fragrant flowers. Visionaries such as Gertrude the Great (1256–1302) reported vivid encounters with Jesus displaying his immeasurable love for his people as he opened his breast to reveal the eucharistic heart. Folk images portrayed the wounded heart flanked by the nail-studded feet and hands pinned upon the cross. All this was part of the patrimony to which François de Sales was heir.

Trained by his Jesuit mentors to be attentive to the interior movements of desire—consolation and desolation—and to be an exegete open to the mystical reading of the Scriptures, the young François de Sales was captivated when he encountered the *Canticle of Canticles*, opened to him in a class taught by Benedictine Scripture scholar Gilbert Générard. He thus came to conceive of the drama of human life as a compelling love story, an astonishing story of a world of intertwined human and divine hearts bridged by the crucified heart of Christ.

The devout Christian life was best conceived, the Savoyard came to believe, as an “exchange of hearts”: the gentle, humble crucified heart of Christ (revealed in Matthew 11:29-30) gradually exchanged for the human heart through prayer and the practice of the “little virtues,” those ordinary relational habituated practices such as gentleness, humility, simplicity, cordiality, and patience. The mystical trope of the exchange of hearts familiar in the era through the stories of mystics such as Catherine of Siena was, in a sense, laicized and domesticated by François who taught that all devout persons in all walks and circumstances of life were called to this heart-transformation. He saw the realization of a God-directed transformed world especially in the cultivation of loving relationships, being with one another heart to heart.

Chief among these heart-centered relationships was spiritual friendship, a unique form of equal and reciprocal love he referred to as the “bond of perfection.” Taking his cue from the Gospel of John in which Jesus calls his disciples to the love of friendship with himself and each

other and demonstrates the length and breadth of divine love by laying down his life for his friends (John 15: 13-15), de Sales put the heart at the center of the mystery of salvation. Just as the Son from the beginning was in the heart of the Father, knowing the secrets of the divine heart, so the beloved disciple leaned on the breast of the Son to share the secrets of that heart, thus all disciples are called from servitude to friendship, to love one another, to love as they have been loved, to communicate with God and with each other heart to heart, because friends, unlike servants, are privy to the secrets of the master's heart.

For the Savoyard bishop, as for his contemporaries, the Virgin Mary was both the focus of veneration and the model of the human person fully realized and showing forth the graces of redemption. She, who was closest to her son, the Savior, carried the Redeemer beneath her heart, was most intimate with him in reciprocal love and obedience, and shared his sufferings, her own heart being pierced by his sorrow. It was Mary who modeled the exchange of hearts to which humankind was destined. De Sales expounded on Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth narrated in the Gospel of Luke:

Charity and humility] it was these two virtues which motivated her and made her leave her little Nazareth, for charity is never idle; it burns in the hearts where it dwells and reigns, and the most Blessed Virgin was full of it, because she bore Love Itself in her womb. . . . She also loved her neighbor in a most perfect degree. . . . She not only possessed charity, but had received it in such plentitude that she was charity itself. She had conceived Him who, being all love, had transformed *her* into love itself.⁵

The women's religious congregation that he founded in 1610 with widowed Frenchwoman Jeanne de Chantal (1572–1641), the Visitation of Holy Mary, was to model this Marian way of being in community to the conflicted world of the times through the practice of the little virtues of gentleness, humility, and mutual cordiality. In one of her letters to the burgeoning Visitation monastic order, Mother Superior Jeanne de Chantal encouraged her sisters in religion to embody this vision of a world of conjoined hearts.

⁵ *The Sermons of Francis de Sales on Our Lady*, ed. Lewis Fiorelli, trans. Nuns of the Visitation (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 1985), 50–52.

Ah, my dear sisters, our beloved Visitation is a tiny kingdom of charity. If union and holy cherishing do not reign, it will soon be divided and consequently, laid waste, losing the luster which all the ingenuity of human effort could never regain. . . . Let us therefore all pray that the Spirit of Love, uniter of hearts, grant us this close and living union with God by the total dependence of our will to His and between us by a perfect cherishing and reciprocal union of heart and spirits and in our little Institute by a mutual and exact conformity of life and affection without talk of “yours” and “mine” ever occurring among us, and with our amiably serving each other to the greater Glory of God.⁶

The Visitation spread rapidly in France. By the time of Jeanne de Chantal’s death in 1641 there were eighty-six foundations. The sisters carried with them the hidden practice of the exchange of hearts. Alongside this, François de Sales’s best-selling writings, *Introduction to the Devout Life* and *Treatise on the Love of God* (the former written for lay persons embarking on the spiritual journey, the latter for those more advanced in devotion) spread the interiorized Salesian vision of a world of intertwined hearts across the Catholic spiritual landscape. To “Philothea” his imagined female lay reader and in his characteristic rhetorically rich manner, de Sales wrote of the heart transformed by devotion and the exercise of virtues.

Amid the difficulties that you experience in the exercise of devotion remember our Lord’s words: “A woman in labor is sorrowful because her time has come, but once her child is born, she no longer remembers her anguish for the joy of having brought someone into the world.” You have conceived the world’s noblest child, Jesus Christ, in your soul. Until he is completely born you cannot help but suffer. But have courage. When these sorrows pass, eternal joy will remain for having given such a one to the world. You shall have brought Him forth fully when you have completely formed him in your heart and in your words by imitating his life.⁷

⁶ Sainte Jeanne-Françoise Frémyot de Chantal, *Sa Vie et ses oeuvres*, Tome III (Paris: Plon, 1874), 341.

⁷ *Oeuvres de Saint François de Sales*, Édition complète d’après les autographes et les éditions originales, par les soins des Religieuses de la Visitation du première monastère de la Visitation d’Annecy (Annecy: 1892–1932), III, *Introduction de la vie dévote*, 137.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart and the Immaculate Heart

A half century after de Sales's death a young member of the Visitation monastery at Paray-le-Monial, Marguerite-Marie Alacoque (1647–90), received a series of visions between 1673 and 1675 of Jesus revealing his heart and commissioning her to be the “Apostle of the Sacred Heart”: visions during which she vividly experienced the searing exchange of her own heart for that of the Savior. The first of these visionary encounters took place while she was praying before the Eucharist on the December 27 feast of John the Evangelist, named by tradition as the “beloved disciple,” who had leaned on the master's breast, becoming privy to the secrets of the divine heart.

He said to me “My divine heart is so impassioned with love for humanity and for you especially. It cannot contain the flames of its burning charity inside. It must spread them through you and show itself to humanity so that they may be enriched by the previous treasures I share with you, treasures which have all the sanctifying and saving graces needed to draw them back from the abyss of destruction.” . . . He asked for my heart. I begged him to take it and he did, placing it in his own adorable heart. He let me see it there like a little atom consumed in a burning furnace. Then he returned it to me and placed it where it had been saying. . . . “It will serve as your heart . . . and you will be given the joy of shedding your blood on the cross of humiliation.”⁸

The instructions given to this new Visitandine apostle were to advocate for the institution of a series of devotional and liturgical practices to give honor to and make reparation for the perceived abuses directed toward the eucharistic heart of Christ. Marguerite-Marie experienced Jesus asking her to establish a feast of the Sacred Heart in the liturgical octave following the feast of Corpus Christi (the Body and Blood of Christ, a feast whose genesis had been in the revelations of a twelfth century visionary), as well as an hour of prostration between Thursday night and Friday in honor of Christ's agony in the garden, and the practice of observing the First Friday of each month to adore the eucharistic heart and

⁸ *Vie et oeuvres de Sainte Marguerite-Marie*, presentation Professeur R. Darricau (Paris-Fribourg: Editions St. Paul, 1991), 1:82–84.

make reparation for what were perceived as the abuses heaped upon it: failure to participate in the Eucharist due either to a false notion of human unworthiness and divine judgment or simply laxity.

Marguerite-Marie's visions took devotion to the Sacred Heart in a new direction as it became tinged with the flavor of the Bérullian or French School of spirituality with its emphasis on adoration as the primal stance to be taken before the divine, as well as shaped by the current French political and cultural moment. Jansenism as a theological proposition had been officially condemned in 1642, yet a Jansenistic spirit still permeated much of French Catholic life: a vivid sense of human unworthiness prevailed and eucharistic reception was in decline. While she was a vowed religious of the order of the Visitation of Holy Mary and thus a daughter of François de Sales and his vision of a conjoined world of human and divine hearts, the context of Marguerite Marie's spiritual flowering was quite different from her Savoyard founder's.

Although it took decades (not until 1856) for the Catholic Church to officially establish the Feast of the Sacred Heart as obligatory for the entire church, the liturgical and devotional practices Marguerite-Marie envisioned in the seventeenth century were, after some hesitation, adopted by her own Visitation community, then quickly championed by a series of Jesuits. First her confessor at Paray-le-Monial, Claude de la Colombière (1641–82) who came to believe that her visions were authentic, then Fathers Jean Croiset (1656–1738) and Joseph de Gallifet (1663–1749) took up the effort to write her biography and vigorously promote the practices she had advocated. Within a half century French Catholicism had adopted the Sacred Heart as patron and protector, and cities were consecrated to the Heart of Jesus to avoid the plague and other natural disasters.

The French School and Devotion to the Hearts

A contemporary of Marguerite-Marie Alacoque, Jean Eudes (1601–80), priest-founder of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary and the Order of Our Lady of Charity, raised devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary to new theological and spiritual heights. Eudes's thinking was deeply shaped by the Bérullian or French school of spirituality but he also drew from the heart-centered vision of François de Sales. As did the Savoyard bishop, Eudes saw the heart of Christ as the

“new heart” of the children of God. He expanded this notion to apply to the Church, those incorporated into the Mystical Body of Christ through the sacrament of baptism. Eudes saw the new heart as given so that humans might love God and neighbor just as Jesus did and honored the heart of Christ as the center of the universe, the point of connection between God and the created world.

The first liturgical offices for the celebration of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary were composed by Eudes and he dedicated the seminary chapels of his priestly community, the Congregation of Jesus and Mary (the Eudists), to the twin hearts of the Son and his Mother. The feast of the Heart of Mary was celebrated publicly for the first time in 1648, and that of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in 1672.

In keeping with the era’s emphasis on Mary as the human person most loved by God and most entirely swept up in the divine embrace, Jean Eudes focused on the innumerable qualities of the Virgin’s heart that exemplified the apex of divine-human reciprocal love. In his rhapsodic *The Admirable Heart of Mary*, the native of Normandy presented the term “heart” as signifying both the material, corporeal heart of the Virgin—her memory, intellect and will, the highest point of her spirit which turns directly toward God—and the entirety of her interior life. The term as he used it also included the Holy Spirit Itself and the Son of God who is the “heart” of the Father. All these, he claimed, are present in the heart of the Virgin herself. The treatise explored in cascades of imagistic language the innumerable rich metaphors and exemplary qualities that Eudes asserted can be ascribed to Mary’s heart: sun, center, fountain, sea, garden, burning bush, harp, throne, sanctity, power, truth, mercy, justice, zeal, peace, glory, patience, humility, and so forth. In chapter 5 he contemplated the image of the fountain, drawing prayerfully on Scripture and tradition to exclaim how the Virgin is admirable in all the perfections and virtues that issue from her incomparable heart.

The fourth symbolic picture of Our Lady’s most blessed heart is the wonderful fountain that God caused to spring from the ground at the beginning of the world, as described in the second chapter of Genesis. “A spring rose out of the earth, watering all the surface of the earth.” Bonaventure tells us that this fountain was a figure of the Blessed Virgin Mary. . . . But we have equal reason to say that this represented her heart, which is truly a living fountain whose heavenly waters irrigate not only the whole earth but every created thing

in Heaven as well as on earth. . . . So holy and impenetrable is the heart of Mary that only God, Who enclosed within His treasures of grace and put His seal upon it, can know the quality, quantity and price of the graces hidden in this sealed fountain. All we can say is that Mary's Immaculate Heart is a fountain of living and life-giving water, a fountain of milk and honey, a fountain of wine. . . . Finally it is the source of an infinity of blessings and goodness.⁹

Eudes wrote as well and with equal fervor about the mystery of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Jesus' heart loves boundlessly. The uncreated, divine love which fills that heart is quite simply, God's own self. Because God is unlimited, God's love is also unlimited. Since God is everywhere, God's love is everywhere, in all places and things. The Sacred Heart loves us not only in heaven but on earth. In the sun, in the stars, in everything created. We are loved in all the hearts in heaven, we are loved in all the hearts of everyone on earth who has some care for us. All the love in heaven and on earth shares in the love of Jesus' Sacred Heart. Jesus even loves us in our enemies' hearts. I say boldly that we are loved even in hell, in the hearts of the damned and demons, in spite of their anger and hatred, because divine love is everywhere, filling heaven and earth like the presence of God.¹⁰

Later exponents of the French School continued and expanded on heart-centered devotion. In the writings of Louis de Montfort (1673–1716), Parisian priest and founder of the Company of Mary (the Montfort Fathers), the Virgin was extolled as Queen of Hearts. De Montfort was an ardent promoter of the Rosary and is considered one of the chief architects of modern Marian devotion, placing her at the center of the plan of God and at the core of the spiritual practices that he promoted in order to transform human hearts.

Mary has received from God a great dominion over the souls of the elect; for she cannot make her residence in them as God the Father

⁹ St. John Eudes, *The Admirable Heart of Mary*, trans. Charles di Targiani and Ruth Hauser (Buffalo: Immaculate Heart Publications, 1947), 46–47.

¹⁰ Adapted from "Other Meditations on the Sacred Heart," in *The Sacred Heart of Jesus* by John Eudes, trans. Dom. Richard Flower (New York: Kenedy and Sons, 1946), 121–22.

ordered her to do, and as their mother, form, nourish and bring them forth to eternal life, and have them as her inheritance and portion, and form them in Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ in them, and strike the roots of her virtues in their hearts and be the inseparable companion of the Holy Ghost in all his works of grace—she cannot, I say, do all these things unless she has a right and dominion over their souls by a singular grace of the most high. . . .

Mary is the Queen of Heaven and earth by grace, as Jesus is the King of them by nature and by conquest. Now as the kingdom of Christ consists principally in the heart or interior of humanity—according to his words, “The Kingdom of God is within you”—in like manner the kingdom of Our Blessed Lady is principally in the interior of a person; that is to say, the soul.¹¹

De Montfort believed that since it was through the Virgin that the redemption of the world was begun, so through her it must be consummated. With a strong sense that he was living in consciousness of the last times when the second coming of Christ is imminent, de Montfort taught that

Being the sure means and the straight and immaculate way to go to Jesus Christ and to find him perfectly, it is by her that the souls that are to shine forth especially in sanctity have to find Our Lord. He who shall find Mary shall find life, that is, Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. But no one can find her who does not seek her; and no one can seek her who does not know her; for we cannot seek or desire an unknown object. It is necessary then, for the greater knowledge and glory of the Most Holy Trinity, that Mary should be more than ever known.¹²

At the core of Louis de Montfort’s spiritual program was total consecration to Mary’s heart. The devotee was to surrender him- or herself to the Virgin through a variety of interior exercises designed to regenerate the person from within: honor Mary as Mother of God, meditate on her virtues and grandeurs, make acts of praise and gratitude to her, unite with her, and begin, perform and end all actions with the view of pleasing her.

¹¹ Adapted from Louis de Montfort, *True Devotion to Mary*, trans. Frederick Faber (Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1985), 22.

¹² *Ibid.*, 29.

In addition there were exterior practices which included joining a Marian association or order, giving alms, wearing Marian scapulars or the Rosary, reciting the Rosary or Little Office or Psalter of Our Lady daily, adorning her altars, carrying her image, singing canticles in her honor, and most importantly, making a solemn consecration to her heart. The formula emphasized the continuity with and deepening of the baptismal life as well as the sense of human nothingness without God that is so central to the spirituality of the French School. This Marian-focused devotion was carried throughout the Catholic world by the Association of Mary Queen of Hearts, a lay confraternity under the sponsorship of the Company of Mary.

Expansion of the Devotion to the Hearts of Mary and Jesus

The profound disruption of French Catholic life and French religious communities during the Revolution and the subsequent social and political upheavals of the late eighteenth and into the long nineteenth centuries cannot be overestimated. Yet when faithful practitioners loyal to Roman Catholicism gradually emerged again and were able to haltingly establish presence and practice, the central symbols under which they most often aligned themselves were the Hearts of Mary and of Jesus. This was sometimes a controversial identification as the image of the Sacred Heart was intertwined with the ecclesial tensions of the day: the Sacred Heart was almost solely identified with the Bourbon monarchy and the triumph of Ultramontanist over the French church's Gallicanist factions.

By the eighteenth century the trajectory of devotion to the Sacred Heart in France would move well beyond the realm of pious exercise and become the major ecclesial symbol of resistance against the republican government to champion a Catholicism aligned against the modern world. In fact, at the time of the Revolution, the Sacred Heart became the most identifiable emblem of the Counterrevolution. The emergent republic was characterized in counterrevolutionary circles as a conspiracy against altar and throne and the Sacred Heart as France's salvation and shield. In 1875 construction of the Basilica of Sacré Coeur on Montmartre in the center of Paris began. Known as the Church of the National Vow, the church was to be a sign of reparation and repentance that atoned for the sins of spiritual infidelity that had caused the defeat of France at the hands of Germany in 1870.

CHAPTER TEN

Our Perennial Fascination with Thérèse of Lisieux

Ronald Rolheiser, OMI

I am done with great things and big plans, great institutions and big success. I am for those tiny, invisible loving human forces that work from individual to individual, creeping through the crannies of the world like so many rootlets, or like the capillary oozing of water, which, if given time, will rend the hardest monument of pride.

—William James

Jesus has not given me an indifferent heart!

—Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*

Thérèse's Capacity to Intrigue

Few persons, in recent centuries, have fascinated the religious mind as has Thérèse of Lisieux. Saints, generally speaking, are not very popular today. Yet her popularity continues. What is interesting too about her popularity is that it cuts across many lines, appealing to persons of all ages, every kind of religious persuasion, and every kind of academic background. What accounts for this astonishing phenomenon? What is there about Thérèse and her writings that so captivates and intrigues?

The question of Thérèse's capacity to intrigue all genres of persons is important because, in trying to answer it, we will, I believe, uncover the heart of what she was all about, both in her person and in her teaching. If we can name more clearly what about her captures the heart so strongly, we will, I believe, be in a better position to articulate her spirituality.

What does make her so intriguing? There have been younger saints, gentler saints, and more heroic saints, but never more popular ones, at least not in recent centuries. What makes Thérèse so special? Thérèse of Lisieux fascinates us and has a rare power to truly and healthily fire both our religious and our romantic imaginations, for three interpenetrating reasons. First, she is a child mystic, the Anne Frank of the spiritual life. Second, she is a woman of extraordinary paradox and complexity. And, third, she has that rare power to touch the previously-touched part inside of us. What is curious is that, most often, we consciously relate to Thérèse only through the first of these three, the child mystic. However, even then, unconsciously, what ultimately captivates us is her other two dimensions, her extraordinary complexity and her power to touch what is deepest in us. All of this, however, needs further explication.

What Is So Special about Thérèse?

1) *She is the Anne Frank of the spiritual life.* Someone once said that if you want to understand the real tragedy of the Second World War you can read a thousand books on it—or you can read *The Diary of Anne Frank* where you will see, indeed feel, what war does to the human soul. The same might be said about Thérèse of Lisieux and the spiritual life. You can read a thousand books about how precious a human soul is before God and how, because of this, a soul should respond—or you can read Thérèse's *Story of a Soul*.

Thérèse of Lisieux might be called the Anne Frank of the spiritual life. In both Anne Frank and Thérèse you get to drink from a clear, pure spring. You get to see, and feel, deep realities through the prism of a child's innocence, a child's dreams, a child's simplicity, a child's still uncursed enthusiasm, and a child's purity. Few things have the power to touch the heart as deeply as that, and to trigger piety, both good and bad.¹

¹ Because Thérèse died so young and because her diaries express so much the purity and the innocence of a child (and, in her case, all of this coupled with the tragic loss of her mother), it is no accident that a piety has grown up around her that has unfortunately, but effectively, frightened off many persons. For too many people, devotion to Thérèse of Lisieux is understood to be a drink from a cup of sugar—sickening in its sweetness. That is a tragedy for many reasons, but, in a manner of speaking, it comes with the turf. Her life is ideal putty to the pious imagination. Hence serious studies of her must always do a certain hermeneutic of “de-encrustment.” On the other hand, however, her capacity

Both Anne Frank and Thérèse of Lisieux have that rare power to inflame the romantic imagination. In them, we get the child-mystic, the Christ-child, instructing the elders in the temple. We are always intrigued by this. It triggers an archetype, though not always a mature one, within us.² However, we would do no justice to either Thérèse or Anne Frank if we, naively, thought that what makes their diaries so powerful is their simple innocence. Many children are innocent, have a deep experience of God and of love, and yet their writings or crude drawings inspire no one, save their own mothers. What sets Thérèse and Anne Frank apart? What gives their diaries the power to fire the imagination of millions?

First, they are both great artists. In both of them, we see, not just a child's purity but also an artist's complexity and an artist's talent for aesthetic and transparent expression. Both of their diaries are rare works of art.³ Many of us keep diaries, and all of us have deep experiences, but few of us are great artists. Thérèse and Anne Frank are among those few and it is for this reason, as much as for their innocence and depth, that their writing so powerfully triggers certain things within us. That is what good art does.

to fire piety has its upside. A number of religious analysts, including Karl Rahner, Eric Mascall, and Ernst Käsemann, have, looking at the crisis of belief in our culture and the agnosticism of our daily consciousness, suggested that the churches which have a devotional life, piety, will have the best chance of survival. As Rahner once put it: the day will soon be here when we will either be a mystic or an unbeliever. Piety is the "poor man's" mysticism.

² Scholars who study archetypal symbols and energy tell us that we have four basic archetypal energies, viz. King/Queen, Warrior, Magus, Lover. And we have both a healthy and an unhealthy (adolescent) intrigue with the adolescent expressions of these. Hence there is a perennial intrigue with the child prodigy, the hero, the trickster, and the romantic, i.e., the adolescent expressions of mature energy (the adolescent King/Queen = the Christ Child; the adolescent Warrior = the hero; the adolescent Magus = the Trickster; and the adolescent Lover = the Romantic). Thus it is natural to have a certain (immature) intrigue with the Christ-child prodigy who is instructing the elders.

³ The philosopher Louis Dupré, in his classic work on religious symbol, *The Other Dimension*, normatively defines what makes for true religious art. For him, something is a work of religious art (a book, a piece of music, a statue) if it brings together two things: (i) it has its origins in a true and a profound religious experience, and (ii) it has been given real aesthetic expression. Thérèse's writings, especially *Story of a Soul*, fit this description admirably; indeed *Story of a Soul* can serve as a paradigm. She had a profound religious experience (of preciousness before God) and she was a great artist (she gave rare aesthetic expression to this experience).

However, beyond the truth of that, Thérèse is more than the Anne Frank of the spiritual life. We are, admittedly, intrigued by her innocence, but we are, I submit, even more intrigued by her complexity. There are more dimensions in Thérèse than there are in the young Anne Frank. She is a rare combination of paradoxes and opposites and it is this intriguing near-schizophrenia that lays the real kindling to the fires of the heart.

2) *She is a rare combination of opposites.* Thérèse is so fascinating because, in her, you get something beyond the child-mystic—namely, that rare combination of paradoxes and opposites seen only in great souls.⁴

As we will try to show, hers was a soul formed by great love and great loss, great simplicity and great complexity, great restlessness and great single-mindedness. It is impossible to understand Thérèse in her person, in her message, and in her appeal to people, without grasping this combination of opposites, this radical paradox, within her. Equally, we also need to understand this to extricate Thérèse from a certain encrusting within an unhealthy piety. She was no mere child saint, the little girl, the “puella,” throwing kisses to a hardened, cynical world, as her popular persona unfortunately often makes her out to be. She is a rare mentor of the soul. However, to understand that, we must also understand that combination of opposites that constellated within her.

When you talk about Thérèse of Lisieux, everything must be continually qualified with the phrase, “on the one hand—on the other hand.” This is because, while her way might be called “the little way” and exhibits a radical simplicity, she herself was not very simple at all. Her writings and her person always manifest a certain double persona. A richness, a near-contradiction, and a series of paradoxes touch us from various angles and do not let us categorize her too quickly. The mature Thérèse had a rare combination of opposites. Understanding this can help us understand why Thérèse is so intriguing to us. We might begin to describe her as follows.

⁴ You see this, for example, in people like Socrates, Aristotle, and St. Augustine and, as a prime analogate of course, in Jesus. Great souls are large enough to hold, in tension, near opposites and that is why their disciples are usually not up to the task of faithfully following them and, instead, invariably oversimplify and distort their master’s teachings. That is also why someone once coined the expression: Consistency is the product of small minds. That is an exaggeration, of course, but it can help us understand the paradox that lies so deeply in great souls, including that of Thérèse of Lisieux.

INDEX

- Abandonment, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 20, 21, 22,
29, 30, 34, 114, 121, 147, 161–78
- Acarie, Madame Barbe (Marie of the
Incarnation), 17, 101–2, 110–12,
129
- Asceticism, 9, 91, 95, 101–4, 106
- Alacoque, Marguerite-Marie, 79–81,
115
- Anéantissement*, 20, 110 (*see also*:
self-emptying)
- Aviat, Léonie, 27
Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales,
27, 105
- Bailly, Joseph Emmanuel, 144–47
Congregation of the Blessed Virgin,
144–45
- Baptism, 56–60, 67, 81
- Barat, Madeleine Sophie, 6, 26, 86–87
Religious of the Sacred Heart, 6, 26,
86
- Beauvilliers, Marie de, 94
- Bérulle, Cardinal Pierre de, 1–4, 17,
19–21, 46, 51, 106, 109–14, 120–
21, 129, 162–64, 169–70
*Discourses on the States and
Grandeur of Jesus*, 19; French
Oratory, 3, 17, 110–12
- Bosco, Don Giovanni (John Bosco), 3,
18
Salesians of Don Bosco, 105
- Bourgeois, Marguerite, 18, 118–19
Congregation of Notre Dame of
Montreal, 18, 118
- Brisson, Louis, 27–28
Oblates of Saint Francis de Sales,
27
- Canfield, Benoît de (Benedict
Canfield), 17, 101, 110–11
The Way of Perfection, 17
- Carmelites, 111–12, 163, 174
- Caussade, Jean-Pierre de, 5, 24
Abandonment to Divine Providence,
5, 24
- Certeau, Michel de, 1–2
- Chaminade, Bordeaux Guillaume-
Joseph, 26, 123
- Chantal, Jeanne de (Jane de Chantal),
2–3, 9, 17, 24, 63, 77–78, 102, 109,
115, 129, 165
Order of the Visitation of Holy
Mary, 17, 22, 24, 72, 80
- Chappuis, Marie de Sales, 27
Oblates of Saint Francis de Sales,
27
- Chaumont, Henri, 27
Daughters of Saint Francis de Sales,
27
- Chevalerie, Aymer de, 86
Congregation of the Hearts of Jesus
and Mary, 86
- Christ, imitation of, 9, 22, 91
- Coton, Pierre, 17
- Coudrin, Pierre, 86
Congregation of the Hearts of Jesus
and Mary, 86

- Day, Dorothy, 161, 166, 176–78
Disponibilité, 10 (*see also*: hiddenness)
Douceur, 41, 91, 96–107 (*see also*:
gentleness)
Duchesne, Philippine, 26
- Ecstasy, 18, 22–23, 138
Education, role of, 2, 6, 10, 17, 27, 52–
53, 85, 87, 99, 111, 116, 119
Eucharist, 24, 29, 60–62, 65, 76, 79–80,
88, 97, 113, 116, 125, 170
Eudes, Jean, 4, 17, 23, 46, 63, 80–83,
114–15, 118, 124, 129
The Admirable Heart of Mary, 81;
Congregation of Jesus and Mary
(Eudists), 80–81, 114, 121, 124
- Favre, Joseph-Marie, 87
French Oratory, *see* Cardinal Pierre de
Bérulle
French Revolution, 1, 6, 25–28, 72,
109, 117, 152
French Wars of Religion, 16–18, 22,
91–94, 98
Fristel, Amelie, 124
Fontaines-Marans, Madeline du Bois
de, 112–13
Foucauld, Charles-Eugène de, 7–8, 29
Little Brothers and Sisters of Jesus,
8
- Gentleness, 9, 21, 24, 27, 76–77, 90–
107, 150
Gertrude the Great, 76
Guyart, Marie (Marie of the Incarna-
tion), 18
- Heart
Of Jesus, 3, 9, 21, 26, 75–76, 79–88,
114–16, 122, 137, 162–63
Of Mary, 9, 23, 75, 80–88, 114–16,
124
Hiddenness, 10, 22, 24, 135
Huguenots, 16–17, 91, 93–98
- Ignatius of Loyola, 2–3
Jesuits (Society of Jesus), 3–4, 76,
80, 104, 122
- Jansenism, 24, 71, 80, 85, 87, 90, 104,
107
Joan of Arc, 28
Juan de la Cruz (John of the Cross),
114, 173–76
Jugan, Jeanne, 124
- Labouré, Catherine de, 87–88, 158
The Miraculous Medal, 88
Lange, Mary Elizabeth, 122
Oblate Sisters of Providence,
122–23
Langeac, Agnès Galand de Jesus, 63,
113
Lay movements, 10, 143–59
LeSourd, Angélique, 122
Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus
(Sisters of St. Jacut), 122
Liguori, Alphonsus, 39, 85, 87, 91–92,
104–7
The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ,
104–5; Redemptorist Order, 85,
91, 104, 122
 Lourdes, 6
Lumen Gentium, 59–60
- Malberg, Caroline Carré de, 27
Daughters of St Francis de Sales, 27
Marillac, Louise de, 2, 4, 17, 63, 87,
109, 131–32, 135–37, 147
Daughters of Charity, 4, 17, 63, 73,
87, 109, 131, 136, 146, 158
Mary (Mother of God), 20, 23–24, 26,
40, 42–43, 63–66, 73–75, 77,
80–88, 110, 113, 114–16, 120–21,
123–25, 158
Matel, Jeanne Chèzard de, 17, 115–17
Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate
Word, 17, 117

- Mazenod, Eugène de, 1, 6, 8, 9, 26, 32–48, 67, 105–7, 143–44
 Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (Oblates), 1, 6, 8, 32–48, 122
- Mechtilde de Saint-Sacrement, Mère, 118
- Miramion, Marie Bonneau de Rubelles, 119
- Mission (to the poor), 1, 6, 9, 29
- Montfort, Louis-Marie Grignon de, 4, 82–84, 120, 122
 Daughters of Wisdom, 120;
True Devotion to Mary, 83
- Moreau, Basile-Antoine Marie, 26–27
 Congregation of the Holy Cross, 26
- Mortification, 41, 94–95, 101, 103, 106, 110, 122, 138, 140, 159
- Motte, Pierre Lambert de la, 18, 119
 Lovers of the Holy Cross, 18, 119
- Moye, Jean-Martin, 26, 120–21
 Sisters of the Congregation of Divine Providence, 26
- Mysticism, 1–3, 5, 9, 16, 18–19, 22, 28, 30, 58, 63, 109, 127–28, 183
- Napoleon, 36, 67, 157
- Nothingness, 7, 10, 20, 84, 172, 174
- Olier, Jean-Jacques, 4, 9, 17, 35–37, 41–42, 46, 49–68, 113–14, 118, 129, 138
 Seminary of St. Sulpice, 32, 34, 36;
 Society of St. Sulpice (Sulpicians), 4, 9, 17, 26, 32, 35, 38, 41–45, 45, 49, 57, 64–65, 67
- Oraison*, 41
- Ozanam, Antoine Frédéric, 4–5, 10, 27, 136, 143–59
 Society for the Propagation of the Faith, 154; Society of St. Vincent de Paul, 4, 10, 27, 144–47, 154–59
- Paul, Vincent de, 2, 4, 10, 17, 23–24, 27, 44, 46–47, 53, 73, 87, 115, 117, 119, 127–42, 148–50, 156, 159
 Congregation of the Mission (Vincentians), 4, 17, 129, 134, 136–37, 146; Daughters of Charity, 4, 17, 63, 73, 87, 109, 131, 136, 146, 158
- Pelletier, Mary Euphrasia, 124
- Pollalion, Marie Lumaque, 138
- Pontcourlay, Marie Madeleine Villeneuve de Vignerod du, 115–17
- Pope Francis, 54, 56, 66
- Pope Leo XIII, 85, 115, 176
- Prayer, 4, 5, 8, 21, 40–41, 50, 66, 120, 123, 130, 137–38, 164
- Preaching, 37, 45, 53, 139
- Prez, Claude de, 97
- Reign of Terror, 15, 72
- Renaud, Rita, 125
- Sacred Heart, Feast of, 23, 79–80
- Sales, François de (Francis de Sales), 2–3, 17–19, 21, 24, 27, 63, 72, 75, 78, 80, 85, 90–107, 129, 164–65
 “Bond of Perfection”, 76;
Introduction to the Devout Life, 2, 18, 21, 27, 78, 102–6, 165;
 spiritual direction, 3, 91, 98–100;
Treatise on the Love of God, 78, 100;
 Visitation of Holy Mary, 17, 22, 24, 72
- Salesian Pentecost, 27, 105
- Salle, Jean-Baptiste de la, 4, 23
- Séguir, Louis-Gaston de, 27
 Association of St. Francis de Sales, 27
- Self-emptying, 2, 4, 7, 20, 117, 125
- Servitude, 3–4, 77, 110, 112, 123, 134, 170
- Soubirous, Bernadette, 6

Spirituality, ix, 2–3, 6–8, 19, 21, 24, 46, 49–51, 58, 63, 73–74, 80, 84, 86, 104, 109–25, 128, 137, 140, 157, 159, 162–64, 175, 194–95
Surrender, 9, 21, 23, 24–25, 65, 83, 134–35, 148, 162, 167, 169, 172–73, 177–78

Teresa de Jesus (Teresa of Avila), 18, 63, 111, 138, 163, 173

Thérèse de Lisieux (Therese of Lisieux), 10, 28, 161–78, 181–96

Abandonment, 161–65, 167–71, 173, 176, 178; *Act of Oblation to Merciful Love*, 169; holocaust, 169, 171–75; “the little way,” 7, 28, 164, 173, 176–78, 184, 194–95; poverty, 165–67; St. Cecilia, 168; *Story of a Soul*, 7, 166, 169, 172–73

Trent, Council of, 1, 52–53

Vallées, Marie de, 114–15

Xavier, Francis, 28