

Preface

This collection of translations, summaries, and studies of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century panegyrics on Saint Bernard began in a very limited way, with a translation of a single conference by Armand-Jean de Rancé. But then, having translated that, I thought it might be interesting to translate the very different discourse of Rancé's close friend, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, generally considered to be one of the greatest, if not the greatest, of the seventeenth-century French pulpit orators. Neither Rancé nor Bossuet, however, spoke of Bernard the mystic—it was always Bernard the ascetic, the great penitent, the defender of the church, the scourge of heretics—and so I decided to translate the remarkable panegyric of Henri-Marie Boudon, who, alone of the panegyrists, deals at length with Bernard's mystical experiences. This then led to a translation of Charles de La Rue's fiery polemic against Quietism, in which Bernard goes to battle against the so-called false mystics, Madame Guyon and Fénelon, but since this had been set beside La Rue's revised version of the same panegyric, I translated that as well.

And so one sermon led to another, and, since only one of the panegyrics—that of Bossuet—had ever been translated into English (and that only in an abridged version¹), I decided to translate or, if full translation was not warranted, to summarize the great majority of the panegyrics on Bernard that had been preached in the France of Louis XIV. The Bernard they portray is not, for the most part, the popular Bernard of today—as I

¹ See chap. 7 (Bossuet), n. 30.

have said, Bernard the mystic tended to be carefully avoided—but those who are interested in how the abbot of Clairvaux was viewed and used (perhaps sometimes abused) in the France of the Sun King now have the primary material at their disposal in English.

Given that all the panegyrists used the same basic source—the *Vita prima S. Bernardi* in the editions of Horstius or Mabilon, or its French adaptation in Antoine Le Maistre's *Vie de S. Bernard* (matters to be considered in detail in chapter 1)—it is inevitable that a number of well-known scenarios from Bernard's life appear again and again, and that the same *dramatis personae* play their roles on the panegyrical stage.² This does not mean, however, that the panegyrics are all the same, any more than two buildings designed by two different architects will be the same because both are using the same basic materials. Jacques Biroat's approach, for example, is as different from that of Bossuet as Bossuet's is from Massillon's, and one of the pleasures I found in reading and translating these discourses was the way in which one could hear so clearly the individual voices of their authors.

Some of the panegyrics were easier to translate than others—I found those of Fénelon and Massillon the most difficult—and one must always bear in mind that the meaning of a particular word in seventeenth-century French and modern French may not be quite the same. *Sentiments*, for example, are not quite sentiments, and *crimes* tend to be sins, not crimes. There are many other such words, and there are also a number of important technical terms that appear again and again and that are listed and defined in appendix 1. All the translations, as distinct from the summaries, are complete translations—they are not abridged or paraphrased—and everything the writers wrote or the preachers preached has been translated. I have tried, as best I can, to render the stately French into stately

²See appendix 2, "Personalities."

English, but I fear that I cannot possibly have done justice to the fire of Charles de La Rue's first panegyric on Bernard, or the *onction* of Fénelon, or the tidal wave of words with which Massillon sweeps his listeners away.

The task of translation was made infinitely easier by the fact that with only two exceptions, every one of the editions needed was readily available on the internet, digitalized mainly by Google. The only exceptions were Bernard Velat's edition of Bossuet³ and the excellent edition by Henri Chérot of La Rue's anti-Quietist attack on the ideas of Miguel de Molinos, Madame Guyon, and Fénelon.⁴ It is perfectly possible, of course, that both may now be available. But for me, being stationed in Newfoundland, the old days of long and expensive travel to distant locations, and the hours spent in libraries, pencil in hand, are a thing of the past.

The panegyrists could obviously expect certain things of their audiences that we cannot, in general, expect nowadays. If, for example, they were preaching to a congregation of Feuillants—reformed Cistercians stricter in their observances than even the Strict Observance—they could expect their audience to be intimately familiar with Scripture, some parts more than others, equally familiar with the story of Bernard's life, and fairly familiar not only with Bernard's own writings but also with the writings of at least the four Doctors of the Latin Church: Augustine, Gregory the Great, Jerome, and Ambrose. Few readers today will share the same familiarity, and it has therefore been necessary to add numerous footnotes to indicate what is going on and how the argument is being developed. Sometimes these footnotes are necessarily copious.

Furthermore, in order to appreciate the content of the panegyrics—what is not included as well as what is—and the intentions of the preacher, it is essential to have some acquaintance with the nature of society in *le grand siècle*, the

³See chap. 7 (Bossuet), nn. 4 and 30.

⁴See chap. 9 (La Rue 1), n. 9.

attitude of the church to human sin and human frailty, the fear in so many quarters of mysticism and mystical experiences, and the popularity, importance, and structure of sermons in seventeenth-century France. These matters are discussed in the first three chapters, and they are essential reading if one wishes to come to any appreciation of what the preachers were trying to do. If this seems much to ask, readers should remember Luke 21:19, possess their souls in patience, and remember that when Madame de Sévigné and her friends went to one of the great Parisian churches to hear Bossuet or Bourdaloue, the preacher commonly preached for an hour and a quarter or an hour and a half. It was not an instant age, and the preacher would take his time in touching, moving, and converting the hearts of his audience. Some of the greatest preachers of the age are represented in these pages, though whether they still have the power to touch, move, and convert is a question that can be answered only by those who have the patience to read them.

It seems to me appropriate that the concluding chapter of this volume was written in the delightful cloister of the former Cistercian abbey of Fontaine-Vive, also known as Grosbot, near Charras in the southwest of France, a cloister that had been extensively rebuilt at just the time that many of these panegyrics were being delivered and that has since been superbly restored by Jonathan Clowes and Ann Evans, the present owners of the abbey. To them I offer my thanks for their generous hospitality. Much of the seventeenth-century work was completed by Jean de La Font, abbot of Grosbot from 1641 to his death on March 21, 1673, and his able prior, Dom François Pasquet,⁵ and if there is anything of value in the pages that follow, it may surely be attributed to their benign influence.

⁵See Adolphe Mondon, *Notes historiques sur la Baronnie de Marthon en Angoumois* (Angoulême: G. Chasseignac, 1895–1897), 250–55.

The Quietist Controversy

The reason the panegyrists generally avoided the question of Bernard's mystical experiences was not that there was no interest in mysticism in the France of the Sun King, but because there was too much of it. One could find, in fact, a whole variety of mysticisms, like so many exotic orchids,¹ but the essen-

¹The only comprehensive account of seventeenth-century French spirituality and mysticism is to be found in the marvelously rich (but quirky and idiosyncratic) pages of Henri Bremond's *Histoire du sentiment religieux en France depuis les guerres de religion jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1916–1933 [eleven vols.]). Much of the material presented there cannot be found elsewhere. The first three volumes were translated into English as *A Literary History of Religious Thought in France from the Wars of Religion down to Our Own Times*, trans. K. L. Montgomery (London: SPCK, 1928–1936). Much briefer summaries may be found in Pierre Pourrat, *Christian Spirituality. Later Developments. Part II: from Jansenism to Modern Times*, trans. Donald Attwater (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1955), chaps. 1–12, pp. 1–307, and Louis Cognet, *Post-Reformation Spirituality*, trans. P. Hepburne Scott (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1959), especially chaps. 3–5, pp. 56–141. Cognet offers a very sound and readable summary; Pourrat offers more detail with a good commentary, provided one can sidestep his conservative Tridentine Catholicism. But for the pure joy of reading, in English, a wonderfully entertaining account of Quietism that yet penetrates to the heart of the matter, one cannot do better than to read Ronald A. Knox, *Enthusiasm. A Chapter in the History of Religion, with Special Reference to the XVII and XVIII Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950), chaps. 11–16, pp. 231–388. On the term *spiritualité*, see appendix 1, s.v. *spiritualité* / spirituality. See further Bernard Plongeron,

tial problems, theological, ecclesiastical, and political, lay with Quietism. Unless we understand what the Quietists taught and what they were said to have taught, we cannot understand the aversion to discussing Bernard's mysticism on the part of the panegyrists, we cannot understand the antagonism between Bossuet and Fénelon, and we cannot understand the fire of Charles de La Rue's anti-Quietist polemic, which masquerades as a panegyric in praise of Saint Bernard.

We must begin with Miguel de Molinos, born in 1628 in the northeast of Spain. He studied for the priesthood, was ordained in Valencia and then sent to Rome, where he became well known as a spiritual director and where he made powerful friends in the Curia. In 1675 he published his *Spiritual Guide* (*Guía spiritual*) with the usual approval of the ecclesiastical authorities, and the book proved extremely popular, being translated into Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, and Latin. In the *Guide* Molinos distinguishes meditation from contemplation and then divides contemplation into two forms: acquired or active contemplation and infused or passive contemplation. What are we talking about here? Meditation is discursive, that is to say, it uses the mind and the imagination. Guigo II of La Chartreuse provides a clear explanation: "Reading [*lectio*] is an attentive examination of the Scriptures [made] with the directed attention of the spirit. Meditation [*meditatio*] is the studious action of the mind, seeking out the understanding of a hidden truth under the direction of one's own reason. Reading, as it were, puts food whole into one's mouth. Meditation chews it up and breaks it into pieces."²

"Lumières contre épopée mystique: les 'lectures' de saint Bernard du XVII^e au XIX^e siècles," in *Vies et légendes de saint Bernard de Clairvaux*, ed. Patrick Arabeyre, Jacques Berlioz, and Philippe Poirier (Brecht and Cîteaux: *Cîteaux—Commentarii Cistercienses*, 1993), 306–27.

²Guigo II of La Chartreuse, *Scala claustralium* ii–iii; Sch 163:84–86. Molinos himself cites the *Scala* as one of his authorities, attributing it, as was usual at the time, to Saint Bernard: see Denzinger, no. 2223.

If reading remains on the outside of the subject, says Guigo, meditation enters within, climbs higher, and by using all the powers of one's own intellect, penetrates to the heart of the matter. This is precisely the usage of Molinos.

Contemplation is a different matter entirely. If meditation demands the use of our reason, intellect, and imagination, contemplation involves their annihilation, in the literal sense of being reduced to nothing (*nihil* in Latin). This, according to Molinos, is the true *via interna*, the interior way,³ and in its simplicity it does away completely with the old threefold path of purgation, illumination, and union, "which is the greatest absurdity to be spoken of in mystical [theology], for there is but one single way, the interior way."⁴ Rather than being used, the mind is quietened down and opened up to God, and one's entire human will is placed in submission to the divine will. If temptations and untoward thoughts should arise, they are not to be attacked or cast out or countered by the cultivation of the opposite virtues, but rather ignored or disregarded, something that Molinos calls "negative resistance" (*resistencia negativa*). Under the guidance of a wise spiritual director, anyone can experience this interior contemplative unity, though unless God himself intervenes it will always be acquired and imperfect. But if God does intervene, then we have perfect contemplation, which is passive and infused, and entirely the gift of God. In this state, one's human will has become completely God's will, one is totally abandoned in God, and afterward one's existence continues "as if one were a lifeless body [*corpus exanime*]."⁵ By doing nothing, says Molinos, "the soul annihilates itself and returns to its beginning and its origin, which is the essence of God. In this [essence] it remains transformed and divinized, and God then remains in himself, for then there are no longer

³Denzinger, no. 2201.

⁴Denzinger, no. 2226.

⁵Denzinger, no. 2202.

two things united, but only one, and in this way God lives and reigns in us and the soul annihilates itself in operative being."⁶

This infused and total annihilation of one's human will has certain ineluctable logical consequences. First, if one wills nothing at all, this must include one's own salvation. A soul thus annihilated "ought not to think of reward or punishment or Paradise or hell or death or eternity."⁷ There is, after all, no "you" to do the willing. "When a soul has achieved mystical death, it cannot will anything other than what God wills, for it no longer has a will, since God has taken it away from it."⁸

Second, since one is now nothing more than a musical instrument on which God plays,⁹ the tune that emerges is not one's own but God's. Thus, what may appear sinful in the eyes of others cannot be sinful for you, since you have no part in it. "When doubts arise as to whether what one is doing is right or not, there is no need to reflect [on the matter],"¹⁰ and "through acquired contemplation one arrives at the state of no longer committing any sins, either mortal or venial."¹¹ God may allow the devil to tempt one, and even to move one's members against their will, but the acts that result from this, "though sinful in themselves, are not in this case sins because there is no consent in them."¹²

Third, one must obviously not ask God for anything nor thank him for anything one may receive, for both asking and thanking are acts of the human will.¹³ Since you are now "divinized," what happens is God's doing, and, in essence, no

⁶ Denzinger, no. 2205.

⁷ Denzinger, nos. 2207, 2212.

⁸ Denzinger, no. 2261.

⁹ I have borrowed the analogy from the second-century Apologist Athenagoras of Athens, *Apol* 7.

¹⁰ Denzinger, no. 2211.

¹¹ Denzinger, no. 2257.

¹² Denzinger, no. 2241.

¹³ See Denzinger, no. 2215.

business of yours. It follows, therefore, that petitionary prayer is no more than ignorance, for true prayer consists in “remaining in the presence of God in order to adore, love, and serve him, but without effecting any acts [of your own will].”¹⁴ This includes the Lord’s Prayer, for interior souls find themselves unable to recite it.¹⁵

Fourth, since one’s own human will has now been subsumed in God, it is not fitting for one to perform works, even virtuous works, by one’s own choice and activity; otherwise one would not be mystically dead. Such virtuous works include “acts of love for the blessed Virgin, the saints, or the humanity of Christ, for since they are objects of the senses, so too is love towards them.”¹⁶ And as for “the voluntary cross of mortifications, this is a heavy and useless burden which is to be given up,”¹⁷ and for interior souls, there is obviously no place for the sacrament of penance.¹⁸

In short, a soul that has achieved the perfection of contemplation—a state that, according to Molinos, can be *continuus*, “continuous,” “unbroken,” “uninterrupted”¹⁹—has no desires of its own, not even a desire to be saved, and has achieved a state of sinlessness where what would be sins in others are not sins for that soul. And for such a soul, prayer, acts of devotion, good works, mortification of the senses, and the sacrament of penance have no place at all.

It is hardly surprising that Molinos found himself before the tribunal of the Holy Office (the Inquisition), and despite his reputation as a spiritual director and despite his powerful friends in the Curia, he was condemned for heresy. On September 3, 1687, he was obliged to retract his errors publicly and

¹⁴ Denzinger, no. 2221.

¹⁵ See Denzinger, no. 2234.

¹⁶ Denzinger, no. 2235.

¹⁷ Denzinger, no. 2238.

¹⁸ See Denzinger, nos. 2259–60.

¹⁹ Denzinger, no. 2262.

condemned to imprisonment in the papal prison, the Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome, for the rest of his days. He died in prison on December 29, 1696. After his public retraction in 1687, Pope Innocent XI condemned sixty-eight propositions of Molinos taken from his letters, from witnesses at his trial, and from the Memorandum he himself presented to the Holy Office. It is possible, therefore, that not all of the propositions represent exactly what Molinos said, but they certainly represent what he was thought to have said, which is what is of importance here.

We must now travel back in time almost half a century to Monday, April 13, 1648, when Jeanne-Marie Bouvier de La Mothe was born at Montargis, about seventy miles south of Paris. She was a sickly child, and her parents neglected her education; in its place they instilled a deep and fervent piety. She had wanted to become a nun, but her parents had other ideas, and, at the age of fifteen, she was forced into an arranged marriage with Jacques Guyon, sieur du Chesnoy, who was wealthy, an invalid, and twenty-two years her senior. The marriage was unhappy from the start, and was made even worse by the abuse that the young girl suffered at the hands of her husband's mother. It is not surprising that she took refuge in religion, spending long periods in intensive prayer and apparently experiencing mystical raptures. After twelve years of marriage and five children, Jacques Guyon died, and in 1676 his wife found herself a wealthy widow, twenty-eight years old, in a comfortable house in Montargis.

Five years earlier, in June or July 1671, Madame Guyon had first met François Lacombe, a Barnabite friar five years older than she, and the meeting proved spiritually enriching for both of them. The Barnabites had been founded in Milan by three Italian noblemen in 1530, and Father Lacombe was superior of the Barnabite house in Thonon in Savoy, south of Geneva. In 1680 Madame Guyon had a further mystical experience in which she felt herself summoned to Geneva; as a result she had contacted the bishop of the diocese, Jean d'Arenthon d'Alex, who suggested she use her considerable wealth to set up a

house for “New Catholics”—i.e., converts to Catholicism—at Gex in Savoy as part of a wider plan for the conversion of Protestants in the area. The project was not a success, for Madame Guyon clashed with the sisters who were looking after the house, and tensions were so great that the bishop sent Father Lacombe to intervene. At this time he, officially, became Madame Guyon’s spiritual director, though who directed whom in the relationship is a moot point. Father Lacombe may well have been more influenced by Madame Guyon’s ideas than she was influenced by his.

It is clear that by this time Madame Guyon had developed her own interior spirituality, a spirituality that, like that of Molinos, involved opening oneself up to God and annihilating one’s human will in the divine will. We shall say more on this in a moment. But her unorthodox mystical ideas and the difficult situation in Gex led Jean d’Arenthon to expel both Madame Guyon and Father Lacombe, who were now inseparable, from his diocese. The two then began a five-year journey that would take them from France to Italy and back again to France, and it was inevitable that rumors circulated about the nature of their relationship.

During this period, in January 1685, while Madame Guyon was in Grenoble, she published her *Moyen court et très-facile de faire oraison*, “A Short and Very Easy Method of Prayer,” which contained ideas that disturbed Étienne Le Camus, the bishop of Grenoble. Nor was the bishop happy with Madame Guyon giving informal spiritual instruction in her house and on her own authority spreading teachings dangerous to the faith. As far as the bishop was concerned, the content of Apostolic Tradition was defined by the church; it was not defined by private personal revelations supposedly coming directly from God. He therefore asked her to leave Grenoble, as she did, and she rejoined Father Lacombe, who was then at Vercelli, in the north of Italy.

In July of the next year, 1686, the two returned to Paris, where Madame Guyon continued to teach and offer spiritual

direction, but their timing could not have been more unfortunate. By this time Miguel de Molinos was already in the hands of the Holy Office, and Louis XIV did not care for Quietists or any ideas that smacked of Quietism. Direct communications from God could too easily challenge the authority of the king, and too many revolutionary millenarian movements had had their bases in mystical revelations. On his orders, therefore, Father Lacombe was arrested and imprisoned in the Bastille, and the world knew him no more. In 1688 he was transferred to a prison on the island of Oléron, in 1689 to the fortress at Lourdes, and in 1698 to the castle of Vincennes. Nowhere was he treated well, and after fourteen years in Vincennes he lost his reason and was sent to the asylum of Charenton, where he died in 1715.

Madame Guyon was arrested at the end of January 1688 (by which time Pope Innocent XI had condemned the sixty-eight propositions attributed to Molinos) and confined to the convent of the Visitation on the rue Saint-Antoine in Paris. There she spent the next seven months, before being released through the intervention of Madame de Maintenon, second wife of Louis XIV, who also arranged for her to teach at the prestigious boarding school for young noblewomen at Saint-Cyr that Louis had founded in 1684 at Madame de Maintenon's request. There she continued to teach her doctrines on the interior way, passive prayer, and total submission to God's will—doctrines that, in just a few years, resulted in her removal from Saint-Cyr.

Shortly after her release from the convent of the Visitation Madame Guyon met François de Salignac de La Mothe-Fénelon, who became her most influential supporter. Fénelon, who himself had the soul of a mystic, considered the mystical experiences of Madame Guyon to be authentic and was impressed with her teaching on passive prayer and pure love (of which more in a moment), though he did not agree with all that she taught. From the time of their first meeting they were regular correspondents, and through Fénelon's connections at Court, Madame Guyon's teachings permeated a number

of influential religious circles and were looked on favorably by Madame de Maintenon herself. Then, in 1693, certain of Madame Guyon's students at Saint-Cyr claimed that they had experienced exalted mystical states and that, having achieved union with God, they were no longer bound by conventional morality but were free to follow their own will, which, by definition, was that of God. When news of this development came to the ears of Paul Godet des Marais, bishop of Chartres (Saint-Cyr lay within his diocese), he was naturally alarmed and contacted Madame de Maintenon to express his concerns and warn her of the dangers of Madame Guyon's teachings. Nor was the situation helped by the fact that by this time Fénelon's own writings were showing distinct signs of Quietist ideas. Madame de Maintenon then sought the advice of a number of bishops and priests, all of whom expressed doubts about Madame Guyon's teachings, and it was then decided to consult the bishop of Meaux, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, a prelate of undisputed authority and unquestioned orthodoxy. Bossuet had no desire to undertake the inquiry, being busy with other matters, but royal pressure left him little alternative. Madame Guyon agreed to the choice of arbiter and in October 1693 provided Bossuet with copies of her writings, including her autobiography.

Bossuet undertook his commission with his customary thoroughness and spent three months examining the documents, as well as studying the works of such great mystics as Teresa of Jesus, John of the Cross, and Francis de Sales. That was necessary, for Bossuet, unlike Fénelon, disliked and distrusted mysticism and had not immersed himself in their writings. Bossuet and Madame Guyon met face-to-face for the first time on January 30, 1694, in Paris at the house of one of Bossuet's friends, and once they got down to business, if I may quote E. E. Reynolds, "Mme. Guyon found that she had to face a very thorough criticism of her notions and method. For the first and probably only time in her life, she met someone who could talk her down; in fact, she complained afterwards that she could

not get a word in; the experience was so disconcerting that she took to her bed."²⁰

Bossuet found her sincere and well intentioned but muddled in her thinking, and he was in no doubt that, even if her ideas could be defended, they could too easily be misinterpreted. The events at Saint-Cyr, which had led to her dismissal, had shown that. He was also in no doubt that some of her ideas were just plain wrong. When Bossuet had been suggested as the arbiter in the case, Madame Guyon had agreed to accept his judgment, but when she saw the way the wind was blowing, she requested a further inquiry, preferably conducted by a layman. Madame de Maintenon, who was deeply involved in the whole process, agreed to the inquiry but—reasonably—suggested that it should be conducted by a small commission of ecclesiastics, and, after some negotiation, three well-known churchmen were appointed to the commission. One of them was Bossuet; the other two were Louis-Antoine de Noailles, then bishop of Châlons-sur-Marne, and Louis Tronson, the superior of the Society of Saint-Sulpice. All three were friends of Fénelon, and Fénelon wrote to the committee defending Madame Guyon's notion of "pure love" while recognizing that certain other of her ideas were, one might say, idiosyncratic. Madame de Maintenon, on the other hand, supplied the committee with material decidedly antagonistic to Madame Guyon, for Madame de Maintenon wanted no further harm done to the reputation of her school at Saint-Cyr. The inquiry took eight months, and the committee finally met at Issy, near Paris, in February 1695 to make a final decision. Issy was the summer residence of the Society of Saint-Sulpice, and Louis Tronson was old and plagued by rheumatism. By this date, Fénelon had just been nominated archbishop of Cambrai (a nomination approved by Madame de Maintenon), and in consequence of his new and elevated standing, the three

²⁰ Ernest E. Reynolds, *Bossuet* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963), 221.

members of the committee invited him to attend the concluding conference at Issy. This he did, and the committee drew up a list of thirty-four “Articles on the States of Prayer” that called attention to erroneous ideas in the writings of Madame Guyon. But before we examine these articles, let us outline briefly what it was that Madame Guyon was teaching. Her writings are voluminous, to say the least, but her essential ideas are set forth in her *Short and Very Easy Method of Prayer*, which we mentioned above.²¹

She begins by emphasizing the simplicity of her approach. Her method is indeed short and very easy, and it is open to all. All are called to prayer, all are capable of prayer, just as all are called to salvation. And what is prayer? “Prayer is nothing but the application of the heart to God, and the internal exercise of love.”²² Discursive meditation, on the other hand—meditation that depends on the intellect and reason—is not something to which all are called, nor something of which all are capable; so meditative prayer is not the sort of prayer that God asks of us, and it is not the sort of prayer that the author of the book recommends. Not everyone is gifted with brains, but everyone has a heart, and prayer is simply the giving of one’s heart to God. Furthermore, since “prayer alone can give you [the experience of] the presence of God, and give it to you continually,”²³ you must learn the sort of prayer that may be exercised at all times, whatever your state in life and whatever you happen to be doing. But since prayer that comes from one’s head can have but one object at a time, continual or unceasing prayer must be the prayer of the heart, which is not interrupted by

²¹ See further Nancy C. James, *The Spiritual Teachings of Madame Guyon, Including Translations into English from Her Writings* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007).

²² Jeanne-Marie Bouvier de La Mothe-Guyon, *Moien court & très-facile de faire oraison. Que tous peuvent pratiquer très-aisément, & arriver par la dans peu de tems à une haute perfection. Nouvelle édition* (n.p., n.d.), 9.

²³ Guyon, *Moien court*, 11.

the exercise of reason. The only things that can interrupt it, in fact, are disordered or unregulated affections.

The normal ways of introducing a soul to prayer are meditation and meditative reading (*lecture méditée*), but, as we said above, not everyone is capable of this. But “those who do not know how to read are not excluded from prayer on this account,”²⁴ for the great book that teaches all things is Jesus Christ himself. How, then, should they pray? They should first make an act of adoration and abasement before God and then gather themselves together inwardly and experience the presence of God directly, firmly believing that he dwells within them and controlling their thoughts and senses as best they can. This is the first degree of prayer.

“The second degree is called by some Contemplation, the Prayer of Faith, and of Stillness (*repos*); others give it the name of the Prayer of Simplicity.”²⁵ Madame Guyon prefers this last designation, and here we begin to move into dangerous territory. In this second stage, recollection²⁶ becomes much easier, and one begins to be aware of the sweetness of the presence of God. Nevertheless, one should not enter this stage of prayer seeking such sweetness: one should enter it “with courage, and with a pure and disinterested love [*un amour pur, & sans intérêts*], so that one seeks nothing whatever from God save to please him and do his will.”²⁷ A servant who does his duty only for hope of reward does not deserve a reward, and we should not go to prayer to enjoy spiritual delights, but to experience whatever God wills us to experience, whether it be periods of spiritual drought or spiritual abundance. It is all up to God.

The next stage is to begin the abandonment and giving up (*l'abandon et la donation*) of our whole self to God. By this we become resigned in all things and accept all that happens as

²⁴ Guyon, *Moien court*, 16.

²⁵ Guyon, *Moien court*, 19.

²⁶ See appendix 1, s.v. *recueillement* / recollection.

²⁷ Guyon, *Moien court*, 20.

from God himself: “Abandonment is a stripping off of every care we may have for ourselves to leave ourselves completely at the disposal of God.”²⁸ If God wishes us to suffer (and suffering is the way of the cross), then we must abandon ourselves to that suffering, and in this state of abandonment, Jesus Christ “often gives revelations of his own states in a very specific way.”²⁹ What states? “Illumination or darkness, fruitfulness or barrenness, strength or weakness, sweetness or bitterness, temptations, distractions, pain, weariness, or doubt,”³⁰ and not one of these should hold us back from pursuing our course. It follows, too, that in this state we cannot wish for anything for ourselves, for our human will has been subsumed in that of God. “These are souls for God alone,” she says in her autobiography, “who have no more interest in themselves or for themselves: all is for God, with no care or concern for their own salvation, perfection, eternity, life, or death. All that is nothing to them: their business is to let Divine Justice eat its fill of them.”³¹

Furthermore, this abandonment “is a short and certain way of acquiring virtue, for if God is the source of every virtue, to possess God is to possess every virtue.”³² Abandoned souls, one might say, are passively, not actively, virtuous, because whatever they do that is virtuous is actually being done by God. All that is required is a pure and disinterested love, as Saint Augustine says—“Love, and do what you will”³³—“for when we really love, we cannot wish to do anything that might

²⁸ Guyon, *Moien court*, 22.

²⁹ Guyon, *Moien court*, 26.

³⁰ Guyon, *Moien court*, 26.

³¹ *La Vie de Madame J. M. B. de La Mothe-Guyon, écrite par elle-même, qui contient toutes les expériences de la vie intérieure. Nouvelle édition* (Paris: Libraires Associés, 1790), 2:243. The verb is *se rassasier*, “to eat one’s fill, to gorge oneself with something.” It is a powerful image.

³² Guyon, *Moien court*, 27.

³³ Augustine of Hippo, *In epistulam Johannis ad Parthos*, tract. 7.8; PL 35:2033.

displease the Beloved."³⁴ Austerities and mortifications, therefore, are to be avoided. All they do is draw undue attention to the senses they are trying to control, and the more one mortifies one's senses, the further one withdraws from God! The only way to control the senses is not to attack them outwardly but to separate oneself from them inwardly. Once we possess God in pure love, God will do all that needs to be done, and since our will is now God's will, all we need do is follow our inward inspiration, and then, without any specific thought of mortifications, God will have us do whatever mortifications may be necessary.

The more we love and adhere to God, the more God takes us over. Indeed, "we must state it as a matter of the greatest importance that one must put an end to one's own actions and exertions so that God alone may act."³⁵ At this stage, all a soul needs is its quietude (*repos*), "for it is now that, during the whole day, the presence of God (which is the great effect of prayer, or, rather, the continuation of prayer) begins to be infused, almost continually."³⁶ This infused state of God's presence must inevitably have consequences for the sacrament of confession, for any soul that has achieved this condition need only open itself up to God to have all its faults and sins revealed. Active self-reflection is ineffective in this matter; passive resignation to the Divine Light reveals all. And not only does this passivity reveal all, but because one knows that one is totally in the presence of God, one feels not regret or contrition for one's sins, but only a sensation of love and tranquillity. More than that, "the soul will be astonished that it will forget its faults and have difficulty remembering them. But this, for two reasons, must not cause it any unease. The first reason is that this forgetfulness is a sign that we are purified from the fault and that at this stage it is better to forget everything that

³⁴ Guyon, *Moien court*, 28.

³⁵ Guyon, *Moien court*, 34.

³⁶ Guyon, *Moien court*, 37.

concerns us so as to remember only God. The second reason is that when we must confess, God will not fail to reveal to the soul its greatest faults," and this he will do far more effectively than anything we can do ourselves.³⁷

It is clear, she continues, that by this stage the soul will find petitionary prayer more and more difficult. If you are utterly abandoned in pure love to the will of God, what can there be to ask for? Do not be surprised or concerned about your defects and failings: the more these are revealed to you, the more you must abandon yourself to God and rely on his infinite strength. Do not struggle directly with distractions and temptations, for this will only make them worse: "you should simply avert your eyes from them and draw closer and closer to God."³⁸ Be like a little child confronted with a monster. He does not fight it; he can hardly bear to look at it but shrinks back to his mother's breast where he knows he will find safety. Let God do the work!

We are now approaching the highest level of prayer, which is the total annihilation of oneself in God: "There are but these two truths: the All and the Nothing. Everything else is a lie. We can honor the All of God only by our own annihilation [*anéantissement*], and we are no sooner annihilated than God, who never suffers a void [in nature] without filling it, fills us with himself."³⁹ This is Divine Union, which cannot be achieved by discursive prayer or active contemplation, but only by the repose of one's human will, by absolute passivity in pure and disinterested love. In this state the soul does nothing, being no more than an instrument in the hands of God, who does everything. Is the path that leads to this end difficult? It is not. Is it dangerous? It is not. Is it open to all? It is:

There is no one who does not know that God is the Supreme Good, that eternal blessedness consists of

³⁷ Guyon, *Moien court*, 42.

³⁸ Guyon, *Moien court*, 46.

³⁹ Guyon, *Moien court*, 49.