

# The Human Condition

## A Study of some Seventeenth Century French Writers<sup>1</sup>

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'We are like ruinous old houses that are falling down on every side. If you prop them up on one side, they fall down on the other. They must be supported in all directions, and renovated from the very foundations, for the whole thing is going to rack and ruin. We are all the same, the perfect and the imperfect alike. History is full of souls that have been lost by the abundance of their graces . . . Lucifer found the occasion of his ruin in heaven'.

These few phrases, which end with something that sounds like a reminiscence of Gregory the Great, are nevertheless as characteristic of their own author as they are of their period. They form part of an address given by Pierre de Bérulle<sup>2</sup> at the opening of his visitation of one of those Carmelite convents for whose existence in France he, more than anyone else, was responsible, and they may well serve as a symbol of the theme I wish to discuss in this study, a theme which I think is not without an important bearing upon some topics of contemporary interest. Of this, however, the reader must be left to judge for himself. These pages are offered in the guise of history, not of controversy.

When, by 1595, Henri IV was firmly established in Paris and conditions favourable to a Catholic religious revival in France were returning, it was not only burned and ravaged churches and monasteries that lay in ruins in so many places. These were, in their way, no more than the signs of an interior condition of spirit whose true nature a small number of men of spiritual insight were to discern, as they let it awaken in them a renewed realization of the bearing of traditional Catholic life

<sup>1</sup>The substance of a lecture delivered in the autumn of 1960 to the French department of the Faculty of Letters in the University of Reading.

<sup>2</sup>A photographic reproduction of Père F. Bourgoing's fine *editio princeps* of the *Oeuvres Complètes du Cardinal de Bérulle* (Paris, 1644) has recently been printed at Montsoult (Seine et Oise). It is therefore to this edition by work and page that all references in this study are given. The opening quotation is from *Oeuvres de Piété* CXVI (p. 972). These smaller works are hereafter cited as O.P.

and teaching upon the religious and human situation of their own day.

It is important, I believe, to try to appreciate that situation as it appeared at the time.<sup>3</sup> When one remembers that about a third of the property of the entire French nation consisted of ecclesiastical benefices in which the *haute bourgeoisie* had considerable financial and family interests, it is easy to see why to so many Frenchmen in the sixteenth century the spirit of reform seemed to be primarily an attack on the existing political arrangements. The dissociation between the administration of Church property and the exercise of spiritual functions was too long-standing to appear as scandalous as it does to us today. Even the Huguenot Sully held four commendatory abbasies, and we shall also notice that it was sometimes through what would seem to us to be abuses that notable figures in the Catholic counter-reform found themselves in a position to exert the influence they did. The future Mère Angélique Arnauld became abbess of Port Royal at the age of eleven and later de Rancé, the reformer of la Trappe, was to begin his career by holding his abbacy *in commendam* in the familiar style. Nor were these two centres of controversy the only ones to benefit by the workings of a system whose effect was seen by everyone to be first and foremost juridical. It was possible to condemn its abuses without seriously questioning the legal basis upon which many of them rested.

The trials and calamities of civil war inevitably imposed a strain upon a society from which the demands of interior and personal piety had somehow been so successfully banished, banished at least below stairs where some of those humble and loyal household servants, whose hidden part in the Catholic revival must not be underestimated, often continued lives of devotion that flowered in genuine mysticism. Père Guennou's *Couturière mystique de Paris*, which has recently appeared,<sup>4</sup> gives us an account of a journal of one more, hitherto unknown, case in circumstances like these. To those above stairs, two alternative attractions generally offered themselves. Those who were troubled by what an earlier natural theologian Raymond Sebond had called 'un vide qui a besoin d'être comblé' sometimes turned to Calvinism. It is probable that Calvinism, which was not without its political converts, made many others among men who were profoundly disgusted with the existing religious situation around them and saw, among the Calvinists, people with a genuine spiritual life and services that offered moving

<sup>3</sup>My debt, in the purely historical sections of this paper, to the various studies of M. l'abbé Louis Cognet will be very evident.

<sup>4</sup>Paris, 1960.

sermons instead of dead ceremonies. It was not really dogma that drew so many of the best spirits in this direction. When Anne Arnauld declared that she preferred the company of her Calvinist aunts because they were obviously so much better than the Catholic ladies she knew, she was using the kind of argument which is almost impervious to controversy. Where this admiration for Calvinism did not lead outside the Church, it often acted as a powerful stimulus towards the kind of piety that consists in a practical consciousness of man's human misery and a dependence upon the redemptive work of the Saviour, of which there is, after all, a long and orthodox tradition stretching back into the Dark Ages. The effect of an almost daily contact with Calvinism, into which his work threw him, is a factor of primary importance in the development of the ideas of François de Sales, of which we shall presently have to speak.

But it was not always in a specifically Christian direction at all that cultivated Frenchmen turned for consolation. Stoicism had a great vogue, and Marcus Aurelius and Lucretius were the preferred authors of a humanist trend which tended to think of God more and more as a philosophical entity than as a person, and to put man back in the centre of a world picture from which the thought of an eternal destiny had all but disappeared. M. Adam of the Sorbonne, in a recent lecture in Oxford<sup>5</sup>, has drawn a contrast between the natural theology of Raymond Sebond, of which a translation by Montaigne appeared in 1569, and the thought of Justus Lipsius the humanist who was working in the Low Countries at this same period. Although for Sebond 'nulle chose créée n'est plus voisine à l'homme que l'homme à soi-même', he gives a phenomenology of man which is far from an optimistic and abstract humanist construction of harmony and balance, and is therefore, M. Adam believes, an ideal preparation for understanding Pascal. Lipsius, on the other hand, is not concerned with the blindness and misery of man's actual condition. He begins with the notion of a God of reason, whose wisdom is reflected in an ordered universe. He gives us a picture of a system in which the consequences of the fall and the dominance of the world by the forces of evil, traditional to and inherent in the Christian world-view, are discreetly not denied but stated, as it were, in parenthesis. He appeals to the authority of St Jerome when he says that there is 'a certain natural holiness in our souls which exercises judgment about good and evil', but it is from Cicero and the Stoics

<sup>5</sup>A. Adam, *Sur le problème religieux dans la première moitié du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Oxford, 1959), the Zaharoff lecture for that year.

that his doctrine really derives. It would be a complicated task to attempt to trace all the ramifications and metamorphoses of the humanism of this period and, even were I competent to do so, it would not serve our immediate purpose. It is sufficient to note that apart from the appearance in 1622 of a similar spirit to that of Lipsius in Grotius' work *De Veritate Religionis Christianae*, there are numerous signs that many theologians, either members of, or closely connected with the Society of Jesus, were deeply penetrated with the spirit of a humanism of this type. As M. Adam has pointed out, one of these, Lessius, who was teaching at Douai for seven years from 1574 and at Louvain for fifteen years from 1585, gives fifteen proofs of the existence of God of which not one derives either from Aristotle or any of the old scholastic masters. They invoke a description of the seasons, or the mysteries of the animal kingdom or a meditation on the starry heavens.

The essential note of the various Christian attempts to find a compromise with the humanist materialism of this period is an optimism about a world in which evil is scarcely allowed the place it has in the older theology. With this there frequently goes an endeavour to find a place for natural man before the face of God. There can be no doubt that this tendency found doctrinal expression in the ideas of the Spanish Jesuit Molina, who in his *Concordia*, published in 1588, taught that the efficacy of divine grace has its ultimate foundation not within the substance of the gift of grace itself, but in the divine foreknowledge of free human co-operation with this gift. Lessius adopted essentially the same standpoint on this question. Nor were these the only expressions of this theological approach. Another of the more notable, which gave considerable scandal to theologians of a traditional Augustinian type, was the *Défense de la Vertu* of the Jesuit Père Antoine Sirmond, which came out in Paris in 1641. The author's thesis is that the Christian life does not formally require us to produce acts of the love of God for their own sake. The observance of the commandments and the doing of good are the only precepts that bind under pain of grave sin. It is easy to see how this theory gives the virtues of the pagans a foothold in heaven. The act of charity only obliges to the extent that it may be the condition of the fulfilment of our Christian duties towards God, neighbour or self. 'I am quite ready to say', he writes, 'that God in commanding us to love him is content *au fond* that we should obey him in his other commandments'. In other words, the command to love is merely negative, and Sirmond even says 'we are not so much commanded to love as not to hate'. Although, as I have said, this book

was not published until 1641, it is relevant to mention it when we are discussing an earlier period, not only because it comes at the end of the career of a man who had been teaching for years, but also because it represents a logical development of trends which are discernable at a considerably earlier date. These trends are inevitably reflected in works of popular piety, which tend to offer their readers a devout life *beside* a worldly one.

An awareness of these two widely differing influences of Calvinism and humanism is essential to a proper understanding of the evolution of François de Sales, the first of the great figures of the Catholic revival in seventeenth century France. François was born in the duchy of Savoy, which was no part of the kingdom of France, on August 21st, 1567. In 1581, after a schooling at the nearby town of Annecy, he went by his father's wish to Paris for his university education, and it was there at the Jesuit college of Clermont that he came into vital contact with the humanism of the Society. This first period in Paris was marked by a painful spiritual crisis about which our information is not as full as we could wish but, any psychological and temperamental considerations apart, it clearly arose out of the discussions on predestination which were then in the air, and with which François, still only a boy, was ill-equipped to cope. After six weeks of mental torture in which he came to feel that he might well be one of the damned, he suddenly found relief at the feet of the black statue of our Lady in the Church of St Etienne-des-Grès. As a result of this crisis he eventually emerged from his theological studies a convinced Molinist. Molinism claimed to be a kind of Thomism and one wonders whether it was not perhaps some other kind of Thomism rather than the text of St Thomas himself that had been the cause of his anxiety, for any student of Aquinas would probably admit that his doctrine on predestination *could* be presented in a way which might appear almost indistinguishable from pure Calvinism. This providential personal experience cannot have been without its importance in the development of that extraordinary combination of firmness and gentleness which was later to characterize him as a director. What his natural temperament was may, perhaps, still be considered something of an open question. I confess that long before I had made the leisure to read the first volume of Brémond's great study of this period, I had come to feel profoundly sceptical about François' reputation for irascibility, even though this appears to be based on his own statements. Brémond has made at least some case for regarding them as not unambiguous, and I still feel that it is possible that it was

not in his gentleness but in his firmness that his virtue consisted. At least of the latter quality no one who has seriously tried to follow his teaching could any more doubt than they would of the former, and on this matter we have irreproachable contemporary evidence. 'If this holy man had stayed in France', says Mère Angélique Arnauld in her *Relation sur Port Royal*, 'I believe I could have derived great profit from his holy direction, which was never soft and sweet, as most people have supposed. He overlooked nothing in souls that wished to be led in the truth'.<sup>6</sup> Anyone who has seen the death mask of Mère Angélique, with its almost frightening masculine strength, may judge what this testimony is worth.

But that is to anticipate. At the completion of his studies in Paris in 1588, François was sent to the university of Padua, in the hope that he would settle for a secular career, but there he met the spiritual book he was afterwards to swear by, the *Spiritual Combat* of Lorenzo Scupoli, and nothing could alter his desire for the priesthood. Accordingly he was ordained to the priesthood on December 18th, 1593, at Annecy, the town to which the Calvinists of Geneva had forced their bishop to retire. In the following year, at his own insistence, he set to work on the dangerous and difficult task of converting the Chablais, a disaffected area of the diocese, a task in which his notable success led to his being made co-adjutor to the bishop in July, 1597.

Geographically and culturally François was admirably placed to appreciate all the factors at work in the religious situation in France at this period. He had, on the one hand, his direct experience with Calvinism. On the other, contacts, largely through the milieu of Mme Acarie, with all the principal figures of the Catholic revival in Paris, were fostered by an eight months stay in the city, terminating in the autumn of 1602. There would seem to be some reason for thinking that it was this second stay in Paris that gave an impulse to the extensive spiritual correspondence whose remarkably mature beginnings preceded and in some ways occasioned the publication of the *Introduction to the Devout Life*. On his return from Paris in 1602 François succeeded to the difficult bishopric of Geneva, being ordained bishop on December 8th of that year. Naturally, he was now busier than ever but, using his spiritual correspondence as a basis, he had by 1608 produced a book whose success was immediate and lasting. There was a second edition of the *Introduction to the Devout Life* in 1609, another in 1610, another in

<sup>6</sup>*Relation écrite par la Mère Angélique Arnauld sur Port-Royal* ed. L. Cognet (Paris, 1949), pp. 100 and 101.

1616 and a definitive edition in 1619. 'This is', he says in his preface, 'a very capricious age, and I foresee clearly that many will say, that it appertains only to religious and persons of devotion, to direct individual souls along the path of piety, that such a work requires more leisure than a bishop can well spare, when charged with a diocese so heavy as mine is; that it is too great a distraction to the understanding, which should be employed in affairs of greater importance. But, as for me, my dear reader, I say, with the great St Denis, that it appertains principally to bishops to lead souls to perfection'.<sup>7</sup> There were a few of François' contemporaries who were not slow to see that this was the conviction which so many years hard work with the Calvinists had produced, that the answer to Calvinism was not controversy but holiness, without which nothing would be gained. Its relevance to the struggle with Calvinism was, of course, only one aspect of the importance of a book which in François' own lifetime had been translated into Italian, Latin, English, Spanish and German. François died in 1622, but by 1656 the book was available in seventeen languages and when Dom Mackey edited it for the Annecy edition in the nineteenth century it must have run through more than a thousand editions. Its influence, direct and indirect, has been almost incalculable and, at least in England, this has possibly been as powerful beyond the confines of the Church as it has within it and certainly as continuous. Marie de Medici sent a copy of it bound with diamonds and precious stones to King James I, and a proclamation of May 14th, 1637, shows that it was important enough for Charles I to order all copies of it in England to be destroyed to save himself from the imputation of being a Catholic.

What was the reason for this universal acclamation? Though incomparably better written, the *Introduction* retains, at least on its surface, something of the colour and flavour of many of the little books of humanist piety that had preceded it. It does seem, incidentally, that in spite of the avowal of the preface that he has given no thought to elegance of style, François did in fact make a number of revisions of the language prior to the definitive edition of 1619, though these are mainly in favour of the lucidity which is such a mark of his writing. Yet it was not because it was the product of a singularly talented hand that this little book was so outstanding. It was rather that under the appearances of the familiar it was a *volte-face* from the contemporary humanist standpoint. Far from countenancing a depersonalized piety

<sup>7</sup>Citations from the *Introduction* are cited in the translation of Allan Ross (London, 1924).

which would dissociate the world of devotion from the avocations of secular life, the *Introduction* is inspired by a vision of personal engagement in any and every situation. 'And since devotion', says François in his opening chapter, 'consists in a certain excelling degree of charity, it not only makes us ready, active and diligent in observing all the commandments of God; but it also prompts us to do readily and heartily as many good works as we can, even though they be not in any sort commanded, but only counselled or inspired. . . In fine, charity and devotion differ no more, the one from the other, than the flame from the fire'. The devout life is, in other words, the Christian life in all its fullness.

It was his invigorating demands that ensured for François' *Introduction to the Devout Life* its prominent rôle in the Catholic revival of his own day, and its effectiveness was due in no small measure to his exceptional genius as a spiritual director. François is no theoretician of the spiritual life, he has none of the fecundating theological ideas which were to make Pierre de Bérulle the father of so many spiritual children, but among spiritual directors he was that one in ten thousand of whom he speaks, who knows how to accommodate himself to individual differences of character and vocation and appreciates how to give his directives a practical bearing upon what he finds. The *Introduction* reveals already his immense interest in and insight into psychological processes and his tendency to constellate all he has to say about the exercise of the virtue of charity—he believed that it was by charity that the walls of Geneva would be broken down—but it is not, of course, in the *Introduction* that we shall look for the fullest justification of that way of living whereby, through fidelity to mental prayer, the Christian life of action becomes charged with spirit. This we shall find in the most remarkable product of François' extraordinary spontaneity, his *Traité de l'amour de Dieu*.

I say 'extraordinary spontaneity' for this huge book which, however familiar one becomes with it, never fails to astound one with the apparently inexhaustible abundance, freshness, neatness and appositeness of its imagery, was often written on the backs of envelopes in odd quarters of an hour snatched from periods when, among other things, the bishop was sometimes coping with as many as twenty-five letters a day. It was in composition over a very long and formative phase. Parts of it were written prior to the publication of the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, but it owes its distinctive character chiefly to a developing relationship with the most gifted of François' spiritual daughters, Mme

Jeanne Françoise Fremiot de Chantal. Writing of his method of meditation in the *Introduction* François had said 'Some will tell you that, in the representation of these mysteries, it is better to make use of the simple thought of faith, and of a simple apprehension entirely mental and spiritual, or else to consider that the things are done within your own spirit; but that is too subtle for a commencement, and until such time as God may raise you higher, I counsel you to remain in the low valley which I have shown you'.<sup>8</sup> He first came to know Jeanne Françoise in 1604 and his first direction of her was in conformity with the suspicion of an abstract and mystical spirituality which the foregoing passage suggests. But Jeanne Françoise was instinctively a mystic and when, about 1607, she came into contact with the newly founded Carmel at Dijon, where she discovered kindred spirits, François found himself gradually forced to let her show *him* ways of which he would, equally instinctively, have been cautious.<sup>9</sup> The interest he was thus compelled to take in mystical theory is reflected in the finished *Traité*, which eventually came from the press on July 31st, 1616.

In the first four books of the *Traité*, which in his preface he declares to be more or less optional reading for 'such souls as only seek the practice of holy love', François makes it his business, as he says, to go deep down into the roots of the subject and to construct as a basis for his affective piety a minute theory of the human will. It is indeed, he says, the *man* who loves, but he loves by his will, and therefore the end of his love is of the nature of his will: but his will is spiritual and consequently the union which love aims at is spiritual also.<sup>10</sup> In his doctrine of the mystical path which culminates in union with God, François will therefore lay great emphasis on conformity of will to the will of God. In the sanctuary of the human soul there is 'une certaine éminence et suprême pointe de la rayson et faculté spirituelle' which is not guided by the light of argument or reasoning, but by a simple view of the understanding and a simple movement of the will, by which the spirit bends and submits to the truth and the will of God. Into this *pointe de l'âme* 'reasoning enters not . . . and all the light is in some sort obscured and veiled by the renunciations and resignations which the soul makes, not desiring so much to behold and see the goodness of the truth and the truth of the goodness presented to her, as to embrace and

<sup>8</sup>Part 2, chap. 4.

<sup>9</sup>Letter 54 in *Selected Letters of St Francis de Sales*, ed. E. Stopp (London, 1960) may be cited as typical of this phase.

<sup>10</sup>Bk I, chap. 10.

adore the same'.<sup>11</sup> If this doctrine will be important to those who are approaching the summits, those who are only in the foothills will find François anxious to emphasize what is hopeful in the human situation and to insist on the good which remains in man even after the Fall. 'As soon as man thinks, with even a little attention, of the divinity, he feels a certain delightful emotion of the heart, which testifies that God is the God of the human heart . . . We are created to the image and likeness of God: what does this mean', he says, 'but that we have an extreme affinity with his divine majesty?'<sup>12</sup> For François the fundamental possibilities of the spiritual life are thus rooted in nature itself, though they cannot be realized without the assistance and animation of grace. Before this theological tenet the question therefore arises: Why does nature give us a thirst for a precious water of which she cannot give us to drink? In a delicately constructed chapter he reaches this conclusion. 'This inclination to love God above all things, which is natural to us, does not remain in our hearts for nothing; for God, on his side, uses it as a loop to capture us more gently and draw us to himself, and it seems that by this, the divine goodness somehow keeps a hold on our hearts like little birds on a string, by which he can draw us when it please his mercy to take pity on us—and on our side, it is a sign and reminder of our origin and creator, to whose love it moves us, giving us a secret intimation that we belong to his divine goodness'.<sup>13</sup>

The presence of this 'spark under the ashes' is for François the ground of his optimism about the possibility of real holiness for each individual soul and, as we might expect in the prince of directors, the fullest value is given to the personal differences of vocation by which this possibility is realized. 'In truth', he observes, as we see that there are never found two men perfectly resembling one another in natural gifts, so are there never found any wholly equal in supernatural ones . . . And although grace is not given to men according to their natural conditions, yet the divine sweetness rejoicing, and as one would say exulting, in the production of graces infinitely diversifies them. To ask why this is, is as absurd as to ask why God made melons larger than strawberries, or lilies larger than violets . . . It is an impertinence to search out why St Paul had not the grace of St Peter, or St Peter that of St Paul . . . for one would answer to these enquiries that the Church is a garden diapered with innumerable flowers; it is necessary then that they should be of various sizes, various colours, various odours, in fine of

<sup>11</sup>Bk I, chap. 12.

<sup>12</sup>Bk I, chap. 15.

<sup>13</sup>Bk I, chap. 18.

different perfections'.<sup>14</sup> Indeed he is so keenly aware and appreciative of these personal qualities that we sense his reluctance to envisage the stripping of the soul in its preparation for union with God as anything like a depersonalization, and find him saying of it 'We cannot long remain in this nakedness, despoiled of all sorts of affections. Wherefore following the advice of the holy apostle, as soon as we have put off the garments of the old Adam, we are to put on the habits of the new man, that is to say of Jesus Christ, for having renounced all—yes, even the affection to virtues, neither desiring of these nor of other things a larger portion than God's will intends—we must put on again divers affections, and *perhaps the very same which we have renounced and resigned*: but we must now put them on again not because they are agreeable to us, but because they are agreeable to God'.<sup>15</sup> In spite then of his perhaps sometimes disturbing experience with Mme de Chantal, we find no attempt in François to systematize the passive purifications of the spirit, such as readers in France would shortly meet in the translations of the Spanish Carmelite John of the Cross, and even his most telling passage about the soul's passivity in the hand of God is given a touchingly personal character by the use of a lovely image of a mother with a child in her arms. He has, too, a practical optimism about the life of the human affections. 'Divine love', he says, 'is willing for us to have other loves; nor can we easily discover which is the chief love of our heart . . . Rabbits are incomparably fertile, elephants never have more than one calf; but this little elephant alone is of greater price than all the rabbits in the world. Our love towards creatures often abounds in the multitude of productions; but when sacred love acts its work is so eminent that it surpasses all; for it causes God to be preferred before all things without reserve'.<sup>16</sup> Here is a sense of equilibrium which it is easier to speak about than to maintain, and doubtless François' view is not altogether unaffected by the maturity he himself attained in this respect, a maturity which had perhaps something to do with his natural temperament. On the other hand one must set against this the opening chapter of book XII of the *Traité* in which he insists that progress does not depend upon one's natural temperament. 'Though souls inclined to love have on the one hand', he says, 'a certain propensity which makes them more ready to desire to love God, they are on the other hand so subject to set their affections upon lovable creatures, that their propensity puts them in as great danger of being diverted from the purity of sacred love by a mixture of other loves . . .

<sup>14</sup>Bk II, chap. 7.<sup>15</sup>Bk IX, chap. 16.<sup>16</sup>Bk X, chap. 7.

Nevertheless, if two persons, the one of whom is loving and sweet by nature, the other harsh and sour, have an equal charity, they will love God equally but not alike . . . It imports not much then, whether one have a natural inclination to love, when it is a question of a love which is supernatural, and exercised supernaturally'. From this passage, typical of many one could cite, one can see that for all the value he attributes to personal and human qualities, François never loses his theological clear-headedness. He never confuses nature and grace. From this point of view his humanism has an affinity with the contemporaries of the twelfth century bestiaries and his mitigated Augustinianism often reminds one of the early writers of Cîteaux, especially our own English Aelred of Rievaulx, in whom one could discover some almost verbal parallels. Not, of course, that these writers are in any direct sense his sources, but it is probably no small part of his importance that for all his strongly personal traits François is a very sure interpreter of a long tradition and in him the best of so much medieval spiritual writing seems to live again. If there is an element which brings him closer to his contemporaries it is that, in spite of the psychological rather than metaphysical turn of his thought, François tends to view God very philosophically and directs the souls of his disciples to the divine essence. There is, it is true, a fine section on the Incarnation in book II of the *Traité*, and another, at the close of the work, on Calvary as the academy of love, but it cannot really be said that the incarnate Christ ever attains the prominence in his thought, that he was to play in the thought of a younger man in Paris of whom François had said 'He is everything I should like to be myself'.

Pierre de Bérulle had been born at the Chateau de Serilly in Champagne in 1575, and grew up a grave boy, fond of solitude, who continued to look younger than his years, a false impression which was dispelled when he opened his mouth. 'He was never young', says Brémond, 'though I do not say it to his credit'. After passing, like François de Sales, through the Jesuit Collège de Clermont, his bent for theology led him to the Sorbonne, where he came under the formation of an intellectual clergy, men like Duval and Gallot, among whom scholastic learning still flourished. There too he found men who, often under the pressure of Protestant apologetics, had studied and got to know their Church Fathers. Providence had also thrust him into the heart of the circle of friends of his cousin, Mme Acarie—whose ecstasies had presented both their bewildered subject and her clerical friends with a living theological problem—for, upon the exile of her

husband in 1594, she had retired with her children to the Paris house of Mme de Bérulle. This circle included perhaps the most influential theoretician of the mystical life at this period, the English convert Capuchin Benet of Canfield, and the most notable spiritual director in Paris, the Carthusian Dom Beaucousin. All the members of this group had, beside their real personal taste for spiritual things, a common outlook characteristic of the mystics of the Low Countries and of the Pseudo-Denys, whose works were then being re-edited.<sup>17</sup> Benet of Canfield's *Règle de perfection reduite au seul point de la volonté de Dieu*, which did not appear until 1609, may be regarded as a reliable guide to the sort of thing he had taught Mme Acarie when they first met about 1592. Canfield teaches the renunciation of conceptual and discursive ways in prayer and tends, like Tauler, to by-pass the humanity of Christ to come to the divinity. There is a strong note of self-annihilation in his doctrine of conformity. Bérulle's first work, *Bref discours de l'abnégation intérieure*, which appeared in 1597, two years before his ordination to the priesthood, also throws an indirect light on the ideas current in this milieu and particularly those of his director Dom Beaucousin, at whose command it was written. It is really a free adaptation of a little Italian book by a Milanese lady Isabella Bellinzaga, from which several passages on the humanity of Christ have been eliminated; so that the whole tone, with its insistence on detachment from interior graces, is very abstract and theoretical. When one remembers this background of reading, one can readily understand that a translation of St Teresa of Avila which appeared in 1601 did not make a very favourable impression on Mme Acarie who had, in any case, never experienced imaginary visions of the kind she there read about. But when St Teresa herself appeared to her and told her to bring the Carmelites to France, the matter called for further attention. The advice of Beaucousin, Duval and Bérulle was sought and, after a second appearance, François de Sales who, it will be remembered, was in Paris at the time, was also drawn into the consultation. The upshot of these discussions was that de Bérulle undertook the protracted and difficult negotiation which ended with the arrival in France of six Spanish Carmelites in October, 1604.

The wonderful maturing of de Bérulle's mind as a theologian belongs to the years that follow this first phase in his career. He evidently

<sup>17</sup>The pioneer studies of Dom J. Huijben in the literature of this milieu, 'Aux sources de la spiritualité française du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle' (*Vie Spirituelle*, Supplément, Dec., 1930, Jan.-May, 1931) still have their uses.

ly pursued a personal reading of the Latin Fathers, especially Augustine, and some of the Greek Fathers, which carried him far beyond the controversial purposes which may have been, as with so many others, the original object of his study. He has moreover read and meditated on St Paul with care, so that when his spirituality, centering on the mystery of the Incarnation, has evolved, it is rooted in scriptural and patristic sources. His mind is then, as it were, all of a piece, and his manner magisterial. Those who are captured by him will always find it difficult to do him adequate homage. As Dagens has said, the '*Discours de l'état et des grandeurs de Jésus* remind one of Augustine on the Trinity in their combination of speculation, affective piety and *élévations mystiques*',<sup>18</sup> and I imagine a student of the twelfth century meeting him for the first time would scarcely fail to recognize in him the same qualities that put William of St Thierry, an earlier disciple of Augustine, head and shoulders above any other theologian of his century.

'God who produces creatures outside himself in nothingness', says Bérulle in an Advent meditation written some time after 1612, 'wishes in the Incarnation to produce a created nature in himself, in his own being, in the person of his Word, and give it the subsistence of the Word for its subsistence. This is how the work of the Incarnation differs from the work of creation, when God draws the creature out of nothingness and produces and leaves it in nothingness: *Ex nihilo in nihilo . . .*'<sup>19</sup> What this nothingness of God's creature, man, consists in is the subject of much of Bérulle's reflective effort, and the background to these reflections is this mystery of the union of the two natures in the one person of Jesus Christ. For 'since from this new being a new order follows, so from this new order follows a change and innovation in the conduct of divine providence. It is no longer the heavens that rule the earth, but it is the earth that rules the heavens; and the first mover is no longer in the skies, but on the earth, since God has become incarnate on earth. For it is God incarnate who is now the first mover; and the first heaven which moved all the others has changed its order and place, and is now only the second mover. Even the order, state and situation of the principal parts of the world is reversed by the reversal that God has made with regard to himself in this mystery. For heaven is no longer above the earth, but the earth is above the highest heaven, that is namely, the earth of our humanity living in Jesus Christ'<sup>20</sup>. In this last sentence is the germ of all Bérulle's spiritual and ascetic doctrine.

<sup>18</sup>J. Dagens, *Bérulle et les origines de la restauration Catholique* (Paris, 1952).

<sup>19</sup>O.P. XV, p. 767.

<sup>20</sup>*Discours*, IV, 8, p. 222.

For what does an examination of the creaturely condition reveal? 'Being is not essential and necessary in a creature, for an eternity passed by without its coming to be: but if the creature *does* exist, if it is created, then it is dependent, it serves its creator, and it is easier to efface its being than its servitude. Our being is a relationship to God (*Notre estre est un rapport à Dieu*). The more perfect this relationship is, the more excellent our being . . . The thing we care for and our duty, our perfection and our contentment go together. For since we cannot be gods by nature, cannot be absolute and independent, cannot exist to ourselves, to wish to do so is to wish for the impossible and to fight against our very being'.<sup>21</sup> This, he says in the sixth of the *Discours*,<sup>22</sup> is the wretched condition of the sinner who can indeed be his own ruin but cannot destroy what is his by nature; for this necessarily implies a condition of indigence, of adherence to and dependence on the Creator, which cannot in any wise be separated from him. God's device on the other hand is: He who is. It will be seen that this conception of the nothingness of the creature does not just imply the infinite distance between the maker and the made, but also implies the relationship of dependence, and the opposition between existing to oneself and existing to God. 'Man as man has', he says, 'a kind of life which is proper to him, which makes him different from plants and animals, which raises him above everything sensory and created, which makes him tend towards uncreated being, gives him a capacity for God and makes him bear his image and likeness in so many ways: and the further he goes from this movement towards and relationship to God the further he withdraws himself from the life which is proper to man as man'.<sup>23</sup> The condition of being a man, then, is not to be purely nothing, but to have a vocation to God—a vocation which demands a response. This is why sin is a turning back from this call in the depths of our being, and is 'a second nothingness worse than the first; a nothingness of grace, a nothingness opposed to God, a nothingness resisting God: and hell is the ultimate establishment in this wretched state of nothingness, where the damned completely lose the use of the good of their natural being, and are irreparably established in the condition and servitude of sin'.<sup>24</sup> This is, as it were, the opposite pole of that vision of man 'considered in the design of God' which we find in an unfinished meditation on man's creation where Bérulle has turned a reminiscence of Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the dignity of man* to his own purposes. 'Il est miracle

<sup>21</sup>O.P. CXXI, p. 981.<sup>22</sup>p. 251.<sup>23</sup>O.P. CXXI, p. 982.<sup>24</sup>O.P. CXXXI, p. 998.

d'une part, et de l'autre un néant: il est céleste d'une part, et terrestre de l'autre: Il est spirituel d'une part et corporal de l'autre. C'est un ange, c'est un animal, c'est un néant, c'est un miracle, c'est un centre, c'est un monde, c'est un Dieu, c'est un néant environné de Dieu, indigeant de Dieu, capable de Dieu, et remply de Dieu s'il veut'.<sup>25</sup>

*S'il veut*—if he wishes. 'May I know you, and know myself', he prays in a prayer to the Trinity, 'may I refer myself to you, as you have referred me to yourself . . . by the very condition of my being, which is nothing but an inseparable shadow of your being, and a simple relationship to you'.<sup>26</sup> Here again is the conviction that any conception of man apart from God is necessarily false, because, separated from him, man's very being turns back towards nothingness. 'The world of nature and the world of grace are two worlds, though the one exists and is found in the other . . . In the world of nature there are many categories: but in God, who is the world of worlds . . . there are only two categories . . . substance and relation . . . no accidents, no quality, no quantity. In this world the category of relation is one of the least, *tenuissimae entitatis*, and yet it is the most important category in the world of grace, which only exists and consists in relation to God'.<sup>27</sup> 'Let us then', he says elsewhere, 'contemplate the world as always emanating from God and always referred to God by God himself. . . Let us have regard to this relationship and aspire to it by a new and special relation which we shall make of the world and ourselves to God, corresponding by our free will to the necessary, primitive and essential condition of our being'.<sup>28</sup> This is what the life lived in Christ enables us to do. It is, as one recent study of Bérulle has put it, the restoration of a created relation, which subsists in virtue of another, by an uncreated relation, which subsists in itself.<sup>29</sup> It will thus be seen how closely the work of grace in the thought of Bérulle is related to his doctrine of the Trinity. 'We see then', he says, 'that the goodness . . . of God tends by a profound and secret counsel to reduce all things to unity and to enclose everything, that is to say the creator and the creature in a wonderful circle of unity, and to unify them moreover at the point and centre of the divine unity by the mystery of the Incarnation, and by the unity of one Person, at once created and uncreated . . . For the Word is like a marvellous centre of unity, situate in the midst of the divine persons . . . situate in the midst of created and uncreated being . . . and this centre

<sup>25</sup>O.P. CXIV, p. 969.

<sup>26</sup>O.P. CLIII, p. 1031.

<sup>27</sup>O.P. CXVIII, p. 976.

<sup>28</sup>O.P. CXLVI, p. 1023.

<sup>29</sup>R. Bellemare, *Le sens de la créature dans la doctrine de Bérulle* (Paris, 1959), p. 143.

of unity draws everything to God'.<sup>30</sup>

It was a matter of great importance that the man who was to express his concern for the restoration of the true dignity of the priestly life by the foundation of the French Oratory in 1611, should thus have been fitted to lead so many disciples to the waters of a new life. The lines of his influence may be felt throughout the century. M. Vincent de Paul is a son of his; through Condren and Jean-Jacques Olier his doctrine inspires the prayer of St Sulpice, and even the teaching of the Brittany missionary Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort at the turn of the century would be unintelligible without Bérulle. Every time of crisis and change is a time of crisis for the doctrine of God and the doctrine of man. It is, I believe, significant that at the time of which we have been speaking, it was not a doctrine of man of humanistic origins that gave hope to the human situation, but a doctrine that had a deep theological root. As Bossuet, who often has the manner of Bérulle, was to say just after the middle of the century in his great *Sermon sur la mort*: 'La foi nous a rendu à nous-mêmes, et nos faiblesses honteuses ne peuvent nous cacher nôtre dignité naturelle'.<sup>31</sup>

## Encounter with God—III: from Tabernacle to Temple

JOSEPH BOURKE, O.P.

### RADIANCE, CONVERGENCE AND CONCENTRICITY

In two previous articles<sup>1</sup> I have tried to explore that special conception of Yahweh's encounter with, and presence to Israel which Old Testament theologians call *kabod* theology. When the Jerusalem temple was destroyed in 586 B.C. the exiled priests finally committed to writing

<sup>30</sup>*Discours*, VII, 4, p. 267.

<sup>31</sup>Hachette edn. p. 303.

<sup>1</sup>*Life of the Spirit*, March and May, 1961.