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“To Govern One Soul is Already to Govern a World”: Perspectives on Spiritual Direction in the *Memorial of Directors* of Pierre de Bérulle (1575–1629)

Abstract

This article examines Pierre de Bérulle’s conception of spiritual direction through a close reading of the *Memorial* (1625), a key text addressed to the superiors of the French Oratory. While spiritual guidance appears throughout Bérulle’s writings, the *Memorial* offers the most systematic expression of his mature understanding of this ministry. Situating the text within the context of seventeenth-century ecclesial reform, the study highlights the decisive influence of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite on Bérulle’s theology of mediation, hierarchy, and holiness. Spiritual direction is presented as an *ars artium*, entrusted primarily to the priesthood and structured according to the Dionysian triad of purification, illumination, and perfection. Rather than a merely juridical function, this mediation involves the communication of grace and the formation of Christ in souls, grounded in the mystery of the Incarnation. The *Memorial* articulates a coherent synthesis of spiritual direction that integrates Christology, Trinitarian theology, and ecclesiology, and that played a formative role in the development of the French School of Spirituality.

Keywords: Pierre de Bérulle, spiritual direction, priestly mediation, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, French School of Spirituality.

„Rządzić jedną duszą to rządzić światem”. Perspektywy kierownictwa duchowego w dziele *Memorial of Directors* Pierre’a de Bérulle’a (1575–1629)

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł analizuje koncepcję kierownictwa duchowego Pierre’a de Bérulle’a poprzez analizę dzieła *Memorial* (1625), kluczowego tekstu skierowanego do przełożonych Francuskiego Oratorium. Choć wskazówki duchowe pojawiają się w całym piśmiennictwie Bérulle’a, *Memorial* oferuje najbardziej systematyczne wyrażenie jego dojrzałego rozumienia tej posługi. Umieszczając tekst w kontekście reformy kościelnej XVII w., tekst podkreśla zdecydowany wpływ Pseudo-Dionizego Areopagity na teologię Bérulle’a dotyczącą pośrednictwa, hierarchii i świętości. Kierownictwo duchowe przedstawione jest jako *ars artium*, powierzone przede wszystkim posłudze kapłańskiej i ustrukturyzowane według dionizjańskiej triady oczyszczenia, oświecenia i doskonałości. Zamiast zwykłej funkcji prawnej, pośrednictwo obejmuje przekazywanie łaski i formowanie Chrystusa w duszach, zakorzenione w tajemnicy Wcielenia. *Memorial* formułuje spójną syntezę kierownictwa duchowego, integrującą chrystologię, teologię trynitarną i eklezjologię, która odegrała kluczową rolę w rozwoju Francuskiej Szkoły Duchowości.

Słowa kluczowe: Pierre de Bérulle, kierownictwo duchowe, kapłańskie pośrednictwo, Pseudo-Dionizy Areopagita, Francuska Szkoła Duchowości.

Today, spiritual direction or accompaniment is readily spoken of as a theologically grounded mediation that constitutes a primary means of discernment in the Christian life. Within the rich life of the Church, various authors have both theorized about and practiced it. This article seeks to present briefly some observations on the original conviction and the understanding of spiritual direction held by Pierre de Bérulle (1575–1629)¹. As the initiator of a mystical, missionary, and ecclesial reform movement in seventeenth-century France, this author remains relatively little known outside the French context. This may be due to the complexity and repetitiveness of his writings; to the sustained language he employs, Baroque French that is non-colloquial, redundant, and marked by numerous technical terms and digressions; to the nationalist orientation later assumed by the French School of Spirituality (which is why some prefer the term *Bérullian School*²); or also to the controversies provoked by Bérulle himself, such as those surrounding the question of vows or his governance of the Discalced Carmelites in France, whose authority he externalized to the Order while establishing himself as Superior³.

This article aims to highlight several important aspects of the conception and practice of spiritual direction developed by the founder of the French Oratory⁴. Although innumerable passages throughout his writings allude to this theme, it is in

¹ We are aware that vocabulary impacts us today. In fact, today people speak more of spiritual accompaniment than of direction, because it sounds too external-directive-intrusive. Let us imagine expressions such as *régir une seule âme* (“to govern a single soul”), *la conduite des âmes* (“the guidance of souls”), etc., which are hardly acceptable today. The context explains the text and the modes of expression of a past era.

² For a presentation on the context and the various authors of the French school, we refer to: Henri Bremond. 1923 (2006). *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France, depuis la fin des guerres de religion jusqu'à nos jours*. I-V. Bloud et Gay; Yves Krumenacker. 1998. *L'École française de spiritualité. Des mystiques, des fondateurs, des courants et leurs interprètes*. Paris: Cerf.

³ We cannot underestimate the scope of the controversy between Bérulle and the Teresian Carmel. In fact, over a span of thirty years, from 1600 to 1632, the “Bérulle case” involved countless bishops, 7 papal nuncios, cardinals, the Holy Office, 5 popes, the King of France, 5 papal bulls, 15 briefs, and theologians coming and going... Carmelite nuns excommunicated! The friars and the Jesuits were urging the Carmelites to disobedience... At its core, this conflict over the governance of the Order in France reflects a much larger problem, which arose in the aftermath of Saint Teresa's death in Spain and, with the particularities of Gallicanism, was exacerbated in French territory. Cf. Stéphane-Marie Morgain. 1995. *Pierre de Bérulle et les Carmélites de France*. Paris: Cerf.

⁴ In brief lines, we present a synthesis of the theological and spiritual doctrine of our author, which we consider necessary to better understand some of the considerations expressed: Man must recognize his condition as a creature and acquire a sense of God, striving toward Him through pure freedom and love. In the Incarnation, a mystery of self-emptying out of love, Jesus becomes the “restorer of our being”; we are the blessed captives of His triumph. It is a new creation that calls man to divine perfection (in this design of God, Mary, through her surpassing holiness, retains a privileged place). By humbling Himself to our misery, the Word becomes the path of our return to God. It is up to us to follow His mysteries, to live a life of faith, to stand before Him as little children, to deny ourselves His presence out of love for Him, and to accept dereliction in order to attain eternal joy. Jesus, finally, as the only Priest and the only perfect Mediator, offers Himself to us in the mystery of the priesthood, which perpetuates that of Jesus present among us, in order to communicate it to souls.

the *Memorial* that it is addressed in a particularly focused and systematic manner. This text will therefore be examined in greater detail, and some of its most significant passages will be presented in English translation⁵. We think this study is relevant today because it allows for a rethinking of priestly mediation and spiritual direction not as an exercise of power, but as participation in an economy of holiness oriented toward the formation of Christ in each person.

The *Memorial* is addressed to the superiors of the Oratory at the time when Bérulle was preparing to depart on a diplomatic mission to England, in June 1625⁶. The text itself allows for a precise dating (25 May 1625), since the author states that it was written “on the present solemnity of the Holy Spirit on which I write these things”. At that point, the Constitutions of the Oratory had not yet been drafted; this document therefore sheds light on a decisive stage in that formative process. In this sense, the *Memorial* may be understood as a kind of circular letter issued by the Superior for the internal use of the members of the Oratory⁷.

Bérulle’s thought is here encountered in its mature form. The more polemical and contentious aspects of his earlier positions (those that had previously given rise to controversy) appear refined, tempered, and more carefully balanced. An author in constant development, Bérulle engages with controversy as a means of growth, assimilates diverse influences, and continually seeks to hold his positions in equilibrium. For this reason, these pages bring to the fore elements that are particularly significant within his extensive body of work⁸.

⁵ Pierre de Bérulle. *Mémorial de quelques points servant à la Direction des Supérieurs en la congrégation de l’Oratoire de Jésus*, OC. Vol. 8. *Mémorial*, 373–406. The *Memorial*, work that chiefly holds our attention, will be cited throughout this study using the abbreviation ME. Michel Dupuy. 1969. *Bérulle et le sacerdoce. Etude historique et doctrinale. Textes inédits*. Ed. P. Lethielleux. Paris: Lethielleux, devoted a series of reflections to the topic within the framework of a study that presented unpublished texts by Bérulle. In many of our considerations, we follow and expand upon the insights of Dupuy and other scholars, whom we will gradually cite.

⁶ In order to negotiate the royal marriage between Princess Henriette and Charles I of England, he hoped for an end to the persecutions suffered by English Catholics. However, since Charles I was not Catholic, the Pope’s reluctance had to be overcome. At the same time, Bérulle viewed with disfavor the alliances with Protestant states that Richelieu relied on to counter Spain, and in 1627 he had to withdraw from the political scene. Cf. Michel Dupuy. 2001. *Le Christ de Bérulle*. Paris: Desclée, 13.

⁷ Jean Orcibal. 1965. *Le cardinal de Bérulle. Évolution d’une spiritualité*. Paris: Cerf, 119. The work was published in the *Complete Works* (OC) after the cardinal’s death. The earliest text is the 1632 edition (the ‘circular’ has not been preserved), which does not differ from the 1644 *Complete Works* edition (edited by the Superior of the Oratory, P. Bourgoing), the only changes being in the presentation or in the Roman numerals, which were converted into chapters. The work is preceded by a *Letter to the Superiors*, also included in the *Complete Works* edition. The writing is difficult and often repetitive. At times, it gives the impression that the text was not ready for dissemination, as if it were a draft. Perhaps this is simply because it was intended for internal use within the community of Oratory fathers, and therefore, a stylistic revision was not considered necessary.

⁸ The development of P. de Bérulle’s thought and spirituality was presented by Orcibal. 1965. *Le cardinal de Bérulle. Évolution d’une spiritualité*; we refer to this text, which remains fundamental even today.

1. Bérulle as a spiritual director

From an early age, he showed a marked interest in the *conduite des âmes*. He was called to guide small groups that would later develop into large communities, notably the Carmelites and the Oratorians. As a spiritual director, he maintained an extensive correspondence with leading figures of the seventeenth century, including Saint Vincent de Paul, René Descartes, and Henrietta of France. Some of these letters of spiritual direction survived destruction. They testify to the importance he attributed to this ministry and to the high esteem in which he held it; however, they contain relatively few explicit theological or theoretical reflections.

It is only in the *Memorial* that Bérulle develops certain points more systematically, particularly those serving the guidance of superiors. The text is addressed to all confrères who are required to govern either a house or at least a single soul, since “to govern a single soul is already to govern a world” (ME 1).

Before his ordination to the priesthood, a newly converted woman requested that he act as her spiritual director. Bérulle declined, citing both his lack of priestly ordination and his youth. This is noteworthy, since in the same period lay figures, such as Gaston de Renty (1611–1649), exercised the ministry of spiritual direction, as did numerous religious women, whose correspondence clearly attests to how widespread this practice was in the seventeenth century. Yet the young Bérulle refused, perhaps considering ordination to be a necessary condition for such a task. Be that as it may, a profound sense of the gravity of this responsibility seems to have accompanied him from the outset, and it is in God that he sought to center all spiritual accompaniment:

The soul in this world ought not to depend on God immediately, nor on God in itself, but on God in another, submitting everything that it has, or thinks it has, of God within itself to everything that is of God in another, that is to say, to the divine authority that God has placed and established in another for it⁹.

These lines are situated within a polemical context shaped by Protestantism and Illuminism. Against the Protestants, Bérulle reproaches their encouragement to “depend on God immediately”, particularly “in matters of doctrine and public belief”, thereby disregarding the authority of the Church. The young Bérulle had wished to devote his life to the struggle against Protestantism; however, the controversies he engaged in with the Huguenots proved unfruitful. Through this process,

⁹ *Opuscle of Piety* 179, no. 3.

he came to understand that it was not debate that would bear fruit, but rather the holiness of the Church, and especially the holiness of the clergy.

In this regard, the political metaphors and imagery so prevalent in this period reveal the deep concern and interest surrounding the theme of the unity of God, from which all reality was to be understood and to which everything was to be referred back to. By contrast, Illuminism proposed that the soul place itself in God, depending on Him in conscience and interior doctrine. Somewhat surprisingly from a contemporary perspective, Bérulle instead invites the soul to place God in the other, that is, in superiors and spiritual directors who have received this mission. For Bérulle, the exercise of this ministry requires an authority that confers the mission: “Feed my sheep”, mediated through legitimate pastors (*Discourses of Controversy: The Mission of Pastors*). This point will be taken up again shortly.

Throughout the *Memorial*, one observes a clear and consistent spiritual vision of this ministry, *ars atrium*, which is entrusted to the priestly state:

That prudence and natural ability, although very useful, are not sufficient for this task, and that, beyond a pure and elevated intention, beyond virtue, prudence, and the good qualities that may be presupposed, there is need of a supernatural gift which Saint Paul seems to number among the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12: *opitulationes, gubernationes*)¹⁰. This art is a science not of memory but of the spirit; not of study but of prayer; not of discourse but of practice; not of contention but of humility; not of speculation but of love, and of the love of Jesus, who gave himself and surrendered himself, forgot himself, and poured himself out for the salvation of souls¹¹.

2. The distinction between the internal forum and the external forum

A brief clarification is required on this point. We are far removed from the seventeenth century, and the Church has developed considerably since then. Today, a superior may not intervene in matters of the internal forum; in Bérulle’s time, however, this was not the case. Indeed, he asked young Oratorians to open their consciences to him¹². To such an extent does this go that, from a contemporary perspective, Bérulle may appear authoritarian or intolerant, especially in light of the difficulties surrounding his governance of the Discalced Carmelites in France¹³.

¹⁰ ME 6. It refers to verse 28, where he speaks of the gift to “assist” and “administer”.

¹¹ ME 11.

¹² OR 29, no. 2.

¹³ Morgain. 1995. *Pierre de Bérulle et les Carmélites de France*, 351.

In Bérulle's understanding, everything is ordered towards a spiritual end: the perfection and holiness of the members. The role of a superior is therefore primarily spiritual. The superior is the pastor of his community. This does not mean that he confuses the two fora; rather, his conception stands close to that of Saint Ignatius of Loyola (a practice that remains in force among the Jesuits, who confess or manifest their conscience once a year to the provincial superior). In this sense, it was natural for Bérulle to give directives concerning the interior life of Oratorians and Carmelites alike: he explains how to pray, imposes penances and readings, and so forth.

It may thus be said that, in Bérullian thought, the priest is endowed with both a visible and an invisible authority, granted to him for the exercise of a ministry that surpasses him. Nevertheless, "Each of us must do this, albeit in different ways, that is, each according to his abilities and according to the part assigned to him in this work: some by praying, others by working, others by accompanying with prudence, others by humbly receiving direction"¹⁴.

A soul "must be treated reverently and carefully, as something holy and sacred":

Let us therefore make use of these truths and contemplate God in His work, Jesus Christ in souls, and souls in God. Let us treat souls and houses as part of the spiritual and mystical Body of Jesus Christ on earth. Let us treat them with reverence and with care; let us treat them as holy and sacred realities; and let us treat them as still destined for the fulfillment of so lofty and so great a state—namely, all that concerns the perfection of grace and of glory which the Eternal Father has established in Jesus, and through the love of Jesus for the world¹⁵.

Indeed, if God has placed so great a treasure in so fragile a vessel, and has concealed so great a work of His power and of His grace beneath so contemptible a veil, do we not debase ourselves before God when we debase another in our own eyes, by failing to recognize something so true, so worthy, and so proper to our duty?¹⁶.

This presupposes that the spiritual director possesses an extension of spirit that honors and approves everything that is of God, so that he may be able to understand those whom he does not resemble:

¹⁴ *Letter of Presentation of the Memorial.*

¹⁵ ME 5.

¹⁶ ME 26.

Not limiting himself to his own person, to his institute, nor to his particular path, but emerging from the narrowness of nature, he extends himself and applies himself, by grace, to all and to everything, neglecting nothing and least of all disdaining any aspect of his office. For God is a universal agent and, being infinite, He has infinite ways of governing within the Church and within souls; and we, not by authority but by charity, must be united with all¹⁷.

In dealing with souls, charity is essential: “whether in charity, in patience, in kindness, in solicitude, in edification”. The soul must dwell in charity, in patience, in kindness, in solicitude, and in edification. Recalling these texts of Saint Paul addressed to the Corinthians, which should be read once a week and put into practice several times a day, Bérulle emphasizes their constant relevance¹⁸.

We must treat and bear with love the souls who have given themselves to God out of love, commanding very little, but guiding them through example, through prayer, and through love for their duty, and by imitating that pagan *qui hoc temperamentum suae modestiae solebat indicere ut ne praecipere videretur*¹⁹.

For this authority is not given to us by God in order that we might establish ourselves in it or rest upon it, but rather in order to suffer and to labour. That is to say, we do not possess authority in order to perform acts of authority, but in order to perform acts of charity, and for the service and exercise of God’s charity towards souls. Our authority, therefore, must be more clothed with the conditions of humility than with those of power, according to what He says to His apostles: *reges Gentium dominantur eorum*, etc., *vos autem non sic, sed qui maior est in vobis fiat sicut minor*. It must have more gentleness than power, more patience than force, as though it proceeded from Him who is both the Lamb and the Sovereign, and who, even in glory itself, retains the name of Lamb, in order to compel us to imitate Him and to preserve His qualities upon the earth²⁰.

In this task, the work of the director of souls must always preserve a fundamental characteristic: to be a *servant of souls*, remaining humbly attentive to what Christ may ask of him through them:

¹⁷ ME 23.

¹⁸ ME 21.

¹⁹ ME 22. Bérulle cites Pliny. *Panegyric on Trajan*, X, 3: “who had the custom of adapting this measure to his modesty so as not to give the impression of ruling”.

²⁰ ME 22.

In our ministry and in every action, we must exercise at the same time holy humility and charity, the two greatest virtues of Christianity and the least known to the world before the coming of Him who is the light and the love of the world. For by loving God in souls and humbling ourselves under the power of Jesus, we serve souls, always keeping before us this sacred authority of Jesus over them and over ourselves. Let us love and adore this authority of God-Man and Man-God, in which all our happiness consists, on earth and in heaven, in time and in eternity²¹.

Nor must the director forget that “he himself is a disciple and is instructed while instructing souls”:

We must honor and also presuppose every other form of knowledge appropriate to the ecclesiastical state (...) a spirit of love, of reverence, and of light before Jesus; a spirit that serves the designs and counsels of Jesus in souls; a spirit of honor, of adherence, and of dependence in relation to all that concerns Jesus, a spirit that must be known and practiced by superiors, and indeed be eminent in them²².

3. Controversies with the Religious: Mediation and Dionysius the Areopagite

In this period, a certain antagonism existed between the regular and the secular clergy. The conflict ultimately traces back to the dispute involving the mendicant orders at the University of Paris, the Sorbonne. Religious orders competed for parishes and for the patronage of powerful families. In Bérulle’s time, the Sorbonne was a stronghold of the secular clergy, and religious orders found little place within it. From a political perspective, the royal court regarded with suspicion the freedom of action enjoyed by religious orders, since they did not depend on French national authorities but on Rome. This exemption was perceived as an anomaly.

The Jesuits occupied an intermediate position: they were religious, yet in certain respects secular, since they did not chant the Office in choir. Because of their direct dependence on the Pope, they were considered champions of Ultramontanism. On several occasions, Bérulle laments the fact that religious orders had come to hold a monopoly on holiness. The very term “state of perfection”, traditionally applied to religious life, appeared to him untenable.

In Bérulle’s (ideal) vision, the hierarchy of sacred order (the mission conferred by Christ) ought to coincide with the mystical hierarchy of souls. In the context

²¹ ME 31.

²² ME 13.

of the politico-religious struggles of early modern Europe, Bérulle looks to the early Church as the ideal to which one must return. The corruption of his own age, he believed, had dispersed authority away from the prelates, transferred holiness to the religious, and entrusted doctrine to academics.

At its origins, the Church was divided into two parts, both holy, if we consider its institution and its origin: one is the people, the other the clergy; the one receives holiness and the other communicates it. (...) At that time, holiness resided in the clergy as in its stronghold, and overthrew the idols and impieties of the earth; at that time, the clergy, composed of prelates and priests, breathed only holy things, leaving profane things to the profane; at that time, the clergy bore deeply engraved within itself the authority of God, the holiness of God, and the light of God, three noble ornaments of the priestly crown, joined together by the counsel of God upon His anointed, upon His priests, and upon His Church, so that its first priests were both the saints and the doctors of the Church. God thus preserved in one and the same order authority, holiness, and doctrine, uniting these three perfections in the priestly order in honor and imitation of the Holy Trinity, wherein we adore the authority of the Father, the light of the Son, and the holiness of the Holy Spirit, divinely bound together in unity of essence²³.

In the spirit of reform (understood as a return to the most authentic form of the Church of Christ) Bérulle's aim was to renew holiness through the “dignity and superiority of the priestly state”. Whereas religious vows arise from a human act of will that selects a particular virtue (for example, solitude in the case of the Carthusians, obedience among the Jesuits, poverty among the Franciscans), the priestly order, by contrast, originates in a divine decision, in a consecration. For Bérulle, diocesan clergy thus represent a more perfect path to holiness, since “the priestly order was founded by Jesus Christ”, rather than by a saint, as is the case with religious congregations (Saint Benedict, Saint Francis, and others).

Bérulle extends this understanding to spiritual direction. The holiness of religious people makes them apt for this ministry, yet the priesthood demands an even greater holiness. Dionysius, in his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, places priests above monks. For the author of the *Élévations*, the faithful and monks are subject to priests, and priests in turn to the bishop²⁴. What is striking is the profoundly theologically grounded manner in which he conceives the priestly ministry:

²³ *Opuscle of Piety* 212.

²⁴ Dupuy. 1969. *Bérulle et le sacerdoce*, 145–161.

The priesthood does not depend upon the action of the one who receives it, as does the religious state, but upon the action of Jesus Christ Himself and upon the consecration which He effects. For this reason, the perfection of the priestly life, according to the exemplar of that of Jesus and in imitation of the apostolic life, consists in the state rather than in the vow, and subsists through act and exercise rather than through promise²⁵.

The priest is a mediator between God and human beings: he receives his authority from on high and exercises it over those entrusted to him. When mediation is understood in a juridical context, no difficulty arises, since a superior authority makes use of intermediaries to convey its instructions. The difficulty emerges when one goes beyond the language of images (when what is communicated is holiness, the love of God, which does not require intermediaries). The problem arises when one passes from the image of a human hierarchy, for example that of the royal court, to the spiritual realm, where what is transmitted is not a hierarchical command to be obeyed, but holiness itself, the love of God. This would constitute a serious and crude offence against divine omnipotence: God has no need of mediators. It is the reading of the works of Pseudo-Dionysius (*Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and *The Spirit to Demophilus*) that provides Bérulle with the key to resolving this issue, through a twofold response. On the one hand, the priestly state stands at the origin of all the holiness found in the Church of God; on the other, grace is transmitted through intermediaries, and thus holiness must pass through the priest as through a necessary channel. Each priest must therefore cultivate a particular relationship with “Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom we are united by this ministry in a special manner and by a power so exalted that it is not even fitting to the angels in the state of glory”²⁶.

This brings to the fore the question of *l'influence dionysienne* and the notion of mediation in Bérulle's work. In becoming incarnate, the Word reveals what the priesthood is and what its role consists of. There is no difficulty in affirming that the High Priest is the source of all holiness; the issue arises when the disciples are understood as mediators. Indeed, priests are ministers of the one priesthood of Christ. For this reason, in order to dispose themselves more fully and more fittingly to the action of Christ through His intermediaries, Bérulle proposes the vows of servitude. The Oratorian was to place himself in a state of dispossession of self, of *kenosis*: he was to be capable of renouncing “all power, authority, property, and freedom”, and of placing himself “in the hands of Jesus and

²⁵ *Préface de Bourgoing* to the Works of Bérulle, 1644, XXVI.

²⁶ *Opuscle of Piety* 309 bis, § II, OC, vol. 4, 388.

of His sacred humanity”. In this way, one’s entire life becomes a complete and total priestly sacrifice offered to God, transforming one’s very existence into a redemptive victim:

Jesus Christ in the Sacrament is the victim of the human race, a victim of praise and of adoration. Humanity needs this victim in order to adore God and to praise Him, just as it needs a victim of redemption. (...) Christ on the Cross is a victim of redemption, and upon the altar of the Church a victim of adoration. (...) Thus let the priest be a victim! In his life, in his gestures and actions, he ought to be nothing other than a victim immolated to the glory of Jesus. John was a voice and nothing but a voice: ‘I am the voice’ (John 1:23). The same must be said of the priest: let the priest be, and be nothing other than, a victim; and let his life be the sacrifice by which he immolates himself (that is, this victim) to Jesus. The priest sacrifices Jesus; therefore let him also sacrifice himself²⁷.

The influence of Dionysius in the *Discourses of Controversy* is difficult to determine with precision; however, it is unmistakably evident in these later texts. Within the Oratorian project, clearly Dionysian elements emerge: the priest occupies a rank of eminent holiness, greater than that of monks and even of angels; the ecclesiastical state is not only holy and sacred, but is even placed “at the origin of all the holiness that exists in the Church of God”²⁸.

It must be noted that Dionysius’s strongly hierarchical conception fitted perfectly with the political and religious vision of the seventeenth century. Grace is communicated beginning from God and from Christ, and then descends from hierarchy to hierarchy until it reaches the laity, through the mediation of priests and bishops. If what these reformers sought was holiness and the renewal of the Church – what today might be termed a holy People of God – this necessarily presupposed that priests themselves had to be holy in order, in turn, to sanctify others. They sanctify themselves by sanctifying others.

Paul Cochois highlighted Bérulle’s attitude as a spiritual director under the influence of Dionysian thought²⁹. Indeed, the Cardinal draws a parallel between the angelic hierarchy and the ecclesiastical hierarchy: the celestial hierarchy understood as a hierarchy of love, and the visible hierarchy called to become a hierar-

²⁷ *Opuscle of Piety* 279, OC, vol. 4.

²⁸ OR 80, no. 2.

²⁹ Paul Cochois. *Bérulle, hiérarque dionysien*, 314–353.

chy of love³⁰. The Power of the Father is at work in the Incarnation of His Son, and ministers, insofar as they are united to the humanity of Christ, must be conscious that it is “the very power of God that acts, not our own”:

It is the power of God that acts through His own Son, and not through some lesser intermediary. All these effects spring from a source so lofty and so living as the sacred mystery of the Incarnation; they have their origin in the divinity of the God-Man, in the humanity of the God-Man, in the holiness of a life that is humanly divine and divinely human, in the infinite merit of a living God, acting and suffering upon the earth, in the efficacy of His Cross and His death, and in the power of His glory³¹.

The priestly ministry, in Bérulle’s thought, is very frequently compared to an angelic ministry, and the priest is likened to an ambassador:

To govern a soul (and a house of God) for a heavenly and supernatural end presupposes a heavenly and supernatural grace and power, for it means transcending the limits of nature, entering into the role and function of the angels who, being blessed, are guardians of souls; it means imitating on earth what is done in heaven – that is, accomplishing a work and exercising a governance that corresponds to the works and hierarchies of heaven. For it is the same God who made heaven and earth and governs them by His providence, wisdom, and power. It is the same God who, on earth as in heaven, wills that His will be done and that His holiness be recognized, adored, and shared. It is the same God who has established an order and a governance of grace on earth as in heaven, in which angels and human beings alike enter as equal participants in His providence. Indeed, although there are many differences between these two natures, human beings in this respect are like the angels, serving the divine order as they do, and bearing in Scripture even the name and the quality of angels (that is, of those sent to serve those who are called to salvation) and exercising functions that are similar, since both in heaven and on earth there is a need to purify, to illumine, and to perfect³².

In this text, deeply inspired by the hierarchies of Dionysius the Areopagite, the ecclesiastical hierarchy corresponds to the celestial hierarchies: it is a source

³⁰ We agree with the opinion of S. Morgain. 1995. *Pierre de Bérulle et les Carmélites de France*, 256.

³¹ *Letter of Presentation of the Memorial*.

³² ME 2.

of grace, and the superior of an Oratorian house, whose soul must be eminent in grace, truly exercises an angelic office, namely that of purifying, illuminating, and perfecting all those who are entrusted to him. The call, therefore, is to watch over each individual entrusted to one's care, each forming part of a whole established by God in a harmoniously ordered hierarchy³³:

We must regard every soul and every holy house as a subject enclosed within divine providence for His glory, and as a hierarchy of heaven upon earth, a hierarchy that must be established by God and must likewise be governed in a worthy manner³⁴.

Illumination as Mediation. The author of the *Memorial* develops the doctrinal role of superiors and priests in such a way that one gains the impression that he perceives their essential function. What ministers are called to teach is more than an office or a body of knowledge; it is an art. They communicate a wisdom, a *gnosis*. The superior is the master of the spiritual life and must lead others to Christ. All of this closely resembles the illumination described in Dionysius's *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*: the priest purifies in order to make illumination possible. He possesses a higher form of knowledge, whereas the ordinary faithful do not attain certain truths; beneath the veil of symbols, the priest knows their theological meaning and is able to enlighten those entrusted to him, diffusing a light that comes from the Light of all light. To purify, to illuminate, to perfect, this triad appears constantly in Dionysius and in the tripartite conception of the spiritual and mystical life. Béruls le takes it up in precisely these terms: superiors “must imitate the higher angels and the eminent orders among the angels”³⁵; and likewise, “as in heaven, so on earth, there is a work of purifying, illuminating, and perfecting”³⁶.

³³ Jean Orcibal differs in his assessment of P. Cochois, since this notion would depart from the Dionysian categories, as it was common at the time to compare priests to angels (cf. p. 154). For the author of the *Memorial*, the angel is a “messenger” “at the service of those who are called to salvation”, as defined by Scripture (Heb 1:14; Mt 4:11). This biblical definition does not correspond to the theology of Dionysius *strictu sensu*, for whom the angel is an intermediary by nature before being so by mission. The angel transmits enlightenment by virtue of the position he occupies in the hierarchy and is a messenger only incidentally. But for Bérulle, it is the opposite. The angel is a messenger and a servant, just as an Oratorian (or a priest in general) is. It seems to us that Bérulle's thought develops step by step and freely employs images in style and language. The missions of the angel and the priest are placed in parallel, even though in Dionysius the nuances are more varied. The imagery and influence of Pseudo-Dionysius remained present throughout the seventeenth century, as has demonstrated Anne Régent-Susini. 2009. “Dionysisme et gallicanisme: La figure de l'évêque selon Bossuet”. *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 3 : 413–428.

³⁴ ME 3.

³⁵ *Opuscle of Piety* 191, n. 3.

³⁶ ME 2; OP 191, n. 3. This was also highlighted by René Roques. 1955. “L'Univers dionysien. Structure hiérarchique du monde selon le Pseudo-Denys”. *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 147 (2) :

Holiness as Mediation. M. Dupuy follows the classification given in *Epistle* 891, which is strongly Dionysian in character: authority, doctrine, holiness. To authority and doctrine, the priest must add holiness. Dionysius employs forceful language with regard to priests: “he who does not illuminate is excluded from the sacerdotal order”. For Bérulle this is evident: the priest “communicates what exceeds him”. This does not refer to a sanctification *ex opere operato* resulting merely from the power to sanctify, but rather evokes a sanctifying action that entails the communication of personal holiness. The superior-director sanctifies by being holy himself:

(...) It belongs to the very nature of one who is regarded as a master that he himself is a disciple, indeed the first disciple of his own school; that he is instructed while instructing others, that he sanctifies himself while rendering others holy; and that Jesus is properly speaking the sole master of this science, as He Himself says to those who were to become the teachers of the universe: *unus est magister vester*³⁷. And in order to enter His school, into His science and into this art of governing souls by His Spirit and for His glory, we must recognize that everything we know of God, of His only Son, of the economy of His grace, of His ways with souls, of souls themselves, and of the art of governing them in grace, comes from Him³⁸.

This requires a “science” that is not learned through speculation, but through prayer “at the foot of the Cross”:

(...) This science is learned not so much from books and in academies as from the book of life and at the foot of the Cross, by adhering to Jesus, adhering to His ways, adhering to His love (...). The science that is given by Jesus and as it were emanates from Jesus aspires to Jesus, and with the Apostle knows only Jesus and Jesus crucified; yet in Him and in His Cross it knows all things and attains the end of all things, which is Jesus, Alpha and Omega, for thus He reveals and names Himself to His beloved disciple. Let us all be lovers of this truly spiritual science, of this science that has Jesus as its end, as its object, and as its origin; of this science that is learned from Jesus; of this science whose principle is humility of spirit, purity of heart, self-abnegation, and adherence to Jesus; of this science which all superi-

183–184: “Ce qui caractérise essentiellement l’ordre des prêtres, c’est qu’ils donnent la lumière divine. Tandis que l’ordre des évêques unifie et parfait, que celui des ministres purifie, l’ordre sacerdotal a pour fonction illuminer”.

³⁷ Mt 23:8: “One is your teacher”.

³⁸ ME 13.

ors must possess and seek above every other, and of which they must make a holy and solemn profession³⁹.

For this, the constant meditation on the mysteries of the faith is required: “In particular, we must have a special devotion to the mysteries of the Incarnation, the Passion, and the Resurrection”⁴⁰. Bérulle conceived the Oratory precisely “to awaken within the Church the spirit of the priesthood”; to understand the Oratorian ideal, therefore, is also to discover the understanding of the priesthood that the founder of the French School sought to promote and that, after him, his heirs transmitted and popularized within the life of the Church. Bérulle envisaged the “restoration of the clergy” as a return to the situation of the primitive Church (that is, for him, to the state described in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* of Pseudo-Denys): the “authority of God” was not then separated from the “holiness of God” nor from the “light of God”. Bérulle died before he was able to compose the doctrinal synthesis on the presbyterate that the Oratorians had requested of him. Nevertheless, as a kind of leitmotif, this idea recurs throughout his writings: “Jesus Christ is the Priest, and we are his ministers”; whether it is a matter of communicating his Word, his Spirit, or his Body, “we must act only through the Spirit of Jesus Christ”.

The Value of Each Soul. A recurrent idea in the period is the established expression: “The soul is a world”⁴¹. This idea, of Pythagorean origin, was taken up by Gregory of Nazianzus (*Orations* 38 and 43) and by John of Damascus (*On the Two Wills of Christ*, no. 18, PG XCV 144 B). In the context of the Renaissance, this phrase became a *cliché* at a time marked by profound wonder at the human being himself: the human body was studied and regarded as a harmonious machine, composed of organs with astonishing functions (echoes of this can even be found in the philosophy of Descartes, who maintained an epistolary correspondence with Bérulle). The same can be said of the human soul:

What could one not say about rest during sleep, imagination during dreams, memory and recollection, reflection and anger, desire, and, in a word, about everything that contributes to the economy of this miniature world that is the human being?⁴².

³⁹ ME 12.

⁴⁰ ME 17.

⁴¹ ME 1.

⁴² Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 28, 22; PG XXXVI, 66.

Bérulle writes: To govern a soul is to govern a world, and a world that has more secrets and diversity, more perfections and rarities, than the world we see⁴³.

This is the idea of the human being as a microcosm, which here takes on a renewed meaning. Just as the universe is unique, so too is each soul. God is more concerned with the value of each individual soul than with that of the entire created world (“more concerned than with the world, which weighs less before God than a single soul”⁴⁴, since:

To govern a soul is to govern a world, and a world that has more secrets and diversity, more perfections and singularities than the world we see, and a far more excellent relation to the archetypal world, that is, to him who is the creator and the idea of all that subsists outside the divine essence. Even God, when he looks upon his works, regards the soul with a very different gaze. And we must honor, follow, and imitate this holy, pure, and divine gaze, looking upon the works of God as he himself looks upon them, and adoring this gaze, which in God is God himself, but God who discerns, judges, and prefers the various works of the same power⁴⁵.

This great value derives from the soul’s spiritual nature. For Bérulle, the Incarnation confers a new way of conceiving the dignity of the human soul. Humanist wonder finds a rare echo in this seventeenth-century mystic: For God did not make this world for the sake of the world itself, but for the souls that are in it, upon which he expends his care and his providence⁴⁶. God willed to unite himself and to apply himself not only to the soul, but to the body and to all the parts of the body; divine charity extends even to the lowest and smallest parts, even to those that appear least useful and honorable of his mystical body (cf. ME 4)⁴⁷. Likewise, the superior must esteem souls precisely in their diversity, which is infinite:

Every soul (and every holy house) is a member belonging to the body of the Son of God. For we are all grafted into him as the branch into the vine, as he himself says, and we are bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh, as his Apostle says; and every soul and every house forms part of the spiritual and mystical body of Jesus, a body redeemed by his blood, nourished by his substance, living by his Spirit, and even united

⁴³ ME 1.

⁴⁴ ME 1.

⁴⁵ ME 1.

⁴⁶ ME 1.

⁴⁷ ME 4; Dupuy. 1969. *Bérulle et le sacerdoce*, 165.

to his own proper and natural body and to his very Spirit through the Holy Eucharist. This mystical and sacred body, and every soul that forms part of it, receives and bears a very great dignity because of the greatness of its mysteries⁴⁸.

4. Forming Christ in Souls

In Jesus dwells the fullness of divinity (Ephesians 3:19); in him are found all the treasures of God’s wisdom and love (ME 12, citing Colossians 2:3); he is the masterpiece of God (OP 44, no. 6). Priests are called to form Jesus Christ in souls, and he himself is the fruit of their labours:

(...) our works and our movements are directed towards forming Jesus Christ in souls, for he himself is the fruit of our works; he is the end of this heavenly production of grace; he is the end of our ministry, which tends to produce and to form him in hearts, to apply his blood and to give his Spirit to human beings. (...) What a great design, for so lofty and so heavenly an end: to cause spirits to be born to a new and divine life, and to produce and form Jesus Christ in souls! This is how the Apostle speaks to his disciples: *Quos iterum parturio*, he says, *donec formetur Christus in vobis*⁴⁹. This word is great, but it is true and must weigh heavily upon us, for it concerns our life and our ministry. God, who produces his Son within himself, wills to produce him anew in souls; and this is one of the births that the Father gives to his Son and that the Church recognizes and celebrates in her offices: for the Father produces him in his bosom on the day of his eternity, then in the womb of the Virgin in the fullness of time, and finally in our hearts and in our spirits at every hour and at every moment⁵⁰.

This theme is dear to mystical literature: the *theogenesia* of Dionysius (PG 392B, 397A, 404C, 425A, 432D, 433A, 504B); the theme of the generation of the Word in the soul also recalls Ruysbroeck in the *Miroir du salut* (*Œuvres* I, pp. 128, 132, 139). The soul is a world, and that world is made for a divine life; for this reason, the priest must assist in the birth and growth of Christ within the soul:

⁴⁸ ME 4.

⁴⁹ Gal 4:19: “I have borne you a second time until Christ is formed in you”.

⁵⁰ ME 8.

Thus, let us never tire of thinking it and of saying it: Jesus is the fruit of our labors, and our ministry tends to produce what the Father produces in his eternity⁵¹.

This ought to fill us with love, with self-abasement, and with devotion in our labors and in the exercise of our holy, spiritual, and supernatural function, a function that unites us to the eternal Father by producing his Son, a function that unites us to the Son himself as produced and formed by us in souls, a function that thus elevates us and unites us to the greatest realities in time and in eternity⁵².

We, upon the earth, labor not for the earth, but for heaven and for the God of heaven and earth, to offer to God living victims who praise him for ever, and to fill heaven with spirits and subjects who must be formed here below under our discipline and sanctified on earth by our hands⁵³.

Thus concludes the “movement by which God, creating and forming all things, refers and relates them all to himself”⁵⁴. The priestly ministry imitates and honors the eternal generation of the Word when it brings Jesus to birth temporally in souls. The priestly function is such that,

in this mystery accomplished by the human being, he wills to divinize for himself all that he has made and formed by his power; and all that the soul vivifies in the human body is divinized by the eternal Word, in this body that he has taken and consecrated for himself in order to honor God his Father and to accomplish our salvation⁵⁵.

Bérulle lived in a milieu in which hierarchies were an integral part of everyday life. He was close to the Court and to King Henry IV, who appointed him chaplain (Bérulle systematically refused the bishoprics that were proposed to him). Within this world of ecclesiastical and civil hierarchies (at Court), he contemplated the human soul, which for him manifests the hierarchical structure of the universe as God created it and Christ re-created it. It is within this order that divine light is transmitted through intermediaries.

Cochois offers an excellent summary of the itinerary of Bérullian mediation: “to submit oneself to the hierarchical mediators to whom God has given ‘authority’ in order to lead souls towards such a state of divinization”. These mediators are

⁵¹ ME 9.

⁵² ME 8.

⁵³ ME 8.

⁵⁴ *Opuscle of Piety* 123.

⁵⁵ ME 23.

first the Virgin, then the deified humanity of the Word made flesh. The subsistence of this humanity in the Person of the Word is for Bérulle “the archetype and exemplar” of all states of mystical passivity. Bérulle’s Christocentrism is essentially mystical. In order to ‘honor’ the hypostatic state of the humanity assumed by the Word, and to participate in that state through hierarchical dependence, God must cause us to subsist mystically within this deified humanity, just as it itself subsists in the Person of the Word. One then becomes part of the “Choir of Jesus”, is incorporated into the order of chosen and privileged souls upon whom Jesus, the divinizing sun of the new creation, imprints his “states” in the same way that the Thearchy radiates its divine perfections upon the various orders of the celestial hierarchy. But for this, one must first be admitted to belong to the *Chorus Mariae*, to be incorporated into the order of souls likewise chosen and privileged who participate in the very mystical intimacy that the Virgin had on earth with Jesus”⁵⁶.

The work of spiritual directors is embedded within the historical-salvific dynamic, prolonging the mystery of the Incarnation in a particular manner, in relation to the human nature given by the Blessed Virgin. This is a dynamic that situates the action of the priest within a movement that proceeds from the Trinity and is directed back towards the Trinity:

Since Jesus, the fruit of heaven and earth, the fruit of the eternal Father and of Mary, has been received and welcomed into the world; since God has become man and man has become God; heaven and earth have been renewed in grace and blessing. Our ministry therefore has a more excellent end and operation, because it tends to give birth to and to form that Jesus in hearts; it tends to give his body and his Spirit to the world; and it tends to grant a new birth to him who was born from all eternity in the bosom of the Father and, in the fullness of time, in the womb of the Blessed Virgin. It tends to draw us into that kind of covenant with the Son of God which the Son of God himself honored, celebrated, and exalted with these great words: *qui facit voluntatem Patris mei, hic meus frater, soror et mater est*⁵⁷.

The “Apostle of the Incarnate Word”, as Urban VIII called him, does not ignore the communal dimension of faith; yet, following Dionysius, he readily situates himself within the vertical dimension, one of the transmissions of teaching and

⁵⁶ Paul Cochois. 1958. “Bérulle, initiateur mystique: les vœux de servitude”. École pratique des hautes études, Section des sciences religieuses, 114.

⁵⁷ ME 9; Mt 12:50: “Whoever does the will of my Father is my brother, my sister, and my mother”.

influence, rather than in the horizontal sense of the mutual support that the faithful offer one another⁵⁸.

5. The Priestly Ministry and the Trinity

In Bérulle's conception, the priest must be an imitator of the divine Persons, especially of the Father, in order to exercise authority over the faithful with love. The People of God contemplate and are enlightened through the ministry of priests.

Through the mystery of the Incarnation, Christ in his humanity is at once the Image and the Instrument of the Father. This mode of union in Christ is unique and unrepeatable, singular and sublime; yet, by virtue of this archetypal union, priests may be jointly associated by God with his action in souls. The priest must imitate Christ, who is the Image of the Father⁵⁹. The priest is an image of the Image; for this reason he is regarded as *alter Christus*. Through ordination, through the priestly state, the presbyter becomes conjoined to Christ; he is a priest of Jesus and belongs to him. The priest imitates God the Father not only by forming Christ in souls, but also according to the model of the Incarnation (that is, of the temporal conception in the womb of the Virgin) by causing the Holy Spirit to remain there⁶⁰.

For Dionysius, the ministerial priesthood is nothing other than a concrete mediation within a set of mediations that structure the universe. In the Dionysian perspective on the priesthood, Christ is not High Priest because he unites human nature to the divine, but because, as the Logos, the Son within the Trinity is the first begotten (or, in the Platonic vocabulary commonly used in the seventeenth century, the first emanated) from the Father, and his entire essence and existence are referred to the Father. In Bérullian thought, the Word becomes incarnate in order to communicate to priests the hierarchical power that he himself has received from the Father, the "universal bishop" in the eternal generation. Christ as man is the one who institutes the ecclesiastical hierarchy; for this reason, he is the first hierarch, the first initiator.

The priestly spirit, "the divine art of instructing souls and governing them along the interior paths", proceeds from the source of divinity, that is, from the Father, and is communicated solely through the mediation of the Incarnate Word. It is in

⁵⁸ Cochois. 1958. "Bérulle, initiateur mystique, 328.

⁵⁹ The vocabulary here is not that of Dionysius, but of Saint Thomas: when he speaks of the *instrumentum conjunctum divinitatis*.

⁶⁰ Dupuy. 1969. *Bérulle et le sacerdoce*, 169; Morgain. 1995. *Pierre de Bérulle et les Carmélites de France*, 260–262.

the Incarnation of the Word that the nature of the priesthood is revealed: there is an identity between the formation of Christ in the womb of the Virgin and the formation of Christ in souls through the ministry of priests. Being conjoined to Christ, priests are the prolongation of the deified humanity of the Son, in order to communicate grace to the whole body. Within this order of things, the priestly ministry must be imperatively “in the hands of this Humanity” of Christ, allowing him to act through his ministers: “we must act only through the spirit of Jesus, guiding, animating, applying, and filling our spirit as form fills matter”.

6. The Nature of Mediation

The priest is often presented as one who imitates the divine Persons, especially the Father:

The present solemnity of the Holy Spirit, on which I write these things, teaches us that the divine Persons bring their state, their productions, their relations, and their communion to fulfillment in love, which is the third Person and the blessed term of the Holy Trinity. Likewise, created persons, as worshippers and imitators in their small actions and communities of the uncreated Persons, must bring their state, their conduct, their activity, and their communion to fulfillment in charity and not in authority; for we do not possess authority in order to exercise authority, but solely in order to practice charity, which is the end and the design of the power that has been given to us (...). This is a point of great importance for those who, being priests and fathers in the Church of God, represent and imitate him who is the Father in the Godhead, from whom every fatherhood derives. And so that those who are subordinate may also have something from which to profit in passing over to and imitating this sacred mystery, I urge them to adore and to imitate, in these eternal thoughts, their unity and their principle, their emanation and their union in the Persons from whom they proceed. For although the Persons from whom they proceed, being divine, equal, and infinite, are incapable of dependence and inferiority, nevertheless they are and act not from themselves but from their principle, and they have being, life, action, and mission only from their origin: the Son from the Father and the Holy Spirit from the Father and from the Son: *Ego enim ex Deo processi et veni: neque enim a me ipso veni, sed ille me misit*⁶¹.

⁶¹ ME 22; Jn 8:12: “For I have come from God and have come here; I did not come on my own, but He sent me”.

The priest is a mediator because his knowledge of God and his priestly life place before human eyes a visible image of an invisible reality. Bérulle constantly returns to the Dionysian categories of illumination, mediation, and grace through communion. For him, the Incarnation is the closest union that can be conceived: the created world united to God, a union that imitates the divine life itself. The Virgin is the image of this unity. Priests, forming a community, reflect the union of the divine Persons (OR 18, no. 1). Dionysius' exemplarism enables Bérulle to articulate a coherent conception of priestly mediation: just as crystal reflects and diffuses light, so the priest "communicates" (OP 153, a specifically Bérullian term) and "influences" (OP 191) the knowledge of God.

In the *Memorial*, this theology is also intertwined with Thomism, since Bérulle affirms that the priest is an "instrument of God" (OP 191; ME 8, 9, 19; OR 14, no. 3; OR 43, etc.). This formula was well suited to explaining the ministry of the sacraments. What is striking, however, is that for Bérulle the priest is also an instrument of God in spiritual governance. God wills to "associate" him⁶², to "conjoin" him (*conjoindre*)⁶³ to his own action in souls. In the guidance of souls, rather than emphasizing the light or personal power of the priest, Bérulle relates everything to the priest's being an instrument of God:

But there is this difference: whereas the Father, producing the Son within himself, is the sole principle of his beloved Son, and whereas the Holy Spirit, God like him and eternal like him, has no part in this eternal production except by producing the Son from himself, God has nevertheless willed to make use of the Virgin in order to give him to the world, and he wills to make use of us in order to give him to souls, and he wills to associate us with himself in so lofty and divine a ministry⁶⁴.

Just as the instrument of an artist contributes to a work whose full meaning it cannot know, so the priest leads a soul cooperatively into a divine action that transcends him. The founder of the French Oratory desired that the director be docile to divine inspirations in the same way that a pencil is pliable in the hand of the artist. Through the priest who directs, the grace of God can lead a soul as infallibly as *ex opere operato* in the sacraments. Every priest knows that the souls entrusted to him receive more graces than he himself is capable of imparting. The superior-di-

⁶² ME 8.

⁶³ ME 8.

⁶⁴ ME 8.

rector must adapt his ministry to the diversity of paths (paths that are infinite) by which God leads a soul.

7. Mediation in the Return to God?

Spiritual direction is a ministry in which priestly mediation is exercised in a privileged way, in a “descending” mode. The superior enlightens the inferior by transmitting to him the gift of grace. But how is the director-superior a mediator in the “ascending” order, that is, in the sense of the return to God? In Dionysius, in the *Hierarchia Ecclesiastica*, the priest introduces the faithful into a path that only he knows; the faithful glimpse it only through symbols. The goal is to be “placed in the state that the great Saint Denis calls *pati divina*”, in order “to let God act in us as he did before we were created”, when “he predestined us to be his adopted sons in Jesus Christ, the Beloved”. Bérulle’s praxis shows a strong resemblance to this: he has his directives follow a spiritual itinerary by asking them to take a vow of servitude to Jesus and Mary. He himself knows well the theological justification for this, but the Carmelites who are to profess the vow do not. How is one to explain to them what is meant by the *dénouement que l’humanité de Jésus a de sa subsistence propre et ordinaires?* (destitution by which the humanity of Jesus is deprived of its own proper and ordinary subsistence?). He ultimately proposes that they make the vow “in the intention of the Father Director”⁶⁵.

I implore Our Lord Jesus and his most holy Mother to render me a worthy instrument of their will in you; and the first action that I desire to accomplish in you after this is to employ the power that Jesus and Mary deign to give me over you, in order to dedicate and consecrate you henceforth to the uncreated being of Jesus⁶⁶.

For Cochois, Bérulle exercises over the souls he directs the power of the “Dionysian hierarch”, leading them along paths unknown to them and uniting them to

⁶⁵ The vows of servitude are indeed for him the means of living continually in dependence upon the Virgin and Christ. He then receives from them not only supernatural lights to guide souls securely, but, insofar as these souls mystically ‘bind’ themselves to his own, he receives a hierarchical ‘authority’ that enables him to ‘bestow upon them divinizing influences’. Capable of ‘imitating the eminent orders among the angels who purify, who illuminate, who inflame those who are subject and subordinate to them’, he uses the ‘power’ he receives from God to ‘apply’ to these souls, according to their particular vocations, the grace of this or that ‘state’ of the Incarnate Word. He thus assigns them a place in the *Chorus Jesu*, in the same way that the hierarch, in Dionysius, assigned to each his place within the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Cochois. 1958. “Bérulle, initiateur mystique, 111–115.

⁶⁶ CB 852.

Christ. In the worldview of the French thinker, souls are related to one another and also establish relations among themselves: the director can say that a given soul belongs to such-and-such a heavenly choir, or that it should be consecrated to one mystery of Jesus rather than another. Nevertheless, Pierre de Bérulle invites souls to dispose themselves to the graces that the Lord wills to grant them; he does not himself choose the path on their behalf. He is always careful to unite souls to Jesus and to Mary, and not to his own person. The vocabulary he uses can at times lend itself to misunderstanding. Thus, for example, the expression “to offer a soul to Jesus or to Mary” signifies intercession, prayer on behalf of that person, and constitutes a concrete way of exercising the priesthood and intercession for those who have been entrusted to him.

8. Faith and Obedience as a Return to God

Bérulle never calls for mechanical or blind obedience to the spiritual director, something evident in the delicacy and discretion with which he refers to this matter in his correspondence with those under his guidance. The director’s task is to enlighten, to intercede, and to foster growth in both the understanding and love of Jesus. The priest binds a soul to this or that mystery of Jesus by enabling it to know and love that mystery, leading it to an ever-deepening admiration. In the *Memorial*, spiritual direction is defined as the “divine art of instructing souls and governing them along the interior paths”⁶⁷:

(...) This surpasses our own thoughts and those of the angels, and it would be better to remain in silence and in profound reverence. But since I must speak, I wish to do so with the spirit and the words of a great saint and great doctor who said: *ars artium cura animarum*⁶⁸, and I must warn you that it is necessary that the Spirit of spirits or, to speak according to Scripture, the Father of spirits, who is God, or, if you prefer, the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son, be the teacher of this science and the director of this work (...) Blessed be He for having come upon the earth, for having illuminated it with His light, for having founded and opened His school, for having taught the secrets of heaven and, among others, this divine art of instructing souls and governing them along the interior paths. But He admits into His school only

⁶⁷ ME 10; cf. ME 33.

⁶⁸ Citation from Gregory the Great, *Pastoral Rule* (I, 1, PL 77, 14A): “the care of souls is the art of arts”.

the humble and the simple, and He governs them along the interior paths; He desires no other disciples in His academy, and it is to them alone that He directs His Spirit, His grace, and His words: *super quem requiescet spiritus meus, nisi super humilem et tremementem sermones meos?*⁶⁹.

(...) Let us often contemplate these three wonders; let us turn clearly toward these three distinct objects; let us draw our guidance from these three distinct authorities, each according to its own condition and proportion; and let us have recourse to the supreme authority of God over all things, in order to derive from it both power and direction. Let us adhere to the unity of His essence and to the fecundity of His Persons so as to conceive the spirit of unity, wisdom, charity, and holy and spiritual fecundity within His Church, in honor and in imitation of the fecundity and proper character of the three divine Persons⁷⁰.

Although he was a man of strong character and governance, Bérulle did not impose his own will as though it were the will of God. He constantly evokes the example of Christ, obedient unto death. Obedience thus becomes the principal means of self-denial and self-emptying within the dynamic lived between the director and the soul entrusted to him:

for to govern well and to be well governed is a singular gift of God, and it is a gift of the same Spirit of God, who, by granting prudence to some and docility to others, authority to some and obedience to others, often bestows a similar grace upon souls in different conditions, and at times even grants a more abundant and higher grace to those who are governed rather than to those who govern. This comes from a hidden counsel that keeps us in humility and mutual respect: those who govern reverencing the hidden grace present in those who are subject to them, and the others deferring to the authority of God that resides in their superiors. Thus all are humbly and divinely united and subordinated to one another through the efficacy of the same Spirit, who is ever one and the same amid the diversity of souls, gifts, and operations⁷¹.

Directors must dispose themselves theologically for this mission, which God carries out through them as His instruments: “Let us prepare ourselves for grace

⁶⁹ ME 10; Is 66:2: “Upon whom shall my spirit rest, if not upon the one who is humble and who fears my words?”.

⁷⁰ ME 33.

⁷¹ *Letter of Presentation of the Memorial*.

and prepare ourselves to be living instruments, animated by the Spirit of Jesus, in order to carry out the works of Jesus upon the earth”⁷².

Self-emptying and the humiliation of the director, insofar as they unite him to the mysteries of Christ’s Passion, likewise constitute a path toward union with God and a return to Him through self-forgetfulness and adherence to Christ, to His Mother, and to God Himself: Therefore, by corresponding to God’s designs for us and by serving the power of His Son upon the earth, let us forget ourselves, ascend to heaven, adhere to Jesus, God and man, adhere to Mary, Virgin and Mother of God, and adhere to God Himself in His unity and Trinity⁷³.

9. Conclusions and Overview

In the guidance offered by spiritual directors, illumination is fundamental, since the minister must lead others in the discovery of God. For this reason, the priest must be advanced in divine knowledge. Although the validity of a sacrament does not depend on the holiness of the priest, the clarity of teaching and the light he is able to impart do depend upon it. He leads others to love Christ because he himself has been transformed by the love of Christ.

On 17 April 1614, a brief of Paul V fulfilled his aspirations. From that moment onward, there were no further hesitations: God granted him “authority” to carry out his new functions in the manner of a Dionysian hierarch. Identifying his canonical office with that of a director of conscience, Bérulle, from 1614 onward, would assume the role of initiator with regard to both the Oratory and Carmel.

The hierarchical constitution of the Church shows that, in Bérulle’s conception, the spiritual direction of the faithful appears to be primarily the ministry of the diocesan priest rather than that of a religious one, because the secular priest belongs “to the Order of Jesus Christ”. In his worldview, priests must become aware of the supreme dignity they possess by virtue of the priestly state, which is superior to the religious state, since the latter (like all Christians) receive the holiness of the Church through the hierarchical mediation of priests. Consequently, priests ought to surpass religious not only in knowledge but above all in holiness. Priestly consecration is a divine initiative, whereas religious vows are a human desire to consecrate oneself according to the spirituality of a holy founder.

⁷² ME 5.

⁷³ ME 32.

Undoubtedly, today such language and ideas may appear imbued with clericalism; nevertheless, Bérulle’s vision of God’s work of creation, redemption, and sacramental life displays an admirable unity and complexity. In his great contemplation of the mysteries of the Trinity and of the Word Incarnate in the womb of Mary, the French reformer perceives the human being, created, redeemed, and made a subject of divine grace, returning to God through the sacraments that unite him to the humanity and divinity of Christ. In the ministry of spiritual direction, the priest stands in continuity with the action of the Trinity. “The Father makes use” of priests “to give His Son to souls”; it is the Son of God who possesses this hierarchical power as High Priest and who associates priests with entering the school “of the Holy Spirit”, which admits only the humble and the simple:

For it is God’s design in this work, and it must be ours, to be made holy by the Holy of Holies and to be made fit to sanctify others by our example and by our works. This is what we must all do with fidelity and perseverance, employing our concerns, our desires, and our prayers, and, in a word, the whole use of the spirit of nature and of grace which it has pleased Him to give us⁷⁴.

The priesthood is a passive mediation in relation to the Son who sends priests to proclaim the Gospel, and an active mediation in relation to the persons entrusted to them by virtue of the priestly office. For this reason, souls ought to desire the perfection that comes to them through the ministry. For Bérulle, the priestly state demands a “great perfection and the same holiness that must exist in the Church of God, for it is a holy and sacred state in its institution, a divine office in its exercise and ministry, and indeed the source of all holiness in the Church”⁷⁵. The ministry of the director must “give birth to spirits unto a new and divine life” and must “produce Jesus Christ in souls”⁷⁶.

The spiritual director-the superior (an Oratorian) is by vocation the source, the hierarchy, of this holiness; his mission is to communicate the illumination he has received to the faithful entrusted to his care. He communicates a perfection acquired through mystical knowledge, since he is animated by the love of Christ, this science is properly a spiritual science, for it belongs to the Spirit of God; it concerns realities that are truly spiritual and divine, and it even renders its possessor spiritual, insofar as it is “an emanation of that great light”.

⁷⁴ *Letter of Presentation of the Memorial*.

⁷⁵ *Opuscle of Piety* 309 bis, § II, p. 387.

⁷⁶ ME 8.

It would be the work of Jean-Jacques Olier and Saint John Eudes, through the establishment of seminaries, missions, and the accompaniment of priests, religious people, and laypeople, to popularize Bérulle's doctrine, to simplify it, and to bring about the transition from the ministerial priesthood to the common priesthood. This transition would become one of the key and defining features of the French School of Spirituality.

Bérullism is not, first and foremost, a priestly spirituality. Certainly, there is a strong emphasis on the mission and mediation of priests in order to advance the reform of the clergy and, consequently, of the Church. In this sense, the momentum generated by communities dedicated to formation in seminaries helped disseminate Bérulle's thought. Yet for him, what was essential was to make Jesus Christ live in souls, something made possible by the Incarnation. In the language of contemporary theology, one would say today that Bérulle proposes a baptismal spirituality, even if this expression may appear somewhat anachronistic in the context of the seventeenth century, which was marked by a hierarchical conception of both society and the Church.

The greatness of the priest does not derive from the position he occupies in the Church through a benefice named or granted by the king, but from his union with the divine Priest, Jesus Christ, in whose work he must cooperate. The priestly ministry thus appears as a necessary instrument, *instrumentum conjunctum*, joined to the Son of God in the dispensation of the grace that deifies the Church. Through interior mortification, the priest must himself become a pure capacity for God, and thus a direct instrument of the Son of God, a living image of Jesus Christ: "to accustom oneself to meekness and patience, in honor and imitation of the Son of God, bearing for so long in his school the lowliness and roughness of his apostles"⁷⁷. The priest has no other mission than to bring Jesus into hearts. The contemplation of the states of Christ is of greater importance than spiritual direction alone or mere devotional practice, although Bérulle was careful never to disparage these activities.

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⁷⁷ ME 25.

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