

# What Can Committed Women Do? Part – 2

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## *Abstract*

Mother Madeleine of Saint Joseph was the first French prioress of the Carmel of the Incarnation. She was a formator, prioress, mystic and spiritual leader of the Carmelites of France. Madeleine of Saint Joseph, charged as a young woman with the formation of the new Carmelites, was a trusted and steady leader during whose lifetime fifty-two Carmelite convents were established in France. Both Madame Barb Acarie and Mother Madeleine were close associates of Pierre de Bérulle who was a pivotal figure in the development of the Carmel as well as the founder of the French Oratory.

## **Madeleine of St. Joseph du Bois de Fontaines (1578-1637)**

### **Introduction**

Madeleine du Bois de Fontaines (1578-1637) was the first French prioress of the Teresian Carmelites in France. During a period of over thirty years as a Carmelite nun, Mother Madeleine of Saint Joseph served as mistress of novices and was elected prioress for two terms in the Carmel of the Incarnation in Paris. She established and was elected prioress of a second Parisian Carmel at the rue Chapon, and she helped to establish and stabilize the Carmels of Lyon and Tours. Madeline of Saint Joseph's contribution to the development of Carmelite life and French spirituality was significant due to many factors. Among these were: her leadership of the Carmelite community of Paris; the breadth

of her influence across all social classes, her gifts of prayer and deftness at spiritual direction, and her “spiritual insights marked by teachings of both Teresa and Bérulle.” (Delville 1994:220)

Madeleine du Bois de Fontaines, was the daughter of a retired ambassador, Antoine du Bois, whose ancestors were originally from Flanders. He had been employed by Henry III and his predecessor Charles IX in several ambassadorial posts in England, Germany and the Netherlands and finally as ambassador to Flanders before he retired to Fontaines after a distinguished career. (Senault 1645:5). It was during one of his visits to Flanders that du Bois’s wife Marie Prudhomme, pregnant with her sixth child received a premonition that this child would be more blessed than her other children (1935:10). Her daughter Madeleine was born on Pentecost day, May 17, 1578 in Paris.

Madeleine grew up in a pious household and one in which she and her siblings were given an education. She was a precocious child and biographers say she was spiritually sensitive to the thought of eternity and the judgments of God. One day when she saw a child’s coffin she cried and cried because her thoughts had turned to eternity and a fearful judgment (1645:7). As a young woman, Madeleine decided to separate herself from the “world” and to shun its allurements. The life of the royals held no fascination for her. Instead, she devoted herself to prayer and pious activities, managing the household and caring for younger brothers and sisters after her mother’s death. The twenty-two year old also involved herself in works of charity among the poor (1645:23) As she matured, so did her gift of prayer and the many fears she experienced as a child were soon replaced by a sense of the goodness of God’s love. “How good it is to love God!” she told her sister Catherine (1935:44). At that time, Madeleine was already receiving spiritual direction from a Capuchin friar Laurent since 1602 and was considering religious life.

By the year 1603, at the age of twenty-five, Madeleine decided to enter the Capuchin Poor Clares over the objections of her father. Antoine du Bois was still grieving over his wife’s death and came to Tours for a Lenten sermon in hopes of receiving some consolation. It was there that he met the young priest, Pierre de Bérulle. Subsequently, Bérulle came to visit du Bois at his home and met Madeleine. She spoke of her plans to enter the Capuchins and Bérulle invited her to consider joining the new Carmelite foundation to be erected in Paris within a year’s time. On 11 November 1604, Madeleine du Bois de Fontaines became one of the first French candidates for Carmelite life, along with Marie d’Hannival, a relative of Jean de Brétigny, who became Marie de la Trinité.

### *Gifts for Spiritual Leadership*

The day after her profession as a Carmelite nun, Madeleine of Saint-Joseph was appointed novice mistress at the Carmel of the Incarnation in Paris. Her biographers say that her spiritual acumen and understanding of the Carmelite way of life were factors responsible for her appointment by the Spanish superiors and ratified by the Order's ecclesiastical superiors. For three years Madeleine of St. Joseph exercised the role of novice director. Those who presented themselves to be trained were from various backgrounds and age groups. In addition to this task, Madeleine of Saint-Joseph was put in charge of the building begun by Madame Acarie in the faubourg St. Jacques. She communicated with builders and was responsible to bring the work to completion. The abilities of Madeleine of Saint-Joseph did not go unnoticed by the newly-arrived Carmelites. Nearly from the time they arrived, Mother Anne of Jesus and her companions expressed a strong desire to expand the foundations of the Carmelite order to Dijon as soon as possible. Another convent northwest of Paris in Amiens was to be opened. This would be followed by a proposed move to Flanders and the Spanish Netherlands. The way in which Madeleine of Saint Joseph dealt with the novices, women of varied ages and experience, including the mother of Pierre de Bérulle, was so skilled that Mother Anne of Jesus proposed that Madeleine of Saint Joseph accompany her to Flanders to begin a foundation under the aegis of the Flemish Carmelite priests. When this proposed move was refused by the French ecclesiastical superiors, it was decided that Madeleine of Saint-Joseph would remain in Paris.

The decision was evidently a good one, for it gave the French Carmelite the opportunity to instill the charism of their Spanish foundress, Teresa of Avila into the hearts of the young candidates. At the end of three years, there was no hiatus. Rather, she was given another three years in leadership, this time as prioress. On the feast of the Good Shepherd, April 20, 1608 Madeleine of St. Joseph was unanimously elected prioress of the Carmel of the Incarnation, also called the Grand Convent. As a young prioress, Mother Madeleine of Saint-Joseph was faced with considerable challenges. She was responsible for inculcating the charism of the Spanish foundresses among the French women. She recalled the traditions and teachings of Mother Teresa of Avila, for example, that "at each new degree of prayer, as a mark of progress, the soul's humility is more profound" - something that would be very true of herself (Sérouet 1965:394). In a letter to another Carmelite she recalls the advice of Mother Anne of Jesus, that novices be instilled with a detachment and freedom that makes it possible to send them anywhere at any time (1965:37). This would be important for her to recall as well -

having lived such a short time with the Spanish women. She served two terms as prioress and in 1615 she was sent to Tours to help stabilize the newly-founded communion. The following year 1616, she established the Carmel in Lyon and was called back to Paris to found the Carmel on rue Chapon in 1617. In 1624 she was recalled to the Carmel of the Incarnation to serve as prioress once more.

### *The Religious Experience of Madeleine of Saint Joseph*

Madeleine's religious experience was marked by two movements: detachment from things of the "earth" and adherence to the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Early in her novitiate experience, Madeleine experienced herself being detached from all created things (1935:84). This same theme appears again though now she is "dead" to all created things in an entirely new way. She is drawn into a participation in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to God. She sees herself as an unworthy recipient of divine mercy and at the same time one privileged to see the loving relationships of Father and Son within the Trinity. In a letter written to Bérulle sometime between the years 1621-1623, she writes describing her mystical experience of participating in Christ's sacrifice. As if she were standing outside of her own soul, she sees God's goodness and mercy and shares in Christ's surrender:

Our Lord made me see that he put me into the state (état) of his sacrifice and that the soul of Jesus Christ sacrificed mine to the divinity by a new death to self and to all created things. It seems to me that my soul entered into sharing the sacrifice that the soul of Jesus made to God, and I saw in that his great goodness and mercy to me. He gave me a share in his surrender when he said: Your will be done. I also saw the abandonment that he experienced from his Father; and although my participation was not total, it seemed to me that it was very extreme. (Sérouet 1965:24)

Not an exuberant mystic in the style of a Teresa of Avila, Madeleine of Saint Joseph was nonetheless gifted with mystical knowledge. She describes herself as sharing in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to the divinity and of her soul being sacrificed or offered with that of Jesus to the Father. She gains experimental knowledge of the activities of the persons within the economy of Trinity. She enters into a sense of the mystery of Christ's sacrificial death, experiencing to some degree his abandonment and surrender.

In the narrative of her experience, Madeleine of Saint Joseph says that our Lord has "placed her into the state of his sacrifice" (*dans l'état de son immolation*). For Bérulle, who was a significant influence in her formation, adoration of God is accomplished through a personal

adherence to Jesus Christ in his mysteries. "Through adherence, adoration becomes no longer a series of discrete moments, but a state (état), no longer a succession of acts, but a constancy of being in a depth of adherence that can only be effected by God" (Buckley 1989:52).

These themes form a consistent and major portion of her mystical writings: self-offering, the nothingness of her soul (*l'anéatissement* of her soul), her creaturehood, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, his centrality in her life, adoration and love, worship in spirit and in truth, adherence to Jesus Christ in his humanity. The grace to unite herself to Jesus' "Thy will be done" was a continual challenge throughout the whole of Madeleine's life.

### *The Face of Carmel to the "World"*

As prioress of this great convent, Mother Madeleine was the face of Carmel to French society. She had to moderate the enthusiastic royals who were fascinated with the Carmelite women living a life hidden behind the grille. The queen herself, Marie de Medicis often came to visit the Carmel for spiritual advice and support, or perhaps to relieve her boredom. Other royals such as the Princess of Condé, Charlotte Montmorency and the Duchess of Longueville, Catherine d'Orleans came with their whole entourages of ladies-in-waiting while they sought spiritual counsel from Mother Madeleine of Saint-Joseph. She offered encouragement to Michel de Marillac, uncle of Louise de Marillac. In a letter of June 1, 1626 she congratulates him on his important appointment as Keeper of the Royal Seals and says, prophetically, that she often recalls the memory of a martyred chancellor in England (1965:35). For in a few years' time in Easter 1631 or 1632, after the imprisonments following the Day of the Jupes, Mother Madeleine would be writing to Michel de Marillac, the prisoner of Cardinal Richelieu, offering him consolation:

We have recommended you to the great saint Magdalene on her feast day, reminding me that you have a particular devotion to her, who is very reliable having seen the Son of God. I was thinking last evening hearing the Gospel read, of the greatness of that soul whom Jesus Christ praised for her love and her faith and to whom he gave his peace in the first moment of her conversion. I have asked him for your share in the graces so great and so unusual that she received, whom I believe has the power to obtain from him who gave them to her. (1965:70)

Nor were Mother Madeleine's contacts limited to the aristocracy. Sister Agnes of Saint Michael remembers a baker who made great progress in prayer under the direction of Mother Madeleine. (Rimaud, 1966:65).

Louise of Jesus, a Carmelite biographer records another instance of Madeleine of Saint-Joseph's accessibility and wise counsel. Two young Irish Jesuits, studying in France where they could be safe from the English reformation anti-Catholicism, conversed with each other in Bordeaux. One of them had just returned from Paris. His friend inquired if he had spoken with Mother Madeleine. No, came the reply. To which his companion answered, "You have seen nothing then, if you haven't seen Mother Madeleine. She is the marvel of Paris; she is wonderful!" (1935:445)

Mother Madeleine's interactions with people across the broad spectrum of Parisian society reveal her engagement with the world as personal and astute. The same Cardinal Richelieu who imprisoned Michel de Marillac for treason approached Mother Madeleine of Saint-Joseph for the community's prayer for the success against the English in the siege of La Rochelle. She obliged him by requesting the community to pray before the Blessed Sacrament for forty hours to ensure the French victory. Later, after the death of Pierre de Bérulle, in 1629, Mother Madeleine wrote to Cardinal Richelieu to acknowledge his acceptance as Cardinal Protector of the Carmelite Order in France. (1965:49)

### **Safeguarding the Tradition of Teresa of Avila**

Perhaps a more significant challenge that Mother Madeleine of Saint-Joseph faced was the current of false mysticism that swept through many of the religious houses of France in her times. Like her mother foundress Teresa of Avila, Madeleine of Saint-Joseph insisted strongly upon devotion to the humanity of Christ. All prayer was to be rooted in the gospels and in the life of Christ. In an extract from a letter to an unknown correspondent, perhaps a sister, Madeleine expresses her dismay at the idea of straying from devotion to Christ. She is concerned over the trend developing in her sisters' piety, what she called "withdrawal"<sup>1</sup> from Jesus Christ:

Since you believe that I am in possession of both great and ordinary realities at once, I want to speak about that freely with you. I have none of these subtleties, but it is true that I, like others, may have some of this and some graces in prayer. However, in my experience these things are more like something toward which I reach, rather than something I have achieved. I am amazed at those souls who have immediately accomplished everything.

For my part, I am fifty years old, but do not seem to have yet begun. Those other souls are in the divine essence. They no longer exist. They

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1 She uses the term "desappliquer".

have lost their being in Jesus Christ. They are intimately with God, to hear them tell it. Indeed there is nothing more beautiful in the world. My approach is quite different. One of the greatest sorrows I bear is to see that the evil spirit has been able to detach so many good souls from the realities and thus leading them along paths of illusion. O my God, what is more sublime than Jesus Christ? Is he not the splendor of the Father and the image of his substance? Is he not his beloved Son in whom he is well-pleased? Is he not the one in whom the fullness of divinity resides?... Our blessed father [Pierre de Bérulle] and our blessed Marie of the Incarnation [Madame Barb Acarie], when I first knew them thirty years ago, expressed great sorrow to see the beginning of this development. They told me that it was one of the great problems of the church. (Thompson 1989:191-192)

Standing firmly in the tradition of her Holy Mother Teresa, Madeleine of Saint-Joseph was convinced that Jesus Christ is the pre-eminent way to God. Both she and Teresa understood that the humanity of Christ is the way through which God's graces are communicated (Huguenin 1993:14). As much by meditation as by mystical contemplation, Teresa perceived with intensity that the reason for the Incarnation and the Passion of Christ is divine mercy. To this, Madeleine of Saint-Joseph would say a firm, "Amen!" Writing to a member of the clergy, Madeleine of Saint Joseph cites the wisdom and experience of Teresa of Avila:

You see she testifies to the regret she had at following the advice that she was given to leave behind devoting herself to the humanity of Christ as if it would hinder her from the heights of contemplation and at taking the advice (for so long) that she sees that one of the greatest errors she could have made and the greatest losses she would have ever had. In the *Interior Castle*, she wrote that the interior state that she knows is the most elevated on earth consists in this very intimate union of the soul with Jesus Christ that she calls the spiritual marriage (1965:254).

Mother Madeleine of Saint-Joseph counsels her sisters that an affective engagement in faith with the person of Christ is essential for spiritual growth. Her advice comes from her own experience of Christ in the gospels as she writes to one of her community:

Ask the holy Virgin to admit you to her company, like the holy women who followed Jesus to the cross. Consider their patience and suffering so much opprobrium, blows and outrageous words for approaching him, and above all else, look at their great strength and constancy, look at their suffering for him whom they know to be the only Son of God and the life and their life (1965:179).

In another place she writes encouraging her correspondent to relate affectively to Christ. Although there is little evidence of bridal imagery in the writings of Mother Madeleine of Saint-Joseph as would be found in such mystics as Teresa of Avila or Mechtild of Magdeburg, Madeleine finds herself quite drawn into the story of her patroness, Mary Magdalene. She advises a sister: "Put yourself often at Christ's feet with holy Magdalen, as a great sinner. Pray that he permits you to remain and deigns to give you some part in the profound humility and ardent love of this saint.... Place yourself between his arms with confidence and love and you will receive much more than you have, provided you have good will" (1965:193).

*"I will not abandon you"*

Given responsibility for the running of a large convent at a young age, Madeleine of St. Joseph called upon God for help. Her responsibilities ran the gamut from arranging domestic affairs<sup>2</sup> to providing spiritual direction. On several occasions she experienced the presence of Christ speaking to her about the community (1935:118). On another occasion, she received Divine assurance that the community's rule and life style would receive papal confirmation from Clement VIII (1935:200): "I will not abandon you," were the words spoken to Madeleine. While in her first term of office at the Carmel of the Incarnation, Madeleine of St. Joseph experienced other consolations directly related to her community: "Our Lord showed me what he wants to give to the souls in this house; it seems to me that it is a place where his spirit and his glory can repose. And I live a great perfection that no tongue can express. I see so many things that one may say: Blessed are the souls who may arrive at such great graces!" (1935:118)

During most of her life, Madeleine of St. Joseph was plagued with illness and in the final years before her death in 1637, she was troubled with an on-going eye inflammation. She wrote to a prioress while she was fifty: "For it is true that it is a strange thing to be in charge of such a great number of daughters with so little health... but when I look at him, I can only represent my motives and my miseries.... All that I have to do is to pray and be patient." (Sérouet 1965:45)

The responsibility for re-formulating, re-creating and re-expressing the Teresian charism within the French culture was Madeleine of Saint-Joseph's. As Morgain (1995:58) writes, "It would be above all necessary

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



that the French be allowed the possibility of giving the writings of the holy Mother Teresa an interpretation that conformed to their culture, their history, and their aspirations."<sup>3</sup> The efforts of the untried superior and the inexperienced community proved successful. French Carmelite life developed rapidly and within forty years of founding there were fifty-five Carmels in France. (1996:45)

### *Pierre de Bérulle 1575-1629*

Any discussion of the French school would not be complete without reference to Pierre de Bérulle whose contributions to French Catholic life, and the Carmelite order, in particular were significant, though not without controversy. Pierre de Bérulle was born in 1575. As a young man he attended a Jesuit College in Clermont in 1592. He wrote his first work in 1597, *Brefdiscours de l'abnégationintérieure* (A Brief Discourse on Interior Abnegation). Two years later he was ordained a priest. Bérulle was still searching for his true vocation whether as a member of a religious order or diocesan clergy when he decided to make a retreat with the Jesuits at Verdun. Prior to this retreat, Bérulle was very taken with the spirituality of the Rhineland mystics (Eckhart, Tauler, Ruysbroek), but with the experiences of the spiritual exercises of Ignatius of Loyola, Bérulle found himself taking a significant step toward embracing the Incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ.

A cousin of Madame Acarie, Pierre de Bérulle often went to her home for discussions of spirituality. There he became acquainted with her desire to bring the Carmelites of Teresa of Avila to France. When plans were made, it was Bérulle who offered to accompany the Spanish Carmelites to Paris. His task was to negotiate with the Spanish Carmelite priests for the transfer of the six sisters to France. Initially, he impressed the women. "That little Don Pedro," Mother Anne of Jesus exclaimed, "had more strength and vigour than all the rest!... Our holy Mother (Teresa) would have loved him well!" (1930:219). Though she admired Bérulle, Anne of Jesus regretted that the Order was placed under the jurisdiction of French priests and not under disalced Spanish or Italian Carmelite Fathers.

The Holy See appointed three French priests as their superiors, much to the consternation of the Carmelite men and women. André Duval was a lecturer at the Sorbonne and quite deaf. Jacques Gallement was involved in parish work. That left the young Bérulle with the responsibility for the women's congregation. In 1610, six years after the arrival of the

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3 Translation mine.

Spanish Carmelites, the ban was lifted and Spanish Carmelite men were allowed to come into France. The pope at the time, Paul V reviewed the appointment of the ecclesiastical superior for the Carmelites. Rather than appointing the Spanish Carmelites to the position, Paul V ruled in 1614 that Bérulle would be the perpetual visitor. This enraged the Spanish Carmelite men who denounced the proceedings in Rome. In 1619, Fr. Denis of the Mother of God organized a group of about fifteen Carmelite women in Saintes and in Bordeaux to formulate opposition to the superiors – Gallement, Duval and Bérulle (Dupuy, 1964:21). The incident led to papal intervention affirming the powers of Bérulle, and though the King of France and the parliament of Bordeaux became involved in the dispute, there was no change.

With such an unfortunate situation, there were divisions that formed among the Carmelite women which were to be exacerbated by Bérulle's proposed vow of servitude to the Virgin Mary. Thompson relates that Bérulle would have "encountered the tradition of professing vows to Mary, the perfect example of servitude, during a mission to Spain in 1604 for the Carmelites." (Thompson, 1989:14) In addition to that, the profession of such vows was common among Catholics in that anti-Protestant era. In the Congregation of the Oratory that Bérulle founded, the priests made a vow of servitude to Jesus Christ (1964:111).

As ecclesiastical superior, Bérulle visited the Carmelite houses and gave instruction in prayer and spirituality. It would seem that Bérulle's own biases, particularly his devotions, were being passed on to the women in the case of the vow of servitude to the Virgin Mary. However, it was more than a matter of his personal devotional preferences. It arose from his sincere belief and perhaps mystical intuition, that the vow of servitude to Jesus and Mary as a "prolongation of the baptismal vows" would actually confer on those professing them a radical capacity of reflecting and diffusing to "inferior hierarchies the deifying light" received through Jesus and Mary and originating in the font of the Father's Godhead. (Buckley 1989:14) The "state" (état) of the Incarnate Word in the kenosis of the Incarnation was an absolute source of wonder to Bérulle. The humility and the grandeur of the Incarnate Word were key concepts in Bérulle's theology. Within this context, Bérulle understood Mary's grandeur. Mary, the Mother of Jesus is linked inextricably with Jesus in the mystery of the Incarnation. "Mary was and remains what every human being is called to: 'a pure capacity for Jesus, filled with Jesus' (*Vie de Jésus* xxxix,501)" (1989:53) It is for this reason, that Bérulle composed a vow formula and tried to persuade the Carmelites of the vow of servitude to Jesus and Mary.

In Bérulle's view, inspired by his devotion to the Incarnate Word of God, such a vow of servitude to the Virgin Mary, would be a spiritual benefit and blessing for the Carmelite order. He communicated his thoughts on the vow of servitude with several women in the spring of 1614. They were Madeleine of Saint-Joseph (du Bois de Fontaines), Marie de la Trinité (d'Hannivel), Marie de la Trinité (Sevin), Catherine of Jesus (Nicolas). He suggested that taking the vow of servitude become part of their spiritual practice. Mother Madeleine of Saint-Joseph found the idea personally helpful, but suggested that the vow be taken privately, which she did while she was residing at the Carmel on rue Chapon (1995:118).

However, in June of 1615, while on an official visitation of the Carmel in Chalon, Bérulle announced that the vow of servitude would be mandatory and perpetual (1994:44). His edict was met with opposition from the Carmelite women of Chalon. They did not think the vow was in keeping with the spirit of Teresa of Avila. Bérulle remained obstinate and clashed with both Gallement and Duval over the issue. Madame Acarie herself also opposed the vow. Madeleine of Saint Joseph is recorded as saying, "There will be much suffering, but the Holy Virgin will reach down and help us." (1935:147).

The controversy over the vow of servitude was to be the end of Bérulle's career. Soon after this time, Bérulle was falsely discredited by theologians at the Sorbonne. He was a broken man as a result of what Morgain calls his "imprudence" (1995:293). Bérulle's well-intended interference in the spiritual practice of the Carmelite women caused untold suffering and division amongst the various foundations<sup>4</sup> and was the cause of his own undoing. Morgain shows convincingly that the underlying issue of ecclesiastical jurisdiction was very likely a factor in the whole affair during which Bérulle's reputation was unfairly attacked (1995:478-481).

Later on, after the controversy of the vow of servitude had died down somewhat, Bérulle wrote to Madeleine of Saint Joseph about his own spiritual life. He wrote from Rome on November 6, 1624. He was sent, probably by Cardinal Richelieu, to obtain a papal dispensation for Henriette of France to marry Charles I of England, but he is in complete desolation. Writing to Mother Madeleine, he says that he cannot penetrate what is the plan of God for him in his journey to Rome (Dagens 1937:529). He appeals to her for prayer and support as

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4 The result was the division in France of Carmels of Bérulle and those of Teresa as Delville states. (1994:226)

he feels in a state of complete poverty and incapacity in respect of his relationship with God (1937:530).

At the end of Bérulle's life in 1629, Madeleine of Saint-Joseph summed up her great admiration for Pierre de Bérulle, speaking as friend about him:

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

Despite all the controversy, Pierre de Bérulle's overall influence in the reform of seminary training and his Christological insights would merit him the title, "Apostle of the Incarnate Word." His Christo-centrism would be diffused through the Oratorian priests teaching at St. Sulpice Seminary in Paris, through the Lazarist priests, through the writings of John the Baptist de la Salle, in the spirituality of the de Montfort priests, the Eudists, the Sulpicians of Fr. Olier. Krumenacher speculates that Bérulle's Christo-centrism was the origin of Catholic Action, of the progressive "deviations" of Vatican II, of the theology of Bonhoeffer and a great part of contemporary theology. (Krumenacker 1998:17)

## Conclusion

It was the purpose of this article to focus on two women who played a significant role in Catholic life in France during the seventeenth century and to trace the mystical inspirations that guided them. Madame Barb Acarie and Mother Madeleine of Saint-Joseph du Bois de Fontaines were two women of Carmel in post-reformation France. Both of them worked closely with Pierre de Bérulle. Both of them were recognized by the Catholic Church for their heroic virtue.<sup>5</sup> The title "foundress" of Carmel in France is reserved to Madame Acarie, Marie of the Incarnation, and

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5 Madame Acarie, Marie of the Incarnation, died in 1618. The process for Barb Acarie was introduced in Rome in 1627. A papal decree by Urban VIII declared that all causes for beatification must wait until fifty years have elapsed since the death of the person concerned. She was declared blessed on June 5, 1791. (Sheppard 1953:Appendix 1). Madeleine of Saint-Joseph's process was begun in 1645, eight years after her death in 1637. Though the French Revolution interrupted the process and documents were lost, Mother Madeleine was declared Venerable in July 1789. (Macca 1972:184)

Mother Madeleine of Saint-Joseph is known as the “propagatrice” or transmitter of the discalced Carmelite life in France. (Macca 1972:184)

In the suffering and numerous challenges which each of these women faced, they bore the inevitable cross of the Lord, conformed as they were by the Spirit to the image of Christ. Madame Acarie’s marriage, her husband’s exile, the sufferings of her mystical states, her own physical disabilities, the task of bringing the Carmelite women to France, humbly handing over the prospective Carmelite candidates to the Spanish foundresses, the great rift between herself and her cousin Bérulle - these sufferings created a saint. Mother Madeleine of Saint-Joseph’s heavy responsibilities as novice mistress and prioress for much of her life, the cultural differences with the Spanish Carmelite women, the oppressive ecclesiastical structures and religious territorialism that caused suffering and division amongst the Carmelite women, her own ill health, her concern over the false mysticism and withdrawal from devotion to the humanity of Christ on the part of some of her sisters, the misunderstandings that arose because of her relationship with Bérulle as a spiritual directee and her support and friendship to him in his later years - all of these circumstances undoubtedly created a woman who like Barb Acarie (Mary of the Incarnation) would through her suffering become an instrument of the Spirit for the salvation of many.

Madame Barb Acarie, mystic and housewife, remembered for her *Salon Acarie*, the birthplace of inclusive theological and spiritual conversation, was instrumental in setting France ablaze with a new spirit. Instrumental in transplanting the Teresian reform to France, she was an early mentor for Madeleine of Saint Joseph, who was herself a mystic and spiritual leader who tended the growth of Carmelite life among the newly formed French communities from 1604 until her death in 1637. Although not a member of *Cercle Acarie*, Mother Madeleine has been assigned a place in the constellation of theologians and spiritual writers who belong to the French school of spirituality (1989:22).

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