

***The Spiritual Journey  
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**Our Mothers' Voices**

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### **The Spiritual Journey: The Interior Life**

*A genuine spiritual life compels us to breathe, live, and move in God alone. Life, breath, action – that is the whole person. But let our living, breathing, and doing be only for God, through Jesus Christ.*

St. Madeleine Sophie Barat

*Go on advancing, you are on the true road. Remember, it is not you who have taken it but God who has placed you there. Walk trustfully and may nothing in the world be able to dishearten you. May Jesus' Spirit dispel from you that other spirit which makes you discouraged and mistrustful. Give your heart, once and for all, to love and trust.*

St. Madeleine Sophie Barat

*O, Eternal Father, I come to You through the Heart of my Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Through this divine Heart I adore You for those who do not adore You; I love You for those who do not love You; I gratefully acknowledge You to be my God.*

Prayer of St. Philippine Duchesne

*Let all be thoroughly convinced that prayer is the foundation and the support of the Society, and that if neglect thereof should become general, the ruin of the Society would speedily follow.... Let all then apply themselves lovingly to prayer which will lead them to the Heart of the Divine Spouse, and then unfold to them its adorable perfections, especially its immense charity; let them place their happiness as much as possible in this holy exercise which by purifying their hearts will unite them closely to the Heart of Jesus, by conformity of sentiments, of affections and of will.*

*Constitutions of the Society, 1826*

*Let us ask Mary, who formed the Messiah by her fidelity to the Spirit, for those attitudes of contemplation and obedience in view of the Kingdom. May she obtain for the Society, for this Chapter, the gift of union and conformity with the Heart of her Son, this Heart that our Mother Foundress showed us as source and symbol, center and model.*

Superior General Conception Comacho, RSCJ, 1970-1982

[1370 words]

## **The Road to Emmaus: Our Journey with the Risen Christ**

*Gregory Mohrman, OSB*

I have always loved the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, but in recent years it has taken on even more significance as I have come to touch ever deeper into the rich heritage which our tradition offers concerning the Word of God and its relation to our encounter with Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. As a devoted son of the Sacred Heart, I offer this reflection to all those who cherish the charism of the Society and the Spirit that lies at its heart.

*That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.*

*While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.*

It is so easy to see how this story of the journey to Emmaus can become our story – it is the story of my own personal journey in life, of our collective journey as a community, a people, the Church. It is the parable of the journey of the Society.

Journeys are always fearsome things. They disrupt the *status quo* in our lives, force us to break out of the familiar, and (literally) cover new excitement and expectation. But always, if entered into with faith, the journey can become the means for transformation.

The journey that these two disciples walked was much like that. They had to walk away from the Jerusalem they had known and the vision that they had thought was there. It must have been a desolate and seemingly endless seven miles.

There was so much to talk about, all of it sad, all of it disappointing. Why had it all gone so wrong? Why hadn't we foreseen the trouble? Why hadn't He done things differently? Why? Endless whys...

Then comes the Stranger. Had things been different, we might have welcomed the diversion, but when you are so caught up in your own misery, it is hard to make room for anyone else. Too bad we had not remembered how often God takes the guise of a stranger.

*And He said to them, "What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered Him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" And He said to them, "What things?" And they said to Him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered Him up to be condemned to death and crucified Him. But we had hoped that He was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find His body; and they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels who had said He was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see."*

You would think He would have had the decency to keep his mouth shut, seeing how miserable we were. But He had to ask, and that started it all pouring out again, like a popped blister. And though it really did no good, at least we felt better having let it out, sharing the pain and sorrow with one more person.

But really, how could He have not known? Everyone must have known! Everyone should have known!

What was the use now anyway? He is gone and it is all over, and no amount of wishful thinking can change anything. It is best just to go home and forget about the whole thing. This hint of a vision of angels is nothing more than a pipe-dream – nothing can come of it.

And then the world is changed, and all their assumptions about the way things should be are turned upside-down. So like us, when in the midst of our own poverty of spirit, God works a miracle of revelation that we could never have planned, never have hoped for.

*And He said to them, “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.*

What a revelation! What an unexpected and utterly unimaginable turn of events. The Stranger turns the tables on us, and shows us what was in front of our faces all along, but we could not see. How could that be? Who could this be? Who can speak like this?

The Stranger speaks, and through the Word of God we still hear His voice. With the ears of the heart, the Scriptures become the voice of the Lord for me, for us, at this time, in this place – an ever-new source of God’s grace.

*So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, but they constrained Him, saying, “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.” So He went in to stay with them.*

Whoever you are, do not abandon us, for you have touched something deep within us – so much like one who, not so long ago, did the same. Through His word, everything seemed

new. Your words do the same for us, and through you, all that we have had to experience these past days begin to make sense.

Stay with us...

Stay with us, Lord, for in our life's journey the road is often hard, the path uncertain, and the way so fraught with trial. Do not make as if to go on and leave us behind, for if You abandon us, how can we go on?

*When He was at table with them, He took the bread and blessed, broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him and He vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road, while He opened to us the Scriptures?"*

And suddenly it is all clear – disarmingly so, in a mixture of joy and awe at a bit of terror thrown in. But there is no denying the reality of it. How could we have been so blind? How could we not have seen? Once the insight is gained, hindsight always shows how foolish we were and how simple it all was from the start.

Did not hearing His Word set our hearts on fire! To have hearts aflame with the passion of God – would that the whole world were caught up in such a flame!

In the breaking of the Bread, and in the breaking of the Word of God along the road, that is where we come to know Him as Stranger no longer. In Word and Sacrament lies the key to our life's journey, for in them the presence of the living Lord remains with us always, to accompany us on the journey we make to the city of God.

*And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, who said, "The Lord has risen indeed*

*and has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road and how He was known to them in the breaking of the bread.*

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[2675 words]

**Spirituality of St. Madeleine Sophie and the Educational Mission  
of the Society of the Sacred Heart**

*Catherine Baxter, RSCJ*

*This was given at the Mission Outreach Retreat at St. Charles, Missouri on June 21, 1996*

I would like to begin with some general thoughts about spirituality as we understand it today, then something about St. Madeleine Sophie's spirituality as I am coming to understand it, and then how I see her spirituality continuing to give direction and a distinctive spirit to the Society of the Sacred Heart and its educational mission.

Spirituality has become something of an "in" word. Today we read article after article about the renewed interest in spirituality as distinct from formal institutional religion and church membership. A recent issue of *Time* magazine explored the relationship between spirituality and healing. We see courses and workshops offered on Creation Spirituality, New Age Spirituality, Native American Spirituality, Feminist Spirituality, Masculine Spirituality, Spirituality at Mid-Life, Spirituality of the Golden Years. And what can account for the popularity of "Touched by an Angel"? Yet, spirituality is a somewhat fuzzy term. There is something otherworldly about it that makes it hard to pin down.

Actually, the term can be understood in several ways. In a purely philosophic sense, we can make a distinction between the material and the spiritual and recognize the human capacity to transcend the self through knowledge and love of another. In a religious sense this human capacity for self-transcendence reaches its highest actualization in a relationship between an individual and a higher power, and this relationship is lived out in some form of personal

commitment to a way of life. When we become more specific and speak about Christian spirituality, we understand this relationship with God as a gift of the Holy Spirit, lived out in and through Christ within the believing community.

When we talk about spirituality, we are talking about the inner life of the human person, the perceptions, attitudes and values through which I interpret my life experiences, and interpretation which then shapes the way I respond to concrete circumstances, to persons and to events. Each of us has a spirituality; it is the lens through which we see meaning and purpose in life, the ground on which each one of us stands and faces outward to the world and inward to the self.

Who am I, what do I most deeply desire, what gives my life value and meaning? Now that I have made it professionally, now that the mortgage is paid, now that the children are grown, now that I am beginning to think about retirement, is this all there is? We do not find answers to those questions in theological debates or catechisms or papal documents. Those answers come from our hearts; commonly from an encounter with mystery, the mystery of ourselves and the mystery who is God, unceasingly calling us through the Spirit, to open ourselves to newness and freedom and fullness of life.

A passage from a book entitled *The Art of Passing-Over* by Francis Doff captures for me the meaning and the transforming power of spirituality in our lives.

A friend of mine once shared an experience with me which she said changed her whole life. As a little girl, she studied the flute with one of the foremost flutists in the country. At one of her lessons, she and her teacher were playing a duet together. All of a sudden the teacher stopped and said, "You are listening only to yourself. You are afraid that you will make a mistake. You are worrying about how you sound and about what I think. I want you to listen to

me....Now, let's try it again." Together, student and teacher played through the whole duet without a single interruption. When they had finished playing, the teacher turned to the little girl and with eyes filled with tears said, "For the rest of your life, remember how that felt."

Spirituality is the way the human heart tunes in, listens to, and moves with God's on-going revelation and self-communication as it is playing in all the changing circumstances of human life and in the concrete events of human history. When we are *tuned in, when we are listening* to God, we know it; we remember how that feels, and our lives do change.

How does the Spirit seem to be calling us now in our time? What has changed? What is changing in the response made by the human heart, the human family, and the Christian community?

To answer that, I have to go back to one of the best kept secrets of the twentieth century, the documents of the Second Vatican Council. There, more than thirty years ago, the Church, reclaimed and rearticulated the truth deeply rooted in Scripture, that all people are called to holiness; by the grace of baptism all have been divinized. Religious life and priesthood were not some "higher states" while married life and single life were for those who did not quite have what it takes. "All the faithful of Christ," the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church states, "are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity. By this holiness a more human way of life is promoted even in this earthly way of life. In the various types and duties of life, one and the same holiness is cultivated by *all* who are moved by the Spirit of God."

The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World affirmed the value of this world and of human activity in this world. It encouraged the Church to read the signs of the times and to find God present and acting in the here and now, in political, social and economic life. The Church no longer viewed "the sacred" as a sphere divided from "the secular." I think

that these two documents introduced themes that have become key elements in contemporary spirituality.

Contemporary spirituality rejects dualistic and hierarchical ways of thinking and speaking. We are not split-level beings, nor are we disembodied spirits; the way to God leads to wholeness, to the integration of humanness and holiness; God draws us in the totality of our being; we respond to God in and with and through the totality of our being.

Closely related to the emphasis today on wholeness is the recognition that to be human, to be fully alive, is to be fundamentally, radically, relational. We are one with an interdependent world, one with an interconnected universe. From this follows a yearning and searching for experiences of community, for a sense of inclusion and participation, for a deepened sense of mutual responsibility and a growing awareness of the spiritual and moral significance of social, political, and economic structures and processes.

We can find these themes expressed in rather unlikely sources.

In an article entitled, "Can We Ever Go Back," in the *Wall Street Journal* sometime last summer, the author reviewed many of the social problems of American society today: crime, violence, child neglect and abuse, the breakdown of the family structures, corruption in political and economic life. He concluded his cataloguing with the following statement: "If the source of America's social disintegration is to be pinpointed so that it might be remedied, honesty compels us to identify the essence of America's social discontent today as selfishness." He went on to assert that there are "two things that would solve all of our so-called social problems, neither of which can be legislated by liberals or conservatives. These are self-denial and love."

I recall the cover story for an issue of *Time* magazine last summer. Entitled "Twentieth Century Blues," the article explored the theory that modern life really is not what we human

beings were designed for. It somehow does not fit our genetic makeup. What we are suffering from is mismatch. The story claims that “There is a kinder, gentler side of human nature that the technological society that we have created forces us to repress.” We pursue the myth of the more: that I have almost enough, I need just a little bit more, a few more sixty-hour weeks will put me over the top. With a better car, a bigger house, I will be contented forever. “This relentless pursuit of the more keeps us from living our truth, from knowing our neighbors, loving our kin, in general from cultivating the warm, relational side of human nature. Selfishness is making us sick. It smothers our innate human capacity for trusting relationships.”

Is that not why we are here? Are we not doing what we are doing because we experience the need and we believe in the possibility of transforming society; because we want to give our energy to creating a world where love and community and justice and compassion are lived realities, not mere rhetoric? We are here because we believe that the spirituality of St. Madeleine Sophie Barat has something to contribute to the shaping of the world of the twenty-first century just as it has had in the nineteenth and twentieth.

Who was this woman? What accounts for her influence over two centuries? What might she have to say to us now? Can we find in her life of prayer, in the relationship with Jesus, help to strengthen and deepen our own?

We have very little direct knowledge about her life of prayer, about what went on between her and her God. She left us no journals, no retreat notes, no poetry or art or music expressive of her relationship with God.

We do have the letters she wrote, 14,000 of them, during her sixty-five years as Superior General. We also have the Constitutions of 1815 and the conferences she gave throughout the years.

In reading these, we come to know a woman passionately in love with Jesus, her Lord. When she spoke as she so often did of “the Heart of Jesus” she was not speaking of His physical, bodily organ; she was speaking of His whole person, His love, His desires, His attitudes, His feelings, His relationships. She came to know Him by heart as it were. His Heart became her lens through which she looked at the needs of her world. She saw in the Heart of Jesus the symbol of God's love lavishly poured out, God's own spirit freely given. To communicate the reality of that love to others and to lead them to experience it themselves became the driving force of her life.

Some may be able to remember the late sixties and the seventies when we tended to teach religion with Argus posters and pop music. One particularly popular poster bore a quotation from St. Irenaeus, a second century Doctor of the Church that read: “The glory of God is the human person fully alive.” Only in recent years have I discovered that there is more to the quotation. “The glory of God is the human person fully alive and the life of the human person is the vision of God.” A contemporary definition states, “Glory does not convey simply the static majesty and splendor of God but is a way of speaking about how God dynamically communicates God's very life to humanity and to the world.”

Both the ancient and modern statement say to me that giving glory to God has something to do with a mutual exchange, with a reciprocal relationship. God eternally engages in an extravagant, unconditional act of self-giving. To the extent that we open ourselves to let God's love flood our hearts without imposing our drive to control the agenda, without thinking that we have to earn this love or even worse that we deserve some credit for it, then do we reveal God's love breaking through in our time, in our world; then do we become fully alive; then do we become God's glory.

I think St. Madeleine Sophie understood that well. For her, to give glory to God, to be

fully alive, meant nothing more and nothing less than to be as Jesus was, to do as Jesus did. In Him we learn what it means to be most fully and authentically human. We become that when we enter into an ever-deepening knowledge of and union with the thoughts, desires, and choices of His Heart, when we allow the fullness of His being and the fullness of our being to gift one another, totally, freely.

She would want us to remember that the purpose of the Society of the Sacred Heart was not to teach, not to administer schools or colleges, not to give retreats or engage in social services, but to show forth the love of God revealed in the Heart of Jesus. For her, to give glory to God, to be fully human and fully alive, meant to experience an intimate union with Jesus, to let His spirit form and reform our hearts in the attitudes, desires, and passions with which He fulfilled the mission given Him by the One whom He called Father.

St. Madeleine Sophie would also want us to remember that such a life of union and conformity with the Heart of Jesus is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. It is not of my doing; it is pure gift. Her name for the life of prayer was “interior spirit” which she described as “the ceaselessly renewed recollection of the presence of Him for whom we act...an intimate union of our soul with God...immediate dependence upon the grace of God, upon the touch of the Holy Spirit.”

Growth in interior spirit leads to the realization that union with God is ours now; fullness of life is ours now, not in some misty after-life, not as dessert if we eat our vegetables, not as a reward for our exercise of willpower. We are never going to be loved by God more than we are at this moment. Our capacity to recognize that love, to respond to it, and take delight in it may increase, but God's love for us is steadfast. God's love is with us in all our days and all our ways.

And I think she would emphasize with us the importance, the sacredness of living in the

present moment. When we stop to think about it, we often live in the past...wishing we had done something differently or reliving our moments of success. And how often we live in the future, with either anticipation or anxiety...maybe things will be better once I get a promotion, or I do not know what I would ever do if such and such a thing happens to me. And we are right. We do not know now how we might respond to an unknown future. St. Madeleine Sophie tells us, "God does not ask of us the perfection of tomorrow or even of tonight, but only of the present moment in which we are acting." Here and now, in the concrete circumstances of life at this moment, you and I in our uniqueness, in our humanness are God's glory; we are the manifestation of God's love to our world today.

St. Madeleine Sophie embraced the tension of walking along a way that is both/and, a life lived in union with God in the midst of the nuts and bolts of daily life. She embraced the mystery of paradox; the mystery of seemingly contradictory truths that lies at the heart of Christianity, the mystery of Jesus, God made man, giving life through death. I think she would tell us not to try to resolve the tension, but to welcome it. "To give ourselves generously to God; to live in perfect, absolute dependence upon grace. Our only desire must be to be precisely and solely what God wants us to be, and that involves nothing less than an entire surrender of ourselves and our interests into God's hands. We have only to let God act upon us and correspond faithfully to His action."

*Catherine Baxter, RSCJ, attended Manhattanville; she is administrator of the Oakwood Infirmary in Atherton, California.*

**4430 Words**

## **Madeleine Sophie Barat's Doctrine of Interior Life**

*Mary Quinlan, RSCJ*

Madeleine Sophie (1779-1865), foundress of the Society of the Sacred Heart, taught a doctrine centered on devotion to the Heart of Jesus but with some particular emphases which were especially her own. Most characteristic of her spiritual teaching was her insistence on the importance and the possibility of leading a truly recollected life, no matter how many and distracting one's occupations might be. Her own life, spent entirely in very demanding administrative duties, yet allowed her to experience mystical prayer, and she herself was the best example of the spirituality she inculcated in others. We know her spiritual teaching from the many volumes of her letters and conferences as well as from the Constitutions of her congregation and from the recollections of those who knew her during the more than six decades of her leadership of the order, so that, although she never wrote any theoretical work on spirituality, we have ample material on which to base an assessment of her doctrine.

### **Early Spiritual Formation**

Her understanding of devotion to the Sacred Heart evolved over many years. As a ten year old child in the little Burgundian town of Joigny, she first saw images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Her brother Louis, eleven years her senior, had gone to Paris to participate in the clandestine ministry during the revolution of 1789. He was eventually imprisoned during the Reign of Terror but before that he had sent the pictures to his parents to give them courage and hope. The daily family prayers recited before these images in which Sophie and her parents entrusted Louis to God's care made a deep impression on the child

and came to be the focus of her devotion.

When the Reign of Terror had ended and Louis, now a priest, returned to Joigny in 1795, he found Sophie a mature, charming, and intelligent fifteen year old. He was now convinced that she was destined for some outstanding service in the church, and he persuaded their parents to allow him to take her to Paris with him, there to continue her education, which he had overseen since her early childhood, and to give her a thorough spiritual formation.

For Sophie, the following five years in Paris, where she lived with her brother and at times various young women in a sort of novitiate under Louis's direction, constituted an orientation period of extreme severity, only somewhat mitigated by the interest she took in her religious studies. Already well trained in the classics and liberal arts and a gifted linguist, she now devoted hours every day to mastering the writings of the fathers of the church, the classics of western spirituality, and, above all, the scriptures. Throughout her life she drew on these sources for the development of her spiritual teachings and attained a breadth of view which enabled her to direct women of all types of personality with a sureness of touch and a freedom which allowed each person to grow in the way that was natural to her. In the almost sixty years that Madeleine Sophie spent as superior general of her congregation, she exercised enormous influence not only on her own religious but also on the thousands of people who came to her for advice and direction. If she had not had such a solid knowledge of spirituality, she probably would not have been able to elaborate a doctrine of such profundity and simplicity. Out of all her experience came an original synthesis of insights drawn from many spiritual traditions. In one sense her spiritual formation ended quite early as she took up the responsibilities of leadership of the congregation when she was still in her twenties, but in another sense she never ceased to be a pupil of those who, in her view, were the surest guides to whom she listened with great humility.

Thus her spiritual formation was lifelong.

### **Religious Vocation**

During the years in Paris, Sophie felt herself attracted to the contemplative Life and planned to become a Carmelite when circumstances would allow it. But Joseph Varin, a priest who became acquainted with her in Paris and felt impelled to assist in the founding of an order of women to be dedicated to educational work, thought as Louis Barat did that Sophie's unusual gifts of mind and heart seemed to indicate that she was called to a more active service in the apostolate. At the end of the revolutionary period, all convent schools in France had been destroyed and the Catholic education of women was virtually unprovided for. Therefore, the priests whom Sophie knew and whose judgment she trusted urged her to collaborate in establishing an order which would have as its special work the education of girls. They did not propose that Sophie should found a new order but that she should give leadership in the forming of a French branch of a congregation, the *Dilette di Gesù*, just then being established in Rome. Thus it was that Sophie, without actually intending it, laid the foundation of what was to become a separate congregation, the Society of the Sacred Heart.

But it was not merely the arguments of others that convinced Sophie that this was her vocation. Before she had met Joseph Varin and while she still felt herself called to be a Carmelite, she was at prayer one day and seemed to see a large monstrance raised high above the earth, and before it was a throng of people in adoration. She understood obscurely that she would have a mission, along with others, to raise up such a host of worshippers from all parts of the world. Probably the memory of this experience helped to persuade her that she ought to concern herself with the apostolate of education. In the event, the schools which developed under her leadership had as their principal task the inculcation of faith and, when solid foundations had

been laid, the development in the pupils of true devotion to the Sacred Heart which would be a source of grace to all. Thus the vision of adorers from the ends of the earth was to be fulfilled.

### **Devotion to the Sacred Heart**

In the course of many years, Saint Madeleine Sophie sought to penetrate ever more deeply into the meaning of devotion to the Sacred Heart. As Margaret Williams, RSCJ, who has made a careful study of the writings of the saint on this subject, has pointed out, the foundress, besides using scriptural sources, turned to the medieval mystics, to the prayer-books of the sixteenth century, to the writings of the Jesuits of the following century such as Nouet and Lallemant, and to the works of Francis de Sales, Eudes, and Bérulle. From the latter and from the French school in general, she learned to meditate on the interior dispositions of Jesus in order to unite herself to them. Apart from these sources, she attached great importance to the tradition of Paray-le-Monial and "knew by instinct what role the revelations made to Margaret Mary Alacoque would play in future developments of the devotion."

In the mind of Madeleine Sophie, the devotion to the Sacred Heart was closely linked to devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. From the tradition of Saint Margaret Mary there came an emphasis on reparation, the practice of the Holy Hour in preparation for the First Friday of the month which was to be celebrated as a day of special devotion, and the use of various prayers and other acts of devotion intended to draw people to the love and worship of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. When the Society of the Sacred Heart was developing its way of life in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, these aspects of devotion to the Sacred Heart were exerting a powerful influence in the church— and not less so on the first generation of Religious of the Sacred Heart. Most of them had had personal experience, or had heard of it from their parents, of desecrations of the Eucharist, not to mention the guillotining of people who insisted

on professing their faith during the revolution of 1789. For the early members of the Society of the Sacred Heart, then, it was natural to respond to the appeal of Jesus for love and reparation and to associate it with his presence in the Blessed Sacrament. Mother Barat herself was so convinced of the value of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament that she would have preferred to give to it the time assigned to the recitation of Office if that had been possible at the time of the approval of the Constitutions in 1826. Through her influence the custom of making a half-hour of mental prayer daily before the Blessed Sacrament grew up; it was part of the hour and a half of mental prayer provided for in the order of day.

### **Interior Life**

As greatly as Mother Barat esteemed formal prayer, she once said that interior life is more than prayer, by which she meant that the constant recollection of God's presence at least through an obscure awareness throughout the activities of the day was of major importance in the development of prayer. Such an awareness was of the essence of devotion to the Sacred Heart as she conceived of it. She spoke of interior life as the constantly renewed recollection of the presence of God for whom we act, a recollection which she thought of as equivalent to the entire sacrifice of oneself. Yet she never ceased to point out how easy and delightful is the life of a person who is truly given over to the action of God. One time in writing to one of the religious she said:

Few give themselves over to the Holy Spirit, and what a mistake we make in not being among the privileged few! Believe me, it costs much more to stay in a miserable mediocrity in which one belongs neither to God nor to oneself. It is like swimming between two currents; it is difficult and dangerous. Hurry up and plunge into mid-stream. The Holy Spirit will then carry you and you will get to port much more quickly.

And she said in one of her conferences:

A soul who is thus given no longer walks, she flies; the greatest sacrifices cost her nothing, and the heaviest crosses no longer weigh her down. What am I saying? The cross is her happiness; she loves it, desires it, because God permits that a soul who is thus given over, handed over, to him instead of feeling the sufferings which accompany the cross, no longer tastes anything but its consolations.

Apropos of this passage, Mary Wolff-Salin, RSCJ, draws attention to the importance of this joyous interpretation of spiritual experience when one is reading Mother Barat's letters and conferences; otherwise, the emphasis she places on suffering might suggest a dolorism which is entirely at variance with her optimistic and joyful outlook on the spiritual life. She was a realist and she knew by experience how joy, sorrow, anxiety and trust can coexist at the same time in a person. She expressed the whole range of emotions in referring to her own experience. The warning about dolorism is well made.

In another part of the conference quoted above, Mother Barat exclaimed:

If only it were given to me, if I were not unworthy, to speak to you of the happiness of a soul who surrenders to the Holy Spirit fully and with no reserve! If I could tell you what happens within her, if I could picture for you her joy! It is not she who acts, it is God; she only moves, only walks, by his inspiration. Everything becomes easy for her. She experiences no more difficulties, meets with no more obstacles. The Holy Spirit enchains such a soul. She is his; he binds her to himself.

The dominant note in Mother Barat's spiritual direction of others was joyful freedom in dependence on God. The following passage may illustrate the point:

Be in peace about the state of your soul and your manner of prayer; only love and do

what you please. The essential thing and the proof of true love is forgetfulness of self and of one's own interests to think only of those of the loved one .... So what difference does it make how you pray provided that your heart is seeking the one you love?

When Mother Barat was seventy-eight years old, writing to a religious who had been her close friend and confidante for many years and who had evidently asked for some advice, Mother Barat sketched out joint spiritual direction for her friend and herself:

Let us both ask Jesus to enlighten and guide us. Oh, my daughter, how weak, ignorant and subject to error we are if His divine Spirit does not take hold of us and lead us. At my age, which ought to have given me knowledge of a good many things, I am always aware of my own insufficiency, my nothingness, my mistakes if I act without dependence on the Spirit of Jesus; how many times I have to regret it! So here is the spiritual direction for the two of us: let us repress our natural activity, let us act under the eyes of Jesus and according to His impulsion; let us forget and annihilate the self and we will have fulfilled the precepts, even the counsels, and all the rest will be given to us.

### **The Holy Spirit**

As is already evident, Mother Barat's devotion to the Sacred Heart can hardly be separated from her desire to live always under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps this emphasis on the Spirit is the most characteristic aspect of her own piety. One tries in vain to divide these two strands of her thought. As Margaret Williams, RSCJ has put it:

Through experience [Mother Barat] found the role of the Holy Spirit in the devotion to the Sacred Heart; she expressed it in such an all-pervasive way that it is, perhaps, the most distinctive note in her spiritual doctrine. There is hardly a letter or conference that does not refer to the Holy Spirit, usually in the phrase "Spirit of Jesus" or "Spirit of his

Heart." At first reading this phrase seems often to be generic or impersonal, but in its use it points to the Sanctifier, the third Person of the Trinity, and in many sentences it is linked to the Sacred Heart: "The Spirit of Jesus who dwells always in an interior soul united to the divine Heart will know at the right moment what to do, to decide, to counsel" (*St. Madeleine Sophie: Her Life and Letters*).

Just as there was a close connection in the mind of the foundress between devotion to the Sacred Heart and an inner life lived under the guidance of the Spirit, so too the Spirit drew her to an inner penetration of the Gospels. She was absorbed in the mysteries of Christ as they came before her in the course of the liturgical year, although she always returned to the contemplation of the passion and also had special insight into the incarnation of the Word of God which filled her with awe and humility. Thus her inner life revolved about the mysteries of Jesus always in view of the revelation of his love.

### **Interior Life and the Work of Education**

As we know from her first vision of the Society as it might be one day, Mother Barat viewed the work of education in the light of faith, the faith of those who carried it on and those who received it. It was obvious to her that the real success of the work could come only if the religious practiced a true interior life. She certainly valued their natural gifts and urged them to prepare themselves seriously for their apostolate, but she did not consider talent enough. In a letter to Mother d'Avenas who was later to become a famous teacher and director of studies she wrote:

If only you knew how much the Society needs holy and learned women you would hurry up and become one. Here in the Roman novitiate we have a number of saints but not a single scholar, not one! It is all very well to lay the foundations of solid virtue, but only

the union of virtue with learning will give our work its perfection. Unite these two things closely, my daughter, and you will understand the full extent of your vocation.

The type of educational work for which the Society was best known in the lifetime of Mother Barat and long thereafter was that of boarding schools for girls of affluent families. The foundress recognized the pressing need of good Christian education for young women who were likely to become leaders in their social milieu. She wanted them to exercise a beneficent influence, and she therefore held up to them ideals of service, self-sacrifice and strong faith. But she was equally concerned about the education of poor children and wished never to found a boarding school unless there were an accompanying school for children of modest means. In her view, the financial gains from the boarding schools were required to support the schools and other works for the poor. Without this concern for the poor, she would have thought that the Society failed to care for those dearest to the Heart of Jesus. Similarly, she wanted the work of retreats to be given much attention, since this was a means of inculcating a spirit of faith and prayerfulness in women of whatever social class who came to the convent seeking spiritual help; this was one of the most significant ways in which the Society could spread the knowledge and love of Christ.

Over and above these formal ministries, the members of the Society were to consider as a means of making known God's love all contacts with lay people whom they might meet in the course of their duties. For many of the religious this became a heavy if beloved apostolate and for no one more so than for Mother Barat whose decades of residence at the rue de Varenne had brought her into contact with people of every kind who came to her with a variety of needs. She once remarked that she felt more like a minister of state than a cloistered religious. No doubt her charm and wisdom as well as her patent holiness drew people to her. She herself set the example

of this ministry – what might be called the ministry of friendship. The incidents which illustrate her attitude to it are so numerous that it is difficult to choose one to stand as an example of all of them, but the following anecdote seems to sum up the spirit in which Mother Barat carried on this apostolate.

It happened that one day when a large crowd of visitors were attending a ceremony at the convent on the rue de Varenne (now the Rodin Museum), a poor elderly woman joined them and by chance fell into conversation with Mother Barat. They agreed that they would see each other soon again, but when the old woman came for her next visit the portress thought it would be enough to give her an alms and send her away. This happened several times until Mother Barat by chance learned of it. She was distressed about it and gave orders that whenever her friend came she was to be called immediately. After that, the two of them often sat together talking animatedly. On one occasion the portress, who must have been somewhat lacking in human feeling, was shocked to see Mother Barat rise and remove her warm petticoat from under her skirt and give it to the poor woman. For Mother Barat the spirituality of the heart knew no bounds of class or financial status. She comforted duchesses in their trials and also provided for the spiritual welfare of their coachmen. No one who could benefit from what she called "a little word about God" or a small gift was left outside the range of her care and concern.

But with all her love for people and her burning enthusiasm for the work of education, Mother Barat never ceased to teach her daughters that zeal should not lead them to think that prayer was of less importance than activity. A thought often expressed by her occurs in one of her letters: "It is certain that our vocation is or should be as contemplative as it is active. I could even say that the former [aspect] must dominate and sustain the latter."

## **Contemplation in the Midst of Action**

The tension between the contemplative and active aspects of the life was plainly felt by the foundress and was perhaps more acute in her case because she carried a burden of responsibility as superior general for almost six decades, until her death at the age of eighty-five, and for most of her life was strongly drawn to mystical prayer. She often experienced ecstasy and lost contact with whatever was going on about her. She always tried to hide or ignore these incidents, but if she had to speak of them she sometimes laughingly said that Jesus had played a trick on her and sometimes she excused herself by saying that she was tired or unwell. The religious understood both her raptures and her unwillingness to speak about them, so they learned to act as if these episodes were not taking place. The marvel was that with all these occasions of being swept away from the realities around her, Mother Barat had a precise knowledge of everything that pertained to her duties and was a close observer of persons for whom she was responsible.

Her experience of prayer enabled her to lead others who were gifted with unusual modes of contact with God. The ultimate experience of prayer for her seems to have occurred when she felt herself in direct contact with the persons of the Holy Trinity. She seldom spoke of those moments but certain remarks in her direction of others suggest that she knew from experience what such contact meant. Once in writing to Mother Goetz who was to be her successor as superior general and who was afraid of the increasing responsibilities which fell to her, Mother Barat encouraged her to put her trust in the Heart of Jesus and then she added a few words describing how the Trinity animates nothingness by the divine Spirit. And on another day, writing to a religious who was passing through a time of pain and darkness, she told her that if she had known, even for a moment, true union with the Trinity, she would then taste so much joy

in heavenly things that she would no longer hesitate and nothing would be capable of distracting her from the love of Jesus.

But Mother Barat did not lead others to points beyond which they were called by grace. She was careful in her direction, lest someone should fall into illusion. She preferred to have them pray simply and humbly without either fearing or desiring the great trials experienced by some of the mystics. She always encouraged fidelity to the action of the Holy Spirit, knowing that in the practice of interior life lay safety and the right balance between action and contemplation, according to their vocation. If she encountered in a humble and obedient religious some exterior manifestations of extraordinary grace, she tried to keep these phenomena hidden as much as possible. Like all true mystics and especially like Teresa of Avila from whose writings she had learned so much, Mother Barat valued God's action in itself but approached its external manifestations with critical acumen. Once, on hearing about someone reputed to have mystical experiences, she wrote to Eugénie de Gramont, long headmistress of the school on the rue de Varenne and a woman of great sense and executive ability: "I will believe in visions, Eugenie, when you have them. Let me know right away!"

On the other hand, in the presence of real mysticism she was full of reverence and joy. She hoped that all the religious, seeing the effects of grace in women who were particularly holy, would imitate their virtues. She especially thought that in old age the religious should give their major attention and energies to prayer, as she would have wished to do herself. But that joy was withheld from her. She accepted as God's will the Society's refusal to release her from her duties as superior general even when, at the age of eighty-four, she begged the councilors to do so, in order, as she put it, to give her a little leisure to prepare for death. They could not think of it. She therefore continued to the end to give that example of contemplation in the midst of action which

is the particular way in which the Society has always glorified the Heart of Jesus.

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## NOTES

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**The Spirituality of Philippine Duchesne as Revealed in Her Letters to  
Madeleine Sophie Barat and Joseph Rosati**

**Selected Passages**

*Catherine Donlan Schmitt*

The French Revolution, and all that it meant for the people of that time, abolished religious life in community, introducing a period of secular life for Philippine until she could reacquire Sainte Marie and attempt to reopen this convent as a Visitation community. When this Visitation community failed, Philippine's decision to combine her community with Madeleine Sophie Barat's closed one stage of her life and opened another.

Two paths led Philippine to this point in her life: first, training at home and at Sainte Marie, second, a sense of seeing into the heart of things, a dream to change the world for the better. These were intense longings. Catherine Mooney attempted to articulate this desire as "an attachment for her to the incarnated reality of God within human life" (Mooney, 41). These were, therefore, two aspects of her adult spiritual journey: first, the workings of a logical and penetrating mind, and secondly, the experience of a yearning whose object was God. She lived in a docile state of openness to God's will, a disposition that accommodated both the logic of her mind and the yearning of her soul. Both her training in Christianity and her experience of yearning for God deepened her commitment to the Catholic Church.

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**Philippine's Way of Prayer**

Her prayer, so precious to her, was spent in a style of prayer she had learned at the Visitation, and it was ideal both for this early period of her life in the Society and for years later. In fact, in 1834 Philippine wrote to Madeleine Sophie about her established habit of prayer

because the Society's General Council of 1833 decided on the Ignatian method of meditation points: "One difficult point for me is the emphasis on that method of prayer and examen. I never could follow it in the past, and I am much less able to do so now, when my imagination wanders worse than ever." Louise Callan, RSCJ, describes Philippine's prayer:

She found it difficult to reason in prayer, to follow out a prolonged train of thought and draw conclusions that would move the will. Instead, by an intuitive movement of the soul she reached the heart of the mystery proposed for consideration and rested at once in prayer. That was her way, though the 'resting' might mean spiritual activity embracing every soul in the world, or wrestling under the burden of personal faults and desires, under the urgency of grace or the trial of aridity and darkness that at times overwhelmed her. The sweetness of prayer was often lacking to her; the will to pray was a constant gift of the Holy Spirit (Callan, 111-12).

Philippine and Madeleine Sophie understood that there was no conflict between the Ignatian nature of spirituality and Philippine's method of prayer because both Ignatian and Salesian spirituality call the person to union with God.

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### **Philippine and the Society**

The Society provided Philippine with a firm basis of acceptance, warmth, and security that brought about the peace and interior freedom she needed in order to grow as a person and a religious. With this growth, there gradually developed in her life a sense of wholeness, of unity, and of purpose. This came only with time and patient discipline. The childhood dream of missionary life that became an adult resolution would become a lived reality as a religious of this Society. Eventually she would echo this sentiment to Madeleine Sophie on July 3, 1828 from America: "Our attraction for the missions is inseparably bound up with the incomparable love for

the whole Society and its Mother General whose lowliest daughter I am (Callan, 477-78). Life in the Society would make known God's will in her life, and would bring her to what would be her American period, 1818-1852.

First of all the Society provided Philippine with a place where she could sink roots. Given the history of change in her life, the stability the Society provided proved to be enormously significant for her personal growth. She became part of a supportive community where she felt a deep sense of belonging and of mutual respect.

Besides providing a home base, the Society, secondly, provided Philippine with the opportunity to receive regular and capable spiritual direction. This help proved invaluable: reconciling her attraction for the contemplative life and its greater solitude with the difficulties she had carrying out her vocation as educator, missionary, American foundress and superior. In 1818, the very year of her departure from France, Philippine wrote to Madeleine Sophie Barat: "I shall not repeat what I wrote in my last letter. We carried yours to the foot of the altar before reading it – we wanted to thank God for this great joy. You can understand the sentiments of our hearts" (Callan, 245-46).

The depths of this sentiment was evident throughout Philippine's years in America. For example, she wrote in 1824 when Madeleien Sophie was ill:

My sisters are always untied in prayer to avert the terrible blow your death would be; we pray rather that He would give you strength to carry the burden He has imposed on you; no one else would bear such heavy responsibility with such devotion to the good of all. Nothing in this world was as important to he as guidance or approval from Mother Barat.

Finally, the Society provided Philippine with the atmosphere she needed in order to experience God's love and forgiveness at a profound level through the work, the solitude, and the

prayerful atmosphere which the Society provided. She writes to Mother Boilvin: "As to the faults which are displeasing to God, they are forgiven seventy times seven times if you detest them. As I have the same hope for myself, I trust that the Heart of Jesus will unite us once more in the same community" (Callan 575). Philippine never lost sight of her humanity, but she knew the healing power of kindness in a Christian community.

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### **Philippine's Involvement in the World**

Philippine's spirituality included involvement in the world. She functioned in her missionary life conscious of its final end and united with Jesus. Her eschatology and her Christology supported her view of involvement in the world. If we recall her focus on "last things" and on Jesus' presence, we will recognize common threads tying these elements together, and we will see how they are connected with her commitment to involvement in the world as well.

Since Christ is the focal point of the world, all human activity carried out in union with Jesus had great significance for her. Christians are called to center their lives on Jesus Christ. They were called to build their lives around Him, integrating all relationships into one central relationship with Him. For her, a personal union with Jesus Christ was central to Christian holiness. Yet the direction of this holiness and union with Christ was not away from the world or human activity. She grew closer to the Risen Lord by way of involvement in daily activity lived in accord with her understanding of God's purpose in her life. Human activity had permanent value, for it contributed to building the world, preparing it for its final transformation in Christ.

She understood the evolution of the world, its progress towards the final Judgment of all things, as the realization of God's continuous creative action in the world. It was in this context

that human activity took on special value. Humanity is called to cooperate with God in building up the world, preparing for its final transformation:

It is a great mistake to come to this country hoping to have a good time, be respected and make one's fortune. But if one only wants God's Will, then peace follows even in ill-success, for God has not commanded us to be happy. All your [Madeleine Sophie Barat's] daughters whom God has chosen to be in this house are happy with this lot; they do not want to go elsewhere even to be with you which would be their greatest temptation (Duchesne to Barat, February 28, 1825).

They were called to participate in God's continuously creative action for the gradual transformation of the world. The Christian identified with the world in so far as the Christian is united with God's action in the world. "We dig the garden, carry manure, take water to the cow, clean the little cow-shed . . . and we do this with as much joy as we would were we teaching since God wills our life to be thus" (Duchesne to Barat, February 15, 1819). She believed that God was served by both her success and her failure because God was served by the desire to work for God's glory according to God's plan. Her community should not simply reside in America, they were to work, to labor, to be involved. "If God, seeing our desire to work for His glory, contents Himself with our good will, we can do no more (Duchesne to Rosati, July 31, 1824). They were to be at work in this world because God must act through them: "I am only at peace when I think that God wanted our work and He will accomplish it (Duchesne to Barat, August 29, 1820).

Prayer is not only a matter of one's interior life. Philippine stressed the apostolic outreach of all prayer, both the prayers she offered as well as those offered for her. Recognition of one's union with God must include a recognition of union with all those who live by the same Spirit

and are one in Christ. In our work, our homes, our land, our relationships, we find the Lord. Of the religious freedom for the people in her new land, and her sentiments for Madeleine Sophie, she wrote to her Mother on July 3, 1825:

In the States, tomorrow, the feast of Independence will be celebrated; there will be nothing but rejoicing in all classes, no matter what their religious belief. For the Catholics do not forget that on that day they obtained freedom for their own form of worship. As for me, I cast my thoughts forward to the twenty-second and celebrate in my heart in advance-and forever – the sweet and touching dependence that binds me to you. Yes, I shall thank God to my last breath and we heartily unite ourselves to all the good wishes that will be sent to you for Saint Madeleine's Day.

Worship was intimately connected with life and human activity. All her prayer overflowed into a life of apostolic charity and a life of genuine concern and compassion for others. She often acknowledged this shared spirit with Rosati, writing to him on January 6, 1822:

I was deeply moved by the proofs of your interest that have reached me. We have not forgotten to pray for your house, and at the beginning of the new year I have increased my prayers for you and your Seminary, the hope of religion in this diocese.

There was no conflict between prayer and action. Any genuine Christian apostolic work must be nourished by a spirit of prayer, a spirit of trusting in God's plan for the world. If we are to be instruments of Christ, we must be united with Christ in love. Prayer, in fact, led to a heightened social awareness and concern. Our interest in others and our action on their behalf according to God's plan was a form of prayer, another way of uniting ourselves with God. This interest and activity, this involvement in the world affirmed one's relationship with God.

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## **The Incarnated Reality of God in Human Life**

For Philippine, the apostolic life lay in being committed to the task of belonging to an order in which single deeds, sentiments, moral episodes became part of a complete pattern that valued the here-and-now as well as the yet-to-come elements of life. In turn, this commitment placed great importance on maintaining a sense of the whole and a consciousness of belonging to the spiritual order. Her life-orientation opened her to God, invited God into her life, and involved a surrender to God's will. Through her work, she wanted to bring God to this land so that God's reign would be manifest here, too. Missionary work expanded the visible presence of God. Her attention to the presence of God encouraged her to follow God's will in her work for God's glory.

The manifold activities of her apostolic life were connected to the holy that was present in the everyday, in the routine as well as in the special event. Her spiritual life was a process of attaining and sustaining faith through deeds. Worldly activity became a source of holiness.

In Philippine's vision, then, God has chosen to be involved in the world we see, touch, hear, smell and taste all about us. God awaits us in every instant, in the work of every moment.

Philippine found God in the human community. She focused her attention on the necessity of service: a ministry of helping others, a ministry of authority, evangelization, worship and education.

What she did, then, was important, for it was cooperation with God's continual work of creation. Human activity, thus, had religious value, and she accepted the task of involving herself in the things of the earth. Philippine's search for God in all things stressed that all human life can be sanctified. Through her work and action, she found God and touched God in all things.

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*These selections are excerpted from Dr. Schmitt's doctoral dissertation, The Spirituality of Philippine Duchesne as Revealed in Her Letters to Madeleine Sophie Barat and Joseph Rosati, St. Louis University, 1998. Her extensive research was conducted in part at the National Archives of the Society of the Sacred Heart in St. Louis.*

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[4040 words]

## **Perspectives On Being Contemplative And Apostolic**

*Annice Callahan, RSCJ*

### **Introduction**

How is it that we can be entirely contemplative and entirely apostolic at the same time? What are some ways the contemplative and the apostolic dimensions of our lives can augment each other? How can we nurture the intrinsic relationship between prayer and mission without denying either that we are called to a life of contemplative prayer or that we are called to an apostolic life?

What do these terms “contemplative” and “apostolic” mean to us now? What are our images for these words? Do we see prayer as quiet time alone with God and our apostolate as busy time? What is apostolic prayer? Contemplative service? Is our prayer apostolic only when we are consciously aware of the concerns and needs of others? Is our service, our ministry, contemplative only when we bring it to God in our prayer?

Christian contemplation, contemplative union with God in Christ, has an undeniable apostolic dimension that has more to do with our concern for others' growth and holiness than any particular work. And genuine apostolic thrust must be grounded in our faith in God's presence, power, and providence if it is to be more than good will, philanthropy, benevolence, or worse, condescension.

To be entirely contemplative and entirely apostolic at the same time sounds like a contradiction in terms. At any one moment, can we not be only one or the other? Does one not preclude the other? Let us see if we can bring them closer together in our lives the way Jeanne de Charry, RSCJ archivist and scholar, brought them together in her words:

The glorification of the Heart of Jesus is the unique end that determines the nature of the Institute [of the Sacred Heart]. It is to be entirely contemplative and entirely apostolic. It is not an Institute “integrally ordered to contemplation,” to which an apostolate is later added, nor is it an Institute with a social and charitable end, looking to prayer as the first and foremost means of sustaining its activity. It is a question of a single movement which is at the same time adherence to the Heart of Jesus and participation in His redemptive plan of spreading His love.<sup>1</sup>

Madeleine Sophie Barat wrote in the 1815 Abridged Plan of the Institute that: “The spirit of this Society is essentially based upon prayer and the interior life, since we cannot glorify the adorable Heart of Jesus worthily, save inasmuch as we apply ourselves to study its interior dispositions in order to unite and conform ourselves to them” (1815 Constitutions 5, 330). One of the clearest distinctions made in recent years is between mission and ministry, *why* a congregation is sent as distinct but not separate from *how* a congregation serves others. We are more apostolic when we give to others out of the center of our own contemplation, peace, and freedom.

### **Perspectives On Being Contemplative And Apostolic**

The approach I take in this section is to look at perspectives on being contemplative and apostolic according to Madeleine Sophie Barat, and according to some twentieth-century documents of the Society of the Sacred Heart written after the Second Vatican Council.

#### **According To Madeleine Sophie Barat**

Madeleine Sophie's spirituality is deeply rooted in scripture and tradition, marked by her experience of nineteenth-century France. Devotion to the Sacred Heart continued during the

French Revolution even as Jansenism tried to keep Roman Catholics from being devoted to the Heart of Christ or of even talking about the Sacred Heart.

Madeleine Sophie Barat was fond of her patron saint, Mary Magdalene, who had the choice of staying at the tomb and searching for the Jesus she had known or of moving into the garden to discover the risen Christ who is always revealing himself in totally unexpected ways. In this instance, it is the depth of her contemplative intuition which recognizes the intimate way He names her. As she describes her personal encounter with the risen Christ, Mary Magdalene is already alive to Him in a new intimacy and collaboration with Him in spreading the good news of His resurrection. Like her, we are invited beyond friendship to the Gospel call to discipleship (John 20:11-18).

Madeleine Sophie perceived the call of Religious of the Sacred Heart to be entirely contemplative and entirely apostolic in the spirit of Mary Magdalene. Speaking of her patron, Mary Magdalene, she told the novices once:

There is the spirit of the Society. Our first inclination is to linger at the feet of the Master; that is the contemplative life, what we must do in prayer. But it is then that Jesus says to us: "Go, tell my brothers." Mary becomes an apostle. We say to the whole universe: "Know His Heart."<sup>2</sup>

Mother Barat lived and developed this spirit of the Society of the Sacred Heart in a dynamic way. Her own unitive approach to contemplation and action led her to integrate both in what she loved to call "interior life," based on surrender to the Heart of Jesus:

An order which unites the contemplative and the active life has a powerful grace which underlies its action...; by this means the true interior life will be maintained. I ask the Heart of Jesus to draw to it a great number of souls who

have an attraction to prayer. Then I shall say my *nunc dimittis*, for it is thus that I have always conceived of the Society of the Sacred Heart.<sup>3</sup>

Her favorite advice to both the timid and the bold was to cultivate what she called “interior spirit.” By this she meant “dependence on the Spirit of God.”<sup>4</sup> These two phrases, “interior life” and “interior spirit,” were for her interchangeable and expressed more than specific exercises or times of prayer, more than what we do during the time of prayer.

What is “interior spirit?” It is the entire sacrifice of ourselves by the mortification of the senses, by the immolation of our passions, by the renewed recollection of the presence. Interior spirit is, then, that intimate union of our soul with God, that immediate dependence upon the grace of God, upon the touch of the Holy Spirit.

It is the fine and sensitive tact of the daughters of Madeleine Sophie to recognize in themselves the operations of God that each one may give herself over to them.

Interior spirit is the complete stripping off of self and of one's own interests.<sup>5</sup>

Madeleine Sophie wrote on November 24, 1806: “This spirit of recollection is a simple regard toward God and an equally simple attention on ourselves, which we must strive to embody in all our actions.”<sup>6</sup> This habitual attitude of union with God gave her a contemplative view of the world. Interior life and interior spirit were linked for her with obedience to the Holy Spirit which is a central theme in her letters and conferences. Once she said: “If I had a second life to live it would be passed only in obeying the Holy Spirit.”<sup>7</sup> To another she wrote: “Refuse nothing to the Holy Spirit.”<sup>8</sup> When she spoke of the practice of continual mortification, she remarked that fidelity at all moments is asked of a heart given over to the Spirit's guidance.<sup>9</sup> On Pentecost in 1827, she said: “A soul that is given over to the Holy Spirit no longer walks; she flies. The greatest sacrifices no longer cost, the roughest crosses no longer weigh her down.”<sup>10</sup>

On Pentecost in 1834, she wrote that a person with interior spirit is to have the dispositions of the apostles preparing for the coming of the Spirit.<sup>11</sup>

Interior spirit was for Mother Barat her way of being entirely contemplative and entirely apostolic. Madeleine Sophie wrote to Mother de Limminghe once: “None of those returns on self that impede the operation of the Holy Spirit...; that is what God wants of you, and that should be your attraction.”<sup>12</sup> In another letter to Mother de Limminghe, she warned: “Interior spirit is eaten away like this; the Holy Spirit needs calm in order to act freely.”<sup>13</sup> In that same letter she pointed out that the habit of depending on God's will would draw one closer to God than retreats and penances and whole days of prayer, since what attracts God is dependence upon the Spirit's operations: when it is for God that one works and suffers, then God is always with us when we act.<sup>14</sup> So intimate was this union for her that she wrote: “The Spirit of Jesus, who always dwells in an interior soul united to the divine heart, will make us know what to say, decide, advise. We are then docile instruments that receive and hand on.”<sup>15</sup> Madeleine Sophie phrased her belief that the Society she founded was to be both contemplative and apostolic in several ways. To Mother Eugénie Audé, she wrote that the greatest proof that we love God is to work to gain souls for God and devote ourselves to God.<sup>16</sup> In offering Mother Thérèse Mailluiseau a little word on her interior life, she urged her not to dread the emptiness and sense of loss through which her soul must pass for purification, and at the same time to renounce the solitude that was her attraction.<sup>17</sup>

Madeleine Sophie herself had a tender devotion to the Heart of Jesus but instead of trying to transplant Margaret Mary Alacoque's form of Sacred Heart devotion which focused on reparation, Mother Barat put her unique stamp on this devotion by emphasizing adoration more than reparation and by perceiving that education was her apostolic form of reparation. Her

inspiration for the initial vow of education to youth came from her vision of “a throng of adorers” around the world, students with a living faith in Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament formed to the spirit of adoration and reparation.<sup>18</sup>

Mother Barat was clear that the way to work for the glory of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the salvation of souls was a unitive way of reparation which included the interior work of adoration as well as the external work of education. In sharing her conviction about the spirit of prayer, she went so far as to say:

This way of ways, this way *par excellence*, is interior spirit, that spirit that gives life and fruitfulness to everything. It is interior spirit that makes us another Jesus Christ...This interior spirit must be the breath of our soul, the soul of our soul.<sup>19</sup>

Reparation can be viewed as seeking justice with the heart of an educator but also as compunction of heart, an aspect of adoration. Mother Barat called RSCJ to be both adorers and educators in an integral way. Education is considered as essential to the Society's mission and as inseparable from the call to work for justice. It must also be indicated that Mother Barat saw adoration as another essential dimension of the Society's mission, to make our students adorers all over the world. An image of what she meant is not only people kneeling on *prie-deux* before the Blessed Sacrament, but also people consciously living their relationship with God and acting out of that relationship to mediate Christ's personal love to others. It can be asserted that Mother Barat thought of perpetual adoration as a “specific aim” of the Society, along with education and retreats.<sup>20</sup> It can also be observed that the life of RSCJ built on close relationship with Jesus Christ is communitarian not individualistic, originally perhaps to insure perpetual adoration.<sup>21</sup> Interior spirit can be viewed as a form of perpetual adoration in the sense of being preoccupied with Christ, his person and his concerns, letting him become the center of one's life.

Madeleine Sophie was adamant that women attracted to the Society feel an inclination to both the contemplative life and the apostolic life. She was known to have said that giving ourselves exclusively to contemplation or to action would not be in the spirit of our vocation which has for its aim the glory of God and the salvation of people.<sup>22</sup> She herself received extraordinary spiritual gifts which were often visible to others who saw her taken out of herself for long periods of time. She never, however, advised her religious to beg for noticeable extraordinary graces since she thought they could get in the way of the apostolate. She was more interested in the mysticism of everyday things, of ordinary grace. One clear example of how Mother Barat united the contemplative and the apostolic in her own life is found in her correspondence, for example, with Mother Philippine Duchesne. So many of her letters began with spiritual direction and end with homey details about money, property, and mutual friends.<sup>23</sup>

A word which Madeleine Sophie used to capture that single movement of being both contemplative and apostolic is the word “simplicity” whereby she meant a single-hearted search for God as well as a directness with others. She described it as “that simplicity which springs from the calmness of a soul who seeks and longs for nothing but her God.” Integral to her insight is the unity of the love of neighbor and the love of God:

They must therefore practice as far as they can this lovable and frank simplicity which excludes all disguise and dissimulation, keeps at a distance all the silly cunning of self-love, avoids all singularity, chooses always the most straightforward and obvious line of conduct, leads us to treat our neighbor without affectation or constraint, without pretension and without guile, but with unaffected cordiality and a pure and sincere affection. It is from the Heart of Jesus Christ that they must draw the spirit of this modesty and simplicity, which are so

recommended to them, and are so necessary (1815 Constitutions, #348, XIX).

### **According To Some Post-Vatican II Society Documents**

How do some documents of the Society of the Sacred Heart written after Vatican Council II express this call to interior spirit, to the union of the contemplative and active life?

The 1967 Special Chapter after Vatican II was prophetic in reinforcing the call to be entirely contemplative and entirely apostolic. For example, the orientations read: “Consecrated as we are to education, ours is an apostolic institute whose life has its source in intimate union with Christ and serves Christ Himself in his members” (1967 Chapter, 20, III). These orientations spoke about the inner unity of the Society's apostolic religious life as the very love of Christ's Heart lived and contemplated, a consecration that is a single service of love of God and people (1967 Chapter, 39). They also talked about the Society's apostolic activity resulting from an intimate union with Christ (1967 Chapter, 40).

The document of the 1976 General Chapter used the language of Vatican II, the vocabulary of “charism” and “mission” unfamiliar to Madeleine Sophie. She spoke instead of “the grace of our vocation” and “the object” or “end” of our Society. These are not synonymous terms, but they are correlative. What came through over and over again in the Chapter of 1976 is the call to contemplation and communion. The contemplative and apostolic dimensions merge in this vision of life together for others: “The call to contemplation in freedom and adoration has laid hold of our whole life.”

(1976 Chapter, 7). This call to adoration implies apostolic concern for and response to others in collaboration with Christ. The fullness of this collaboration is described as communion, a communion not only with Christ and one another but a communion with those we serve and with all people in the world: “The power of our charism is also a force for communion” (1976

Chapter, 7).

The 1982 Constitutions were an invitation to turn to Christ's Heart as the way of learning how to be contemplative and apostolic: “The pierced Heart of Jesus opens our being to the depths of God and to the anguish of humankind. Jesus draws us into his movement of adoration...and love for all, especially those who are poor” (1982 Constitutions #8). Learning how to contemplate reality through His Heart, RSCJ are transformed to respond compassionately to the heart of humankind. “This contemplative attitude permeates our whole being, helping us to live ever more united to Christ in our relationships, our tasks, and our ministry; it becomes a powerful force of conversion and transformation for mission” (1982 Constitutions #22). RSCJ are invited to unite prayer and mission in their celebrating and living the eucharistic dimension of their lives: “By receiving the body of Christ, we unite ourselves to his prayer of thanksgiving and to his offering of himself...for the life of the world. Gradually, the Eucharist makes us become more truly the body of Christ, broken to give birth to a new humanity” (1982 Constitutions #29). Becoming contemplative and apostolic at the same time implies surrendering to the Spirit one's capacity to relate: “Called like Mary to follow Christ in a life conformed to his, we hand over our capacity to relate to persons and things. By the power of his Spirit, Christ transforms this capacity for the service of mission” (1982 Constitutions #41).

The 1988 General Chapter explored concrete implications of the call to be contemplative and apostolic as an international apostolic community, committed in particular to making known the love of God revealed in Jesus to young people, the poor, migrants, and women.<sup>24</sup> The 1988 working paper on education presented by the International Education Commission articulated an integration between being contemplative and being apostolic in our service of education. “We have begun to understand that as women, as Christians, as religious, as educators, the call of God

to us means that the world has a claim on us, that it lays claims to our love, our contrition, our forgiveness, our contemplation; it has the right to ask of us justice, compassion, solidarity with the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized” (1988 Education: a Commitment, 10-11).

After two formation meetings and an assembly of provincials, the Central Team published, in 1992, a paper developing the conviction that the fate of the Society is in our hands. In it was asserted that “discernment lies at the very heart of our apostolic religious vocation...discovering the action of the Spirit in our lives” (1992 Fate of the Society, 4-5). A second conviction which was underlined was the importance of “accompaniment which has as its goal opening us to the awareness of God's action in our life...Today we speak of community accompaniment...as well as personal accompaniment” (1992 Fate, 6). These two convictions indicate a way to become contemplative and active.

The 1992 Act of Hope of the United States Province reinforced four convictions that touch on the call to be contemplative and apostolic. These are the centrality of prayer and contemplation in our lives; the call to be educators marked by “faith, love, compassion, and a capacity for relationship;” the internationality of the Society situating the challenges and social issues of our own country in the context of a global reality; and communal discernment as a vital element of our life together (1992 Act of Hope,7-8).

The 1994 General Chapter emphasized the call as educators to nurture life by focusing on compassion and communion as contemplative and apostolic attitudes of heart: “The compassionate gaze of Jesus directs our eyes and our hearts toward a world where many are like ‘sheep without a shepherd’ and brings to birth in us the desire to give our lives as women of

compassion and communion to nourish life, to help life grow, to defend life” (1994 Chapter).25

## **Conclusion**

Madeleine Sophie's journey of the heart led her to become entirely contemplative and entirely apostolic as an educator in the church of nineteenth-century France, helping to form educators who, in turn, would form students to become adorers and then proclaim to the world: “Know His Heart.”

The journey of the heart of RSCJ is to become entirely contemplative and entirely apostolic as educators in the church of the third millennium, integrating adoration and compassion with a preferential option for the poor and the oppressed. As RSCJ contemplate the pierced Heart of Christ in the broken heart of humanity, the focus today is on compassionate solidarity with the poor, educating to reconciliation, and work for justice and peace. The invitation is to seek the face of God in the wounds of humanity and to know the love of God in the healing of those wounds.

*A version of this paper was originally presented as an address to the California Provincial Assembly, Atherton, California, June 28, 1981. Gratitude to Irene Cullen, RSCJ, Claire Kondolf, RSCJ, Virginia Rodee, RSCJ, and Mary Jane Tiernan for their valuable suggestions for revision.*

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11. See Madeleine Sophie Barat, Conference for the Feast of Pentecost 1834, in Margaret Phelan, RSCJ, Project Coordinator, An Interior Spirit: Anthology of Writings of the Superiors General of the Society of the Sacred Heart (St. Louis: Society of the Sacred Heart, 2000), 8-9.
12. Avignon, March 29, 1832, Lettres pour les Supérieures, I:80, in Williams, Saint Madeleine Sophie, 335.
13. Rome, February 19, 1833, Lettres pour les Supérieures, I:86, in Williams, Saint Madeleine Sophie, 335.
14. Ibid., in Williams, Saint Madeleine Sophie, 336.
15. Paris, August 19, 1846, Lettres pour les Supérieures, I:252, in Williams, Saint Madeleine Sophie, 434. Other references to this theme can be found in Williams, Saint Madeleine Sophie, 341, 342, 507, 512, 513, 514, 540, 549, 567, 571, 572, 591.
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19. Amiens, 1841, Conférences, I:317, in Williams, Saint Madeleine Sophie, 344.

20. See Jeanne de Charry, History of the Constitutions: Formation of the Institute, 225.
  21. See Jeanne de Charry, History of the Constitutions: Formation of the Institute, 63.
  22. June, 1847, Conférences, II:34, in Williams, Society of the Sacred Heart, 334.
  23. For examples, see Louise Callan, RSCJ, Philippine Duchesne: Frontier Missionary of the Sacred Heart 1769-1852, Abridged Edition (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1965), and Catherine M. Mooney, Philippine Duchesne: A Woman with the Poor (New York: Paulist, 1990).
  24. See 1988 Chapter, Introduction, 1-2. At a 1999 RSCJ Theologians' Conference, Amelia Vasquez, RSCJ, claimed that the new century calls us to interculturality, rather than internationality, given the cultural pluralism within countries, inviting us to celebrate unity due to our differences, not in spite of them. See Amelia Vasquez, RSCJ, "Summary Paper on World and Church," Conference 2000, Chicago, Illinois, July 26, 1999.
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**1417 Words**

**A Special Call From God:**

**Spirituality of the Elder RSCJ**

Judith Brown, RSCJ

*This was presented to the Kenwood RSCJ retirement community, January, 1999.*

When I see us gathered here today, I think of the treasury of prayer, of spiritual wisdom, of love for the Society and the ways it has nurtured our lives, and the ways you have nurtured so many lives. I think also of the special call to which our Constitutions refer when speaking of our later years, or what is sometimes called “the end of time.” This special call of Our Lord invites us to continue to seek Him with all our hearts and to discover each day new facets of His love for us and all those we hold in our hearts. Speaking of this special call, our 1982 Constitutions say:

This may be the most contemplative period of our life, keeping its prophetic and apostolic power through the truth and depth of our relationships and the joy with which we bear witness to the fidelity of God’s love.

This paragraph is symbolized for me in a contemporary painting. It is a picture of the Three Kings or Wisemen. Around the edge of the picture are the words “Guide us to thy perfect light.” Recently I have seen the significance of this picture. In the foreground are two of the kings, one quite youthful in appearance, his gaze directed heavenward to the star. Behind him, the second, a more mature man, gazes at the younger king his hand resting supportively on his shoulder. In the background, behind these two, is the third king, seated upon a camel; his flowing beard and hair are grey. His eyes are closed, and the light from the star suffuses his face. His expression is beatific. A most interesting thing is the camel, the beast of burden which carries him, appears to have no eyes, because a brocaded shade hangs before them! This unusual picture

seems to say that as physical sight and energy fade one must continue to search for the light, allowing oneself to be guided within and guided from within. The message of the elder king is “Your mission is to hear the God who speaks within and to support those still in active ministry with prayer, with love, and with the wisdom of reflected experience.”

Let us return to our Constitutions:

This may be the most contemplative period of our life, keeping its prophetic and apostolic power through the truth and depth of our relationships and the joy with which we bear witness to the fidelity of God’s love.

The first few words are pivotal. “This may be the most contemplative period of our life...” The words direct us to the possibility that our final years may be the most contemplative, enlivened by our prayer, our apostolic zeal, charity. The words of also caution us about the process of diminishment, of emptying out, which is part of our later years: “Certain deprivations, such as illness, decline of physical (and mental) energy, or the lessening of responsibility” may come to us but they are a special call from God, and our response “cannot be improvised.” It is in answering this special call with fidelity that we enter this most contemplative period of our life.

It seems to me that this is where we become like the old king in the picture, seated upon the sightless camel. We can no longer call upon the physical and, in some instances, the mental habits of a lifetime. Even prayer as we knew it seems beyond our powers at times, or at the least filled with dryness, distractions, and darkness. But our faithful God is always present within our hearts and souls, is pleased with us and “guides us to His perfect light.” The “emptying” processes of our final years are not accidents, tragedies, or obstacles we can move beyond to approach that “most contemplative period of our lives.” They are part and parcel of it! The Constitutions continue on this point: “Our response... cannot be improvised but is prepared

through our whole life. In prayer we discover that the fidelity of God dwells at the very core of our weakness.”

It is this fidelity of our God and our readiness to dwell there with Him that can make our aging years “the most contemplative period of our life.” This same paragraph, links the contemplative aspect of our vocation in its later years with the apostolic aspect, in saying that this contemplative period keeps “its prophetic and apostolic power through the truth and depth of our relationships and the joy with which we bear witness to the fidelity of God’s love.” The union of the contemplative and the apostolic aspects of our vocation has at times raised questions and caused pain for many of us: How genuine is my service of God and others if I am constantly drawn to the contemplative life? And how deep is my life of prayer if I am constantly immersed in the apostolate?

At one of the busiest and most difficult moments of her life, in 1844, Our Mother Foundress found the inspiration and the time to give a series of conferences at the Motherhouse on Interior Spirit, the Foundation of the Spiritual Life. She had lived through the deeply painful days of the General Council of 1839 and the equally painful and chaotic years of trial of the “Revised Constitutions” when the Society was all but destroyed. She had prayed for and seen the Society return to its foundation and center: consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. She herself was sixty-four years old, on the threshold of old age for a person of her times, and no doubt secretly hoping that the Society would release her from her role as Superior General! Of course, that desire would never be realized in her lifetime. Instead, she left us in 1844, a legacy of the precious spirit which should enliven us at every period of our lives, and enliven the lives of all whom our apostolic zeal would touch. These conferences on Interior Spirit breathe the spirit of

contemplation-in-action which has always been ours, “that contemplative outlook on the world” of which Mother Camacho spoke so ardently at the General Chapter of 1976.

We are all familiar with the lines in St. Madeleine Sophie’s opening conference on Interior Spirit which begin: “But what is this interior Spirit? It is the entire sacrifice of ourselves, the intimate union of our souls with God,”... and so forth. In the opening words of this conference, however, she catches the spirit of contemplation-in-action, which is the spirit of the Society:

We have still very much to do... I know your good will, but that, again, does not suffice in a house where all... may draw the very essence of the pure spirit of our Institute to carry it to all parts of the universe, for the whole world is ours who wish to save all... but to establish others we must be established ourselves... I desire this house to be as a sanctuary where the spirit of The Society dwells....

I think our Mother Foundress would say the same thing were she present here today: “I desire this house to be a sanctuary where the spirit of the Society dwells” – that two-fold spirit which is at once contemplative and apostolic. I think it was this two-fold spirit which the General Chapter of 1982 had in mind when they said each one of us is “in mission for life.” The vocation of a Religious of the Sacred Heart is just that to have and to nourish that “contemplative outlook on the world” which keeps us at the heart of Our Lord’s and the Church’s mission, to spread God’s kingdom of love in the world. We do not lay that aside at sixty-five, seventy-five, eighty-five, or ninety-five. I would like to strike the word “retirement” from our vocabulary as RSCJ! The reality of our call as older RSCJ as expressed in the Constitutions is so opposite to retirement:

We look for new ways of manifesting the love of Jesus. We are called not only to accept the love and service of others, but to give others the love that we have drawn throughout life from the Heart of Jesus.

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**Do This in Remembrance of Me  
I Corinthians 11:24**

*Dolores Aleixandre, RSCJ*

**In the Shadow of the Word**

*Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings,  
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.  
Ascribe to the **glory of His name**;  
worship the Lord in holy splendor (Psalm 29:1-2).*

*Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth;  
sing the glory of His name;  
**give Him glorious praise.**  
Say to God:...*

*“All the earth **worships** you;  
they sing praises to you,  
sing praises to your name.”  
Come and see what God has done:  
He is awesome in His deeds among  
mortals (Psalm 66:1-5).*

These two ancient psalms of Israel put us in contact with a powerful need felt by a believer: to manifest admiration for the Lord, to proclaim His glory, to praise Him, to fix on Him everyone's attention...

It corresponds with our human way of paying homage to someone. We invite people for a celebration, we get together, we speak of this person, we proclaim what He or she has done, we applaud, we offer Him or her something valuable.... The eyes of all are fixed on the person, and no one else dares in any way to divert the attention towards Him self or herself.

*Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your  
name give glory,*

*for the sake of Your steadfast love and  
Your faithfulness (Psalm 115:1).*

If we strip the word “homage” of its worldly meaning of vainglory, we find in it precious elements of human relationships. It expresses the capacity to set oneself apart in order to admire the grateful acknowledgement of His or her actions, the desire to make them known to others, the joy and expression of gratitude, the creativity of turning all of that into a festive celebration... The hymn in Philippians (the Philippians were one of the very first Christian communities), reveals the same desire:

*...so that at the name of Jesus  
every knee should bend,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue should confess  
that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of the Father (Philippians 2:10-11).*

When the moment comes to teach a novice how to pray, Madeleine Sophie takes her before the Eucharist and points out the proper attitude for prayer. She does this with a triple expression very dense in its meaning but that sounds outmoded to us: “...they must do all in their power by the **purity of their homage, the fervor of their love, and the fullness of their oblation....**”

But if we read those words with the biblical perspective pointed out above, we may understand better this “Eucharistic pedagogy.” We could say that Madeleine Sophie would like a future RSCJ to enter into the Eucharist by way of “analogy” with Jesus’ “interior dispositions” expressed there:

- Praise to the Father: “...in the unity of the Holy Spirit, **all glory and honor** is yours, almighty Father...” The whole Eucharistic mystery expresses Jesus’ only passion: His

Father's glory. All in Him is directed by this predominant passion, and nothing of self interferes with His attention centered in the Father whose glory and praise He seeks:

“I do not seek my glory...”

The “purity of homage” may be understood in this context.

- His love “to the end” takes Him to the highest point of faithfulness and of the gift of self for those whom He loves. The Eucharist shows us how far love goes when it breaks its boundaries and reaches the “logic of unmeasurement.”

For Madeleine Sophie the “fervor of love” does not reside in the feelings but in the affective determination to give oneself entirely to God. It is the opposite of tepidity and mediocrity; it presupposes a high “inner temperature” – (“were not our hearts burning?...”) that changes the disciple into a passionate follower of the Master.

- The total gift of Jesus is expressed in the “Take, eat, this is my self; this is my life offered for you as bread broken and wine poured. This is my existence emptied into death so that you may have life.”

The “plentitude of their oblation” comprehends the desire and the decision to live thus “in memory of Him ,” to give oneself wholly; with all that one is and all that one has without keeping or reserving anything for oneself.

### **Praying with Madeleine Sophie**

- Place yourself before Jesus in the Eucharist and, before beginning to pray, bring to your mind the reason for praise and thanksgiving that are in your heart. Reverend Mother Stuart used to pray for “a small opinion of myself, and immense opinion of Thee...”

Leave all thought of yourself, let your gaze and your attention be fixed on Jesus who is worthy of all your gratefulness and praise. You can express this with the words of a little known hymn found in Sirach 51.

- Approach Madeleine Sophie. Ask her to help you live in your prayer and in your those attitudes so important to her. Let her guide you in the work of placing the intensity of your attention on Jesus, and experience the freedom given by “the purity of their homage”: that is to say, the purity of heart of she who has left the self behind “in simplicity of heart, which looks to God alone, [and desires] only what He wishes, without self-seeking or self-interest” (1982 Constitutions, 41). Ask her also to permeate [contagiar] you with the strength (the “*fervor...*”) of her love of Jesus and the world, that she may make you understand in what consists for you that “plenitude of oblation” by which you “hand over [your] capacity to relate to persons and things” so that Jesus may transform it, by the force of His Spirit, into service for the mission (1982 Constitutions, 41).
- If you are in a group, you may silently adore the Eucharist for a while. You can read aloud, slowly, the eucharistic prayer IV, making pauses. At the end, as an echo, repeat the sentences expressing in any way the interior dispositions of Jesus towards His Father and towards us:

*Father, we acknowledge your greatness: all your actions show your wisdom and love....*

*He always loved those who were His own in the world. When the time came for Him to be glorified by you, His heavenly Father, He showed the depths of His love.*

*And that we might live no longer for ourselves but for Him who gave Him self up to death*

*for us and who by rising from the dead destroyed death and restored life.*

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*This selection is reprinted with permission of the author from her book In the Shadow of the Word: Praying with Madeleine Sophie Barat.*

## **Listening and Loving**

### **The Eucharist as Mirror of Sacred Heart Spirituality**

*Kathleen Hughes, RSCJ*

#### **Introduction**

In the *Constitutions of the Society of the Sacred Heart*, 1982, there is a brief but deeply illuminating paragraph about the Eucharist:

By receiving the Body of Christ,  
we unite ourselves to His prayer of thanksgiving  
and to His offering of Himself to the Father  
for the life of the world.

Gradually, the Eucharist makes us become more truly  
Body of Christ, broken to give birth to a new humanity. §29

Through active participation in the Eucharist, and especially through reception of the Body and Blood of Christ, the *Constitutions* suggest, our lives are merged with Christ's life. In the unfolding of the Eucharist our daily dyings and risings are joined with the dying and rising of Christ; our daily experiences of gratitude and sacrifice are united with His prayer of thanksgiving and offering to the one he called His Abba. Eucharist plunges us into the very life of God, and it invites us into the two-fold movement of the Heart of Christ, for Christ was at one and the same time deeply captivated by God and deeply given to every desire of God's heart for the life of the world.

Religious of the Sacred Heart have come to talk about this double movement of the Heart

of Christ – being at once completely contemplative and completely apostolic – as the double demand of our consecration. We are called to a life of prayer and union with God and that contemplative union with God makes us long for the establishment of God’s reign in our world. Our prayer sends us to make known the love of God’s heart which we have discovered in solitude. Our prayer motivates our action. And at the same time, our daily apostolic experiences drive us back to prayer where we bring with us the sufferings and hopes of those we have encountered on the way. It is an ever deepening spiral of listening and loving.

This may all sound a little esoteric – perhaps a way of life limited to religious “professionals.” But it is not. Prayer and activity, contemplation and mission, love of God and love of our neighbor, being and doing...these are some of the many ways to talk about the basic vocation of all Christians. By virtue of our baptism, we are plunged into Jesus’ life and, throughout our lives, we are invited to “put on Christ,” to learn the thoughts and sentiments of his Heart and to make them our own. His total preoccupation with God and his unfailing desire to do God’s will become, then, the measure of our own humanity.

There is no better event than the celebration of the Eucharist to teach us how to listen and to love after the manner of Jesus Christ. Contemplation and action, listening and loving, are the very attitudes that we rehearse together every time we gather for this liturgy. The Eucharist, while not exhausting our spiritual lives, provides a perfect model for a balanced spirituality. The very shape of the eucharistic liturgy, the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, tells us about the dynamic of the spiritual life: first we attend and then we respond, first we come before God in silence and poverty of heart and allow God to take hold of us and transform our hearts, and then we reply in word and ritual action. We lift up our hearts and join our

thanksgiving to the great prayer of thanksgiving, the one sacrifice of praise in Christ. In fact, the two principle parts of the Mass perfectly illustrate the essential elements of the spiritual life: contemplation and action, being and doing, listening and loving. If we take our cue from the Eucharist, we discover that we cannot respond to God – we cannot engage in action or doing or loving – without also being women and men of attentiveness and listening and contemplation. In this age of the Church's life, listening is by far the harder of these two aptitudes to acquire, so first a word about learning how to listen before we look at the Eucharist more carefully.

### **Listening as Key to the Spiritual Life**

To suggest that "listening" is a key to the spiritual life is another way to talk about becoming people of prayer. Yet, especially in this age of noise and haste, we can easily agree with St. Paul: "We do not know how to pray as we ought!" We barely even know how to talk about it, about that mysterious conversation with the Divine which prayer is. We do not know how to be in the presence of the One who is wholly Other, how to allow ourselves to be held and loved, forgiven and embraced, blessed and transformed, or how to speak our thanksgiving and praise in communion with the God of our lives.

Perhaps a story will give us courage and hope.

Among the many great zen-like tales of the Hasidic rabbis is the one told about a conversation among disciples in the days just after a great master's death. One of the disciples asked several others: "Do you know why our master went to the pond every day at dawn and stayed there for a little while before coming home again?" No one knew, so the one who had posed the question told them: "He was learning the song with which the frogs praise God. It takes," he added, "a very long time to learn that song." Every day, it seems, the great rabbi put

aside matters of consequence and simply sat by the pond. But perhaps, since none of the disciples except one knew what the rabbi was doing, we may conclude that in all those trips and in all that time the rabbi never became proficient. Perhaps the rabbi was never able to say: "Listen. I know a whole verse of the song now. I'd be happy to sing it for you." So, all that time, a whole lifetime, and not much to show. But the rabbi never weighed matters, never considered just how hard the song was to sing, never wondered whether he would ever approach a frog in musical aptitude.

Perhaps what the rabbi learned was how to sit by a pond, how to still his mind and heart, how to listen in some of the many ways that listening takes place. Perhaps what the rabbi learned was that listening, becoming open and receptive, precedes loving, that action must be tested in contemplation, that doing is useless without being. Perhaps what the rabbi teaches us is something about the importance of listening and learning, and something about the song, the song which in our case is the Church's song, not our own, the song which is Jesus' song before the one he called Abba, the song which is the Spirit's song in each one of us.

When St. Paul said that we do not know how to pray as we ought, he immediately added that the Spirit would aid us in our weakness. The Spirit of God will teach us to become listeners, will help us and prompt us to sing now this verse, now that phrase of Jesus' song. The Spirit will tutor our hearts if we take the time to go to the pond and listen.

There is no right way to pray. Why? Because we are each different people in different circumstances with different temperaments, drawn to different sorts of ponds. Some will dwell in silence, others love music. For some God is found in the beauty of nature; for others it is on a city street where they encounter the pierced heart of Christ in the pierced heart of humanity.

Prayer is a gradually deeper and deeper relationship with God and, as with any other relationship in our lives, it will change and modulate over time. There will be conversation of every kind, small talk, awkwardness even, but also exchange about what is really going on – the struggles and the pain and the hopes and joys. There may sometimes be a struggle with truth; there may be a rush of words; there may be deep and comfortable silence like the silence of old friends when words cease to matter.

Sometimes, like the rabbi, we will need some structure to become real listeners. Structure can take many forms: there is the discipline of time, of space, of regularity, of certain patterns. We may find the Scriptures appointed for the liturgy useful to launch our listening and to keep us sensitive to their word of life which touches us, troubles us, challenges us. We may turn to the psalms as a pattern of praise in tune with the rhythms of morning and evening, of feast and season, of the joys and sorrow, the highs and lows of the human heart. We may occasionally find that talking about prayer with another, a soul friend, is the discipline we need to remain faithful listeners by the pond. And regularly, the celebration of the Eucharist will transform us and tutor our hearts.

### **The Eucharist: A School of Listening**

Perhaps the best school of all to learn the art of listening and loving is that of Eucharist. Regular, attentive participation in the Eucharist for the Christian corresponds to the rabbi's pond. In the Eucharist we are invited, in a myriad different ways, to listen. Consider the Gathering Rites and the Liturgy of the Word. Even before the celebration of the Eucharist begins, God's word is revealed to us in those who gather around us, a motley assembly of nationalities, ages, race, gender, abilities, and so on, drawn to one another's side because of God's gift and grace

and because our very presence says to one another that God finds us and saves us in a common life. God's word is spoken as the ministers process down the aisle – all life is journey into God, they tell us – as our voices search for words to name the feast or season and to merge our praise as one. And then, in the sign of the cross and greeting, we mark the sign of salvation on our bodies, saying, in so many words, that all we do will be done in the name of the Triune God. We speak, then a word of trust: we greet each other with the hope that in the very act of gathering, the Lord is with us. We come as loved sinners to this celebration and we say so to each other, and then, absolved, embraced, we give God praise for creating us, sustaining us and rescuing us for God alone is the Holy One, God alone is the Lord. So many words we hear in these entrance rites and our “listening” culminates with a prayer spoken in our name to God, through Christ, in the power of their abundant and life-giving Spirit. And all of these “words” and all of our attentive listening during these simple rituals of gathering, prepare us for listening, strictly speaking, to the revealed word of God in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, in the voice of the psalmist, in the words of the homily – all of it “revealed” and all of it revealing of human history and human life and the human heart and God's tender presence throughout. Each week a different piece of the story, each week a different word to shape our being and to inspire our doing.

What will all this listening do for us? It will gradually, almost imperceptibly, transform our minds and hearts. As we sit by the “pond” and listen deeply and well, we will learn the song of Christ who sings it now forever before the throne of grace. Once we learn this song we can sing it with Christ in His great prayer of praise and thanksgiving, the Eucharistic prayer.

## **The Eucharist: A School of Loving**

Our loving, our response to all we have heard and seen in the Gathering and the Liturgy of the Word, begins with intercessory prayer. The word we have heard has stretched our hearts, our concerns, our cares. The cries of the needy, the plight of our world, the anguish of sickness and death in this local community all form the substance of our faithful prayers and the object of our giving in the collection. Next we move to the Table of the Eucharist, preparing the table, the gifts and ourselves for the action of Eucharist which is to follow. We make ourselves available for the same action of God which will transform the bread and wine into Christ's body and blood.

The central action of the eucharistic celebration follows, the great prayer of praise and thanksgiving called the eucharistic prayer, and it makes us bold in our loving: we unite ourselves with Christ; we remember the great things God has done; we beg the transforming power of the Spirit; we tell the story of the Supper once again; we stand in union with the Risen One and offer the one and only sacrifice, the spotless victim, and surrender ourselves to the same action of the Spirit; we join our prayer with that of Mary and the saints that all the world will share in the salvation and redemption of Christ; and we add a final, doxological burst of praise.

What is there left of our loving? To pray in Jesus' own words, to embrace one another in peace, to come together at the table and share the food of life, and then to go in peace, but never the same, for those of us who eat of this food must change, must go in the peace of Christ to live, in deed, what we have just done together in word and ritual action.

## **Conclusion**

The whole of the Eucharist may be likened to a dress rehearsal. In many ways it is just

that. When we come to the Eucharist we “rehearse” the attitude and values of Christ. We learn, gradually, even imperceptibly, to listen more deeply to the word and the way of God in our lives. And listening leads to loving, to responding to the gift and grace of God in Eucharist. We cannot do otherwise. Meanwhile, each time we celebrate the Eucharist we will do it more truly through Christ and with Christ and in Christ to the glory of God. Just as the Eucharist is a perfect mirror of the relationship of Christ to His Abba, His dear Father, it is the same spiritual dynamic that we are all called to realize in our lives – listening and loving, learning to ache with the very desires of the Heart of God and to work for their realization. As the *Constitution of the Society of the Sacred Heart* remind us: “Gradually, the Eucharist makes us become more truly Body of Christ, broken to give birth to a new humanity.”

565 words

### Three Titles for Mary in the Society

*Adapted from a letter of Mother Marie-Thérèse de Lescure, RSCJ*

*Reprinted with permission from Religious of the Sacred Heart, a commemorative publication by the Motherhouse in Rome on the occasion of the bicentennial of the Society*

With regard to devotion to Our Lady, we have in the Society a family inheritance which our Holy Mother bequeathed to us as her very own idea: three titles which the Society has always honored with confidence and love because it has discovered in them a wonderful harmony of grace and the spirit of its vocation.

First, the *Immaculate Heart of Mary*. It is in the depths of this source that the Society must discover the secret of interior life upon which it is essentially based. The Constitutions reveal this secret to us when they show us “Mary so closely united to the Three Divine Persons.” When she consecrated us to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Saint Madeleine Sophie gave us a glimpse of the union she herself had attained. In that glimpse we may discover the true secret of the inner life which Our Lady wishes to see strong and vigorous. There in the inmost depths of our souls, the Three Divine Persons deign to wait and to long for us!

*Mater Admirabilis*, treasure of calm and serenity, in an activity which should spring from the only fruitful source without ever exhausting or troubling it. We love her for the light of her downcast eyes, for the peace radiating from her countenance, for her very attitude revealing her inner fullness of grace. To have spent a few moments in her presence is a grace that leaves a lasting trace in our lives, and the welcome that this dear picture gives us everywhere we go throughout the Society is one of the signs that we are

indeed at home. She is the Virgin of the Invisible and the Virgin of the Essential. Let us beg her to lead us on, and to fix our gaze upon the Invisible, which her own eyes look upon: the Invisible Presence, the Invisible Life, the Invisible Action, the Invisible Love. In the midst of non-essentials which invite and often beguile us, we run the risk of encumbering our souls and confusing our values. May she give us a hunger and thirst for the Essential!

Devotion to *Our Lady of Sorrows* will ever be cherished in the Society as a sacred tradition written into its history by the love and unconquerable trust of Saint Madeleine Sophie. Our heavenly Mother has trodden before us a dull, monotonous road. She can enable us to value aright its austerity and discover its soul-saving power. Saint Madeleine Sophie was not afraid to tell us what she had understood of the desolation of soul endured by the Mother of Sorrows, nor what she asked for each of her daughters both then and now. An understanding, first of all, of the Cross: "May the spouses of the Sacred Heart never know any cross but that of Jesus." What she had discovered in the grief-stricken soul of Our Lady she asked also for us: intimate union with, Jesus crucified. "May we be your faithful children, calm and steadfast at the foot of the Cross."

*Marie-Thérèse de Lescure, RSCJ, from the vicariate of France, was Superior General of the Society of the Sacred Heart, 1946-1957.*

## Our Lady of Sorrows

In one of the moments of greatest suffering in her life, Madeleine Sophie went with her counselors to pray before an icon of Mary: a picture of Our Lady of Sorrows seated at the foot of a bare cross, which was on the outside wall of a great pavilion in the Villa Lante. It was a few days after the stormy 1839 General Chapter. She was living through a situation of deep anguish and incomprehension. The words of her prayer to Mary reveal what was happening in her and her way of accepting such deep suffering:

*O Mary, Mother of sorrows and of love, penetrated by the keenest gratitude for the numberless graces that you have poured out on this little Society, we come solemnly to acknowledge what we owe to your motherly protection, and the merits of your transpierced heart. Finish your work, O divine Mother... Love gave you the cross, grant that the cross may give us love, and may there never be, for the spouses of the Heart of Jesus, any cross other than the cross of Jesus. May we bear about in ourselves the cross of Jesus Christ, the sufferings of His passion and the remembrance of His wounds. Grant that wounded and torn like him, we may be inebriated with the cross of His love (Margaret Williams, RSCJ, St. Madeleine Sophie: Her Life and Letters, 303).*

When life was most difficult for Madeleine Sophie, when she had gone through tense day of hard opposition, when, besides, persons she trusted were the cause of the conflict, when all the circumstances led to lament, to complaint, to imploring that "the hour" might soon pass away, Madeleine Sophie starts her prayer with words of thanksgiving. She forgets herself; she is capable of going further than the concrete situation and looking for direction in Jesus through that "sure access" that is His mother.

She leads Madeleine Sophie to Jesus, and from then on her gaze will always be fixed on Him. He is the only one that counts, He is the only one that matters, and the remembrance of His wounds (today we would say her "compassion") makes her react once again with that generosity which is the foundational grace of the Society which makes each one able to "accept the cross for His love" and draw near to those who, today, live crucified.

*Dolores Aleixandre, RSCJ*

74 words

**O Lady, You Haunt My Heart Highway**

O Lady, you haunt my heart-highway  
 with your acceptance of God's motherhood.  
 I know I do not, but wish that I could,  
 so unreservedly say YES, throw  
 my life to Love without demand  
 for blue-printed security. Show  
 the magnificence of this mystery:  
 your simple settling for heaven in a stable-cave,  
 for God as infant son, for generations  
 of blessing after you gave  
 your Nazareth up for Calvary.

*138 words***Commitment**

It seems so small, that *Yes*.  
 So short a time it took  
 to say so small a word that shook,  
 with all its shining positiveness,

apocalyptic gates, whose pearl  
 before such astonishing faith flung wide  
 forever. The Holy Spirit's bride,  
 vivacious, single-hearted girl,

in one dynamic, exis  
 tential deed, committed all our race  
 to God, and God to man again, in grace:  
 Spirit and Bride oned in marriage kiss.

Now the Fruit of Love is fleshed  
 in human coat. No column of fire  
 to see, no cloud to spire –  
 only a Baby in a stable crêched.

Dare any exegete explain away  
 Shekinah's glory hidden in the hay?

*Anna Mae Marheineke, RSCJ, attended the Academy of the Sacred Heart, St. Charles, and Maryville; she is a library assistant at the Academy in St. Charles.*

## MATER ADMIRABILIS

*The following is Mother Perdrau's own account written in a letter of how she came to paint this famous picture.*

Do you remember our old nurse Jacqueline? We used to call her the Saint. I was far from being a model child, and when my sewing and books wearied me, I tried to avoid them. It was my grandmother's wish that I should learn to spin. To take up the spindle and distaff seemed to me a very irksome task. My nurse encouraged me by suggesting thoughts of faith.

"Come," she would say, "let us go to the temple of Jerusalem and see there Our Lady as she was at your age. She is spinning. Ask her to let you sit on her footstool. She will teach you to spin. You will never grow weary if you remain near Mary. See how calm she is, how gentle. She is thinking of God and working for Him." Thus our old nurse pictured the scene of long ago as she fancied it under the porticoes of the temple. The lesson was soon learned, and the ideal days of Mary were engraven on my imagination. I began spinning my flax as if seated near the Virgin of Israel.

In contemplating her I grew to love her as she toiled near the Holy of Holies, calm, pure, peaceful, her soul fixed on God. Thus Mater Admirabilis became a reality to me years before I was able to express my mental image on wall or canvas.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of November, 1828, I was then thirteen years old; I was kneeling in the Church of Chaillot when the Blessed Virgin granted me a favor which I consider the germ of my religious vocation. The Feast recalled the Virgin of the Temple. I beheld, as it were, my beautiful ideal, while a deep understanding was granted me of the passage in the Apocalypse referring to the Cantic of the Virgins. I implored the Virgin Mother to make me like her, that I too might

follow the Lamb. From that hour I never ceased wishing to become a religious and the thought of consecrating my life to God was associated with the Virgin of the Temple.

But I am not writing an autobiography so I shall pass over the years between 1828 and 1844, when my parents at last consented to my becoming a postulant in the Convent of the Sacred Heart of the Trinita dei Monti in Rome.

On Sunday, May 1, 1844, the Community was assembled for recreation in the cloister on the first floor of one of the long cloisters of the quadrangle opening on the courtyard of the old Monastery of the Minims. We were talking about the beautiful Roman customs for the month of Mary when the portress interrupted the conversation by calling Reverend Mother to see a Cardinal. All exclaimed as she rose, "Oh, if the Blessed Virgin would only come and take our Mother's place." My glance was directed as if by inspiration towards a niche in the opposite wall. It was deep, arched at the top, and the surface looked to me like a canvas ready for a picture. At the same time I recalled the Madonna of the Temple, my childhood's ideal. "Shall I ask Our Lady to come? Shall I place her where she can stay and work with us?" I exclaimed.

"Oh, yes!" the Sisters answered, "but how?"

That was my secret. I had studied Art, especially fresco painting. It was customary to sketch a subject carefully, then reproduce it on the wall. I had just finished a picture of the *Flight into Egypt* and was to paint it near the main staircase, where it could be effaced, as no one seemed to believe that I should succeed. First frescoes are generally scraped off at once.

After the recreation I began to reflect on my promise to bring Our Lady into the old corridor. It would be necessary to make a sketch, ask the Community to sacrifice their favorite resting place in the summer months, and all this only to fail and receive a good humiliation. No! So I determined to think no more about the matter. The Blessed Virgin, however, wished to be

pictured there, and to make the cloister of the Trinita another Temple Court, so she filled my soul with remorse for my want of generosity, till I decided to speak to my Superior. The devil, who had many motives for opposing my project, suggested a few of them to me, but fearing infidelity to grace I hastened to Reverend Mother and frankly told her everything.

She listened kindly, but, unwilling that the Community should sacrifice their recreations in the cool cloister, she refused. I withdrew satisfied, but fifteen days later I returned to my Superior and told her how the vision of Mary in the Temple haunted me day and night, and that if she would permit, I should like, at least to make a sketch. Without attaching any importance to what I called an “inspiration,” Reverend Mother asked the Community to change their quarters, thinking, perhaps, that a good humiliation would be profitable for a postulant. I began my picture. I shall not say how easy it was to trace the outline of the picture so long stamped on my mind and heart. My pencil seemed to have wings and soon I could send the sketch to my teacher. He approved and even expressed pleasure at the Mystic thought it embodied. I thanked him for his advice and determined to continue my plans. My only aid became the mason sent to cover the wall with fresh lime every morning. On this I had to paint while it was still fresh, or rather, damp. The excessive heat made it difficult to work on the plaster, which at times hardened so quickly. “Signora,” the mason would say, “You must hurry today; the lime will set in five hours!” The Blessed Virgin, however, always kept the wall damp long enough for each day’s task.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June, 1844, Feast of Our Lady of Peace, I finished the face of my dear Madonna. From 6:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M. I worked on that sweet, pure face, the wall remaining perfect all the time. Our Lady is helping me, I thought, but I spoke to no one of my secret. In fact, no one would have believed that the Blessed Virgin could take any interest in the poor

fresco, which I felt sure the Community tolerated only out of Charity. They looked at it with compassion, thinking that it would result for me in a good humiliation. I could easily understand the mistrust that the unfinished picture inspired. It presented a most doleful appearance. “My little field flower,” my “Lily of the Valley,” was certainly anything but attractive. The sky was a dark, dingy blue, the trees yellowish green; the dress of the Madonna a dark, brick red; the mantle canary color; the veil grey; the face copper color.

I was almost horrified at the sight, and asked permission to hang a curtain before the niche. Having done this, I continued to work in solitude. The Mistress of Health sometimes crossed the barricade and came behind my screen to say, “Don’t make yourself ill over such a fright.” I thanked her for her maternal interest. However, though disappointed, I was not discouraged, and confided entirely in the protection of my beloved Madonna. I felt that she was with me and at times my soul was filled with the sweetest consolation. The peace, the purity in her face had the most blessed influence over me. I lived in an unseen world, near Mary in the Temple, alone with God, under the shadow of the Holy of Holies. This influence, which later on the soldiers used to tell me they felt in the presence of Mater Admirabilis, was already a power over my whole being – as it has been over all who have honored her under that sweet title.

At last all was finished except the gold on the border of the mantle and the aureola. My poor mason consoled me by saying, “Patience, Signora, she will be beautiful. ‘Tis a rose seen at dawn, and it will open in the full splendor of noon.” The curtain was still hanging before the fresco. I went every morning to look at my Madonna.

Little by little, as the plaster dried, the colors became less crude, less glaring. I watched with joy as the background became realistic. The dress toned into a pretty pink; the cloak and veil a clear white; the lily spotless in purity; and the face! *She, not I*, had painted *it*. She had

mirrored her virginal beauty on that hard wall, as she was later to impress it upon souls devoted to her. Filled with joy at the sight of such a transformation, I fell upon my knees crying, “O, Immaculate Mother, “it is not I who have made you so pure, so lovely. You have taken up your abode here. I thank you, O my sweet Queen!” and I gave her all the glory of the finished work – her own work – I felt sure.

There remained the gold which had to be carefully mixed and placed. Here another cause for humiliation. The varnish used in mixing the gold powder gave out a sickening odor, which penetrated throughout the house, while the smoke from the little “brasiers” clouded the cloister. I could hear as persons passed, *Povera Sorella*. At three o’clock all was finished. It had taken me one month to paint the picture and three weeks had passed in the drying process.

We were in the beginning of the month of August. The sunlight flooded the cloister near the spot where my *Lily of the Valley*, my *Flower of the Field* was to dwell as the magnet to attract souls to God. I knelt before her calling her the *Madonna del giglie*. My prayer was, “Oh, Immaculate Mother! If, in coming years this picture which you have helped me to paint attracts the homage of any heart, if it reveals any of your hidden virtues, remember that today I refer all the glory to you, and unite now with all those who will hereafter love and venerate you.” I had to come down from my contemplation, as my brushes, paints, varnish etc. etc. were strewn around me. An old Sister passing by asked if I did not need assistance. I gladly accepted her charitable offer and drew aside the curtain.

“Oh, how beautiful! O Mary! O My Mother: O Madonna Mia” she cried, falling on her knees in prayer. I had to rouse her from her quiet ecstasy, and soon all was in order.

I called some of the Children of Mary and told them to prepare candelabra and flowers so as to organize a little fête for the return of our Superior that evening from our Convent of the

Villa Lante. The children exclaimed as they read the inscription in gold placed over the picture, *Ego flos camp et lilium con-vallium*, “O, yes, she is a lily, a beautiful flower.”

They resolved to prepare with the pupils a *Magnificat* to be sung when Mother returned. The hour for the first gathering in the cloister so soon to become a chapel at last arrived. It was a perfect evening, and peace pervaded the tiny sanctuary where the Community and school were assembled. I longed to witness the surprise of all. Not an exclamation was heard. All fell on their knees as if subdued, conquered by the presence of Mary. The holy image looked like a vision from heaven, and silent prayer seemed to be the only fitting homage. Mater Admirabilis was already beginning her mission as sacrament of peace and purity.

The carriage bringing back Our Mother was heard. The portress begged her to come at once to the cloister, but Reverend Mother, believing that a humiliation would be good for me, fearing the effect of triumph on my soul, refused, and saying she was tired, went at once to her room. This was a disappointment to all, and for me, a sacrifice, the first offered to Mater Admirabilis. I remained calm and happy.

At the end of 1845, I left Rome. My farewell to my little Madonna was tender and sad. I was never to see her again. She was one year old. She became, however, the guide and model of my interior life, and has remained so through all the years since then.

No painting has ever been a copy of the Madonna in Rome as to the expression of the face. The Blessed Virgin was the artist at the Trinita, and I have never felt the same kind of assistance since those happy days spent near my Lily of the Valley, my beautiful Field Flower.

The picture of Mater Admirabilis is now classed among the miraculous images of our Blessed Lady. The wall surrounding the fresco is covered with ex-votos, while the fresco itself has been pierced in order that our Mother may be adorned with a crown and necklace.

Shortly after the artist had finished her labor of love, His Holiness, Pius IX, came to the Trinita. Until his coming, the picture had been called the Virgin of the Temple, or the Madonna of the lily, but when our Holy Father knelt in prayer before it, he cried out in admiration, “She is truly Mater Admirabilis, and so this image had been called that ever since.

*Both Mother Perdrau’s words and the concluding commentary were published in the Messenger of the Sacred Heart, October 1899.*

## *The Seal and the Logo of the Society 1800-2000*

**The seal of the Society in its earliest form:** The two hearts of Jesus and Mary are very realistically portrayed. The Heart of Jesus is surrounded by a crown of thorns, the wound is visible, and the cross planted in it; the flames signify love. The Heart of Mary is set slightly behind the Heart of Jesus, with which it seems to form one. It too is pierced, by the sword of Simeon's prophecy, and from it too spring flames of love.

Above, the Eucharistic host, radiant with light, expresses the close link that Madeleine Sophie always made between the Eucharist and the Sacred Heart. A wreath of lilies surrounds the hearts, symbolic of the purity of heart that enables the religious to unite herself to the redemption.

The image means that the object of the Eucharistic adoration is Jesus giving his life out of love for us: *...the Sacred Heart of Jesus, source and symbol of the chief benefits which the love of Christ has bestowed on us...* (1815 Constitutions) which can also be expressed in the words of Saint Margaret Mary: *Behold this Heart which has so loved the human race, and is so little loved in return.*

**The present logo of the Society:** The Heart is part of a dynamic movement: it is open (a way of suggesting the wound) ready to gather all into one. But the striking addition is the world, with the cross planted in its midst, echoing the prologue of the Constitutions: *God's mercy and faithfulness shine forth in a world wounded by sin. He has sent His beloved Son who became one of us, and gave us His life, to set us free ... and to gather together all things in Himself for the glory of His Father.*

The Eucharist is more than ever present: through it *we are drawn into the gift of Jesus to His Father for the life of the world, and in His Body we are gathered into one* (the Constitutions), while *we enter into the mystery of His open side.*

The area of contemplation has been considerably broadened. It is no longer the Eucharist alone that is contemplated in adoring Christ, but the world too becomes the object of our contemplation: *Christ is present, hidden in the heart of the world. Earth could not hold Him in death; He lives and the whole world of time and space is transfigured through His risen life.* (Chapter 1970)

*Agnès Bigo, RSCJ, province of France, pastoral ministry, Douai*

### ***The Seal***

Symbols have many meanings. Though there is no official explanation of the traditional seal, it has generally been accepted that it was the design of St. Philippine Duchesne. The seal shows the hearts of Mary and Jesus between two branches of lilies. One branch was thought to represent the religious and the other to represent the students, both open to the Son, in the spirit of adoration. In this mission of forming students as adorers of the Eucharist, Madeleine Sophie reconciled being a contemplative who was at the same time a teacher.

The monstrance, sun-like in shape, is the vessel which holds the Eucharist for the purpose of adoration and Benediction. St. Madeleine Sophie envisioned perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and this exposition of the Eucharist is suggested in the design of the traditional seal.

*Marie Louise Martinez, RSCJ, a Society archivist*

### ***The Logo***

A symbol eliminates the need for words. The heart of each of us sees and responds to whatever we encounter in a unique and valuable way. It is therefore essential that each one of us interprets symbols for ourselves. This is what the symbol of the heart and the world means for me today.

The heart represents our hearts, the Society, and the Heart of Jesus. Its openness calls us to become as valuable, transparent, and welcoming as Jesus is. It is the shape of a ribbon, to remind us that communication among us is an essential part of our heritage and essential to our survival. It surrounds the whole world to remind us of internationality. We are called to be open, to embrace, to treasure each other.

At the opening of the heart is a three-dimensional cross. It reaches deep and extends wide. The cross is placed at the opening of the heart because, if we are as open as the world and Jesus calls us to be, we will suffer. Without the willingness to suffer, we cannot enter the hearts of each other, cannot be open to the world, or enter the Heart of Jesus.

*Oonah Ryan, RSCJ, director of the Neighborhood Artisans, Detroit, designed the Society logo.*

**Early History of the Devotion to the Sacred Heart**  
**an excerpt from**  
**The Society of the Sacred Heart in North America**  
*Louise Callan, RSCJ*

Devotion to the Sacred Heart, that spiritual force which engendered the order, is in essence and spirit as old as Christianity itself. From the days when our Saviour went about doing good on earth, loving and calling forth love, there has been devotion to the Incarnate Son of God. During His mortal life men came to know this Man in Whom, according to St. Paul's incisive phrase, the fullness of the Godhead dwells corporeally,<sup>1</sup> came to realize that in Him are gathered all divine perfections, above all, infinite love. They saw that love in action, working the redemption of the world and inviting to imitation through discipleship. Not imitation of a mere external sort, but the reproduction of the very principles which directed the conduct and life of Christ. From the crowd that followed Him, He chose a group to know Him personally, intimately, to love Him passionately, to become special instruments in carrying on His divine mission. Theirs was to be no passing, superficial knowledge, but a penetrating study of the life and character of the Man-God Whose invitation they accepted. They would become *scholars* in that excellent knowledge of Christ, *artists* in tracing for all future generations the life-picture of the Master of the Gospel, and *saints* through the realization of this ideal in their own souls.

All this, however, was not strictly speaking devotion to the Sacred Heart, the very essence of which is worship of Jesus Christ considered in the most precious part of His Humanity, His adorable Heart, and in the most appealing of His sentiments toward mankind, His ardent love. Such devotion came rather as a development of the life of faith, unfolding slowly

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<sup>1</sup> Colossians, 2: 9.

through the centuries. Privileged souls there were who, while contemplating the mysterious wound in the Sacred Side, saw therein the wounded Heart, sought refuge in Its depths and understood the treasures It concealed. At length they came to know the Divine Heart as the symbol and epitome of the virtues and the life of Christ. To the mystics of medieval days succeeded the contemplatives and ascetics of later centuries, and in turn the ardent apostles who preached and propagated this cult of love, which was to appear as the divinely chosen means of *rapprochement* between God and souls in modern times.

It was reserved, however, to the spiritual renaissance of seventeenth-century France to produce those varied currents which would unite at length in a common stream of devotion and make public the worship of the Sacred Heart. From the Oratory of the learned and saintly de Bérulle came St. John Eudes, author of the liturgical worship of the Sacred Heart and founder of the first feast in Its honor. From the Ignatian school came Blessed Claude de la Colombière, "the perfect Jesuit,"<sup>2</sup> chosen director of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, whose spiritual life had been modelled after the ideals of St. Francis de Sales. In the soul of this humble Visitandine modern devotion to the Sacred Heart found its first home, inspired by Christ Himself. He it was Who formulated its object, its practice and its spirit, Who chose as special instruments for its propagation the Order of the Visitation and the Society of Jesus, Who revealed the treasures stored therein for all mankind, making those magnificent promises for the apostles of His Heart and for all souls of good will who would accept the love and grace He offered, even pleaded with them to receive.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Henri Bremond, *Histoire Littéraire du Sentiment Religieux en France*, 6: 410.

<sup>3</sup> J. V. Bainvel, *Devotion to the Sacred Heart, The Doctrine and Its History*.

From the day when in the silent chapel of Paray-le-Monial St. Margaret Mary beheld the *Heart That has so loved men*, devotion to the Sacred Heart spread in France in spite of the war waged against it by Jansenists, in spite of "enlightened" ridicule, even in face of misgivings on the part of some of the clergy and opposition from many Jesuits who feared too hasty an adoption of what might prove a feminine delusion, "idle tales." Rome, too, followed her proverbially slow course. Only after three-quarters of a century did the Church give its sanction to the public celebration of the feast of the Sacred Heart. Marie Lezinska, Queen of France, had pleaded with three successive popes for this privilege, and it was in compliance with her request that the Archbishop of Rheims and the assembled French clergy enrolled the nation under the spiritual banner of the Sacred Heart in 1765. Like a fusion of new blood the devotion gave vigor of soul wherever it spread. Penetrating all classes of society, it brought strength and courage for the catastrophic days through which France was to pass.

With the revolutionary outbreak of 1789 the country became the scene of an anti-Christian persecution directed by the spirit of rationalistic philosophy, and advancing steadily towards radical atheism. The leaders of the National Constituent Assembly, armed with legislative power, secured the passage of a series of laws which aimed directly at the overthrow of ecclesiastical authority and the destruction of religion throughout the length and breadth of the land. The Declaration of the Rights of Man, interpreted practically, meant the abolition of the rights of God in human society. The spoliation of Church goods and revenues, the suppression of monastic vows and the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, with its accompanying oath, marked successive stages of the anti-religious crusade which was rendered doubly effective by the confiscation of ecclesiastical property, clerical residences, religious institutions, even those

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devoted to public instruction.<sup>4</sup> Humanly speaking, this flood of persecution seemed destined to wipe religion out of France.

Yet, high as the tide of destruction rose, the heroism of Christianity crested the wave and devotion to the Sacred Heart grew with astonishing rapidity among French Catholics, who saw therein a promise of safety and salvation for themselves and for their unhappy country. The writings of Père Lanfant bear witness to this remarkable extension and to the extraordinary role played by the picture and badge of the Sacred Heart during the revolutionary epoch. But this eloquent apostle merited the hatred of the republicans by his membership in the Society of Jesus before its suppression, his personal renown as court preacher, the ardor of his zeal and the integrity of his faith. In the end he fell a victim to the wrath of his enemies in the September massacres.<sup>5</sup> The fruit of his apostolate was manifested, however, as the political and social upheaval increased in frenzy. To the Heart of Christ the captive Louis XVI turned in his hour of agony, and for thousands of his loyal subjects the picture of the Sacred Heart became a religious shield with which they armed themselves for the warfare of the spirit, thereby drawing upon their heads the fury of the Jacobins. Worn as an emblem of patriotism by the soldiers of the Vendée, the badge of the Sacred Heart became more than ever suspect in the eyes of the revolutionary leaders. To be discovered wearing such a scapular was a pledge of martyrdom. And martyrs there were who bravely mounted the scaffold, condemned for the crime of loyalty to the

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<sup>4</sup> Fernand Mourret, *Histoire Générale de l'Église*, 7: 93.

<sup>5</sup> Henri Fouquieray, "Une Victime des Journées des Septembre: Le Père Lanfant," *Études*, 105: 50-75 and 160-184.

principles of Christ and devotion to His adorable Heart. Confessors in greater numbers and with perhaps even loftier heroism bore a long-enduring persecution, openly or in hiding, or took the road to exile for the sake of a greater good.

Léonor François de Tournély was among the French émigrés who sought refuge from the storm in France under the hospitable shelters offered by neighboring countries. At the seminary of St. Sulpice he had distinguished himself among the most fervent students, impressing his instructors as a character destined to accomplish great things for Christ.<sup>6</sup> As the violence of the revolution increased, de Tournély's noble lineage and steadfast attachment to the royalist cause exposed him doubly to persecution and he was advised by the saintly Sulpician, Abbé Emery, to leave France. Father de Tournély and his friend, Charles de Broglie, like him newly ordained, made their way first to Belgium. They were soon joined by a number of companions from St. Sulpice who shared their desire to follow as nearly as possible the Rule of St. Ignatius and hoped one day to see the re-establishment of the Society of Jesus. United by the bond of intense personal love for Jesus Christ, the little group took the name of *Fathers of the Sacred Heart*.

At Venloo another member joined their ranks. Joseph Varin d'Ainville had been a student at St. Sulpice, but his health had given way under the strain of study and he had quitted the seminary to enter the army of Condé. He saw distinguished service in the campaigns of 1792 and 1793, and as a dashing cavalry officer thought only of honor and advancement in a military career. Having missed a sharp engagement through a leave of absence, he felt himself disgraced and withdrew from the army of Condé. He then sought a commission in the Austrian army corps commanded by the prince of Coburg. Crossing the Belgian frontier, he passed through Venloo

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<sup>6</sup> Agnes de Beaulieu, *Léonor de Tournély et Son Oeuvre*, p. 24.

where Father de Tournély and his newly founded society were residing for a time. One night passed in their company changed the whole course of his life. Bent as he was that evening on military fame, the following morning, July 18, 1794, he surrendered completely to divine grace and enrolled himself forever in the army of Christ. That very day the little company set out for Augsburg, which they reached at the end of a five weeks' tramp. As he entered the city, Varin learned that on the day following his great enlistment his mother had mounted the scaffold to die, offering a last prayer that her son might one day enter the priesthood, to which she felt him called by God. Two years later Joseph Varin was ordained priest.<sup>7</sup>

As superior of the little society, Father de Tournély gave his spiritual sons an example of the most attractive holiness. He was indeed "a very lovable saint," as they said, joining unalterable serenity to simplicity and charity, a contemplative soul to an apostolic heart. The ambition he set before his society was to share in the tremendous task of repairing the disasters of the Revolution by providing means of Christian education for the rising generation in France. Under the direction of the *Fathers of the Sacred Heart*, boys could be trained along the splendid lines followed by the Jesuits of old. But what of the future wives and mothers of France? One day there came to him in prayer a vivid inspiration to bend every effort towards the establishment of *une Société des Religieuses du Sacré Cœur*. It was not the first time such an idea had occurred to him, but it was the decisive call of grace. From that time forward he sought with the aid of his twelve companions to lay the foundation of the order as he conceived it:

A Society whose members were destined to consecrate themselves to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to endeavor to enkindle once more the love of Jesus in souls and to shed the light

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<sup>7</sup> Achille Guidée, *Vie de R. P. Joseph Varin*, p. 8.

of His teaching in their minds; and for this end, to conform themselves to the interior sentiments and dispositions of this Divine Heart and to propagate this devotion by means of education.<sup>8</sup>

Léonor de Tournély did not live to see the establishment of that society... When a premature death overtook him in 1797, he entrusted his project to Father Joseph Varin with the words: "I may have been mistaken regarding the means and the time, but God wills that Society. It will be! It will be!"

The din and devastation of the French Revolution and the glowing flame of devotion to the Sacred Heart were symbolized in the fire that brought Madeleine Louise Sophie Barat into the world. She was a child of lowly parentage in an obscure town of Burgundy, from whose soil were sprung the great apostles of the Sacred Heart, Margaret Mary Alacoque and Claude de la Colombière.

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<sup>8</sup> Beaulieu, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

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