

Margaret Mary Alacoque and the Relational Mystery of the Visitation of Holy Mary

By Wendy M. Wright

In a letter of greeting written from Paris in 1619 to the Visitation monastery in Annecy, the community's foundress Jane de Chantal joyously communicated the relational spirit that was to characterize the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary.

Since our Lord, in His goodness, has gathered our hearts into one, allow me, dearest Sisters, to greet you all, as a community and individually, for the same Lord will not allow me to greet you in any other way. But what a greeting it is! The very one that our great and worthy Father taught us: LIVE JESUS! Yes, my beloved Sisters and daughters, I say the words with intense delight: LIVE JESUS in our memory, in our will and in our actions!... [Have] a spirit of gentle cordiality toward each other, a spirit of recollection of your whole being toward our divine Master... strive for that loving union of hearts which brings about a holy peace and the kind of blessing we should desire to have in the house of God and His holy Mother.¹

With co-founder Francis de Sales, Bishop of Geneva, Mother de Chantal had established an innovative community for women in 1610. Intended neither as a traditional contemplative, enclosed monastic foundation nor as an active community with a specific apostolate, the Visitation was rather to be a place where devout widows, the frail of health, the handicapped and others without a call to severe asceticism could join together and “Live Jesus.” To do so they were encouraged to practice what the founders described as the “little virtues” –humility, gentleness, patience, charity, and simplicity - which were considered central to the Christian life. These virtues were the ones that Christ himself had embodied: “Come to me and learn from me for I am gentle and humble of heart.” (Matthew 11:28ff). That gentle, humble heart of Jesus was to animate

each Visitandine's heart. This vision of the Christian life was profoundly relational. In fact, the mystery for which the community was named, the Visitation of the Virgin Mary to her cousin Elizabeth recorded in the gospel of Luke, was understood to be revelatory of both the mutual loving dynamism of the divine heart and of human hearts. Like Mary, the sisters were to cultivate intimacy with the divine lover and loving relationships with others so that the loving union of hearts of which Jane wrote so beautifully would be realized.²

During the closing decades of the seventeenth century a Visitation sister from the monastery of Paray-le-Monial would receive a series of visions of Christ revealing His Heart that would become the basis for the later world-wide devotion to the Sacred Heart. At first glance, the spirituality of the devotion which this sister, Margaret Mary Alacoque, inaugurated seems far from the spirit of the Visitation as Jane de Chantal and Francis de Sales envisioned it. Margaret Mary's sense of her own "nothingness," her intense focus on suffering, her seeming lack of attention to community relationships breath a different air from that of the Visitation founders. Moreover, the central devotional postures of the Sacred Heart cult, adoration and reparation, seem to direct attention away from the mutuality suggested by the relational spirituality of Jane de Chantal and Francis de Sales. This study represents an initial attempt to address the question: is the relational mystery of the Visitation evident in the spirituality of Margaret Mary Alacoque? In other words, is it possible to find evidence, a generation and a half after the founding of the Visitation of Holy Mary, of the cultivation of loving, gentle relationships at the original core of that community's life?

It is of course open to some debate as to whether the original vision of the Visitation was ever as keenly relational as suggested here. While Salesian spirituality in its other forms, for example lay life, does stress the importance of relationships, especially friendships in the spiritual life, it is possible to argue that the Visitation, as a community of vowed religious, would emphasize other characteristics, such as exclusive intimacy with God, simplicity of character, and cordial but not particular regard for one another.³ While founder Francis de Sales wrote glowing of and practiced spiritual friendship himself, he did hold the common contemporary view that

It is understood that in a well-ordered monastery, the common purpose of all tends to true devotion. So it is not required to make these particular communications there, due to the fear of seeking in particular what is in common, and of passing from particularities to partialities. But it is necessary that those who live among worldly people and embrace true devotion join together in a holy and sacred friendship. By this means they encourage, assist and support themselves as well.⁴

Nevertheless, the relational thrust of Salesian spirituality does, I would argue, leave its mark upon the Visitation. This is clearly seen in the gentle and relationally attentive methods of spiritual formation encouraged by foundress Jane de Chantal and in both founder's insistence that the unique calling of the sisters of the Visitation was to establish a union of hearts.⁵ The congregation had no distinct apostolate other than the work of surrender of the heart. This was to be realized among the members of the community as well as in prayer.

With this in mind, I will explore the writings of Margaret Mary Alacoque, with an eye to discerning whether this charism seems evident either in her own spirituality or in the spirituality of the Visitation at Paray-le-Monial, during her tenure there (1671-1690).

I will pursue this question with reference to the changing climate of French spirituality toward the end of the seventeenth century. The acknowledged difficulty of this approach is that thorough insight into the dynamics of life of the Paray community would require research into the writings of other Visitandines as well as Margaret Mary and into formation documents of the time. With this caveat and the admission that according to her own testimony Margaret Mary was, at least in the early years of religious life, seen as neither a typical nor an exemplary Visitandine, I will nevertheless look for evidence of relational spirituality in her writings. Later in her life she was considered exemplary enough to be named novice mistress and she certainly has served as a spiritual model for later generations because of the attention generated by the great revelations of the Sacred Heart that she received.

My primary sources will be three. First, her autobiography, *Vie par elle-même*. Second, the *Fragments* found in her collected works. And third, her letters, especially the letters to Sr. Felice- Madeleine de la Barge that were penned during the last several years of her life.

The Autobiography: *Vie par elle-même*

This spiritual memoir was written in the year 1685 at the express request of Jesuit Fr. F. J. Rolin. Reluctant to commit this intimate narrative to the eyes of posterity, Margaret Mary nevertheless complied it as an act of obedience, yielding a manuscript of 111 pages. The work was never completed however, for when Fr. Rolin left Paray in 1686, he neglected to order the Visitandine to continue her writing.

This is perhaps the writing through which Margaret Mary is best known as it contains her famous “great revelations” of the Sacred Heart devotion as well as an account of her early life, entry into religion and the extraordinary trials that she describes herself as suffering there. It is difficult, from a twenty-first century American perspective, not to find the autobiography an odd, even repellent document. From its opening pages it focuses on Margaret Mary’s experiences of suffering. From the vantage point of her thirty-odd years she looks back and sees the pattern of her life unfold as a veil of tears. The account of suffering on the one hand accurately depicts the difficult circumstances of her childhood. It also reflects the religious interpretation with which Margaret Mary cloaked all her experiences. Jean Claude Sagne has analyzed the Paray visionary’s life as summed up in the agonized cry of Jesus, “I thirst” (John 19:28). In imitation of Jesus, whose interior suffering was the deep secret of his heart, Margaret Mary’s entire life is reviewed through the lens of interior suffering, a suffering mirroring the obedient love that the Son had for the Father. Her road of love, Sagne points out, was the road of abandonment of self in loving participation with the heart of Jesus, who so abandoned himself in passionate love.⁶

Margaret Mary’s language of suffering was not hers alone.⁷ Jane herself is recorded as holding up the value of what she termed the “Martyrdom of Love”⁸ Nor was the idea of being hidden in the heart of Christ foreign to Visitandines before Margaret Mary. For example, of Mother Marie-Constance de Bressard, who was the superior of the Grenoble monastery, it is said,

Completely consecrated in love to the holy humanity of Jesus, she received intimate communications from the Sacred Heart... [She said] ‘One day, considering Our Lord on the Cross He showed me that His side was open so that

we could see His love and his desire to receive all our hearts in His... My heart was drawn close to this sacred heart... this heart assured me of His special protection and assistance on all occasions that I have recourse to Him'.⁹

But Margaret Mary's intense experience of suffering as the key quality of living Jesus is distinctively her own. Embedded in *Vie par elle-même* are few clues as to the relational quality of either Margaret Mary's own spirituality or that of the community at Paray-le Monial. She does describe herself as a girl as "having a 'tender affection' for her mother." In fact, when she found herself with the desire to be a nun, this desire was conflicted, for mother and daughter "loved each other so dearly that we could not bear to be parted."¹⁰ But there is no hint that this maternal bond played any part in her later life. It was primarily during her adolescence, when mother and daughter were held together in virtually captivity by relatives and Margaret Mary came to be her ill parent's caretaker, that this relationship seems to have held sway.

Other relatives are depicted in *Vie par elle-même* as cruel, uncomprehending, and obstructive to her religious vocation or absent. She makes no mention of childhood friendships. The mere suggestion of possible liaisons with young men leaves her appalled.¹¹ The true intimacy of her youth was not human but divine. Thus of her earliest prayer she wrote:

The blessed virgin has always taken great care of me. I had recourse to her in all my necessities and she has preserved me from great dangers. I did not dare address myself to her divine son, but only to her and I often presented her with the little crown of the rosary, which I said on my bare knees, or genuflecting and kissing the ground at every Ave Maria.¹²

During a youthful illness, Margaret Mary consecrated herself to the Virgin with the promise that if cured, she would one day become one of her daughters. But it was during the domestic confinement she and her mother suffered at the hand of relatives that Margaret Mary began to cultivate the relationship that would remain pivotal until the end of her life.

From that time all my affections turned towards the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, where I sought my only delight and consolation...¹³

I spent the nights as I had spent the days, shedding tears at the foot of my crucifix. There I was given to see without my understanding it, that he deserved to be absolute master of my heart and render me conformable in all things to his suffering life. He wished to constitute himself my master...¹⁴

It was Jesus experienced as present in the sacrament, as a voice heard in her prayer, as a Master and guide, and as a model and companion in suffering, who was to dominate Margaret Mary's relational life, even after her entry into the monastery of Paray-le-Monial in 1671.

Shedding not a tear as she left her mother (although the latter displayed marks of sorrow and affection), Margaret Mary depicts her entry into Visitation life not in terms of the horizontal networks of loving women she encountered but with the vertical imagery of dependence and obedience to God and to those in positions of responsibility. Of her superiors she said:

As I had never known what it was to be guided and directed, I was happy to find myself in a state of dependence, so that I might be able to obey.... and I considered all that was said to one as so many oracles,...¹⁵

Her reflections, of course, reflect in some degree the hierarchical arrangement implied in all religious formation of the time as well as echo Francis de Sales who enjoined the devout to look upon their spiritual guides as angels come down from heaven to take one back there.¹⁶

But all Margaret Mary's relationships, even that most intimate divine love, were cast in terms of verticality and dependence. Asking her novice mistress to teach her mental prayer, the novice was instructed to place herself before the Lord as a blank canvas before a painter. Not comprehended the advice, she was prompted by an inner voice to "Come and I will teach you."

As soon as I went to prayer, my Sovereign Master gave me to understand that the canvas was my soul whereupon he wished to paint all the features of his suffering life, which had been spent wholly in love, silence, privation and solitude and finally had been consummated in sacrifice. These characters he would imprint on my soul, after having purified it from all the stains with which it was as yet sullied, both through love of self and through affection for earthly things and for creatures to whom my compliant nature was much drawn.¹⁷

Vie par elle-même does not purport to be an account of the relational life of the Visitation. It intends to recount a spiritual journey. In other words, it is primarily a record of interiority. His approach to the writing of spiritual autobiography was not without parallel in the era. One only has to read the contemporary spiritual itinerary of Ursuline missionary Marie of the Incarnation, which contains virtually no mention of the intense schedule of physical hardship, encounter with the native people or catechetical labor that dominated the life of this Frenchwoman. This was the era in which the term "spirituality" was identified chiefly with an interior life conceived as distinct from an exterior life.

Thus others in the Paray monastery figure in Margaret Mary's story only scantily. Superiors are mentioned primarily in relation to the many incidents in which Margaret Mary believes she trespassed against her vows of obedience. A rare mention of a community member occurs in an account of the impending death of Sr. de Senecé, a 13 year old sister of the "Little Habit", who Margaret Mary was afraid would die without the sacraments. A fervent intercessory prayer and a promise to fulfill three commands given by the Sovereign master of her soul were the context for mentioning this sister.¹⁸

In general, the quality and nature of human relationships cultivated within the Visitation are not much evidenced. It is worth noting that the nature of her intimate relationship with the divine seems to follow a distinctive pattern. As already suggested, Margaret Mary's spirituality followed very closely the pattern of *imitatio* of the suffering Jesus. In this she viewed herself primarily as recipient. While the language of espousal and passionate intimacy is not absent from her narrative, that intimacy inevitably leads to sharing directly in suffering.

He enkindled therein such an ardent desire to love Him and to suffer that I no longer had any rest. He pursued me so closely that I had no leisure except to think of how I could love him by crucifying myself. His goodness towards me had ever been so great that he has never failed to provide me with means of daring so.¹⁹

Her Lord figures as a very exacting overseer who constantly reprimands, is disappointed with her, and causes her to be constantly mindful of her incapacity and unworthiness. This sternness the Visitandine interprets as an excess of fatherly love.

I am unfaithful, I often fail, and he sometimes seemed pleased that I should do so, both to humble my pride and to make me distrust myself, seeing that without him I could only do evil and would fall continually without being able to rise again. At such times this Sovereign good

of my soul would come to my assistance, and like a good father would stretch out his loving arms toward me saying, “Now thou knowest full well that [thou canst do nothing] without me.” This filled me with gratitude for his loving kindness, and I shed an abundance of tears on seeing that his only revenge for my sins and continual infidelities was an excess of love by means of which he seemed to wrestle with my ingratitude. He would sometime place it before my eyes side by side with the multitude of his graces, thus making it impossible for me to speak to him except by my tears, while I suffered more than I can express. Thus did this Divine Love deal with his unworthy slave.²⁰

The language of obedience, slavery and utter dependence dominates Margaret Mary’s description of her intimate relation with the divine. Sternness and dominance characterize as well her depictions of her dealings with Visitation founder Francis de Sales who on occasion appeared in her inner landscape.

Although I concealed nothing from my Mistress, I nevertheless formed the design of extending her permission with regard to penances and of going beyond her intention. When in the act of doing this, our Holy founder interposed and gave me so severe a reproof that I have never since had the courage to recommence. His words are thus deeply engraven on my heart; ‘What is this, my daughter, dost thou think to please God in surpassing the limits of obedience, which in the foundation and principal support of this congregation, and not austerities?’²¹(52)

It is true that obedience -being a “Living Rule” -figures prominently in the later correspondence of Jane de Chantal, the Visitation’s co-founder. And the biographies of Francis de Sales are not without mention of the occasional appearance of a hidden, severe side to his personality. But these references are embedded in a fuller, more prominent language of cordiality and gentleness. Early Visitation life is better summed up in these phrases penned by Jane de Chantal and quoted at the beginning of this essay. It is my contention that, as the century progressed, the core Salesian teaching of “living between

the two wills of God” that so characterized the balanced spirituality of Francis de Sales, was muted. The Savoyard had always taught “obedience” to God’s will. But he saw that will as having two expressions: “the signified will” and the “will of God’s good pleasure”. The first referred to the divine will discerned through all the means of human discernment: prayer, scripture and tradition, consultation with spiritual advisors, the prick of conscience and so forth. De Sales applauded the exercise of human agency in the work of “Living Jesus”. The “will of God’s good pleasure” referred to those events and influences that happen to us and are outside our human control. These too are manifestations of God’s will. But the true art was to live in the tension *between* the two wills.²² By the second half of the seventeenth century that tension seems to have collapsed. Thus the *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, the work attributed to Pierre de Caussade, Jesuit advisor to a community of Visitandines in Nancy, could hold up abandonment as normative spiritual teaching. This teaching, which focuses almost exclusively on passive human acceptance of God’s will as expressed in the circumstances outside oneself, is, I believe, a truncated version of de Sales’ more complex notion of following the will of God. Muted is human agency. Absent is any Christian humanist optimism in the creature’s cooperation with the Creator’s grace. Submission to the Will of God’s Good Pleasure alone remains.

Indeed, the entire tenor of French spirituality had shifted by the latter part of the century. The hallmark of the French or Bérullian school of spirituality which dominated the ethos of the grand siècle’s second half was an emphasis on the grandeur and omnipotence of God alongside a corresponding emphasis on human nothingness or *anéantissement*. Human capacity and agency was downplayed. Divine agency

highlighted.²³ This spiritual relational imagination mirrored the political and social relationships of the era of the Sun King, Louis XIV, an era noted for its rigid hierarchies and concentration of royal power. A corresponding shift is clearly apparent in Margaret Mary's case as it is in the case of the author of *Abandonment to Divine Providence* and his Visitandine charges in Nancy. Following her 1671 profession Margaret Mary records that her Divine Master spoke to her and said:

Let me do everything in its time; for I will have thee now to be the sport of my love, treating thee according to its good pleasure as children treat their playthings; thou must therefore, abandon thyself blindly and without resistance, allowing me to please Myself at thy expense...

I saw and felt Him close to me, and heard His voice much better than if it had been with my bodily senses... It imprinted on me so deep a sense of self-annihilation, that I felt, as it were, sunk and annihilated in the abyss of my nothingness. Whence I have not been able to withdraw myself. Penetrated with respect for this infinite Majesty. I would have wished to remain either prostrate on my face before Him, or on my knees.²⁴

In this regard it is perhaps instructive to compare Francis de Sales' favored image of Jesus, found in Matthew 11:28. Here is the Jesus who offers rest and respite to one who takes His yoke upon their shoulders, the Jesus who invites one to learn from Him for He is *gentle and humble* of heart. Contrast this with one of Margaret Mary's visitations from her beloved master who likewise invited her to learn from Him.

Learn, he said, that I am a Holy Master and One that teaches holiness, I am pure and cannot endure the slightest stain... if I am gentle in bearing with thy weakness, I shall not be less severe and exact in correcting and punishing thy infidelities.²⁵

If *Vie par elle-même* gives us scant indication of a "world of hearts" or of a spirituality of human relationships in the Visitation of Margaret Mary's day, it does give

us ample evidence of the shape and texture of the intimacy experienced between human and divine hearts. That relationship is characterized by obedience of inferior to superior. Agency in the relationship belongs to God and the human part played is one of submissiveness and abandonment.

Fragments

Writings other than the autobiography give us a clearer sense of the “apostle of the Sacred Heart’s” view of the relational charism of the Visitation. In a fragment traditionally dated 1687, she asks of God, on the feast day of Francis de Sales, for the graces necessary for the Institute, “particularly for the holy charity and unity that he desired for his daughters”.²⁶ God rejects her request several times but finally responds to her entreaties.

Each must make an earnest search into herself for anything that may be an obstacle to my grace, one of the greatest of which is jealousy and envy of each other and a hidden coldness which destroys charity and renders my graces useless.²⁷

Francis de Sales is reported on the same occasion as informing her from his place in heaven that

... a true daughter of the Visitation must be a living host, in imitation of Jesus Christ, immolated to all God’s plans, sacrificed by superiors or afflictions which occur, without any self-concern ...²⁸

At another time, again the date 1687 is traditionally given, the celebration of the Feast of the Visitation prompted the following revelation from the divine Savior in response to Margaret Mary’s prayer to the Virgin for some special graces for the community. In her prayer, Jesus addressed his Mother.

My mother, you have the power to dispense my grace as you please. I am ready, for love of you, to suffer the abuse that they make of it, by the disregard they have for my spirit of humility and simplicity which must keep the daughters of the Visitation hidden in me, their crucified love, whom they persecute by the prideful spirit which has ruptured the bonds of charity and divided what I have united.²⁹

It is possible that this fragment corresponds to the period, obliquely alluded to in the autobiography, when she was commanded by God to deliver a critique of community life, was subsequently cast into inner tumult, exhibited strange behavior, such as the inability to eat, and was suspected by some in the community of being possessed.

On yet another occasion, presumably the autumn of 1677, she prayed fervently to the Virgin on behalf of a community she perceived as lacking charity.

Another time, as we were reciting the “Salve” in her chapel, at the words, “advocata nostra”, she replied, ‘Yes, my daughters, I am indeed here, but it would be with much more pleasure if you would be faithful to my Son.’ And since that time, I have found myself free of the desire which had pressed and tormented me almost constantly, to ask God for the graces of which I have spoken, especially the spirit of charity for which I would have sacrificed a thousand lives if I had them, in order to see it reign in the communities.³⁰

One further Fragment will illustrate the continuing theme of distress over the failure of the Visitation to truly live the charism of its foundation. This section illustrates the extent to which Margaret Mary viewed disunion in community as a heinous fault.

He showed me many religious souls who, because of some disunity with their superiors had been deprived of the help of the Holy Virgin, the saints and the visitation of their guardian angels and plunged in the horrible flames of Purgatory ...³¹

It is well known, through the great Revelations of the Sacred Heart, that Margaret Mary felt called by God to make note of the ingratitude and infidelity of those called to religious life. No doubt this was not a popular message to feel obliged to deliver. In the context of this inquiry, this preoccupation of hers is an interesting one. Clearly, she was aware of the emphasis on charity and the union of hearts in the Visitation charism. Clearly too she observed, or felt she observed, a lack of charity and the absence of heartfelt unity in her own community.

What is unclear to me is the actual manner in which disunity and lack of charity was exhibited. Did this mean that sisters were disobedient or challenged their superiors? Were they, as it appears, uncharitable toward her and suspicious of some of her unusual behaviors? Were they unkind to one another? Did they form cliques? Were her superiors concerned about the same issues? Did they themselves lack charity? Was the attitude of gentleness, so prominent especially in Jane de Chantal's instructions on guidance within the Visitation, actually practiced? In what did charity consist for Margaret Mary? Was it shown primarily between people? Between the individual and God? Was it identified solely with the experience of suffering? Thus was it most clearly evidenced when one suffered some loss or injury on behalf of or because of another?

These questions merit further consideration.

Letters to Sr. Felice-Madeleine de la Barge

The extant correspondence between Margaret Mary and this younger sister gives us special insight into the visionary of Paray. In these letter she is presented to us as spiritual guide and mentor in the Visitation way of life. Sr. de la Barge was a woman of

deep prayer and ardent desire. Her sister in religion sensed this and took her under her wing, encouraging her in the path of pure love and radical abandonment to God. The language of these letters is quite different from that of the *Autobiography* and the *Fragments*. The reader is immediately reminded of the letters of spiritual direction that founding mother Jane de Chantal penned to her charges. The gracious language of loving kinship in Christ is clearly evident.

I beg the Sacred Heart of our loving Jesus to establish the reign of His love and peace in our hearts forever. Mine, beloved sister, blessed him with all its might when, on reading your dear letter, He showed me how much mercy and grace He grants your precious soul. Far from seeing anything bad in all you tell me, I find in it only cause to praise His goodness for His loving watchfulness over you. He wants to bring you to the end He has in mind for you which is, if I am not mistaken, to establish in your heart the reign of His pure love, so that you may reign, I fondly hope, forever in heaven. ...

May everything in us be purified by His crucified love, in which I remain wholly yours with my heart's most sincere affection. It truly cherishes you in that of our good master.³²

Clearly, Margaret Mary has deep affection for Sister de la Barge and sees that affection as part of their relationship in community. I would suggest, however, that a subtle shift has occurred in the half century since the founding of the community. The reign of hearts that the Paray visionary extols is not quite the interconnected world of human hearts of which the founders spoke. That humanist emphasis on human experience – the delightful, consoling, challenging love of others - found in the founders' writings seems absent. Instead, focus is placed upon the heart of Jesus, especially on the suffering of that heart. And while, a desire for charity lived out in the Institute is clearly part of Margaret Mary's hope, she seems not to wish to enjoy such consolations but

yearns instead for a “pure love” born exclusively from suffering. A 1689 letter to Sister de la Barge, addressed as “dear friend”, at the Monastery of Moulins will serve as illustration.

I was consoled on reading your letter. It confirms me more and more in the sentiments this divine heart has always given me in your regard. ... your self-effacement will elevate you to union with your sovereign Good. By forgetting yourself you will possess Him, and by abandoning yourself to Him He will possess you.

... Be to Him a field that he may cultivate as he pleases without any resistance on your part. Remain humbly and peacefully clinging to His good pleasure, altogether hidden away in the blessed darkness of your own abjection. I cannot help thinking more and more that it is there he wants you to be, that it is there He looks upon you with complacency, especially when these precious humiliations bring bitterness to your poor heart. .. God, wishing to possess our heart completely, will not let it taste anything but bitterness in creatures and all things below, so that, in drawing its affections away from them, it may remain quite buried in him and united with him by the love of its own abjection...³³

In conclusion, as this brief survey of Margaret Mary Alacoque’s writings suggests, subtle shifts had occurred in the spirituality of the Visitation of Holy Mary over the generation and a half between the span of time that separated the Paray-le Monial nun and the community’s founders. In some sense this is to be expected: each generation of faithful must make a faith its own, and while attempting to receive a tradition must interpret it according to its own contextualized experience. Margaret Mary’s spirituality of adoration and reparation with its intense focus on the suffering heart of Jesus and the failure to achieve pure love breathes the austere air of the dominant French School of her era and minimizes the Christian humanist sensibility that is evident in the earlier Salesian tradition. Further study might well find all the elements of the Paray Visitandine’s spirituality anticipated in the writings of Jane de Chantal and her contemporary

Vistandines or even in the admonitions of Francis de Sales. But it is clear that the axis of late seventeenth century Salesian spirituality, especially in the Visitation of Holy Mary as experienced by Margaret Mary Alacoque, had shifted. The realization of a world of interconnected divine and human hearts now was not so much a matter of a Mother Superior enjoining her charges to “live Jesus” by the transformation of their hearts into the Savior’s gentle, humble heart as of the adoption of a more submissive, penitential, and austere devotion to the Sacred Heart to make reparation for sin. The community’s religious gaze no longer rested upon the simultaneous realization of vertical (divine) and horizontal (human) relationships - encoded in the mystery of visitation of Mary and Elizabeth carrying the transforming gift of God to one another - but was cast upwards toward an inclining but magisterial divinity whose proper worship human beings seemed no longer able to achieve.

¹ Quoted in my “‘That Is what It Is Made For’: The Image of the Heart in the Spirituality of Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal” in *Spiritualities of the Heart*, edited by Annice Callahan, R.S.C.J., (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1990), 152.

² See Joseph F. Chorpenning OSFS “Connecting Mysteries: The Visitation and the Holy Family in the Salesian Tradition (from St. Francis de Sales to the *Année Sainte* [1867-1871]) in *La Sagrada Familia en el siglo XIX: Actas del Cuarto Congreso Internacional sobre La Sagrada Familia... de 1998* (Barcelona: hijos de la Sagrada Familia/Nazarenum, 1999), 811-33. See also H  l  ne Bordes, “Charit   et humilit   dans l’oeuvre de Fran  ois de Sales,” *XVIIe*, 43 (1991), 15-25 and her “La meditation du myst  re de la Visitation par Fran  ois de Sales et l’esprit de l’ordre de la Visitation,” *Visitation et Visitandines*, 69-88.

³ See my article, “The Visitation of Holy Mary: The first years” in *Religious Orders of the Catholic Reformation in Honor of John Olin*, edited by Richard L. DeMolen (New York: Fordham University Press, 1994), 217-250. Sr. Mary Pat Burns, V.H.M. does not emphasize this dimension of the community’s life. Cf. “Visitandines” in *Dictionnaire de spiritualit  *, T. , 1002-1010. On the relational emphasis in DeSales’ life see Ren   Champagne, *Fran  ois de Sales ou la passion de l’autre*, (Canada: Mediaspaul, 1998).

⁴ *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Pt.III, Ch.19. In this paper I have used the S.F.S. Publications translation, (Bangalore, India, 1990), 170-71.

⁵ See my “Jane de Chantal’s Guidance of Women: The Community of the Visitation and Womanly Values” in *Modern Christian Spirituality: Methodological and Historical Essays*, edited by Bradley Hanson (Atlanta, GA: Scholar’s Press, 1990), 113-38.

⁶ Jean-Claude Sagne, “La personnalit   spirituelle de Marguerite Marie” in *Sainte Marguerite-Marie et le message de Paray-le-Monial*, ed. R. Darricau, B. Peyrous (Paris: Descl  e, 1993), 175-89.

⁷ It is intriguing to consider Margaret Mary in light of the phenomena Michel de Certeau in *The Mystic Fable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) has described: the evolution of a distinctive linguistic reality that came into prominence in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which he termed la “mystique”. One of the features of this new “language”, in fact a “new science,” was that it created a “space” that resisted the speculation of theologians and professionals.

⁸ See my “Jeanne de Chantal and the ‘Martyrdom of Love’: the Exploration of a Theme” in *Salesian Insights*, edited by William C. Marceau, CSB (Bangalore, India: Indian Institute of Spirituality, 1999), 13-28.

⁹ Quoted in Henri L’Honor  , “Le culte du Coeur du Christ    la Visitation avant Marguerite-Marie” in Darricau, 124.

¹⁰ The most recent French edition is *Autobiographie*, in *Vie et oeuvres de Sainte Marguerite-Marie*, presentation du professeur Darricau, Tome I (Paris: Editions Saint-Paul, 1990). In this paper I have used the 1930 translation by the Sisters of the Visitation reprinted as *The Autobiography of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque* (Rockford, Illinois, 1986), 32.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹² *Ibid.*, 20.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁴ Ibid., 25.

¹⁵ Ibid., 57.

¹⁶ Cf. *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Pt.I, chap.4.

¹⁷ *Autobiography*, 52.

¹⁸ Ibid., 114-15.

¹⁹ Ibid., 52.

²⁰ Ibid., 83.

²¹ Ibid., 52.

²² Cf. *Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal: Letters of Spiritual Direction*, edited by Wendy M. Wright and Joseph F. Power, O.S.F.S., translated by Péronne-Marie Thibert, V.H.M.(Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1988), 40-43.

²³ See my “The Salesian and Bérullian Spiritual Traditions” in *Alive For God In Christ Jesus: Proceedings from the Conference on the Contemporary Significance of the French School of Spirituality*, (Buffalo: St. John Eudes Center, 1995), 157-67.

²⁴ Autobiography, 58-59.

²⁵ Ibid., 64-65.

²⁶ “Fragments” in *Vie et oeuvres de sainte Marguerite-Marie Alacoque*, Tome.II, (Paris: Editions Saint Paul, 1991), 63. The translations from the Fragments are my own.

²⁷ Ibid., 62.

²⁸ Ibid., 64.

²⁹ Ibid., 65.

³⁰ Ibid., 66.

³¹ Ibid., 70.

³² “Lettres” in *Vie et oeuvres*, Tome II, 283. I have used the Clarence A. Herbst, S.J. translation in *Letters of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque*, (Orlando, FL: Men of the Sacred Heart, 1976), 121.

³³ *Vie et oeuvres*, 330-31. *Letters*, 98.