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## ► To cite this version:

Laurence Lux-Sterritt. Clerical Guidance and Lived Spirituality in Early Modern English Convents. Laurence Lux-Sterritt and Claire Sorin. Spirit, Faith and Church. Women's Experiences in the English-Speaking World, 17th-21st centuries, pp.60-91, 2012. hal-01408181

**HAL Id: hal-01408181**

**<https://hal.science/hal-01408181>**

Submitted on 3 Dec 2016

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## CHAPTER TWO

### CLERICAL GUIDANCE AND LIVED SPIRITUALITY IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH CONVENTS<sup>1</sup>

LAURENCE LUX-STERRITT

In early modern England, Catholic subjects incurred harsh penalties on account of their faith, which was not only illegal but also considered akin to treason. The recognition of the Pope's spiritual authority was accounted incompatible with a subject's duty of obedience to the English monarch, who was both the head of state and the governor of the Church of England, as stipulated in Elizabeth I's 1559 Act of Supremacy. Later, in 1563, the Elizabethan *39 Articles of Religion* disavowed all the essential tenets of Catholic life. Pope Clement VII responded in 1570, excommunicating Elizabeth in a Bull calling Catholic subjects to deny the queen's authority. A movement of Catholic recovery was organized, mainly at the English college founded in 1568 at Douai by Cardinal Allen, for the training of young priests whose vocation was to return to England as missionaries. The mission, quickly spearheaded by the Society of Jesus, was so successful in its recruitment of trainees that the English Parliament passed an *Act Against Fugitives Over the Sea* in 1571, in order to dissuade the exodus of young men seeking ordination abroad. With time, it became treason even to hear the Mass, or to have commerce with known missionaries on English soil.<sup>2</sup> The severity of this penal system forced Catholics to withdraw to the relative safety of the household, and to practise their faith in secret.

Yet English Catholicism was diverse and multi-faceted. In order to avoid heavy fines, the forfeiture of their estates, imprisonment or even death, some chose to compromise with the established Church. They attended the compulsory Anglican services on Sundays, thereby publicly displaying their obedience to the letter of the law, but they continued to practise their own faith privately at home. The pragmatism of these so-called Church Papists was often criticized by the more radical element of the English Catholic community, for whom attendance to Anglican services was a betrayal of the Roman faith.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, a considerable proportion of Catholics withdrew from the national Church and were therefore listed as non-conformists, or recusants, to bear the full brunt of the law.<sup>4</sup> Others still chose to emigrate to a Catholic country on the Continent, to live their faith openly and without

fear of punishment, often in France or the Spanish Provinces.<sup>5</sup> After the disillusion which followed James I's accession to the English throne in 1603, an estimated 5,000 Catholics of both sexes fled persecution and found refuge on the Continent; although some of these expatriates led a simple lay life, many of them entered a religious institution.<sup>6</sup>

When they took the decision to enter a convent, English Catholic women began an entirely new life. Like all nuns, they left the secular world to become devoted to God; yet in their particular case, this separation from the world was made all the more significant since it entailed a life in exile on the Continent, far away from their homes. The first stable convent specifically for English members was a Benedictine house founded in Brussels in 1598. The Poor Clares followed suit in the town of Gravelines in 1607, the Augustinians in Louvain in 1609, then (amongst others), the Sepulchrines in Liège in 1642 and the Carmelites in Lierre in 1648. Each of these institutions, once securely settled, branched out to other cities, thereby multiplying the houses of each Order. The lives of these communities have recently been thrown into light thanks to the research undertaken by the AHRC-funded project entitled *Who Were the Nuns? A Prosopographical Study of the English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800*. Through its website, this project has made available a small sample of records documenting English convents and, most importantly, provided a searchable database allowing researchers to find out details about every single English woman who entered holy Orders at the time.<sup>7</sup> Used in conjunction with recent publications such as Claire Walker's *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe*,<sup>8</sup> and with the forthcoming volumes of edited primary sources to be published by Pickering and Chatto from 2012,<sup>9</sup> such new resources will undoubtedly open this yet little-researched field to exciting new scholarship.

This essay explores issues regarding the practice of Catholic spirituality in early modern English convents. In the highly normative Post-Tridentine Church, nuns were not left free to practise their faith according to their own will. The reforming Council of Trent (1545–63) had sought to regain control and impose order over every aspect of Catholic life, and had been particularly thorough in its dealings with female religious. Conventual life thus obeyed several layers of strict rules. Blanket general rules were imposed upon all convents (such was the case of enclosure), but each Order also referred to the more precise Rules or Constitutions left by its founders (regarding silence, learning, asceticism or work, for instance). Finally, each individual followed the advice of her confessor or director, who guided her upon her spiritual journey. The analysis of the roles played by directors in religious women's spiritual lives poses several questions regarding the thorny issue of authority. What did learned directors, with their reliance upon theological knowledge, advocate as sound paths to the divine when advising women, with their reputedly weaker abilities? Was their guidance deemed indispensable for a religious woman hoping to find God? Did the

rationalized methods advocated by clerics suit female spirituality and the women's lived experience?

### **Order, Method and Exercises: How to Experience Spiritual Union**

Spiritual guidance took many forms. Nuns would undertake spiritual exercises as a means to improve the state of their souls; each step of the exercises was designed to promote further union with God. Most communities used the Ignatian model of the Spiritual Exercises, adapted for the purposes of enclosed women. This was, in itself, a testimony to the success and popularity of Jesuit spirituality in the 17<sup>th</sup> century since, originally, Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556) had devised his Exercises for his Society, that is to say for men with a missionary vocation. Yet with time, Jesuits adapted the Exercises not only to the needs of laymen but also – against the recommendations of the founder himself – of lay and religious women.<sup>10</sup>

In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Jesuit Exercises became common practice in convents of all denominations. Through the performance of specific steps, and using ideas and images to contemplate and pray, nuns hoped to achieve indifference to and detachment from the world and from themselves; they endeavoured to leave behind all earthly preoccupations and offer their souls entirely to God, allowing him to work his will in them. Conventual archives abound in manuals dispensing advice for the undertaking of the Exercises; most were penned by clerics, but a few were authored by nuns themselves.

The Exercises taught the penitent a keen attentiveness to the work of God within her soul; they necessitated a thorough examination of conscience and strict guidance through each stage of the retreat. Ritual performance was crucial: it enabled the nun to forget herself and reach out for the divine.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the women were encouraged to focus fully upon the observance of precise steps and the correct performance of the task. In *A Most Profitable, and Necessary Advertisement for all Such, who Shall Make the Spiritual Exercise*, Father Steven Robinson, once director of the Carmelites of Hoogstraten, called this “the true method of doing it well”.<sup>12</sup>

You must begin those exercises by endeavoring to gain those dispositions, which are required to do them well. And to this end, you must attentively read in the very first day this same Advertisement once, or twice over, together with the Method of Mental Prayer. But in order you may the better comply with all these duties, and with more advantage, before, you begin this lecture, [...] you must 1st, kneel down, and recite devoutly a short prayer to obtain the Grace of doing it well [...]. 2dly, If

you meet with some difficulty in the lecture, you must mark it down in a paper, which must serve to no other use, than this; and after words, you must beg of your Confessor the explication of it. 3dly, You must firmly purpose to exactly practise all the good advices, this lecture will furnish you with. [...] 5thly, As soon as you see the directour, lay open to him all your doubts, and difficulties.<sup>13</sup>

This quotation illustrates several characteristics of spiritual direction. The confessor was always presented as the point of reference, the wise guide helping the penitent through the difficulties of her retreat. He was the guardian of theological knowledge, able to explain a lecture and dissipate doubts. His authority was visibly embedded in the text, through the repetitive use of the imperative voice or of modal verbs such as “must” and “shall” with each injunction. Finally, the director expounded his method, warning nuns of the necessity to heed his orders exactly, step by step; for this purpose, his manual was divided into numbered sections, each often subdivided into bite-size directions, as in the example above. The performative aspect of this ritual was of such importance that it was to be laid out in detail before even touching upon the actual spiritual content of the exercise.

Yet not all the manuals for the undertaking of spiritual exercises were authored by clerics; some nuns took it upon themselves to guide their own Sisters through this essential part of their spiritual life. Their approach testified to their complete endorsement of clerical methods, offering simple adaptations of those. For instance, at the Sepulchrine convent of Liège, Elizabeth Ayray (1656–1705), in religion sister Victoria, wrote her own *Considerations for the Ten Dayes Exercises*. She prescribed a full course of ten days as practised annually by the Jesuits themselves. In other respects too, Ayray imitated the clerical model faithfully, ordering her manual in a similar fashion, and emphasizing the importance of a system to be followed scrupulously. She divided her *Considerations* into ten sections (one for each day), each section being itself subdivided into smaller parts, in which nuns were to contemplate specific questions. For instance, after considering the current state of their souls, dwelling upon their sins, their bad habits, or their personal inclinations, nuns should dedicate the seventh day to spiritual concerns. Ayray advised the following questions for meditation:

What esteeme doe I make of the meanes of my salvation, of Holy Mass, confession, comuion [sic], prayer, meditation etc. 2dly, what preparation doe I make to prayer, to communion, and confession? With what diligence and industry doe I make my 400 examins of confession? doe I performe my duty heerein out of custome onely, or with life and spirit?<sup>14</sup>

When following instructions, the nun was not to decide upon anything; her mind was set free of such preoccupations, as she focused solely upon the dutiful execution of the tasks set out for her. Order was paramount, and the instructions were systemized and numbered, with sections and sub-sections, to avoid any confusion or distraction. Thus entirely dedicated to the performance of the rite, the nun emptied her soul and, free of emotion or thought, she could reach serenity. Through this vacuum, she became a non-person, an expression of the medieval “empty vessel”, or holy receptacle to be filled with the divine. A Benedictine writer used this image in a lively metaphor, urging her Sisters to empty their souls and make themselves available to God: “Thou art to be filld with good. Poure out the evell. Imagin that God would fill thee with hony: if thou art filld with vinegar, where wilt thou put the hony”.<sup>15</sup> This pure soul, or virgin spirit, became “As a cleare glasse without spot”.<sup>16</sup> From this stage onwards, divine love would fill the soul and make it ever purer in a self-perpetuating process: once the soul was ready to be united with God, divine love would in turn increase its purity, in an ever ascending spiral.<sup>17</sup>

The nuns’ understanding of spiritual union as a journey made up of distinct stages followed the explanations dispensed by their directors. Father John Rigolené, SJ, copied Father Peter Champion’s treatises on divine love for the benefit of the Carmelites of Hoogstraten. His first treatise, entitled *The Amiable Jesus or The Practise of Love towards our Lord Jesus Christ* explained how mystical union was divided into three stages of love: affective, effective and passive. In order to progress from the first stage to the last, nuns should undertake the Exercises with great zeal:

our own part, we ought with zeal embrace, and practise with diligence the exercises of divine love. Ther are three sorts, affective, effectual and passive. Affective are the inward affections which the soul produces towards the adorable person of Jesus Christ. Effectual are the proofs or effects which evidence the sincerity and solidity of our affections. Passive are the operations of Jesus Christ in a soul well dispos'd.<sup>18</sup>

Having stripped herself of all earthly concerns, the nun first experienced affective love. This love was not merely a base emotion, derived from the lower part of the soul and of a sensual nature; it was on the contrary a virtuous *affect*, detached from animal nature. Then, through her constant efforts, her perseverance and the performance of systematic exercises, the retreatant experienced effective love. According to the treatise, this love allowed the nun “to assimilate the soul to the word incarnate as far as this life is capable of assimilation.” During this stage, they made themselves “like unto [...] the adorable Person of our Lord”.<sup>19</sup> This required the

practice of mortification, although punishment was not to be sought for its own sake, but rather as a way to experience something akin to the suffering of Christ.

Meditation upon Christ's Passion, evoking each station of the Cross according to a simple method, aroused feelings of compassion and empathy and brought nuns to mortify their own senses. This stage of their spiritual journey led them effectively to change their inclinations, desiring now to identify with the suffering Christ rather than to live a comfortable life. Transformed into purely spiritual beings, the nuns would finally experience passive love, a state in which they united with God so perfectly as to become one with him. They were then but strangers to themselves, mortified by the assimilation of the word incarnate, a living image of Christ on earth, unspoiled by human sin. Their rejection of the world did no longer spring from their own efforts, but from the supernatural and transforming effects of God's love. They no longer sought earthly friendships, entertainment or status, they were free from self-will and pride, transcending their mortal coil and uniting with the divine.<sup>20</sup> Of course, such passive love bore no common measure with earthly love: it was construed not as a "low" appetite but as an expression of the upper portion of the soul, a superior and virtuous *affect*. It was, after all, the true purpose of a religious life, the goal towards which all efforts reached, the one achievement nuns longed for.

Godly union affected the nuns not only spiritually but physically also, and Father Rigolené warned the Carmelites that the encounter came with such intensity that it was like a blow, a "stroak in the heart", a wound inflicted upon a body which then "pined" and "sighed" or "groaned". He described this experience in highly physical terms, evoking the mystic's "languishing fits of love".<sup>21</sup> The Church felt that such intense experiences should be closely supervised, fearing that the women should misinterpret or misuse the workings of divine love.

### **Clerical Guidance as a Safeguard of Female Spirituality**

The guidance of confessors was the backbone of both male and female religious life in the early modern Catholic Church, but the relationships of penitents with their confessors could be quite traumatic. In fact, the sacrament of confession was one of the issues to which reformer Martin Luther (1483–1546) objected most energetically, having himself suffered great anxiety, even panic at the prospect while still an Augustinian monk.<sup>22</sup> Yet the Council of Trent saw fit to reinforce clerical authority even further; one of the collaterals of this policy was the vindication of confessors as the essential guides without whom no individual, religious or lay, male or female, could ever hope to purify their souls. For a religious person therefore, penance was at the very heart of the daily practice of devotion.

The Benedictines of Cambrai, for instance, used clerical instructions which called to their attention their human frailty. Retreatants were warned that, left to their own devices, they would necessarily stray in their choice of books and in their practice of meditation. They would misuse their time according to their whims. They would be blind to their own faults and would not see “their vices, their passions and spiritual necessities which, for want of that assistance, lurk in them undiscovered or if seen they appear in borrowed dresses, which self love never fails to clothe them with”.<sup>23</sup> They could not hope to direct themselves since a guide must, by definition, already know the way. Such enlightenment was the privilege of confessors who, as they trained for that purpose, were familiar with the teachings of the Church and the wisdom of theology.

If clerical guidance was necessary to both men and women religious, it was deemed all the more crucial for nuns since, as the general introduction to this volume highlights, women were believed to be defective by nature.<sup>24</sup> Their perceived physical, moral and spiritual inferiority was said organically to bind them to terrene vices and make them prone to sin.<sup>25</sup> Women, in the image of their collective mother Eve, were easily duped and would always incline towards the satisfaction of their senses rather than Godly obedience and humility. In order to underpin this general belief, Tridentine decrees pointed to examples of unruly nuns: through the ages and across the whole of Europe, women who were allowed to develop their own relationship with the divine could be deceived.<sup>26</sup> Some who believed they experienced Godly visions were in fact possessed by demons, which manipulated them with as much ease as the serpent had manipulated Eve. Thus, since the Middle Ages, priests had become expert at discerning holy experiences from demonic ones; nuns who claimed to have received special favours from God through ecstasies or visions were to be closely examined. The 17<sup>th</sup> century, also known as the *siècle des saints*,<sup>27</sup> abounded in cases of visionary women; some of them, upon examination, turned out to be deliberate frauds, whilst others were declared possessed by devils. This period of intense devotion would test the exorcists’ methods to the limit and be the theatre of abuses in this field, much to the outrage of Protestant polemicists.<sup>28</sup>

To avoid the scandals caused by uncontrolled female mysticism, strict clerical guidance was deemed necessary.<sup>29</sup> In *A Most Profitable, and Necessary Advertisement*, Father Robinson instructed the Carmelites of Hoogstraten and repeatedly emphasized the importance of submission to clerical guidance. Nuns, he declared, must rely upon the counsel of their directors, without which they could not achieve divine union. They should never enter into any exercises or retreat unsupervised since, despite their best intentions, the outcome would be blighted by their flawed nature. He explained:



To make the Spiritual Exercises is nothing else, than to retire yourself from the noise, and distractions of the world, that you may the better for a few day's time treat with God, and with your soul, by the means of a prudent directour about the reformation of your life, and of the true method of doing it well [...].<sup>30</sup>

Directors were the “means” to spiritual enlightenment; to some extent, Robinson implied, they were the representatives of the Lord on earth, nearly on a par with God. Indeed, Robinson defined the purpose of the Spiritual Exercises as “to take advice of God upon the state of life you have embraced”; then, in lieu of God’s advice, he immediately proceeded to give his own: “I advice you to begin those exercises with a clear, and open manifestation all your thoughts and intentions to your unworthy directour.” It was clear that God’s advice and the director’s were to be considered as one and the same. The implication was that, since God trusted confessors to lead their penitents’ souls to him, the nuns should trust them also without any reluctance.

Clerics were well-versed in theology and intimate with the divine mysteries; they were therefore deemed able to gauge the spiritual needs of individuals and of communities better than the interested parties themselves. Overall, Robinson encouraged his penitents “to blindly obey to the directions, and advices, of their Confessour, whom God has chosen to this employment”.<sup>31</sup>

With few exceptions, nuns generally recognized the authority of their spiritual directors as a necessary condition for a holy religious life. Although by then reputed wilful and somewhat rebellious since she had left the Order of the Poor Clares, Mary Ward (1585–1645) wrote during a retreat:

I will endeavor to be always greatly united with my derector, because God dos govern me and enfuse his holy grace into my soule by him, he also doth manifest the devine will, and following his derection I shall infallibly receive suffitient grace to execut the same perfitly.<sup>32</sup>

In the papers of the Cambrai Benedictines, copies of dozens of letters authored by various spiritual directors have been preserved.<sup>33</sup> Each of these came as an answer to the solicitations of nuns who requested the advice of their confessors on points of spirituality and conscience. In their replies, clerics sometimes appear overwhelmed by their penitents’ demands. When nuns wrote in distress about their directors’ delayed replies, they were chided for their impatience. When one requested extensive guidance on a

particular point, the cleric wondered: “doe you intend I shall compose a book for you?”<sup>34</sup>

Yet even as he wrote on the subject of obedience and submission, Robinson bemoaned the tendency which he found in some nuns to withhold information from their confessors, and to follow their own methods of meditation.<sup>35</sup> Manuscripts belonging indiscriminately to all the Orders recommended the greatest mistrust towards one’s own self-will, or personal preferences in matters of spirituality. Those who did not blindly submit to the guidance of clerics may do so for a variety of reasons, all of which were denounced as sinful. For instance, a document addressed to beginners in the Benedictines of Cambrai warned new Sisters against overzealous righteousness which would make them consider any criticism as misguided; it also denounced misplaced shyness, which could prompt them to shrink from the full disclosure of their sins for fear of losing their confessor’s esteem.<sup>36</sup>

The sheer abundance of writings reinforcing the authority of spiritual directors and highlighting their guidance as an absolute necessity testifies to underlying tensions. Indeed, if many women endorsed this gendered and hierarchized view of their spiritual journey, some found it difficult to comply with, especially when the divine calls they experienced did not meet with the approval of clerics. Mary Ward herself, despite her earlier resolution to submit to her confessor’s will, found it impossible to compromise with the divine order she had received in 1611 to found a Society of Jesus for women. For the beginning she knew clerics would never accept such a vocation; she later recalled receiving both God’s command and his warning in a letter to her Jesuit supporter John Gerard: “Take the same of the Society. Father General will never allow it. Go to him.”<sup>37</sup> Indeed, the Jesuit General never approved Ward’s vocation, and neither did the Pope; the “Jesuitess” was to spend twenty years attempting to secure approbation for an Institute which, though it seemed to her to be God’s plan, failed to comply with the Church’s norms. Yet she refused to deviate from her path which she held directly inspired by God and therefore nonnegotiable.<sup>38</sup> When God’s will and the will of clerics were not the same, how did women negotiate the tensions between the two sources of authority they had been taught to value above all else?

### **Nuns’ Lived Experiences: The Issue of Unmediated Mysticism**

Personal experience of divine union was at the centre of the spiritual lives of nuns. The obituaries of various communities testify to the mystical enlightenments of many other women such as Clare Vaughan (1638–87) in religion Dame Clare, from the Pontoise Benedictines, or Catherine

Gascoigne<sup>39</sup> (1623–90), in religion Dame Justina of Santa Maria, from the Paris Benedictines, whose obituary declared:

seekeing God puerly in all she did, and suffered, she made great progress in contemplation & union with him whom her soule loved. [...] and by this stricte uinon of her soule with God she recevied that devine light to finde out, & faithfully trace, those secret, & hidden ways of perfection, to which she afterwards arrived.<sup>40</sup>

When nuns wrote about their lived experiences of spiritual union, they expressed their entire dedication to a God who had come to represent their entire world. Dame Justina's aunt, also named Catherine Gascoigne (1601–76), wielded much authority in the Cambrai Benedictines, of which she was twice Abbess.<sup>41</sup> She wrote poetry which was representative of this trend:

One thing alone I crave,  
Namely  
All in everything.  
This One  
I seek,  
The only One  
Do I desire.  
Rooted in One  
Is all,  
From the One  
Flows all.  
This is the very One  
I seek  
Will have  
Only then  
Be[en] filled.<sup>42</sup>

Her sister, Margaretta (1608–1637), in religion Margaret, also wrote poetry in which she expressed the complete annihilation of her self and hailed God as the alpha and omega of her entire world:

I would see nothing  
Heare nothing  
Feele nothing  
Know nothing, [...]  
Have nothing  
But thee and thy will.<sup>43</sup>

Nuns devoted their every waking moment to God; they dedicated their thoughts, their work, their prayers to him and lived, it appears, in a state of perpetual longing. Such Christo-centric devotion clearly placed God at the heart of the nuns' *raison d'être*; they existed for him only, even in their most common daily acts. In these devotional writings, confessors and advisers are emphatically *not* on a par with Christ, in comparison to whom all fades into insignificance.

An intense sense of craving emanates from the many manuscripts in which religious women envisaged the blissful end of their spiritual journey through contemplative, passive love:

O my dearest Lorde and my God, O my best beloved spouse and friend choosen above all others. O my love, my refuge, my joy, and whatsoever my heart can desire? [...] O that my soule with all its powers myght perfectly be united unto thee, never more to be separated from thee, but allwaise to rest in thee, that so enjoying thy sweet embraces it may be drowned and melted into thy owne divine substance.<sup>44</sup>

English nuns from all Orders wrote about their experiences of mystical love, and embraced their passive state with particular zeal as a type of “contemplative activism”.<sup>45</sup> They evoked their yearning to meet their bridegroom in texts which abound with metaphors of all-consuming love and longing. Whether in verse or prose, the women presented themselves as lovers, pining for the object of their passion. These writings, focused upon the moment of impending union with God, provide an interesting contrast to other devotional texts; there, the lexical field changes, leaving aside the usual register of reserve to reclaim a more passionate vocabulary. To express this heightened experience, the word “desire” is found recurrently. When writing about “the dear object of [her] love”, the style of one Poor Clare author becomes a stranger to restraint; as Father Champion announced in his treatise used by the Carmelites, the nun pines, sighs, groans, and languishes; she expresses feelings which possess her “ardently”, “with an incomparable ardour”, and “with passion”.

The common topos of the furnace of love, so dear to Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross,<sup>46</sup> is found in numerous documents; in this particular example, the nun confesses: “my hart burns with desire to see & possess you”, “I burn with desire to take my flight towards heaven”.<sup>47</sup> The Benedictine Catherine Gascoigne echoed the same sentiment when she described her life,

aspiring daily to be wholly burn'd with this inflamed love and nothing know but him alone, whom I desire to be my portion, part & all in all to me.<sup>48</sup>

Another Benedictine called for God to enter her soul, “that [...] I may be quite consumed in thy love”.<sup>49</sup> Ultimately, many used images of penetration, when they felt their hearts pierced with God’s love; the fleshy boundaries of the body no longer appear hermetic but are erased to allow the merging of the nun’s physical entity with God’s spiritual being, as they unite to become one. A Poor Clare writer, considering Jesus’s crowning with thorns, eloquently showed the blurring of the self when she wrote:

I adore you, O the God of my hart, I adore your ineffable love which has reduc’d you to this state. [...] make an end of your work, transpierce your hart with your thorns, O good Jesus, let them come forth of that sacred head, all bath’d with your blood and burning with your love, as enflam’d darts to pierce me with their points & enflame with their fire.<sup>50</sup>

Through her *imitatio Christi*, the nun experienced the pain inflicted upon Jesus in his Passion, and in their mystical union, it was no longer clear where her self ended and God began.

Although devotional writings usually express deep contempt for emotions as the expressions of bodily cravings, desire and passion appear rehabilitated in the context of mystical love. This was made possible by the shift operated in the very experience of divine union, during which all was bathed in God’s glory and therefore made holy and pure. The passions of a mystic, it was understood, bore nothing in common with animal appetites. At this stage of passive love, or pure love, the nun was free of lowly emotions; she became filled with spiritual transports, a bliss so intense and Godly that it could not be adequately expressed in words.<sup>51</sup> Because of the limitations of earthly language, the vocabulary used to describe these holy experiences had to be borrowed from that of human love, for lack of anything better, although this remained highly inadequate. Thus, many scholars have commented upon the undeniably sensual, even erotic nature of some accounts describing the spiritual union of a pure soul to her bridegroom.<sup>52</sup>

Unsurprisingly, clerical authorities were somewhat concerned with the potentially sexualized nature of mystical raptures; since the Middle-Ages, even the most renowned female mystics fell under the close scrutiny of Church delegates dispatched to assess the veracity and the Godliness of their visions. Saint Teresa of Avila (1515–82), who had been canonized by Pope Gregory XV in 1622, had been investigated by several priests to ascertain whether her unorthodox spiritual methods were inspired by God or evil spirits. Teresa, before becoming a great Saint and exemplar for generations of religious women, had experienced long years of discontent due to conflicts with her directors, who were troubled by her unmediated,

powerful spiritual experiences. Later, when her sanctity was recognized and she was asked to testify in writing, she took the opportunity to chastise spiritual directors who, she claimed, were so enamoured with their authority that they condemned anything which eluded them, failing to recognize God's work as it unfolded in front of their very eyes. Those were no longer useful spiritual guides but rather impediments to an inspired soul, and she accused them of attempting "to tamp God down by controlling her".<sup>53</sup>

Thus, the relationship between spiritual direction and mystical union was a delicate, sometimes tense affair. Many nuns could not envisage their journey to the divine without the clear guidelines given by their confessors, or without the help of the methodological landmarks provided in the Spiritual Exercises. But experiences varied and, for others, such guidance proved restrictive, even stifling; far from providing spiritual light, it rather snuffed it out.

For such religious, contemplation and passive prayer were the privileged paths to holiness. This method required much less intervention on the part of the spiritual director, and was advocated by Augustine Baker (1575–1641) when he took his position with the Cambrai Benedictines between 1624 and 1633.<sup>54</sup> Baker doubted the suitability of Jesuit directors for contemplative nuns, and argued that methods fitted for missionary and active religious were not ideal for the direction of convents.<sup>55</sup> Thus, instead of following a specific list of prescriptions to meditate upon, as in the Jesuit Exercises, he encouraged nuns to read and ponder upon the texts of late medieval mystics, which he glossed over and discussed in his own prolific devotional treatises. Baker's influence on the reading practices of the Cambrai Benedictines resulted in the gradual building of a rich library both at Cambrai and at its daughter house in Paris. Indeed the catalogue of the Parisian house testifies to the variety of the nuns' collections, which included many lives of saints such as St Bridget, Julian of Norwich, or Anne of St Bartholomew.<sup>56</sup>

Baker thought that religious persons should be allowed to find their own way to God, under His divine guidance and that of illustrious role models such as the revered saints of the late-medieval period. Spiritual directors, he argued, should be used only when the retreatant faced a particular difficulty, and not viewed as quasi-divine themselves. He complained:

it is a too common tendency for directors to make their penitents dependent upon them, to the detriment of their spiritual progress, besides other inconveniences. [...] A director must not, then, bind all souls to begin by the same method, for it is sure not to suit some. He should teach each soul how to become illuminated by God Himself through prayer and abstraction.<sup>57</sup>

Baker extolled contemplative prayer, which led to mystical union with God without the need for predefined methods or exercises of the Ignatian type. In order to guide the Benedictine nuns along this path, he wrote for them an impressive corpus of over sixty manuscript treatises between the 1620s and the 1630s, in which he intertwined his own words with those of reputed mystics such as Tauler, Fitch, Blossius, St John of the Cross or even women such as Julian of Norwich or Teresa of Avila. When the new chaplain Father Francis Hull arrived at Cambrai in 1629, this became a matter of controversy and Baker was accused of exhorting the nuns to refuse clerical guidance. Yet his teachings resonated well with the Cambrai community and beyond, and it prompted some nuns to undertake a task they would normally shy away from: they began writing about spirituality and about lived religious experience in their own names, voicing their opinions on the matter.

Dame Catherine Gascoigne wrote to defend a spiritual path which was less strictly regulated than that prescribed by the Ignatian method. She advocated a type of mystical contemplation inspired by holy exemplars such as Julian of Norwich (1342–1416), whose *Showings of Love* she partially transcribed. In two of her manuscripts, *A Relation on her Form of Prayer* and *A Defense of Augustine Baker's Way of Prayer*, she promoted passivity and detachment in order to allow the soul to be penetrated by God in contemplation. Gascoigne expressed her confidence in God's grace as a much surer path towards spiritual union than any exercises undertaken through the retreatant's own will. She wrote:

for many times I find a great & strong desire to please, and praise God and yet am not able in any sort to doe it [...]. But thus I see there is no way but patience & resignation, till it pleases Him who only can enable me, [...] for methinks the more I strive or force my self the further I am from it. For everything methinks, even thinking of good and holy things, doe rather breed images and cause multiplicity in the soul, and are distractions & impediments to me in my prayer, and tendance towards God, so I must keep myself in as much quietness as may be.<sup>58</sup>

When alluding to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, she used images of force and violence made to the soul; her choice of lexical field evoked toil and vexation rather than smooth progress towards a goal. Her preferred method required the annihilation of personal will and an entire reliance upon God's benevolence. She clearly stated that souls were enabled by God only, thereby implicitly reducing the power of directors.

Dame Gertrude More (1606–33), also from the Cambrai Benedictines, found her spiritual fulfillment in Baker's methods; she wrote a vehement

defense both of his spiritual teachings and of the right of nuns to read and learn from the devotional writings of holy exemplars. In her *Apology for Herself and her Spiritual Guide and Director*, Venerable Augustine Baker,<sup>59</sup> she reminded clerics that despite their wisdom and experience, the ultimate judge of a soul's holiness was God, not priests:

God, [...] changeth not His opinion of us according as the humour of the Confessor may be. [...] Who sees not that this is turning religious obedience (in those that simply desire to perform it) to a policy abominable to be thought of or named! O my God! was this Thy meaning when we vowed ourselves to Thee? Or, rather, didst not Thou say, 'Be wise as serpents and simple as doves?'; Thou didst not say, 'Be so foolish under pretence of blind obedience, that thou shalt not know thy right hand from the left!'<sup>60</sup>

Those were very daring words to be written by an early modern nun; they implied that the common practice of spiritual direction had been perverted and abused by priests who so enjoyed their power over their penitents that they had lost sight of their duty to enable souls to reach union with the divine. To her, obedience was due to God before all creatures and therefore, if a nun's path was dictated by God, she had no choice but follow it. But in her previous experience, when she attempted to do this, she had encountered the opposition of her director, who insisted she must follow the Exercises. In this respect, she argued, clerics sometimes went against God's will.

To Gertrude More, the Jesuit model, which most of her English Sisters followed, was in fact alienating nuns from their true spiritual quest. Instead of seeking God only, nuns were preoccupied by the good opinion of their directors and the exact performance of a myriad Exercises they did not understand. She argued that these methods, though perfectly attuned to the Jesuit vocation, were simply not adequate for the simple souls of religious women. The anxiety attached to their correct performance caused confusion, and prevented the soul from soaring towards her heavenly spouse. She wrote:

For, [...] by making our obedience to regard Superiors, we trouble and perplex ourselves in thinking it must be done with this circumstance, and in this manner, and at this time, and divers other circumstances little to the purpose, or else we shall not perform our obedience in perfection. This is to tire out ourselves and make ourselves weary of obedience, and not to serve God with alacrity and cheerful willingness. This is to find His yoke intolerable, and not sweet and easy [...].<sup>61</sup>



Similar convictions were echoed by another prolific writer, Dame Barbara Constable (1617–84), who had entered the Benedictines of Cambrai in 1638, five years after Baker's departure.<sup>62</sup> Although she did not enjoy a personal relationship with Baker himself, she wrote abundantly to defend Bakerism and its non-interventionist, anti-authoritarian approach to spirituality. Amongst her works, *Advices For Confessors and Spirituall Directors* (1650), *Speculum Superiorum* (1650) and *Considerations for Preests* (1653) were addressed to clerics and daringly proffered advice on spiritual direction.<sup>63</sup> Thus, Constable dared to turn the tables upon the hierarchical order which had been the very backbone of the Tridentine Church.<sup>64</sup> She compared the practices of her day with those of holier eras, and "the ill priests" of her times with their more saintly predecessors. She transcribed thousands of folios of devotional treatises and instructions, and was the author of at least six original works between 1649 and 1663. Such prolific activity stemmed from her desire to testify to the efficacy of unmediated mystical union,<sup>65</sup> and to offer a compendium of theological and meditational knowledge coming from unquestionable sources: the Scriptures, the primitive Fathers of the Church, and the most renowned mystics and saints, whose lives many nuns read daily, some in Latin, many in English translation. Such were, she argued, the true sources of spiritual guidance, and these holy writings were to be preferred to the performance of systematic exercises.

The Cambrai controversy and the examples of several English religious women such as Mary Ward demonstrate that, even for the most devoted daughters of the Church, it was not always possible to comply with the guidance of spiritual directors. This tension did sometimes –as in the case of Cambrai– stem from the inadequacy of the methods employed. The Jesuit *Exercises* were devised for the use of men, and of missionaries: nuns were neither, and the Cambrai rebels argued that their contemplative and enclosed status warranted a different approach. But there was far more to the issue of nuns' spiritual guidance than the dispute around Jesuit instructions; at the core of this problem lay a deep-seated diffidence towards female spirituality and an unresolved disagreement about the very essence of spiritual life and the devotional methods which structured it.

### Conclusion

The histories of early modern English convents in exile reflect the bigger picture of European female monasticism. On a pragmatic level, they faced the same problems with their new settlements, they knew the same wavering between great success and uncertainty, and they were linked to the political and socio-economic circumstances of both their lands of asylum and their home land. Their spiritual lives too reflected the climate of the times. As consecrated women, nuns strove to dedicate their every waking moment to

the glory of God; in order to help their souls to shed its earthly bounds and soar towards the divine, they followed the advice of their confessors and spiritual directors, who prescribed methods to turn their mind and soul away from the world and towards their heavenly goal. In many communities, nuns practised the Jesuit Spiritual Exercises, often adapted to suit their needs and abilities. Some followed the ten day course, others preferred a half-course of five days, whilst others still believed that three days were sufficient.

Adaptation was necessary, if only because nuns were not to be missionaries in hostile lands, and therefore did not have the same requirements as the Jesuit fathers. Moreover, a deep-seated gendered prejudice meant that some advisors believed women did not have the necessary resilience to remain focused over the course of the full ten days. This was the case of Father Robinson, who estimated that a simple three-day Exercise was “sufficient for [the Carmelites of Hoogstraten] to profit by”.<sup>66</sup> As illustrated in the writings of Dames Catherine Gascoigne or Gertrude More, some nuns themselves endorsed the gendered prejudices of the age to argue that the Exercises were not suited to women’s limited intellect and, more importantly perhaps, to the way in which their spirituality naturally expressed itself.

It was believed that women were different spiritual creatures than men; to some, this meant they were less endowed with grace and more likely to be led astray by their sensual nature. Such an approach validated the need for minutely precise spiritual direction, in which the women did not take any initiative and did not enjoy any leeway in the practice of their devotions. Yet to others, female defectiveness on the contrary made women more likely to know God, since they were unhindered with superfluous knowledge or rational thinking. In Cambrai, Augustine Baker himself argued that women’s natural inferiority forced them to rely more heavily upon God. Hence, their flawed nature was in fact a spiritual gift:

Women in their verie nature are more religious then men. [...] And though we cannot enter into all the reasons of nature, yet we maie conjecture [...] that women being of a colder complexion are more fearful and have lesse confidence in themselves which urgeth them upon occasions of feare [...] to recurre unto God for help as by the verie instinct of nature [...] And thus in the verie course of nature have they some advantage over men [...]<sup>67</sup>

Thus, according to Baker, women should not follow the strenuous path of the Spiritual Exercises, which was not only ill-suited to their enclosed vocation but was in fact unnecessary. His advocating of a less interventionist form of spiritual direction resonated widely amongst the English Benedictine communities and beyond, where the nuns embraced a

more contemplative, unmediated union with God. This, of course, opened the door to much controversy, as mysticism had always been regarded with great caution by the Church authorities. When women were left to experience divine love on their own, could they be trusted not to defile the experience with base sensual appetites? Mystical writings did indeed convey the spiritual lived experience in highly sensual terms. Could women be trusted to commune with good when their nature made them so vulnerable to evil?<sup>68</sup>

The Catholic reaction to female mystics was polarized, elevating the nuns who gained clerical trust to the rank of saints and casting down those who did not as devils, lunatics or heretics. Yet the ambiguity about women visionaries was not the prerogative of the Catholic Church; it was shared also by Churches of other denominations in 17<sup>th</sup>-century England, as Phyllis Mack has shown in her study of Quaker visionary women.<sup>69</sup> It seems that those who incurred the censure of their institution were deemed guilty of loving their God in an inappropriate, embodied manner. Yet, as Simone Weil beautifully put it:

To reproach mystics with loving God by means of the faculty of sexual love is as though one were to reproach a painter with making pictures by means of colors composed of material substances. We haven't anything else with which to love.<sup>70</sup>

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Personal thanks go to Caroline Bowden (Queen Mary University, London) for getting me involved in what she simply described as "the nuns project" in 2008. I owe her the discovery of an unsuspected wealth of archival resources, and a new direction in my research.

<sup>2</sup> 1581, 23: Elis. I, c.1, Act to Retain the Queen's Majesty's Subjects in their Due Obedience; et 1585, 27: Elis. I, c.2, Act against Jesuits, Seminary Priests and such other like Disobedient Persons.

<sup>3</sup> Alexandra Walsham, *Church Papists. Catholicism, Conformity and Confessional Polemic in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Brian Magee, *The English Recusants: A Study of the Post-Reformation Catholic Survival and the Operation of the Recusancy Laws* (London: Burns and Oates, 1938); John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570–1850* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1976).

<sup>5</sup> The Spanish Provinces, or Spanish Netherlands, were regions ruled by Spain in the Low Countries, spanning most of Flanders (some parts of today's Northern France, Belgium and Luxembourg).

<sup>6</sup> Hugh Aveling, *The Handle and the Axe. The Catholic Recusants in England, from Reformation to Emancipation* (London: Blond and Briggs, 1976), 98. See also Peter Guilday, *The English Catholic Refugees on the Continent, 1558–1795* (London: Longmans and Green, 1914).

<sup>7</sup> See the project website on "Who were the Nuns? A Prosopographical study of the English Convents in exile 1600–1800." Accessed August 23, 2011. <http://wwtn.history.qmul.ac.uk/>.

<sup>8</sup> Claire Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe. English Convents in France and the Low Countries* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Caroline Bowden, ed., *English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800*, 6 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, forthcoming). For details of the contents, see "Pickering and Chatto Publishers." Accessed August 29, 2011.

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<sup>10</sup> See for instance Christopher Chapple, *The Jesuit Tradition in Education and Mission. A 450-Year Perspective* (Scranton: University of Scranton press, 1993) and J. J. Scarisbrick, *The Jesuits and the Catholic Reformation* (London: Historical Association, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> On the relevance of ritual, see my "Émotions religieuses et rituels catholiques: l'amour dans les couvents anglais en exil", at <http://britaix17-18.univ-provence.fr/texte-seance3.php>.

<sup>12</sup> Baltimore Carmel, Maryland (henceforth BCM), Box 5. Steven Robinson, *A Most Profitable, and Necessary Advertisement for all Such, who Shall Make the Spiritual Exercise*, (1747), item 2.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, items 5–9, my italics. All quotations preserve the original spelling of the manuscripts; the punctuation has been modernized only where the original obscured the meaning of the text.

<sup>14</sup> Archives of the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre, Colchester. Victoria Ayray, *Considerations for the 10 Dayes Exercise*. The document is undated and not foliated.

<sup>15</sup> Archives départementales du nord, Lille (henceforth ADN). Benedictines 20H–40, MS *God is to be loved before all things*, item 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, item 10.

<sup>17</sup> BCM, Box 5. MS, *Dark Night of a Soul, or the Perfect Mortification, which Prepares the Soul to Union with God*: 2d: “The purer is the soul, the more closely is united to God; this union consists in this that God dos invest the soul, penetrates her, and so transformes her into himself, that she is as it wer deifi’d. The like more or less, as the chrystal glasse is expos’d the sun is pure and clearer, the more dos the sun enlighten it, darts its rayes, and imparts its proper qualities.”

<sup>18</sup> BCM, Box 5. John Rigolene, S.J., *Smal Treatises of Devotion set forth by Father Peter Champion of the Same Society*. “First Treatise, The Amiable Jesus or The Practise of Love towards our Lord Jesus Christ”, f.3.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, f.11.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 12 : “to banish unprofitable visits, conversations, natural friendships, excessive laughter, profuse merriments, drolleries. [...] 5° to check pride, haughtiness, ambition and all is great in the estimate of the world, which in the eyes of God is meer baseness. Liberty of spirit conformes our interiour to the interiour of Jesus Christ”.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 16.

<sup>22</sup> Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: New American Library, 1950), 40–2.

<sup>23</sup> ADN, Benedictines 20H–28, *Directions for the retreat*, f.4: “They follow their own fancy in the choice of the books they read and the method they use in their meditations, they spend their time as humour suggests [...]”

<sup>24</sup> See also Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion Of Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Margaret Sommerville, *Sex and Subjection: Attitudes to Women in Early Modern Society* (London and New York: Arnold, 1995) and Alison Weber, “Little Women: Counter-Reformation Misogyny”, in *The Counter-Reformation: The Essential Readings*, edited by David Luebke (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 143–62.

<sup>25</sup> Megan Brock’s essay in this volume demonstrates quite plainly that the issues surrounding women’s physicality still affect their positioning in today’s Catholic Church.

<sup>26</sup> Daichman, Graciela, *Wayward Nuns in Medieval Literature* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986).

<sup>27</sup> Louis Châtellier, *L’Europe des dévôts* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987); Louis Cognet, *Post-Reformation Spirituality*, trans. by P. J. Hepburne-Scot (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1959).

<sup>28</sup> For a Protestant author’s take on the discerning of spirits, see John Gee, *The Foot out of the Snare: With a detection of sundry late practices and impostures of the priests and Jesuits in England. Whereunto is added a catalogue of such bookes as in this authors knowledge have been vented within two yeeres last past* (London: Robert Milbourne, 1624). On the practice itself, see among others, Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle-Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Michel de Certeau, *La Possession de Loudun* (Paris, Julliard, 1978) and *La Fable mystique : XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris, Gallimard, 1982); Benoît Garnot, *Le Diable au couvent: Les Possédées d’Auxonne (1658–1663)* (Paris: Imago, 1995); and R. Po-Chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540–1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), especially the chapter entitled “Holy Women, Beatas, Demoniacs”, 144–58.

<sup>29</sup> On the crucial roles played by Confessors, see Rudolph Bell, “Telling Her Sins: Male Confessors and Female Penitents in Catholic Reformation Italy”, in *That Gentle Strength: Historical Perspectives on Women in Christianity*, edited by Lynda L. Coon, Katherine J. Haldane, and Elizabeth W. Sommer, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1990), 118–33; Jodi Bilinkoff, *Related Lives. Confessors and their Female Penitents, 1450–1750* (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 2005) and Patricia Ranft, “A Key to Counter Reformation Women’s Activism: The Confessor-Spiritual Director”, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 10 (1994): 9–23.

<sup>30</sup> BCM, Box 5. Steven Robinson, *A Most Profitable, and Necessary Advertisement*, Item 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, item 6.



- <sup>32</sup> Mary Ward, “35 Resolutions Taken during the Spiritual Exercises in Saint Omer, 1610–1615”, in *Mary Ward und ihre Gründung. Die Quellentexte bis 1645*, edited by Ursula Dirmeier, Corpus Catholicorum vols. 45–48 (Münster: Ashendorff Verlag, 2007), vol. 45, 163.
- <sup>33</sup> ADN, Benedictines 20H–10, ff. 466 *et passim*.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* f. 488.
- <sup>35</sup> BCM, Box 5. Steven Robinson, *A Necessary Advice—which Endeavour to Read with the Greatest Attention You Can* (1747, following the Most Profitable and Necessary Advertisement), item 4.
- <sup>36</sup> ADN, Benedictines, 20H–31, *Advice to Beginners*, ff. 2–3: “when their Superior does not approve of their spirit, and maner of proceeding, they judge that they doe not understand it, and that they are not spiritual [...] They are affraid of declaring their sines to him in confession openly and plainly lest they should disesteeme them”.
- <sup>37</sup> Mary Ward to Father John Gerard, April 1621, in Dirmeier, *Mary Ward*, vol. 45, 437.
- <sup>38</sup> See Jeanne Cover, *Love—The Driving Force: Mary Ward’s Spirituality: Its Significance for Moral Theology* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Marquette University Press, 1997).
- <sup>39</sup> She was the niece of Margaret Gascoigne and Catherine Gascoigne, Abbess of Cambrai.
- <sup>40</sup> Hansom, Joseph, ed., “The English Benedictine Nuns of the Convent of Our Blessed Lady of Good Hope in Paris, Now St. Benedict’s Priory, Colwich, Staffordshire. Notes and Obituaries”, *Catholic Record Society*, Misc. VII. 9 (1911): 334–413, 353.
- <sup>41</sup> She was Abbess in 1629–1641 and 1645–1673.
- <sup>42</sup> Stanbrook Abbey, Catherine Gascoigne, *One Thing Alone I Crave*.
- <sup>43</sup> Downside Abbey, Gillow, MS Baker, 4, f. 149, as cited in Walker, *Gender and Politics*, 150.
- <sup>44</sup> ADN, Benedictines, 20H–37, *On the Love of God*, f. 185.
- <sup>45</sup> Walker, *Gender and Politics*, 148.
- <sup>46</sup> St John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love*: “O sweet [...] O tender wound! [...] In Your sweet breathing, so full of glory and good things, how tenderly You fill me with Your love”, stanza 4.
- <sup>47</sup> Anonymous, *Sighs of a Soul who Desires to Leave the World to Go & Unite Herself to God in Heaven*, items 6 to 11.
- <sup>48</sup> Bibliothèque Mazarine, MS1202 iv, Catherine Gascoigne (1724).
- <sup>49</sup> ADN, Benedictines 20H–37, f. 186.
- <sup>50</sup> Archives of the Monastery of the Poor Clares, Much Birch, Herefordshire. Anonymous, *Of the Crowning with Thorns*, from the sickhouse book (1732), f. 6.
- <sup>51</sup> The Sepulchrine Mary Dennett (1730–81), in religion Christina of the Sacred Heart, was elected Prioress from 1770 to 1781. When writing about her visions, she declared that she “an Immense deal more to say” but could not express it. Archives of the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre, Colchester. Christina Dennett, *Vision of the Sacred Heart*, 1766.
- <sup>52</sup> See for instance Caroline Walker-Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption. Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone, 1992).
- <sup>53</sup> See Elizabeth Rhodes, “Teresa de Jesus’s *Book* and the Reform of the Religious Man in Sixteenth Century Spain”, in *Gender, Catholicism and Spirituality. Women and the Roman Catholic Church in Britain and Europe, 1200–1900*, edited by Laurence Lux-Sterritt and Carmen Mangion (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 68–82, 69. See also the excellent work by Alison Weber, *Teresa of Ávila and the Rhetoric of Femininity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).
- <sup>54</sup> On Augustine Baker’s mysticism and the controversy around his spiritual direction of the Cambrai Benedictines, see for instance B. Weld-Blundell, ed., *Contemplative Prayer: Ven. Father Augustine Baker’s Teaching Thereon from “Sancta Sophia”* (London, 1907) and J. McCann and H. Connolly, eds., *Memorials of Father Augustine Baker and Other Documents Relating to the English Benedictines* (London: CRS 33, 1933). Also Claire Walker, *Gender and Politics*, 143–47.
- <sup>55</sup> B. Weld-Blundell, *Contemplative Prayer*, 52.
- <sup>56</sup> Bibliothèque Mazarine, MS4058, ff. 143–206, *A Catalogue of Manuscript Bookes Belonging to ... the English Benedictine Nuns ... in Paris*. Also Anselm Cramer, “‘The Librarie of the Howse’. Augustine Baker’s Community and their Books”, *Analecta Carthusiana* 204 (2002): 103–10; Jan Rhodes, “Dom Augustine Baker’s Reading Lists”, *The Downside Review* 38.111 (1993): 157–73.
- <sup>57</sup> B. Weld-Blundell, *Contemplative Prayer*, 54.
- <sup>58</sup> Bibliothèque Mazarine, MS 1202 iv, Gascoigne, *Defense of Father Augustine Baker’s Way of Prayer* (1633), ff. 383–4.
- <sup>59</sup> Gertrude More’s manuscripts were published posthumously in the form of two separate works edited by Augustine Baker himself: *The Holy Practices of a Divine Lover, or the Sainctly Ideot’s*

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*Devotions* (Paris, 1657) and *Confessiones Amantis*, or *Spiritual Exercises*, or *Ideot's Devotions*, to which was added the *Apology* (Paris, 1658).

<sup>60</sup> Benedict Weld-Blundell, ed., *The Writings of Dame Gertrude More* (London: R. & T Washbourne, 1910), 246–47, §44–45.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*; 296, §59.

<sup>62</sup> Heather Wolfe, “Reading Bells and Loose Papers: Reading and Writing Practices of the English Benedictine Nuns of Cambrai and Paris”, in *Early Modern Women's Manuscript Writing: Selected Papers from the Trinity/Trent Colloquium*, edited by Victoria Elizabeth Burke and Jonathan Gibson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004): 137–56.

<sup>63</sup> Respectively, Downside Abbey Archives, MS 82146/629 (1650), Colwich MS 43 (1650) and Downside Abbey MS 82145/552 (1653).

<sup>64</sup> Jenna Lay, “An English Nun’s Authority: Early Modern Spiritual Controversy in the Manuscripts of Barbara Constable”, in *Gender, Catholicism and Spirituality. Women and the Roman Catholic Church in Britain and Europe, 1200–1900*, edited by Laurence Lux-Sterritt and Carmen Mangion (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 99–114, 110. See also Also Heather Wolfe, “Dame Barbara Constable: Catholic Antiquarian, Advisor and Closet Missionary”, in *Catholic Culture in Early Modern England*, edited by Ronald Corthell, Frances E. Dolan, Christopher Highley and Arthur F. Marotti (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 158–88.

<sup>65</sup> Stanbrook Abbey, Barbara Constable, *Gemitus Peccatorum or the Complaints of Sinners*, uncatalogued.

<sup>66</sup> BCM, Box 5. Steven Robinson, *A Most Profitable, and Necessary Advertisement*, Item 6.

<sup>67</sup> Stanbrook Abbey, Baker MS 2 fols 189–90, The Book D, cited in Walker, *Gender and Politics*, 148–9.

<sup>68</sup> Similar questions seem to apply to female ministry in the Anglican Church today, as Églantine Jamet-Moreau’s essay indicates later on in this volume.

<sup>69</sup> Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>70</sup> Simone Weil, *The Notebooks of Simone Weil*, 2 vols, trans. Arthur Wills (London: Routledge and Ken Paul, 1956), 2: 472.