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Terence C. Cave

Excerpt

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## CHAPTER I

## DEVOTIONAL TRADITIONS

THE DEVOTIONAL TRADITION AND ITS REVIVAL<sup>1</sup>

The character of the Renaissance is frequently dependent on the convergence of different traditions; renewal begins in religion, philosophy and literature with an attempt to reassess and to synthesise the experience of past centuries. In this way, medieval modes of thinking and writing may persist in the new era, but no longer as the sole authority; the concept of tradition has been broadened, and by a process of comparison and reconciliation a rapid evolution becomes possible. Much the same is true of the history of devotional practice, at least in its codified, 'literary' form. There were already considerable differences of purpose and thus of emphasis in the works of the medieval masters, differences involving the whole range of possibilities between mystical theology and practical piety, between the formal treatise on the one hand and the liturgical hymn or the vernacular sermon on the other. The sixteenth century reviewed and developed most of these possibilities; at the same time, a variety of new factors came into play. Devotion

<sup>1</sup> The following outline of the devotional tradition and its revival in the sixteenth century is of necessity highly compressed. For a more detailed picture, consult, for example, H. Bremond, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France depuis la fin des guerres de religion jusqu'à nos jours*, vols. 1–2 (Paris, 1929–30); L. Cognet, *De la Dévotion moderne à la spiritualité française* (Paris, 1958); J. Dagens, *Bérulle et les origines de la restauration catholique (1575–1611)* (Brussels, 1952), and *Bibliographie chronologique de la littérature de spiritualité et de ses sources (1501–1610)* (Paris, 1952); E. Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London, 1955), and individual studies on for example St Bernard and St Bonaventura in the *Etudes de philosophie médiévale* series; P. Pourrat, *La Spiritualité chrétienne*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1918–28). On more specific topics: M. Bataillon, *Erasmus et l'Espagne* (Paris, 1937), and 'De Savonarole à Louis de Grenade', *RLC*, 16 (1936), pp. 23 ff.; C. Dejob, *De l'Influence du Concile de Trente sur la littérature et les beaux-arts chez les peuples catholiques* (Paris, 1884); L. Gillet, *Histoire artistique des ordres mendiants* (Paris, 1939); W. G. Moore, *La Réforme allemande et la littérature française* (Strasbourg, 1930); J.-M. Prat, *Maldonat et l'Université de Paris* (Paris, 1856); A. Renaudet, *Préréforme et humanisme à Paris pendant les premières guerres d'Italie (1494–1517)* (2nd ed., Paris, 1953); F. A. Yates, *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1947).

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[More information](#)*Devotional traditions*

made contact with humanist scholarship, and thus with the philosophy of antiquity: the themes of self-examination, spiritual progress and meditation on death were now remembered in the context of the schools of thought (predominantly Platonist) which had originally helped to form them. Furthermore, the increasing contact between monastery and lay society created a demand for treatises which were not only comprehensible to a wide public, but also attractive to read; thus devotional writing began to use the devices of profane rhetoric, finding its way before long into the ode, the sonnet, and narrative prose. The mingling of so many currents and influences produces a diversity which can at times seem as bewildering as that of other areas of Renaissance activity. On the other hand, it was the aim of both the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation to restore, in terms of personal religious practice as well as of theological reasoning, the sense of a fundamental, authoritative tradition. In the devotional manuals of the period, this aim is evident in the constant acknowledgement of Biblical and patristic sources. Furthermore, and in part because of the way these sources were used, there is a central core of devotional method and matter which is passed on from work to work, sometimes almost verbatim, so that writers of different religious orders or even of different confessions will often seem to echo one another and their medieval predecessors. This core gives the tradition a unity and a consistency amid many vicissitudes. Its main constituents (thematic, methodological, stylistic) will be considered in greater detail in chapter 2 and elsewhere; for the present, it will be sufficient to sketch the broader outlines of the tradition, laying particular emphasis on the forms it assumes when it reaches the post-1570 period in France.

It is convenient, if at times misleading, to think of devotion as existing in opposition to theology. In its most extreme form, this dichotomy would be represented on the one hand by the formalised reasonings of the scholastics, constructing faith on the basis of an authoritarian logic, and on the other hand by the simple, personal approach of, say, the *Imitation*, relying on imagination and emotion. The early Church Fathers were aware of no such distinction: theology and private prayer were both essential and complementary aspects of a Christian way of life. This was no doubt in part due to the Neoplatonist affinities of patristic theology. One of the central elements of

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Excerpt

[More information](#)*The devotional tradition and its revival*

Augustine's religious thought was the concept of a meditative ascent towards knowledge of the Divinity, a spiritual progress which expressed itself naturally in Neoplatonist language; and in this system there is complete concord between the intellectual structure and the need for a personal faith. Much of what the Middle Ages knew about Platonism was transmitted through Augustine, and the devotional tradition was throughout to remain conscious of his influence. But with the emergence of scholasticism in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the picture begins to change. The mystic Bernard of Clairvaux is opposed to the logic of Abelard, and in the following century the teaching of Bonaventura and the Franciscan school, although not incompatible with the theology of Aquinas, marks the starting-point of a divergence which within a century or so will become acute. The mystics of Germany and the Low Countries—Tauler, Suso, Ruysbroeck—maintain a direct link, through Bonaventura, with Augustine and the language of Platonism; their doctrine is scarcely on the level of 'simple piety', indeed it involves a considerable complexity of thought, but it is the principal generating force in the foundation of the Windesheim community, and later of the concept of a *devotio moderna*. Ruysbroeck and his disciples at Windesheim were increasingly concerned with the dissemination of devotional practice beyond the walls of the cloister, and it is this aspect of the group's activities which is represented by the *Imitation of Christ*; here the principles of meditation are laid down simply enough to make them accessible to the widest audience.

Once this movement in the direction of an organised devotional practice for the laity has become established, it is sustained in one form or another into the Counter-Reformation period; editions of the *Imitation*, both in Latin and in French translation, proliferate throughout the sixteenth century. On the other hand, the swing in favour of a simple, affective piety was later to be corrected, in some circles at least, by a revival of 'intellectual' meditation. Erasmus, who owed a great deal to Windesheim, was also deeply suspicious of the excessive externality of popular religion and its emphasis on pathos, on the easy flow of tears. His *De praeparatione ad mortem* brought to the *ars moriendi* tradition, with its simple, pictorial approach, a new element of intellectual argument; likewise, the *Enchiridion militis christiani* con-

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Excerpt

[More information](#)*Devotional traditions*

ceives of 'inward prayer' in terms of controlled thought rather than of quasi-mystical effusions. The latter work, as an authoritative formulation of the 'spiritual combat' concept, was to have a profound influence in the Counter-Reformation. The piety of Erasmus thus gives a new direction to the anti-theological nature of devotion; the method of the Sorbonne theologians is rejected, but the intelligence of the Church Fathers, of Augustine and Jerome, is re-invoked, and the New Testament is to be approached with the scholar's understanding. In France, the greatest direct influence of Erasmus concerns the circle of Evangelists associated with Marguerite de Navarre, converging there with the infiltration of Lutheran ideas and with a mysticism of Neoplatonist extraction. After his death, he was suspected of having opened the door to the Protestants; nevertheless, many of his ideas found their way (often anonymously) into the doctrine of the leading devotional movements, and his attempt to reconcile devotion with humanism anticipates a period in which these two traditions will be allowed to mingle in a number of ways.

Among the most vigorous opponents of Erasmus were the Carthusians of Cologne, who were responsible for publishing and disseminating the works of the Dutch and German mystics—Harphius, Tauler, Ruysbroeck and so on—as well as adding original contributions to the same tradition. The leading figure of the Charterhouse, up to his death in 1539, was Landsberger (Johann Justus), one of whose chief preoccupations was to stem the rising tide of Protestantism. His *Enchiridion*, like the *Imitation*, is directed towards a lay audience; but the degree of austerity and of abnegation it recommends would seem more suited to the cloister. The influence of Erasmus is suggested by the dislike of facile emotion and by the attitude to prayer, which should be 'inward' but controlled; Landsberger's ascetic ideal would however certainly have been too extreme for Erasmus. The work of the Charterhouse as a whole—and of the Benedictine Louis de Blois, whom the Carthusians were later to edit—is monastic, and its cultivation of an austere and highly-developed mysticism makes its influence a specialised one. It supplies an essential link in the tradition of mystical devotion, resuming and passing on with renewed impetus the work of the Dutch and German school, and its achievements will be remembered well beyond the turn of the century. But when the 'invasion mystique'

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Excerpt

[More information](#)*The devotional tradition and its revival*

begins in France, it will be due equally to sources of inspiration transmitted from the south, particularly from Spain; and it is Spain, too, which will set many of the trends in the more popular forms of devotion with which we are concerned here.

The history of devotion in Spain in the sixteenth century is full of tensions. On one hand there is from the early years of the century a powerful mystical current, represented particularly by the *alumbrados*; on the other hand, the terror of the Inquisition soon began to inhibit any public expression of these tendencies. Hence the somewhat ambiguous position of the Dominican Luis de Granada. His stress on interiority, and also on the need to make devotion accessible to all kinds and classes of people, earned him the censure of the Inquisitors;<sup>1</sup> but for the same reasons his works became very widely disseminated both in Spain and in Europe as a whole. Indeed, there is little doubt that, in France at least, their impact was initially far greater than that of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*; and this point needs to be emphasised if one is to consider the relationship between devotional method and literature. Much the same could be said of his contemporaries Alonso de Madrid and Antonio de Guevara. Granada's devotional method was influenced by Cisneros, one of the great precursors of Counter-Reformation methodology, but also by Erasmus's *Modus orandi*; indeed, Erasmus was acknowledged as a master in many Spanish circles before his death, particularly at Alcalá.

Loyola himself was intimately involved in the same atmosphere. His formation was influenced by the piety of the Dominicans and Franciscans, and his *Spiritual Exercises*, the focal point of devotional method in the sixteenth century, were doubtless modelled to some extent on the *Exercises* of Cisneros, published in 1500. Loyola's work appeared at a crucial moment. Inward prayer had become a highly controversial issue, since the undisciplined appeal to faith and to 'illumination', the reliance placed on the individual in his relationship to God, could and did produce dangerous approximations to Reformation doctrine. Loyola's task was to place prayer and meditation on a securely orthodox footing, to provide a clear-cut framework, and thus to justify personal reflection as one of the central aspects of Christian life in both

<sup>1</sup> His *De la Oracion y Meditacion* and his *Guia de peccadores* were nevertheless condemned (temporarily) by the Valladolid Index of 1559.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)*Devotional traditions*

monastic and lay circles. Considered as a group, the Spanish prayer-methods were extremely influential in France, and dominated the devotional atmosphere there in the last third of the century; but with the beginning of the new century, other influences began to make themselves felt, especially that of St Teresa's Carmelite reform and thus of a feminine, emotional mysticism. In this way, the achievements of Spain continued to contribute to those of France long after the end of our period, and tended to replace the straightforward devotional exercise with a more ambitious progress towards the mystical experience.

This is a century in which influences travel far and fast; and the internationalism of the Jesuits is the outstanding example of the way in which contacts were made and new ideas promulgated. Loyola had been nurtured in a Spain where the influence of both Erasmus and Savonarola was strong; between 1528 and 1535 he studied at Paris—at the Collège de Montaigu, the Collège de Sainte-Barbe, and the Sorbonne; and he also maintained a close contact with the Cologne Charterhouse. Certainly, in the preparation of an atmosphere which fostered the wave of devotional translations in the later sixteenth century, the influence of the Jesuits was decisive. Their optimism, soon to become notorious, was largely successful in overcoming ascetic trends in the devotional tradition. They met the attacks of Erasmus (and of the Calvinists) on excessive 'externality' in popular religion by an affirmation of the value of external aids to complement a thorough-going revival of 'interior' devotion; thus painting and rhetoric were confidently exploited to arouse religious fervour. Meanwhile, the Council of Trent was slowly reconciling itself to a similar course of action: its final ratification only added impetus to a movement already firmly established.

It will by now be clear that the major devotional movements of the sixteenth century are not of French origin; the circle of Marguerite de Navarre is perhaps the nearest approach to an organised effort in the earlier part of the century, and the term 'devotion' can only be applied to it in a rather special sense. However, after the outbreak of the wars of religion, with the multiplication of external influences, interest in devotion begins to gather way. The most important single factor in this change of climate is the increasing use of the vernacular,

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Excerpt

[More information](#)*The devotional tradition and its revival*

both in translations and in original compositions. For more than a century, the French language had gradually been gaining authority as a vehicle for religious doctrine and worship: French translations of devotional literature had appeared occasionally in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, together with picture-Bibles and other aids for the unlearned. But it was only in the second half of the century that such translations became numerous and finally outstripped Latin editions.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, original treatises in French and collections of sermons became commonplace. The importance of this wave of French devotional literature is stressed by both Bremond and Dagens:

Avant François de Sales on a vu des centaines d'introductions à la vie dévote, écrites en français et qui s'adressaient à tout le monde. Pendant les trente dernières années du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle et les toutes premières du XVII<sup>e</sup>, des prêtres, des religieux. . . des laïques enfin ont mis en notre langue presque tous les grands mystiques, de saint Denis à sainte Thérèse.<sup>2</sup>

This movement, dissociating itself from the cloister and penetrating deeper and deeper into lay circles, was to culminate in the *Introduction* itself, which St François intended as a replacement for the translations which he had had to recommend hitherto.

The 'popularisation' of devotion may be seen as one element of an overall attempt to meet the Calvinist challenge, with its direct, vernacular appeal (the *Institution chrestienne* became the first French theology in 1541). Catholic translations of the Bible began to appear almost as regularly as Calvinist ones, and translation changed the whole nature of the Bible: it had been part of a distant, immutable ritual, now it was available for personal meditation. At the same time the potentialities of its language were released into the vernacular, and here again the achievement of the Calvinists—the Marot-Bèze Psalter, the Calvinist drama, and the prose of Calvin himself—was formidable and invited rivalry. Before 1550 there were few enough popular Catholic treatises—one or two works by Gerson, lives of Christ in the picture-Bible tradition by the Carthusian Guillaume de Branteghem, and several of the oddly-titled productions of the Dominican Pierre Doré (Rabelais's Doribus). Between 1550 and 1570 the publication of handbooks in

<sup>1</sup> At the level of European communication, the vernacular was on the other hand often a barrier; thus translations were made in both directions, according to the audience for which a particular work was destined.

<sup>2</sup> Bremond, *Humanisme dévot*, p. 19; cf. Dagens, *Bibliographie*, 'Préface', p. 9.

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Terence C. Cave

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Devotional traditions*

French increases steadily: Doré still proliferates, but he is joined now by René Benoît (translator of the Bible and later to become the confessor of Henri IV), the Jesuit Edmond Auger, Dupuy-Herbault, and translations of Vives and of Louis de Blois. But it is not till after 1570 that the full range of foreign and Latin devotional works—those of the Cologne Charterhouse and their mystical forebears, of the Spanish mendicants and Jesuits, of Italians like Panigarola and Serafino da Fermo, as well as the patristic and medieval treatises of Augustine, Bernard, Bonaventura and so on—becomes available in French. In the four years immediately preceding Henri III's accession, versions were published of Augustine, Anselm, Bernard, the *Imitation*, Dionysius de Leuwis, Landsberger, Louis de Blois, Vives, Guevara, Luis de Granada, Serafino da Fermo and Borromeo, not to mention original works by Auger, Dupuy-Herbault, Benoît and others.

At the same time a new trend becomes increasingly evident: the work of lay translators, often better known in other fields. The historian François de Belleforest is first mentioned in Dagens's *Bibliographie* as the translator of St Cyprian's sermons (1565), but his first great success was undoubtedly his version of Guevara's *Livre du Mont de Calvaire* (1571), which was being reprinted up to the end of the century; the following year he produced Granada's *Devotes contemplations*. In the dedication of the Guevara work, he stresses repeatedly the unusual nature of his translation, composed by a layman, for a layman: 'plusieurs s'estonneront autant de voir à qui je le dedie, comme qui est celuy qui le traduit'.<sup>1</sup> He says that he is accustomed to 'tracer l'histoire', not to 'boire à plaisir de ceste surnaturelle liqueur de Theologie' (notice that he calls 'theology' this devotional work with its detailed description of the sufferings of Christ and its symbolic interpretations of each episode in the Passion story). But he points out that Guevara addressed his works to laymen as much as to priests:

...sommes tous Chrestiens, ayans besoin de sçavoir le chemin de nostre perfection, et les moyens de parvenir à icelle...Cecy estant le devoir du Chrestien (je dis de tous, afin qu'on ne pense que les seuls hermites et devotieux doivent mediter la passion de nostre Seigneur) que de chercher la voye de felicité: et n'en y ayant d'autre que la mort du Sauveur du monde nostre Dieu, et le fils de l'homme crucifié.

<sup>1</sup> A. de Guevara, *Livre du Mont de Calvaire*, trans. F. de Belleforest (Paris, 1589; 1st ed., Paris, 1571), dedication, *non pag.* (dated July 1571).



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[More information](#)*The devotional tradition and its revival*

Much the same attitude is outlined in his translation of Granada's *Vray chemin*, where he speaks of 'le soing que ce religieux avoit de faire voir et entendre aux rudes, et petits (car c'est à eux à qui il adresse cest œuvre) le moyen de se preparer à la devotion, et meditation'.<sup>1</sup> This explicit popularising aim is frequently found in the works of the Spanish school, and although the Germanic tradition plays an important part in this wave of translations, the Spaniards are more popular with lay translators. Belleforest and his contemporary Gabriel Chappuys are principally concerned with the treatises of the Spanish mendicants, never with the Cologne Carthusians, whose ascetic tendencies would certainly make them less acceptable to a lay audience.

The coincidence of the devotional revival with the wars of religion is doubtless also due in part to the universal need for 'consolation' at a time of national affliction. The words *consolation* and *affliction* (often *consolation des affligés*) appear regularly in the titles listed in Dagens's *Bibliographie*. At the same time, contemporary evils were frequently seen as a punishment for sin. Tamisier's dedication of his meditations in verse on the Penitential Psalms speaks of 'oraison et meditation' as the remedy for 'les extremes calamitez et afflictions, desquelles Dieu a visité nostre pauvre patrie'; this is typical of many other contemporary dedications and prefaces to devotional works.<sup>2</sup> It was the same attitude that motivated Henri III's conviction that the best cure for the civil wars lay in the appeasement of God's wrath through penitence and devotion. Henri III's religious attitude is in itself an outstanding example of the devotional revival. He felt himself singled out for a high spiritual destiny, symbolised by the emblem of the three crowns, and his wife Louise de Vaudémont was famous for her piety. Champion has collected an impressive array of testimonials for Henri's devotional ardour, by Louis Le Roy, Du Perron, and Pierre Crespet among others:

Henri est le contemplateur fait pour la vie paisible ou tourmentée de l'âme. Il n'est pas un homme d'action . . . Le fond de l'esprit du roi demeurait la

<sup>1</sup> L. de Granada, *Le Vray chemin et adresse pour acquerir et parvenir à la grace de Dieu . . . par le moyen et compagnie de l'Oraison et Contemplation en la Loy et amour de Dieu*, trans. F. de Belleforest (Paris, 1579; 1st ed., 1576), 'Advertissement au lecteur, sur la traduction du present livre', *non pag.*

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, J. Guytot, *Les Meditations des zelateurs de pieté* (Paris, 1582), 'Conclusion du traducteur sur le profit de la presente version', *non pag.* The dedication of this edition is dated 1568, the *privilege* 1580. Dagens lists a 1571 edition.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)*Devotional traditions*

piété; et il ne fait aucun doute . . . que sa grande idée a été la réforme du royaume par la douceur, la foi, la pénitence, la restauration des mœurs.<sup>1</sup>

From the beginning of his reign he was subject to the influence of the Jesuits: he defended them in their struggle at the Collège de Clermont (where Maldonat had taken over the chair of theology in 1564), and his confessor Auger was the first Jesuit confessor of a French king. Auger composed a number of treatises, as well as a translation into French of the *Imitation*, published in 1578; and that this translation was intended for the widest possible audience is suggested by the vignette on the title-page of the first edition, showing a labourer, a woman, and a child carrying the Cross.<sup>2</sup> Auger was familiar with the Italian penitential orders, and had encouraged parallel orders in the south of France; thus he was no doubt largely responsible for the king's creation of a series of penitential *confréries*. The *Confrérie des pénitents de l'annonciation de Notre-Dame* (the 'white penitents'), formed in 1583, were associated with the need for an heir; it was this order that held the famous procession in the rain in which Henri and the *mignons* took part. In December of the same year, the *Confrérie d'Hieronymites* was founded at Vincennes. The Hieronymites were related to the Blue Penitents of St Jerome;<sup>3</sup> among their number was Henri de Joyeuse, comte de Bouchage, once a *mignon* and later to become the Capuchin Père Ange de Joyeuse. Finally, in 1584, Henri formed the *Congrégation de l'Oratoire de Notre Dame de Vie Saine*, to which were attached first a number of Cordeliers, later of Minims. The character of this institution, representing a devotional parallel to the *Académie du Palais*, was certainly influenced by Borromeo's *Accademia delle Notti Vaticane*; the Italian saint, renowned for his asceticism and his reformation of religious orders, had made a great impression on Henri from the time of the new king's passage through Italy in 1574. This Vincennes 'Academy' brought together a wide variety of political, religious and literary figures, and the combination is particularly interesting in that it suggests a close connexion between devotion and the humanist tradition:

<sup>1</sup> P. Champion, 'Henri III et les écrivains de son temps', *BHR*, 1 (1941), pp. 65, 104.

<sup>2</sup> See *ibid.* p. 107.

<sup>3</sup> The 'white penitents' had been established at the Couvent des Augustins, and thus both orders were associated with the 'humanist fathers', Augustine and Jerome. This may be of significance when seen in relation to the atmosphere of the two Academies.