

NEOPLATONISM AND FRENCH RELIGIOUS THOUGHT
IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Thesis presented for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Oxford
by J.P. Dray, Christ Church, Hilary Term, 1987.

-Abstract-

This thesis is a heuristic and argumentative study of the significance of Neoplatonism in the religious thought of the French Catholic revival of the seventeenth century. Taking the broad corpus of Neoplatonic thought - classical, patristic, mediaeval and, especially, that of the Florentine Renaissance - as its starting-point, it deals briefly with the reception and exploitation of Neoplatonic ideas by the French Humanists, before proceeding to consider the seminal influence of the cercle Acarie in the late sixteenth century. It is in this spiritual group of distinctly mystical bent that we discern the beginnings of a profound movement of religious thought greatly inspired by Neoplatonism, with its ultimate origins in the years predating the Reformation, and which continued to play an important part in seventeenth-century philosophy and theology. This Neoplatonic movement is exemplified by the Order of Capuchins and the Congrégation de l'Oratoire, and the main part of the thesis concerns these two religious groups in which the continuity, consistency and, indeed, inescapability of the Neoplatonic tradition are readily apparent. Amongst the Capuchins, the development away from abstract mysticism towards more Humanistic apologetics directly influenced by the Florentines is charted. With regard to the Oratoire, we have attempted to illustrate and demonstrate its pervasive spirit established by its founder and the nature of the Neoplatonism of its members whose fundamental thought and spirituality were informed by Dionysian mysticism and Augustino-Platonic idealism; the problems raised by the thought of Descartes are also considered in our survey of later Oratorians. The final three chapters are devoted to Malebranche, Bossuet and Fénelon, respectively, three major thinkers of the seventeenth century who embody the philosophical, the Humanistic or apologetic and the mystical strains of Neoplatonism that we have identified and which we believe are essential to the Catholic reform of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

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-Longer Abstract-

This thesis is a study of the importance of Neoplatonism in the religious thought of the period generally known as the French Counter-Reformation taking the term in the broader sense of the Catholic revival extending from the late Renaissance to the end of the Grand Siècle. Its aim is twofold. First, it is heuristic in that it seeks to identify a more significant présence de Platon in seventeenth-century France than is commonly accepted, concentrating on two religious groups in particular, namely the Order of Capuchins and the Congrégation de l'Oratoire, both of which were newly established in France during the Counter-Reformation. Second, it argues that Neoplatonism was central and even essential to the thought of the spiritual and intellectual renewal of the period, both as a feature of a long-term process going back to the Florentine Renaissance and as source of special inspiration for many, if not all, of the leading theologians and philosophers of the Counter-Reformation and beyond.

Chapter I sets out the nature of the broad corpus of Neoplatonic ideas inherited by seventeenth-century France. Passing quickly over classical Neoplatonism and the ancient tradition of the prisca theologia, it concentrates on the Christian Neoplatonism of Augustine and the pseudo-Dionysius,

both of whom were major authorities in the seventeenth century and, as such, were important vehicles for the dissemination of Neoplatonism, and of the quattrocento Florentine scholars, Marsiglio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, who were the immediate source of many Neoplatonic ideas, not least because of the former's Latin translations of Plato and the Neoplatonists which made their works widely available in Western Europe for the first time. Consideration of the particular emphasis of Ficino's thought especially his apologetic purpose centring on the nature of the soul, its divinity and immortality, serves to establish the character of the Neoplatonism handed down to succeeding generations.

Chapter II deals with the sixteenth-century background to our main theme. It indicates the ways in which Florentine Neoplatonism was received by the early French Humanists and traces, in general outline, the various avatars and progress of Neoplatonic thought in the French Renaissance. Without treating its aesthetic or literary forms in any detail, it considers the philosophical and theological preoccupations of the pre-Reformers, the importance of the many translations of Neoplatonic texts and the increasing tendency towards exploitation of Neoplatonic doctrines for apologetic and spiritual ends. Above all, a sense of continuity and community of purpose in the Neoplatonic tradition from the early Renaissance to the Counter-Reformation is stressed.

Chapter III examines the real beginnings of the French Counter-Reformation and the rôle of the many prominent spiritual writers and thinkers who constitute the cercle Acarie. Having indicated the composition of this circle of religious reformers and outlined their common aims

and interests, this chapter largely concerns two major figures who are taken as representatives of the basic directions of the group as a whole. The first is the Capuchin, Benoît de Canfield, who exemplifies the tendency of the French Catholic reformers towards abstract mysticism and also stands at the head of a long line of Capuchin spirituality in the seventeenth century. The second is Saint François de Sales, a central figure of the Catholic revival in both theory and practice; the spirituality of François de Sales has a different, more personal emphasis and represents the tradition of Christian Humanism with its fundamental core of Neoplatonic doctrines and which inspired much seventeenth-century devotional and apologetic writing, whilst providing a practical ideal of the religious life.

Chapter IV examines the development of Capuchin thought. It begins with the spirituality of Laurent de Paris which already marks a departure from Canfieldian mysticism and inaugurates the evolution of Capuchin theology and philosophy away from abstract mysticism towards the position of Christian Humanism following the example of Saint François de Sales. This development culminates in the work of Yves de Paris where the influence of Ficinian Neoplatonism is quite overt, but throughout the first half of the seventeenth century numerous Capuchin authors evince an increasingly scholarly disposition and a distinct preference for Neoplatonism which manifests itself in apologetic and spiritual works greatly indebted to the Florentines in particular.

Chapter V treats the foundation and early years of the Congrégation de l'Oratoire. It begins with an assessment of the personal philosophy of its founder, Pierre de Bérulle,

his mysticism, his Christocentrism and his indebtedness to the Neoplatonic thought of Augustine and the pseudo-Dionysius. In his formation of the Congregation, Bérulle established the spirit of the Oratoire with its profound piety and atmosphere of intellectual freedom with a distinct preference for the idealist, exemplarist, spiritualist philosophy of the Neoplatonists. Moreover, the impact of Bérulle's spirituality was inescapable within the Oratoire and informed the thinking of all his disciples; his successor, Charles de Condren, continued and reinforced his work, and also helped to extend his already considerable influence outside the Congregation, not least in such parallel institutions as Jean-Jacques Olier's Compagnie des Prêtres de Saint-Sulpice. The notion of continuity and consistency within organized institutions inspired by the spiritual ideals of the Catholic revival is of considerable importance as it serves to confirm and perpetuate the line of Neoplatonic thought.

Chapter VI continues the study of Oratorian Neoplatonism in the work of authors from Gibieuf to Lamy, concentrating on such eminent figures as André Martin and Louis Thomassin. It notes a progression from a general Neoplatonic spiritual atmosphere to specific Neoplatonic scholarship and a tendency for Oratorians to pursue radical philosophical and theological interests, developing logically and systematically the essential Augustinianism and Dionysianism of Bérulle and increasingly adopting the thought of Descartes, and which were to involve many members of the Congregation in prolonged controversies.

Chapter VI is devoted to the philosophy of Malebranche.

Inevitably, it considers the significance of the thought of Descartes in the formation of Malebranche's system, but it seems preferable to regard the rôle of Descartes as providing less a radical new point of departure than a method of metaphysical speculation that is fully in accordance with the long-term movement of intellectual and spiritual renewal, especially its fundamental idealism. Accordingly, whilst not underestimating the importance of Descartes in redefining the real questions of philosophy and the terms in which they were to be answered, the thought of Malebranche is examined in the perspective of the Oratorian tradition. His philosophical preoccupations give his work a character very different from that of Bérulle, but the spirit of Bérulle nonetheless underlies Malebranche's attempt to place God at the very centre of the universe and all human activity in his theories of vision in God and occasional causes. If not a mystical system, le malebranchisme is thoroughly idealist and reflects Oratorian spirituality, and, if the direct influence of Neoplatonism is no longer discernible in Malebranche's original synthesis of Augustino-Platonic thought, it is certainly still compatible with it.

Chapter VIII is devoted to Bossuet. Although the Bishop of Meaux lies outside our strict terms of reference, his significance in the history of seventeenth-century French religious thought is such that, like Saint François de Sales, his position and contribution cannot be overlooked. Bossuet's limited acceptance of Cartesianism is considered, but the emphasis is rather on the consequences of his Augustinianism and his thorough acquaintance with the thought of Plato himself for his spirituality in which he reveals himself as the inheritor of the religious spirit of the Counter-

Reformation and its Neoplatonism. Neoplatonic themes recur throughout Bossuet's work and one can discern the persistence of the tradition of optimistic apologetics inspired by Renaissance concerns and motifs which, whilst no longer forming part of a total grandiose system in the Ficinian manner, nonetheless make Bossuet something of a theological and philosophical conservative.

Chapter IX is devoted to Fénelon. As a product of the seminary of Saint-Sulpice, Fénelon belongs closely to the tradition of spirituality engendered by the Catholic revival and has much in common with the early Oratorians. Again, the problems raised by the philosophy of Descartes cannot be avoided, but of greater interest is Fénelon's status as a spiritual epigone, an outstanding example of Counter-Reformation spirituality in an age when the religious life was in decline. Two aspects of his work are stressed in particular. The first is his profound Humanist erudition and direct knowledge of the philosophy of Plato and his followers. The second is his mysticism which, for all the unorthodox implications of his doctrine of pure love, is inspired by the pseudo-Dionysius and represents the logical conclusion of a spiritual tradition inaugurated by Benoît de Canfield and Bérulle.

In conclusion, our final three authors can be said to represent the aboutissements of the three main strains of Neoplatonism that we have discerned in the religious thought of the French Counter-Reformation. All three indicate the way in which the impact of Descartes was inescapable, but equally they exemplify the importance of preoccupations that predate the advent of Cartesianism - Malebranche in the realm of pure

philosophy, Bossuet in apologetics, and Fénelon in mystical spirituality. In all three domains, Neoplatonism is seen to have been of fundamental significance particularly within the organized institutions of the Oratoire and the Order of Capuchins, but also in the religious thought of the age as a whole and it is this that, besides the identification of instances of Neoplatonic philosophy and theology, is our main conclusion, namely that the spiritualism and idealism of Neoplatonism corresponded to the deepest needs of the Catholic revival in France and served to provide an intellectual framework for a reinvigorated faith.

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Platon pour disposer au christianisme

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NOTE ON EDITIONS AND SPELLING

The bibliography at the end of this thesis indicates those editions of both primary and secondary sources that were actually consulted; where relevant, full bibliographical details of important primary sources, in particular the place and date of publication of the first edition, have been included in the notes to the text. Wherever possible, either modern, critical editions of primary sources or the first definitive sixteenth- or seventeenth-century edition have been used. Occasionally, however, my choice of edition has been wholly determined by the available resources of the nearest library; a comparison of the bibliography with the catalogues of the Bodleian and British Libraries, and the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, will frequently reveal precisely where a particular book was read. Otherwise, it may be helpful to note that certain works by Capuchin or Oratorian authors have been found only in the Bibliothèque des Frères Mineurs Capucins, 32, rue Boissonade, 75014 Paris, and the Bibliothèque de l'Oratoire, 75, rue de Vaugirard, 75006 Paris, respectively.

With regard to orthography, I have consistently retained the spelling of the edition used, except that I have distinguished between "i" and "j", "u" and "v", and inserted accents on final "é" and on "à" in the interest of clarity;

for the same reason, I have modernised the punctuation of primary sources wherever it seemed unnecessarily obscure.

ABBREVIATIONS

Throughout this thesis, the abbreviations OC and Corr have been used to denote Oeuvres complètes and Correspondance respectively where there could be no confusion as to the author concerned; this applies particularly where a chapter is devoted wholly or in large part to a single author. Similarly, once introduced, long titles of works under discussion have frequently been abbreviated to a convenient, but clear, form, especially in the notes (for example, Recherche stands for Malebranche's De la recherche de la vérité). The following standard abbreviations for the titles of reference books and periodicals have also been used:

<u>APC</u>	<u>Annales de la philosophie chrétienne</u>
<u>BHR</u>	<u>Bibliothèque d'humanisme et Renaissance</u>
<u>BLE</u>	<u>Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique</u>
<u>DS</u>	<u>Dictionnaire de spiritualité</u>
<u>DSS</u>	<u>XVII^e siècle</u>
<u>DTC</u>	<u>Dictionnaire de théologie catholique</u>
<u>EF</u>	<u>Études franciscaines</u>
<u>JHI</u>	<u>Journal of the History of Ideas</u>
<u>JHP</u>	<u>Journal of the History of Philosophy</u>
<u>PG</u>	<u>Patrologia graeca</u>
<u>PL</u>	<u>Patrologia latina</u>

<u>RAM</u>	<u>Revue d'ascétique et de mystique</u>
<u>RHLF</u>	<u>Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France</u>
<u>RHR</u>	<u>Revue de l'histoire des religions</u>
<u>RIP</u>	<u>Revue internationale de philosophie</u>
<u>RLC</u>	<u>Revue de littérature comparée</u>
<u>RMM</u>	<u>Revue de métaphysique et de morale</u>
<u>RTP</u>	<u>Revue de théologie et de philosophie</u>
<u>RFN</u>	<u>Rivista di filosofia neo-scolastica</u>

INTRODUCTION

"Few of the movements that have shaped Western culture and thought have remained as little known as Neoplatonism".¹ Nor, one might add, as little understood or even explored. As Wallis goes on to suggest, the reasons for this are manifold, from the very difficulty of ancient Neoplatonism itself to the relative lack of scholarship devoted to this important intellectual movement until recent years. The former will, of course, forever be an obstacle for all but a rare few who can combine a profound knowledge of Greek and a trained philosophical mind with a religious sensitivity of distinctly mystical bent. With regard to the latter problem, the pioneering efforts of scholars at the turn of the century² have, if now outdated and somehow simplistic, nonetheless served to generate significant modern research in later-classical studies, concentrating particularly on Plotinus and Proclus. Much of this work has, however, been of a highly specialist nature. In his book Neoplatonism, Wallis has provided an accessible, popular account superseding that

1 R.T. Wallis Neoplatonism (London, 1972), p. ix.

2 C. Bigg, Neoplatonism (London, 1895); É. Bréhier, La Philosophie de Plotin (Paris, 1928); E.R. Dodds, Select Passages Illustrating Neoplatonism (London, 1923); C. Elsee, Neoplatonism in relation to Christianity (Cambridge, 1908); R. Eucken, Die Lebensanschauungen der grossen Denker (Leipzig, 1890); W.R. Inge, The Philosophy of Plotinus, 2 vols. (2nd ed., London, 1929); L. Grandgeorge, Saint Augustin et le Néoplatonisme (Paris, 1896); T. Whittaker, The Neoplatonists (2nd ed., Cambridge, 1918).

of Whittaker, until then the last general study, but, of necessity, its scope is limited, and the inevitable omission is that it neglects to provide an adequate survey of the influence of Neoplatonism in the post-classical world.

Such an omission is doubly unfortunate. For, the influence of the Neoplatonic tradition on Western civilization has been both profound and wide-ranging, and - perhaps more significantly - more or less continuous, if in varying guises. Few would now dispute the first contention; in art, philosophy, and literature, the significance of classical Neoplatonism in succeeding ages has been widely illustrated and the Neoplatonism of the Renaissance, in Italy, France, or England, stands fully documented, not to mention that of, say, the circle of Alcuin, the eleventh century, or the Romantic era. And yet, there has been a tendency to regard such moments in isolation, as pinnacles of artistic or intellectual achievement almost in reaction against a prevailing ignorance or even barbarism.

Certainly there is no doubt that the Neoplatonic moment has frequently coincided with the finest flourishes of European culture, but, if one is to maintain the relative continuity of an undercurrent of Neoplatonic influence, then one must also seek it where one might almost least expect it. A re-examination of certain pre-conceived ideas about historical periods and intellectual "-isms" would therefore appear desirable and indeed necessary. In this, the master is Étienne Gilson who, in his prodigious and truly magisterial output, has done so much to undermine what might be termed the monolithic conception of the history of European ideas, and it is his work that has inspired a primary aim of this thesis, namely to combat the "intellectual isolationism" of

much earlier scholarship.

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, it was still common to make a facile distinction between mediaeval and modern thought, between Scholasticism and the "Cartesian revolution", perpetuating D'Alembert's view of Descartes as "un chef de conjurés, qui a eu le courage de s'élever le premier contre une puissance despotique et arbitraire".¹ Gilson's early work on Descartes has done much to rectify such a distorted view of the history of philosophy engendered by the Enlightenment's faith in the achievements of the modern age which tended to dismiss the achievements of the past.² Instead, Gilson, and in his wake Henri Gouhier,³ takes a longer view of the history of philosophy, particularly with regard to the status of the seventeenth century in France when the modern age had hitherto been presumed to have been born almost ex nihilo. This is not to question the originality of the cogito, which in its explicit rejection of existing philosophical systems posed an entirely new problem with which succeeding generations had to come to terms, but to place it in a proper perspective: in his reaction against scepticism and attempt to establish valid criteria for philosophical and scientific knowledge, Descartes did demolish the edifice of Scholasticism, but in building his own philosophical structure he inevitably used

1 Discours préliminaire de l'Encyclopédie in vol. I of the Encyclopédie, 28 vols. (Paris, 1751-72), p. xxvi.

2 See especially La Doctrine cartésienne de la liberté (Paris, 1913), Études sur le rôle de la pensée médiévale dans la formation du système cartésien (Paris, 1957), and the articles "Humanisme médiéval et Renaissance" in Les Idées et les lettres (Paris, 1932), pp. 171-96, and "Philosophie médiévale et Renaissance" in Héloïse et Abélard (Paris, 1938), pp. 225-45.

3 See especially his important article, "La crise de la théologie au temps de Descartes" in RTP, 4 (1954), pp. 19-54.

some ancient materials, essentially Scholastic and Augustinian.

A similar re-assessment has taken place in historical scholarship. As Michael Mullett shows in his pamphlet, The Counter-Reformation,¹ the received view of the Counter-Reformation, exemplified in England by such historians as B.J. Kidd,² H.O. Evennett³ and A.G. Dickens,⁴ that the Counter-Reformation originated at about the same time as the Protestant Reformation and in reaction to it, and that it ended between, say, 1600 and 1650, perhaps with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, is no longer generally accepted. Jean Delumeau's Le Catholicisme entre Luther et Voltaire⁵ epitomises the revolution that has occurred in our thinking about the Counter-Reformation, regarding it less as a Counter-Reformation than as a long-term process with its origins in the Middle Ages and continuing at least until the end of the seventeenth century, and which, far from being opposed to the Protestant Reformation, has much in common with it, including its inspiration. It is for these reasons that the the notion of a Catholic Reform or Revival seems greatly preferable, and has been adopted by many prominent historians of spirituality and religious thought, particularly in France where this phenomenon appears exemplified.

What this thesis seeks to stress, then, is not a

1 London, 1984.

2 B.J. Kidd, The Counter-Reformation (2nd ed. London, 1963; first published in 1933).

3 H.O. Evennett, The Spirit of the Counter-Reformation, (Cambridge, 1968).

4 A.G. Dickens, The Counter-Reformation (London, 1968).

5 3rd ed. Paris, 1984 (first published in 1971). A.D. Wright also adopts this line in The Counter-Reformation (London, 1982).

historical action and reaction in philosophy and religion, suggesting rupture and discontinuity, but a very strong sense of continuity, both within the seventeenth century in France and between the seventeenth century and all that went before it, a continuity that derived its immediate impulsion from the philosophical and religious movements of the Renaissance in Italy and in France, but which also belongs to a much broader tradition in Western thought.

Whitehead's remark that "the safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato"¹ is perhaps something of an exaggeration, but there is more than a grain of truth in Coleridge's observation that "every man is born an Aristotelian or a Platonist".² In this modern age of positivism and mathematical logic, when metaphysical speculation is largely out of fashion, such categorization appears irrelevant, or at best crude, and yet Platonism and Aristotelianism nonetheless represent two poles, one spiritual and the other material, towards one of which all men are attracted more than to the other. Each has known its periods of general ascendancy, but that need not preclude the simultaneous presence of the other in defiance of the ambient spirit of the age.

The spirit of the seventeenth century in France has been variously characterized as Augustinian in theology and either Aristotelian or Cartesian in philosophy, and it would perhaps seem surprising to seek, and more so to find, so nebulous a corpus of ideas as Neoplatonism in an age of classical order.

¹ A.N. Whitehead, Process and Reality (New York, 1941), p. 63.

² Table Talk, 20 July, 1830.

Certainly it appears much better suited to the eclectic enthusiasm of the Renaissance, and P. Costil well represents such a view:

Le néoplatonisme suppose et favorise à la fois une certaine liberté intellectuelle, et un désir de conciliation des idées, qui caractérisent l'époque où la réforme tentée à l'intérieur de l'Église cherchait à s'adapter à la philosophie antique. Le tournant se produit au cours des années du Concile de Trente (1545-1563), qui voient s'accroître et se multiplier les oppositions de doctrine. Dans l'Europe nouvelle issue de ces discussions, entre les camps irréductiblement rivaux de Rome, de la Réforme, et de la Renaissance païenne, l'idéal néoplatonicien n'a plus d'autre asile que la tour d'ivoire de quelques esprits isolés, de plus en plus rares.¹

That Neoplatonism played a substantial rôle in the unificatory spirit of the Renaissance is not in dispute, but to banish it to the ivory towers after Trent is symptomatic of the monolithic approach to history; the circumstances that led to Trent did not change overnight, and nor were the problems raised during Trent resolved overnight.

Indeed, quite the reverse is the case. The period commonly referred to as the French Counter-Reformation marks the culmination of pre-Tridentine concerns and the triumph of their ideal. The spirituality of the École française represents the resolution of the pre-Reform problem about the nature of religious life, and this solution is found in precisely the terms of the pre-Reformers. Neoplatonism played an important part in the philosophical and religious concerns of the Italian and French Renaissances; it is not, therefore, surprising that it should be a central feature of the spirituality of the Catholic revival.

The presence of Platonism or Neoplatonism in seventeenth-century France has not passed unnoticed. As J.-L. Goré points

¹ André Dudith, humaniste hongrois, 1533-1589 (Paris, 1935), p. 335, n. 3.

out, "Le temps n'est plus où E. Vacherot affirmait - voici un siècle - qu'après 1600 les théories platonisantes perdaient toute importance".¹ Nor is it generally accepted that "en 1604, Aristote était encore le maître".² The work of Jean Dagens on the Oratoire,³ Jean Orcibal on Port-Royal,⁴ and Charles Chesneau on the Capuchin, Yves de Paris⁵ has amply demonstrated the importance of Platonic ideas in the seventeenth century. However, the arguments of Dagens and Chesneau carry a significant proviso which limits their force:

Parallèlement [au] courant thomiste, un courant augustinien se déroule à travers le XVII^e siècle. Je dis, à dessein, augustinien et non platonicien, bien que la plupart de ces apologistes se réclament de Platon et défendent la théorie des idées platoniciennes; mais, comme ils rejettent tous la thèse de la réminiscence et surtout celle de la métempsychose, c'est en réalité à saint Augustin qu'il faut les rattacher.⁶

And, again:

Aussi ne faut-il pas parler du platonisme de Bérulle. Il y a souvent chez lui une sorte de vêtement platonicien, des métaphores, des réminiscences platoniciennes, mais les vraies sources sont toutes chrétiennes; et quand Bérulle platonise, c'est qu'il s'agit d'idées qui ont été incorporées à la tradition chrétienne par saint Augustin par exemple, ou bien d'idées dionysiennes, que l'on croyait d'origine apostolique.⁷

1 "Néoplatonisme et quiétisme: Fénelon et l'Aréopagite" in RHLF, 69 (1969), p. 584. Cf. La Notion d'indifférence chez Fénelon et ses sources (Paris, 1956), p.16. The reference is to Vacherot's Histoire critique de l'École d'Alexandrie (Paris, 1846-51).

2 L. Dedouvres, "Le Père Joseph, lecteur en philosophie" in EF, 29 (1913), p. 339.

3 Bérulle et les origines de la restauration catholique, (1575-1611) (Paris, 1952).

4 "Thèmes platoniciens dans l'Augustinus de Jansénius" in Augustinus Magister, 3 vols. (Paris, 1954), pp. 1077-85; and "Néoplatonisme et Jansénisme: du De Libertate du P. Gibieuf à l'Augustinus" in Analecta Gregoriana, 71 (1954), pp. 33-57.

5 Le Père Yves de Paris et son temps (1590-1678), 2 vols. (Paris, 1946).

6 Chesneau, Le Père Yves, vol. II, p. 438.

7 Dagens, Bérulle et les origines, p. 256.

Certainly, Augustine and the pseudo-Dionysius were essential (and, above all, orthodox) vehicles for Platonic or Neoplatonic ideas in the seventeenth century, and so too, to a lesser degree and in a more complex way, Cartesianism, but to see only Augustine and the pseudo-Dionysius where one might equally discern Plato and his disciples is perhaps to mistake authority for source and to neglect the influence of Neoplatonism on Augustine himself and still more so on the pseudo-Dionysius. It is, moreover, to deny, as M. Dubois-Quinard indicates,¹ that the seventeenth century had any effective, direct access to Platonic or Neoplatonic writings themselves. It is the purpose of this thesis to show not only that many religious writers of the seventeenth century knew the works of Plato and his successors, but also that they were a source of profound inspiration, satisfying the innermost yearnings of the soul of the spiritual renewal of the age, just as they have always been a source of spiritual uplift, providing a response to fundamental human needs, an intellectual basis for faith, and, most especially, a rational underpinning of essential Christian beliefs about God, truth, the soul, ideas and morality.

Such an attitude is Jules Brody's point of departure in his article "Platonisme et Classicisme": "L'attitude dite platonicienne n'est rien d'autre qu'une tendance fondamentale et immémoriale de l'esprit humain qu'un homme nommé Platon se trouve avoir localisée dans le temps en l'incorporant à un contenu philosophique particulier".² A belief in absolute

1 M. Dubois-Quinard, Laurent de Paris (Rome, 1959), p. 224, n. 2.

2 J. Brody, "Platonisme et Classicisme" in French Classicism. A Critical Miscellany (Englewood Cliffs, 1966), p. 187.

beauty and a rigorous idea of what is true does indeed appear to be a central aspect of the classical ideal, but this contention remains rather indeterminate and does not permit one to go beyond the most basic of generalisations; it even suggests, despite Brody's account of a Platonic current underlying French Classicism, the real insignificance of the doctrines of Plato in the seventeenth century, as Mme. Goyet concludes: "A l'usure du temps, de la critique, et par la concurrence des génies modernes, Platon paraît s'être rétréci".¹ It is, however, possible to identify a more specifically Platonic influence within the Classical movement itself, and F. Gohin has done so with regard to La Fontaine in an important, if all too brief, study of the status of Platonism in the seventeenth century. This essay is of particular interest as it makes the distinction between aesthetic Platonism (which has been well documented)² and what he describes as "le platonisme théologique qui veut concilier l'humanisme et la foi",³ and, passing over the former to consider the latter, Gohin proceeds to indicate the rôle of the Oratoire as a major centre of philosophical activity and especially Platonic scholarship, where La

1 T. Goyet, "Présence de Platon dans le classicisme français" in Assn. G. Budé. Actes du Congrès de Tours et de Poitiers (1953), p. 371.

2 Another general study is to be found in P. Shorey's Platonism, ancient and modern (Berkeley, 1938), ch. 6, "Platonism and French Literature". On more specific aspects of seventeenth-century aesthetic Platonism, see: L.W. Johnson, "Literary Neoplatonism in Five French Treatises of the Early Seventeenth Century" in The Romanic Review, 60 (1969), pp. 233-50; N. Cronk, "Une poétique platonicienne à l'époque classique: le De furore poetico de Pierre Petit (1683)" in DSS, 146 (1985), pp. 99-102; A.H.T. Levi, "The Neoplatonist Calculus" in Humanism in France (ed. Levi, Manchester, 1970), pp. 229-48.

3 F. Gohin, "La Fontaine et Platon" in La Fontaine: Études et Recherches (Paris, 1937), p. 21.

Fontaine had in fact been a confrère in 1641-42.

Gohin's approach is also that of this thesis. Whilst, for example, Charles Huit's series of articles "Le platonisme dans la France du XVII^e siècle"¹ identifies particular instances of Platonism, its concentration on the individual precludes any sense of pattern or general movement. If, however, one puts together the various case-studies of Brody, Goyet, Gohin, Huit and others, one arrives at a fairly substantial "présence de Platon au XVII^e siècle", and surely, if one accepts a large body of discrete data, then one begins to seek connections between them and perhaps even the existence of a wider scheme of interest, influence, and interaction. Gohin began to do this; it is our aim to develop his approach.

In the closing pages of his French Moralists, Anthony Levi, having devoted part of a chapter to the Florentine Academy of the Quattrocento and made frequent reference to Marsilio Ficino, concludes: "It is the extent of the indebtedness of the seventeenth-century moralists to Ficino and Pico della Mirandola that seems to me perhaps the most important single conclusion of the foregoing chapters".² Going beyond the influence of Platonic aesthetics and the theory of love, derived essentially from the Symposium and Ficino's commentary De Amore, on sixteenth-century

¹ C. Huit, "Le Platonisme dans la France du XVII^e siècle" in APC, 151-54 (1906-07), *passim*. It should be pointed out that his identification of the author of La Morale de Platon (Paris, 1642) as the Oratorian, Charles Lecoq, author of the Annales ecclesiastici Francorum (8 vols., Paris, 1665-83), on pp. 490-91 of his first article, is unfortunately erroneous; the author is in fact the much less distinguished Florent Lecoq, Prieur de Montilliers (near Doué-la-Fontaine).

² A.H.T. Levi, French Moralists (Oxford, 1967), p. 333.

poetry,¹ Levi sees a wider and more profound significance of Platonism and Neoplatonism, not only in the late sixteenth century, but throughout the first half of the seventeenth century and even beyond. For Levi, the works of the Neostoics, Bérulle, Descartes, Pascal, Bossuet, and even Malebranche - to name but a few of the most important thinkers of the age - all contain elements of Neoplatonic thought that can be traced back to the fifteenth-century Florentine Academy.

Similarly, in Henri Busson's La Pensée religieuse française de Charron à Pascal,² the name of Marsilio Ficino again occurs with some regularity at significant moments, and in La Religion des classiques (1660-1685) the author asks: "Qui nous fera l'histoire [...] de l'apport de Ficin à la défense du spiritualisme?" adding in parenthesis that "elle sera longue et probante".³ Taking more or less for granted the rôle of Ficino during the Renaissance both as an apologist in his own right adducing Plato in defence of Christian faith and as a translator and commentator, Busson underlines the use made of Neoplatonism in the early seventeenth century by such religious writers as the Capuchin Yves de Paris, the Jesuit Louis Richeome, and the Carthusian Polycarpe de la Rivière. With regard to the Classical period, Busson believes that Neoplatonism was in decline, having been largely supplanted by Cartesianism, and yet, although the

1 See especially A.J. Festugière, La Philosophie de l'amour de Marsile Ficin et son influence sur la littérature française au XVI^e siècle (Paris, 1941).

2 Paris, 1933. See also Julien-Eymard d'Angers, L'Apologétique en France de 1580 à 1670: Pascal et ses précurseurs (Paris, 1954).

3 Paris, 1948, p. 323.

Neoplatonic world-view was indeed rather outmoded by the late seventeenth century, it will be seen that Platonic and Neoplatonic elements are far from absent in the works of such Cartesians, or semi-Cartesians, as Malebranche, Bossuet, and Fénelon, thereby suggesting the persistence of the Neoplatonic tradition until the end of the Grand Siècle.

Levi's almost obsessive insistence on the pervasive influence of Ficino's theory of love and the will on the seventeenth-century moralists represents a substantial contribution to our awareness of the survival of the Neoplatonic tradition beyond the Renaissance, but Busson's more tentative suggestion of the importance of Ficino for the evolution of seventeenth-century French religious thought points more interestingly to the pattern amidst individual instances that we seek. Both, however, have Quattrocento Florence as their starting-point. It will also be ours, but, contrary to Levi, the aim is less to prove the influence of Ficino in particular than to illustrate in a more heuristic manner the influence of a broad corpus of ideas, conveniently termed Neoplatonism, that was inherited by the French Counter-Reformation and responded to its needs, that is to say, to provide an exposition of Neoplatonic ideas, recurrent themes and motifs rather than great blocks of thought, in use by religious writers who shared certain fundamental concerns. What these ideas are and their intellectual force, both generally and in the Florentine context, forms the subject of the opening chapter, which aims to establish the nature of the tradition inherited by the seventeenth century.

The scope of a thesis is necessarily limited, and inevitably there are not a few notable omissions (deliberate as well as accidental). The intention here is to concentrate

mainly, if not quite exclusively, on two religious groupings, both new to France in the Counter-Reformation, the Order of Capuchins, Franciscan friars of the new rule of 1528, and the Congrégation de l'Oratoire, many members of which were leading figures in the Catholic spiritual revival in France after the Wars of Religion in the last decade of the sixteenth century and the early seventeenth century.¹ Having already made a conscious decision not consider the main aspects of Renaissance Platonism, aesthetics, the theory of love and scepticism, I am also constrained to disregard many of the most important religious orders and movements of the seventeenth century.

Not least of these is the Society of Jesus. Levi, Busson, and Julien-Eymard d'Angers have shown the influence of Ficinian Neoplatonism on Jesuits including J. Hayneuve, L. Richeome, F. Garasse, P. Coton, N. Caussin, and even L. Marandé, but, quite apart from the factor of space, there are various reasons to justify their exclusion from this thesis. Firstly, and most significantly, the Society, banished from 1594 to 1604, was absent from France during the first decade of the genesis of the religious renewal centred on the circle of Mme Acarie. In retrospect, this may in fact have determined the very development of the spirituality of the École française, for Ignatian spirituality is essentially opposed to the mysticism of pure love that was to characterize much of the thought of the Catholic Reformation.

¹ It is interesting to note that the revival of interest in Platonism in both England and France occurred in the period immediately after civil war, as if to emphasize the very quality of spiritual uplift inherent in Platonism.

As Dom Huijben notes:

On peut se demander si le grand mouvement, dont nous étudions ici les origines, se serait développé de tout point suivant les mêmes lignes, si les Jésuites avaient pu se livrer sans entraves à leur ministère. Car il est évident que, sans être en opposition avec saint Ignace, ni Capucins, ni Chartreux surtout, n'ont tout à fait les mêmes préoccupations ni les mêmes tendances: par la force même des choses ils ont imprimé au mouvement naissant, auquel ils présidaient, une orientation plus mystique qu'il n'auraient peut-être eue en d'autres conjonctures.¹

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Furthermore, and this is scarcely less important, the Society as an educational body allowed little place to the study of Plato, and its scholarship can fairly be summarized as orthodoxly Thomist, which is quite the opposite of the case with the Oratoire.

Equally, Mabillon and the Benedictines of Saint-Maur, the editors of the works of Augustine² and possibly the greatest classical scholars of the age, must also be passed over as being deserving of a more detailed study than the space available here will allow, and so too, for the same reason, the Carthusians (with the notable exception of Dom Robert Beaucousin, who played a vital part in the seminal cercle Acarie, as did A. Du Val and P. de Gamaches, doctors of the Sorbonne, which will also not figure here in any significant form). As for Port-Royal, Jean Orcibal's articles on the relationship between Neoplatonism and Jansenism represent an achievement upon which it would be presumptuous to attempt to improve; moreover, the lack of coherent structure or organisation within the movement means that instances of Neoplatonism were few and unconnected, and Plato hardly occupied the place in Jansenist education that he did in the

¹ J. Huijben, "Aux sources de la spiritualité française du XVII^e siècle" in Vie spirituelle. Supplément, janvier 1931, pp. 19-20.

² Paris, 1679-1700.

curriculum of the Oratoire.

The full reasons why I have chosen to concentrate on the Capuchins and the Oratorians should become apparent in the course of the thesis, as they form a substantial part of its argument, but it is perhaps worth making some preliminary remarks. Firstly, the formative rôle of the cercle Acarie can not be overstated, and the Capuchin, Benoît de Canfield and the founder of the Oratoire, Pierre de Bérulle, with many other eminent confrères, were prominent members of this spiritual group. The meditations of this coterie, which also included Saint François de Sales who can scarcely be overlooked in any study of seventeenth-century religious thought whatever its prime concern, determined future developments both within the Order of Capuchins and the Oratoire and in those new orders and congregations that were to proliferate in the first half of the seventeenth century as a result of this initial impulsion and perpetuated its original ideals. Secondly, there is the profound significance of institutionalization. Within the Capuchin Order and the Oratoire, there is a considerable degree of coherence, continuity, and consistency, born out of their internal organization and fostered, especially, by their involvement in education, both internal and external. It is this, possibly above all else, that allows one to talk meaningfully of a real and continuous presence of Platonism and Neoplatonism in seventeenth-century French religious thought.

Affiliation, then, is the key notion behind this thesis. Its emphasis lies not on individual analysis of isolated works and authors, but on the broad sweep of interconnections. The ends to which it tends appear in the

form of three of the giants of the age, Malebranche, Bossuet, and Fénelon. The degree of attention devoted to them perhaps appears disproportionate, but it should be borne in mind that they are not single-issue figures, and that their thought is so much more complex. And yet, for all their highly original contribution to French thought, they still bear the imprint of their formative influences. As an Oratorian, Malebranche is shaped by the tradition of Bérullian spirituality, and Fénelon, through his connections with Saint-Sulpice, is also directly related to the École française; strictly speaking, Bossuet stands outside our scheme, but he is no less the product of the Counter-Reformation. It is through such affiliations that three such great figures will be seen to conform to the general intellectual and religious movement of the early seventeenth century, and indeed represent the culmination of the three principal tendencies within Christian Neoplatonism, the philosophical, the apologetic and the mystical, that will be identified in the course of this thesis.

If this study were to have a subtitle, then, it might well be "From Bérulle to Fénelon". Certainly this would aptly summarize the direction of seventeenth-century spirituality, but there is also the wider dimension alluded to earlier in this Introduction, and epitomized by P. Chaunu:

Le XVII^e siècle religieux français ne se comprend bien qu'inséré dans un modèle plus large, le modèle de l'histoire du temps long de la Réforme de l'Église. Entre les basses eaux du XV^e et les basses eaux du XVII^e siècle, un temps lourd, un temps riche, celui des hautes eaux religieuses. La problématique d'une Réforme purement rupture a brouillé cette réalité essentielle: Réforme protestante et Réforme catholique s'inscrivent dans un continuum. Elles répondent à des préoccupations identiques, elles participent d'une même richesse, elles

se comprennent mieux rapprochées qu'opposées.¹

It is such a notion of a long tradition and a profound inheritance that is the point of departure here.

¹ P. Chaunu, "Le XVII^e siècle religieux: Réflexions préalables" in Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations, 22 (1967), p. 284.

1. NEOPLATONISM AND THE FLORENTINE ACADEMY

Narrowly defined, Neoplatonism is a classical (and pagan) philosophy. It is, in the words of E.N. Tigerstedt, "the transformation of Platonism into a metaphysical or theological system, occurring in the last century B.C. and the first two centuries A.D."¹ This definition contains the two essential truths regarding Neoplatonism: the notion of systemization and the religious dimension. The former is indeed the central characteristic of all Neoplatonism, and the most profound contribution of all Neoplatonists from Plotinus to Ficino, who saw themselves as faithful disciples of Plato simply ordering the doctrines of the Dialogues within a coherent structure. This has led to important, and at times misleading, consequences. For, although there were Hellenists, from Jean de Serres (Serranus), the editor and translator of the 1578 edition of the works of Plato,² to the Oratorian scholar Richard Simon, who perceived a difference between the presumed teachings of Plato himself and those of his successors, there existed until comparatively recently no distinction in nomenclature,³ and those whom we should now describe as Neoplatonists believed, rightly or wrongly,

1 E.N. Tigerstedt, The Decline and Fall of the Neoplatonic Interpretation of Plato (Helsinki, 1974), p. 7.

2 Platonis opera quae extant omnia ex nova J. Serrani interpretatione, 3 vols., Geneva, 1578.

3 Robert dates the appearance of "le néoplatonisme" in French as late as 1836.

whatever their distortions of the Platonism of the Dialogues and however elaborate their own philosophical constructions, that they, as Platonici, were the true continuators of the work of the master. For Ficino, Plotinus was a Platonist, just as he considered himself to be.

This has led to confusion and misunderstanding. It seems, therefore, preferable to adopt the modern terminological convention of distinguishing between Platonism, the philosophy of Plato himself as contained in the Dialogues, and the sometimes grandiose metaphysical and theological schemes of the later Neoplatonists, which B. Kieszkowski has described in perhaps rather extreme terms as an "originale sistema filosofico, non riducibile alla filosofia di Platone".¹ It will, thus, be possible to speak of the Platonic theories of love and the soul, the Ideas and beauty, politics and ethics, whilst such notions as the hierarchy of being, the One and the All, the idea and attributes of God, and the highly mystical ideal of contemplation are technically more Neoplatonic formulations. Moreover, such a distinction allows one properly to arrive at a very broad conception of what is Neoplatonic, as it dissociates Neoplatonism in its religious implications from the essentially non-religious, and certainly non-Christian, Dialogues. One can legitimately refer to Christian Neoplatonism, whilst Christianity and Platonism often sit uncomfortably together; in the present context, this is of fundamental importance.

Echoing Coleridge's formulation that "every man is born

¹ Studi sul Platonismo del rinascimento in Italia (Florence, 1936), p. 12.

an Aristotelian or a Platonist", P.O. Kristeller has written:

The history of Platonism, like that of every living tradition, must not be conceived as an endless repetition of identical doctrines, but rather as a continual adaptation and transformation of certain basic ideas. "Platonism" is not a label that establishes a simple equation between various thinkers classified as Platonists, but a kind of general orientation which assumes a new meaning in each particular case.¹

Certainly, within even Renaissance Platonism and Neoplatonism, there are several different movements, and the individual emphasis of Marsilio Ficino is not that given by Petrarch, Nicholas of Cusa, the Byzantine scholars Pletho and Bessarion, or the more purely literary Humanists of the Italian and French Renaissance. However, Ficino's Neoplatonic theology places him clearly within a well established tradition. For all the modern studies devoted to the far from insubstantial influence of Scholastic Aristotelianism on Ficino,² again reinforcing the perception of intellectual history as a sequence of overlapping tendencies rather than distinct blocks of thought, Ficino is essentially the inheritor of Saint Augustine, at least the Augustine of the

1 "The Scholastic Background of Marsilio Ficino" in Traditio, 2 (1945), p. 35. Cf. E. Garin, "Ritratto di Marsilio Ficino" in Belfagor, 6 (1951), p. 300, and M.J.B. Allen, The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino (Berkeley, 1984), "Introduction", p. xi.

2 Whilst Saitta and Schiavone insist on the dominance of the Neoplatonic influence on Ficino, Kristeller and Collins see the influence of both Neoplatonism and Thomism, and Gilson, Fabro and Dress emphasize the strong influence of Aquinas (especially the Summa contra Gentiles). See especially: P.O. Kristeller, Le Thomisme et la pensée italienne de la Renaissance (Montreal/Paris, 1967), and "Humanism and Scholasticism in the Italian Renaissance" in Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters (Rome, 1956), pp. 553-83; A.B. Collins, The Secular is Sacred: Platonism and Thomism in Marsilio Ficino's "Platonic Theology" (The Hague, 1974); É. Gilson, "Marsile Ficin et le Contra Gentiles" in Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age, 24 (1957), pp. 101-13; C. Fabro, "Influenze tomistiche nella filosofia del Ficino" in Studia patavina, 6 (1959), pp. 396-413; W. Dress, Die Mystik des Marsilio Ficino (Berlin/Leipzig, 1929).

early philosophical dialogues, and the broad movement of Christian Neoplatonism. Ficino's syncretism, to which the notion of the philosophia perennis is a significant contributory factor,¹ clearly allows for a multiplicity of sources, but the model and inspiration for his synthesis of Neoplatonic philosophy and Christian theology is above all the Bishop of Hippo:

Agostino manifesta a Ficino il platonismo non tanto come dottrina di Platone, ma come vivente tradizione di pensiero che si è arricchita via via di elementi nuovi e che, con la sua maniera profondamente religiosa di intendere la realtà e l'uomo in essa, più di ogni altra si presta a diventare la base per una filosofia cristiana. E in questo senso la sintesi agostiniana di platonismo e di cristianesimo serve a Ficino da modello e punto di riferimento.²

Of course, Augustine is far from being the only Father of the Church to have undergone the influence of Neoplatonism. Indeed, the later history of Neoplatonism is to be found as much within the Church, particularly in the East, as amidst the crumbling ruins of Hellenism, and, quite apart from the Platonic echoes of scripture (notably the Gospel according to Saint John and the Epistles of Saint Paul, especially Corinthians), there is from the second century onwards a distinct school of Christian Neoplatonism running parallel to

1 For Ficino, the Judaic religion and Greek philosophy ultimately have the same source, stretching back to Moses, Zoroaster, Orpheus and the Hermetic texts, cf. the "Prooemium" to the commentary In Plotinum in Opera omnia (2 vols., Basel, 1576), vol. II, p. 1537, and the "Argumentum" preceding the translation of Hermes Trismegistus' Pimander, ibid., p. 1836.

2 A. Tarabochia Canavero, "S. Agostino nella teologia platonica di Marsilio Ficino" in RFN, 70 (1978), p. 632.

the pagan tradition.¹ In particular, the Eastern mysticism of Origen and Clement of Alexandria bears the stamp of Platonism,² and that of the Cappadocian Fathers, Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa, was under the strong influence of Plotinus.³ In the Western Church, however, it is the figure of Augustine that predominates.

Augustine himself has attested to the profound influence of Neoplatonism on his thought, praising it above all other non-Christian beliefs and acknowledging his particular indebtedness to Neoplatonic works in effecting his conversion from Manichaeism to Christianity in 386-87.⁴ Furthermore, although he drastically qualified his earlier pronouncements in Retractiones I, he far from rejected Neoplatonism after his conversion. It is true that one can contrast the strong Neoplatonism, derived mainly from Plotinus and Porphyry,

1 It is the view of R. Eucken that Plotinus has influenced Christian theology more than any other thinker (Die Lebensanschauungen der grossen Denker, pp. 254-7), whilst Dean Inge was if anything still more forthright in his contention that Christian theology is in fact Neoplatonism applied to the interpretation of the beliefs of the first Christians: "The greater part of [Neoplatonism] passed over into Christian philosophy, which it shaped for all time. [It] is part of the vital structure of Christian theology, and it would be impossible to tear them apart" (The Philosophy of Plotinus, vol. I, p. xiii. Cf. pp. 10-14).

2 On Clement and Origen, see C. Bigg's The Christian Platonists of Alexandria (2nd ed., Oxford, 1913), and Henry Chadwick's Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition (Oxford, 1966).

3 For an introduction to the rôle of Neoplatonism in the first millennium, see parts II and V-VII of The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy (Cambridge, 1967), which also contains useful guidance for further reading. There are interesting collections of articles in A.H. Armstrong's Plotinian and Christian Studies (London, 1979), and Saint Augustine and Christian Platonism (Villanova, 1967), and in Neoplatonism and Christian Thought (ed. D.J. O'Meara, New York, 1982).

4 Augustine praises Plato and Plotinus in Contra Academicos III, 18, endorses Neoplatonism in De civitate Dei VIII, 4 ff., and admits the extensive influence of Neoplatonism in Confessiones VII, 9-21.

whose works he clearly knew well, if only in the Latin translation of the fourth-century theologian Marius Victorinus, of the philosophical dialogues and treatises, notably the Soliloquia, De immortalitate animae, De quantitate animae, De vera religione, Contra Academicos, and De libero arbitrio, with the pessimistic theology of grace of the anti-Pelagian writings, but, even in his two greatest works, De civitate Dei and De Trinitate, Neoplatonic metaphysics provides many of his first principles. This applies both in specific details and in the general tenor of Augustine's philosophy, the main end of which he defines as "Deum et animam scire".¹ This association of God and the soul immediately identifies the axis of Augustine's thought and points to the main preoccupations of later Christian apologists and spiritualists who were equally to follow the Idealist tradition of Plato. What Augustine found in Neoplatonism was a philosophical system and terminology well suited to attaining a rational understanding of revealed truth, and this was to be its ultimate significance for his inheritors also; the otherworldliness of Neoplatonism, the opposition of Being and Becoming, the existence of a higher Reality of pure, eternal Ideas, forms the starting-point of a Christian philosophy to be elaborated on one essential certainty, namely the conception of God as the one source of Being, Truth, and Goodness, in short, the summum bonum of mankind. Around this central unifying principle, Augustine's Christian metaphysics is constructed, embracing Neoplatonic doctrines and Christian truths: the hierarchy of being and the immortality of the soul, the theory of Ideas and the

¹ Soliloquia I, ii, 7, in PL, vol. XXXII, col. 872.

epistemology of illumination, the ascent of the soul and the primacy of love in the will, Neoplatonic eros and Christian agape, emanation, the hypostases and the Trinity, the apophatic and the cataphatic attributes of God, infinite Being and infinite power, justice, and love.¹

If the Neoplatonism of Plotinus became absorbed into Christian philosophical speculation through Augustine, then the second great pagan Neoplatonist, Proclus, found his way into Christian theology through the four Greek treatises and ten complementary letters of the pseudo-Dionysius; indeed, it is arguable that, but for the works of the pseudo-Dionysius, Proclus would have had very little influence on Western thought, and that because of the pseudo-Dionysius his influence was considerable. Although internal and external evidence suggests that the Dionysian texts date from the late fifth or early sixth century, and it is no longer accepted that the author was the first-century convert of Saint Paul and the patron saint of Paris, as Abbot Hilduin's legendary biography claimed, this latter tradition persisted until modern times; Lorenzo Valla (1405-57) was the first to challenge the dating and authorship of the texts, as both Erasmus and Luther were to do later, but, throughout the Middle Ages and beyond, their authenticity was almost impeachable, and it is important to note that the quasi-

1 A brief état présent of scholarship on Augustine's Neoplatonism is to be found in J.J. O'Meara's "The Neoplatonism of Saint Augustine" in Neoplatonism and Christian Thought (New York, 1982), although Grandgeorge's Saint Augustin et le néoplatonisme (Paris, 1896) is still indispensable. The best general works on Augustine are those of Gilson, Introduction à l'étude de saint Augustin (Paris, 1929), F. Cayré, Initiation à la philosophie de saint Augustin (Paris, 1947), H.-I. Marrou, Saint Augustin et l'augustinisme (Paris, 1955), and, in English, H. Chadwick, Augustine (Oxford, 1986).

apostolic authority of the pseudo-Dionysius was fully accepted and stoutly defended throughout the seventeenth century in France where his influence was second only to that of Augustine himself.

One of the great achievements of Proclus's Elements of Theology¹ was to introduce a strict logical order into Neoplatonism, in particular developing Plotinus's theory of the emanation of hypostases into a complex scheme of triads which make up the intelligible world, and it is this hierarchy of triads that the pseudo-Dionysius took and applied to the orders of Christian heaven and thence to the ranks of the Church, which are in their image, in The Celestial Hierarchy and The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, thereby establishing "the mediation of divinity to terrestrial beings through the heavenly orders of angels and the terrestrial orders of the Church".² This treatment of the hierarchy of the Church, in particular, was to be of no little importance in the Counter-Reformation in the attempt to assert episcopal authority and in the quarrel between seculars and regulars, but, throughout the history of Western Christian thought, it is On the Divine Names and On Mystical Theology that have had the greatest impact, as they confront a central problem of all Christian theology, namely how one can talk of a God who is beyond all description and understanding.

The former work deals with affirmative or cataphatic theology, and contains an account of the attributes that can be ascribed to God, beginning with the Good, and proceeding to Unity and Trinity, Beauty, Love, Being, Life, Wisdom,

¹ E.R. Dodds's edition of the Elements (2nd ed., Oxford, 1963) has a very helpful "Introduction".
² Wallis, p. 161.

Intelligence, Reason and so on, fully reflecting the teachings of Neoplatonism on the One; it is also an important source of the famous image of the sun which recurs with considerable frequency in Christian theology.¹ The Mystical Theology treats negative or apophatic theology, and the practical discipline of the mystic. Though brief, it was to be highly influential as it presents a compact description of the mystical life, discussing the divine darkness or rather the inaccessibility of divine light to man, the preparation and purification of the soul, and the literal ecstasy of its ascent to illumination and union. If the affirmative attributes of God have tended to become commonplaces in Christian thought, then the mystical theology of the pseudo-Dionysius has been a constant source of genuine inspiration, a model of divine mystery and ecstatic love, a paradigm of Saint Paul's "vivo ego, iam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus",² which was to influence spiritual writers from Bonaventure to Nicholas of Cusa, and from Bérulle to Fénelon.³

During the Western Middle Ages, direct knowledge of Plato's works remained very limited. There was the partial translation and commentary of the Timaeus (17A-53C)⁴ by Calcidius (fl. c. 400), which together with Macrobius's contemporary commentary on Cicero's Somnium Scipionis formed

1 De divinis nominibus, caput iv, in PG, vol. III, col. 697. It is to be found originally in Plato's Republic VI, 508-509, and figures prominently in Ficino's De sole in Opera omnia, 2 vols. (Basel, 1576), vol. I, pp. 965-75.

2 Galat. 2. 20. On the ecstasy of pure love, see also De divinis nominibus, caput iv, in PG, vol. III, col. 712.

3 Of the literature on the pseudo-Dionysius, one should mention in particular H. Koch's Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in seinen Beziehungen zum Neuplatonismus und Mysterienwesen (Mainz, 1900).

4 Published in Plato Latinus ~~IV~~ (London/Leiden, 1962).

the two main pillars of mediaeval Platonism. Then, in the twelfth century, Henricus Aristippus translated into Latin the Meno¹ and the Phaedo², and in the thirteenth century the Dominican William of Moerbeke added his partial translation of the Parmenides to the known corpus of Platonic texts.³

Yet, as Raymond Klibansky has well shown,⁴ there was a flourishing Platonic or Neoplatonic tradition throughout the Middle Ages, from Boethius to Nicholas of Cusa. Certainly, until the School of Thierry of Chartres and the end of the twelfth-century Renaissance, Neoplatonism continued to dominate Western thought in the guise of Augustinianism, but it should be noted that it survived through the Scholastic period, even amongst such staunch Aristotelians as Saint Albert and Saint Thomas Aquinas, largely on account of the pre-eminent patristic authority of Augustine, but not least because the philosophy of the Arab commentators on Aristotle, especially Avicenna and Avicbron, was permeated with Neoplatonic doctrines. Moreover, if the influence of Augustine and the Arabs ensured that Neoplatonism persisted even in the Schools where Aristotle was the philosopher, until both Augustine and Plato began to come to the fore again in the age of Petrarch, there existed at the same time another, and extremely vigorous, current of Neoplatonic thought stemming from the Latin translation of the Dionysian texts by John Scotus Eriugena (c.810 - c.877).

1 Published in Plato Latinus, I (London, 1940).

2 Published in Plato Latinus, II (London, 1950).

3 Other important sources in the early mediaeval period were the second-century Latin Platonist Apuleius and the translation of the Hermetic Asclepius that was wrongly attributed to him.

4 R. Klibansky, The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition during the Middle Ages (London, 1939). See also E. Garin's Studi sul platonismo medievale (Florence, 1958).

Whilst also occupying a central position in the speculative theology of the Schools,¹ the works of the pseudo-Dionysius inspired a long movement of mystical theology. Franciscan thought, for example, was, from the very beginning, predominantly Neoplatonic, and more specifically of the Dionysian strain; whilst Roger Bacon was exceptionally a fervent Aristotelian, Duns Scotus wrote forcefully against the Aristotelianism of Aquinas, and, above all, Saint Bonaventure established the theoretical basis of Franciscan spirituality with his Itinerarium mentis in Deum, a work of distinctly Dionysian (and also Augustinian and Plotinian) inspiration. Equally, the Victorines inclined towards Dionysian mysticism, and the ~~r~~heno-flemish school of mysticism initiated by Meister Eckhart (c.1260-1327) and his pupils, Tauler and Suso, wholly embraced the Dionysian tradition, which Jan van Ruysbroeck, Hendrik Herp (Harphius), Denis the Carthusian, and Nicholas of Cusa were to continue up to the dawn of the Renaissance,² and which was to be highly influential in seventeenth-century France. R

It was such a broad and diffuse corpus of Latin Neoplatonism that Quattrocento Florence inherited, as Ficino indicates in his noteworthy letter to Martin Prenninger (12 June 1489):

Interrogas qui rursus apud Latinos inveniantur Platonici libri. Dionysii Areopagitae omnia sunt Platonica, Augustini multa, Boetii Consolatio, Apulei De daemonibus, Calcidii commentarium in Timaeum, Macrobiani expositio in Somnium Scipionis, Avicbron De fonte vitae, Alpharabius

1 Both Albertus Magnus and Aquinas wrote commentaries on the pseudo-Dionysius.

2 Late Medieval Mysticism, ed. R.C. Perry (London, 1957), presents a useful selection of texts with helpful, if brief, introductions. On the rheno-flemish school in particular, see L. Cognet's Introduction aux mystiques rhéno-flamands (Tournai, 1968).

De causis, et Henrici Gandavensis, Aviccenae Scotique
multa Platonem redolent...Exstat insuper Defensio
Platonis a Bessarione Cardinale Niceno facta; quaedam
speculationes Nicolai Cusii cardinalis.¹

The fifteenth-century Florentines, however, enjoyed one considerable advantage over their mediaeval Latin predecessors: they possessed the original and complete Greek works of Plato and the Neoplatonists.² In the Byzantine East, Plato had always occupied a premier position, and the arrival of the Greek exiles, Pletho and Bessarion, in Italy during the last years of the Empire was directly to engender the essor of Platonic and Neoplatonic scholarship of the fifteenth-century Florentine Academy under the leadership of Marsilio Ficino who can justly be said to have introduced the original work of Plato and his followers into Western Europe and given the initial impetus to the broad movement of Renaissance Platonism and Neoplatonism.³

The origins of the Florentine Academy lie most particularly in the close friendship between Gemistus Pletho and Cosimo de' Medici who was inspired by this contact to make Florence the centre of a new Platonic school. The leading representative of this school, which was to include Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Landino, Alberti, Aglio, Diacetto and Poliziano, was Marsilio Ficino. Born in 1433, the son of the physician to the Medicis, Ficino had already

1 Opera, vol. I, p. 899.

2 Aurispa and Traversari brought the complete manuscript of the works of Plato from Byzantium in 1423; as early as 1424, Leonardi Bruni had finished a partial Latin translation of the Phaedrus (up to 257C).

3 As L. Robin has written: "Ce fut par la traduction latine de Marsile Ficin, en 1483/4, que l'ensemble de l'oeuvre de Platon fut, pour la première fois, révélé au monde occidental" in Platon (Paris, 1935), p. 34.

begun his studies of Greek in 1456,¹ and written, in 1457, De Voluptate, a work essentially of Stoic morality, but in which he makes his Platonic allegiance quite explicit, referring in the "Prooemium" to Plato "quem tanquam philosophorum deum sequimur, atque veneramur"², and exploiting the Phaedrus and the Timaeus in his discussion "de laetitia, gaudio, et voluptate, secundum Platonem".³ It was to this promising young scholar that Cosimo gave several Greek manuscripts in 1462, and also a villa at Careggi where he might devote himself to the study of Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy. This marked the foundation of the Florentine Academy.⁴

The first fruit of Ficino's labours was the translation of the Hermetica, which was complete by April 1463. In the same year he began the translation of Plato's Dialogues, and by the death of Cosimo in August 1464 ten were complete; a total of twenty-three were ready by April 1466, and the first complete draft would appear to have been finished by 1468/9. The translation was finally published in Florence in 1484, with a second, corrected, edition appearing in Venice in 1491.⁵ It was in 1484, also, that a visit from the young Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-94) inspired Ficino to translate the works of Plotinus (published in Florence in

1 On Ficino as a scholar of Greek, see P.O. Kristeller's "Marsilio Ficino as a beginning student of Plato" in Scriptorium, 20 (1966), pp. 41-54, and R. Marcel's excellent biography, Marsile Ficin (1433-1499) (Paris, 1958).

2 Opera, vol. I, p. 986.

3 Opera, vol. I, p. 987.

4 The only general history of the Florentine Academy is that of A. della Torre, Storia dell'Accademia Platonica di Firenze (Florence, 1902), but Nesca Robb's Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance (London, 1935) represents an excellent general introduction, and the many books and articles of P.O. Kristeller are indispensable (see Bibliography for full details).

5 This edition was reprinted at least eighteen times between 1517 and 1602.

1492) and the other leading Neoplatonists, including the pseudo-Dionysius, Iamblichus, Proclus, Porphyry, Alcinous, and Psellus, and to write important commentaries on many of the works he had translated, notably on Plato and Plotinus.¹

This chronology would appear to suggest a distinct decline in Ficino's scholarly activity in the period between 1468 and 1484. In fact, this is far from being the case, as it was during this time that he produced his own original philosophical and theological works, which were to impose his particular stamp on Renaissance Neoplatonism and which are essential to a full understanding of its significance. Of these the first, and possibly most influential, was his commentary In Convivium Platonis de Amore, inspired by a celebratory banquet given by Lorenzo de' Medici and written between November 1468 and July 1469. In the following years, from 1469 to 1474, he would appear to have been very much preoccupied with the problem of the immortality of the soul, and these meditations resulted in the writing of his major work, the Theologia platonica: De immortalitate animorum (published in Florence in 1482). At the same time, in 1473, Ficino was ordained, occasioning the comment of his contemporary biographer, Giovanni Corsi, "ex pagano miles Christi~~/s~~ factus";² whilst, as R. Marcel believes, "paganus" i may in fact mean no more than "layman",³ his ordination nonetheless serves to confirm the truly Christian nature of Ficino's Humanism and the sincerity of his attempt to reconcile Plato and Scripture. In any case, in 1474, he wrote

¹ Marcel's Marsile Ficin contains a helpful "Essai de bibliographie ficinienne" listing all the editions of Ficino's works, translations and commentaries both in the original Latin and in translation (pp. 747-51).

² Cited by Marcel, Marsile Ficin, p. 354.

³ Ibid., pp. 354-55.

De christiana religione, a work of practical apologetics rather than a theoretical statement (published in Florence in 1476). It is these works, together with those of Ficino's great friend Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, above all the famous Oratio. De hominis dignitate (1487), that form the original contribution of the Florentine Academy.¹

In many respects, the thought of Pico is considerably more complex. Although the facile distinction between Pico, the Scholastic thinker, and Ficino, the Christian Humanist, is no longer generally accepted, there is nonetheless a certain opposition between the universalistic attitude that pervades the work of Pico and what Cassirer has described as Ficino's attempt "to establish again the main ideas of Platonism, to set forth their agreement with Christianity, and to exhibit them as the foundation of every true philosophic and religious system".² This is not to deny the influence of Scholasticism or Aristotelianism on Ficino; he has a full knowledge of, and respect for, Aquinas, exploits Scholastic terminology, and even the critique of Averroism in Theologia Platonica XV is as much Scholastic as Humanistic. However, whilst for the young Ficino, as for Petrarch, Plato was no more than a symbol, the syncretism of his mature works has a clear sense of direction, and that direction is distinctly (Neo-)Platonic. Pico's syncretism, on the other hand, often leads to contradictions. It is no coincidence that he intended to preface his defence of the Conclusiones

¹ Recent scholarship has tended to concentrate much more on Pico rather than Ficino; full up-to-date bibliographies can be found in W.G. Craven's Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: Symbol of his Age (Geneva, 1981) and M.J.B. Allen's The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino (Berkeley, 1984).

² "Giovanni Pico della Mirandola" in JHI, 3 (1942), p. 126.

nongentae in omni genere scientiarum (1486) with the Oratio. De hominis dignitate, for the dignity and freedom of man is the intellectual focus of his scholarship in his radical quest for truth. Although, in 1482, Pico wrote to Ficino expressing his desire to convert from Aristotelianism to Platonism, he later wrote to the Humanist Ermolao Barbaro: "Diverti nuper ab Aristotele in Academiam, sed non transfuga...verum explorator".¹ Pico sees a perfect harmony between the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle, believing that it is only in the manner of expression that the two are opposed; in the same letter, then, he defends Scholasticism against literary Humanism, philosophy against rhetoric, content against form. What he really rejects is the quest for form for its own sake; for Pico, true Humanism lies not in literary man, but in the study of man's place in the world and of the truths that concern him. It is a Humanism looking forward to that of Montaigne in its emphasis on man himself.

Yet, for all that, Ficino and Pico stand side~~/by~~side at the head of a long tradition of Christian (Neo-)Platonism. Florentine Neoplatonism was notoriously eclectic, combining Stoic, Epicurean, Hermetic, and Sceptical elements within a basic Neoplatonism, which, as has been seen, is itself an amalgam, whilst far from turning its back on Scholasticism, and this was doubtless a great factor in its wide appeal to succeeding generations. Above all, though, what both Ficino and Pico have in common is their inspiration which is fundamentally religious and most definitely Christian in intention.

It is important to note that Ficino and Pico were

¹ In Opera omnia (Basel, 1557), p. 368.

contemporaries of the Dominican Friar, Girolamo Savonarola, whose apocalyptic sermons inveighing against the widespread relaxation of faith and morals in late fifteenth-century Florence filled the congregations of the crowded Duomo with shame, remorse and fear. Pico had been a friend of Savonarola from 1482, and doubtless the prophet of the Gladius Dei influenced his mystical, ascetic contempt for the world, expressed in the letter to his nephew, Gianfrancesco Pico, of 15 May 1492,¹ the Regulae XII, partim excitantes, partim dirigentes hominem in pugna spirituali,² and also the Oratio.³ Poliziano and the Benivieni brothers were also amongst his followers, and so too Ficino himself, at least up to 1494 and possibly up to 1497, as Marcel argues,⁴ although he was to denounce him as Antichrist after his death in 1498. Unsurprisingly, Savonarola's public pronouncements were wholly hostile to the Neoplatonists,⁵ but he seems to have been more tolerant in private, and indeed developed his own learned Scepticism and Fideism to combat the Neoplatonists on their own ground. The very interaction between this ascetic fanatic and the Neoplatonists, however, is significant, as it suggests two opposed, but parallel, approaches to solving the same basic problem, which need not necessarily be irreconcilable.

Ficino's apologetic intention is made plain in the

1 In Opera, p. 340-43.

2 In Opera, pp. 332-33.

3 Pico's statement of the theme of the "spiritual combat", which occurs frequently throughout his works, greatly influenced Erasmus's Enchiridion which was the prototype for all subsequent treatments of this important concept in the sixteenth century and beyond.

4 Marsile Ficini, pp. 555 ff. See also D.P. Walker, The Ancient Theology, Chapter 2, "Savonarola and the Ancient Theology".

5 See his sermons of February, 1497, and March, 1498.

"Prohemio" to the Italian version of De christiana religione which he presents as "un libro in confermatione et defensione della vera religione quale è la cristiana".¹ Indeed, this work exemplifies the monistic tendency of Florentine Humanism, pointing to the affinity between wisdom and religion, the end of both activities being the contemplation of divine truth; for, it is through understanding and the exercise of the will that man approaches God, as he sets out in the "Prooemium" before progressing to a rational exposition of Christian faith. Such an Augustinian view of the philosopher as "amator Dei", and pre-Thomist synthesis of religion and philosophy, indicates the way in which he will exploit Neoplatonism as a means of mediating Christian truth.

Clearly the concerns and objectives of ancient, pagan Neoplatonism and its Florentine, Christian equivalent are very different. The fundamental principle of the philosophy of Plotinus or Proclus lies in the essential dialectic of Plato, that all change has as its corollary an underlying permanence and all difference an underlying unity, and that hence there are two distinct worlds, the transient world of sensible objects and Becoming, and the eternal world of the Ideas and Being. Christian Neoplatonism fully embraces this basic principle, and it is vital to its metaphysics, cosmology, and epistemology, but it is not its starting-point. Whereas the quest for unity is the main force behind Greek speculation, this unity is already a fact of faith for the Christian, namely "He who is". Accordingly, there is a shift of emphasis: whilst Greek philosophy starts with the

¹ Della christiana religione (~~1514~~, c. 1480), "Prohemio" n.p. (non-paginated).

universe and being, and seeks the unity of truth, Christian Neoplatonism tends to begin with man (and more specifically his soul) and seeks salvation. This is the structure of De christiana religione, and it is also the movement of the Theologia Platonica.

God and the soul are the two poles of Ficino's system, and the soul's relation to God is the centre of his metaphysics. This is made explicit in the "Prooemium" to the Theologia Platonica, which presents the epitome of Ficino's Neoplatonic theology in which the immortality of the soul is, as the sub-title suggests, the irreducible core. The starting-point here is the Platonic image of the sun, the illuminating medium between God and the soul:

Plato, philosophorum pater...cum intelligeret quemadmodum se habet visus ad solis lumen, ita se habere mentes omnes ad Deum, ideoque eas nihil unquam sine Dei lumine posse cognoscere, merito iustum piisque censuit, ut mens humana sicut a Deo habet omnia, sic ad Deum omnia referat. Igitur sive circa mores philosophemur, animum esse purgandum, ut tandem factus serenior divinum percipiat lumen Deumque colat; sive rerum causas perscrutemur, causas esse quaerendas, ut ipsam denique causarum inveniamus inventamque veneremur.¹

As in Plotinus and Augustine, the pure soul is illuminated directly by divine light, and it is for this reason that all intellectual activity leads "ad contemplationem cultumque Dei summa cum pietate".² There follows, then, the image of the soul as the mirror of the divine, and hence automatically the prime significance of self-knowledge:

Quoniam vero animum esse tamquam speculum arbitratur, in quo facile divini vultus imago reluceat, idcirco dum per vestigia singula Deum ipsum diligenter indagat, in animi speciem ubique divertit, intelligens oraculum illud "nosce te ipsum" id potissimum admonere, ut quicumque Deum optat agnoscere, seipsum ante cognoscat.³

1 TP (ed. Marcel, 3 vols., Paris, 1964), "Prooemium", p. 35.

2 Ibid., p. 35.

3 Ibid., pp. 35-36.

For Ficino and for all Christian Neoplatonists after him, as for Augustine before, inspection of the soul immediately reveals two essential truths:

... pium cogniti Dei cultum, et animorum divinitatem, in quibus universa constitit rerum perceptio et omnis institutio vitae totaque felicitas. Praesertim cum Plato de his ita sentiat, ut Aurelius Augustinus eum, tamquam christianae veritati omnium proximum, ex omni philosophorum numero elegerit imitandum, asseruitque Platonicos, mutatis paucis, christianos fore.¹

Ficino is well aware of the influence of Plato on Augustine, and, in this respect, it is Augustine who is his clear model, determining his theory of the soul.

Book I of the Theologia forms the exposition of Ficino's basic doctrine of the soul. Its beginning is wholly Augustinian, in that man would be a weak, miserable, uncertain being, if were not for the sole fact that he enjoys the higher light of God which sets him apart from brutish existence.² In particular, the significance of the soul is that it occupies, in its rational quality, the middle place in the five degrees of reality that make up the universe; as "vinculum mundi", it reconciles the opposite extremes of the chain of being. Indeed, it is central to Ficino's purpose that it should occupy the middle position, both with regard to his cosmology which is based on principles of gradation and mediation so that all things are connected through a common element (thus, the universe achieves its balanced perfection through man who is situated between matter and pure spirit) and to the religious implications of his whole system, and to this end he has rejected the Plotinian scheme of six hypostases (One, Mind, Soul, Sensation, Nature, Body)

1 Ibid., p. 36.

2 Caput I, "Si animus non esset immortalis, nullum animal esset infelicius homine".

in favour of the Phaedran plan of five levels of reality (One/God, Angel, Soul, Quality, Body). Within the basic dualism of body and soul, the body is regarded, as in Plato, Plotinus and Augustine, as a prison or encumbrance from which the pure soul must escape, and through contemplation it ascends the chain of being to the absolute truth of God whose attributes are considered in a manner combining both Dionysian and Thomist theodicy in Book II ("De Deo iam invento"). Books III and IV develop the treatment of the place of the rational soul in the universe, and Book V presents the traditional Platonic and Augustinian arguments for the immortality of the rational soul.¹

The later books of the Theologia expand on these basic themes, further examining the qualities of the soul (Books VI-X), expounding the epistemology of innate ideas and illumination (Books XI-XII), demonstrating immortality (Books XIII-XIV), and replying to objections (Averroist, Epicurean, and even Platonic) in a typically Scholastic fashion (Books XV-XVII).² The essence of Ficino's thought, however, is to be found in the opening Books and in the final ~~resumé~~ (Book XVIII), in which he underlines the agreement between Platonism and Christian theology in their fundamental premises of a Prime Mover, the hierarchy of beings, the soul as an eternal emanation of the divine, and the ascent or return of the soul to its divine origin through love.

Paradoxically, the difficulty of Ficino's system lies in its very unity and coherence. Even more than the ancient

¹ These are derived in the main from the Timaeus and the Phaedo and from Augustine's De immortalitate animae.

² For a full exposition of Ficino's philosophy, see P.O. Kristeller, The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino (New York, 1943).

Neoplatonists, he succeeded in elaborating a complex philosophy which brings together a wide range of sources in a vast and original synthesis, in which theodicy, cosmology, epistemology, and the theory of the soul are closely inter-related. What has made this possible, and still intelligible, is the clear focus on the soul and its relation to its divine origin. In this respect, Augustine's "noverim me, noverim te" is Ficino's motto, and the sequel to the initial impulsion of the injunction of the Delphic Oracle. Ficino does not, however, propound a gnostic theosophy, but, like Augustine, he develops his metaphysics of divine knowledge into a spirituality of divine love. If knowledge of God is the necessary consequence of knowledge of self, then love of God is the essential complement to knowledge of God.¹

It was Augustine who first placed the will beside the intellect as an independent faculty, and, in Ficino, the will performs a dynamic rôle, actively desiring the good that the intellect proposes. Clearly the will is dependent on the intellect, and here one sees the full significance of the soul's position at the centre of the universe as it is solicited by both higher and lower things, and capable of following either the light of divine reason or the seductions of the passions; it is the duty of the intellect to propose to the will the one true good.² That both the intellect and the will have the same object is at the heart of Christian Neoplatonism, and this reconciliation is brought about by the identification of the Christian God with the Platonic Idea of

1 The full exposition of Ficino's theory of love is to be found in the commentary on the Symposium (De amore), especially in the fourth "Oratio", that of Aristophanes.

2 The source of this trichotomist psychology is to be found in the myth of the charioteer in the Phaedrus.

the Good and the Beautiful or the Neoplatonic abstraction of the All as the true end of the soul in its ascent.

For Ficino, the life of the soul is the quest for reunification with its divine origin, a process of purification and ascent through the hierarchy of being to beatific union with God.¹ As such, his theory of love stands firmly in the broad mystical tradition of Plato, Plotinus, Augustine and the pseudo-Dionysius. The emphasis, however, is distinctly anthropocentric; instead of regarding love pessimistically as an annihilation of self in the divine totality, Ficino sees it optimistically as the deification of man. This revival of the Platonic eros at the expense of the Pauline agape is central to Renaissance Humanism.² Later Christian Neoplatonists will return to a more strictly orthodox notion of charity, but this shift of emphasis will hardly undermine the value of the Ficinian teaching in general, especially in the succinct, and less overtly Neoplatonic, form given to it by Pico's Oratio.

Pico likewise centres his thought on man as a "magnum miraculum"³ and "mundi copula",⁴ and capable of attaining the divine. Above all, though, what makes man a great creation is his free will, epitomized by this divine address to Adam:

Nec certam sedem, nec propriam faciem, nec munus ullum
peculiare tibi dedimus, ô Adam, ut quam sedem, quam
faciem, quae munera tute optaveris, ea pro voto, pro tua
sententia, habeas, et possideas ... Tu nullis angustiis
coercitus, pro tuo arbitrio, in cuius manu te posui, tibi

1 It is noteworthy that, because virtue is equivalent to the spiritual ascent of the pure soul, Ficino saw no need to develop a moral system beyond a certain basic Stoicism, the fundamental ethical doctrines of which are also those of Platonism and Augustinianism.

2 See A. Nygren, Agape and Eros, 3rd ed. (London, 1982), pp. 666-80 especially.

3 Oratio. De hominis dignitate in Opera omnia, p. 313.

4 Ibid., p. 314.

illam praefinies. Medium te mundi posui, ut
circumspiceres inde commodius quicquid est in mundo. Nec
te coelestem, necque terrenum, necque mortalem, necque
immortalem fecimus, ut tui ipsius quasi arbitrarius
honorariusque plastes et fctor, in quam malueris tute
formam effingas. Poteris in inferiora quae sunt bruta
degenerare. Poteris in superiora quae sunt divina ex tui
animi sententia regenerari. O summam Dei patris
liberalitatem, summam et admirandam hominis felicitatem,
cui datum id habere quod optat, id esse quod velit.¹

This celebration of human freedom is no less radical than
that of Ficino, but it is less presumptuous; the soul has
divine potential, just as it has the possibility of
subjecting itself to the passions, but it is not divine as of
right. Instead, Pico places greater stress on the theme of
the spiritual combat,² and, again, self-knowledge is the point of
departure.³

The latter part of the Oratio constitutes a defence of
philosophy, bewailing the contemporary disregard for the
personal quest for truth ("Est enim iam hoc totum
philosophari (quae est nostrae aetatis infelicitas) in
contemptum potius et contumeliam, quam in honorem et
gloriam")⁴ and arguing for the philosophia perennis and the
contributions to the sum of human wisdom of sages from
Orpheus and Zoroaster to Plato and Aristotle. This defence of
natural philosophy is, however, no less related to the
spiritual combat; it is an aspect of the ascent of the soul,
which is seen in terms of Jacob's ladder: "Tum bene
compositam ac expiatam animam naturalis philosophiae lumine
perfundamus, ut postremo divinarum rerum eam cognitione
perficiamus, et ne nobis nostri sufficiant, consulamus Iacob

1 Ibid., pp. 314-15.

2 Ibid., pp. 316-18.

3 Ibid., p. 320.

4 Ibid., p. 322.

patriarcham, cuius imago in sede gloriae sculpta
coruscat...".¹

The true significance of Pico's association of asceticism, contemplative or speculative philosophy, and mysticism emerges in the Regulae XII and the letter to his nephew of 15 May 1492. Here, everything is seen very much sub specie aeternae, and the spiritual combat appears ineluctable, with Christ its exemplary exponent: "Recordetur, stultum esse credere, ad coelum posse perveniri, nisi per huiusmodi pugnam, sicut et caput nostrum Christus, non ascendit in coelum, nisi per crucem, nec debet servi conditio melior esse, conditione domini".² Moreover, man should welcome the fight as it enables him to come to resemble Christ more closely, and it is in Christ alone that he must trust for support in the struggle.³ This specifically Christian otherworldliness is much more explicit in Pico's work than in Ficino's, and the simple spirituality of the letter to Gianfrancesco Pico, that of the authentic Christian life following the model of the Incarnate Word, was to be no less significant than the complex metaphysical construct of Ficino's Theologia.

Florentine Neoplatonism, then, is far from being either a pure return to the original, Greek Plato, or even a reiteration of the thought of the ancient Neoplatonists. It consists of an amalgam of ideas from a multitude of sources: Plato himself, the mathematical Neoplatonism of Iamblichus and Proclus, the more mystical Neoplatonism of Plotinus, the Christian mysticism of the pseudo-Dionysius, the ultimate

1 Ibid., p. 317.

2 Regula III, in Opera, p. 332.

3 Regulae IV and V.

patristic authority of Augustine, and mediaeval thought, including Scholasticism. It also encompasses elements of Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Scepticism, not to mention the occult, in the form of the Chaldaean Oracles, and the pristine wisdom of the purportedly ur-ancient Hermetica. Yet, it was a process of both assimilation and transformation, and a key feature of Florentine Neoplatonism is its concern for Christian orthodoxy and its frequent apologetic intent. Certainly, one can contrast the mystical tone of Pico with the more literary, contemplative attitude of Ficino, Pico's heterodox Humanism with the more thorough-going Christian Neoplatonism of Ficino, but a unity of preoccupations remains. Self-knowledge and man's place as microcosm in the scale of being, the immortality of the soul, the theory of divine illumination, the theory of love and the ascent of the soul, the attributes of God, supreme Being, the One and the All - these are the essential concerns of Florentine Neoplatonism; and, although the Florentine Academy was far from being the exclusive source,¹ it was these ideas, together with the complete works of Plato and the Neoplatonists, that the scholars and thinkers of Quattrocento Florence passed on to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France.

1 Other possible sources of Neoplatonic thought available to France in the seventeenth century - notably German or Rheno-/flemish mysticism and Franciscan spirituality, but also later-Italian and Spanish thought - will be considered when appropriate.

2. THE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY BACKGROUND

If the influence of Florentine Neoplatonism was to be profound in France, then its initial progress was nonetheless slow. In his famous essay, "Le platonisme et la littérature en France à l'époque de la Renaissance (1500-1550)",¹ Abel Lefranc suggests that the reasons for this are that French culture was still essentially backward before the reign of François I and that French thought was still dominated by Scholasticism.² The latter assertion is no doubt true, but it would perhaps be fairer and more accurate to say that, for the most part, the early French Humanists continued to pursue their own, more strictly Christian or at least religious, interests, without rushing to embrace new ideas from Italy with undue haste. One might say that, instead of adopting the methods and teachings of Italian Humanism wholeheartedly and uncritically, the French Humanists assimilated the new doctrines gradually and with careful discrimination. For one thing, despite the apologetic intentions of Ficino and the sincere faith of Pico, much of Italian Humanism, both in Florence and outside, was too purely literary for French taste in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Moreover, in a culture where the mediaeval way of thinking had yet to be superseded, Lefèvre d'Étaples and his circle

¹ In Grands écrivains français de la Renaissance (Paris, 1914).

² Ibid., p. 69.

were primarily concerned with Scholastic problems of theology and philosophy. At first, then, the Italian Humanists provided only an example of philological method;¹ it was only later, during the reign of François I, under the patronage of his sister, Marguerite, Queen of Navarre, that Neoplatonism, derived to a large extent from the Florentine Academy, became a significant intellectual force.

Nevertheless, the Florentines were far from unknown in France at the end of the fifteenth century. Guillaume Fichet was the first to introduce Italian Humanism into the French universities and, in 1470, sketched out a project for the development of Humanism in France. In 1471, 1483, and 1486, Robert Gaguin, who was much interested in Bessarion's defence of Plato, visited Italy, and similarly Pico made two visits to Paris, in 1485-86 and 1487-88, where he was enthusiastically received by the Fichetistes, as the Scholastics had scornfully dubbed the Humanists.² Moreover, in the winter of 1491-92, the leading French Humanist of the age, Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, set off for Italy with Guillaume Gontier as his companion, and with the intention of becoming acquainted with Pico's Neoplatonic mysticism and the Aristotelian rationalism of Ermolao Barbaro; as it turned out, they failed to meet Ermolao Barbaro, but they did encounter Ficino, Pico, Landino, and Poliziano. Another French scholar to have close links with Florence at the end of the fifteenth century was Germain de Ganay who corresponded with Ficino, and whose brother, Jean, frequently

¹ See F. Simone, "Sur quelques rapports entre l'humanisme italien et l'humanisme français" in Pensée humaniste et tradition chrétienne aux XV^e et XVI^e siècles (Paris, 1950).

² See L. Dorez and L. Thuasne, Pico de la Mirandole en France (1485-1488) (Paris, 1897).

met Ficino whilst accompanying Charles VIII in Italy.¹ Although it was only a quarter of a century later that Fichet's Humanist ambitions began to be fulfilled, with the regular teaching of Latin literature and encouragement of the translation and exegesis of the classical poets, orators and philosophers, and even the study of Greek, it is nonetheless in this group of scholars around Lefèvre d'Étaples, and including Guillaume Gontier, Jean and Germain de Ganay, Robert Gaguin and Josse Clichetowe, that the beginnings of French Humanism are apparent, and a letter of Gaguin to Ficino of 1 September 1496, recommending a young friend about to set off for Italy, underlines the French Humanists' awareness and admiration of the Florentines:

Virtus et sapientia tua, Ficine, tanta in nostra Academia Parisiensi circumfertur, ut tum in doctissimorum virorum collegiis, tum in classibus etiam puerorum tuum nomen ametur atque celebretur. Testes tuorum meritorum sunt illi praeclari labores tui, quos ut Platonem latinum redderes desumpsisti; auget gloriam tuam Plotinus ex schola Platonis latinus a te factus. Leguntur praeterea atque in precio habentur alia lucubrationis tuae volumina et familiares epistolae, quibus omnibus plerique nostratium scholasticorum ardent facie nosse et intueri hominem a quo tam praeclara doctrinae monumenta prodierunt.²

The enthusiasm of this testimony is, perhaps, overstated, but it does indicate the extent of Florentine penetration in

1 On the early contacts between Italian and French Humanists, see: A. Renaudet, Préréforme et humanisme à Paris pendant les premières guerres d'Italie (1494-1517) (Paris, 1916); W. Mönch, "Marsiglio Ficino und die Nachwirkung Platons in der französischen Literatur- und Geistesgeschichte" in Kantstudien, 40 (1935), pp. 165-79, and Die italienische Platonrenaissance und ihre Bedeutung für Frankreichs Literatur- und Geistesgeschichte (1450-1550) (Berlin, 1936); R. Lebègue "Le platonisme en France au XVI^e siècle" in Assn. G. Budé. Actes du Congrès de Tours et de Poitiers (1953), pp. 331-51; R. Marcel, "Introduction et succès du platonisme en France à l'aube de la Renaissance" in The Late Middle Ages and the Dawn of Humanism outside Italy (Louvain/The Hague, 1972), pp. 89-99.

2 Roberti Gaguini Epistolae et Orationes, ed. L. Thuasne, 2 vols. (Paris, 1903), vol. II, pp. 20-21.

France in the late-fifteenth century.

Lefèvre himself, however, was concerned to direct the attention of the French Humanists very much towards questions of theology and metaphysics, and yet, although his sympathies still remained strongly with Aristotle, he too underwent the clear influence of Ficino, particularly with regard to the more esoteric aspects of Catholic doctrine which tended to be derived from Alexandrian or Dionysian Neoplatonism. Thus, one finds that Lefèvre edited Ficino's De triplici vita,¹ and wrote commentaries for an edition of Ficino's translation of the Hermetic Poimandres,² which he was to publish himself in 1505. Furthermore, he was particularly attracted by the mystical side of Neoplatonism, and, a firm believer in the authenticity of the Dionysian writings, published the works of the pseudo-Areopagite under the title, Theologia vivificans, cibus solidus.³ Indeed, despite Lefèvre's profound dogmatic preference for Aristotle, even the Decem librorum moralium Aristotelis tres conversiones of 1497 is full of references to the Neoplatonists. Moreover, in 1508, as if to advance the cause of Neoplatonism in even the early French Renaissance, he also formed the intention of producing an edition of the works of Nicholas of Cusa, which eventually appeared in 1514.⁴

Nevertheless, the essential characteristic of Lefèvre's philosophy is that of an accord between Aristotelian science and Christian mysticism. Like Erasmus, he distrusted

1 Paris, 1492. Lefranc claims that De triplici vita had already been published twice by Regnault, in Paris and Rouen, in 1489 (Grands écrivains français, p. 73).

2 Paris, 1494.

3 Paris, 1498.

4 3 vols., Paris, 1514.

excessive Platonizing, and, taking pains to ensure that his philosophy had a fully Christian basis, he took from Neoplatonism only that which did not conflict with his fundamental beliefs. Interested in the new ideas, but still firmly accepting an essentially Aristotelian view of the world, Lefèvre sought above all to avoid polemical controversy and so reached a conservative compromise; attracted by the philological method and Neoplatonic mysticism, he nevertheless refused to adopt wholesale the teachings of the Florentines. Such an attitude was largely typical of the early French Humanists.

Succeeding generations were to be less conservative, but, even at the turn of the century, one French Humanist was a consistent and thorough-going Platonist, namely the Lyonnais doctor, Symphorien Champier. It was he, more than any other, who helped to spread the teachings of Ficino in France at the beginning of the sixteenth century, and to some extent determined the nature of Neoplatonism in the early French Renaissance. Champier published several works expounding Neoplatonic doctrines, including his Periarchon de principiis disciplinarum platoniorum,¹ and the De quadruplici vita, written in imitation of Ficino's De triplici vita.² Like Ficino, Champier sought to demonstrate the possibility of an alliance between Plato and Christianity, and the Duellum epistolare³ and Symphonia Platonis cum Aristotele⁴ are evidence of his grandiose vision of a Platonic theology. The specific influence of Ficino is apparent in Janua logicae et

1 (?)Paris, 1515.

2 Lyon, 1507.

3 Venice, 1519.

4 Paris, 1516.

physicae¹ which contains two short treatises entitled "De immortalitate rationalis animae" and "De mundi anima secundum Marsilium Ficinum", and also in La Nef des dames vertueuses.² The latter is directly influenced by Ficino's commentary De amore, which Champier had published in partial translation in the same year, 1503.

M.-M. de la Garanderie has described Champier as "un compilateur et un relais", lacking originality or even coherence.³ This rather harsh criticism contains much truth, but so too does the suggestion that "[son] souci de ne pas transgresser l'orthodoxie" may be a significant factor in his written output.⁴ For, it is important to note that, although most French Humanists knew the work of the Neoplatonists, ancient and modern, few embraced the richness of ~~the master's~~ Ficino's philosophy in its totality. Champier was certainly one of these few, but his successors developed his thinking in different directions; from his ideal of a grand synthesis, only a couple of ideas were to be extracted, namely the immortality of the soul and the theory of love derived from De amore.

Traces of Platonic and Neoplatonic thought - notably the theory of ideas, the immortality of the soul, the mysticism of procession and return, the concept of the Logos, and the ideal of the philosopher-king - are to be found in the works of most, if not all of the pre-Reformers in France, from Bovillus to Budé and Rabelais, but none elaborated a complete

1 Lyon, 1498.

2 Lyon, 1503.

3 Christianisme et lettres profanes (1515-1535) (Lyon, 1976), p. 151.

4 Ibid., pp. 151-52.

Platonic system.¹ One can, however, reasonably talk of a Platonic Academy in France in the early sixteenth century, and its origins are to be found in the circle of érudits and poets centred on Marguerite de Navarre, the real champion of Plato in the age and the prime-mover behind the efforts of Héroet, Scève, Ramus, Du Bellay and others. It would be wrong to seek in this disparate group a coherent Platonic philosophy, but the focus of their endeavours epitomizes the break-down of the system of Ficino into its constituent parts and isolates one particular, and highly influential, strain of Platonic and Neoplatonic thought. This focus lies in their exploitation of the theory of love, most especially in poetry.²

The courtly love of the Middle Ages had, of course, been essentially spiritual and had established an elaborate code of love, but it was the Renaissance that gave a philosophical basis to such a conception of love. The major source of this philosophical substructure was Ficino's De amore, but there were several other texts of the Italian Renaissance that were equally influential, including Pico's Comento sopra una canzona de amore da Hieronimo Benivieni, Bembo's Asolani, Equicola's Di natura d'amore, and Castiglione's Il Cortigiano,

1 This partial exploitation of Plato in the early French Renaissance has been studied by Lefranc, Lebègue, and Marcel in the works already cited, and also by A.H.T. Levi, "The Neoplatonist Calculus" in Humanism in France at the end of the Middle Ages and in the early Renaissance (Manchester, 1970), pp. 229-48; D.P. Walker, The Ancient Theology (London, 1972), Ch. 3, "The Ancient Theology in Sixteenth-Century France"; C. Huit, "Le Platonisme pendant la Renaissance" in APC, 130-35 (1895-98), passim.

2 On the Platonism of Marguerite de Navarre, see in particular Lefranc's Grands écrivains français, pp. 139-249, and, on the Platonism of the Renaissance poets, F.A. Yates's The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century (London, 1947), and A.J. Festugière's La Philosophie de l'amour de Marsile Ficin (Paris, 1941).

all of which went through many French editions. Ficino, though, the very source of the expression "Platonic love", was the main inspiration, as the number of editions and translations of De amore underlines.

The first complete translation of De amore appeared in 1546; Gilles Corrozet had, like Champier, produced a partial translation in 1542, but it was Simon Sylvius (dit de la Haye), "valet de chambre de Marguerite de France, Royne de Navarre", who first published the work in its entirety.¹ The dedicatory poem further underlines the significance of Marguerite's sponsorship. Moreover it was she who inspired various translations of Plato in French based on Ficino's Latin text. These included Jean de Luxembourg's unpublished Phédon (c. 1540), Bonaventure des Périers's Lysis (1544), Dolet's Hipparque (1544), Richard le Blanc's Ion (1546), Philibert du Val's Criton (1547), which had been translated by Simon Vallambert in 1542, and Fr. Hotman's Apologie de Socrate (1548). Also, Louis Leroy's Phédon and Banquet appeared in 1553 and 1559 respectively, although it is not certain that they were based on Ficino's Latin edition.²

The direction of these scholarly efforts, however, tended to be mainly aesthetic or psychological, and led to considerable success and influence not least at court. The philosophers, on the other hand, more methodological and

1 Le Commentaire de Marsile Ficin sur le Banquet d'Amour de Platon (Poitiers, 1546).

2 Ficino's Platonis opera had been published eleven times prior to 1550, including two Paris editions (1522 and 1533) and two published in Lyon (1548 and 1550); a further nine editions appeared in the second half of the sixteenth century, of which six were printed in Lyon (1556, 1567, 1570, 1581, 1588, and 1590). For a full bibliography of Ficino's works and translations, see Marcel's "Essai de bibliographie ficinienne" in Marsile Ficin, pp. 747-51.

metaphysical, met with strong opposition in the schools and universities. Ramus, for example, an impassioned anti-Aristotelian, who sought the complete reform of university education, the eradication of Scholasticism and a more philosophical emphasis in Renaissance Humanism, and exhorted Catherine de Medici to follow the example of her illustrious predecessors, Cosimo and Lorenzo, was persecuted for his teachings. Étienne Dolet suffered a worse fate, and was hanged and burned ~~at~~ the place Maubert in 1544 because of his translation of the Axiochus containing a passage denying the immortality of the soul which was condemned as heretical. e

The real reason lies in continuing official opposition to the "new" ideas. For all the Humanists' adoption of Plato as a battle-cry and the distinctly heterodox "Sancte Socrates, ora pro nobis", the advance of Platonism or Neoplatonism as a philosophy or intellectual basis for faith was especially slow. The triumph of Platonism in the first half of the sixteenth century came largely with the literary achievements in poetry and prose of the pre-Reformers. Apart from Marguerite herself, Héroet and Scève epitomize this aethetic Platonism, as does Pontus de Tyard, and a fundamental Platonic outlook underlies the thought and work of the Pléiade as a whole, if to varying degrees. Essentially, it was the theory of "Platonic love" and the notion of the poetic furor that the poets took up, and, together with a certain limited mysticism or at least spirituality, they are central to the works of even the greatest, and most original poets of the age, Du Bellay and Ronsard. in p

In his short paper, "La période platonicienne et la

période stoïcienne dans la Renaissance française",¹ Raymond Lebègue regards the period 1530-1560 as the moment of the triumph of Platonism following "une période préparatoire, pendant laquelle les idées de Platon et des néo-platoniciens se sont répandues en France, lentement, dans un cercle étroit de savants",² and assesses it thus: "La vogue du platonisme en France pendant cette période est due, pour une large part, à l'influence des ouvrages de Ficin. Mais il faut y ajouter celle des dialogues platoniciens qui sont composés en Italie, celle de la poésie pétrarquiste et l'action qu'a exercée la soeur du roi, Marguerite de Navarre".³ Thereafter, Lebègue, like Costil and others, sees a period of decline in interest in Platonism, regarding it as an impossible intellectual ideal in the France of the Wars of Religion, and in its place points to the rise of Stoicism as a response to the troubles and miseries of the age. Certainly, the increased popularity of Stoicism can not be denied, flourishing particularly in the Neostoic works of Lipsius and Du Vair, but three objections can be made to Lebègue's broad assertion. Firstly, Neostoicism, in many of its basic premises, is far from being opposed to Platonism with which it in fact has very much in common, in particular its emphasis on the dominance of Reason over the passions, the prominence of virtue inspired by a higher ideal, and its

1 In Bulletin of the International Committee of the Historical Sciences, 9 (1937), pp. 314-20.

2 Ibid., p. 314.

3 Ibid., p. 315

overlooks the continued importance of aesthetic Platonism, as exemplified in Baïf's Académie de Poésie et de Musique (founded in 1570) and its successor, Guy du Faur de Pibrac's Académie du Palais (established under Henri III in 1576).² Thirdly, and, in this context, most significantly, the outbreak of civil war did not entail the cessation of all speculative activity; indeed, the converse would appear to be the case, and Platonism and Neoplatonism continued not only to exercise an influence but even enjoyed a profound boost in interest amongst scholars, philosophers, and theologians.

In his article "Introduction et succès du platonisme en France à l'aube de la Renaissance",³ Raymond Marcel identifies the four principal themes in the Platonic philosophy of Ficino which were to be of greatest importance for the French Renaissance "l'immortalité de l'âme, le

1 This Neoplatonic tendency within Neostoicism is exemplified by Guillaume du Vair's Traité de la constance et consolation (published in a modern, critical edition by Flach and Funck-Brentano, Paris, 1915), in particular Book III, and De la sainte philosophie (edited, together with the Philosophie morale des stoïques, by G. Michaut, Paris, 1946). On Neostoicism generally, see L. Zanta's La Renaissance du stoïcisme au XVII^e siècle (Paris, 1914), P. Mesnard's "Du Vair et le néo-stoïcisme" (in Revue d'histoire de la philosophie, 1928, pp. 142-66), and the various articles of Julien-Eymard d'Angers in the collection Recherches sur le stoïcisme aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles (New York/Hildesheim, 1976).

2 See E. Frémy, L'Académie des derniers Valois (Paris, 1887). It is also interesting to note that Neoplatonic elements are far from absent in the works of two leading Protestant poets writing during the later years of the Wars of Religion, D'Aubigné's Les Tragiques (especially Book VII, "Jugement") and Du Bartas's Première et Seconde Sepmaines (published in The Works of Du Bartas, edited by Holmes, Lyons and Linker, 3 vols., Chapel Hill, 1935-40; La Création du Monde ou Première Sepmaine is in vol. II and La Seconde Sepmaine is in vol. III) though with a much more distinctly apologetic or polemical intent than in the works of their Catholic predecessors and contemporaries.

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microcosme, le délire poétique, l'amour".¹ Of these it was the first, the immortality of the soul, that was immediately of particular interest. For earlier theologians, notably Saint Thomas, immortality was a self-evident corollary of man's divine origin; Ficino, on the other hand, sought to establish it philosophically, and the publication of his Theologia Platonica in 1482 marked the beginning of a controversy that lasted a century and more.

It is no coincidence that Ficino should have devoted a substantial section of his Theologia to a refutation of the Averroists ("Liber Quintus Decimus. Solvit quaestiones Averrois de intellectu"). The root of the problem lay in the interpretation of Aristotle's De Anima which seemed to deny the immortality of the individual soul, and, in particular, the contention of the Arab commentator Averroes (1126-1198) that Aristotle taught only the immortality of a collective soul, a universal intellect in and through which the individual (mortal) soul can know. This view came to the fore in the thirteenth century, when the most important works of Averroes were translated into Latin, and it was to be one of the major sources of European rationalism in later centuries; certainly, it was this tradition, strengthened by the publication of the commentaries of Alexander of Aphrodisias who denied the immortality of the soul still more strongly,² that the Paduans, who had long been cultivating a positivist, Aristotelian method, took up when they turned their attention to the question of the immortality of the

1 Art. cit., p. 94.

2 In the Aldine edition of Aristotle (Venice, 1495-98).

soul at the end of the fifteenth century.¹

The most illustrious representative of this school was the Mantuan doctor and philosopher, Pietro Pomponazzi (1462-1525), professor at the university of Padua for twenty-one years from 1488 before moving to Bologna, the spectre of whose rationalist scepticism was to haunt European thought down to Pierre Bayle and beyond. Although De Fato on the perennial problem of free will and providence² and De Incantationibus setting out a thoroughly modern theory of miracles³ were both radical works, it was above all his Tractatus de immortalitate animae that had the most profound long-term impact. In fact, Pomponazzi's De Anima is not actually an Averroist treatise; it is considerably more subversive. For all his protestations of good faith and his conclusion that the problem of immortality is a "neutrum problema", inaccessible to reason and to be accepted as a matter of faith, Pomponazzi provoked a scandal through his critique of the traditional arguments of Plato and Aquinas for the immortality of the soul, in particular the idea that eternal life is to be seen as a reward for moral virtue as he maintains that virtue is an end in itself and advances a modern, naturalistic ethic with much in common with Neostoicism and looking forward to Kant's categorical imperative.⁴

1 As E. Renan has written, "Le XVI^e siècle n'a eu aucune mauvaise idée que le XIII^e n'avait eue avant lui" (Averroès et l'averroïsme, 3rd. ed., Paris, 1886, pp. 230-31).

2 Written in 1520 and published in Opera (Basel, 1567).

3 Published in Basel, 1556.

4 The even more ambivalent Pierre Bayle later defended Pomponazzi, insisting on the impossibility of proving immortality by rational means and claiming that the same rational method for demonstrating immortality could just as well be used to prove the mortality of the soul (see the Dictionnaire, art. "Pomponace", note F).

In effect, Pomponazzi's work was a direct refutation of Ficino's teaching on the soul in the Theologia platonica with its Neoplatonic and Thomist foundations; its consequences, however, were still more wide-ranging. In the first place, De Anima was published in 1516, that is to say, only three years after the Fifth Lateran Council had promulgated the bull "Apostolici regiminis" (19 December 1513). The Council of Vienne had earlier (6 May 1312) made the dogmatic statement that the soul is the form of the body in order to stress the reality of the Incarnation; Lateran V continues in the same vein, but goes much further in its pronouncements on the soul and its immortality:

Cum itaque diebus nostris (quod dolenter referimus) zizaniae seminator, antiquus humani generis hostis, nonnullos perniciosissimos errores, a fidelibus semper explosos, in agro Domini superseminare et augere sit ausus, de natura praesertim animae rationalis, quod videlicet mortalis sit, aut unica in cunctis hominibus; et nonnulli temere philosophantes, secundum saltem philosophiam verum id esse asseverent; contra huiusmodi pestem opportuna remedia adhibere cupientes, hoc sacro approbante Concilio damnamus et reprobamus omnes asserentes animam intellectivam mortalem esse, aut unicam in cunctis hominibus, et haec in dubium vertentes: cum illa non solum vere per se et essentialiter humani corporis forma existat, sicut in canone felicitis recordationis Clementis Papae V praedecessoris nostri in generali Viennensi Concilio edito continetur; verum et immortalis, et pro corporum, quibus infunditur, multitudine singulariter multiplicabilis, et multiplicata, et multiplicanda sit... Cum verum vero minime contradicat, omnem assertionem veritati illuminatae fidei contrariam omnino falsam esse definimus; et, ut aliter dogmatizare non liceat, districtius inhibemus; omnesque huiusmodi erroris assertionibus inhaerentes, veluti damnatissimas haereses seminantes per omnia detestabiles et abominabiles haereticos et infideles, catholicam fidem labefactantes, vitandos et puniendos fore decernimus.¹

This anti-Averroist statement establishes, for the first time, the immortality of the soul as an article of faith.

¹ Mansi, Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio, vol. XXXII, col. 842. Cf. also Histoire des conciles oecuméniques, vol. X (Paris, 1975), pp. 419-20.

Surprising though it may seem, there is no significant scriptural basis for the immortality of the soul unless one accepts that this, essentially Greek, philosophical concept is identical to the Christian resurrection of the dead; instead, it entered into Christian thinking through the Hellenistic culture of the early Fathers. Having been a part of Christian doctrine de facto for over a millenium, the immortality of the soul only became an official dogma de iure in the early sixteenth century when it was beginning to come under serious threat, notably from the Paduan school, and there can be little doubt that Pomponazzi's teaching, even before the publication of De Anima, was the prime target of this doctrinal assertion.

Moreover, the bull "Apostolici regiminis" goes on to combat another threat posed by Pomponazzi:

Insuper omnibus et singulis philosophis in universitatibus studiorum generalium et alibi publice legentibus districte praecipiendo mandamus, ut cum philosophorum principia aut conclusiones, in quibus a recte fide deviare noscuntur, auditoribus suis legerint seu explanaverint, quale hoc est de animae mortalitate aut unitate et mundi aeternitate ac alia huiusmodi, teneantur eisdem veritatem religionis christianae omni conatu manifestam facere et persuadendo pro posse docere ac omni studio huiusmodi philosophorum argumenta, cum omnia solubilia existant, pro viribus excludere atque solvere. Et cum non sufficiat aliquando tribulorum radices praescindere, nisi et, ne iterum pullulent, funditus evellere, ac eorum semina originalesque causas, unde facile oriuntur, remove, cum praecipue humanae philosophiae studia diuturniora, quam Deus secundum verbum Apostoli evacuavit et stultam fecit, absque divinae sapientiae condimento, et quae sine revelatae fidei lumine in errorem quandoque magis inducunt quam in veritatis elucidationem, ad tollendam omnem in praemissis errandi occasionem, hac salutari constitutione ordinamus et statuimus, ne quisquam de cetero in sacris ordinibus constitutus, saecularis vel regularis aut alias ad illos a iure arctatus, in studiis generalibus vel alibi publice audiendo, philosophiae aut poesis studiis ultra quinquennium post grammaticum ac dialecticam, sine aliquo studio theologiae aut iuris pontificii incumbat...¹

¹ Mansi, ~~ibid.~~ vol. XXXII, col. 842.

Pomponazzi's separation of reason and faith had served not so much to reinforce the traditional mediaeval doctrine of the two truths, as to liberate a potent reason acting outside the confines of faith. The response of the Church was unambiguous, namely to deny the autonomy of philosophy and to subordinate all rational speculation to theology. It also insisted that, pace Pomponazzi, reason could and should be used to prove the truth of articles of faith such as the immortality of the soul. Accordingly, refutations of the teachings of Pomponazzi and his followers soon followed the statement of principle of "Apostolici regiminis".¹ Through his critique of Ficino's philosophical discourse on immortality, Pomponazzi had helped to define the main focus of Christian apologetics for some two hundred years to come. It had shown the necessity of rationalist apologetics in order to combat the arguments of the emergent libertins on their own terms, and, in the wake of the Florentines' preoccupation with the soul, it ensured that this was to become a dominant theme of Christian apologetics, Protestant scarcely less than Catholic, throughout the sixteenth century and even well into the seventeenth.²

1 An early reply to De Anima was that of the orthodox Aristotelian Agostino Nifo, De Immortalitate humanae animae libellus adversus Petrum Pomponacium Mantuanum (Venice, 1518) defending the rational demonstration of immortality.

2 On Pomponazzi, the Fifth Lateran Council and the problem of immortality, see: H. Busson, Les Sources et développement du rationalisme (Paris, 1922 and 1957); E. Renan, Averroès et l'averroïsme (3rd. ed., Paris, 1866); J.-R. Charbonnel, La Pensée italienne au XVI^e siècle et le courant libertin (Paris, 1919); F. Gilbert, "Cristianesimo, umanesimo e la bolla Apostolici regiminis del 1513" in Rivista storica italiana, 79 (1967), pp. 976-90; D. Cantimori, Eretici italiani del cinquecento (Florence, 1939); G. di Napoli, L'immortalità dell'anima nel Rinascimento (Turin, 1963); P.O. Kristeller, "The Immortality of the Soul" in Renaissance Thought and its Sources (New York, 1979), pp. 181-96.

That the early French Renaissance was far from being indifferent to what was happening in Italy at the end of the Quattrocento has already been seen, and this is further underlined by almost immediate interest in the problem of the soul. In 1533, Amaury Bouchard, a friend of Rabelais, dedicated his unpublished De l'excellence et immortalité de l'âme, based on Platonic and Pythagorean arguments, to François ~~/~~¹; in 1536, Paleario, a friend of Dolet, published De immortalitate libri tres in Lyon; in the same year, J. Ferrerio edited a Commentaire du Songe de Scipion to be followed by De immortalitate docta et arguta digressio in 1541; in 1552, Charles de Bouelles (Bovillus), a pupil of Lefèvre d'Étaples, and whose De Sapiente has been described by E. Cassirer as "die unmittelbare Weiterbildung und die systematische Durchführung des Grundgedankens von Picos Rede",² published the Dialogi tres de immortalitate.³ I^{er}

Parallel to the "aesthetic" Neoplatonism of the poets with their concentration on the theory of love and divine inspiration, then, there was, in the first half of the sixteenth century in France, a corresponding preoccupation with the immortality of the soul and its corollary, the notion of man as microcosm. In the second half of the century, however, one can discern two significant developments. First, there is what one might describe as the e_x

1 BN ms. fr. 1991.w.

2 E. Cassirer, Individuum und Kosmos (Leipzig, 1927), p. 93. De Sapiente, edited by R. Klibansky, appears as an appendix to this work.

3 The list of such treatises is indeed extensive; fuller accounts are to be found in R. Marcel's "Introduction et succès du platonisme en France à l'aube de la Renaissance", pp. 96-98, D.P. Walker's The Ancient Theology, chapter III, "The Ancient Theology in Sixteenth-Century France", and H. Busson's Le Rationalisme, chapter XV, "Apologistes mineurs".

épanouissement of Christian apologetics; although there continued to be frequent specific defences of immortality,¹ there was also an increasing trend towards "total" apologies for the Christian faith, setting out a complete rational basis for belief to combat the "atheists". Second, from the 1570s onwards in particular, a pronounced increase in Neoplatonic studies is apparent.

One of the earliest "total" apologies in France was Gabriel du Préau's De la cognoissance de soy-mesme pour parvenir à celle de Dieu (Paris, 1559), a work whose very title and format were to find many echoes in the seventeenth century. Philologist, professor of theology at the Collège de Navarre and virulent anti-Protestant, Du Préau (1511-1588) first published a French translation of the Hermetic text based on Ficino's Latin edition (1549); continuing the line of Hermetic interests of Lefèvre d'Étaples and Symphorien Champier, this edition (republished in 1557) anticipates Adrien Turnèbe's Greek-Latin edition of 1554 and the ample commentary of François de Foix of 1579.

De la cognoissance appeared in Paris in 1559. Whilst it would be wrong to describe Du Préau as a thorough-going Platonist, and whilst he follows Saint Paul in insisting that the works of philosophers do not serve "à l'institution et introduction de vie salutaire d'un chrestien, la conversion duquel ... doit tousjours tendre non és choses de ce monde,

¹ For example, Jean de Neufville's De pulchritudine animi libri quinque (1556), J. Charpentier's Disputatio de animo (1558), Ch. de Bourgeville's Athéomachie (1564), Viret's Instruction chrestienne (1564) and La Primaudaye's Académies (1577 and Suite 1580) all regard Pomponazzi as the greatest threat to orthodoxy and combat his Aristotelian rationalism from a strongly Platonic point of view.

mais és cieux",¹ his apologetic approach is nonetheless typical of Augustine and the Neoplatonists. Immediately the adoption of self-knowledge as the essential point of departure, the consequent perception of the divine origin and immortality of the soul, and the definition of wisdom as knowledge of divine things and ultimately of God himself link Du Préau with Ficino and Pico, and also suggest the influence of Erasmus's Enchiridion.² Above all, though, De la cognoissance is an Augustinian work concentrating on the misery of man who does not know himself (and hence cannot know God) and the beatitude of man who knows his true end, but its scheme is still broadly Platonic; if grace is triumphant, there is no less a place for natural illumination in the context of a Platonic epistemology of innate ideas: "Si tu ne cognois ceste lumiere qui est en toy, c'est à dire ton ame et ton entendement, comment pourrois-tu cognoistre Dieu?".³ Ultimately, then, it is through self-knowledge, the acceptance of mind-body dualism, a certain asceticism and true piety that man can advance, with the assistance of grace, towards beatific contemplation of God. This is the basic plan of De la cognoissance, and it will also be that of many, if not most, later apologies.

It may also be interesting to consider Montaigne's translation of Sebond's Theologia naturalis in this respect. Written in 1434-36, this work attracted little attention in France in the fifteenth century. Nicholas of Cusa, however, possessed a copy and it was through the circle of Lefèvre d'Étaples, especially Charles de Bouelles, who were

1 De la cognoissance (Paris, 1559), "Prologue".

2 Du Préau also wrote an Enchiridion (Paris, 1559).

3 De la cognoissance, "Prologue".

themselves greatly drawn to the thought of the German cardinal, that Sebond's apology became known in France; in the early sixteenth century, then, there were several Latin editions of the work, notably those published in Lyon in 1526 and 1540. No doubt his attack on the nominalist division of reason and faith, and his attempt to demonstrate that natural reason arrives at the same truths as Christian revelation appealed to the early Humanists, as did his conception of the ascent from naturally attained knowledge of God to a fully Christian love of God through Christ.

It is not the place here to speculate on why Montaigne translated Sebond's Theologia naturalis first in 1569 and in a revised edition in 1581,¹ but the translator is well aware of the author's intentions: "Sa fin est hardi, et courageuse, ^{ke} car il entreprend, par raisons humaines et naturelles, establir et verifier contre les atheistes tous les articles de la religion chrestienne".² It is in this respect, as a work appropriate for the times, combatting the "atheists" and the "nouvelletez de Luther" which threatened "nostre ancienne creance",³ that Montaigne's translation of Sebond is of interest in the present context of the development of Neoplatonic (or, at least, Augustinian) apologetics in sixteenth-century France.

Sebond's claims for his book are indeed extravagant. The Theologia had been placed on the Tridentine Index of 1558/59, but after 1564 only the "Prologue" remained proscribed; it is

1 This problem is considered in most general studies of Montaigne, but especially in J. Coppin's Montaigne, traducteur de Raymond Sebon (Lille, 1925).

2 "Apologie de Raymond Sebond" in Oeuvres complètes, ed. A. Thibaudet and M. Rat (coll. Pléiade, Paris, 1962), p. ~~453~~ ⁴¹⁷

3 Ibid., p. ~~482~~.

here that the naturalistic arguments are most pronounced, arguments that Montaigne moderated significantly in his otherwise faithful French translation. For Sebond, his Theologia is a necessary and infallible book of nature containing all that man needs to know for his salvation, as the two "books" of God, the universal order of nature and Holy Scripture are in agreement. Perhaps surprisingly, then, one finds that the Theologia as a whole is severely Augustinian in outlook. For all the pretensions of human reason, man is regarded as weak and sinful, torn between two contradictory loves; the consequences of the fall are ever-present, and the emphasis on man's altered state looks forward to Pascal.¹

Yet, despite the insistence that divine illumination or grace is necessary for a full knowledge of truth, Sebond maintains that man can at least attain some degree of natural wisdom, and again the first step in this process lies in self-knowledge. For all the Augustinian pessimism of the work, its structure and development are nonetheless Neoplatonic, as the title of the opening chapter suggests: "De l'eschelle de nature par laquelle l'homme monte à la cognoissance de soy et de son créateur". Man, Sebond continues, occupies a central position in the hierarchy of being, and, as Pico writes in the Oratio, is distinguished by his free will, the freedom to rise or fall within this hierarchy. Moreover, although self-knowledge reveals both man's grandeur and his misery at once, man is naturally inclined to seek truth and to receive divine illumination.

¹ Cf. chapter 232, "Nous ne fusmes pas produits de Dieu tels que nous sommes".

What illuminated man perceives, then, is his indebtedness to the absolute Being, the infinite Intelligence and source of all Ideas and perfection, and whom man is bound to love if he is to rise out of present misery.

The strict Augustinian emphasis of Sebond's apology, concentrating on man's spiritual obligations and the necessity of loving God freely in the exercise of the will, makes it a precursor of many seventeenth-century apologies and moral or spiritual treatises, but its framework belongs to the tradition of essentially Neoplatonic partial or total apologies of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Nor, in post-Tridentine France, were such apologies the sole preserve of the Catholics. The most eminent Huguenot of the late sixteenth century, Philippe du Plessis-Mornay, was himself a vastly erudite apologist in the Neoplatonic tradition. In his De la verité de la religion chrestienne (Anvers, 1581), one finds in the first fifteen of the thirty-three chapters a defence of the existence of God, creation, providence, and immortality against the free-thinkers, and especially the Paduans, in which Plato, Plotinus, ~~Proclus~~, Iamblichus, Proclus and the entire gamut of thinkers and mystics of the prisca theologia from Zoroaster, Orpheus and, in particular Hermes Trismegistus, are major sources, indeed authorities.¹

It was Du Plessis-Mornay's Traicté de l'Eglise (London, 1578) that was to provoke what can fairly be described as the first great French Catholic apology, namely Pierre Charron's

¹ Pacard's Théologie naturelle (La Rochelle, 1579) is another ~~protestant~~ apology defending the existence of God, creation and the immortality of the soul against the Paduan rationalists.

Les Trois Veritez (Bordeaux, 1593). The final text goes far beyond the original intention of defending Catholicism as the one true faith (the third "truth"), and aims to combat contemporary impiety, or at least religious laxity, by demonstrating that Christian faith is not contrary to reason, so it is not surprising that this work owes little or nothing to Neoplatonism. Charron was not, however, unaware of the Neoplatonic tradition as his later De la Sagesse (Bordeaux, 1601; 2nd ed., Paris, 1604) shows. Although, like Jean-Pierre Camus's Diversitez (Paris/Lyon, 1609-18), this is a compendious digest of second-hand ideas presented in an often inconsistent manner, it does serve to exemplify contemporary preoccupations, and here Neoplatonic teachings on self-knowledge, dualism, immortality, ethics and epistemology are prominent, even if they are not treated exclusively.¹

Charron's (unacknowledged) sources are many, but Montaigne and the Neostoics were particularly important influences. With regard to epistemology, however, Charron seems to have been following Jean Bodin, who, for all the heterodoxy of his thought, was one of the most explicit Platonists of the late sixteenth century. The very title of La République (Lyon, 1576) links him with Plato and his Platonism is fully developed in Universae Naturae Theatrum (Lyon, 1596). Here he presents a complete world-system according to the ordered hierarchy of nature, stressing the concept of the chain of being, the hypostases of creation and the central position of man the microcosm in this balanced

¹ There are three major studies of Charron, J.-B. Sabrié's De l'humanisme au rationalisme: Pierre Charron (1541-1603) (Paris, 1913), J. D. Charron's The "Wisdom" of Pierre Charron (Chapel Hill, 1960) and the immeasurably superior Pierre Charron by R. Kogel (Geneva, 1972).

scale. The fourth of the five books deals with the soul, and chapter nine contains an attack on Aristotelian epistemology and a defence of innate ideas: "Sic etiam in animis nostris, virtutum ac scientiarum omnium semina sparsa fuisse...".¹ Similarly, in Book V Chapter xi, there is a section "De ideis platonicis" in which one finds marginal references to Alcinous and to Ficino's teaching of the Platonic doctrine of ideas in his Theologia Platonica, and where ideas are defined as follows: "Sunt igitur Ideae exemplaria aeterna in Opficis aeterni mente, vel, ut planius loquar, essentia causalis rerum omnium in esse intelligibili producta".² The doctrine of ideas as exemplars in the divine mind is Neoplatonic and the name of Plotinus occurs as frequently as that of Plato himself, but the more or less consistent Neoplatonism of Bodin leads him into one of its greatest dangers, as his bold attempt to unify all branches of knowledge in the quest for ultimate truth founders on his panpsychical conception of the world.

Such significant instances of Platonism in the latter half of the sixteenth century need not appear at all surprising, if one considers the flourishing tradition of Platonic and Neoplatonic scholarship, particularly in the 1570s. Doubtless the publication by Henricus Petrus in Basel of the complete works of Pico (1557) and Ficino (1561 and 1576), besides numerous re-editions of Ficino's Latin texts of Plato and the Neoplatonists, contributed to this renewed interest, exemplified by the work of Guy Lefèvre de la Boderie (1541-98). Whilst Gabriel Chappuys was translating

¹ Theatrum (Lyon, 1596), p. 475.

² Ibid., p. 630-31.

several Italian treatises on the theory of love, and his brother, Nicholas, was translating Pico's Heptaplus (Paris, 1579), Lefèvre de la Boderie was occupied with the works of Ficino. A vastly erudite scholar and poet with connections with Ronsard and Du Bellay who first of all translated Ficino's commentary De Amore (Paris, 1578), Lefèvre de la Boderie was a zealous Catholic and also translated Ficino's De triplici vita¹ and De christiana religione which appeared with Pico's Oratio (Paris, 1578). Significantly Lefèvre de la Boderie offered his translation of Ficino's apology as "une oeuvre tres docte et fort necessaire pour la radresse de plusieurs devoyez et confirmation de fidelles chrestiens et bons catholiques".² Ficino's aim in this work had been to convert non-believers into philosophers and then to lead them from Platonic beliefs on God and the soul to true Christian piety; clearly this was Lefèvre's hope also in presenting it to the French public in a new translation at a time of civil war, religious strife and growing scepticism.

As has been seen, though, Plato was not appropriated by the Catholic cause alone. If it was Ficino's Latin translation that first introduced the complete Platonic corpus to the western world, Jean de Serres (Serranus), a prominent and virulent Protestant polemicist until he later became an enthusiastic spokesman for reconciliation between Huguenots and Catholics, produced the first Greek edition, with Latin translations and commentaries, and which was to become the most famous of all editions, for, even if the

¹ Les trois livres de la vie (Paris, 1581/82). Jehan Beaufils had published a French version of the first book in 1541.

² De la religion chrestienne (Paris, 1578), Title-page.

translations did not supersede Ficino's more faithful renditions and his attempted systematization of the Dialogues into six "syzygies" was not accepted, it is the pagination of this edition that is still used today.¹

The introduction, which is partly a self-defence and partly a defence of Plato, is of particular interest. Here, Serranus seeks to defend Plato against charges of scepticism, lack of order and allegorism, and, whilst acknowledging the danger of all philosophy to religion, to establish the "true" Plato. First, he rejects the aporetic, the ~~s~~ocratic Plato of the New Academy, the ironical, enigmatic debater and doubter,² but he also rejects the Plato of the ancient Neoplatonists, condemning Iamblichus, Proclus and Porphyry especially,³ and the interpretations of Ficino and Nicholas of Cusa.⁴ The errors of Plato himself are many, including his belief in metempsychosis, and the community of goods, women and children,⁵ but he does have insights into divine truth (as well as making valid contributions in ethics, politics and physics) and, referring to Bessarion's defence of Plato in the fifteenth century, Serranus says: "ex quibus omnibus perspicuum esse potest, non deesse Platoni in bona sua causa validissimas rationes".⁶ It is, then, as a vehicle of divine truth that Plato is useful. For, even after the Fall, all men retain certain sparks of truth, if somewhat obscured;⁷

1 Platonis opera quae extant omnia (Geneva, H. Estienne, 3 vols., in-folio).

2 Platonis opera, "Introduction", xx v r^o-vi v^o.

3 Ibid., xxx I r^o.

4 Ibid., xxx I v^o.

5 Ibid., xx IIII r^o.

6 Ibid., xx IIII v^o.

7 Ibid., xx II r^o-v^o.

moreover, "prima nimium veritatis illius scintilla est religionis sensus" and this "religious sense" allows not only the belief in God, virtue, and reward or punishment in the afterlife, but also the Platonic ascent from self-knowledge to knowledge of God.¹

Serranus was to return to the "quelques petites étincelles" of truth in Plato in his De l'immortalité de l'âme (Lyon, 1596).² Again he condemns the errors of Platonism and underlines its inadequacies. He discounts "les gloses des platoniciens" ³ whom he accuses of having misunderstood and distorted the theory of ideas, but, whilst still differentiating between "le vrai-semblable" of the Academy and the solid truth of the Church,⁴ he nonetheless devotes his first section to a proof of the "excellence de l'âme immortelle, par la doctrine de l'Académie", where substantial extracts from Alcibiades I, the Phaedrus, the Timaeus and the Republic Books VI and VII figure prominently. Self-knowledge and the notion of the "retour de l'âme" perform a central role in the exposition, but Serranus still refuses to accept the Neoplatonic concept of hierarchy, speaking scornfully of "toutes ces eschelles des platoniciens" with the marginal reference "de scalis sive gradibus animae commenta Platoniorum. Marsil. Ficin. in Theol. sive de animi immortalitate: ex Iamblycho, Proclo, Alcino, Porphyro et caeteris".⁵ Serranus's insistence that,

1 Ibid., xx III r^o.

2 Charles Sorel refers to De l'immortalité de l'âme as a precursor of seventeenth-century treatises on the soul (La Bibliothèque française, 2nd. ed., Paris, 1667, p. 41).

3 De l'immortalité, p. 35.

4 Ibid., "Preface" (non-paginated).

5 Ibid., p. 18.

for Plato, an idea is a cause and that the first cause is God in whose mind the paradigm or model of creation is formed serves to counter what he regards as the Neoplatonic "corruption" of the master's thought in talking of the emanation of ideas from the divine mind.

Serranus's "emancipation" of Plato represents a third attitude to Plato, between that of the hierophant of the Neoplatonists and the sceptic of the Academics. It did not, however, establish itself to any significant extent. The Academic interpretation of Plato continued to find support amongst the sceptics, and, more importantly, Serranus's view completely failed to assert itself against the mystical interpretation of the Neoplatonists which was so learnedly and so thoroughly propounded by Ficino and his successors. Above all, though, it was the latter that emerged triumphant at the end of the sixteenth century in France and was to prove highly influential throughout the seventeenth century when not only were the original texts of Plato and the Neoplatonists, of Hermes Trismegistus and the pseudo-Dionysius readily available, but the particular interpretation of the Neoplatonic tradition put forward by the Florentines proved extremely attractive to the spiritualists of the Catholic revival.

3. "LE CERCLE ACARIE"

If the origins of the French Catholic revival ultimately lie in the preoccupations of the pre-Reformers, and its immediate impulsion is to be identified in the decrees of the Council of Trent, then there is no doubt that its true beginning is to be found in the final decade of the sixteenth century and that it centred on the group of spiritual reformers that emerged in Paris around "la belle Acarie", the blessed Marie de l'Incarnation.

At the end of the sixteenth century the Catholic Church in France and, indeed, the country in general were in a wretched state.¹ The civil strife which had broken out in 1562, and the origins of which went back to the death of Henri II, eventually died down after Henri de Navarre, the leader of the Huguenot faction who acceded to the throne as the first of the Bourbon line in 1589, converted to Catholicism in 1593. However, although this abjuration did much to restore political unity and social stability in the kingdom, the religious divide remained. To many Protestants the conversion of Henri IV seemed the ultimate betrayal, but,

¹ J. Orcibal provides an outline of the situation in Les Origines du jansénisme, vol. II (Paris, 1947), pp. 1-10. Summarizing the position, L. Prunel identifies three main consequences of the Reformation and the Wars of Religion, namely: "division des esprits, mais néanmoins triomphe du catholicisme"; "le clergé catholique était plus batailleur qu'apostolique"; "le désordre dans les abbayes" (La Renaissance catholique en France au XVII^e siècle, Paris, 1921, pp. 8-10).

it would be wrong to regard this as representing the triumph of Catholicism at the end of the sixteenth century, not least because the Edict of Nantes, promulgated in 1598 in order to guarantee freedom of conscience and worship, made any claim of victory sound hollow as the Protestant movement continued to flourish.

Moreover, the Wars of Religion had inflicted immense damage on the French Church. Not only had it suffered financial ruin as funds were diverted into the war-effort, but it was also in a state of moral and intellectual decay. Whilst traditional doctrines and practices were under attack both from the subjectivist and naturalist tendencies of Renaissance Humanism on the one hand, and from the radical critique of the Reformers on the other, the Catholic Church seemed to be doing little to counter either at all effectively. As has already been mentioned, Charron's Les Trois Veritez marks the beginning of a more vigorous defence of the Catholic faith through intellectual argument rather than by force of arms, but, until then, the Reformers' assault on the hierarchy, dogma and ecclesiastical abuses of the Catholic Church had provoked no more than feeble self-defence with little attempt at reform or counter-attack. In particular, there had been no real ~~undertaking~~ to carry out **commitment** the reform of the clergy, both secular and regular, who remained intellectually, morally and spiritually mediocre, as the Council of Trent had decreed, and the conservative Church had retained its mediaeval practices.

Nevertheless, as Louis Cognet writes, "malgré sa profonde décadence, due à des causes sociales (abus des institutions ecclésiastiques) ou intellectuelles (naturalisme humaniste), le milieu religieux français, à la fin du XVI^e siècle, porte

en lui les germes d'un renouveau possible".¹ The King himself fully supported the Catholic revival after his conversion and did much to encourage the implementation of the decrees of the Council of Trent on the internal reform of the Church, especially by making many fine appointments to bishoprics (it was the episcopacy that Trent had charged with the task of re-establishing ecclesiastical discipline).² Equally the new orders of the sixteenth century, notably the Jesuits, the Capuchins and the discalced or reformed Carmelites, led the way towards the reform of the old religious orders (of which only the Carthusians seemed to be an exception to the general decline) and to the foundation, or at least introduction into France, of several new orders in the seventeenth century. Above all, though, the French Catholic revival was made possible by the presence and activity of perhaps a dozen remarkable individuals who, collaborating closely, were to establish and define the French School of spirituality both in theory and in practice at the beginning of the seventeenth century. P. Chaunu has described this "école française" as "les travaux pratiques du Concile de Trente";³ it is this, but it is also much more, for it represents both a radical internal, organizational reform and, more significantly, a profound new spiritual point of departure which transcends the comparatively limited ambitions of Trent. If the

1 Les Origines de la spiritualité catholique au XVII^e siècle (Paris, 1949), pp. 100-101.

2 Helpful introductions to the deliberations and decrees of the Council of Trent are to be found in Latran V et Trente by O. de La Brosse and others (Paris, 1975), and Histoire de l'Église, vol. XVII, L'Église à l'époque du concile de Trente by L. Cristiani (Paris, 1948).

3 Église, culture et société (2nd ed., Paris, 1981), p. 408.

sixteenth century had seen little original work in the spiritual domain in France, then the beginning of the seventeenth century saw the blossoming of a spiritual movement that was both original and sublime, and, moreover, "ce renouveau ... n'a pu cependant prendre son ampleur que parce qu'un ensemble de contingences ont provoqué l'apparition d'un groupe déterminé, centré autour de Mme Acarie, qui est devenu un foyer de rayonnement".¹

Born Barbe Avrillot in Paris in 1566, "la belle Acarie", as the wife of a prominent liqueur and civil servant was known, would appear to have undergone a profound religious conversion upon reading Augustine's "Quid avarius illo, cui Deus sufficere non potuit?".² This was to change Mme Acarie's spiritual life completely, for thereafter, from 1588, she began to experience the direct presence of God in mystical ecstasies which attracted wide attention and devoted her life to the service of religion and good works. The most notable individual achievement of Mme Acarie came as a result of a vision of Saint Theresa of Avila that she had in 1601, conveying God's will that she should introduce the Theresian Reformed Carmelites into France. This project was examined and approved by François de Sales, Bérulle and André Duval, and, in 1604, six Spanish Carmelites duly arrived in Paris; Mme Acarie herself entered the order in 1614, after the death

¹ Cognet, Les Origines, p. 101.

² In Epistolam Joannis Tractatus VIII in PL, vol. XXXV, col. 2039.

of her husband, just four years before her own death.¹

For David Knowles, "ecstasies, raptures and the like have in themselves no spiritual value".² Indeed, they can even be taken as a sign of mental sickness or (from an older perspective) of demonic possession. What is important, then, is the interpretation and the direction of the mystical experience of the divine. In this respect Mme Acarie was especially fortunate in that in the summer of 1592 she made the acquaintance of the English Capuchin, Benoît de Canfield (Benet of Canfield),³ who became her spiritual director and who, together with the Carthusian Dom Richard Beaucousin (who also directed her on occasions), reassured her that she was affected by the true voice, will and action of God and provided guidance in her intense inner life. Above all, though, as her reputation began to spread widely in Paris, Canfield and Beaucousin introduced Mme Acarie to their own spiritual circles which in turn were to find their focus and meeting-place in the Hôtel Acarie.

Partisan religious historians have eagerly sought to establish the prior claims of their brothers in religion as

1 The earliest biography of Barbe Acarie is that of A. Duval, La Vie admirable de soeur Marie de l'Incarnation (Paris, 1621). Of the several more modern biographies and studies, one must mention the major works of Bruno de Jésus-Marie, Madame Acarie, épouse et mystique (Paris, [1937]) and La Belle Acarie: Bienheureuse Marie de l'Incarnation (Paris, 1942); the latter contains a comprehensive bibliography and also an annotated edition of Les Vrais exercices (first published in 1622).

2 What is mysticism? (2nd ed., London, 1979), p. 55.

3 When referring to Capuchins active in France in the seventeenth century the most commonly used French "nom de religion" has been retained throughout, although alternative appellations are given where appropriate and, sometimes, important (for example, Joseph de Paris is perhaps better known as François Leclerc du Tremblay, Richelieu's "éminence grise").

the dominant influence in this spiritual circle; all, however, agree on who its members were and, for our present purpose, it will be sufficient simply to identify them. First, the founder of the "école française capucine", Benoît de Canfield, was followed by his confrères and disciples of the Capuchin house of Saint-Honoré, Archange de Pembroke, Pacifique de Souzy, Ange de Joyeuse and Joseph de Paris. Of equal importance as a spiritual centre was the Carthusian monastery of Vauvert whence Beaucousin exercised a considerable influence over the religious life of the capital. Then, there were the doctors of the Sorbonne, Duval, Cospeau and Gamaches, the secular priests Gallemant and Quintandoine de Brétigny, the Minim, Estienne, the Jesuit, Coton, the Feuillant, Sans de Sainte-Cathérine, and the reformer of the Benedictine monastery of Montmartre, Marie de Beauvillier, as well as many laymen, including Michel de Marillac, René Gaultier, Mme de Maignelay and Mme de Sainte-Beuve. To these names must then be added those of the two greatest representatives of French religious thought of the early seventeenth century, namely Pierre de Bérulle and François de Sales.

Despite the disparate origins of this group, its homogeneity is remarkable, both in general orientation and in specific activity. Spiritually its tendency was distinctly ascetic and mystical, cultivating an abstract devotion of direct union with the divine essence, and drawing its inspiration from the pseudo-Dionysius, the Rheno-flemish mystics, Saint Catherine of Genoa, Saint John of the Cross, Saint Theresa of Avila, and La Perle Évangélique (which Beaucousin translated in 1602). The Hôtel Acarie was not, however, simply a centre of spiritual formation, but also the

source of bold apostolic initiatives which served both to disseminate and to perpetuate its spiritual ideals. As has already been mentioned, Mme Acarie herself instigated the introduction of the Theresian reform into France and Marie de Beauvillier, set about the reform of the Benedictine monastery of Montmartre, but there were many other lasting achievements: Mme Acarie was also behind the establishment of the Ursulines in Paris in 1607; François de Sales - quite apart from his tireless efforts in reforming and strengthening the secular clergy - founded the Ordre de la Visitation Sainte Marie together with Saint Jeanne de Chantal in 1610; and, most permanent and important of all, Bérulle founded the Congrégation de l'Oratoire in 1611. Moreover, the spirit of these dynamic individuals was subsequently to inspire the work of Saint Vincent de Paul in founding the Prêtres de la Mission at Saint Lazare, of Jean-Jacques Olier in founding the seminary of Saint-Sulpice and of Saint Jean Eudes in founding the Société des Prêtres de Jésus-et-Marie, and it was through such institutions that the French Catholic revival was prolonged throughout the seventeenth century.¹

1 Further, if not necessarily fuller, accounts of the members and activities of le cercle Acarie can be found in the following works: Dom Huijben, "Aux sources de la spiritualité française du XVII^e siècle" in Vie spirituelle. Supplément, 1930-31, passim; Godefroy de Paris, "L'École franciscaine de Saint-Honoré" in Revue sacerdotale du Tiers Ordre de saint François, 18-20 (1947-49), passim; L. Cognet, Histoire de la spiritualité chrétienne, vol. III, La Spiritualité moderne: I L'Essor, 1500-1650 (Paris, 1966); E. Dubois, "The Hôtel Acarie: a meeting-place for European currents of spirituality in early seventeenth-century France" in Durham University Journal, 71 (1979), pp. 187-96; R. Taveneaux, Le Catholicisme dans la France classique, 1610-1715, vol. II (Paris, 1980); P. Chaunu, Église, culture et société (2nd ed., Paris, 1981); M. Marcocchi, La spiritualità tra giansenismo e quietismo nella Francia del seicento (Rome, 1983).

Without wishing to diminish the rôles played by other leading figures in this group, notably Richard Beaucousin, it is both necessary and desirable to concentrate here on three of its members in particular who both served to form and also epitomize its spiritual direction. Pierre de Bérulle will be considered in some detail below in connection with his all important foundation of the Oratoire. Benoît de Canfield, on the other hand, whether or not one accepts the claims of his modern confrères that he was the main-spring of the spiritual evolution of le cercle Acarie and the "French School" that it engendered, must be considered in his proper chronological position, at the head of the Capuchin movement in France and as a prime source of the French mystical tradition in the seventeenth century. Equally, Saint François de Sales exercised a profound influence on the development of French spirituality throughout the seventeenth century, adding a more distinctly Humanist dimension to the initial mysticism of the group that he joined, through Bérulle, at the end of the sixteenth century. Together, Canfield and François de Sales bear witness to the fundamental spirituality of the early French Catholic reformers and its relation to Neoplatonism and point towards future developments in French religious thought. ?

Although, in a wider historical perspective, it was the Society of Jesus that played the most prominent and long-lasting part in the history of the Catholic Church after the Reformation, not least because of the formidable education afforded by its colleges,¹ the Capuchin reform, a vigorous

¹ The Collège de Clermont had already become one of the leading schools in France by 1575, and Jesuit pupils were to the fore in French affairs from Descartes to Voltaire.

offshoot of the Franciscan order (which had already been divided definitively into Conventuals and the stricter Observants ten years previously), in fact predates papal approval for Saint Ignatius Loyola's Society of Jesus in 1540. Founded in Italy in 1528, the Capuchins sought literal observance of the Franciscan Rule (itself the epitome of the Gospels) aiming to follow as closely as possible the original ideals of simplicity, poverty, humility and obedience in a life of service to others and of personal devotion in union with Christ.

The Capuchins established themselves officially in France in 1574.¹ Initial contact had been made some years previously when Cardinal Charles de Lorraine, Archbishop of Reims, met several Capuchin theologians at Trent in 1562 and, impressed by the sanctity of their way of life and convinced of the good that the order would do in France, invited a small group of friars to his château at Meudon whilst he began negotiations for the introduction of the order in France. Shortly afterwards, Pierre Deschamps, a dissident Cordelier and zealot of the strict observance seeking a more authentically Franciscan life, forestalled the efforts of the Cardinal de Lorraine by founding the small community of the Pauvres Ermites in Picpus. A period of controversy and some conflict followed, but the situation was regularized on 6 May 1574 when Gregory XIII revoked the decree of Paul III limiting the Capuchins to Italy. Almost immediately there was an influx of Capuchin friars into France and the order

1 On the early history of the Capuchins in France, see: Godefroy de Paris, Les Frères Mineurs Capucins en France (2 vols., Paris, 1937-50), and Raoul de Sceaux, Histoire des Frères Mineurs Capucins de la Province de Paris (Blois, 1965).

settled in Saint-Honoré where the main house was to enjoy the protection of Catherine de Medici. At first the order met with opposition and distrust, due largely to innate suspicion of foreign new-comers, but, after playing an important part in the relief of suffering in Paris during the plague of 1580, it became fully accepted by the people and rapid expansion was assured. Thus, from its original base in Paris, the order soon began to spread throughout France. In 1580 the Commissariat Général de France or Province Saint-François, which then had six houses under its jurisdiction, was divided into the two Provinces of Paris and Lyon; there followed the creation of the Provinces of Toulouse (1582), Saint-Louis or Provence (1587) and others in the early seventeenth century. Attracting new recruits from all sectors of society, the order grew rapidly in numbers and houses so that by 1602 the Province of Paris had sixteen convents with a total of three hundred and thirty-seven friars.

Throughout the period, though, the Convent of Saint-Honoré and the Province of Paris played the dominant rôle, not only in forming the spirit of the Capuchin order in France but also in exercising a profound influence on men of God and men of power alike (indeed both at once in the spectacular case of Joseph de Paris, a spiritual disciple of Benoît de Canfield and the "éminence grise" who was also Richelieu's secretary). Moreover, it was in Paris that the character of the order in France began to change as the primitive, eremitical spirit of Picpus was gradually transformed into the apostolic ideal of Saint-Honoré. To some extent this was a consequence of the politico-religious considerations which had led Charles de Lorraine to seek the introduction of the Capuchins in France in the first place.

If the Capuchins were to contribute significantly in the struggle against Protestantism, then the laudable example of austerity and piety of the early Capuchins needed to be supplemented by the more effective weapons of the nascent Counter-Reformation. Accordingly, the friars began to acquire the skills of directors, preachers and controversialists.

In accordance with the original ideal of simplicity, academic study, which had in any case been in continuous decline within the Franciscan order since its apogee in the thirteenth century, was initially actively opposed in favour of humble piety. However, although the apostolate of the Capuchins can be said to lie primarily in the example of their living Christology, there is something of an inherent contradiction between this ideal of simplicity and another prime aim of the order, namely preaching. This tension has existed within the Franciscan movement throughout its history, no less within the Capuchin branch than between the two branches from which it originally broke away. In sixteenth-century France, though, this tension was resolved largely by external historical factors: for all the unease and opposition of the Spirituals who regarded all intellectual activity as incompatible with the Franciscan ideal, the decrees of the Council of Trent and the necessity of an active response to the Reformers made it inevitable that this new and popular mendicant order should become, if not exactly bookish, then at least more inclined towards scholarship. Already, the Constitutions of 1536 stressed the need for the order's preachers to study. At first, this meant no more than biblical exegesis, but, after the deliberations of Trent on the relation between study and the apostolic

life, Capuchin learning became increasingly wide-ranging so that the Constitutions of 1575 insisted on the necessity of philosophical (essentially Scholastic) as well as biblical or theological studies in all Provinces of the order. Finally, the General Chapter of 1613 stipulated three years' study of logic and philosophy and four years' theology before permission to preach would be given.¹

The master of Franciscan scholarship is, of course, Saint Bonaventure; the most faithful disciple of Saint Francis, the Seraphic Doctor is, in the words of Ubaldo d'Alençon, the "chef de file" of all Franciscan thought and the founder of Franciscan metaphysics.² At the heart of his system lies a thorough-going Theo- and Christocentrism, a theology of pure love and knowledge of God, the primacy of the will and the mysticism of the anagogic way, the triple path to God through purification, illumination and unification with the grace of Christ. It was to this theology that the Franciscans of the sixteenth century turned again as Trent urged a return to the

1 On Capuchin studies, see: Hilarin Felder de Lucerne, "Les Études dans l'O.F.M.Cap. au premier siècle de son histoire" in EF, 42 (1930), pp. 369-84, 513-33, 667-87, and 43 (1931), pp. 26-43. It should still not be forgotten, however, that the great majority of Capuchin friars never studied at all. Although education developed rapidly in the main houses of the order, it was related to only one aspect of its life, namely the apostolate; it was irrelevant to the contemplative life, which was, if anything, more important, and the demands of the apostolic and contemplative lives are reflected in the division between those who took orders and lay friars, and the further division of the priests into qualified preachers and simple clerks who had not gained permission to preach and led a life of devout contemplation. The preachers, therefore, represented a small minority (for example, of the total of three hundred and thirty-seven friars in the Province of Paris in 1602 only thirty were preachers), but it was from their ranks that many formidable spiritual thinkers emerged who were to be highly influential both within the order and outside.

2 Ubaldo d'Alençon, "La Spiritualité franciscaine" in EF, 29 (1927), p. 285.

masters of the thirteenth century. Official sanction was also given by the Bull "Triumphantis" of the Franciscan Pope Sixtus-Quintus which raised Bonaventure to the status of Doctor of the Church (1588) and an edition of his complete works appeared immediately thereafter¹ with a consequent growth in Bonaventurian literature.

This is not to say that Bonaventure constituted the sole source of Capuchin theology in the late sixteenth century. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, there existed a high degree of intellectual freedom within the order which makes it difficult to talk of an overall Capuchin school, for Aquinas and Scotus were also studied (though often with the intention of reconciling them with Bonaventure) and such a prominent Capuchin as Joseph de Paris remained a strict Aristotelian. However, it was still essentially Bonaventure's Christian mysticism with its roots in Augustinianism and, ultimately, in Neoplatonism that lay at the heart of Capuchin theology and philosophy in the late sixteenth century. Pope Leo XIII described Bonaventure as "the Prince of mysticism" and it was certainly as such that he was received by the Capuchin members of le cercle Acarie. Nevertheless, it would clearly be too simplistic to posit Bonaventure as the sole source of Franciscan mysticism. Plato, Plotinus, Augustine and the pseudo-Dionysius, besides more recent influences such as the Spanish mystics, Saint John of the Cross and Saint Theresa of Avila, all contributed to the theory of the Spiritual Way, quite apart from the example of Christ himself and the Gospels and the original thought of Saint Francis. Moreover,

¹ Sancti Bonaventurae...Opera, Sixti V Pont. Max. iussu diligentissime emendata, 7 vols., Rome, 1588-96.

one should also point to the significance of Rheno-flemish mysticism, in particular that of the Franciscan Harphius, with its greater intellectualism, a concentration on the abstract as opposed to concrete or personal imitation of Christ. It was such a heterodox tradition of philosophy and theology, greatly but far from exclusively indebted to Bonaventure, that the Capuchins inherited at the end of the sixteenth century and it is to the final decade of this century, the period when Jérôme de Castelferretti was Gardien of Saint-Honoré (1586-99) which saw the emergence of the Capuchin order as a real force in the French Counter-Reformation with some of the foremost spiritualists of the age amongst their number, that we now turn our attention.

"Personne ne conteste au P. Benoît de Canfield le titre de fondateur de l'École française de Saint-Honoré".¹ Born William Fitch in Canfield, Essex, in 1562, Benoît de Canfield was a trained lawyer who experienced a crisis of conscience upon reading Robert Parsons's The Book of Resolution and was converted in late July 1585.² This initial conversion, seemingly as radical and irresistible as that of Augustine or Bunyan, led quickly to a conviction of the truth of Catholicism and, in 1586, he was obliged to leave England for France. Called to enter the Franciscan order, he was at first torn between the Cordeliers and the Capuchins, but, attracted by the austerity of the latter, he began his noviciate at Saint-Honoré in 1587 under the eminent supervision of Julien

¹ Godefroy de Paris, Les Frères Mineurs Capucins en France, vol. II, p. 479.

² It should be noted that the first Capuchins active in France were mostly of Italian or English origin; it was only at the very end of the sixteenth century that indigenous members came to prominence in the order.

de Camerino, Jérôme de Castelferretti and Bernard d'Osino and with Honoré de Paris (Honoré de Champigny), Ange de Joyeuse, Archange de Pembroke and Léonard de Paris amongst his co-novices. Professed in 1588, he was ordained in 1591-92 after a period of study in Italy. Thereafter, apart from a visit to England when he was arrested and imprisoned (1599-1602), he remained at Saint-Honoré for the most part playing an active rôle in the affairs of the Province of Paris and acquiring a great reputation in spiritual circles and as a director until his death in 1610.¹

It is, perhaps, to exaggerate Canfield's importance to accept Bremond's assessment of this English Capuchin as the greatest influence on seventeenth-century French piety,² but his significance was nonetheless immense and this can be seen in two particular aspects of his life and work: first, his immediate contacts with the circle of Mme Acarie and his direct influence on his confrères within the Province of Paris through his spiritual and administrative activities; second, the wide circulation of his major work, La Règle de Perfection.³ The first complete edition of the Règle did not appear until 1610, but, although it is uncertain precisely when all three parts were written (a draft may have been

1 The definitive study of the life and work of Canfield is Optat de Veghel's Benoît de Canfield: Sa vie, sa doctrine et son influence (Rome, 1949); one should also mention P. Renaudin's Un maître de la mystique française: Benoît de Canfield (Paris, 1956) and Etta Gullick's "The Life of Father Benet of Canfield" in Collectanea Franciscana, 42 (1972), pp. 39-67.

2 "En effet, je le retrouve partout, et je serais assez près de croire que de toutes les influences qui ont façonné la prière au XVII^e siècle il n'en est pas une qui dépasse la sienne", Henri Bremond, Histoire littéraire, vol. VIII (Paris, 1926), p. 226.

3 First published in toto in Paris in 1610, it has recently appeared in a critical edition prepared by Jean Orcibal (Paris, 1982).

finished by the time of his ordination), they were definitely complete in manuscript by 10 August 1593 when Canfield refers to them in a letter to Jean-François de Blois.¹ The inspiration of the Règle very likely goes back to his noviciate, when he underwent severe spiritual trials and experienced ecstatic visions which doubtless affected the evolution of his mystical spirituality, and Édouard d'Alençon dates the first sketch to Canfield's stay in Italy after his noviciate.² What is important to note, though, is that Canfield's spiritual doctrine was in any case fully developed before he became spiritual director of Mme Acarie (from 1593); one can therefore assume that the full doctrine of the 1610 edition of the Règle (that is to say, including Part III "Traitant de la volonté de Dieu essentielle et vie superéminente") was known and discussed in Parisian spiritual circles in the last decade of the sixteenth century.

This early dating of the first manuscript versions of the Règle underlines the independence of Canfield's spirituality, especially from that of the Carthusians, whether in the form of the works of Denis the Carthusian³ or through contact with Dom Beaucousin and the Chartreuse of Vauvert-les-Paris. Moreover, the two mysticisms can be said to derive ultimately from rather different sources. For, whilst Carthusian

1 "Lettre contenant la réponse à un doute touchant l'objet de l'amour de Dieu" printed in Règle (Paris, 1627), pp. 252-59 and reprinted in Orcibal's edition.

2 Édouard d'Alençon, art. "Benoît de Canfield", in DTC, vol. II, col. 718.

3 As the catalogue of the Capuchin library of the period reveals, members of the order had access to the Opera Spiritualia (Cologne, 1532) and Commentarium in omnes S. Dionysii Areopagitae libros (Cologne, 1536) as well as many other works by Carthusian mystics. This catalogue appears as an appendix to M. Dubois-Quinard's Laurent de Paris (Rome, 1959), pp. 357-63.

spirituality is thoroughly impregnated with abstract Dionysian Theocentrism, Canfield's mysticism belongs more closely to the very origins of Franciscanism and must be seen in the perspective of the Franciscan tradition of Christocentrism, asceticism, the primacy of love in the will and the ascent to God through Christ. Undeniably, Canfield was also influenced by Harphius and the more abstract mysticism of the Rheno-flemish spiritualists as exemplified by Ruysbroek, but this was a secondary inspiration. What is important is the combination of Canfield's Franciscan inheritance and his own innovative input, and, although his Franciscan spirituality was to be developed in two rather different ways in the seventeenth century, by Bérulle and the French School (under the influence of a more abstract Dionysianism) and by the Christian Humanists, not least within the Capuchin order (under the influence of Saint François de Sales), the relative purity of Canfield's original conception should be stressed.¹

The full title of the first complete French edition of the Règle is La Reigle de Perfection contenant un bref et lucide abrégé de toute la vie spirituelle réduite à ce seul point de la volonté de Dieu and the text itself is preceded by a plate, with the inscription "Non mea voluntas sed tua fiat",² which together with the following "Explication de cette figure", exemplifies Canfield's doctrine. At the centre of the engraving is the ubiquitous Neoplatonic image of the

¹ The question of Canfield's sources, especially more modern Italian and other influences, is treated fully in P. Renaudin's "Les Sources de la Règle de Perfection de Benoît de Canfield" in EF, Nouvelle série I (1950), pp. 167-182, and in the more general works cited above.

² Luke 22. 42.

sun representing the will of God and surrounding it are three concentric circles of faces turned towards the sun and corresponding to the three degrees of the divine will, external or active, internal or contemplative, and essential or supereminent, which form the subjects of the three parts of the work.¹ Much of Canfield's originality lies in the form and terminology of his spiritual synthesis, but the fundamental doctrine of the Règle is as simple as this plate suggests. It is, essentially, that the spiritual perfection sought by all Christians² consists in the psychological union, and the indirect ontological union, of the will of man with the will of God; it is a state in which the soul sees and loves only God and feels at one with the divine essence; it is an awareness of the nothingness of created being and the All of God, and, hence, a simple, loving vision of God who alone is Being. This ideal state of perfection in conformity with the will of God in Christo is to be attained through the three stages treated in the three complementary parts of the Règle: the first deals with the external will, its obedience to the law and to reason; the second with the internal will or illumination and inspiration; finally, the climax is the essential or supereminent will in which man achieves the vision of God Himself and union with Him.

Such a doctrine, with its emphasis on the opposition of

1 Règle (ed. Orcibal), pp. 84-86.

2 Like François de Sales and in accordance with the aims of the Council of Trent, Canfield sought to bring his spiritual ideal within the reach of all men; if, as the preface "Au Lecteur" to the Règle suggests (ed. Orcibal, p. 88), the way of abnegation is difficult and not open to all, the Chevalier chrestien (Rouen, 1609) provides the counterpart of the theoretical Règle in the form of a practical manual of Christian life for all levels of believers.

being and nothingness, and the ascent of the purified soul through contemplation to the beatific vision of, and union with the One and All, clearly has much in common with Neoplatonic mysticism,¹ but the authors whom he cites are not Plato or Plotinus. Equally, the triple division of the spiritual life is related to the Theologia mystica of Harphius and the Rheno-flemish tradition of Ruysbroek, but the central doctrine of a simple, loving devotion to God through Christ owes little or nothing to the late mediaeval mystics. Instead, Canfield's doctrine belongs simply to the early Christian, especially monastic, teaching of the anagogic way of the contemplative life, and, as has already been suggested, it is Bonaventure who is his main authority (especially the Soliloquium, the Sententiae and the Itinerarium mentis in Deum)² with Saint Francis as the direct inspiration of this personal spirituality in Christo.

If little is specifically new in the Règle, the originality of Canfield lies in his systematization of isolated elements which, if not consciously taken from other sources, can at least be found elsewhere, into the doctrine of the conformity of the will to the will of God through self-annihilation and meditation of the crucified Christ.³ It is this central thesis, the essence of his spirituality of

1 Especially Plotinus, Enneads I, 6; Augustine, De beata vita; pseudo-Dionysius, Theologia mystica.

2 Canfield used the Rome edition of 1588-96 which was in the library of the Paris house.

3 Optat de Veghel summarizes Canfield's original synthesis as follows: "Elle consiste à considérer toute la vie spirituelle, ascétique et mystique, sous l'aspect d'un simple et amoureux regard actif et passif de la seule volonté de Dieu qui est Dieu même. L'élément le plus caractéristique de cette synthèse est, nous le croyons, son orientation nettement mystique. Dès le commencement, en effet, tout est dirigé vers la fin: l'expérience mystique de la volonté de Dieu, qui est Dieu, le Tout" (Benoît de Canfield, p. 374).

both personal and universal experience, that ensures the unity, and indeed the orthodoxy, of the Règle. Later generations were to stress different aspects of the whole doctrine, and not always with a happy outcome,¹ but the rounded wholeness balancing ascetism, contemplation and Christocentric devotion was a source of great inspiration for the French Counter-Reformation.

Canfield's effective influence can perhaps be dated from his very entry into the Capuchin order in 1587 when, he claims, he immediately began to exercise his "rule",² but certainly from 1592 onwards when the first two parts of the Règle, at least, were circulating in manuscript. His specific influence, both directly personal and through printed editions of the Règle, is to be seen in the works of his confrères from his contemporaries Archange de Pembroke (who was greatly involved in the reform of the convent of Port-Royal), Ange de Joyeuse and Archange Ripaut through Laurent de Paris, Joseph de Paris and Martial d'Étampes down to Paul de Lagny in the late seventeenth century. Yet, his invisible influence was possibly more profound. A member of le cercle Acarie after his return from Italy, he was to become one of its leading figures, directing at various times Mme Acarie herself, Bérulle and Marie de Beauvilliers, to name but three

1 Critics attacked Canfield's doctrine of annihilation, in particular, seeing it as leading to complete passivity. Certainly, the tendency towards purely passive meditation was later to degenerate into Quietism and the Règle was placed on the Index in 1689, but, although one can point to Quietist implications in certain individual passages, particularly in Part III which was by far the most radical (and potentially heretical), the sense of the whole with its concentration on spiritual exercise and the meditation and imitation of the Passion of Christ is not Quietist.

2 See the "Dedication" to the English edition of the Rule (Rouen, 1609, and reprinted in facsimile, Menston, 1970).

of the most prominent Catholic reformers of the period. Given the community of interest, it is difficult to attribute any specific area of inspiration; it will, however, be sufficient just to note that many of the spiritual teachings of Benoît de Canfield were to find their echo in the thought and devotions of his contemporaries and successors, and that they belong to the broad tradition of Christian mysticism.

In the case of Saint François de Sales, it is possible to be more precise. Whatever one's particular interest in the French Counter-Reformation, such was the diversity of his activities and writings that the figure of François de Sales cannot but be encountered and taken into account in a study of the spiritual revival of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Declared a Doctor of the Church in 1877, he was beatified in 1661 and canonized in 1665 by Alexander VII, but the first inquiries with a view to his canonization took place as early as 1627 in Annecy, barely five years after his death in 1622. Modern scholarship reinforces the contemporary Church's view of this leading representative of the Catholic revival. Henri Bremond sees him as the very incarnation of what he calls "l'humanisme dévot"¹ and regards the publication of his Introduction à la vie dévote (Lyon, 1608/9) as "une date mémorable dans

¹ H. Bremond, in Histoire littéraire...I L'Humanisme dévot (1580-1660), (2nd ed., Paris, 1929), part I, chapter 1. Bremond distinguishes between "l'humanisme chrétien" and "l'humanisme dévot", the former being more Humanist in inspiration and the latter more mystical, but Julien-Eymard d'Angers, in L'Humanisme chrétien au XVII^e siècle: Saint François de Sales et Yves de Paris (The Hague, 1970), prefers the sole use of "Christian Humanism", whatever its particular form or orientation, and this is the practice that has been followed here so as to avoid a proliferation of terms which are unnecessary and in any case difficult to define and to distinguish.

l'histoire de la pensée et de la vie chrétienne",¹ the opening pages of the Traité de l'amour de Dieu (Lyon, 1616) as "une charte magnifique de l'humanisme dévot",² and the closing books as "[la] charte du haut mysticisme français pendant le XVII^e siècle".³ Such judgements are shared by Strowski,⁴ Calvet,⁵ and Lajeunie⁶ amongst others.

It is not the present intention to claim François de Sales for the Neoplatonists; for all the references to Augustine, the pseudo-Dionysius, Philo, Hermes Trismegistus and Plato himself, the mass of evidence throughout his prolific output is completely against any such reading. Yet, if his Humanism is no longer the classical philology and erudition of the Renaissance with its preference for Plato and the Stoics, but rather a certain confidence in man rooted in scriptural and patristic authority, François nonetheless benefited from a fully Humanist training which brought him into contact with such schools of thought. By the end of the sixteenth century, Humanist influences had become unavoidable, even in such conservative institutions as the Sorbonne and the Jesuit colleges, and the aim here is to hint at how, where and to what effect they may be discerned in the work of François de Sales, and hence to adumbrate their future significance for the development of French religious

1 Bremond, Histoire littéraire, vol. I, p.69.

2 Ibid., p. 115.

3 Ibid., p. 127.

4 F. Strowski, Saint François de Sales (Paris, 1898). A second edition, revised in the light of Bremond's work, appeared in Paris in 1928.

5 J. Calvet, La Littérature religieuse de François de Sales à Fénelon (Paris, 1938).

6 E.-M. Lajeunie, Saint François de Sales et l'esprit salésien (Paris, 1962) and Saint François de Sales: L'homme, la pensée, l'action (2 vols., Paris, 1966).

writing in the seventeenth century. For, Saint François de Sales belongs very much to the tradition of Christian Humanism inherited from the Renaissance and opposed to the extreme Augustinian pessimism of the Reform; he is the successor of Ficino, Pico, Colet, More, Lefèvre and, perhaps above all, Erasmus, maintaining and developing the noble, optimistic doctrine of man that was defined by Trent. In the words of Henri Bremond, again: "J'ai couvé un oeuf de colombe, disait Érasme, Luther en a fait sortir un serpent. Qu'il se rassure: sa colombe naîtra bientôt et elle s'appellera François de Sales".¹ It is this notion of continuity from the early Renaissance that is of particular interest here.

Born in Thorens in 1567, the eldest son of a landed family, François began his studies at the Collège de la Roche and the Collège Chappuisien d'Annecy. Then, having been tonsured in 1578, from 1581 at the latest until 1588, he studied in Paris, first at the Jesuit Collège de Clermont and later at the Sorbonne. His father, who wished his son to become a lawyer, had intended him for the Collège de Navarre, but François preferred the greater piety of the Jesuit College, at that time one of the most flourishing of the Parisian schools and one of the most advanced (and liberal) of the Jesuit Colleges, and successfully fought against his father's will. This seems to have been important for François's intellectual and spiritual development, for it was at Clermont that he acquired a thorough Humanist education in theology, philosophy and the ancient languages, and underwent

¹ H. Bremond, "La Philosophie de saint François de Sales" in Revue de Paris, 30 (1923), pp. 135-52 at p. 141.

the influence of two great Humanist scholars, the Jesuit Jean Maldonat and his Benedictine disciple, Gilbert G  n  brard. Maldonat had not taught at Clermont since 1576, but his pervasive influence was still to be felt through his followers and his course-books; the latter was professor of Hebrew at the Coll  ge Royal and his course on the Song of Songs in 1584 greatly inspired Fran  ois, especially his own doctrine of divine love.

With this basic Humanist training and increasingly leaning towards the spiritual life, Fran  ois registered at the University of Padua, ostensibly to study law, in 1588. The following three years were decisive in determining the course of his subsequent career, as he became the disciple of Antoine Possevin, another renowned Jesuit and Humanist scholar, who, as his spiritual director, guided him in his theological studies (notably the topical problems of grace, free-will and predestination) and fortified his desire to enter the Church. Moreover, in Padua, Fran  ois came into direct contact with the intellectual dilemma that faced Christian theology as it emerged from the Renaissance. Although the spirit of the old faculties was still far from dead in late sixteenth-century France, the pedagogical reforms that had occurred during the Renaissance had to a large extent succeeded in fulfilling Ramus's ambition of placing the classical authors at the very centre of the curriculum. In this respect, the Coll  ge de Clermont was very much dans le courant and Fran  ois clearly gained from this enthusiasm for the classics during his studies in Paris. However, the orthodox Christian scholar could not fail to become aware of the tension between what one might regard as the perfect "form" of the classics and their pagan content,

with their non-Christian conceptions of man and the universe. This tension within the Humanist movement became fully apparent to François de Sales in Padua where unbaptized Aristotelianism and the naturalistic rationalism of Pomponazzi were still a powerful force. For all his Humanist education, François could not tolerate any tendency towards naturalism and, in his reaction against this danger, he followed Maldonat in his integration of Humanism into a grand theological, and thoroughly Christian, view of man and the world in which the term "Humanism" takes on a different, indeed more modern, meaning.

Nevertheless, the fact of François's Humanist training remains, and its mark can already be seen in his youthful works. For example, in his analysis of the contemplative Exercice du Sommeil ou Repos Spirituel,¹ E.-M. Lajeunie has discerned the principal themes of Ficino's dialectic of love.² Written during François's spiritual crisis of 1586/7, the Exercice, without making any specific reference to Ficino, is indeed based on De Amore. The first five degrees of the Exercice depict the Ficinian alliance of ethics and aesthetics according to which man is attracted away from evil and ugliness and towards good and beauty through the faculty of the intellect which, being divine and immortal, is capable of conceiving higher ideas. Then, in the final three degrees, just as Ficino leads the soul upwards to the beauty of bodies, virtues, ideas and finally the infinite, pure source

1 In Oeuvres complètes, vol. XXII, pp. 33-37. References are to the edition in twenty-seven volumes published in Annecy, 1892-1964.

2 Saint François de Sales: L'homme, la pensée, l'action, vol. I, pp. 158-63.

of all beauty, which is God, François likewise continues the ascent of the soul up to love of the divine attributes, and finally to fulfilment and repose in the loving vision of God Himself. This dialectic of love is also that which lies at the heart of the later Introduction à la vie dévote and it is a dialectic derived essentially from Ficino's commentary De Amore which, as Lajeunie stresses, clearly exercised a profound influence on the early development of François's own theory of divine love: "L'étude qu'en fit François de Sales semble être un des carrefours de la voie salésienne".¹ This is not to say that François de Sales was a thorough-going Ficinian, but it does underline the extent to which Florentine Neoplatonism had penetrated French intellectual life at this time so that its influence was almost unavoidable;² as Lajeunie writes, "cette diffusion se fit naturellement dans tous les milieux cultivés de l'époque, parmi les universités surtout, et François de Sales ne put échapper à cette influence".³

During his stay in Padua, another work was published which was even more important for the development of his spirituality. This was Lorenzo Scupoli's Combattimento spirituale⁴ which was to be François's own "livre de chevet"⁵

1 Saint François de Sales: L'homme, la pensée, l'action, vol. I, p. 176.

2 Henricus Petrus's edition of Ficino's Opera omnia had, of course, just been published (2 vols., Basel, 1576), and there was at that time a spate of French translations of the works of the Italian Neoplatonists by Guy Lefèvre de la Boderie and others (see above, chapter 2).

3 Saint François de Sales: L'homme, la pensée, l'action, vol. I, p. 159.

4 Venice, 1589.

5 Cf. "Le Libraire au lecteur" in the Paris edition of 1675 and Jean-Pierre Camus's L'Esprit du Bienheureux François de Sales, ed. M. Depéry (3 vols., Paris, 1840), vol. I, pp. 164-65, and vol. II, pp. 18-20.

and which, strongly recommended by him, became very popular in seventeenth-century France.¹ Under Scupoli's influence, François would appear to have moved away from the anthropocentric Neoplatonism of Ficino towards a more Pauline, mystical Christocentrism as exemplified by the Traité de l'amour de Dieu. Yet, as its title suggests, Scupoli's work is essentially a treatment of the theme of the spiritual combat, and as such, although Scupoli's ascetic spirituality provides something of a corrective to Ficino's Platonic dialectic of love, it is equally indebted to the Neoplatonic tradition, reinforcing many of its basic themes, so that its influence on François de Sales can be seen as a modification of his spirituality rather than a reversal of direction. For, although the notion of the spiritual combat is ultimately scriptural in derivation, there is no doubt that conceptions of the combat during the Renaissance and after were formed by Erasmus's Enchiridion militis christiani, which was indebted in turn to the teachings of the Florentines, in particular Pico's Oratio with its emphasis on self-knowledge and trichotomist psychology, whilst Scupoli's references to the "eyes of the soul" ("l'occhio interno" or "l'occhio dell'anima") immediately recall Ficino's "acies animi" which he himself translates as "l'occhio dello intelletto".²

All these elements come together in the mature spirituality of François de Sales. The second of the Vrays entretiens spirituels emphasizes the need for self-knowledge

¹ The "Préface" to the edition published in Paris in 1659 refers to four previous French translations, and, as will be seen below (in chapter 5), the Combattimento greatly influenced Bérulle in particular.

² De Amore (ed. Marcel), p. 207.

(which, for François, as for Bérulle or Pascal, entails a recognition of man's ~~misery~~ without God, whilst retaining [↑] a ^{wretchedness} distinctly more optimistic attitude towards grace and free-will);¹ the first book of the Traité in particular is built around the theme of the combat with its trichotomist psychology;² as Levi points out,³ the Neoplatonist association of self-knowledge and the ascent of the soul to love of God is made explicit in the chapter "Du recueillement amoureux de l'âme en la contemplation";⁴ above all, there is the constant emphasis on the supremacy of the will which is at the heart of the Neoplatonic theory of love.⁵

The spirituality of François de Sales, however, is as far from abstract mysticism as it is from rationalist naturalism. On the contrary, his conception of the spiritual combat, the exercise of the intellect and the will, and moral austerity lead to a dynamic love the object of which is a fully personal God attained through Christ. Ultimately, his voluntarism leads to a formulation similar to those of Canfield: "[il faut] se laisser entre la Providence divine, sans s'amuser à aucun désir, sinon à vouloir ce que Dieu veut de nous",⁶ but it is important to note that this is an active conformity with God's will and not a passive mysticism; following the example of Saint Paul, this is the peak of Christian perfection, and it is this perfection and the

1 In OC, vol. VI, especially pp. 19-20.

2 In OC, vol. IV, especially chapter 10.

3 French Moralists, pp. 124-25.

4 Traité, Book VI, chapter 7 (in OC, vol. IV, pp. 326-3).

5 The Combattimento had a still wider significance in the seventeenth century because of its treatment of self-love and condemnation "delle virtù apparenti" and "degli inganni dell'amor proprio" (see J. Lafond, La Rochefoucauld: Augustinisme et littérature, Paris, 1977).

6 Vrais entretiens XXI in OC, vol. VI, p. 384.

practice of devotion that form the true matter of François's spiritual works.

If François de Sales's writings were popular and influential in the seventeenth century, then his personal contacts were even more important, for, as was the case with many leading figures of the French Catholic revival, his greatness lies above all in the inspiring example of his religious life. François left Padua in January 1592 and, in December 1593, renounced the law and became a priest. Throughout the following decade, he was prominently involved in the conversion of the Chablais where his active apostolate quickly earned him a wide reputation. Then, in January 1602, he arrived in Paris to negotiate the establishment of Catholicism in Gex; he stayed until September and Lajeunie writes: "Ces huit mois de séjour furent des plus féconds et pour lui et pour la France".¹ In Paris, then, apart from developing contacts with King and court (Henri IV was one of his greatest admirers and sought to keep him in France), he joined le cercle Acarie.

François's precise rôle in this spiritual circle is not entirely clear. It was Bérulle who introduced him, but, although he said of him that "il est tout tel que je sçaurois desirer d'estre moy mesme",² it would be wrong to regard him simply as a protégé or disciple of the founder of the Oratoire. Indeed, the reverse seems likely to have been the case, as François's spiritual doctrine was already well developed whilst Bérulle's was still inchoate (for example, Possevin had introduced François to Scupoli, he was well

¹ Saint François de Sales et l'esprit salésien, p. 59.

² Letter of 3 June 1603 in OC, vol. XII, p. 189.

acquainted with Theresian spirituality which he followed in its emphasis on the humanity of Christ, as distinct from the Rheno-flemish abstractions of the supereminent life, and, in 1599, he had visited the Oratory of Philip Neri in Rome). Furthermore, it is significant that Mme Acarie, who had already been directed by several leading members of her circle, engaged François as her confessor immediately upon his arrival; clearly she did not regard him as an apprentice. This is certainly the view of J. Calvet: "Ne renversons pas les rôles et n'allons pas faire de lui un disciple de Bérulle; il reste l'initiateur religieux du XVII^e siècle"¹ and "l'action de François au début du XVII^e siècle fut décisive".² Equally, E.-M. Lajeunie sees him as a master not a pupil during his stay in Paris in 1602.³

François's rôle in the spiritual revival of the Counter-Reformation was of the greatest importance. Consecrated Bishop of Geneva on 8 December 1602, he set about the improvement of the clergy in his diocese, not least by ensuring that they were well educated (ignorance being one of the best founded and most hurtful of Protestant reproaches to the Catholic Church), but, even whilst devoted to pastoral work and his active apostolate, he continued to exercise a profound influence on developments throughout France. He was a constant example and inspiration for his wide range of friends in the new and in the reformed orders. Besides confessing Mme Acarie, he was the advisor of Marie de Beauvilliers and also directed Angélique Arnauld. He was

¹ La Littérature religieuse, p. 28.

² Ibid., p. 78.

³ Saint François de Sales: L'homme, la pensée, l'action, vol. II, pp. 197-98.

a close friend of Duval, who, with Bérulle and Gallemant, was one of the three original superiors of the Reformed or Discalced Carmelites in France, and himself strongly supported this reform, speaking enthusiastically in favour of its introduction in France at a meeting of spiritualists in Beaucousin's cell at Vauvert in July 1602. As a reformer of the clergy, his influence on Vincent de Paul and even Olier was decisive. Finally, his rôle in the foundation of the Visitation with Mme de Chantal is well known.¹

No less important was his involvement in the foundation of the Oratoire. François had aligned himself with the spiritual movement of "divino amore", represented in Rome by Philip Neri, since his student days and, having visited the Roman Oratory in 1599, was filled with enthusiasm for the congregation. It was he who told the young Pierre de Bérulle of the Oratory and encouraged him to introduce the congregation to France, and in so doing did Bérulle a great service by giving him a clear sense of direction and purpose at a time of uncertainty and indecision. Certainly the establishment of the Roman Oratory in Thonon in 1607 was the fulfilment of a cherished dream of the Bishop's, and he was no less delighted at the foundation in 1611 of Bérulle's congregation in Saint-Honoré after his close friend, Nicolas de Soulfour, had played a major part in the negotiations.

1 The Visitation was founded on 6 June 1610, and seventeen years later had already established twenty-eight convents in France, Savoie and Lorraine. This wide diffusion of the Visitation Order during the seventeenth century assured the formation of large numbers of girls (usually of good family) sent to its convents for schooling, quite apart from those who actually became nuns. The Visitandines, moreover, enjoyed close connections with the Oratoire, with Oratorians frequently acting as directors or confessors, so that the joint rôle of both François and Bérulle was institutionalized on a very large scale.

In a letter to Bérulle of 20 January 1612, François speaks of his desire to see the further advancement of the congregation "laquelle j'estime devoir estre un des plus fructueuses et apostoliques oeuvres qui ayt esté fait en France, il y a long tems".¹

Also, one should note François's attitude towards the regular orders, both healthy and in decline. Although he was to die before the outbreak of the quarrel between seculars and regulars, in which his close friend and disciple, Jean-Pierre Camus, was a prominent protagonist, he was no less horrified at the abuse of exemption and other scandals than the Bishop of Belley (though the virulence of Camus's attack on monks goes quite against his master's spirit). In his Compte-rendu de l'estat du diocèse de Genève (1606) submitted to Paul V, he writes: "Mirum quam dissipata sit omnium Regularum diciplina in Abbatiis et Prioratibus hujus diocaesis".² From his general criticisms, though, he exempts the Carthusians and the mendicant orders, and, in particular, his preference was for the Capuchins. He had worked with them, notably Chérubin de Maurienne and Esprit de Beaune, in the mission to convert the Chablais, and the continuing ties and mutual admiration between them are illustrated by his recommendation of the Capuchins to Camus when they were seeking to found a house in Belley: "A la verité, ilz sont praeferables pour mille raysons, puis que maintenant ilz ont faculté de confesser en cette Province; car ilz ont des gens de capacité, une renommée et approbation incomparable des

¹ Letter DCCXLV in OC, vol. 15, p. 154. Cf. Letter DCCXLVI (ibid., p. 156).

² In OC, vol. XXIII, p. 325.

peuples, une pauvreté qui incommode le moins ceux qui les entretiennent, une correspondance entr'eux qui peut tenir en observance les Religieux, et une tres particuliere inclination à vous honorer".¹ In 1618, François was given letters of affiliation to the order and his first biographer was the Capuchin, Philibert de Bonneville.²

Particularly revealing, though, is François's attitude towards the leading Capuchin habitué of the Hôtel Acarie, Benoît de Canfield. As has already been said, le cercle Acarie had a distinct tendency towards abstract mysticism that, taken to its logical extreme, was to lead to ~~q~~uietism. Q Such passivity had no place in the Christian Humanist spirituality of François and this can be seen in his very limited approval of the Règle in a letter to Mère de Chastel, Superior of the Visitation de Grenoble: "On peut laisser lire le livre de la Volonté de Dieu jusques au dernier, qui estant asses inintelligible, pourroit estre entendu mal à propos par l'imagination des lectrices, lesquelles, desirant ces unions, s'imagineroyent aysement de les avoir, ne sachant pas ce que c'est".³ The heresy of "imagination" or "illusion" was a very real danger in the early seventeenth century, and was the cause of much suspicion of the mystical tendency, but François's more or less explicit rejection of the third part of the Règle and the Rheno-flemish tradition from which it partly derives is much more profound and, indeed, original.

Apart from his many hundreds of letters of direction and

1 Letter MDLXII (of 27 October 1619) in OC, vol. XIX, p. 47. On this episode, see: P. O'Reilly, "Notes pour servir à l'histoire du couvent des Capucins de Belley" in EF, 44 (1932), pp. 530-48.

2 Vie de François de Sales (Lyon, 1623).

3 Letter MDCLXVII in OC, vol. XIX, p. 253.

advice and several spiritual treatises of which the best known is the Introduction à la vie dévote, the principal statement of François's spiritual doctrine is, of course, to be found in the Traité de l'amour de Dieu. To some extent, the Traité grew out of his spiritual commerce with Mère de Chantal between 1610 and 1616, but there is no doubt that it also owes something to a work mentioned with unqualified praise in the "Préface" to the Traité: "Nous voyons de plus un grand et magnifique Palais que le Reverend Pere Laurens de Paris, predicateur de l'Ordre des Capucins, bastit à l'honneur de l'amour divin, lequel estant achevé sera un cours accompli de la science de bien aymer".¹ The content of Laurent de Paris's Le Palais de l'amour divin (Paris, 1602) will be considered in more detail in the following chapter, but it is important to note here that François de Sales would have been much more in sympathy with the Humanist dimension of the Palais, its Bonaventurian charity and primacy of the will in its natural love of God, than with Canfield's mysticism of the supereminent life as it is described in the third part of the Règle. It is such a Humanist mysticism (if it can indeed be called a true mysticism) that François evokes in the sixth book of the Traité:

L'orayson et la theologie mystique ne sont qu'une mesme chose. Elle s'appelle theologie, parce que, comme la theologie speculative a Dieu pour son objet, celle ci aussi ne parle que de Dieu, mays avec trois differences: car, 1. celle la traite de Dieu entant qu'il est Dieu, et celle cy en parle entant qu'il est souverainement aymable; c'est à dire, celle la regarde la divinité de la supreme bonté, et celle ci la supreme bonté de la Divinité. 2. La speculative traite de Dieu avec les hommes et entre les hommes; la mystique parle de Dieu avec Dieu et en Dieu mesme. 3. La speculative tend à la connoissance de Dieu, et la mystique à l'amour de Dieu; de sorte que celle la rend ses escholiers sçavans, doctes

¹ In OC, vol. IV, p. 7.

et theologiens, mais celle-ci rend les siens ardents, affectionnés, amateurs de Dieu, et Philothées ou Theophiles ... En somme, l'oraison et la théologie mystique n'est autre chose qu'une conversation par laquelle l'âme s'entretient amoureusement avec Dieu de sa très aimable bonté, pour s'unir et joindre à icelle.¹

This is not at all the language of abstract mysticism; rather it is a return to the Augustino-Platonic notion of the philosopher as "amator Dei" in the most active sense.

If, as Jean Mauzaize and M. Dubois-Quinard strongly believe,² there is any direct influence of the Palais on François de Sales's spirituality, this would clearly make him the most important disciple of Laurent de Paris. Direct influence, however, is of less importance here than community of interest and identity of direction. Although more recent spiritual doctrines derived from Italy, Spain and northern Europe have their part to play, the common sources of both François de Sales and Laurent de Paris lie mainly within the broad school of (Neo-)Platonism, including Augustine, the pseudo-Dionysius, Bernard and Bonaventure. Indeed, in the words of M. Dubois-Quinard, "pour tous deux, leur doctrine spirituelle s'énonce ... à l'école philosophique de Platon, de saint Augustin, de saint Bonaventure et des Flandres. Tous deux ... sont des représentants importants de la théorie de l'amour pur".³ The Neoplatonism of François is far from being

1 In OC, vol. IV, pp. 303-304.

2 See: J. Mauzaize, Le Rôle et l'action des capucins de la Province de Paris (3 vols., Lille/Paris, 1978), pp. 725-26 and 909; M. Dubois-Quinard, Laurent de Paris (Rome, 1959), p. 345 and, especially, her Saint François de Sales et Laurent de Paris: Notes sur la pensée originale du "Traité de l'Amour de Dieu" (1616) de saint François de Sales et sur le problème de ses sources ... Influence du "Palais de l'Amour Divin" (1602) du capucin Laurent de Paris (Thèse complémentaire, Paris, 1956), passim. In the conclusion to the latter, Laurent is described unequivocally as the "inspirateur de saint François de Sales, de son génie philosophique, spirituel et littéraire" (p. 450).

3 Saint François de Sales et Laurent de Paris, p. 23 bis.

overt, but he has learnt much from his study of the Italians, especially Ficino, at Clermont and in Padua and, if Ficino is not the authority that he adduces, the essence of Florentine Neoplatonism nonetheless underlies his spiritual doctrine of pure (though not passive) love. Thus, through the pseudo-Dionysius and also Bonaventure, the Neoplatonic theory of inspiration and illumination dominates the Traité; the first book is a thoroughly Platonic treatment of love in which love arises through resemblance, sympathy and correspondence, and tends towards union with the object of that love; Beauty and the Good are identified throughout in man's ascent from contemplation to union; moreover, man has a natural inclination to love God from the spark of the divine that is within him, and, for all the need for asceticism and rigorous exercise of the will with the assistance of grace, it is this that binds man essentially to God.

These Humanist associations of the theology of love, certainly present in the earlier work of Laurent de Paris, but given prominence and a popular emphasis by Saint François de Sales, had a great impact on the theory and practice of the religious life in the seventeenth century. That this should be so underlines the achievement and importance of the Bishop of Geneva in the history of seventeenth-century French religious thought, an achievement and importance epitomized by Jean Calvet:

François de Sales est la porte du XVII^e siècle religieux, dont il a ouvert toutes les avenues, même celles qui semblent échapper le plus à sa lumière. C'est lui qui a réconcilié la Renaissance et l'esprit chrétien en pénétrant la Renaissance d'esprit chrétien; c'est lui qui a rapproché la vie de la religion en insérant la religion dans la vie quotidienne; c'est lui qui a ramené le christianisme à l'intérieur en l'appliquant à transformer, à transfigurer la conscience; c'est lui, et ceci est l'oeuvre essentielle qui explique et anime toutes les autres, c'est lui qui a rappelé que l'essence

du christianisme est l'amour".¹

If Canfield represents the more abstract mysticism of le cercle Acarie, then François de Sales exemplifies the Humanist tendency that will be apparent in the succeeding generation of spiritualists, in particular amongst the Capuchins. The mystical tradition continued to flourish throughout the seventeenth century, but the mark of François could not be avoided. The influence of his Christian Humanism was inescapable in every sphere, just as he himself could not disown his own Humanist inheritance, and it was to a large extent through him that Renaissance ideas, not least Florentine Neoplatonism, found renewed life in the seventeenth century once placed firmly in a rigorously Christian context, and indeed went to underpin much of the French Counter-Reformation.

1 La Littérature religieuse, p. 21.

4. THE CAPUCHINS

It is possible, without excessive historical or chronological distortion, to discern two distinct phases in the Capuchins' rôle in the French Counter-Reformation. The first centred on Canfield, his contemporaries and disciples, and was distinctly mystical. The second likewise insisted on the pre-eminence of the contemplative life, but, corresponding to a general shift in taste in French culture away from abstract mysticism, the tone and emphasis of the work of later Capuchins are rather different. Of course, the Règle continued to exercise a considerable influence both within and outside the order,¹ but it was no longer the prime source of Capuchin inspiration. Instead, a more Humanist and more scholarly (indeed, bookish) strain can be identified, for "le mouvement humaniste, qui dépendit en grande partie de saint François de Sales, a influé profondément sur un certain nombre de penseurs capucins, tel Sébastien de Senlis dont la Philosophie des contemplatifs (1621) est l'illustration la plus marquante de l'humanisme chrétien, mais aussi Léandre de

¹ Over fifty editions and translations of the Règle were published throughout Europe, and many works by seventeenth-century French Capuchins sought to emulate it, including Joseph de Paris's Exercice des bienheureux (Troyes, 1610) and Introduction à la vie spirituelle (Poitiers, 1616), Martial d'Étampes's Traicté facile pour apprendre à faire oraison mentale (Paris, 1629), Constantin de Barbanson's Anatomie de l'âme (Liège, 1635), Joseph de Dreux's Conduite intérieure pour toutes les actions de la journée (Paris, 1667) and Paul de Lagny's Chemin abrégé de la perfection chrétienne (Paris, 1673) which is a perfect summary of the Règle.

Dijon, Jacques d'Autun, Archange de Valognes, voire même Philippe d'Angoumois".¹ To this list must be added the name of Yves de Paris, the very incarnation of seventeenth-century Christian Humanism, and also that of a Capuchin already identified as a linking-figure in the development of Capuchin thought, namely Laurent de Paris. Certainly, if Canfield is the first great "chef de file" of seventeenth-century Capuchin spirituality, then the second is without doubt Laurent de Paris. The first edition of his Palais de l'amour divin (Paris, 1602) stands at the head of the long line of spiritual works produced in the seventeenth century; it precedes publication of the Règle and, of the written output emanating from le cercle Acarie, only Bérulle's Bref discours de l'abnégation intérieure² and Jean Quintandoine de Bretigny's French translation of the works of Saint Theresa of Avila³ appeared before it.

Laurent de Paris entered the Capuchin order at Saint-Honoré on 7 October 1581, seven years before Benoît de Canfield. In her monograph on Laurent, Mme Dubois-Quinard insists on the originality of his thought,⁴ effectively denying any formative influence of Canfield (as of François de Sales) and suggesting that the second edition of the Palais (Paris, 1614) in fact represents a critique of the Règle which stresses pure love in a rather different way: "Laurent, lui-même, a mis le doigt sur cette évidence en

1 J. Mauzaize, Le Rôle et l'action des capucins de la province de Paris, p. 1351-1352.

2 Paris, 1597. This was in any case an adaptation of Gagliardi's Breve compendio, as will be seen below.

3 3 vols., Paris, 1601. This edition was revised by Beaucousin (whose translation of La Perle évangélique appeared in 1602) and Dom du Chèvre.

4 Laurent de Paris: Une doctrine du pur amour au début du XVII^e siècle (Rome, 1959), pp. 320-29.

opposant l'exercice de la volonté qu'est la Règle de perfection à son propre exercice unique de l'amour: Le Palais de l'amour divin".¹ Certainly, there is a distinct difference of emphasis between the two works, and this does indeed lie in the difference between (rather passive) conformity of the will to the will of God and (more active) love of God, but it would be misleading to insist on the complete independence of the development of Laurent's thought from the spiritual doctrine of Canfield. Canfield was, after all, a dominant influence in the Parisian circles which Laurent also frequented during the period when the doctrine of the Palais was being elaborated. And, besides, their spiritual masters are broadly identical. A certain indebtedness, or at least interaction or cross-fertilization, would therefore seem to have been inevitable. Nevertheless, it is still the points where Laurent is opposed to Canfield that are of greatest interest.

First published in 1602 and then in a revised, augmented version in 1614, the Palais was intended as the first in a series of five volumes, a series which proposed to offer a complete guide to Christian perfection and a method for rising from the state of sin to pure love of God.² However, although Laurent refers to the other volumes on several occasions, only the fourth part, Les Tapisseries, would appear to have been published (Paris, 1631). The basic substance of the Palais is briefly summarized: the starting-point is the opposition of All and Nothing, and the

¹ Laurent de Paris, p. 5.

² The other volumes were to have been: II La Chambre du trésor du pur amour; III La Salle du pur amour; IV Les Tapisseries sacrées et royales du pur amour divin; V Le Sacré cabinet du très pur amour divin.

excellence of man created in the image of God but his nothingness without Him, from which Laurent concludes that the sole aim of man in this life must be Christian perfection and that this perfection lies in pure love of God; this perfection or the exercise of pure love, with its various stages from the simple vocal act of devotion to transformative union with God, forms the subject-matter of the Palais which would, in turn, have prepared the way for the following volumes presumably treating ascending degrees of perfection. Accordingly, the Palais is divided into three parts. The third deals with pure love itself, whilst the first two treatises set out what one might describe as the philosophical basis that lies behind and leads to the doctrine of pure love. These are the "Traité de l'excellence de l'homme", which forms the "premiere pierre fondamentale du sacré palais", and the "Traité du néant de l'homme créature raisonnable". It is these opening parts that contain the most interesting aspects of Laurent's work in the present context, for it is here that his Neoplatonism is most apparent.

Contrary to the protestations of MM. Dedouvres,¹ Chesneau² and Dagens³ that it is wrong to talk of Platonism as such in the seventeenth century and that it is preferable to keep to thoroughly Christian sources such as the Scholastic Aristotle, the apostolic Dionysius or Augustine, it should be accepted, with Mme Dubois-Quinard, that "en fait, il y a au 17^e siècle, adopté par une bonne partie de

1 L. Dedouvres, "Le Père Joseph, lecteur en philosophie", in EF, 29 (1913), p. 339.

2 C. Chesneau, Le P. Yves de Paris et son temps (1590-1678) (2 vols., Paris, 1946) vol. II, p. 438

3 J. Dagens, Bérulle et les origines de la restauration catholique (1575-1611) (Paris, 1952), p. 256.

l'école spirituelle française, et pas seulement par la famille capucine, un mouvement **platonicien** rigoureux qui hérite du renouveau platonicien des 15^e et 16^e siècles et même de celui des 13^e et 14^e siècles".¹ Laurent de Paris stands at the head of this distinctly (Neo-)Platonic movement in seventeenth-century spirituality, the precursor of Bérulle and the Oratorian Neoplatonists as of later Capuchin Neoplatonists such as Sébastien de Senlis and Yves de Paris. It is this overt Neoplatonism that sets Laurent apart from Canfield as much as his emphasis on pure love in opposition to the proto-quietist doctrine of conformity of the will.

Chapter 1 of the Palais presents a catalogue of biblical allusions to the notion of the excellence of man created in the image of God the exemplar. This is followed, in the second chapter, by a series of references to Neoplatonists and Christian writers who have upheld the same idea; the list includes Pythagoras, Plato, Plotinus, Hermes Trismegistus, Lactantius, Augustine and Denis the Carthusian.² Already this list of authorities distinguishes Laurent from Canfield, but this Neoplatonic element is taken further as he refers frequently to Ficino's editions of Plato, Hermes Trismegistus and Pythagoras,³ and is clearly well acquainted with the works of the Florentines. The library of the Paris house, first mentioned in 1598 and properly organized and provided with a librarian in 1640, contained many Neoplatonic works and it is clear that Laurent had first-hand knowledge of

1 Laurent de Paris, p. 224.

2 To complete the collection of classical Neoplatonists, Proclus, Iamblichus and Philo are cited on excellence elsewhere in the Palais.

3 See, for example, Palais, p. 4. References are to the second edition of 1614.

them.¹ As he talks of man as "un échantillon de la Divinité, rayon du grand soleil Divin",² "le grand miracle du monde",³ and "l'abregé des oeuvres de creation",⁴ such imagery suggests the direct influence of Ficino and Pico and this is underlined by the ensuing accumulation of Neoplatonic images of man the microcosm, the "vinculum mundi", "le centre, ce me semble, et le milieu de toutes creatures, chaine des choses superieures et inferieures, qui lie les celestes avec les terrestres d'un merveilleux accord ... capable des sciences acquises et infuses, imitateur de la premiere cause, petit singe de Dieu, perfection de l'univers, miroir de toutes choses".⁵

This is the positive aspect of self-knowledge in the Palais where the Socratic injunction leads to man's awareness of his potential for perfection as described later in part I; the corollary, though, is the negative aspect (or rather a second positive aspect, as it is essential to man's attainment of perfection) which is the perception of the nothingness of created being, ~~for~~, "l'homme n'est parfait que par dependance".⁶ Perfection does not lie in mere knowledge of self and of God, nor even in self-annihilation ("car ce n'est qu'un aide pour ôter seulement un des premiers et

1 The catalogue, as reproduced in Mme Dubois-Quinard's Laurent de Paris (pp. 357-63), contains Ficino's Latin translation of Plato (Lyon, 1557) and Louis le Roy's French translation of the Symposium (Paris, 1559), as well as two editions of Ficino's complete works (Basel, 1520 and 1561), Pico's Opera (1496, 1506 and 1601) and the commentary of the Italian Franciscan Annibal Rosselli In Pymandrum et Asclepium (2 vols., Cracow, 1585-86), together with many other works by ancient, mediaeval and Renaissance authors of Neoplatonic inclination.

2 Palais, p. 4.

3 Ibid., p. 4.

4 Ibid., p. 5.

5 Ibid., p. 5.

6 Ibid., p. 26

principaux empeschemens de cete perfection d'amour, à sçavoir l'amour propre de soy déreglé"),¹ but knowledge of "l'homme rien de soy"² is its beginning. Here the emphasis appears to be less on the contingent, psychological nothingness of sin than on the ontological nothingness of man opposed to the All of God; it is a metaphysical question of Being opposed to the dependence of created being set out in terms very similar to those of Laurent's contemporary, Pierre de Bérulle.

This ontological nothingness is not, however, the dominant motif in Laurent's work. Self-knowledge and submission of the will are the first stages in man's ascent towards God and total loss of self in pure love. This juxtaposition, indeed interpenetration, of Neoplatonic and Christian ideas, typifies the inseparability of philosophy and mysticism in Laurent's thought and lies at the heart of what Mme Dubois-Quinard calls his "humanisme mystique".³ Just as the doctrine of nothingness is balanced by an optimistic view of man's potential in the spirit of the Renaissance, so the doctrine of pure love is equally permeated with Neoplatonic ideas of the return of the soul to absolute Being. In this perspective, annihilation takes on less of an ontological significance than a psychological significance, that is to say, it signifies the removal of the obstacles (essentially sin and self-love) to man's regaining his proper status as the most exalted of created beings and who, as in the spiritual doctrine of François de Sales, is truly

¹ Palais, p. 39.

² Ibid., p. 587. Cf. p. 577: "... vous n'étant rien de vous-mêmes en toutes façons universellement, puisque Dieu est le seul vray être vraiment, qui subsiste par soy-même indépendemment".

³ Laurent de Paris, p. 174.

"capable de Dieu". Correspondingly, Laurent talks of man's loss of light and truth, a deficiency which can and must be rectified, and transposes the metaphor of Plato's cave into the context of his Christian mysticism: "Que l'aveuglement de mon intellect est émerveillable ... accoutumé aux tenebres des choses existantes au dehors et aux phantômes des choses sensibles, quand il envisage cete lumiere et verité, vous l'être souverain, il luy semble ne rien veoir pour tout ny plus ny moins que quand l'oeil regardant veoid la pure lumiere du soleil en sa rouë, il luy semble ne rien voir pour tout".¹ The process of purification through pure love returns to the soul the vision of the light of divine truth obscured by sin and attachment to the things of this world.² Self-knowledge thus reveals the nothingness of man, but, at the same time, it also points to the spark of the All within this relationship of complete dependence, and so prepares the way for the re-establishment of man and ultimately his exaltation. In this sense, as against the ontological nothingness of, say, the Rheno-flemish mystics, the nothingness of man and this world can be said to be essential to **all** mysticism in that there can be no divine union without rejection of worldly things, and this is its positive force in the Humanist spirituality of the Palais.

The end of man, then, is perfect, unitive, transformative love of God: "la fin de l'homme consiste à aimer Dieu d'un amour parfait, que nous appellons autrement amour unitif, jouissant et transformatif, qui consiste en la mutuelle

1 Palais, pp. 420-21.

2 This idea of the Fall as a loss of light brought about through involvement with material things is, of course, Plotinian (Enneads V, 1).

amitié de l'ame à Dieu, et de Dieu à l'ame".¹ As in Bérulle's Christology, the exemplar of such love is the oneness of the Incarnate Word with God in the perfect sacrifice, "[le] sacrifice perfectif, unitif, consommant et consommatif"² of Christ. Laurent's Christocentrism is more fully developed in the Tapisseries which reflects the importance of devotion to Christ for the Franciscans, but in the Palais he already regards the divine contemplative life as a life of union with Christ and does not separate union with God from union with Christ. If the Tapisseries concentrates on consideration of the états of Christ and the significance of the mystery of the Incarnation for man, the Palais equally stresses texts from Hebrews on the priesthood "selon l'ordre de Melchisedech" and tends towards a eucharistic theology similar to that of Bérulle.³ Yet, for all this Christology, the definitions of love are frequently taken from Neoplatonic sources. Laurent quotes from the Symposium ("Amor pur^{us} et verus est partus in pulchro et bono per essentiam")⁴ and from Ficino's commentary ("Amor est pulchri et boni cogniti desiderium");⁵ similarly, the pseudo-Dionysius is cited on the universal quest for Beauty and the Good: "Pulchrum et bonum cuncta creata per omnia appetunt".⁶ In Laurent's Humanist mysticism, then, Christian notions of love are inseparable from the Neoplatonic conceptions to which they are in any case closely related; his doctrine of sacrifice and charity is bound tightly to the Neoplatonic desire for a

1 Palais, p. 14.

2 Ibid., p. 21.

3 See chapter 6, in particular.

4 Palais, p. 418.

5 Ibid., p. 418.

6 Ibid., p. 418.

return to lost light, Beauty and the Good.

Equally the three stages of love ascending to perfection, broadly corresponding to the mystical triple way, are related to Neoplatonic concepts of purification and the ascent of the soul. Paul, Augustine, Bernard, Bonaventure, Ruysbroek, Harphius and Denis the Carthusian are Laurent's orthodox authorities, but he also cites Proclus and other explicitly Neoplatonic sources.¹ As in Plotinus, the soul comes closer to divine light by dissociating itself from matter, which, if not exactly evil, is certainly negative in value. Moreover, closely connected with the idea of the ascent of the soul through love of Beauty and the Good is the theory of illumination and, although Laurent presents no clear statement of his epistemology, he patently sides with the Neoplatonic doctrine. Even in the natural order, man is inclined to know God intimately and directly through reason which is divine in origin, and his imagery of light and the sun points specifically to an Augustinian conception of divine illumination.² This Platonic affiliation is confirmed by the connection between love and purification of the "eye of the soul" which enables man to gain divine illumination immediately or internally even though, as in the negative theology of the pseudo-Dionysius, the divine source of this illumination is ultimately incomprehensible. God is perceived directly, and again, if Laurent is largely following Augustine and Bonaventure in his theodicy, the essential, intelligible attributes of God - Unity, Being, Beauty, Goodness - are also Platonic or Plotinian in derivation,

1 Palais, p. 128.

2 Ibid., pp. 420-21, for example.

whilst the notion of God as the fount or cause of all perfection is Dionysian.¹

Whereas Canfield's voluntarist mysticism is essentially Franciscan in inspiration, indebted to Bonaventure, Harphius and the spirit of Saint Francis himself, Laurent de Paris belongs to a more Humanist-orientated tradition which is overtly Neoplatonic. Even when Bonaventure is the most direct source of Laurent's doctrine, as is often the case, it is Augustine and the pseudo-Dionysius who lie behind the Seraphic Doctor, and, behind them, Plato, Plotinus, Proclus and Hermes Trismegistus; innate ideas and the theory of illumination, Socratic knowledge of the polarity of All and Nothing, the excellence of man created immortal in the divine image, the primacy of the will and the doctrine of purifying, perfective love are all Augustinian and Bonaventurian concepts, but they are also Neoplatonic and Laurent does not shun the original Neoplatonic authorities. Indeed, in the second edition of the Palais, the inspiration of Augustine and Bonaventure is ultimately inseparable from the contribution of the Neoplatonists, both ancient and modern, and, as in Ficino's Platonic theology, one finds in the Palais a complete synthesis of Neoplatonism and Christian spirituality.

Whilst Canfield's mystical doctrine undeniably exercised a seminal influence on the spiritual revival of the Counter-Reformation, Laurent de Paris's Palais seems, like the works of Saint François de Sales, to have been equally important in

¹ Palais, p. 663. Laurent also cites Nicholas of Cusa (the Capuchin library possessed an edition of Cusa's Opera, Basel, 1565) on the immensity of God and refers to the metaphor of the centre and circumference of a circle.

determining the tone, direction and intellectual affiliations of this nascent spirituality in the early seventeenth century. The immediate popularity of Laurent's doctrine can be seen in contemporary reactions to it; François de Sales' description of the Palais as "un cours accompli de la science de bien aimer"¹ was echoed by Jean-Pierre Camus² and Cardinal Giovanni Bona³ and followers of Laurent's Humanist, Neoplatonic spirituality of pure love include François de Sales and Camus, the Jesuits Coton and Richeome, the Carmelite Jean de Saint-Samson and even, to some extent, Bérulle (although any similarity here is perhaps due to common sources rather than direct influence). This not to deny the importance of La Perle Évangélique, The Cloud of Unknowing, Thomas à Kempis's Imitation of Christ, Gagliardi's Breve compendio, Scupoli's Combattimento spirituale, Canfield's Règle, the works of Saints Theresa of Avila or Catherine of Genoa, or any combination of these or other works on the formation of the theology of love of the early seventeenth century, but Laurent de Paris certainly stands at the head of a long line of spiritual writers who combined Augustinianism and Humanism in a Neoplatonic theology of Christian love. Within the Capuchin order, in particular, his influence spread rapidly and largely determined the nature of the Christian Humanism, still tending towards mysticism but imbued with a Neoplatonism inherited from the Florentines, which characterized the Capuchins throughout their period of

¹ Traité de l'amour de Dieu, "Préface", in OC, vol. IV, p. 7.

² De la volonté de Dieu, secret ascétique (Paris, 1638), p. 6.

³ Via compendii ad Deum, per motus anagogicos, et orationes jaculatores (first published in Rome in 1657) in Opera omnia (Antwerp, 1677), p. 118.

ascendency in Paris,¹ and, whilst Canfield had his own disciples, Laurent equally had his, notably Honoré de Paris, Philippe d'Angoumois, Zacharie de Lisieux, Sébastien de Senlis and Yves de Paris. Though Honoré de Paris's Académie Évangélique (Paris, 1622) and Philippe d'Angoumois's Occupation continuelle (Douai, 1613) still stress the more strictly mystical aspects of pure love, the works of Sébastien de Senlis and Yves de Paris, in particular, tend increasingly to ignore the self-annihilation and asceticism of Canfield and adopt a more rationalist, Neoplatonic view of the world.

The subtitle of Sébastien de Senlis's first work, La Philosophie des contemplatifs, immediately announces him as a disciple of Canfield, claiming to contain "toutes les leçons fondamentales de la vie active, contemplative et sur-eminente".² Accordingly, the emphasis is on the opposition of All and Nothing, the necessity of self-annihilation and the supremacy of life in God alone. Self-knowledge is again the point of departure: "En nous connoissant, nous connoissons toutes choses: c'est là comme à son centre, qu'aboutit toute la philosophie; c'est la baze de la vraie sagesse, l'entrée de la sapience, le contrepoison du peché, le fondement de nôtre heur, de nôtre honneur, et de toutes les richesses

1 A great exception to this general tendency was Joseph de Paris who, whilst a disciple of Canfield, continued to teach Thomist philosophy in 1603-1604 (see L. Dedouvres, "Le Père Joseph, lecteur en philosophie", in EF, 29 (1913), pp. 337-58 and 491-503).

2 The French edition published in Paris in 1621 is, in fact, the second edition; Sbaralea, in his supplement to Wadding's Scriptores ordinis minorum (both republished in the early twentieth century as the first four volumes of the Bibliotheca Historico-Bibliographica, Rome, 1906-36), gives the first edition as Philosophia contemplantium, Paris, 1618 (Supplementum, vol. III, p. 94, cf. Lexicon Capuccinum, col. 1571).

spirituelles".¹ Its force, however, is not positive in the Humanist sense, but only in that it leads to humility and love of God:

C'est elle qui nous apprend à connoître et aimer Dieu, à corriger nos mauvaises moeurs, à connoître que nos desseins ne sont rien, que la gloire des humains n'est qu'une fumée, que ce monde nous seduit, et nous abuse, que chacun court à la mort sans difference: et que tout ce qui est ça bas est vain, frêle et transitoire. Somme il n'y a rien de si necessaire, ny de si utile à l'homme, que de se perfectionner en cette science. En elle consiste le commencement, le milieu et la fin de toute la vie devote.²

The misery of human life, in its transience and instability, is complete: "L'homme est un voyageur, qui ne s'arrête jamais, ny nuict, ny jour: il marche continuellement à grand pas suant et haletant, pour arriver à la mort"³ and "la vie de l'homme s'évanoüit comme un ombre, elle finit en commençant";⁴ thus, "en un mot, il n'y a point de creature si necessiteuse, si infirme, ny si miserable qu'est le pauvre homme".⁵ The consequences of the ~~f~~all are extreme: "Nôtre F
memoire est distraite, nôtre entendement obscurcy, et nôtre volonté affoiblie. Somme, que l'homme est tout à fait miserable".⁶ Man should remember that he is "le fils de la terre et le propre neveu du rien"⁷ and that "il faut annihiler tout ce mien moi et tout ce qui le touche et regarde, afin que d'ici en avant Dieu soit en nous-même tout ce nous-même".⁸ This is very much a spirituality of Pauline devotion with an Augustinian attitude towards the Fall. It is

1 La Philosophie des contemplatifs (2nd ed., Paris, 1621), p. 14.

2 Ibid., p. 15.

3 Ibid., p. 4.

4 Ibid., p. 5.

5 Ibid., p. 8.

6 Ibid., p. 13.

7 Ibid., p. 14.

8 Ibid., p. 279^{bis} (N.B. after p. 652, the pagination recommences at p. 217).

the mystical way from self-annihilation and purification to illumination and contemplation, culminating in the perfection of union with God where "ceux là sont vraiment les plus parfaits, qui s'unissent le plus à luy, denuez et devestus de toute affection charnelle et terrestre".¹ This spirituality is well summarized in the conclusion of the work:

La racine de la vraye paix de l'ame, c'est l'humilité, laquelle naist et croist en nous, par la cognoissance, et vray mespris de nous-mesme: si que celuy qui se cognoist et mesprise entierement, il est en possession de la vie tranquille. Or cette tranquillité de quoy nous parlons, n'est autre chose sinon un ciel interieur de l'esprit qui ne fait plus que sourire de la malice des hommes et des diables. L'ame peut estre appelée tranquille, qui a purifié sa chair de toute tache et corruption vicieuse: qui esleve continuellement son esprit au dessus des choses créées: et qui a acquis une qualité et habitude des vertus, pareille à celle que les vicieux ont és plaisirs et voluptez terrestres. Quiconque jouyt de ce thresor sur-celeste: il a dans la poitrine un magazin de Manne, une source d'ambrosie, une canne de sucre, une fontaine de nectar, une ruche de miel, et une plante de baume. Somme c'est un heritage qui n'a point de prix, ny de comparaison sur la terre ...²

Despite the Augustinian emphasis on the misery of fallen man and the necessity of self-annihilation, however, Sébastien effectively stops short of Canfieldian abstract mysticism. He is distrustful of visions, except those of intellectual illumination (such as that of Saint Paul), and of ecstasies that verge on madness, for "ce genre de haute contemplation n'est pas absolument nécessaire à la supreme perfection: qui plustost en cette vie consiste en la charité, par union de nostre volonté à celle de Dieu, et au despoüillement integral de nostre vieil homme, que non pas en la denudation de nostre intellect",³ and much of the work is taken up with devotion and the practice of true virtue and

1 La Philosophie des contemplatifs, p. 270^{bis}.

2 Ibid., pp. 489-90^{bis}.

3 Ibid., p. 315^{bis}.

"oraison". The significance of self-knowledge in this first work of Sébastien de Senlis is that it makes man aware not of his grandeur, but of his ~~miseria~~; yet, the corollary of ~~wretchedness~~ purification is not passive contemplation or conformity of the will to the will of God, but active charity. This, then, would suggest the influence of Laurent de Paris rather than of Canfield. Indeed, for all the severely anti-Humanist aspects of La Philosophie des contemplatifs, there are indications even here - and not just the very presence of the word "philosophy" in the title or the frequent references to "sagesse" and the "sage", which were hardly common currency amongst seventeenth-century mystics - of the future development of Sébastien's thought right away from the abstract mysticism of Canfield.

For example, although Sébastien talks of the metaphysical unknowability of God in a thoroughly Dionysian manner,¹ he also allows a certain knowledge of God through creation: "C'est un grand, specieux, et spacieux livre que celui de la nature, pour y contempler l'auteur de toutes choses. Toutes les pieces de cet univers sont comme des miroüers brillans, qui nous montrent évidemment sa gloire, sa puissance, et sa magnificence".² Moreover, within the perfect harmony of the

1 Man has an intimate knowledge of the existence of God but no clear knowledge of His essence ("Il nous est facile de connoistre Dieu par apprehension, mais par comprehension, c'est chose qui est hors de nôtre portée", La Philosophie des contemplatifs, p. 21, and "Il n'y a rien si clair et manifeste, que Dieu est, ny rien si difficile que de reconnoistre ce que c'est, et enquoy consiste cette divine essence", *ibid.*, pp. 16-17); man's knowledge of the divine essence is thus restricted to the traditional abstract attributes: "Somme ... que ce tout sur-immense est un être si beau, si bon, si puissant et si noble, qu'on ne sçauroit excogiter chose aucune, qui approche de sa beauté, bonté, puissance et noblesse" (*ibid.*, p. 20).

2 La Philosophie des contemplatifs, pp. 24-25.

universe, man appears as an abrégé: "Que l'homme s'arrête un peu à la considération de son soy-même, et il y verra un abrégé de toutes sortes de merveilles".¹ Even in his analysis of the passions and man's abominable slavery to them, his trichotomist psychology, whereby "âme" is situated between "esprit" and "corps" and solicited by both, still allows a glimpse of the grandeur of rational man: "Nous ne sommes hommes que par la raison: cette faculté nous sert à conduire nos passions, comme l'oeil aux autres membres. Sans elle l'homme ne feroit que tourner et piroüetter, sans aucune adresse".² The passions are not to be destroyed but harnessed to the proper end of man which is the Good, and, in this respect, love is the supreme potentiality in man: "Comme l'ame est la meilleure partie de l'homme: aussi l'amour est-il la meilleure piece et production de l'ame. L'amour est la racine de toutes nos affections et actions, bonnes et mauvaises: et une source perenne, de laquelle sont continuellement arrousez, ou les premiers de nos imperfections, ou les florissans parterres de nos bonnes operations. Bref, c'est le maître moteur des volonte de tous les hommes".³ What man must do, then, is direct his love towards the most worthy object, and Sébastien's discourse on love culminates in Plato's image of the inverted tree: "Le but et l'aspect principal de nôtre desir doit viser au Ciel, comme celui de l'eliotrope: ne tenans à la terre que par le fin bout de la nécessité corporelle. Ainsi faisant, l'homme sera vraiment cet homme renversé de Platon, dont les vraies racines du coeur seront en haüt, et les branches du corps,

? premières
or missing word?

1 La Philosophie des contemplatifs, p. 28.

2 Ibid., p. 163.

3 Ibid., pp. 164-65.

contre bas".¹

The publication of La Philosophie des enfans de Dieu (Paris, 1628) further underlines this more Humanist dimension in Sébastien's work. Essentially, it is the third, revised and condensed, edition of La Philosophie des contemplatifs with, as the change in the title suggests, a greater emphasis on asceticism than on contemplation as it progresses only "jusqu'à l'entrée dans l'oraison passive".² This shift away from the mysticism of the passive life bears witness to the evolution of Sébastien's thought and points to the increasing influence of Laurent de Paris or François de Sales. Within a decade, the evolution is complete. Les Entretiens du Sage (Paris, 1637) and Les Maximes du Sage (Paris, 1638) attest to his development towards a position somewhere between the standpoints of Christian Humanism and Christian Stoicism, as he fully assimilates Stoic ideas and authorities into his thoroughly Christian outlook without ever actually refuting Stoicism.³ Of greater interest, though, is Le Flambeau du Juste (2 vols., Paris, 1643) for it epitomizes the extent and direction of Sébastien's evolution. Canfieldian doctrines are not entirely absent (Part II treats the necessity of purification, of loving and living in God alone and of total submission of the will to that of God),⁴ but really Le Flambeau bears little resemblance to the Règle in either form or content. Instead, Sébastien has developed the

1 La Philosophie des contemplatifs, p. 166.

2 M. Dubois-Quinard, Laurent de Paris, p. 335.

3 On the Stoicism of Sébastien de Senlis, see: Julien-Eymard d'Angers, "Le P. Sébastien de Senlis OFM Cap. et le stoïcisme chrétien (1620-1647)", in Collectanea Franciscana, 22 (1952), pp. 286-318.

4 See especially Part II, chapter 45 "De la parfaite union de la volonté du Juste à celle de Dieu".

Humanist and Neoplatonic elements of Le Palais, and following Laurent, François de Sales and his Capuchin contemporary, Yves de Paris, fully taken up the position of Christian Humanism, a Humanism that owes much to the Florentine tradition of Neoplatonism.

In the introduction to his L'Humanisme chrétien au XVII^e siècle: Saint François de Sales et Yves de Paris, Julien-Eymard d'Angers defines the salient characteristics of "Christian Humanism" as a truly Humanist taste for Latin culture and a fully Christian awareness of its limitations and dangers, a defence of the contemplative ideal of life and a more optimistic attitude towards the problem of original sin than that of the more severe Augustinians.¹ This echoes Henri Gouhier's insistence that the central feature of Christian Humanism is a belief in "une certaine suffisance de l'homme",² that is to say that man is not completely corrupted by original sin but only slightly tainted so that he still possesses a natural inclination towards contemplation and love of God. Such is the attitude of François de Sales and Laurent de Paris, and it is also that of Sébastien de Senlis in Le Flambeau.

The opening chapters concern man's natural instinct to know and love God, and the nature of the divinity, and the very first chapter (entitled "Que tout homme connoist Dieu, par un instinct naturel, qu'il ne sçauroit jamais perdre; et que cet instinct le porte à le craindre, et à l'adorer, pourveu que sa perverse volonté ne le prive pas de ce grand

¹ Julien-Eymard d'Angers, L'Humanisme chrétien au XVII^e siècle (The Hague, 1970), pp. vii-viii.

² H. Gouhier, "Note sur l'anti-humanisme: A propos de Bérulle" in Dieu vivant, 23 (1953), p. 147.

bien") immediately strikes a Humanist chord. It is at once stoic and Neoplatonic in tone, and the first authority to be cited is Iamblichus: "Dei notio inest homini ante omnem rationis usum, et naturaliter inest".¹ Then follows the Dionysian image of divine light, "le soleil divin" and "la lumiere de la verité",² which illuminates the minds of all men, raising the contemplative soul upwards from worldly to spiritual things. This theory of illumination is further elaborated in chapter 2. The Laurentian or Salesian theme, suggested at the end of the first chapter, that humble recognition of human weakness and divine greatness is necessary for true illumination is introduced, but this is less a plea for mystical self-annihilation than a statement of man's epistemological dependence on God: "Or tout ainsi que le soleil ne peut estre veu de nous, s'il ne nous esclaire: aussi ne pouvons nous connoistre Dieu, sans son assistance; et le sentiment que l'homme a de luy vient tousjours de luy-mesme, et jamais de l'opinion".³ Human reason alone is insufficient, and the mind which bears the imprint of God, though naturally capable of God, must be illuminated by the first principle upon which it is dependent. Sébastien then quotes Ficino at length on the natural curiosity of the soul and its thirst for knowledge of higher things, especially the origin and end of man,⁴ and this leads on to the Thomist statement that knowledge

1 Le Flambeau (2 vols., Paris, 1643), vol. I, p. 1. ~~the~~ reference is to De mysteriis.

2 Ibid., pp. 2-3.

3 Ibid., pp. 12-13.

4 Ibid., pp. 13-15. The references are to the commentaries on Plato, Plotinus and the pseudo-Dionysius, and to the second book of letters.

precedes love: "Nihil amatur, nisi cognitum".¹ Man is to be distinguished from the rest of creation by the faculty of reason; the world was created for man and man for God so that the true end of man is to rise to knowledge and, ultimately, love of God: "La connoissance de Dieu est la seule porte de nostre salut: on ne peut aimer parfaitement, que ce qu'on connoist; et nous n'avons aucuns biens, que ceux qui procedent de cette origine. Tout le bien de l'homme consiste en ce point, qui est de connoistre Dieu et de l'adorer: cela luy manquant, il cesse d'estre homme".²

The knowledge of God that precedes love of Him can be attained through contemplation of the order and beauty of the universe. For, by contemplating the world, human reason ascends through the chain of causality to the Prime Mover and so this reinforces man's natural intuition of the Divinity. This cosmological argument then becomes inseparable from the (Neo-)Platonic theory that this world no more than reflects ultimate Reality as the rational mind approaches God through "les especes des choses créées":³

Comme chaque partie d'un miroir represente les mesmes especes, que celles qu'envoie la glace, quand elle est entiere: ainsi tous les estres particuliers fournissent cette mesme consequence à nostre contemplation, et nous certifient l'un apres l'autre qu'il y a un Dieu, qui est le premier Principe de tout ce grand Monde, et le seul auteur de ce qu'il contient. On voit les vestiges en toutes ses oeuvres. Et les payens mesme l'ont bien reconnu dans ce grand miroir.⁴

For "les vrays amateurs de leur salut",⁵ God is to be found

1 Prima Secundae, q. 3, art. 4.

2 Le Flambeau, p. 17. Sébastien gives the marginal reference to Hermes Trismegistus: "Hominis salus est cognitio Dei, ex hoc uno cuncta bona" (Poimandres, chapter 10).

3 Ibid., p. 20.

4 Ibid., p. 20-21. The marginal reference is again to the Hermetica: "Deus per singulas mundi particulas ubique splendet" (Poimandres, chapter 5).

5 Ibid., p. 25.

reflected in all things which bear the imprint of the Maker.¹

However, even if contemplation does reveal God, He cannot be known **in Himself** in this life: "Nous connoissons l'essence de Dieu durant cette vie, selon qu'elle nous paroist en ses creatures, et non comme elle est en soy".² Ultimate truth or Reality is unattainable in this existence, and Sébastien quotes from Ficino's De lumine on the unintelligibility of God: "Nihil obscurius quam quid sit Deus".³ Nevertheless this leads to a Dionysian discussion of the divine attributes in so far as this is possible. The image of the circle occurs,⁴ as does that of the sun radiating throughout the universe,⁵ and Sébastien enumerates the divine qualities of efficiency, unity, being, providence, beauty and truth, devoting two chapters (chapters 11 and 12) to the Good for, "selon qu'asseure Platon, la Bonté du Tout-Puissant fut le Principe de tout ce grand Monde".⁶

It is only after this long Neoplatonic theodicy that Sébastien turns to more specifically Christian themes, as the question of divine goodness leads on to divine justice and mercy, and ultimately the Redemption.⁷ Yet, even then, he does not abandon his Neoplatonic Humanism. When he treats free-will, he does so in terms of man's potential to ascend

1 Sébastien refers here to Plotinus, Enneads, III, vii, 10.

2 Le Flambeau, pp. 34-35.

3 Ibid., p. 38.

4 "C'est un cercle de perfections, duquel la circonference n'a point de limites" (ibid., p. 42).

5 "Comme les rays du soleil se respandent sur la Terre, sans quitter son corps, et gardent leur pureté parmy les ordures: De mesme Dieu est partout, à cause de l'immensité de son essence divine ..." (ibid., p. 61). Sébastien again cites Ficino's commentary on the pseudo-Dionysius here.

6 Ibid., p. 92. Elsewhere Sébastien refers to Plato as "ce grand philosophe" (ibid., p. 46).

7 Le Flambeau, vol. II, chapter 13, et seq.

or descend the chain of being: "On ne force pas un homme de suivre le vice, ny d'espouser la vertu: nous sommes tous au milieu du bien et du mal, pour aller à l'un des deux qui nous âgrée davantage: et estre bon ou impie, dépend en quelque façon de nostre vouloir".¹ Pico is not mentioned here, although he is cited shortly afterwards on salvation "non per merita nostra, sed per solam Dei misericordiam",² but the echo of the Oratio is unmistakable. As Sébastien turns to the theme of true love opposed to the misery of self-love and submission to opinion and the passions, the authority of the Church Fathers becomes predominant, but the Neoplatonists, both ancient and modern, still figure prominently. The essence of Sébastien's theory of pure love and the triple way of purification, illumination and perfective union with God, is, of course, Franciscan in origin, yet this Christian mysticism can never be wholly dissociated from Neoplatonism, even if only in its accidentals. In any case, whatever the Franciscan heritage of Sébastien de Senlis, the thoroughly Neoplatonic Humanism of the opening chapters of Le Flambeau in particular cannot be denied, and it is, moreover, a Neoplatonism derived largely from Ficino: "Sa théodicée est fortement platonisante, de ce platonisme qu'enseigna jadis à Florence le platonisant Marsile Ficin".³

This Humanism is far from being unique amongst seventeenth-century French Capuchins. Despite their differing emphases, such works as Philippe d'Angoumois's Occupation

¹ Le Flambeau, p. 110.

² Ibid., p. 128.

³ Julien-Eymard d'Angers, "Le P. Sébastien de Senlis OFM Cap. et le stoïcisme chrétien (1620-1647)", in Collectanea Franciscana, 22 (1952), p. 309.

continue (Douai, 1613), Honoré de Paris's Académie évangélique (Paris, 1622), Martial d'Étampes's Exercice des trois cloux (Paris, 1635), Zacharie de Lisieux's Philosophie chrestienne (Paris, 1637) and Monarchie du Verbe incarné (Paris, 1639), Constantin de Barbanson's Secrets sentiers de l'amour divin (Paris, 1649), and Jacques d'Autun's Les Justes esperances de nostre salut (2 vols., Lyon, 1649) and L'Amour eucharistique victorieux (Lyon, 1666) all display the characteristic features of Neoplatonism, not least an indebtedness to Dionysian exemplarism, in their eucharistic theology and their treatment of asceticism and its spiritual corollary of contemplation. This absorption of Neoplatonism, with its Humanist overtones, into Capuchin thought is therefore not an isolated phenomenon apparent in the work of rare individuals; instead, it underlies the thinking of all erudite Capuchins of the age even in their most explicitly Christian writings.

A perfect example of this development is the work of Léandre de Dijon (ca. 1598-1667), in particular his Les Veritez de l'Évangile, ou l'idée parfaite de l'amour divin (2 vols., Paris, 1661). Dedicated to the Incarnate Word, the source of all wisdom and the light that illuminates man (Léandre evokes the image of the sun's ray returning to its origin through this work of devotion in the Dedication), Les Veritez de l'Évangile is a commentary on the Song of Songs and a complete exposition of Léandre's theory of spiritual love. It is also a work of considerable erudition in which Neoplatonic (and, occasionally, Stoic)¹ sources are

¹ Léandre's Stoicism is discussed in Julien-Eymard d'Angers "Sénèque et le stoïcisme chez ... Zacharie de Lisieux et Léandre de Dijon" in EF, 1 (1950), pp. 337-53.

to the fore, as immediately becomes clear in the "Avant-Propos":

J'estime que c'est une action de prudence de choisir les sujets plus conformes à nostre profession pour en exprimer nos pensées, et nos raisonnemens au public dans un siecle dont les esprits sont extremement delicats, et faciles à censurer les ouvrages d'autrui: et je demeure fortement persuadé de cette verité, lors qu'un bel esprit m'apprend que Platon fait discourir les hommes illustres selon les termes de leur condition. Il attribüe à Socrate les matieres qui concernent les moeurs, qui purifient l'esprit, et qui le rameinent au premier Estre, afin qu'étant le principe de l'homme, il y retourne comme à la fin et au centre de son repos. Il donne à Timée des discours de physique et de metaphysique: il introduit Melisse, disciple de Parmenides, qui parle des abstractions de l'Estre; et son Maistre, qui estant doué d'une profonde sagesse, prononçoit les oracles d'une sublime theologie, sous des symboles qui en cachoient les mysteres aux profanes: Mais lorsqu'il falloit exprimer les secrets mysterieux de l'amour sacré, un prêtre consacré au culte de la Divinité entreprenoit cet office.¹

The "bel esprit", the marginal note informs us, is Ficino² and, as Léandre goes on to elucidate the theory of love of the Song of Songs, Plato, the pseudo-Dionysius and Ficino remain important influences on his interpretation.³

This appears particularly in the "Avant-Propos" of the first volume where Léandre sets out his intentions and defines his conception of mystical theology in terms of the ascent of the soul along the triple way:

Les matieres qui concernent les moeurs sont solidement traitées, pour porter le lecteur à la poursuite des vertus, et à la fuite des vices: les discours en tous ces sujets sont accompagnez ou d'exemples, ou de reflexions morales, ou de saintes pratiques, ou d'affections devotes pour enflammer les volontez à la recherche du Bien souverain, apres avoir esclairé l'entendement pour en penetrer la beauté sans limites. Enfin les secrets plus sublimes de la Theologie Mystique y sont expliquez

¹ Les Veritez de l'Évangile (2 vols., Paris, 1661), vol. I, "Avant-Propos", p. ix.

² The reference is to the commentary on Plato's Parmenides, chapter 37.

³ Léandre describes the pseudo-Dionysius as "le maistre des theologiens" (Les Veritez, vol. I, "Avant-Propos", p. xi).

en faveur des âmes eslevées à un estat passif, pour en faire admirer les merveilles dans les profusions de la Bonté Divine: Et s'il se trouve des âmes touchées d'un desir ardent de la perfection, qu'un feu sacré allume dans leur interieur, je feray une peinture de la clef que leur presente l'Espoux Divin, pour donner l'entrée dans ces celliers.¹

This "key" is, of course, the example of divine love which is the "intelligence cachée du Cantique des Cantiques", the true meaning of this "sainte parabole" of pastoral love,² and so Léandre's "principal dessein [est] de traiter de l'Amour Divin dans toute son estendüe".³

The "Avant-Propos" concludes with Bonaventure's maxim "Non enim disputando, sed agendo sciatur ars amoris", and the gloss, "l'art d'amour s'apprendra plus par la pratique des bonnes oeuvres, que par l'exercice d'une dispute contentieuse",⁴ but, as Léandre begins his exegesis, the erudite scholar quickly takes over. Following Plato, Léandre regards love as the unifying force in the universe, a virtue moving towards the Good and a source of great fecundity, and "la raison nous enseigne que le grand monde est un instrument de musique à une seule corde, qui n'est autre que l'amour".⁵ This musical image figures at the beginning of the first "Esclaircissement"⁶ where love is treated in terms of affinity, consonance and unity, and Ficino (described here, and elsewhere, as "un grand Platonicien")⁷ is cited on the

1 Les Veritez, vol. I, "Avant-Propos", p. xii.

2 Ibid., p. xi.

3 Ibid., p. xii.

4 Ibid., pp. xii-xiii. This condemnation of arid, academic discussion of the question of love doubtless alludes to the contemporary quarrel over the nature of pure love between Jean-Pierre Camus and the Jesuit, Antoine Sirmond.

5 Ibid., p. xviii.

6 "L'amour, qui, selon Platon, est le maistre des arts, a inventé la musique ..." (ibid., p. xiv).

7 Ibid., p. xv.

notion of harmony and the reconciliation of opposites in perfect union. One finds the traditional Renaissance theme of man the microcosm, "un abregé du petit monde"¹ and "un petit monde qui enferme dans son enceinte toutes les creatures",² and the optimistic Salesian belief that man, even in his natural state, still has "une certaine inclination qui porte l'homme à Dieu",³ but the emphasis is on the particular qualities of love found in Ficino's commentary De Amore especially the idea that love is the prime motive force in the universe.⁴ Central to the thesis is the notion of similitude, for, as in Ficino,

la ressemblance est cause de l'amour ... il n'est personne qui aime le bien absolument comme bien, d'autant que s'il estoit aymé dans cette condition absoluë, celui qui se laisseroit gagner à son attrait, aymeroit toute sorte de biens, et l'expérience nous enseigne le contraire; de là vient qu'un chacun ayme le seul bien qui luy est convenable. Et certes cette proposition et convenance tire son origine de la ressemblance que l'amant rencontre avec l'objet aymé: d'où j'infere que comme le bien est cause de l'amour de la part de l'objet, qui estant revestu de bonté se rend tousjours aymable, de mesme la ressemblance est mere de l'amour de la part du sujet qui ayme.⁵

It is thus essential that man be created in God's image and be illuminated by the exemplar which he resembles, in order to love God in the two orders of the natural (which Léandre divides into necessary instinct and the rational act of will) and the supernatural. In both orders the dominant principle is that of circularity, the human love that returns to its divine source: "Dans l'estat de la nature, l'Autheur de son estre luy a communiqué un amour naturel, qui n'est

1 Les Veritez, vol. I, p. xvi.

2 Ibid., p. xvii.

3 Ibid., p. xvi.

4 See De Amore, Oratio III, caput 2, "Amor est auctor omnium et servator" (ed. Marcel, pp. 161-63).

5 Les Veritez, vol. I, pp. 42-43.

autre qu'un poids, et une certaine inclination qui porte l'homme à Dieu comme à ~~son~~ dernière fin, et à son centre, par un mouvement circulaire; parce qu'en estant attiré par une vertu secrete, il y tend pour y trouver son repos";¹ and the superior order of grace is equally "un don surnaturel qui est communiqué ... afin que l'homme estant relevé pardessus la nature par cette qualité divine, il retourne avec son sacré mouvement à Dieu comme à sa dernière fin par un cercle intelligible, apres avoir esté doucement attiré par son principe".²

Such overt Neoplatonism is most apparent in the opening pages of Les Veritez, but it underlies the treatment of love throughout this work and also Léandre's Discursus praedicabiles.³ Following the Franciscan tradition and also under the influence of Saint François de Sales, Léandre places love at the centre of the supernatural, as of the natural, life in which Christ plays an essential rôle and the starting-point is Saint John's "Deus caritas est". His is an optimistic theology clearly stating man's natural desire for the beatific vision of God⁴ in which contemplation, defined as intuitive knowledge of God through grace somewhere between the obscurity of simple faith and the clear, beatific vision of the Divinity, is the normal path that leads to perfection. Such a theory of love might be described as a realistic mysticism. Léandre draws on the Scholastic theology of

1 Les Veritez, vol. I, p. xvi.

2 Ibid., p. xvii.

3 Paris, 1665. Part I contains eleven discourses "de spiritu sancto" (pp. 7-78) and fourteen "de eucharistiae sacramento" (pp. 78-173), and Part II consists of thirty-six commentaries on Hebrews 12.

4 See Julien-Eymard d'Angers's "Le désir naturel du surnaturel. Sébastien de Senlis, Yves de Paris, Léandre de Dijon (1637, 1645, 1661)" in EF, 1 (1950), pp. 211-24.

Aquinas, Bonaventure and Scotus (especially their emphatic Christocentrism), and the mysticism of Harphius, Catherine of Genoa, Theresa of Avila and Bernard and the Victorine tradition of sacred love, but there is no doubt that it was François de Sales who greatly influenced Léandre's optimism and insistence on the primacy of (active) love in the spiritual life.¹ And yet, "sont plus abondamment et plus explicitement que saint François de Sales cités le Pseudo-Denys, Marsile Ficin, Gerson. Au premier et au second, Léandre doit sa conception de l'amour fécond, extatique, ses théories sur les anges, les cercles d'amour, l'amour qui va vers sa sphère, la ténèbre lumineuse. Le troisième avait dit: Istud universum recte dicitur monochordium divinae sapientiae; l'idée, transformée et amplifiée par l'auteur devient son thème général: tout l'être, créé et incréé, chante un cantique d'amour".² Of these three major sources, the significant presence of Marsiglio Ficino is most striking, and his influence, together with that of Saint François de Sales, confirms the tendency towards Christian Humanism, with its strong Neoplatonic content, within the French Capuchin school.

The epitome of Christian Humanism and this tendance platonisante within the Capuchin order is Yves de Paris (1588-1670). It was Henri Bremond who "rediscovered" Yves de Paris after nearly three centuries of neglect, and, for this

1 Léandre describes François de Sales as "autant naïf en ses pensées, que solide en sa piété, et en sa doctrine" (Les Veritez, vol. I, p. 175).

2 Luc de Lyon, L'Amour. "L'Idée parfaite du véritable amour" (P. Léandre). Étude de théologie franciscaine d'après les écrits spirituels du R.P. Léandre de Dijon, Frère Mineur Capucin (+1667) (Saint-Étienne, 1946), p. 104. This monograph is the only full study devoted to Léandre de Dijon.

pioneering scholar, Yves is the "suprême représentant de l'humanisme dévot",¹ the very prototype and incarnation of what more modern scholarship has preferred to call Christian Humanism. Certainly, if classical erudition and a strong preference for Plato and his disciples within a strongly Christian context are the criteria of Christian Humanism, Yves de Paris is indeed a prime example. In his vast output of controversialist, apologetic, moral and philosophical works, he displays precisely that balance of Humanism derived from the Renaissance and profound religious conviction, stressing man's natural inclination to love God in the contemplative life, that is also typical of François de Sales. Where Yves differs significantly from the Bishop of Geneva is in his apologetic purpose. La Théologie naturelle (4 vols., Paris, 1633-37), above all, is an apology in which Yves sets out to convert by means of natural argument those rationalist libertins who reject revelation and authority.² Whether or not Yves actually effected any conversions through this work, it certainly did not pass ~~ed~~ unnoticed, and Sorel wrote in La Bibliothèque françoise: "Si nous voulons raisonner sur les choses divines, suivant les principes de la nature, on doit voir la Théologie naturelle de Raymond Sebond, et celle du Père Yves Capucin".³ This juxtaposition of Sebond and Yves is of interest in itself, as it indicates the common nature of their apologies: the Augustinian Sebond was greatly influenced by Neoplatonic ideas of the necessity of self-knowledge, man's place in the chain of being and his

1 Histoire littéraire, vol. I, p. 425.

2 Cf. the "Advertissement" and "Discours apologétique" in the first volume of La Théologie naturelle.

3 Second edition (Paris, 1667), p. 32.

free will to ascend or descend the scale, and man's indebtedness to God as the source of all being; equally, such Neoplatonic ideas are present in Yves's work, but they are more prominent still and are placed in the framework of an overtly Florentine Neoplatonism. Indeed, Yves is perhaps the greatest disciple of Ficino in seventeenth-century France.¹

Yves de Paris entered the Capuchin order in Meudon in 1619 at the age of thirty upon the death of his father which left the family in extreme poverty and obliged him to renounce the legal profession. His first published work was Les Heureux succès de la piété (Paris, 1632). Written in reply to Jean-Pierre Camus's often scathing attacks on the regulars,² it was a treatise on the excellence of the religious life rather than a polemic but it still aroused much controversy and involved its author in the "Querelle des évêques et des réguliers" for a couple of years. Soon,

¹ Although Yves de Paris is a leading witness in the case for the Neoplatonic cause in seventeenth-century France, it is not proposed to assign to the study of his work the length and depth that it deserves; the reason for this is simply that the Neoplatonism of Yves and Ficino's influence on him have been fully documented by Charles Chesneau (Julien-Eymard d'Angers) in Le Père Yves de Paris et son temps (1590-1678) (2 vols., Paris, 1946), especially vol. II, pp. 62-72 (and vol. II, chapter 1, "La formation de la pensée yvonienne", generally). It will be sufficient here just to outline the broad character and direction of his Neoplatonism. After Bremond's rediscovery, the bibliography of secondary material on Yves is dominated almost exclusively (an exception being René Bady's edition of De l'indifférence, Paris, 1966) by Julien-Eymard d'Angers whose studies include, apart from works already mentioned: Yves de Paris: Introduction et choix de textes (Paris, 1964); "Le P. Yves de Paris et le courant libertin" in Revue d'histoire de l'église de France, 25 (1939), pp. 297-315; "Sénèque et le stoïcisme dans l'oeuvre d'Yves de Paris" in Collectanea franciscana, 21 (1951), pp. 45-88; "Richesse et pauvreté dans l'oeuvre d'Yves de Paris" in DSS, 90-91 (1971), pp. 17-46; L'Apologétique en France de 1580 à 1670: Pascal et ses précurseurs (Paris, 1954), passim.

² Le Directeur spirituel desintéressé (Paris, 1631) and L'Antimoine bien préparé (s.l., 1632) in particular.

though, Yves was able to take up his pen in the cause of all Christianity, rather than in internal ecclesiastical strife.

Given that Yves already had several years of study behind him when he entered the Capuchin order,¹ it is likely that much of his thought had taken shape by the time he was professed and this may account for his relative independence from the Franciscan tradition of spirituality and the greater tendency towards the preoccupations of Renaissance Humanism that he represents within the order. Apart from his sound knowledge of the classical authors, the Fathers of the Church and the Schoolmen, two discoveries in particular (probably made before joining the Capuchins) seem to have influenced considerably the formulation of his philosophical system. The first is the apparent realization that the principles of the Spanish Franciscan philosopher Raymond Lull (ca. 1235-1315) set out in his Ars combinatoria could be employed to unify the different branches of knowledge, and hence that the Scholastic doctrine of the two truths could be replaced by a natural theology in which the correct use of reason enables man to attain some knowledge of divine things.² The second is

1 Like François de Sales, Yves was very probably educated at Clermont.

2 Julien-Eymard d'Angers (Charles Chesneau), who argues for the influence of Lull in Le Père Yves et son temps, vol. II, chapter 1, denies that Yves is actually a Lullist and maintains that Yves takes from Lull not a philosophy but a method by which to reduce all science to one universal, unified principle (Descartes, in a parallel quest, found unity in the truths of mathematics, and this common concern for the primacy of the universal and the unity of the universe may account for the popularity of Lull at the time, whilst, of course, also pointing to a major reason for the interest in the unificatory philosophy of the Neoplatonists in the early seventeenth century in France). The Lullist method of Yves is well set out in his Digestum Sapientiae, vol. I (Paris, 1648), pp. 9-10. A very brief, but acceptably coherent, account of Lull's own theories can be found in Frederick Copleston's A History of Philosophy, vol. II, Part 2 (New York, 1962), pp. 179-82.

his profound reading of Ficino, who seems to have been his main single source of inspiration. For Yves, the accepted Franciscan masters are not the dominant influences. Instead, he developed the Humanist elements of Laurent de Paris's work to such an extent that they became as indispensable to his system as the Christocentric spirituality of Bonaventure to that of the early French Capuchins. If Yves's libertin opponents were still (at least in the first half of the seventeenth century) inspired by Pomponazzi and the tradition of Paduan rationalism, it seems only natural that the apologists (including such contemporaries as Louis Richeome, Jean de Silhon and Charles Sorel) should have had recourse to the Florentine Neoplatonists and their arguments for the immortality of the soul against the materialists and sceptics. Certainly, the appearance of a new edition of Ficino's works in Paris in 1641 suggests his continuing influence, if not necessarily a widespread revival of interest. In any case, if the method of Yves de Paris is based largely on the principles of Lull, the essence of his thought is derived from the Neoplatonic philosophy of Marsiglio Ficino.

Yves's philosophical starting-point is well summarized in a passage from the Ius Naturale: "Natura cum toto suo splendido caelorum, elementorum, mixtorum, plantarum, animalium, specierum apparatu, cum hac amplissima successione saeculorum et generationum, sic amice sibi habet conjunctas partes omnes ut unum quid efficiant, unam infinitae perfectionis et pulchritudinis imaginem".¹ Immensity and unity are the two greatest divine attributes for Yves, but

¹ Ius Naturale (Paris, 1658), p.20.

the single principle that dominates the fundamental core of his system is that of divine exemplarism. According to this, if the unity within diversity of the world forms an image of God, it must be possible to proceed by way of induction from rational contemplation of the world to knowledge (and ultimately love) of God. Thus, in La Théologie naturelle, nature reflects divine unity and immensity; the sensible world is only "une ombre des beautez divines",¹ but, as an "abregé" of divine infinity, it is also "une premiere ouverture à ceus qui s'eslevent à Dieu",² for the beauties of the world are "des vestiges qui eschauffent nostre recherche, et qui ne contentent pas nostre desire, des entretiens qui reveillent seulement l'inclination naturelle que nous avons à connoistre le souverain bien".³ Yves's aim in La Théologie naturelle was, as he makes clear in the "Discours Apologétique", to combat that libertinism whose essence lay in the independence of reason, manifesting itself in either absolute, dogmatic rationalism or practical Pyrrhonism, and his approach in Book I is to use the very weapon of God-given reason to contemplate nature and so seek the cause of its effects; by the law of "médiation", which is central to Yves's system, reason provides the link between the material world and the first truth.

The rationalist argument does not, however, stand against faith or even alone. Yves's Neoplatonic induction, the ascent of the pure, passion-free, contemplative soul from knowledge of the world to knowledge of its creator, is far removed from

1 La Théologie naturelle, vol. I (3rd ed., Paris, 1637), "Advertissement", p. ii.

2 Ibid., p. ii.

3 Ibid., p. ii.

mere rational discourse. In Yves's hands the cosmological proof is an intellectual argument but also an emotional or psychological argument. There is a double movement of reason and sentiment in knowing, say, the immortality of the soul, as the discourse of reason reinforces the original intuition of the soul. God and man thus come together in an illuminative connaturality and, hence, both reason and "heart" perceive and so prove the existence of God, the immortality of the soul and the rôle of Providence.

It is, though, in his view of man as "vinculum mundi" in the middle of the chain of being, his dualism, his epistemology of illumination, his proofs of immortality and his treatment of the divine perfections in the second book of La Théologie naturelle, in particular, that Yves is largely inspired by Ficino. Equally in Ius Naturale, the enormous number of references to Philo, Plotinus, Iamblichus, Hermes Trismegistus and Plato himself underlines Yves's indebtedness to the Neoplatonists, both ancient and modern. Above all, though, it is the idea that the world reflects divine unity in accordance with the three laws of symbolism, continuity and affinity that really links Yves with Ficino because so much that is common to both systems derives directly from this basic principle: the idea of love arising from affinity or resemblance, man's central position in the hierarchy of the universe, the essential presence of divine light in the immortal human soul and the theory of knowledge by illumination.¹ There are points of difference between their philosophies (for example, Yves denies man's power to perform

¹ Cf. P.O. Kristeller's article "L'unità del mondo nella filosofia di Marsilio Ficino" in Giornale critico della filosofia italiana, 15 (1934), pp. 395-423.

miracles, insists on the efficiency of all causes against Ficino's proto-occasionalism, adopts a correspondingly Molinist attitude towards free-will and Providence, and firmly rejects the pantheistic suggestion that the world and stars have a soul), but, even if Yves has slightly modified Ficino's system, perhaps par souci de l'orthodoxie, there is no denying their fundamental affiliation. â

Nor did Yves's ficinisme escape his contemporaries. In his vast work of considerable, if badly digested, erudition surveying the entire history of Christianity,¹ the prominent Recollect, R.P. Paschal Rapine de Sainte-Marie, devotes a lengthy section to Ficino's teaching on the immortality of the soul and asserts Yves's total fidelity to this doctrine.² After giving fulsome praise of Ficino, "le Mercure de son âge"³ to whom the Western world owes a debt of gratitude for his translations and interpretations of Plato and the Neoplatonists, he continues:

[Marsile Ficin] a si dignement traité ce sujet [de l'immortalité] qu'il l'a épuisé et obligé tous ceux qui ont voulu le manier apres luy, d'y revenir comme à la source des preuves. C'est le tesmoignage que luy rend le plus fort, et le plus fécond escrivain de nostre temps, qui avoüe dans le volume qu'il a donné sur la mesme matiere, qu'il emprunte ses plus belles considerations de cet esprit incomparable et qu'il parle apres luy.⁴

The marginal reference here is to "le P. Yves au livre de l'immortalité". Rapine then proceeds to expound Ficino's doctrine of immortality at some length.⁵

1 Le Christianisme naissant dans la gentilité (3 vols., Paris, 1655-59); Le Christianisme florissant au milieu des siècles (3 vols., Paris, 1666-67); Le Christianisme fervent dans la primitive Église et languissant dans celle de nos derniers siècles (3 vols., Paris, 1671-73).

2 Le Christianisme naissant, vol. I, Traité v, chapters 3-6, "L'Abregé de la théologie de Marsile Ficin".

3 Ibid., p. 618.

4 Ibid., pp. 618-19.

5 Ibid., chapters 4-6.

At the time when Rapine was composing this lavish eulogy, during the final years of Yves's life, however, the Ficinian view of the universe that he propounded was by then well out of date in a post-Cartesian world. Although the new edition of Ficino's works in 1641 no doubt served to perpetuate the Florentine influence for several decades thereafter, the decline of Christian Humanism was inevitable: the Ficinian world-view was dealt a severe blow by the system of Descartes and Yves, with his emphasis on the defence of immortality, was very much behind the times in still regarding Pomponazzi and his disciples as the greatest threat to orthodoxy;¹ moreover, the religious and moral climate had changed radically by the time of Yves's death in 1678 so that le juste milieu that characterizes Christian Humanism sat uncomfortably alongside the more rigorous movements of the second half of the seventeenth century. If Neoplatonism was to remain a force in French intellectual life, then it could not be in the monumental form of the grand cosmology and theodicy of Ficino's total system.

At the same time, a clear decline in the fervour and fortunes of the Capuchins in France can be observed towards the middle of the seventeenth century. To some extent this was due to external causes - the general fall-off in religious life in mid-century, the consequences of the

1 Cf. Julien-Eymard d'Angers: "Nos humanistes n'ont pas su se tenir au courant de l'évolution des idées, en matière scientifique surtout; nul d'entre eux, Mersenne mis à part, ne s'est rendu compte par exemple que le système ficinien en vogue aux environs de 1630, avait perdu toute autorité aux environs de 1660: un Yves de Paris rééditant en 1678 sa Théologie naturelle parue en 1633, et cela sans y changer un traître mot, en est la preuve la plus flagrante" ("Problèmes et difficultés de l'humanisme chrétien" in DSS, 62-62 (1964), p. 29).

Fronde, a change in attitude and loss of favour at court - but the friars themselves began to live off their past reputation and to lack new life and vigour. In the van of the spiritual revival of the turn of the century, the Capuchin order was in a state of growing decadence by the middle of the century, a time when the outside world was changing rapidly. Neither its organizational structure nor its increasingly conservative and out-dated theology was a match for this new age, and so the order effectively disappeared from French religious affairs as the seventeenth century progressed.¹

1 Cf. J. Mauzaize: "La Province de Paris arrivait donc à un tournant entre les années 1650-1660, et une période de son histoire était définitivement révolue. On ne rencontrera plus cette pléiade d'écrivains mystiques ni ces religieux qui firent par leur ferveur la renommée de certains couvents au cours des premières années du XVII^e siècle. Sans doute, les Capucins partent encore pour le Levant et l'Afrique, mais en France, leur apostolat auprès des protestants semble stoppé, et cet état de fait confirme l'affaiblissement religieux après la période de grande ferveur des années 1600-1650" (Le Rôle et l'action des Capucins de la Province de Paris dans la France religieuse du XVII^e siècle (3 vols., Lille, 1978), vol. III, p. 1468).

5. BÉRULLE AND THE FOUNDATION OF THE ORATOIRE

In his Zaharoff Lecture for 1959, Antoine Adam discerns two opposing attitudes to religion and the human condition at the end of the French Renaissance, the first an optimistic, Neostoic standpoint represented by Justus Lipsius, and the second a pessimistic Augustinianism exemplified by Raymond Sebond's Theologia naturalis, recently translated by Montaigne, and regards the Catholic restoration under Henri IV and Louis XIII primarily as an anti-Stoic reaction inspired by Augustine.¹ This assessment is broadly accurate, as is the contention that the dialectic of later works such as the Pensées can be found pre-echoed in the Augustinian apologetic of Sebond. It would, however, be wrong to describe the Catholic revival as wholly anti-Humanist. Clearly, the example of no less a prelate than Saint François de Sales proves that this was not so. Moreover, in continuing the anti-Scholastic reaction of the early Renaissance, the French Counter-Reformation almost inevitably encountered Plato and the Neoplatonists. The epitome of such a spirituality, combining both optimism or Humanism and pessimism or anti-Humanism (both of which are present in the thought of Augustine himself), in early seventeenth century France is the founder of the Oratoire de France, Pierre de Bérulle. -A

¹ A. Adam, Sur le problème religieux en France dans la première moitié du XVII^e siècle (Oxford, 1959).

The great historian of French Catholicism, Henri Bremond, placed Bérulle squarely in the tradition of what he termed "l'humanisme dévot",¹ and in this he was followed by Renaudet,² Levi,³ and, to a lesser extent, Dagens.⁴ Henri Gouhier, however, rejects Bremond's category of "devout humanism" completely, dismissing it as neither useful nor meaningful, precisely because of Bérulle's Augustinianism; Gouhier considers his stress on the nothingness of man to be wholly at odds with both the spirit of Renaissance Humanism and the optimism of seventeenth-century Christian Humanists from François de Sales to Yves de Paris.⁵ This apparent contradiction, though, need not even be a paradox. Whilst Bérulle may, by reason of his overall world-view be a pessimistic anti-Humanist, he still enjoys, as Dagens has amply demonstrated⁶ and Gouhier readily admits,⁷ and cannot deny an education and culture that are profoundly Humanist in nature, and this inevitably affects the character of his Augustinian spirituality. Indeed, he can be said to share the very dualism that is in Augustine himself.

Born in 1575 into a family of parlementaires, Bérulle studied grammar and humanities at the Collège de Bourgogne

1 Histoire littéraire, vol. III (Paris, 1929), p. 20.

2 "Autour d'une définition de l'humanisme" in BHR, 6 (1945), pp. 7-49.

3 French Moralists, chapter 5, "Devout Humanism: C. Bérulle and the Conversion of Plato", pp. 136-41.

4 Bérulle et les origines de la restauration catholique (1575-1611) (Paris, 1952).

5 "Note sur l'anti-humanisme: A propos de Bérulle" in Dieu vivant, 23 (1953), pp. 145-50. Gouhier concludes that "le moment est donc venu de renoncer à la catégorie d'humanisme dévot" (p. 150).

6 Bérulle et les origines, Livre I, "Les Années de formation de Bérulle. Renaissance et esprit chrétien", pp. 13-68.

7 "Note sur l'anti-humanisme", p. 148.

under Vincent Raffar (Raffarius),¹ philosophy at the Collège de Clermont and then law before following his vocation and turning to theology in 1594 (again at the Collège de Clermont until the exile of the Jesuits in 1595 when he moved to the Sorbonne). Although he would have concentrated largely on Scripture, the Fathers and Scholastic thought during his years of theology, it would appear that Bérulle continued to read avidly the works of the great Humanists of the Renaissance, not least Ficino and Pico, and it is to them that he owes his fervent admiration of the (Neo-)Platonists whom he later described in the Discours de l'estat et des grandeurs de Jésus as "les plus elevez entre les payens en la cognoissance des choses sublimes, hommes vraiment divins entre les naturalistes, et théologiens entre les philosophes".² This is rare praise indeed from a spiritualist often seen simply as a severe, pessimistic Augustinian, but it already indicates Bérulle's attitude to the tradition of religious Neoplatonism embodied in Renaissance Humanism. Certainly he is more indebted to Renaissance thought than to Scholasticism, as examination of the catalogue of the library of the Oratoire confirms.³ Of course, one cannot be certain that any particular work mentioned in the catalogue actually

1 As the title suggests, Raffar's De platonicae atque aristotelicae philosophiae coniunctione (Paris, 1604) reveals a predilection for the conciliatory tradition in philosophy, citing Ficino, Pico, Patrizzi and even Symphorien Champier, amongst others, and it may be that Bérulle's initial encounter with the unificatory theology of the Humanists dates from this early period of study.

2 In Oeuvres complètes, ed. F. Bourgoing and G. Gibieuf (Paris, 1644), pp. 198-99. A photographic reproduction of this editio princeps of 1644 has been published by the Maison d'Institution de l'Oratoire (2 vols., Montsault, 1960).

3 The catalogue of the old Oratoire is published in Dagens's Bérulle et les origines, pp. 429-41.

belonged to Bérulle, or even that he ever consulted it, but it is likely that most of the books published before ca. 1615, especially the Spanish, German and Italian spiritual texts, were in fact acquired by him. Above all, though, the catalogue provides a general indication of the kind of books available at the Oratoire and the probable sources exploited directly by the nascent École française. It is worth noting, then, that, quite apart from the mystical writings of Canfield, Harphius and Tauler, the spiritual manuals of John of the Cross, Theresa of Avila and Lorenzo Scupoli, and, more generally, the works of Augustine, Bonaventure, Denis the Carthusian and Nicholas of Cusa, all of which are deeply imbued with Neoplatonism, one finds at Saint-Honoré many editions of both ancient and Renaissance Neoplatonists, including the complete works of Poliziano (Venice, 1494), Pico (Basel, 1494) and Ficino (Basel, 1576), together with the latter's De religione christiana (Paris, 1559) and Guy Lefèvre de la Boderie's French translation (Paris, 1578).¹

This is not to say that Bérulle was profoundly influenced by all these works nor to suggest that any work not mentioned here had no influence on the director of the Parisian Discalced Carmelites and founder of the Parisian Oratoire.² An element of uncertainty will always remain, for, although

1 The list also includes: François de Foix's commentary and translation of Le Pimandre (Bordeaux, 1574 and 1579), Ficino's Latin translation of Plato (Lyon, 1548 and Basel, 1576), Serranus's edition of Plato (Geneva, 1578), Ficino's Latin translation of Plotinus (Basel, 1615) and commentary on the Enneads (Florence, 1592), and editions of Alcinous, Proclus and Boethius.

2 For example, the most striking absence or omission from the catalogue is the work of the pseudo-Dionysius whose mysticism was perhaps the single most important influence on Bérulle's thought.

he cites authority, Bérulle, like most of his contemporaries, rarely indicates other, particularly more modern, sources. Nevertheless, one does gain an impression of the intellectual atmosphere that Bérulle created at the Oratoire, an atmosphere of piété savante, of a deeply religious Platonism with an emphasis on its mystical and ascetic aspects. With regard to Bérulle himself, Dagens asserts that "il y a dans toute son oeuvre un ton platonicien et par moments comme une ivresse platonicienne"¹ and points to the direct influence of Plato, the pseudo-Dionysius and the Florentines, but he also adds the rider: "Ce ton, ce décor platonicien, c'est sans doute l'essentiel du platonisme de Bérulle; ce n'est guère qu'un décor".² This is the key to the understanding of his Platonism. According to the historical definition, this "décor platonicien" and the concomitant classical scholarship are the very mark of Humanism, but it is closer to the truth to say that Bérulle is neither a Platonist nor a Humanist (at least, not in the modern sense of anthropocentrism). It may seem paradoxical that a doctrine so full of Platonism should not be properly Platonic, but this paradox is indeed the characteristic feature of Bérulle's spirituality.

The pervasive influence of Neoplatonism is apparent from Bérulle's earliest works. Like his cousin, Mme Acarie, Bérulle was directed by the eminent Carthusian, Richard Beaucousin, from 1595 to 1602, and it was Beaucousin who introduced him to the mystical doctrine of self-annihilation and, just as he had played an important part in encouraging Canfield to write the Règle, inspired his first work.

1 Bérulle et les origines, p. 54.

2 Ibid., p. 54.

Le Bref discours de l'abnegation interieure (Paris, 1597) is largely an adaptation of a late sixteenth-century work, the Breve compendio intorno alla perfezione cristiana by the Italian Jesuit, Achilles Gagliardi,¹ describing the ascent of the soul to full self-annihilation and union with God, a doctrine similar to that of John of the Cross in The Ascent of Mount Carmel and also related to Rheno-flemish mysticism. The essential difference between Bérulle's adaptation and his model is that the latter treats the end, which is Christian perfection, whilst the former deals more with the means, which is self-abnegation. The Bref discours is thus a treatment of the theme of the spiritual combat.

Interestingly, Lorenzo Scupoli's Combattimento spirituale was once attributed to Gagliardi, for it might easily pass for a preface or introduction to the Breve compendio. Whether or not Bérulle knew Scupoli's work at the time of writing his Bref discours, many of his themes reflect the prime concerns of the Italian spiritualist for the purpose of Bérulle's work is equally "de découvrir et bannir l'amour-propre de plusieurs".² The "Avant-Propos" establishes the principles from which the rest follows, namely the self-knowledge that recognizes the dual nature of man and the antagonism of the two loves that derive from this dualism. This basic Socratism is a common motif in Christian spirituality from Augustine onwards, just as it is in the tradition of Ficino's Theologia platonica, Pico's Oratio, Erasmus's Enchiridion and François de Foix's commentary on Le Pimandre, but, whatever its direct source for Bérulle, the notion of the spiritual

¹ Published in an edition by M. Bendiscioli in Florence, 1952.

² In OC, p. 644.

combat to which it gives rise is immediately transported to a higher, more spiritual plane than in the writings of the Renaissance Humanists. The body of the work, then, concerns the two "pierres fondamentales" of self-abnegation, the most efficacious way of combatting amour-propre, which are "une tres basse estime de toutes choses créées, et de soy-mesme plus que de toutes" and "une tres-haute estime de Dieu".¹ In order to approach God, man must renounce everything, external and internal, that does not conform to the will of God.

Indeed, such are the traps and ruses of amour-propre that man must renounce his will altogether so that his love of God is wholly pure; self-abnegation, humiliation and submission to the divine will are thus the essential features of the ascent of the soul through the four degrees of spiritual purification which is the first stage of the anagogic way.

This abstract spirituality, with no direct references to the rôle of Christ as mediator, is clearly launched under the ensign of the pseudo-Dionysius and the Rheno-flemish mystics, but it is more interesting to observe the way in which the Bref discours already typifies Bérulle's exploitation of Neoplatonism. For, he has adopted as his fundamental principles concepts which are essentially Neoplatonic in origin and deployed them in a manner that reveals his independence from Neoplatonism as a complete philosophy. As with Augustine, the originality and greatness of Bérulle lie in his use of inherited Neoplatonic motifs to thoroughly Christian ends without conceding anything to paganism.

Nowhere is this tendency more evident than in the Traité des Energumènes (published under the pseudonym Léon

¹ In OC, p. 651.

d'Alexis, Troyes, 1599). More ambitious than the derivative Bref discours which was addressed only to those "qui ont fait notable progres dans la haine de soy-mesme",¹ it sets out to tackle all those who took the liberty of challenging the Church's pronouncements in the affair of Marthe Brossier (a case of supposed demonic possession) and marks the beginning of Bérulle's career as a controversiste. The influence of Neoplatonism, especially Pico's Oratio, on Bérulle's apologetic purpose is quite clear in the Traité.² It opens with considerations on the common Renaissance notion of man as "un abregé de toute la nature créée".³ Indeed, the opening chapter of the Traité is directly inspired by the famous exordium of Pico's Oratio:

Dieu voulant apres toutes les autres creatures creer l'homme, et considerant que les quatre ordres, qui comprennent l'estenduë de la nature, estoient entierement remplis: l'Ange ayant l'estre intelligent; les animaux, le sensitif; les plantes, le vegetatif; les elemens, l'estre qu'on appelle simplement existant, en sorte qu'il ne restoit plus rien de distinct et separé qui pust estre assigné particulierement à l'homme, il ordonna que ce qui estoit de propre à chacun des quatre, luy seroit communiqué, et qu'en ce faisant il avoit existence comme les elemens, vie comme les plantes, sentiment comme les animaux, et intelligence comme les Anges.⁴

This is the traditional Neoplatonic view of man as vinculum mundi connected to all parts of the world and occupying a central position in the hierarchy of being.⁵

1 In OC, p. 644.

2 Cf. Henri de Lubac's essay, "Jean Pic et Bérulle" in Pic de la Mirandole (Paris, 1974), pp. 130-42, and Jean Dagens's article, "Pic de la Mirandole et la spiritualité de Bérulle" in Pensée humaniste et tradition chrétienne aux 15^e et 16^e siècles (Paris, 1950), pp. 279-86.

3 In OC, p. 1.

4 Ibid., pp. 1-2.

5 Nor is this explicit reference to Pico an isolated instance restricted to Bérulle's early work; many years later in Grandeurs, he insists on the nature of man as "un abregé du monde" (in OC, p. 351) and refers to man as "un grand miracle" (in OC, p. 350), echoing again the opening of Pico's Oratio and Florentine Neoplatonism generally.

Although elsewhere Bérulle's view of the function of self-knowledge tends to be mystical rather than rational, intuitive rather than discursive, here his Socratism is more closely related to that of the Florentines than to the introversion of the German mystics, treating man's dualism at length in a thoroughly Neoplatonic manner without immediately making the spiritual leap towards self-annihilation.¹ And yet, even if Bérulle's attitude towards man as microcosm seems thoroughly Neoplatonic, this is still but a small part of the whole truth for, despite the manifold references to Plato, Plotinus, Apuleius and other pagan philosophers in chapter 1 of the Traité, it is still Scripture and the Fathers that are the real authorities, and he quickly moves away from man's communication with the intelligible world, which pagans as diverse as Epictetus, Plotinus and Empedocles have stressed, to the essential corruption of man, his spiritual combat and the threat posed by Satan to both man and the Church. The difference between the attitudes to Neoplatonism in the Bref discours and the Traité is merely that in the latter Bérulle dwells at greater length on a theme derived wholly from Neoplatonic (notably Florentine) sources before turning to the more strictly Christian, Augustinian substantive theme. Still, the (Neo-)Platonic

¹ Similarly there is another echo of the "Prohemium" to Ficino's Theologia platonica in Oeuvres de piété, chapter 116: "Il est bon ... de nous connoistre nous-mesmes, car en nous connoissant, nous connoistrans Dieu" (in OC, p. 971). In his study, Le Sens de la créature dans la doctrine de Bérulle, R. Bellemare stresses the importance of the creature's knowledge of itself and its status as the very foundation of Bérulle's spirituality: "On saisit ... l'importance primordiale accordée par Bérulle à l'activité connaissante si on la voit sous l'aspect d'une ascèse noétique. Chez un auteur que le platonisme dans tous ses avatars ne cesse de séduire, il n'y a là rien d'étonnant" (p. 177).

erudition and tone persist. Indeed, when describing demonic possession as a caricature of the mystic state, he does so in (Neo-)Platonic terms as being "l'ombre et l'idée de la possession singulière que Dieu a prise de nostre humanité en Jésus-Christ".¹ Bérulle's Christianity is permeated with (Neo-)Platonism, but there is no tension between them, and, if ever this were in any doubt, this is confirmed by the evolution of his Christocentrism.

The Bref discours and the Traité des Energumènes hardly contain Bérulle's complete spiritual doctrine, but they do reveal its two principal poles: self-abnegation and true perfection in God alone. As yet, this self-annihilation is based on Pauline exinanition rather than unity of subsistence in Christ. The first phase of this development had already been achieved in the sixteenth century, namely the reaction against Renaissance Humanism (its ethos, that is, though not its scholarship), but, in the early years of the seventeenth century, Bérulle moved towards his final Christocentric vision, an evolution that appears to be complete by 1606/7. Paul Cochois believes that Bérulle underwent "une crise humaniste" resulting from an awareness of the profound opposition between the Humanism of Ficino and Pico and the Theocentrism of Beaucousin and the mystics.² Whether or not one can reasonably talk of a "crisis", Bérulle certainly realized the dangers of Humanism. Whilst continuing to read and admire the Florentines, he reacted against their anthropocentrism and, under the influence of the Italian, Spanish and Rheno-flemish mystics, increasingly placed God

¹ In OC, p. 14.

² P. Cochois, Bérulle et l'École française (Paris, 1963), p. 68.

firmly at the centre of his universe. The somewhat abstract Theocentrism of the Bref discours and the Traité, thus, represents the half-way stage to the full Christocentrism of Grandeurs. In his preface to the 1644 edition of Bérulle's works, Bourgoing attributes the renewal of the religious spirit in the French Church to this anti-Humanist reaction of Bérulle;¹ to a large extent, this partisan assessment results from the excessive enthusiasm of one of Bérulle's earliest disciples, but the example of Bérulle's Christocentric devotion was without doubt a source of great inspiration. And yet, despite their basic opposition in many respects, Bérulle's Humanism and mystical Christocentrism converge, as with Augustine and Bonaventure, in the Neoplatonic doctrine of exemplarism and it is this principle that provides a framework for his mature spirituality which is apparent in both theory and practice, in both his conception of the priesthood and his Christology.

Having been instrumental in the introduction of the contemplative order of the Theresian Reformed (or Discalced) Carmelites to Paris in 1604 and become one of their three original directors, Bérulle proceeded to found the Parisian

1 Bourgoing proclaims the inspiration of Bérulle's spirituality based on its emphatic devotion to Christ (as God and man in the Incarnation) and reviving "l'ancienne et primitive devotion qui estoit en sa plus grande ferveur, du temps des Apostres et des premiers Chrestiens" (in OC, p. xx), and praises the wisdom of Bérulle for whom the only true science is that of salvation: "Il faut remarquer, que cette sorte de theologie tient plus de la sapience, que de la science; car elle traite des choses hautes et divines, hautement et divinément, et par les plus profonds principes de la foy, sans s'appuyer sur la science humaine, ny sur les raisonnemens de la philosophie; mais s'eslevant au dessus, comme un aigle, qui par son vol s'approche du ciel, et par sa veuë sublime contemple les veritez eternelles, en la propre splendeur et clarté de leur soleil, qui est JESUS-CHRIST nostre Seigneur" (ibid., p. vii).

Congrégation de l'Oratoire in November 1611.¹ In reproducing the reform of Philip Neri in Rome and Charles Borromeo in Milan, Bérulle sought to rediscover the true nature of the priesthood in the early Church and to restore "l'esprit de perfection dans l'état de clergé".² It was an ideal that he found well expressed in the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy of the pseudo-Dionysius. It is possible that Bérulle's Christocentrism derived simply from his personal reflections on the priesthood at a time of uncertainty³ and from the notion of Christ as the sacerdotal model, but it seems more likely that the two conceptions developed simultaneously under the influence of Neoplatonic theories from various

1 The negotiations and arrangements for the foundation of the Oratoire in Saint-Honoré are treated in all general works on Bérulle and his congregation of priests; the fullest account is that of Dagens in Bérulle et les origines, but one should also mention the following shorter studies on Bérulle: P. Cochois, Bérulle et l'École française (Paris, 1963), M. Houssaye, La Vie du cardinal de Bérulle (3 vols., Paris, 1872-75), A. Molien, Le Cardinal de Bérulle (2 vols., Paris, 1947), J.F. Nourrisson, Le Cardinal de Bérulle, sa vie, ses écrits, son temps (Paris, 1856), J. Orcibal, Le Cardinal de Bérulle: Évolution d'une spiritualité (Paris, 1965), and G. Rotureau, Le Cardinal de Bérulle (Paris, 1947). The following works are helpful, if not all essential, in any consideration of the history of the Oratoire: L. Batterel, Mémoires domestiques pour servir à l'histoire de l'Oratoire (5 vols., Paris, 1902-11; photographic reproduction, Geneva, 1971), H. de Chabannes Polignac, Une société de prêtres: l'Oratoire (Paris, 1968), E. Cloyseault, Recueil des vies de quelques prêtres de l'Oratoire (3 vols., Paris, 1882-83), A. George, L'Oratoire (5th ed., Paris, 1954), M. Leherpeur, L'Oratoire de France (Paris, 1926), A. Perraud, L'Oratoire de France au 17^e et au 19^e siècle (2nd ed., Paris, 1866).

2 Correspondance du cardinal Pierre de Bérulle, ed. J. Dagens (3 vols., Paris, 1937-39), vol. I, p. 237.

3 Ordained in 1599, Bérulle experienced a personal crisis of vocation in the early years of the seventeenth century. Tempted by the regular orders, notably the Carthusians or the Capuchins, he went on a retreat to the Jesuit house at Verdun in August 1602; as a result, he did not feel called to change his condition, but underwent a significant spiritual development and emerged with a clear sense of religious purpose which found expression in his involvement with the Reformed Carmelites, the foundation of the Oratoire and many other apostolic, sacerdotal and ecclesiastical activities.

sources, in particular the exemplarism of the pseudo-Dionysius.¹

Clearly apparent in the works of the pseudo-Dionysius is the intention to show that the philosophy of Proclus and the teaching of the Christian Church are not contradictory, but complementary and that the one could indeed illuminate the other. His starting-point is the henads of Proclus. The consequences of Proclus's theory of incommunicable hypostases, each of which stands at the head of its own chain

1 The close friend and confidant of François de Sales, the Feuillant, Dom Jean de Saint François (Goulu) published a translation from the original Greek of the works of the pseudo-Dionysius (Les Oeuvres du divin St. Denys Areopagite, Paris, 1608; a second edition appeared in 1629). In the accompanying Apologie pour les oeuvres de S. Denys l'Areopagite, Apostre de France, Goulu upholds the authenticity of the works as the product of the Areopagite converted by Saint Paul, and defends their apostolic quality. He condemns Luther for his description of the pseudo-Dionysius as "Platonizans magis quam Christianizans" (cited in the second edition of 1629, p. 85) and adduces the authority of Ficino to support his argument: "Marsilius Ficinus homme autant bien versé en l'intelligence de la langue Grecque, qu'en la connaissance des sciences, et spécialement de la philosophie platonique, comme il appert par les versions qu'il a fait des oeuvres de Platon et de Plotin, et plusieurs autres livres qu'il nous restent de lui, n'a douté nullement que saint Denys l'Areopagite fut l'auteur de ces livres, qu'il a tant estimez, qu'il a pris la peine de translater du Grec en Latin le traité De divinis nominibus, et de la Theologie mystique qu'il a illustrez de commentaires" (ibid., p. 108); he goes on to cite Ficino (described elsewhere as "le docte Ficin, l'ame de Platon", ibid., p. 84) and Pico (also described as "miracle de son siecle", ibid., p. 84). Displaying remarkable Neoplatonic erudition, Goulu insists that many ancient philosophers, especially Proclus, borrowed from the pseudo-Dionysius and that "il est vrai sans doute que les philosophes platoniciens de la nouvelle eschole, comme Plotin, Proclus, Porphyre, Amelius et autres, se sont ordinairement approprié ce que les nostres avoient dit, et ont derobé des premiers Chrestiens ce qu'ils ont inseré de plus relevé en leurs écrits" (ibid., p. 121). His historical perspective is distorted by acceptance of the myth of the Areopagite, but, despite the false chronology, much of what he writes is accurate and his testimony underlines the continuing strength of the tradition of the philosophia perennis, whilst revealing an awareness of the affinity between Neoplatonism and Christianity that is surprising in a regular.

of being (as opposed to the emanation of Plotinus's One that resulted in a single chain of being), are hugely complex, but what the pseudo-Dionysius has taken as the first premise of his system is quite simply the resultant triplets of Proclus, as he describes the hierarchies of Heaven and the Church on a triadic principle, proceeding from the original Trinity and descending through the nine orders of angels which form the heavenly hierarchy down to the earthly hierarchy, reflecting the heavenly order, of the ecclesiastical organ of bishops, priests and deacons who are, in turn, charged with initiating the saints, monks and the purified in the divine life through the triple process of purification, illumination and perfection or union with the divine Being. As with Proclus, though, the metaphysical foundation serves only as a basis for his primarily religious preoccupations, namely his mystical theology. For, the principal themes of the pseudo-Dionysius's Neoplatonism are the idea of God as ineffable Being and the ascent of the contemplative soul through the chain(s) of being, and, central to both concepts, there is the notion of exemplarism as, within each hierarchy, there is an exemplar which is the model for all the subsequent manifestations of its chain.

The rôles ascribed to the members of the pseudo-Dionysius's earthly hierarchy reflect the practice of the fifth century when the texts were probably composed. Bérulle simplifies the conception, and, taking the Incarnate Word as the ideal in the supernatural realm, he establishes the priest (ὁ ἱερεὺς) as the ideal in the earthly hierarchy in the exact image of Christ. In founding the Oratoire, Bérulle created, in Dionysian terms, an order or chorus capable of spreading divine light, received from Christ and the Virgin,

to the lower hierarchies, and, as its Superior, he himself became the "high priest" acting as medium between God and men in another order of three. If the mystery of the hypostatic union is the archetype of total submission to the will of God, then this too is the ideal to which the priest must aspire. It is this intellectual framework that Bérulle exploits in his activities as a Catholic polemicist, using Dionysian exemplarism to defend the Catholic Church as instituted by Christ against the ephemeral, man-made church of the Huguenots (especially in De la mission des pasteurs en l'église),¹ and in his actions as spiritual leader of the Carmelites and the Oratoire.²

1 Bérulle was, in fact, far from being the only representative of the French Counter-Reformation to exploit the teachings of the pseudo-Dionysius on the ecclesiastical hierarchy to defend the Catholic Church, and Camus's treatise on the duties of the priesthood, Les Fonctions du hierarque parfait (Paris, 1642), reflects the preoccupations of Bérulle, as do the works of the Jesuits, L. Cellot (De hierarchia et hierarchis, Rouen, 1641) and É. Binet (De la sainte hierarchie de l'Eglise, Paris, 1633). Binet also wrote La Vie apostolique de saint Denis (2nd ed., Paris, 1629), and other works such as C. Hersent's In D. Dionysii Areopagitae de Mystica Theologia Librum (Paris, 1626), and Leon de Saint-Jean's La France convertie. Octave à l'honneur du B.S. Denys l'Areopagite (Paris, 1661) display considerable Neoplatonic erudition and confirm the impression of a vogue of interest in Dionysian doctrines in the first half of the seventeenth century continuing the scholarship of Dom Goulu. It is also noteworthy that Leon de Saint-Jean's Neoplatonic Portrait de la sagesse universelle (Paris, 1655) was inspired by Charles de Condren, the second Superior General of the Oratoire, "[qui] m'avoit poussé puissamment à poursuivre cete entreprise, qu'il jugeoit avoir quelque rapport avec ses propres desseins" (Le Portrait, "A celui qui lît", non-pag.).

2 On Bérulle and the pseudo-Dionysius, see: P. Cochois, "Bérulle, hiérarque dionysien" (in RAM, 37 (1961), pp. 314-53) and "Bérulle et le pseudo-Denys" (in RHR, 159 (1961), pp. 173-204); L. Cognet, "Bérulle et la théologie de l'Incarnation" (in DSS, 29 (1955), pp. 330-52); M. Dupuy, Bérulle et le sacerdoce (Paris, 1969); Julien-Eymard d'Angers, "L'Exemplarisme bérullien: les rapports du naturel et du surnaturel dans l'oeuvre du cardinal P. de Bérulle" (in Revue des sciences religieuses, 31 (1957), pp. 122-39).

Bérulle's major work is the Discours de l'estat et des grandeurs de Jésus (Paris, 1623). Written with the assistance of Saint-Cyran, Grandeurs provides an exposition of the theological basis upon which Bérulle's programme of mystic initiation was founded. It is not just an apology for the Oratoire's collective vows of servitude to Mary and Jesus of 1614/5, but an apology for his entire Christology. In this glorification of the Incarnation and statement of man's nothingness and subsistence in Christ alone, man finds himself "defined" existentially, or rather ontologically, by his relation to the Second Person. Bérulle's insistence that man must "regarder Dieu et non pas nous-mêmes" is a clear denunciation of the tendency to autonomy inherent in all Humanism, and this is the heart of the Bérullian reaction, a revolution that he himself compares to the "opinion nouvelle" of Copernicus, for Christ is the sun, the immobile centre of all things, man's one true source of light and life.¹

It is in man's relation to Christ that Bérulle's Neoplatonic mysticism reaches its apogee. As in Augustine, all human activity must tend towards God, but Bérulle insists not only on adoration par être, but also adoration par état, that is to say a series of acts of adoration that become, by reason of their frequency, a continuous state.² A psychological activity performed discretely by the will thus becomes an essential activity and, ultimately, an ontological

1 In OC, p. 172. Dagens traces this passage to François de Foix's edition of Le Pimandre (Bérulle et les origines, p. 22).

2 On the notion of état, see: F. Guillén-Preckler, "État" chez le cardinal de Bérulle: théologie et spiritualité des "états" bérulliens (Rome, 1974) and Bérulle aujourd'hui: 1575-1975, pour une spiritualité de l'humanité du Christ (Paris, 1978), and F. Jetté's article, "État", in DS, vol. IV², cols., 1372-88.

state. This total self-abnegation, submission and loss of self in God, the annihilation of the self in pure love, has Christ as its ideal model; the Incarnate Word is the perfect exemplar of eternal, selfless love, and, in the nothingness of his created condition, man must imitate Christ: man must open himself up to the (literal) ecstasy of love, so that the Redeemer may lead him to fulfilment in divine perfection:

Eslevons-nous donc à la contemplation de Dieu fait homme, et approchons ce sanctuaire avec esprit d'humilité et de piété, recherchons beaucoup plus d'entrer par reverence et par amour en ses lumieres, que par lumiere en son amour: encore que nous desirions recevoir de luy l'une et l'autre qualité et impression en la conduite de nos mouvemens et affections vers un objet et un mystere d'amour et de lumiere tout ensemble.¹

In Bérulle's ascent of the contemplative soul it is love of Christ that can alone lead to perfection.

Many aspects of Bérulle's Christology owe much to Neoplatonism, even if they appear only as accidentals. He borrows Plato's allegory of the cave when talking of man blinded by contemplation of the mystery of the Incarnation² and also exploits the metaphor of the inverted tree.³ There is the idea of Christ encompassing three worlds, the visible, the intelligible and the archetypal,⁴ and, almost inevitably, He is "un soleil dans le monde de la grace et de la gloire".⁵ Equally, besides the ubiquitous image of the

1 In OC, p. 170.

2 Ibid., p. 170.

3 Ibid., p. 186. Bérulle believes Plato's image has a still greater significance for Christians than even for "ce grand philosophe".

4 "Jesus est un Monde, et si les philosophes appellent l'homme un petit monde, les Chrestiens sont tres-bien fondez d'appeller Jesus un Grand Monde. Il est un Monde qui renouvelle et perfectionne ce monde. Il est un Monde qui lie et contient les trois mondes ensemble, que les Platoniciens constituoient en leur oeconomie universelle des choses existantes en l'univers ..." (ibid., pp. 316-17).

5 Ibid., p. 280.

sun, there are frequent references to the notion of the circle whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere (perhaps derived again from François de Foix's edition of Le Pimandre, which Bérulle certainly knew, although Bonaventure and Cusa are among other possible sources of this Renaissance commonplace).¹ Bérulle also writes in Neoplatonic terms of the idea of God, especially as Unity and Being, and even of the place of man the microcosm in the middle of the chain of being.²

It is, however, in the very core of his spirituality that his profound Neoplatonism is most striking: his doctrine of exemplarism and his theory of emanation and regression. Christ is depicted as an emanation of the divine substance in the "Second Discours" and the multiplicity of man and the universe as an emanation of divine Unity and Being is treated fully in the "Troisiesme Discours"; it is through the double nature of the prototype, the Incarnate Word, that the gulf between this reality and the ultimate Reality can be bridged, that, in terms of the return of the soul to the source of Being (the *ἐπιστροφή* of Plotinus and Proclus), man can attain perfection in God:

1 "Il est cette sphere intellectuelle de laquelle le centre est par tout, et la circonference nulle part" (in OC, p. 250. Cf. pp. 227, 262, 341.

2 "La lumiere et la puissance de la nature ne cognoist point un plus grand miracle que l'homme. Et aussi Dieu creant le monde, s'est arrêté en sa production, comme au dernier et supreme de ses oeuvres en l'ordre de la nature ... Les Anciens ont employé et déployé leur éloquence à célébrer les grandeurs et perfections de l'homme, et avec raison, puis que l'homme est vraiment un grand miracle. Car nous voyons en sa substance deux natures tres differentes, unies d'une admirable façon ... Et de ces deux natures unies ensemble, resulte un excellent composé, qui a existence comme les elemens, vie comme les plantes, sentiment comme les animaux, et intelligence comme les Anges" (ibid., pp. 350-51). Clearly, Bérulle has far from abandoned his Humanist learning.

La profession du christianisme, à proprement parler, est un art de peinture, qui nous apprend à peindre, mais en nous-mêmes et non en un fonds étranger, et à y peindre un unique objet, car nous n'avons pas à peindre, mais à effacer le monde en nous, monde qui est le seul objet et la seule veüe des hommes et l'art des peintres. Nous n'avons point à porter l'image du vieil homme, mais celle du nouvel homme: et pour parler plus clairement, nous avons à y peindre un seul objet, et le plus excellent objet qui soit, et celui sur lequel la peinture a le moins d'atteinte, c'est-à-dire nous avons tous à peindre en nous-mêmes un Soleil, le Soleil du Soleil, le Soleil de Justice, le Soleil du Ciel Empyrée et de l'Eternité, Jesus-Christ nostre Seigneur, qui est l'image vive que le Pere a formée et exprimée en soy-mesme. Et nous avons à passer nostre vie en ce bel et noble exercice, auquel nous sommes exprimans et formans en nous-mêmes celui que le Pere Eternel a exprimé en soy et qu'il a exprimé au monde, et au sein de la Vierge par le nouveau mystere de l'Incarnation. Et en ce noble et divin exercice nostre ame est l'ouvriere, nostre coeur est la planche, nostre esprit est le pinceau, et nos affections sont les couleurs qui doivent estre employées en cet art divin, et en cette peinture excellente.¹

This extended image epitomizes Bérulle's Eucharistic theology, which elsewhere finds expression in the form of sublime élévations (or ecstatic, mystical prayers), and with which Bérulle impregnated the whole of the Oratoire.

After 1623, Bérulle's writings tend to become less abstract and mystical and rather more concrete, concentrating on practical spiritual direction. This does not necessarily mean a rejection of mystical theology, but it is nonetheless true that there are fewer references to exinanition and privation de subsistence in the later devotional works than in Grandeurs. It may just be the consequence of a stylistic development on Bérulle's part, or it may reflect the increasing opposition to Rheno-flemish mysticism in France as the seventeenth century progressed. In any case, whatever the reason for this evolution, Bérulle's spirituality as expressed in Grandeurs continued to exercise a considerable

¹ In OC, p. 282.

influence both through his written works¹ and, more especially, through his disciples within the Oratoire and without.

More than any other individual, it was Bérulle who gave the French school of spirituality its distinctive character based in a synthesis of Rheno-flemish mysticism, Augustinian and Franciscan devotion, and a Neoplatonism at once Dionysian and Humanist. The nature of this synthesis, however, is eclectic rather than syncretic. There can be no doubt that Bérulle was well acquainted with Renaissance Neoplatonism, but he was never tempted to reconcile Christianity and pagan philosophy in the way Ficino and others had done. Certainly, he was greatly influenced by the Humanist climate of his formative years even if, in many ways, his Humanism is indeed no more than "une connaissance profonde de l'antiquité, et aussi adhésion cordiale à l'antiquité dans la mesure où elle annonce, prépare ou préfigure le christianisme".² He praises and admires Plato and his disciples but, as for Seneca and Epictetus, "ils me font pitié ... Ils s'arrestent en eux-mêmes, et il s'en faut esloigner".³ Yet, Bérulle's Humanism is more than what Dagens⁴ described as merely "un décor platonicien" embellishing a doctrine that is fundamentally Augustinian and rooted in Scripture. His Neoplatonism is more profound than that. Without really effecting the "conversion of Plato",⁴ Bérulle achieved a reaction against Humanism through Neoplatonism by absorbing it into a strictly Christian context and, at the same time, this Neoplatonic

1 Bérulle's Oeuvres complètes were published three times in the seventeenth century (Paris, 1644, 1657 and 1663).

2 Dagens, Bérulle et les origines, p. 66.

3 In OC, p. 1006.

4 Levi, French Moralists, p. 136.

Humanism served to keep his austere Augustinianism within the bounds of the strictest orthodoxy.¹ When Bérulle's editors, Bourgoing and Gibieuf, published the Oeuvres complètes in 1644, they sought to play down the influence of the pseudo-Dionysius on their spiritual master because of the growing connection between Neoplatonism and Jansenism (and even proto-Quietism), but really this was not at all necessary, for, in Bérulle's spirituality, Neoplatonism is fully incorporated into his Eucharistic theology of personal devotion. Bérulle established the Neoplatonic atmosphere of the Oratoire and the École française as a whole in perfect harmony and balance with his theology; it was certain of his successors who disturbed this equilibrium and developed his thought in ways that would, in some instances, no doubt have appalled him, as future generations of priests exploited the intellectual freedom that was the mark of the Oratoire and turned, in theology, towards Jansenism and, in philosophy, towards Cartesianism, thereby achieving the dissolution of the fine Bérullian synthesis.

Bérulle died in 1629 and was succeeded as Superior General of the Oratoire by Charles de Condren. Born in 1588, Condren studied philosophy and theology, first at the Collège de Harcourt, then at the Sorbonne under Du Val and Gamaches. He was ordained in 1614 and entered the Oratoire in 1617; there he found in Bérulle a friend and mentor with whom he was in perfect sympathy - an accord founded on their deeply

1 As A. Molien writes: "C'est grâce à [ses maîtres de Clermont] qu'il restera toujours dans la limite permise entre l'humanisme exagéré et les idées jansénistes, contre lesquelles il se serait aussitôt élevé, s'il avait vécu assez longtemps pour les entendre s'exprimer" (Le Cardinal de Bérulle, (2 vols., Paris, 1947), vol. I, p. 104).

Christocentric faith. However, although Condren continued Bérulle's Eucharistic doctrines (as well as furthering the development of the Congrégation as a leading training-ground for the French clergy), he also departed radically from certain aspects of his master's teaching stressing the same abstract mysticism that Bérulle seemed to reject in his later years, a mysticism of self-annihilation and return to divine unity through ecstasy in which the Quietist implications of Neoplatonism become increasingly apparent.

Clearly Bérulle would inevitably have exercised a considerable degree of influence over his successor, but Condren's achievement as a spiritual leader does not lie simply in amplification and exegesis of the work of Bérulle. Indeed, it would appear that the origins of much of Condren's spiritual doctrine predate his friendship with Bérulle. His Oratorian contemporary and biographer, Denys Amelotte, relates how he experienced mystical illumination in childhood, and, at the age of twelve, had a vision in which the majesty of divine light revealed to him the relative nothingness of creation and "la force de cette divine lumiere fit un si puissant effet sur luy qu'il eust souhaité d'estre immolé à l'heure mesme devant la Majesté qui remplissoit son esprit".¹ This mystical experience represents the original conception of man's sacrifice, of which Christ is the perfect exemplar, which Condren was to develop in his study of Scripture (especially Hebrews) and his personal meditations, and which doubtless endeared him to Bérulle. Thus, "Condren

¹ D. Amelotte, La Vie du Pere Charles de Condren (2 vols., Paris, 1643), vol. I, p. 42. A more modern biographical study is that of M.V. Woodgate, Charles de Condren (Dublin, 1949).

est déjà imbu de néantisme quand il vient à Bérulle"¹ and this independent spiritual development may well account for the differences between their respective doctrines.

To a large extent, this element of divergence is reflected in their differing responses to Humanism, and may actually be the consequence of this opposition. As has been seen, Bérulle exploited many Neoplatonic themes derived from Renaissance Humanism, particularly in his early works; Condren, on the other hand, was vigorously anti-Humanist in his attitude towards virtue and the natural powers of man, but also in his attitude towards study. Whereas Bérulle possessed a truly Humanist erudition, Condren held the value of study for its own sake in low esteem: "L'étude est une suite des misères de la vie présente et un exercice d'humiliation, qui provient de la dégradation de la nature privée de sa lumière originelle".² This is not a Humanist view of man at the moment of Creation, but a severely Augustinian perspective of fallen man in all his helplessness. Science can be justified only as a disinterested act of penitence, devoid of all taint of amour-propre, to the honour and glory of God. Accordingly, there is no word of praise for the Ancients, not even the (Neo-Platonists) who, far from enjoying an insight into divine truth, were wholly incapable even of virtue except "d'une manière basse, humaine et naturelle".³

The heart of Condren's spiritual doctrine lies in his forceful denunciation of the natural nothingness of man;

¹ R. Bellemare, Le Sens de la créature dans la doctrine de Bérulle (Paris, 1959), p. 21.

² Condren, Oeuvres complètes, ed. Abbé Pin (4th ed., 2 vols., Paris, 1857-58), vol. I (Ses lettres), p. 371.

³ In OC, vol. I, p. 246.

everything is related to this fundamental concept which is stated forthrightly, even extravagantly, and regularly throughout his work. He condemns the old Adam, man's present state of sin, concupiscence and the corruption of the will, but goes still further to condemn man totally on account of his metaphysical or ontological status as created being. There is no suggestion of man the microcosm situated at the centre of the chain of being with the potential either to ascend or descend the scale; instead, man, in his dependence, is as nothing. This rejection of the Humanist aspect of Neoplatonism, however, has as its corollary an added emphasis on the mystical aspect of the spiritual life which itself tends towards Neoplatonism in its dependence on the notion of the return of the soul to divine unity through ecstasy. Whereas Christian Humanists after Laurent de Paris or François de Sales stressed the more or less natural powers of man to attain divine truth, the spiritualists of the French School after Bérulle emphasized the baseness rather than the greatness of man so that a new triple hierarchy appears, based not on man as vinculum mundi as with the Renaissance Humanists and their successors, but on the opposition of the All and the nothingness of man between which Christ alone acts as mediator in the mystery of the Incarnation.

In general terms the Christologies of Bérulle and Condren are similar. In the "Préface" to his posthumous edition of Condren's L'Idée du sacerdoce, the controversial Oratorian, Pasquier Quesnel, sets out the principles of the Christology of the French School - the grandeur of the Incarnation, Christ's significance as "nostre unique médiateur", his rôle as the Priest of his Father, his sacrifice (which is the end of his priesthood) and the example he represents for the

priesthood and for all mankind - and these are the essential teachings of both Bérulle and Condren.¹ The latter departs from the former, however, in the consequences of his extreme insistence on self-annihilation, for the result of his rigorous polarity of Rien-Tout is the great simplicity of his system: when he writes of the hypostatic union, the Neoplatonic formulae, exemplaire, modèle and patron, occur frequently, but without the connotations of fully Dionysian exemplarism that they have in Bérulle; his Christocentrism is deeply personal, a simple, Franciscan piety with little trace of intellectualization. Its essence lies in the complete loss of self in God following the example of Christ, the perfect model of selfless devotion.

Part I of L'Idée du sacerdoce treats the priesthood of Christ "selon l'ordre de Melchisédech",² his rôle as "la règle de la perfection sacerdotale"³ and the nature of his mediation:

Dieu a voulu que ce Médiateur fût prêtre, et qu'il exerçât sa médiation, et travaillât à la réconciliation de tout le genre humain, en qualité de prêtre; non seulement par quelque action sacerdotale, telle que

1 L'Idée du sacerdoce et du sacrifice de Jésus-Christ (Paris, 1677); it is also published in volume II of Abbé Pin's edition of the Oeuvres complètes. The authenticity of the work is questionable: Quesnel himself seems to have been responsible for Parts III and IV which form something of an appendix, and M. Lepin (in L'Idée du sacrifice de la messe, Paris, 1926) attributes Part I to Toussaint Desmares (1599-1687), another Oratorian who was particularly close to Bérulle and Condren, studied under Saint-Cyran and, like Quesnel, had distinctly Jansenist leanings, whilst only Part II ("Du sacrifice de Jésus-Christ") is held to reproduce more or less accurately the actual lectures of Condren. There is no doubt, however, that the work as a whole fully reflects Condren's thinking.

2 In OC (ed. Pin), vol. II, chapters 2 and 3 especially. These chapters are a commentary or meditation on Hebrews 5.6 that Christ is "a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec".

3 In OC, (ed. Pin), vol. I, p. 172.

l'intercession et la prière, ou par quelque autre simple satisfaction offerte à Dieu, mais par la plus noble et la plus excellente de toutes les satisfactions, et par l'action la plus propre du sacerdoce, qui est l'oblation et le sacrifice.¹

Herein lies the main difference between the Christologies of Bérulle and Condren, a difference that can be characterized as that between élévation and oblation. For Condren, oblation is the fundamental principle of the eternal sacrifice that is the very substance and state of the Incarnate Word, and, as oblation is the essence of Christ's priesthood, so too it must be the essence of the sacerdotal sacrifice and of all Christian life which has Christ as its exemplar.²

The consequences of this emphasis on oblation led Condren back towards Canfieldian mysticism. In the inner life which has love of God as its foundation, self-annihilation is the first stage so that man submits not to his own will but to the will of God and so becomes closer to God. Such is the structure of Canfield's Règle and it is the basic premise of Condren's spiritual teaching, based on an Augustinian view of the corruption of the will and a Franciscan love of God: "Vous devez entretenir votre âme dans l'amour de la volonté de Dieu, et dans la crainte de faire la vôtre ... La première disposition où nous devons être pour accomplir la volonté de Dieu, c'est que nous ne soyons pas attachés à la nôtre, et si nous allons jusqu'à la haïr, nous ne serons pas éloignés de celle de Dieu".³ As with Canfield, this leads to the idea of a mystical return to divine unity through the stages of

1 In OC (ed. Pin), vol. II, pp. 19-20.

2 The sacrifice of Christ is treated at length in Part II of L'Idée du sacrifice. On the sacerdotal ideal of the École française, see: E.A. Walsh, The Priesthood in the Writings of the French School: Bérulle, de Condren, Olier (Washington, 1949).

3 In OC (ed. Pin), vol. I, p. 269.

purification, love and ecstasy, echoing the Neoplatonic return of the soul. However, this movement by which man returns to God through love demands complete passivity of the will and submission to the inner force of pure love;¹ the implications are distinctly Quietist and, as Orcibal has pointed out, if Condren had practised his theory with dogmatic rigour, "de tels principes ne pouvaient enfin aboutir dans la pratique qu'à un quiétisme total".² Indeed, this danger of Quietism is inherent in all Christian mysticism associated with such Neoplatonic conceptions of return to pure Being and Unity.

Extreme anti-Humanism and this sacrificial spirituality of oblation are thus the main elements that Condren brought to the tradition inaugurated by Bérulle. Whereas Bérulle had reconciled the erudite, Humanist aspect of Neoplatonism and the more abstract, mystical doctrines of Neoplatonism in his spirituality, Condren rejects the former and develops the latter. To some extent, the one is the cause of the other, for, by abandoning the intellectual foundations of Neoplatonism, Condren was inevitably left with only an abstract mysticism which, in theory at least, was of rather suspect orthodoxy. In practice though - and it was practical Christianity that was the real concern of the French Catholic revival - Condren continued and reinforced the Bérullian ideal of the priesthood and the Christian life, and, as Superior General of the Oratoire, he exercised considerable influence over his contemporaries both within the congregation and without.

1 Cf. OC (ed. Pin), Vol. I, pp. 26-27.

2 Les Origines du jansénisme, vol. II (Paris, 1947), pp. 83-84.

"L'influence profonde exercée par le P. de Condren sur son entourage est attestée par les éloges extraordinaires qu'en font les personnages les plus recommandables de son temps. Elle ressort plus encore de la façon dont son idée du sacrifice de Jésus-Christ a été exploitée par ses disciples".¹ Amongst these disciples, one of the most important was the founder of the Compagnie des Prêtres de Saint-Sulpice, Jean-Jacques Olier, both because of the seminary that he established² and because of the range and fulness of his written output.³ His doctrine is basically inspired by Condren's teaching that the essence of priestly perfection lies in oblation,⁴ but he is equally close to the original doctrine of Bérulle in that he does not reject the Neoplatonic foundations of his spirituality in his Pauline devotion to Christ. Nearly all the works of the Greek and Latin Fathers were to be found in Olier's library,⁵ but his predilection was for the more spiritual of the Greek Fathers, notably Saint Basil, and his theology belongs broadly to the tradition of Saint Cyril, especially when he talks of man's return to God through Christ. Above all, though, he admired

1 M. Lepin, L'Idée du sacrifice de la messe, p. 486.

2 On the foundation of the seminary of Saint-Sulpice, see G. Letourneau's La Mission de Jean-Jacques Olier et la fondation des grands séminaires en France (Paris, 1906); J. Monval's Les Sulpiciens (Paris, 1934) is a slight, but helpful, introduction to the history and character of the congregation.

3 Bremond described his work as "un commentaire perpétuel" on the theology of Bérulle and Condren and regarded La Journée chrétienne, Le Catéchisme chrétien and the two volumes of letters in particular as "une somme de l'école française" (Histoire littéraire, vol. III (Paris, 1935), p. 460).

4 See especially L'Explication des cérémonies de la grande messe de paroisse of 1657. Olier's Oeuvres complètes were published by Migne (Paris, 1856) and it is to this edition that reference is made.

5 See L. Bertrand, Bibliothèque sulpicienne (3 vols., Paris, 1900), vol. III, pp. 426-27.

the pseudo-Dionysius whom he would describe as "ce grand saint" and "un ange". Following Bérulle, it is the pseudo-Dionysius who lies at the root of Olier's Eucharistic theology, and, indeed, it is Olier who in fact provides the most limpid expression of the ideal of priesthood of the French School and its foundation in Neoplatonic exemplarism.

As the "Préface" to La Journée chrétienne suggests in its epitome of his spiritual doctrine,¹ Olier differs from Condren in that his Christocentrism derives less from the metaphysical nothingness of man than from the psychological argument of the dangers of amour-propre. Still, whilst allowing the perfection of man at the moment of creation and that "l'image de la Divinité y est bien demeurée, mais gâtée et souillée dans ses principales beautés",² it is the example of the inner and outward life of Christ, a model valid for all men and for the priest in particular, that remains at the heart of Olier's teaching. The corruption of man leads him to the conclusion that "il est ... bien important de mourir, pour vivre en Dieu"³ and, when he states that "nous devons regarder Dieu en toutes choses",⁴ he echoes both Condren and Bérulle. Again, one might regard as Olier's motto Saint Paul's "vivo iam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus"⁵ which concludes the first of the twenty-two paragraphs summarizing the spiritual perfection sought by Olier at Saint-Sulpice.⁶ As with all the spiritualists of the French School, the prime concern is for the real reform of the priesthood, a reform

1 In OC (ed. Migne), cols. 167-70.

2 Ibid., col. 167.

3 Ibid., col. 168.

4 Ibid., col. 168.

5 Galatians 2. 20.

6 Pietas Seminarii Sancti Sulpitii in OC, col. 1247.

inspired in practice by the theory of their Christology. The idea that the priest is in the image of Christ is central to the movement;¹ it is an idea derived from Hebrews, but, as seen in our study of Bérulle, it is also inseparable from Neoplatonic conceptions of exemplarism and hierarchy.

Given the significance of Eucharistic theology for the École française and the general mediocrity of the priestly spiritual life that it sought to revive, it is perhaps surprising that it should not have produced more works of Christology than it did. One notable work in this respect, though, is De sancto sacerdotio (Paris, 1631) by Paul Métézeau (1583-1632), one of the original priests grouped together by Bérulle to form the Oratoire.² A lengthy work inspired by the Oratorian, Guillaume Gibieuf, and much approved by Camus, it provides a perfect résumé of the main ideas of Bérulle on the reform of the clergy. It was not intended as a polemical work as some regulars felt, but was simply a product of the strong Dionysian tradition of the early seventeenth century. Thus, one finds in the opening

1 Olier restates this in the Explication des cérémonies de la grande messe de paroisse: "Le prêtre est l'image de Notre-Seigneur ressuscité et glorieux, offrant au Père éternel son sacrifice dans le ciel" (in OC, col. 292).

2 Métézeau has a brief entry in DS (vol. X, cols. 1099-1100); see also the articles by J. Choné, "La Spiritualité sacerdotale", in DSS, 62-63 (1964), pp. 112-32, and I. Noye, "Sacerdoce et sainteté d'après le P. Métézeau (1631)" in La Tradition sacerdotale (Le Puy, 1959), pp. 169-89. He also wrote Theologia sacra (Lyon, 1624), L'Exercice intérieur de l'homme chrestien (Paris, 1627), a devotional work presenting traditional Bérullian themes for oraison, and Traicté de la vie parfaicte (Paris, 1627), a development of the Bérullian notions of the virtue and dignity of the Incarnation, Christ as exemplar and conformity with the mysteries of Christ according to participation in his spirit, which concludes with a treatise on love of God inspired by Richard de Saint-Victor.

pages the doctrines of emanation and regression,¹ illumination,² exemplarism and ressemblance, the hierarchy of the Church founded and maintained by Christ, the essential middle position of the priest as mediator in this hierarchy, the sanctity of the priest in the image of Christ as a participation in the sanctity of Christ and as an adhesion to Christ.³

If theoretical statements of the Dionysian Christology of the French School were relatively few after the first third of the seventeenth century had elapsed, then not least of the reasons for this was the movement's concern with practical priesthood which is reflected in the emergence of many new congregations, not just Bérulle's Oratoire and Olier's Saint-Sulpice, but also Saint Vincent de Paul's Congrégation des Prêtres de la Mission (1625), and Saint Jean Eudes's Société de Jésus-et-Marie (1643), both of which were important training-grounds for French priests and missionaries. Another reason, quite apart from the theological problems (notably

1 "Ex te Domine Jesu Christe, omnia sunt, et ad te rursus omnia reducuntur et redeunt, quae potentia tua sunt, bonitate, et sapientia" (De sancto sacerdotio, p. 3).

2 Christ is "lux denique vera sola, quae omnem hominem venientem in hunc mundum illuminas" (ibid., p. 5).

3 Ibid., p. 5. This inseparability of Eucharistic theology and Christology lies at the heart of the spirituality of the École française both in theory and in practice. The priest is the representative of Christ in administering the sacrament, but, because of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, he must be even more than that: the full significance of ordination is that it enables the priest to perform the miracle of transubstantiation. It is for this reason, above all, that Bérulle and his successors sought to raise the quality of the priesthood to a level worthy of its divine example in the sacrifice of Christ. It is also at the origin of Descartes's speculations as, following the decay of the Aristotelian physics of form and substance, he was inspired by discussions with Bérulle to attempt a philosophically more sound explanation of transubstantiation (though not, perhaps, with the happiest of consequences for Catholic orthodoxy).

the Jansenist controversy) that occupied the minds of all leading Churchmen as the century advanced, was the diversification of activities in which the Oratoire in particular was involved and the most significant of which was education.

The Oratoire expanded rapidly in the first half of the seventeenth century¹ and its influence throughout France spread equally quickly. From its very foundation, the Oratoire enjoyed royal protection; Oratorian confessors were popular at court and in the salons; Oratorians became members of diocesan staff, chaplains and personal tutors; Oratorians took over secondary schools, founded seminaries and educated new generations of clergymen, nobility and bourgeoisie; Oratorians influenced other orders as their spiritual directors (especially the Carmelites, the Visitandines and the Ursulines); the liturgy of Saint-Honoré was even widely appreciated for its aesthetic qualities. If the Oratorians were less important than the Society of Jesus, it was only because they were fewer in number. Like the Jesuits, moreover, the Oratoire was a highly organized institution; it was not just a climate of ephemeral opinion. It had a centralized power-base, a disciplined hierarchy and an identifiable course of instruction, a clearly defined, standardized training, carried out by a small number of well qualified teachers many of whom were amongst the leading

1 M. Leherpeur states that "Bérulle, avant de mourir, avait fondé, hors de Paris, plus de soixante-dix maisons; ses fils dirigeaient six séminaires, vingt-et-un collèges, desservaient nombre de cures et de sanctuaires annexés à leurs résidences" (L'Oratoire de France, p. 16). One may dispute the definition of a seminary as applied to the years preceding the foundation of Saint-Sulpice in 1641, but, otherwise, the Archives of the Oratoire confirm that these figures are not exaggerated.

intellectuals of the age. The possibilities for the constant diffusion of Oratorian ideas were therefore endless, whether through the practical Christianity of the Congregation in its active apostolate or through the theoretical dissemination of its pedagogy. Within the Oratoire itself it was impossible to avoid the central doctrines of Bérulle's spirituality; outside the Congregation, the direct connections between major groups and prominent individuals ensured that Oratorian ideas permeated all the most active and most important religious circles of seventeenth-century France. It is such affiliation that permits one to regard Fénelon, a pupil of Saint-Sulpice, as an important inheritor of the Bérullian tradition. And it is this positive, pervasive and perpetual esprit oratorien, formed by Bérulle's own strong preference for Plato and his disciples, that enables one to claim that the Oratoire was almost exclusively Neoplatonic in its philosophical and even theological orientation and to chart the course of this movement within the Congregation.

6. THE ORATOIRE FROM GIBIEUF TO LAMY

Even before the outbreak of the Jansenist controversy which afforded little opportunity for mystical speculation and, to a considerable degree, actually discouraged it, the original Dionysian Neoplatonism of the founder of the Oratoire and his immediate disciples was giving way to a more philosophical, more Augustinian version that was increasingly scholarly and had less to do with the sacerdotal preoccupations of the École française.¹ An early representative of this tendency is the intimate friend and right-hand man of Bérulle, Guillaume Gibieuf (1580-1650).² His Christocentric devotion places him firmly in the tradition of his spiritual master and his close friendship with Vincent de Paul and Olier, characterized by the desire that the three congregations of the Oratoire, the Mission and Saint-Sulpice should work together for the piety and sanctity of Christ's priesthood, underlines his concern

1 The nature of this development is adumbrated in Gilson's La Doctrine cartésienne de la liberté et la théologie (Paris, 1913), pp. 166-73. A general survey of Oratorian Neoplatonism as a precursor of Cartesianism can be found in A. Espinas's "Pour l'histoire du cartésianisme" (in RMM, 14 (1906), pp. 265-93), Part I, "Les Oratoriens et le Néo-platonisme".

2 On the life and work of Gibieuf, see: L. Batterel, Mémoires, vol. I, pp. 233-60; R. Notonier, "Le Père Guillaume Gibieuf (1580-1650)" (in Oratoriana, I (1960), pp. 18-45, II (1960), pp. 132-50, IV (1961), pp. 157-79); F. Ferrier, La Pensée philosophique du Père Guillaume Gibieuf (1580-1650): Étude bio-bibliographique (2 vols., Lille, 1976) and Un oratorien ami de Descartes: Guillaume Gibieuf et sa philosophie de la liberté (Paris, 1980).

to continue the practical purpose of reforming the clergy.¹ Such ecclesiastical demands on his energies, however, did not lead to the renunciation of philosophy. Indeed, the major work of this favourite pupil of Bérulle, De libertate Dei et creaturae (Paris, 1630), a theology of grace intended to combat the theory of liberty of indifference,² evinces a Neoplatonism considerably more profound than that of his Oratorian predecessors.

A true successor of Bérulle in his practical concern for the glory of the priesthood in the image of Christ, then, Gibieuf also claims Bérulle's enthusiastic approval for the doctrine of De libertate. It is a thoroughly Neoplatonic work, deeply imbued with a Neoplatonism derived from various sources from Proclus and the pseudo-Dionysius to Ruysbroek and the mediaeval mystics, and its starting-point is the Dionysian exemplarism of Bérulle.³ The basic premiss is that human liberty is a derivative, distorted reflection of the pure and perfect liberty of God, and Book I ("De creaturae libertate eiusque reductione in Deum") treats the fundamental teaching that it is in his free will that man is a true image of God. Gibieuf seeks to demonstrate the nature of man's free

1 Cloyseault wrote that "il brûlait d'un saint zèle pour l'honneur du sacerdoce de Jésus-Christ Notre Seigneur" (Généralats du cardinal de Bérulle et du P. de Condren (Paris, 1882), p. 151).

2 Cf. the "Épître dédicatoire" to Urban VIII in which Gibieuf asserts the authority of Augustine's theory of liberty and grace.

3 Jean Orcibal has written that "le De libertate du P. Guillaume Gibieuf ... serait aussi réduit à quelques chapitres si on en ôtait tout ce qui y est, directement ou non, inspiré de l'exemplarisme néo-platonicien" (in "Néo-platonisme et jansénisme du De libertate du P. Gibieuf à l'Augustinus" in Analecta gregoriana, 71 (1954), pp. 33-57, at p. 35). Orcibal bases this assertion on the view that the notion of the imago Dei forms the best criterion for assessing the direct influence of Neoplatonism (ibid., p. 34).

will: that it is not indifferent to its individual acts of volition, but that it is an essential feature of secondary causes to be determined by the first cause, and that the liberty of secondary causes lies in their submission to the divine will that formed them.¹ In this argument he appeals to the authority of the Fathers and the mediaeval theologians, including Aquinas, Bonaventure, Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus, but the essence of the doctrine lies beyond even Dionysian exemplarism; it lies not in an orthodox conception of creation and the Fall, sin and grace, but in Neoplatonic notions of abiding (*μονή*), procession (*πρόοδος*), and regression (*ἐπιστροφή*), according to which, if man cannot return to God as his cause, he can still remain in God as his end and so achieve consummation: "Res creatae exeunt a Deo, et manent in Deo, exeunt a Deo ut a principio, manent in Deo ut in fine. Et permanentia illa cum variis gradibus constet, minor est initio, maior in progressu, suamque tandem summitatem et ultimam perfectionem in consummatione cursus habet".² This is then related to the Neoplatonic distinction between the One and the Good, with a reference to Proclus's Platonic Theology (II,4): "Platonici visi sunt ita distinguere Bonum et Unum, ut Bono attribuant esse finem ad quem omnia tendunt: Uni vero esse principium unde omnia procedunt, quodque sit omnium fundatium".³

Book II ("De libertate Dei et de descensu libertatis a Deo ad creaturas: necnon de illius progressu, consummatione, diminutione et ruina"), dealing with the liberty of God in

¹ This theory of causality looks forward to Malebranche's occasionalism.

² De Libertate (Paris, 1630), p. 96.

³ Ibid., p. 96. Cf. pp. 269-70.

all his operations and man's participation in divine liberty, further underlines Gibieuf's Neoplatonism. The nature of God, the free source of all things, is demonstrated "ex doctrina D. Dionysii"¹ and Proclus is again cited;² equally, the eighth chapter ("Haec Dei libertas in processionibus temporalibus, ultimo confirmatur, insignioribus quibusdam testimoniis Scripturae, D. Dionysii et Platonicorum") draws heavily on Neoplatonic sources and authorities. It is, however, in chapter 12 ("De descensu libertatis a Deo ad creaturas") that Gibieuf's Neoplatonism is most concentrated. Following the pseudo-Dionysius, he propounds the theory that, before coming into being, man is in God and participates in His unity and divine properties, but that, when created, he becomes determined and finite, subject to limitations that do not affect divine Being.³ The relationship of particular being to divine Being, to God as its efficient cause, is thus one of subjection: "Subiiciuntur Deo, et cum ab illo procedunt, et cum ab illo attrahuntur atque ad illum redeunt, sive subiiciuntur illi, et ut efficienti et ut fini".⁴ This anti-Humanist perspective of the theology of the metaphysical subjection of man has its roots in the Neoplatonic opposition of the One and All and the nothingness of created being, a nothingness that is not just psychological as in Augustinian ethics but wholly ontological. This influence of Neoplatonic metaphysics is emphasized by Gibieuf's conception of human liberty and, as in the works of the pseudo-Dionysius, the infrequency of his references to Christ. Although his

1 De libertate, Book II, chapters 5-7.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 324.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 360.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 361.

Neoplatonic spirituality leads ultimately to a theology of grâce efficace that denies free will to sinners, and man, as limited, created being is essentially nothing, there is nonetheless within him an infinite capacity for God, a direct relationship with Him and an inclination towards his sovereign good which are absent in lower orders of being (which are in turn subject to man according to the hierarchy of creation) and this is the origin of man's liberty in the image of God: "Homo liber, quia Deo patet, Dei capax est, Deum ut finem suum quem possedere debet, intuetur".¹ Rational man, then, has an innate intuition of his summum bonum and, indeed, rational being itself consists in this very capacity for attaining the true end of one's being.² The relationship between man and God is thus a question of the Neoplatonic circle of procession and return to Being: "Creaturae per egressum suum a Deo, vere desinunt unum esse cum illo: per regressum autem consummantur in unum".³ This is epitomized in the final chapter (which takes the form of a Bérullian élévation) where Gibieuf speaks of the circle of liberty in which man moves in, from and to God, and where liberty is referred to God as its model and end, as well as its source; it is through this liberty, this participation in the liberty of God that man is in His image and raised above all other created beings.⁴

Reactions to De libertate were prompt and varied, but no-one missed the patent Neoplatonism of Gibieuf's work. Combining praise of Gibieuf's teachings with criticism of

1 De Libertate, p. 363.

2 Ibid., pp. 363-64.

3 Ibid., p. 366.

4 Ibid., pp. 515-16.

Scholastic Aristotelianism, Saint-Cyran wrote in his approbatio: "Indifferentiam quam non platonica, id est divina, sed peripatetica disceptatio in puram putam libertatem iam pridem induxerat, hic auctor ita eliminat, ut mirum sit eam aliquot retro seculis, adolescentiori scholae usqueadeo placuisse".¹ Immediately after publication of De libertate, however, two Jesuits, François Annat and Théophile Raynaud set about controverting Gibieuf's theology of grace in which he had counted on the authority of the Thomists to cover his assaults on Molina.² Raynaud's refutation is the more significant: it accuses Gibieuf of being a descendent of Calvin and, above all, it attacks what it regards as his excessive and imprudent Neoplatonism which it puts down to the influence of Ruysbroek. Perhaps wisely, Gibieuf made no attempt to reply to these criticisms; after all, he really condemns himself on this charge: the pure and perfect liberty of God as against the distorted image of divine freedom in man is proven by the Platonic doctrine of Ideas and the Neoplatonic doctrine of exemplarism, the circle of sin, grace and beatitude is related to the Neoplatonic

1 De libertate, "Approbationes" (non-paginated). Jansenius also signed an approbatio, but both Saint-Cyran and he later reacted against Gibieuf's Neoplatonism. Gibieuf, in turn, dissociated himself from Saint-Cyran once the latter's heterodoxy became clear, though Saint-Cyran had his revenge in inspiring the Augustinus's criticism of De libertate (in vol. III, book 7, chapter xvi). There are nevertheless Neoplatonic aspects of the Augustinus, as Orcibal has shown (in "Thèmes platoniciens dans l'Augustinus de Jansénius" in Augustinus magister (3 vols., Paris, 1954), vol. II, pp. 1077-85).

2 F. Annat, Exercitatio scholastica tripartita (Cahors, 1632) and T. Raynaud, Nova libertatis explicatio (Paris, 1632). That Gibieuf should find himself beset by both Jansenists and Jesuits exemplifies the nature of seventeenth-century religious controversy; if the criticisms of either side are at all justified, then the Jesuits would have the better reason to suspect his orthodoxy (with regard both to his Augustinianism and to his Neoplatonism).

cycle of emanation from and regression to the Unity of Being, and his mysticism of the nothingness of man and the submission of the will to that of God is inseparable from the Neoplatonic dialectic of All and Nothing and the ascent of the soul along the anagogic way.¹

Indeed, Raynaud was one of the first theologians to expose the vulnerable point of Oratorian (and, to a lesser degree, Franciscan) spirituality in seventeenth-century France as its Christian mysticism tended towards the heterodox teachings of Neoplatonic metaphysics and its theology towards an Augustinianism adjacent to that of the Jansenists. After the publication of the Augustinus in 1640, many Oratorians (Quesnel and Sainte-Marthe being the most notable cases) became involved in the Jansenist controversy; others sought to avoid controversy and devoted themselves to scholarship, both biblical and philosophical. Of the many Oratorian exegetists, Louis Thomassin and Richard Simon were amongst the leading exponents of positive theology of the seventeenth century, whilst Charles Lecointe was an eminent ecclesiastical historian. In philosophy, though, the Augustino-Platonic tradition was continued and, as the Oratoire moved away from the original Neoplatonism of the École française which had provided a theoretical framework for their spirituality and priestly ideal, its members were to the fore in the reaction against the Scholasticism of the old faculties both as Platonist critics of Aristotle and as proponents of the new philosophy of Descartes.

¹ Raynaud's strictures on Gibieuf's Neoplatonism prefigure those of another Jesuit, Denys Petau, on the threat to Christian orthodoxy posed by Platonism (cf. Theologicorum dogmatum tomus secundus ... de sanctissima Trinitate, Paris, 1644, p. 2).

When Achille de Harlay-Sancy entered the Oratoire in 1619, he donated to the library many rare manuscripts and printed books which he had acquired during his ambassadorship in Constantinople. These comprised several Bibles, commentaries on Scripture and many works of the (Neo-)Platonists. Jean Morin, Richard Simon and Charles-François Houbigant were all to study the texts, especially the sacred works, but the first to examine the (Neo-)Platonic corpus was Harlay-Sancy's uncle and intimate friend (and his vicar-general when he became Bishop of Saint-Malo), Louis de Morainvillier d'Orgeville (d. 1654). The fruit of his researches was the Examen philosophiae platonicae. The first volume, treating (Neo-)Platonic metaphysics, appeared in Saint-Malo in 1650; a second volume on (Neo-)Platonic physics was published posthumously by Berthault (Saint-Malo, 1655), and Batterel indicates that, at the moment of his death, he was working on a third volume "sur la morale platonicienne"¹ in accordance with the three-fold division of the disciplines of philosophy (logic and mathematics being only the instruments or tools of philosophical enquiry) as set out in the "Examinis philosophiae platonicae praefatio" in the first volume. Of the two known volumes, Batterel wrote: "Les approbateurs [les] regardent ... comme remplis d'une érudition profonde. Il m'a paru, en le parcourant, que c'est un précis de tout ce que nous connaissons de philosophes platoniciens, qui y sont cités à toutes les pages".² Certainly Plotinus and Proclus figure prominently in his exposition, besides Plato himself, together with the pseudo-

1 Batterel, Mémoires, vol. I, p. 221.

2 Ibid., p. 221.

Dionysius, and their doctrines are supported by evidence from Porphyry, Augustine, Aquinas, Henry of Ghent and Scotus.

Morainvillier sets out his purpose in writing the Examen in the "Praefatio ad lectorem". He pays tribute to his nephew for having supplied the manuscripts of Greek and Chaldean Neoplatonists which provided the substance of the work¹ and claims that he is following the instructions of Bourgoing in fulfilling Bérulle's desire that this material should be published in the belief that "hoc depositum non fore inutile Ecclesiae si in lucem emitteretur".² Plato may be "divinus", but Morainvillier is aware of the dangers to the Church inherent in purely natural speculation and will not present Neoplatonic philosophy "nude et simpliciter, sed cum examine exponenda".³ Still, he insists on the value of Plato above all other ancient philosophers, for Aristotle treats of nature but not of God, "cum Plato ubique in celebranda Dei maiestate totus sit".⁴ For Morainvillier, Plato's concern with first causes and the very nature of things, and the theory of ideas and exemplarism bring him very close to divine truth; indeed, he refers to Cyril's assertion that Plato had an imperfect knowledge of the Trinity.⁵ His aim, then, is to collect (Neo-)Platonic texts "ad fidei

1 From the authors whom Morainvillier cites most frequently, one can surmise that works of Porphyry, Plotinus, and Proclus were amongst the most significant Neoplatonic sources left to the Oratoire by Harlay-Sancy.

2 In "Praefatio ad lectorem" (non-paginated).

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 "Neque vero praetereundum est quod D. Cyrillus in praefatione librorum contra Iulianum asserit Platonem habuisse aliquam licet imperfectam cognitionem mysterii Trinitatis. Et primo quidem quod Plato cognoverit generationem aeternam filii a Deo, probat ex Porphyrio ... Quod autem Plato existimaverit in Deo esse etiam spiritum sanctum, probat ex eodem Porphyrio" (ibid.).

confirmationem"¹ and the two surviving volumes of the Examen form a full exposition of (Neo-)Platonic metaphysics and physics. The first is the more interesting and presents the Neoplatonic "scientia de ente", which Morainvillier calls "dialectica", divided Neoplatonically into sections on Being in itself, the Good (which is the "principium entis") and its relation to the One, Mind and the Soul (universal and individual).

Morainvillier d'Orgeville's Examen is admittedly of interest today only because of the fact of its historical existence. It is a dull work, written in sometimes rather poor Latin, and its author is clearly still shaking off the effects of a Scholastic education. It is, however, far from being an isolated exposition of esoteric doctrine inspired by the possession of rare Neoplatonic manuscripts; another was the Universae philosophiae synopsis accuratissima², written at the request of Bourgoing and destined to be the main textbook at the famous Oratorian Collège de Juilly for many years, by Jacques Fournenc (1609-66), a work of much greater significance on account of the prominent position of its author within the Oratoire. Fournenc entered the Oratoire in 1627 at the age of seventeen and became one of the Congregation's leading teachers of philosophy, being

1 In "Praefatio ad lectorem".

2 (?)6 vols., Paris, 1655. Batterel, Ingold and Molien all refer to the work being in three volumes, but the British Library has volume IV (De mundo et caelo), volume V (De elementis generatione et corruptione meteoris) and volume VI (De anima), whilst otherwise no trace can be found of the other supposed first three volumes. To judge by the titles of the three tomes in BL, they could well form a complete treatise on (Neo-)Platonic physics and metaphysics, but the references to the Synopsis in Bouillier's Histoire de la philosophie cartésienne (2 vols., Paris/Lyon, 1854) suggest that the second volume deals exclusively with ethics (vol. II, pp. 7-8).

appointed Superior of the important house, second only to that of Saint-Honoré, of Notre-Dame-des-Ardilliers in Saumur in 1661 where he would have taught the young Bernard Lamy and possibly also Malebranche.¹ It was in Saumur in particular that Fournenc taught the course of philosophy contained in the Synopsis, and that his influence was most deeply felt.²

Batterel records that the Synopsis appeared without preface, privilège or approbation, and continues: "Au reste, tout s'y traite par Aristote ou par Platon, qui, dans la concurrence avec son disciple, a, d'ordinaire, le pas et la préférence".³ Essentially it is a conciliatory work, striving to unite the true philosophy of Aristotle with the spirit of Plato and the doctrines of the Fathers, and in which Fournenc reveals a burgeoning awareness of the philosophy of Descartes:

Paranti mihi compendium in quo brevissime simul atque amplissime peripateticorum omnium quaestionum argumenta discuterentur, multa cum ex novis observationibus, iisque doctissimis quibus recentiores aliquae philosophiam nobilitarunt, tum vel multo uberius ex antiquis monumentis platoniorum excerpta occurrerunt, ex quibus non parum splendoris ac dignitatis elucubrationibus nostris accessurum putavi.⁴

However, his preference for Plato over both Aristotle and Descartes is undeniable. In the "Preface" to volume II on moral philosophy (as cited by Bouillier), Fournenc defends his frequent citation of Plato thus: "At cur Platonem toties?

1 François Girbal refers to Fournenc and his influence in Bernard Lamy: Étude biographique et bibliographique (Paris, 1964), p. 16. Gouhier also mentions him in La Vocation de Malebranche (Paris, 1926), pp. 23, 26, 31, 54, but his information seems to be derived solely from F. Bouillier's Histoire de la philosophie cartésienne (vol. II, pp. 7-8).

2 The fullest survey of Notre-Dame-des-Ardilliers is the unpublished study by A.W. Goisnard, Recherches sur N.-D.-des-Ardilliers à Saumur, the typescript of which is in the Archives de l'Oratoire in Paris.

3 Mémoires, vol. II, p. 497.

4 Cited by Bouillier, Histoire, vol. II, p. 7, n. 2.

Imo cur tum saepe Aristotelem alii citant ac demirantur?
Philosophiam hic profiteor, non theologiam".¹ In ethics,
Fournenc's preference for Plato (and Augustine) is
particularly strong: "Praesertim Platoniorum quos merito in
hac philosophiae parte caeteris philosophis possumus cum
Beato Augustino anteferre: uti planum fiet in sequentibus".²
As for Descartes, the arguments for the immortality of the
soul from the Phaedo precede those of the Méditations:

Nonnulli moderni totam vim demonstrandae huius
immortalitatis ponunt hac cogitatione, qua homo dicit
apud se ego cogito; inde enim sic procedunt: veritas
huius pronuntiatis Ego cogito, ergo sum, sive existo,
adeo certa et evidens est, ut nulla queat fingi ratio
dubitandi. Et cum possim fingere caetera non esse: hoc
uno excepto, quod cogitem et existem, sequitur, inquiunt,
hominem esse rem quandam, sive substantiam cuius tota
natura, sive essentia in eo sit, ut cogitet et quae, ut
existat, non indigeat ulla re naturali: quamobrem,
necesse erit ut homo, id est Mens, per quam solam
inquiunt, homo est, sit res a corpore plane distincta.
Verum reponi posset ab Epicureis hanc cogitationem elici
posse ab imaginatione: neque quidquam in illa esse, quod
corporeae operationis fines supergrediatur, nisi
reflectionem et abstractionem a loco, et tempore.
Quamobrem totum huius ratiocinationis robur pendebit ex
principiis illis duobus, quae copiosius et antiquius a
Platonicis, Peripateticisque stabilita iam sunt. Ideo
nihil video utilius aut rectius quam antiqua revolvere
argumenta: eaque potissimum, quae Plato suggerit: nam
quidquid dicant eius oblatratores, hac in questione,
palam semper retulit.³

Although Fournenc's work is now almost completely
forgotten, it hardly passed unnoticed in the seventeenth
century. A notable testimony is that of the renowned (in some
quarters infamous) Oratorian biblical scholar, Richard Simon:

Les premiers Peres de l'Oratoire avoient comme formé le
dessein d'introduire parmi eux la Philosophie de Platon,
qui leur paroissoit avoir quelque chose de plus grand et
de plus sublime pour la Théologie. Quelques-uns d'eux ont

¹ Bouillier, Histoire, vol. II, p. 8.

² Synopsis, vol. II, p. 4 (as cited by Girbal, Bernard Lamy, p. 16).

³ Synopsis, vol. VI, p. 21 (from chapter 2, "De animae humanae immortalitate", section 2, "Rationes pro immortalitate").

publié des ouvrages sur cette Philosophie. Le Pere Fournent qui passe pour un de leurs plus habiles en ce genre, a fait imprimer un Cours de Philosophie, où l'on trouve un mélange peu judicieux de la Philosophie de Platon avec celle d'Aristote. Cet ouvrage était destiné pour l'usage de l'Academie de Juilli: mais il n'a pas été goûté de personne, même de ceux de sa Compagnie. Ce n'en est pas qu'il n'y fasse de très-belles remarques sur le Platonisme: mais ce n'est pas de quoi il s'agissoit. Aussi n'a-t-il été d'aucun usage pour leur College de Juilli. On l'a regardé comme un livre qui contient de fort bonnes choses, mais qui dans sa totalité ne peut être d'aucune utilité: infelix operis summa.¹

The jaundiced tone of the ex-Oratorian is unmistakable.²

Perhaps there is some truth in his claim that Fournenc's Synopsis was a failure (Simon was régent de philosophie at Juilly in 1663-64 and maintained close contact with the school in later years) and this may account for the rarity of the work and the very few references to it. Nevertheless, Simon has well noted the Platonic tendency of the Oratoire, and the Synopsis, if not the most notable work to be produced by an Oratorian scholar and philosopher, does epitomize the Augustino-Platonic tradition of the Oratoire and suggests the

1 R. Simon, Bibliothèque critique (4 vols., Amsterdam, 1708-10), vol. IV, pp. 100-101.

2 Having been educated at the Oratorian college in Dieppe (founded in 1616, it was the first municipal school to be taken over by the new Congregation), Simon entered the Oratoire at the Maison d'Institution in the rue d'Enfer in 1658; his final ordination in 1670 marked the beginning of his most productive years as a brilliant Biblical scholar, but also the beginning of the prolonged controversies that led to his exclusion from the Oratoire in May 1678. An exponent of positive theology, Simon came to prominence with his Histoire critique du Vieux Testament (Paris, 1678); denounced by Bossuet, it was suppressed and burnt immediately on publication and, in 1683, it was placed on the Index. Undeterred, Simon continued to exercise his critical and original mind, not least in polemics with most of the leading Churchmen of the age - Jesuits, Benedictines, Port-Royal, the episcopacy and Protestants alike - which were renewed by the publication of his Histoire critique du Nouveau Testament (Rotterdam, 1689). Simon launched his final salvo shortly before his death in 1712 with the Bibliothèque critique, a highly entertaining work of personal invective reviving old quarrels in which his former confrères are not spared. The major modern study of Simon is P. Auvray's Richard Simon (1638-1712): Étude bio-bibliographique (Paris, 1974).

nature of its encounter with Descartes.

A contemporary of Fournenc was André Martin (1621-95), author of the compendious Philosophia christiana the first volume of which appeared under the pseudonym of Jean Camerarius and the remainder under that of Ambrosius Victor. The first five volumes were published from 1652 onwards and the first complete edition came out in 1667;¹ a second edition followed in 1671 when a sixth volume was also published.² Pierre Bayle described the work as "un tissu continuel de passages de S. Augustin"³ and this judgement is echoed by Gouhier who called it "une véritable somme philosophique composée uniquement des avec textes d'Augustin S reliés les uns aux autres".⁴ Certainly it is true that "ce Père possédait éminemment son Augustin"⁵ but the significance AM of Martin's achievement as a manipulator of scissors and paste lies in the order of his selection of Augustine and the emphasis that it gives. As Nourrisson writes, "c'est une composition d'un art délicat, où les textes habilement rapprochés ... se rangent comme d'eux-mêmes, dans le cadre préconçu et tout cartésien de ce que l'auteur appelle une

1 5 vols., Paris, 1667. Volume I "De philosophia universim", vol. II "De existentia et voluntate Dei" (the frontispiece has "voluntate", but the page-headings have "veritate" which J. Fabre, in his edition of Philosophia christiana under the title Sancti Aurelii Augustini philosophia (Paris, 1863), takes as being the correct version), vol. III "De Deo", vol. IV "De anima", vol. V "De morali philosophia".

2 This second edition was printed in Paris, though by a different publisher (Léonard rather than Promé); volume VI, "De anima bestiarum", was published in Saumur by Ernou in 1671.

3 In Nouvelles de la république des lettres, mai 1685, p. 492.

4 Gouhier, La Philosophie de Malebranche (Paris, 1926), p. 281.

5 Batterel, Mémoires, vol. III, p. 518. Batterel goes on to describe Martin as "un des plus beaux esprits que nous ayons jamais eus" (ibid.).

philosophie chrétienne, Philosophia christiana. En effet, il n'y prononce pas un mot qui ne vienne du maître; il transcrit plutôt qu'il n'écrit et tout son effort consiste à autoriser de citations augustinienes les formules du dogmatisme auquel il s'est rangé".¹ This dogmatism, then, was the new philosophy of Descartes; hiding behind the protection of the authority of Augustine, André Martin was an eager proponent of the doctrine of clear and distinct ideas.²

André Martin was ever a controversial figure. The first volume of his Philosophia christiana was placed on the Index by Innocent X who regarded it as being full of Jansenism, but, although always slightly haunted by the spectre of Jansenism, it was largely because of his Cartesianism that he attracted unwelcome attention. Having entered the Oratoire in 1641, Martin was ordained in 1646 and began to teach philosophy in Marseille. In 1652, he arrived in Angers where he started to disseminate Cartesian ideas: "C'est par lui que le cartésianisme, joint aux principes de ce saint docteur [Augustin], a commencé à être enseigné publiquement à l'Oratoire".³ In due course, Anjou, notably the Oratorian houses of Angers and Saumur, became major centres of Cartesian scholarship, but initially the new ideas met with

1 J.-F. Nourrisson, La Philosophie de saint Augustin (2 vols., Paris, 1865), vol. I, pp. viii-ix.

2 Although he does not make it explicit, it is evident that Bayle well perceived the Cartesian implications of Martin's Augustinian theology: "Le 2. et 6. volumes sont les plus curieux et les meilleurs. On démontre dans celui-ci que selon les principes de S. Augustin les bêtes sont des machines, et dans l'autre que Dieu existe parce que la vérité immuable et universelle qui éclaire tous les hommes ne peut être que lui" (in Nouvelles de la république des lettres, mai 1685, p. 492).

3 Batterel, Mémoires, vol. III, p. 518. Cf. Nourrisson, La Philosophie de saint Augustin, vol. II, chapter 2, "Influence de saint Augustin au XVII^e siècle", and J. Carreyre, art. "Martin" in DTC, vol. X¹, cols. 214-15.

much hostility even within the Oratoire.¹ For, although the Philosophia christiana's synthesis of Cartesianism and Augustinianism (and, by extension, Platonism) affirms an allegiance that goes back to the close friendship of Bérulle and Gibieuf with Descartes,² the Oratoire was still concerned to remain within the bounds of the strictest orthodoxy. As Oratorian opposition to Thomism became increasingly extreme and dangerously public, Bourgoing (who had succeeded Condren as Superior General in 1641) and Senault (who succeeded Bourgoing in 1662) both sought to stem the tide of radical enquiry, exhorting the Congregations' philosophers and theologians to follow traditional Scholastic doctrines. Thus, Martin himself was ordered to abandon his course in (Cartesian) philosophy in Marseille in 1652 "et ce pour ses désobéïssances continuelles de notre R. P. Général, et pour les dangers auxquels il met la Congrégation tant envers Rome que vers Mr. de Marseille".³ For some twenty years thereafter, regular attempts were made to halt the study and teaching of Cartesianism in the Oratoire, but to no avail;

1 On the Oratoire in Anjou and its involvement with Cartesianism, see: J. Dumont, L'Oratoire et le cartésianisme en Anjou (Angers, 1864); L. de Lens, "La Philosophie en Anjou: Esquisse historique" in Revue de l'Anjou, 10 (1873), pp. 345-75; L. Rondeau, L'Oratoire à Angers (Angers, 1885); J. Maillard, L'Oratoire à Angers aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles (Paris, 1975); P. Clair, "La Vie intellectuelle à Saumur au XVII^e siècle" in Les Provinciaux sous Louis XIV (CMR17, 1975), pp. 121-24.

2 The six volumes of the Philosophia christiana were in the possession of Malebranche, the greatest of all Oratorian philosophers, and, as will be seen in the following chapter, it would appear that he owed much of his knowledge and understanding of Augustine to this Cartesian digest of his thought.

3 Archives Nationales, MM. 577, feuille 1 (cited by Lallemand in Essai sur l'histoire de l'éducation dans l'ancien Oratoire de France (Paris, 1887), p. 117). Early Oratorian opposition to the philosophy of Descartes is considered in Gouhier's La Vocation de Malebranche, pp. 50-55, and Lallemand's Essai, pp. 117-18.

for all the hounding of Martin, Lamy, Poisson and others, the Oratoire quickly became predominantly Cartesian as it was from its beginning irredeemably Neoplatonist, and the early speculations of André Martin were soon taken much farther by a considerably more profound and original philosopher, Nicolas Malebranche.

Equally, although in March 1654 P. Blampignon was forbidden to print his theses because he claimed, it was alleged, "de suivre la doctrine de Platon et de réfuter celle d'Aristote, qui est la seule ordinaire et nécessaire aux escoliers, pour estudier puis apres ou en médecine ou en théologie scolastique",¹ the Augustino-Platonic tradition of the Oratoire continued more or less unchecked. Official pronouncements were more restrained,² but, in practice, they had little effect on the scholarly activities of members of the Congregation. Thus, whilst Jean Morin, Denys Amelotte and Richard Simon pursued Biblical scholarship, and other Oratorians, notably Pasquier Quesnel and the fifth Superior General of the Oratoire, Abel-Louis de Sainte-Marthe, became embroiled in the Jansenist affair, one finds Louis Thomassin (1619-95) continuing the tradition of Neoplatonic studies.³

1 Archives Nationales, MM. 577 (cited by Lallemand in Essai, p. 117).

2 Gouhier characterized the official standpoint as follows: "On y permet de suivre Platon à condition de ne pas maltraiter Aristote" (in La Vocation de Malebranche, p. 53); this assessment is indeed accurate in that Oratorians were free to pursue their own academic researches, in whatever field or direction, whilst studies that might incur the censure of the establishment were discouraged. Intellectual freedom was one of the great attractions of being a new congregation, but this very novelty also brought with it a certain lack of security and the risk of impermanence.

3 The fullest study of the life and works of Thomassin has been carried out by P. Clair in Louis Thomassin (1619-1695): Étude bio-bibliographique (Paris, 1964) and Introduction à la pensée de Louis Thomassin (Lille, 1973).

Born in 1619, Thomassin was educated at the Oratorian college in Marseille from the age of ten and entered the Maison d'Institution in Aix in 1633, returning to complete his rhetoric and philosophy in Marseille in 1634, before taking up his theological studies at Notre-Dame-des-Ardilliers in Saumur in 1637. After teaching in various Oratorian colleges (including Juilly), Thomassin returned to Saumur in 1648, as professor of theology, until 1653 when he was appointed to the chair of theology at the seminary of Saint-Magloire in Paris where he distinguished himself by his lectures on positive theology. Like many of his contemporaries, though, he was unable to avoid controversy: he was suspected of Jansenism until he signed the formulaire in 1657; his first work, Dissertationes in concilia (Paris, 1667), having been criticized by almost all factions (Jansenist, Gallican and Roman), was immediately suppressed; his second work, Mémoires sur la grace (Louvain, 1668), upset the Jansenist sympathizers within the Congregation, and, in 1673, Sainte-Marthe ordered Thomassin to leave Saint-Magloire because of the dissension at the seminary, whereupon he retreated to the Maison d'Institution where he remained for some years until his return to the rue Saint-Jacques in 1690. Still, whilst the powerful Jansenist element in the Oratoire accused him of semi-Pelagianism, Thomassin's moderate Cartesianism and strongly Platonic inclinations were allowed to pass by the theological establishment.¹ Pupil, novice and

1 Of Thomassin's stay in Pézenas (1644-45) when he became interested in the works of Descartes, Batterel wrote: "Il y traitait les opinions nouvelles alors de Descartes et de Gassendy, sans les adopter néanmoins, qu'autant qu'elles lui paraissent s'accorder avec la bonne théologie et la doctrine de saint Augustin, pour laquelle il était alors déclaré" (Mémoires, vol. III, pp. 478-79).

confrère of the Congregation, Thomassin was an Oratorian through and through. It is hardly surprising, then, that he exemplifies the Oratoire's prime concerns and interests, not least its Neoplatonism which is readily apparent in all his major works.¹

For most of his life, Thomassin devoted himself to the construction of a positive theology in emulation of, and in response to, the Dogmata theologica of the Jesuit, Denys Petau.² A significant point of difference between the Oratorian and the Jesuit lies in their opposing attitudes to Plato, for, whereas Petau warned against the dangers of excessive Platonizing,³ Thomassin is so deeply imbued with Platonic philosophy that Bayle regarded the Dogmata theologica ... de Deo Deique proprietatibus (Paris, 1684) as incomprehensible without "quelque teinture de la philosophie de Platon".⁴ Thomassin considered Platonism, with its sublime insights into divine truth, to be a proper introduction to the theology of the Fathers which confirms its validity; although he still insists that theology is ultimately a quest for God through faith rather than reason, his intention is to study everything that is true in pagan philosophy in order

1 As Batterel wrote: "Dans cette vue [his Augustinian affiliation], il s'était plus attaché à la philosophie platonicienne, comme servant d'introduction à la théologie des Pères" (Mémoires, vol. III, p. 479). Cf. Cloyseault: "De tous les différents sentiments des philosophes, ceux de Platon lui plurent davantage, tant à cause de leur subtilité que parce qu'il les trouva plus conformes à la doctrine des premiers Pères de l'Église" (Généralat du P. de Sainte-Marthe, p. 165).

2 4 vols., Paris, 1644-50.

3 See Petau's Theologicorum dogmatum tomus secundus ... de sanctissima Trinitate (Paris, 1644), p. 2.

4 Nouvelles de la république des lettres, avril 1684, pp. 214-15.

to gain a fuller understanding of Christianity.¹

As if to emphasize the continuity of affiliation within the Oratoire, Thomassin states in the preface to the thoroughly Neoplatonic Dogmata theologica ... de Deo Deique proprietatibus, that he had been asked to undertake the work thirty years previously by Bourgoing. Book I begins with the psychological and metaphysical proofs of the existence of God that are absent from Petau. Citing the authority of Plato (Phaedrus) and Plotinus (Enneads, III, 5, i), but also Cicero, Alcinous, Iamblichus and Proclus, he departs from a statement of man's innate knowledge of God and goes on to argue from the Platonic theory of reminiscence,² from man's natural inclination to strive for the ideals of the Good, Truth and Justice, which are all God,³ and from the immortal soul's knowledge of itself and its grasp of the Intelligible and constant union with the Absolute. With the spiritualist's mistrust of the senses, he rejects Aristotelian epistemology in favour of innate ideas⁴ and, following Augustine and the Neoplatonists, stresses the primacy of love (delectation in the broadest sense) in the will in all human activity which

1 This conception of a typically Oratorian "theologia mentis et cordis" (as derived from Augustine, Jerome, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Chrysostom and Gregory of Nyssa) is set out fully in Dogmatum theologiarum tomus tertius et ultimus (Paris, 1689), "Tractatus primus. De prolegomenis theologiae".

2 "Omnis igitur boni cuiuscumque amor, non tam amor novus est, quam vetustissimi circa summum bonum amoris exufflatis desidia cineribus recalescentia; non tantum hortatio et prolectatio est ad summum bonum amandum, sed eiusdem summe quondam amati vestigium et veluti superstes extincto incendio scintilla" (Dogmata ... de Deo, p. 3).

3 "Et boni ergo et sapientiae et veritatis, sicut et beatitatis, quae omnia Deus est, ut appetitio, ita et praenotio naturaliter insita est" (ibid., p. 11).

4 "Exeundum penitus esse et ejiciendum ex animis Christianorum Theologorum illud vulgare praejudicium nihil esse in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu ... " (ibid., p. 26).

tends towards the sovereign Good. Throughout Book I ("De existentia Dei"), Augustine, Anselm, Boethius and the pseudo-Dionysius are the principal Christian authorities, but all are of the broad Neoplatonic school and the pagan Neoplatonists, especially Plotinus, also figure prominently. Moreover there are lengthy quotations from Ficino in support of the proof "ex cognatione mentis cum Deo" of Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril, Augustine and Anselm.¹ The cosmological argument which follows (in chapters 21-25) is thus rendered effectively superfluous.

The following books of Dogmata ... de Deo treat the properties of God thus proven, again drawing on Neoplatonic sources. In Book II ("De unitate et bonitate Dei"), Thomassin presents an exhaustive analysis of Neoplatonic teaching on the One, the ultimate term of the Neoplatonic dialectic, superior to both Being and Intelligence,² and goes on to elucidate the agreement of the pagan philosophers with the Fathers on the infinite unity and goodness of God (whilst also echoing Plotinus's notion of evil as metaphysically non-existent). Book III ("De Deo ut est Esse ipsum, et Mens, et Veritas ...") deals with the divine attributes of Being, Intellect, Truth and Beauty: total plenitude of being is in God;³ He is the beginning, means and end of man's intelligence, in whom the Ideas reside and who alone makes all things intelligible, although Thomassin does retain the action of human intelligence by distinguishing between "lumen illuminans" and "lumen illuminatum".

1 Thomassin cites the Theologia platonica, II, 5, II, 6 and XII, 7.

2 Dogmata ... de Deo, Book II, chapter 2, "Non potest ineluctabilius excogitari argumentum ad astruendam veri Dei unitatem, quam si Deus ipsa unitas, vel ipsum unum esse demonstretur".

3 Ibid., Book III, chapter 3.

(the light of Ideas in God) and "lumen illuminatum" (the light of particular ideas in man);¹ He is the supreme Truth and Beauty to which man must ascend through love.² He further stresses the agreement of the Neoplatonists with Anselm and the Fathers in his elaboration of the negative attributes of God.³ Finally, before turning to more purely theological questions of predestination and grace in the concluding books of Dogmata ... de Deo, Thomassin introduces the problem through an extension of his theory of illumination. Book VI, "In quo de Dei visione agitur", first sets out the Neoplatonic view that "animas hominum, mentesque omnes creatas ab exordio sui contemplatas esse, et clara visione contuitas Verbum Dei, veritatem et sapientiam incommutabilem". The Fall is then presented as a loss of light in a manner suggesting Malebranche's Traité de la nature et de la grace (1680) and, ultimately, echoing Plotinus; the rational soul of created man is still capable of contemplation of eternal truth (chapter 2 is entitled "Visio, seu potius contemplatio aeternae veritatis mentibus creatis, et animis rationalibus quasi connaturalis est"), but it must distance itself from the body in order to attain once more the original true light and beatific contemplation of divinity.

A more strictly philosophical work is La Methode d'étudier et d'enseigner chrétiennement et solidement la

1 Dogmata ... de Deo, Book III, chapter 5. Thomassin's treatment of the Ideas is based closely on that of Plato and Plotinus.

2 Thomassin cites texts from the Phaedrus, the Republic and the Symposium as well as relying on the authority of Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa and the pseudo-Dionysius.

3 Dogmata ... de Deo, Book IV, "De simplicitate divina", and Book V, "De immensitate, de immutabilitate et de aeternitate Dei".

philosophie (Paris, 1685). It bears witness to Thomassin's profound Humanist erudition and his intellectual eclecticism, which, together with a certain theological conservatism, suggest a parallel with Bossuet. In the first book ("Qui contient l'histoire de la naissance et du progrès de la philosophie"), he insists on the unity of divine truth, the sparks of which are innate in all men:

Tant de philosophies par le monde [sont] comme autant de voiles jettez sur le visage de la Sagesse: et [il y a] une seule Sagesse qui en resulte quand on approfondit les choses; parce qu'on trouve par tout à peu près les mesmes sentimens de Dieu, des Anges, de nos ames, du monde, de l'immortalité bien-heureuse ou malheureuse, des bonnes moeurs, de la sage politique: parce qu'on trouve ce que les ames formées de la main de Dieu ont clairement aperçu dans elles-mesmes quand elles y sont rentrées.¹

Such a unificatory, universalistic method caused the Jesuit Hardouin to include Thomassin in his list of atheists,² but the Oratorian really meant to distinguish between the errors and superstitions of pagan philosophy and the eternal truths that the ancients also knew and which are confirmed by the Christian faith.

Accordingly, Book I is a survey of the history of philosophy from Creation to the Romans intended to underline that all philosophy, Pagan, Old Testament and Christian, has the same basic concerns, namely the nature of God and man's sovereign good.³ The opening chapters are devoted to Old Testament wisdom as Thomassin finds "l'origine de toute la

1 La Methode (Paris, 1685), pp. 137-38.

2 In Athei detecti (published in Opera varia, Amsterdam, 1733). The list of supposed atheists also comprised: Jansenius, André Martin, Malebranche, Quesnel, Arnauld, Nicole, Pascal, and Descartes inter alios. It is amusing to note that this masterpiece was placed on the Index in 1739.

3 "Ciceron a déclaré que la Philosophie estoit l'amour, ou l'étude de la Sagesse, et que la Sagesse estoit la connoissance des choses divines et humaines, et de leurs premieres causes ..." (La Methode, p. 3).

Sagesse et de la Philosophie dans les Ecritures et dans le peuple de Dieu".¹ He does not, however, actually maintain that the Greeks knew the Old Testament directly. Instead, he emphasizes the utility of pagan philosophy in revealing insights into the true end of human existence. Of the many schools of thought discussed, it is the Platonic school that is favoured and Augustine is cited on the close relationship between Platonism and Christianity:

Saint Augustin montre admirablement que Jésus-Christ a établi dans la doctrine et dans les moeurs de son Eglise tout ce que les Platoniciens avoient pensé de plus haut de la Divinité, et ce qu'ils avoient écrit de plus pur pour persuader aux hommes le mépris des choses temporelles et l'amour seul des éternelles ... D'où il conclut que cela devoit suffire pour faire entrer tous les Platoniciens dans le sein de l'Eglise catholique, comme en effet plusieurs y estoient déjà entrez. Paucis mutatis verbis atque sententiis Christiani fierent, sicut plerique recentiorum nostrorumque temporum Platonici fecerunt.²

Thomassin is in full agreement with Augustine here as elsewhere.

Having expressed his preference for the Platonists in general terms, Thomassin goes on, in Books II and III, to consider questions of metaphysics and ethics in a way that combines Christianity and Platonism (and occasionally Cartesianism) in an eclectic synthesis. In his metaphysical speculations, the concept of the chain of being and the ascent of the soul to God is of central importance,³ and "cette échelle mystérieuse, qui s'appuie d'un côté sur les beautés terrestres, qui monte à celles de l'esprit, et qui s'élève enfin jusqu'à l'original divin de toutes les

¹ La Methode, p. 87.

² Ibid., p. 193. The reference is to De religione christiana I.

³ Ibid., chapters 2 and 3.

beautez"¹ is the single notion that binds together Neoplatonic metaphysics and Christian charity through the medium of man's rational, immortal soul. In epistemology, as in the Dogmata, God is "le soleil intelligible de la verité"² illuminating the minds of men and Augustine's authority again supports the Platonic theory of Ideas which he places in the mind of God and which represent divine truth.³ However, whilst he regards with some tolerance such Platonic doctrines as the world-soul (chapter 12) and transmigration (chapters 17-18) and allows that the Platonists had a preview of the Trinity (chapter 6), Thomassin underlines a significant error in Platonic thinking in respect of the question of mediation between God and man: he completely rejects the teaching that the angels or demons mediate between creation and creator (as propounded in the Timaeus), and stresses instead that it is love that binds man to God in a direct link through the Incarnate Word (chapter 10). This insistence on love and the Hypostatic Union as mediator, though expressed here in a less personal way than in the

1 La Methode, p. 288.

2 Ibid., p. 280. Cf. chapters 13-16.

3 Ibid., chapters 7 and 8. It is in his treatment of the soul's direct perception of the truth of universal Ideas that the influence of Cartesianism on Thomassin's Platonism is most apparent: "Quelque creance que nous ayons à nos sens corporels, nous en avons encore davantage aux choses que nous voyons au dedans de nous avec clarté et avec évidence. Je suis plus certain et plus assuré que j'ay une vie, que j'ay des pensées, que la mesme chose ne peut estre et n'estre pas, que la vertu est preferable au vice, qu'il faut rendre à chacun ce qui luy est dû: que je ne suis assuré que le soleil luit et que le feu brûle. Car ces premieres veritez se voyent au-dedans de nous et nous voyons dans la lumiere d'une verité constante et infaillible, que tous ces premiers principes d'intelligence sont absolument necessaires, ont esté, sont, et seront toujours, et ne peuvent pas estre autrement: et on ne peut attribuer aucun de ces avantages aux veritez du second ordre, que nous n'appercevons que par les sens" (ibid., p. 286).

works of Bérulle or Condren, is wholly in the Oratorian tradition of Christology, even if Thomassin arrives at it by rather a different route, indeed a route that is essentially opposed to the anti-Humanist pessimism of the École française.

The ascent of the soul to divine perfection through contemplation is treated at length in Book III. Once more the authority of Augustine confirms the agreement of Plato and the Church on the way to beatitude.¹ However, although Thomassin again emphasizes the universality of moral codes as all philosophies find the exemplars of all things in one divine wisdom,² he is also concerned to distinguish the one eternal truth of Christianity from the particular truths of the pagans. A fundamental aspect of this is first seen in his opposition of Stoicism and (Neo-)Platonism: "Le Sage des Stoïciens paroist toujours tout rempli de luy-mesme, et par consequent orgueilleux; au lieu que le vertueux de Platon et de Plotin commence par sortir de luy-mesme, pour se perdre en Dieu par l'amour et par la contemplation de la Verité éternelle".³ The spiritual resonances and antecedents of such a statement are clear, but it does not yet contain the whole truth. For, whilst it seems that most of La Methode is essentially Neoplatonic and only incidentally Christian, the conclusion of the work returns to a more typically Oratorian attitude towards personal devotion which goes completely

1 La Methode, p. 580. Thomassin cites De civitate Dei, X, 2.

2 I.e. "la premiere origine des vertus dans la Sagesse éternelle, ou dans le Verbe divin, où subsistent éternellement les idées et les exemplaires primitifs de toutes les natures, et de toutes les perfections créées, et par consequent des vertus, selon le raisonnement de Macrobe après les Platoniciens" (ibid., p. 627).

3 Ibid., p. 582.

against the tone of optimistic, Humanist Neoplatonism prevalent elsewhere in Thomassin's philosophical output. Following the Augustinian logic, then, the term which precedes the necessity of loving God is an awareness not of the grandeur of man but of his nothingness in his fallen state, and of the need for humility and sacrifice after the example of Christ:

Voila le solide et unique fondement des vertus apres la chute de nostre nature: estant souillez, il faut se purifier par l'humilité et par les larmes de la penitence, avant que de pretendre à s'approcher de Dieu et à jouir de luy. Or c'est Jésus-Christ le Verbe Incarné, qui a apporté au monde ces vertus auparavant inconnuës, la penitence, l'humilité, le sacrifice d'un coeur brisé. Cette doctrine avoit esté avant luy inouïe; cependant avant cela toute la philosophie et toute la vertu n'est qu'orgueil, comme S. Augustin l'experimenta luy-mesme, et comme il le confesse, faisant la comparaison des differentes impressions que luy avoit faites Platon du commencement, et ensuite l'Evangile.¹

Augustine may on occasions point to the closeness of Platonism and Christianity, but in the Confessions he appears anti-Platonist or, perhaps more accurately, **ultra**-Platonist in that he has been through Platonism and gone beyond it so as to come out on the other side with a final emphasis on charity.²

This statement of the ultimate nothingness of man and the necessity of sacrifice and love in the imitation of Christ, then, confirms Thomassin's position in the tradition of Oratorian spirituality, both with regard to its preoccupation with Eucharistic theology, the example of the sacrifice of Christ and the ideal of the priesthood, and its general preference for the philosophy of Plato and the Neoplatonists. If Condren largely abandoned philosophy and

¹ La Methode, p. 746.

² The essential Augustinian text is Confessiones, VII, 20.

separated his spirituality of simple personal devotion from the philosophical basis that it had in the thought of Bérulle, there remained many Oratorians in succeeding generations who emphasized and furthered the Congregation's predilection for Plato, thereby shifting the balance in the opposite direction, back again towards speculative philosophy, and Thomassin is typical of this latter tendency.

Richard Simon's highly critical opinion of Fournenc's Synopsis has already been mentioned.¹ It is an opinion that also applies in general terms to all followers of Plato. In the first place, he does not share the typical Oratorian attitude to Plato:

On ne sçauroit nier, qu'il y ait d'excellentes choses dans les ouvrages de Platon; mais elles sont quelquefois accompagnées de je ne sçai quel galimatias. Ce que vous ne trouverez point dans les livres d'Aristote, qui écrit d'une manière beaucoup plus exacte ... En un mot le divin Platon pour avoir voulu s'élever trop au dessus des hommes, est souvent tombé dans un galimatias pompeux, que quelques uns confondent avec le sublime.²

His objection, however, is not just stylistic. Whereas Thomassin differs from Petau in his approval and exploitation of Neoplatonism, Simon upholds the Jesuit theologian's refutation of "ceux qui ont de la veneration pour les Platoniciens, et qui les regardent comme des philosophes éclairés";³ in particular, he condemns those who believe that Plato had a preview of the mysteries of Christianity and used Platonism "pour attirer plus facilement les payens à la religion chrestienne".⁴ This uncompromising standpoint with regard to Platonic philosophy applies equally to the modern philosophy of Descartes, and especially to some Oratorians'

1 See above, pp. 191-92.

2 Bibliothèque critique, vol. IV, pp. 101-102.

3 Ibid., vol. I, p. 546.

4 Ibid. Cf. vol. II, pp. 478-79.

adoption of Cartesianism:

Il est vrai ... que plusieurs Peres de l'Oratoire font profession d'embrasser les opinions de Descartes, quoique depuis peu de temps les Superieurs s'y soient opposez, ou plutôt ayent fait semblant de s'y opposer. Mais après tout, le Cartesianisme n'est point la doctrine du Corps, mais seulement de quelques particuliers ... Mr de Bérulle premier instituteur des Peres de l'Oratoire en France, estimoit l'esprit et la personne de Descartes, sans entrer dans ses opinions, dont il n'étoit pas capable de juger. Et à vous dire la verité, bien des gens souhaiteroient, que cette philosophie questionnaire qui regne depuis long-tems dans nos ecoles, en fût bannie entierement.¹

Simon, as ever, does not pull his punches and the ex-Oratorian's combined assault on Plato and Descartes is the most forceful rejection of philosophy to have emerged from the Congregation. There is a certain truth in his restriction of Cartesian interests to "quelques particuliers", but those individuals numbered some, if not all, of the most prominent Oratorians of the second half of the seventeenth century, and, for all his fierce hostility to the philosophical tendencies of his former confrères, there was little decline in the Neoplatonism of the Oratoire and, indeed, a considerable increase in the attention ~~paid~~ to the philosophy of Descartes. A prime representative of this continuing adhesion to Plato and expanding Cartesian school is the contemporary of Malebranche, Bernard Lamy (1640-1715).

Like Thomassin, Lamy was entirely a product of the Oratoire.² Educated at the Oratorian college in Le Mans, he entered the Maison d'Institution in 1658. Between 1659 and 1661 (when Fournenc was Superior of Les Ardilliers and

¹ Bibliothèque critique, vol. IV, pp. 99-100. This letter to M. D(allo) of the Sorbonne was written in 1682.

² The major study of Lamy is F. Girbal's Bernard Lamy (1640-1715): Étude biographique et bibliographique (Paris, 1964).

Malebranche a pupil), he studied philosophy at Saumur and it was here that he was introduced to the blend of Augustinianism and Cartesianism that characterizes much of Oratorian thought. Thereafter, he pursued the career of a typical Oratorian scholar, teaching in various colleges, including Juilly, Saumur and Angers. It was in Angers, where he went in 1673 after another period in the strongly Cartesian atmosphere of Saumur,¹ that Lamy began to teach the philosophy of Descartes and attracted the attention of the conservative authorities. The ensuing scandal led to Lamy's exile to Grenoble in 1676.²

During this first period of exile (1676-86), Lamy published his most famous work, the Entretiens sur les sciences.³ At this time, Lamy was teaching in the seminary in Grenoble and the Entretiens set out the principles of his pedagogy, inspired by his experiences in the Oratoire and largely intended to help régents prepare seminarians to be true servants of the Church (although many sections apply equally to general teaching in schools). Greatly influenced by the Oratorian tradition in education as exemplified by Jean Morin (author of the Oratoire's Ratio studiorum, which,

1 Under the influence of the doctor Louis de La Forge, the Protestant Jean-Robert Chouet (who was professor of philosophy at the Protestant Academy of Saumur) and the Oratorian André Martin, Saumur had become an even more active centre of Cartesian study since the time of Lamy's first stay in the angevin town.

2 Lamy returned to Paris in 1686 to teach theology at the seminary of Saint-Magloire, but the publication of his Concordia quatuor Evangelistorum in 1689 resulted in his departure to Rouen where he remained effectively in exile until his death in the same year as Malebranche (1715).

3 The Entretiens were published anonymously in Grenoble by A. Frémon in 1683. Reference is made to the modern critical edition by F. Girbal and P. Clair (Paris, 1966) which follows the text of the third edition ("revue et augmentée") published in Lyon in 1706.

originally commissioned by Condren, appeared in 1645 but is now unfortunately lost) and P. de Verneuil (a close friend of Olier and the first Superior of the college of Juilly, 1639-1650), the Entretiens are particularly indebted to Plato, Augustine, Descartes and Malebranche. For Lamy, Socrates and Christ represent the ideal of the mentor and he gives a clear definition of the teacher's rôle:

Quelque difference que mette la diversité du temperament entre les esprits, il est constant qu'ils ont une même nature. Dieu a mis dans les hommes des semences de doctrine, c'est à-dire, des veritez premières, dont les autres coulent comme les ruisseaux de leurs source. L'art d'apprendre ne consiste qu'à faire une attention particulière à ces premières veritez, et à remarquer les consequences que l'on en peut tirer les unes apres les autres. Les maîtres habiles ne travaillent qu'à faire observer ces deux choses à leur disciples.¹

This underlying epistemology of innate ideas immediately proclaims Lamy's Augustino-Platonic affiliations.

The first Entretien opens with the Augustinian theme that "nous sommes faits pour connoître la verité; mais le peché nous en a éloigné en nous éloignant de Dieu".² Truth is "le Soleil de nôtre ame", and because of the Fall (which is seen as a loss of light), man is condemned to darkness ("des épaisses tenebres").³ Accordingly, man needs a guide to lead

1 Entretiens (ed. Girbal/Clair), p. 63.

2 Ibid., p. 37.

3 Ibid., p. 37. The image of Plato's cave (Republic VII) is implied here; there is an overt paraphrase of the allegory in the Nouvelles réflexions sur l'art poétique: "[Les hommes] ne portent leur vue que sur les créatures et ne s'élèvent jamais au-dessus d'elles pour contempler cet Etre, de la beauté duquel elles ne sont qu'une peinture très imparfaite. Car un homme, qui aurait été toute sa vie dans le recoin d'une caverne, en sorte qu'il n'eût pu voir que les ombres de plusieurs belles statues, éclairées par un flambeau qu'il ne voyait point: aussi pendant que ces esprits terrestres se renferment sur eux-mêmes dans le monde et qu'ils ne considèrent que les corps, ils ne peuvent pas penser que les beautés passagères d'ici-bas ne sont que les ombres d'une Beauté éternelle" (Paris, 1741, p. 453, and cited by Girbal in Bernard Lamy, pp. 60-61).

him out of darkness and this guide is science. As a true Oratorian, Lamy regards all science that does not have God as its object as vain and holds that the only true science is "la science du salut".¹ However, as God is all truth, all truths lead ultimately to God, and this is the real significance of scholarly studies, namely that, properly conducted, they contribute to man's knowledge of divine truth.

This principle applies to Plato as it does to Scripture, and the example of Augustine illustrates this: "[Dieu] fit que dans le tems même que S. Augustin ne pensoit point à Dieu, il étudia les Platoniciens, qui le rendirent capable de comprendre et de goûter les choses spirituelles, et lui donnerent cette élévation d'esprit qui lui est particuliere, et qui le fait regarder comme l'aigle des theologiens".² Such, then, is the theme underlying Lamy's famous eulogy of Plato in which he closely follows André Martin³ in stressing the points of agreement between Platonism and Christianity:

... on voit des choses dans Platon qui aprochent si fort de nôtre religion. Il s'apliqua aux sciences abstraites, comme est la géometrie; ce qui le retira des choses sensibles, et le rendit plus capable de considerer les choses spirituelles. Aussi a-t'il parlé plus dignement de Dieu, de l'immortalité de l'âme, de sa spiritualité. Sa morale est plus élevée et dégagée des choses sensibles; outre qu'il parle divinement, et que par la force de ses paroles, aussi bien que par celle de ses raisonnemens, il inspire de l'amour pour la verité. La lecture de ses écrits élève l'âme au dessus des choses sensibles. Il a sondé assez profondément le coeur de l'homme. Il a connu que l'état où nous naissons, n'est point celui d'une creature innocente: qu'une vie aussi misérable que la nôtre est la peine de quelque peché: que Dieu étoit la fin de l'homme, qu'il nous avoit fait pour lui être semblables. Sa morale est tres-belle, et peu diferente de

1 Entretiens, pp. 57-60.

2 Ibid., pp. 48-49.

3 Cf. Philosophia christiana, vol. I, chapter 14, "Platonicos esse aliis gentium philosophis longe praeferendos" (pp. 100-11).

celle des Chrétiens; ce qui fait dire à saint Augustin, que si Platon avoit vû comme les Apôtres avoient changé toute la terre par leur doctrine: Voilà, auroit-il dit, ce que nous n'avons pû persuader aux hommes.¹

This eulogy is not without qualifications - Lamy admits that "il faut dire qu'il n'est estimable que lorsqu'on le compare avec le reste des païens" and (even) that "il y a parmi les Chrétiens une infinité de petites femmelettes incomparablement plus éclairées que Platon"² - but its significance is plain.

Lamy goes on to present a critique of Aristotle, especially his errors regarding God and the soul,³ and, then, to praise the modern philosophers, notably Descartes and also Malebranche.⁴ What Lamy stresses above all else in the system of Descartes is the method. His idealist epistemology already distrusts the senses, and the cogito and the certainty of clear ideas provide the basis of all knowledge.⁵ Ultimately, though, Lamy leans more towards Malebranche than towards Descartes. Although he prefers the doctrines of André Martin or Gibieuf on grace, he fully accepts Malebranche's occasionalism and the theory of vision in God. As the years passed and particularly after l'affaire d'Angers, the friendship between Lamy and Malebranche became closer and closer and there is no doubt that the Entretiens helped to spread, if not exactly popularize, the philosophy of Malebranche.

Nevertheless, for all the controversy that surrounded Lamy's career as a result of his Cartesian sympathies, his work possesses an important balance. He retains and cannot

1 Entretiens, pp. 250-51.

2 Ibid., p. 251.

3 Ibid., pp. 251-55.

4 Ibid., pp. 256-63.

5 See the section entitled "Idée de la logique" between the second and third Entretiens.

conceal his formidable classical Humanism and, despite his Cartesianism, his Platonism is still quite explicit.¹ Moreover, he maintains a traditional Oratorian piety.² In these respects, at least, he is still very much within the Oratorian tradition of scholarly devotion, a Christocentric ideal and a Neoplatonic metaphysic. In the case of Malebranche, however, the relative simplicity and original purity of Lamy and his precursors have become somewhat submerged in a profound new synthesis. Indeed, le cas Malebranche is considerably more problematic, as typically Oratorian concerns can no longer be seen as distinct from the overall philosophical conception, and it is to this most impressive of Oratorian philosophers that we now turn our attention.

1 Girbal describes the Entretiens as a "véritable code de l'enseignement et de l'éducation dans la tradition chrétienne platonicienne et cartésienne" and even suggests a parallel with Rabelais (in Bernard Lamy, p. 182).

2 The fifth Entretien presents an image of Christian perfection in a holy community that is a magnificent evocation of the spirit of the Oratoire.

7. MALEBRANCHE

As has been seen, the Oratoire was born out of the spiritual revival of the French Counter-Reformation with the prime purpose of training Catholic priests in the image of Christ, the sacerdotal archetype. The fundamental aim of the new Congregation was Christian piety and devotion with a tendency towards mystical contemplation, but, at the same time, accompanied from the outset by an equally important emphasis on learning so as to dispel the image of the ignorant priest put about by the Reformers. With regard to scholarship, the Oratoire had one considerable advantage which allowed it to expand and flourish throughout the seventeenth century: its members enjoyed a degree of intellectual freedom that was unique amongst the religious groupings of the age. The early Oratorians formed the spirit of the Oratoire with their preferences for the Augustinian and Neoplatonic traditions, but, within the bounds set by the demands of orthodoxy, later confrères were at liberty to pursue their own interests. Accordingly, one finds that Oratorians inevitably became involved in all the contemporary debates and controversies from Jansenism to Quietism, and very frequently on the side of new ideas rather than conservative tradition.

This was particularly true in respect of the philosophical "revolution" brought about by the work of Descartes, as many Oratorians became fervent adherents of Cartesianism. Adrien Baillet relates that Descartes had close

contacts with the Oratoire from his early years; Gibieuf, Condren, La Barde and Sancy were amongst his personal friends,¹ and Bérulle himself was his spiritual director and encouraged his philosophical enquiries.² Equally, if Oratorians figured prominently amongst Descartes's initial promoters, many soon became keen disciples, notably André Martin, Poisson, Thomassin and Lamy, but also, and above all, Malebranche. This does not, however, necessarily mean that the progress of Cartesianism was any smoother within the Oratoire than it was in France as a whole, but it does indicate the degree to which the Congregation was receptive to the new philosophy even before Descartes's death in 1650.

Such, then, was the spirit of the Congregation that Malebranche entered as a novice in 1660 - an atmosphere of intense piety, but also of lively philosophical activity - and, in many ways, he is the foremost example of this double tradition of spirituality and scholarship. It is as a disciple of Descartes that Malebranche is generally held to have made his mark on the history of French thought, and much of the secondary literature devoted to his philosophy, from the pioneering work of Blampignon³ and Ollé-Laprune⁴ in the nineteenth century to the contemporary research of F. Alquié,⁵ has concentrated on his Cartesianism, relating it to the broad tradition of Augustino-Platonic idealism to

1 A. Baillet, La Vie de M. Des-Cartes (2 vols., Paris, 1691), vol. I, p. 139.

2 Ibid., vol. I, pp. 165-66.

3 E.-A. Blampignon, Étude sur Malebranche (Paris, 1862).

4 L. Ollé-Laprune, La Philosophie de Malebranche (2 vols., Paris, 1870).

5 F. Alquié, Le Cartésianisme de Malebranche (Paris, 1974) and Malebranche et le rationalisme chrétien (Paris, 1977).

which it patently belongs. Yet, when E. Morot-Sir describes Malebranche as "un cartésien platonisant",¹ thereby underlining the clear sympathy between Oratorian idealism and Descartes's thought, this is not the whole truth. It is wrong to regard Malebranche primarily as a Cartesian philosopher, even platonisant. Instead, it should be borne in mind, as Henri Gouhier rightly points out,² that the reaction against the prevalent Aristotelianism of the Schools clearly predates the advent of Cartesianism, that it was a central feature of the Renaissance and the Counter-Reformation, and that the Oratoire was to the fore in this movement. Throughout the seventeenth century, the Oratoire bore the indelible stamp of its founder; the influence of Bérulle, with his predilection for Plato and Augustine, was inescapable in both spirituality and philosophy, and this very spirit of the Oratoire was an important formative influence in its own right. It is in this perspective that G. Breton insists that the true master of Malebranche (and, by extension, all Oratorians) was not Descartes but Bérulle: "Le premier orienta sa pensée, mais le second avait formé son âme, et l'origine de la philosophie de Malebranche, il faut la chercher dans son âme toute pénétrée de cette vérité qui est le fond même de la doctrine spirituelle du fondateur de l'Oratoire, que nous devons vivre en Dieu et non pas en nous-mêmes".³ It is this view of

1 E. Morot-Sir, Philosophie et mystique (Paris, 1948), p. 203.

2 H. Gouhier, La Vocation de Malebranche, pp. 53-54.

3 G. Breton, "Les Origines de la philosophie de Malebranche" (in BLE, 4 (1912), pp. 214-30), p. 215. On the "étroite parenté" between Bérulle and Malebranche (ibid., p. 229), see also: L. Lavelle, "Bérulle et Malebranche" (in Bulletin de l'Association Fénelon, juillet 1948), and P. Tavecchio, "La spiritualità berulliana e la filosofia di Malebranche" (in RFN, 30 suppl. (1938), pp. 1-45).

Malebranche, as the inheritor of the Bérullian tradition of spirituality and metaphysics, with its distinctly Neoplatonic emphasis, rather than as a Cartesian attempting to "correct" the philosophy of Descartes and to make it a more distinctly Christian philosophy, that is to be developed here.

Little is known of Malebranche's early years,¹ but his weak constitution and studious nature immediately destined him for the priesthood; as Fontenelle wrote: "Il s'étoit toujours destiné à l'état ecclésiastique, où la nature et la grace l'appeloient également".² During his years of private tuition, though, he studied literature, grammar and rhetoric, and acquired a thorough knowledge of Latin and Greek, but without seeming especially attracted to scholarship. Equally his study of philosophy at the Collège de la Marche, under the eminent Aristotelian, Louis Rouillard, and theology at the Sorbonne, apparently left him without enthusiasm for either.³ Yet, if the beginnings were inauspicious, it may be that, as he progressed towards taking holy orders, Malebranche did benefit from his early education in one important respect: it is possible that disillusionment with the sterile doctrines and methods of his teachers laid the

1 The best survey of Malebranche's youth is in Gouhier's La Vocation de Malebranche, pp. 9-17. See also the articles by L. Barbedette: "La formation religieuse de Malebranche. I Ses premières études" in RHR, 96 (1927), pp. 61-77, and "II Noviciat, études théologiques, sacerdoce" in RHR, 97 (1928), pp. 220-37.

2 Fontenelle, Éloge du P. Malebranche, in the edition of Malebranche's Oeuvres complètes published under the direction of André Robinet (21 vols., Paris, 1958-70), vol. XIX, p. 999. All references to the works of Malebranche are made to this edition, except for G. Dreyfus's edition of the Traité de la nature et de la grâce (Paris, 1958) and A. Cuvillier's edition of the Méditations pour se disposer à l'humilité et à la pénitence (Paris, 1944).

3 Of Malebranche's studies, Batterel wrote: "Il les fit en homme d'esprit, mais non en génie supérieur" (Mémoires, vol. IV, p. 325).

foundations for his own philosophical quest.

On 18 January 1660, having rejected the offer of a canonry at Notre-Dame in Paris, Malebranche entered the Oratoire. His first year was spent in the Maison d'Institution in the Fbg. Saint-Jacques, the purpose of which was to initiate the novice to the spiritual life that the Bérullian reform had decreed for the future priest. During this period, he was notable for his austere piety, as Batterel stresses,¹ but made no impression as a scholar; the assessment of his Superiors stated that "[il] donne bonne espérance" and concluded: "Esprit mediocre, bontif et pieux. Jugé propre".² After his year's noviciate, Malebranche was sent to Notre-Dame-des-Ardilliers in Saumur, where Fournenc was then Superior, for six months (April-October 1661) to study theology. Intellectually, Saumur was at that time one of the liveliest towns in France, "un foyer philosophique et théologique intense"³ and "une ville de philosophes et théologiens, avec son Oratoire, son Académie protestante et un milieu cartésien fort zélé",⁴ where Oratorians mixed freely and debated with Protestants and Cartesians. Yet there was still no suggestion of an awakening interest in philosophy, even less Cartesianism, on Malebranche's part; nor should it be assumed that he made any important acquaintances in Saumur, for, although it is possible that he met his life-long friend Bernard Lamy there, it is unlikely that he would have met Louis de La Forge (the future editor

1 Batterel, Mémoires, vol. IV, pp. 361-62.

2 Archives Nationales, M. 230, f. 6 (in OC, vol. XVIII, p. 22).

3 G. Rodis-Lewis, Nicolas Malebranche (Paris, 1963), p. 8.

4 H. Gouhier, La Vocation de Malebranche, p. 22.

of Descartes's L'Homme) and certain that he did not know either André Martin or Louis Thomassin at that time.¹ As if to underline the the predominance of his spiritual training over ~~over~~ any philosophical inspiration, Malebranche then returned to Paris, this time to the main house in Saint-Honoré, which he was to leave only rarely and for brief periods until his death (in 1715), and where "il s'imprégna de la pensée de Bérulle".² Malebranche's thought still appears to have lacked any sense of direction, but all the time, whilst studying Scolastic theology under Chancellor, ecclesiastical history under Lecoigneux, and Biblical exegesis and history with Richard Simon, he was imbibing the spiritual atmosphere of the Oratoire, the Augustino-Platonic tradition of Bérullian mysticism, and developing the profound piety that was to culminate in his ordination on 14 September 1664.

Shortly before his ordination, though, Malebranche discovered Descartes. The episode is well known: strolling in the rue Saint-Jacques, he found Descartes's L'Homme (recently published by Clerselier in Paris in April 1664) in a bookshop, and his reading of this work effected his "Cartesian conversion". It need not necessarily appear surprising that L'Homme should have proved such a revelation for Malebranche.³ Quite apart from his personal indifference to all philosophy and his preoccupation with preparation for the priesthood, it should not be assumed that acquaintance with Cartesianism was inevitable at the Oratoire. When Ollé-Laprune wrote that "dans l'Oratoire, Platon et Plotin, saint

1 Martin did not come to Saumur until 1670 (Cf. Batterel, Mémoires, vol. III, p. 521) and was in Niort in 1661; Thomassin was not in Saumur after 1654.

2 G. Rodis-Lewis, Nicolas Malebranche, p. 8.

3 Cf. Gouhier, La Vocation de Malebranche, pp. 50 ff.

Augustin et Descartes étaient connus, aimés, étudiés au moment où Malebranche y entra",¹ this is a clear exaggeration, with regard to Descartes in particular. The sympathetic encouragement of certain early Oratorians and the active enthusiasm of several disciples reflect neither the interests of the Congregation as a whole nor its official standpoint. In the first place, a few illustrious names, even if some of the most prominent Oratorians, do not necessarily represent the majority of simple, pious priests, largely uninterested in philosophical and even theological problems, who quietly pursued a life of Christian devotion in the sacerdotal tradition of Bérulle. Second, the more conservative Bourgoing had, as Superior General, reacted against the Cartesian leanings of his predecessors (and also, to some extent, the extreme Augustinian tendencies of certain Oratorians) in order to consolidate the position of the Congregation through a policy of, at least, formal conformism to the prevalent orthodoxies, and such a policy was continued by Senault, who succeeded Bourgoing in 1662, and his successor Sainte-Marthe (elected in 1672).²

1 La Philosophie de Malebranche, vol. I, p. 48.

2 In 1654, Bourgoing instructed all Oratorian professors "d'enseigner la philosophie commune et ordinaire et en la manière qu'elle est enseignée en toutes les Universités de France, afin qu'il ne puisse y avoir parmi eux aucune singularité" (Archives Nationales, MM. 577, cited by Lallemand in Essai sur l'éducation, pp. 117-18). In 1678, the General Assembly of the Oratoire again declared "qu'en matiere de Doctrine elle n'embrace aucun party, et n'a aucune opinion de Corps ny de Communauté; mais qu'elle a toujours esté et veut demeurer en liberté de pouvoir tenir toute bonne et saine Doctrine, et qu'elle ne défend d'enseigner que celles qui sont condamnées par l'Eglise, ou qui pourroient estre suspectes des sentiments de Jansenius et de Baius pour la Theologie, et des opinions de Des-Cartes pour la Philosophie" (Actes de la seizième Assemblée Générale, cited in OC, vol. XVIII, p. 137). The consequences of such official pronouncements for Martin and Lamy, especially, have been noted above.

Nevertheless, despite the public assertions of orthodoxy, the Congregation maintained its intellectual freedom, and its attitude towards Cartesianism is well summarized by B.K. Rome: "In 1660 Cartesianism was not in favour at the Oratoire. The members of the Congregation were free to investigate it, but were expressly forbidden to teach it".¹ Oratorians enjoyed the freedom to study Plato, Augustine and Descartes, but not the licence to undermine the prevalent orthodoxies of the Church. Still, for all the attempts of Bourgoing and Senault to limit the spread of new ideas, many Oratorians took full advantage of such freedom to the extent of rendering their efforts ineffectual. Certainly, this freedom was fully exploited by Malebranche in the years following his "philosophical conversion" as he set about repeating and furthering his studies in the light of Descartes's work, and then developing his own system.²

Malebranche's philosophical system is not, however, just an extension of Descartes's or even a syncretic amalgam of several philosophies. As Henri Gouhier rightly insists,³ it is very much his own; vastly eclectic, it is at the same time highly original, a rigorous enquiry into what Malebranche himself regarded as the fundamental problems of philosophy and theology reflecting his own innermost preoccupations. These preoccupations are not essentially Cartesian. It is a

1 The Philosophy of Malebranche (Chicago, 1963), p 3.

2 It may not be fanciful to suggest that Malebranche, whilst constantly involved in profound theological and philosophical debate and even controversy, managed to avoid official persecution both by his Superiors and the Church authorities for the simple reason that he never taught his ideas in either college or faculty, but disseminated his thought solely through his written work and personal contacts.

3 La Philosophie de Malebranche (Paris, 1926), p. 388.

paradox or, perhaps, an inevitable consequence of his genius, that Malebranche is at once the greatest Cartesian and yet wholly anti-Cartesian. Ironically, his attempt to place God at the very heart of a Cartesian world was only to lead to unfortunate conclusions in the eighteenth century, but this Theocentrism was in fact much more deep-rooted in Malebranche's soul than Cartesian mechanism. Like many so-called Cartesians, Malebranche used Cartesianism as a tool, but applied this tool to his own concerns, and these interests were largely typical of the Oratoire as a whole.

The most original and lasting feature of the Cartesian "revolution" was the radical method. Certainly it was the method that was of greatest immediate appeal to seventeenth-century thinkers, and subsequently served to define the main problems of modern philosophy. The majority of seventeenth-century Cartesians, however, were first and foremost men of religion, and cared little for many aspects of Descartes's system except where it happened to accord with Augustine or Anselm. This is important, for the Cartesianism of many if not most seventeenth-century so-called Cartesians is so superficial, relative to Descartes's own theories, as to expose the utility and validity of the term to some doubt; having accepted the method, they often only rejoin Descartes when their theological purpose allows them to gain from, say, his dualism or proofs of the existence of God.¹

What Malebranche found in Cartesianism, then, was a method that immediately did away with all that had

¹ Although the terms "Cartesian" and "Cartesianism" are in many ways thoroughly unhelpful and misleading, this is not the place for a critique of standard terminology and the common usage has been followed uncritically throughout.

dissatisfied him in Scholasticism and provided the spring-board from which he went on to develop his own system. He himself asserts this at the end of De la Recherche de la Verité (2 vols., Paris, 1674-75), his first, longest and most Cartesian work, the result of ten years' meditation after reading L'Homme: "J'avouë cependant, que je dois à M. Descartes, ou à sa maniere de philosopher, les sentiments que j'oppose aux siens, et la hardiesse de le reprendre".¹ He has inherited the method, but his is not a mere continuation or expansion of Descartes's philosophy. Despite many common themes, many of which go back to much older sources, notably Augustine, Malebranche differs fundamentally from Descartes. Already in Recherche III, he opposes Descartes's theory of ideas and begins to develop the theory of "la vision en Dieu" which is the hallmark of le malebranchisme; he has no experience of hyperbolic doubt and reduces the cogito simply to the immediate perception of an ontological first principle; above all, he makes no distinction between faith and reason, but places God firmly at the heart of his entire system as the sole cause of all things so that it does indeed become "plein de Dieu".²

It is this Theocentrism that situates Malebranche, for all his superficial Cartesianism, in a distinct tradition, the tradition of Augustine, Anselm, Bonaventure and Bérulle, that of fides quaerens intellectum. Malebranche's faith was unshakable; what he sought and found through, but not in, Cartesianism was a means of rationalizing his spiritual faith outside the sterile confines of Scholasticism. It is this

¹ In OC, vol. II, p. 449.

² Batterel, Mémoires, vol. IV, p. 330. Cf. Fontenelle's Éloge (in OC, vol. XIX, p. 1001).

spirituality, and even mysticism, that typifies the Oratorian. And Malebranche is above all an Oratorian, "un métaphysicien de la renaissance oratorienne".¹ Regardless of how well Malebranche actually knew his work, if at all, the pervasive spirit of Bérulle informs the core of his philosophy - the glorification of God, His wisdom and His justice - and the Cartesian method simply provided him with a means of developing philosophically the essential Theocentrism of his spiritual master.

De la Recherche de la Verité, then, represents "en même temps son coup d'essai et son coup de maître";² it was an immediate success and the General Assembly of 1675 congratulated the author and thanked him for the honour that this notable work had brought to the Congregation.³ This "coup d'essai" contains the seeds of Malebranche's mature philosophy, but in a longer perspective its emphasis is deceptive, as those Cartesian elements that it does contain are increasingly diluted in later works as his system becomes more and more individual and original. Indeed, the Cartesianism of even Recherche is to some extent illusory. The method and its consequences are fully apparent throughout and the radical dualism characteristic of Cartesianism (though equally of Platonism or Augustinianism) lies at its heart, but the critique of Descartes is already present as Malebranche begins to move towards the theories of the

1 Gouhier, La Vocation de Malebranche, p. 127.

2 Batterel, Mémoires, vol. IV, p. 326.

3 Batterel records that "ce livre fit beaucoup de bruit dans le monde, dès qu'il parut; et, quoique fondé sur des principes déjà connus, il passa pour original" (ibid., p. 329).

Eclaircissements¹ and Entretiens sur la Métaphysique.²

Indeed, this shift is discernible over the sixteen months that separate the publication of the two volumes of Recherche.³ Where Malebranche is in complete accord with Descartes is in the method and insistence on clear and distinct ideas, his main criticism of Scholasticism being its dependence on Aristotle and his acceptance of the trustworthiness of the senses, themes which are particularly elaborated in Books I-III; in the later books, though, his solution to the problem of how the immaterial soul knows the material world tends right away from the Cartesian theory of innate ideas and the awkward doctrine of divine veracity guaranteeing that the thinking self is not deceived when it conceives a clear and distinct idea. The consequences of this departure from Cartesianism lead to the development of the theory of vision in God and its corollary, occasionalism, which are the essential principles of le malebranchisme. In attempting to resolve some of the difficulties of Cartesianism, then, Malebranche limits the force of the cogito and reduces to nothing the Cartesian primacy of the thinking self. This may be the result of the inner logic of Malebranche's thought having started from Cartesian premisses, but it is equally possible that his prime concerns were always basically un-Cartesian and founded in his spiritual training and that Cartesianism simply provided a useful tool, literally a method, for approaching them.

1 The Eclaircissements were first published in the third edition of Recherche (3 vols., Paris, 1678) of which they form the third volume.

2 Rotterdam, 1688.

3 The achevé d'imprimer of each volume is dated 12 May 1674 and 28 September 1675 respectively.

The "Préface" of Recherche sets out the basic themes of Malebranche's thought, and forms a meditation on the notion of dualism, an Augustinian meditation in the manner of Bérulle stressing the theological implications of self-knowledge. It begins with a familiar statement of man's place in the hierarchy of the ordered universe: "L'esprit de l'homme se trouve par sa nature comme situé entre son Créateur et les créatures corporelles"¹ and continues to consider the grandeur and misère of man whereby the union with higher being "l'élève au dessus de toutes choses"² and "c'est par elle qu'il reçoit sa vie, sa lumière et toute sa félicité",³ whilst the bodily union is "la principale cause de toutes ses erreurs et de toutes ses misères".⁴ The degrees that constitute this scale of being are not, however, discrete, representing a vertical ladder to be ascended through the wise exercise of the will as in Ficino or Pico, but, as with Bérulle, man's union with God is strictly ontological. Although the Fall has weakened the union of the soul with God and strengthened the hold of the body, it is still the divine union that alone gives man being; it is literally and in every sense essential.

Man is wholly dependent on God. The soul is not simply the form of the body, but a direct and necessary link between man and God, through which man may know and love God:

Il est évident que Dieu ne peut agir que pour lui-même: qu'il ne peut créer les esprits que pour le connoître, et

1 In OC, vol. I, p. 9.

2 Ibid., p. 9.

3 Ibid., p. 9.

4 Ibid., p. 9. Cf. Entretiens, VI, 7: "Car enfin nôtre esprit est tellement situé entre Dieu qui nous éclaire, et le corps qui nous aveugle, que plus il est uni à l'un, c'est une nécessité qu'il le soit d'autant moins à l'autre" (in OC, vol. XII, p. 141).

pour l'aimer; qu'il ne peut leur donner aucune connoissance, ni leur imprimer aucun amour, qui ne soit pour lui, et qui ne tende vers lui; mais il a pû ne pas unir à des corps, les esprits qui y sont maintenant unis. Ainsi le rapport que les esprits ont à Dieu, est naturel, nécessaire, et absolument indispensable; mais le rapport de nôtre esprit à nôtre corps, quoique naturel à nôtre esprit, n'est point absolument nécessaire, ni indispensable.¹

Even though man has a natural inclination to love god,² the majority of men are slaves of the body subject to the passions and desirous of the material goods of this world; yet, whilst preoccupation with sensible things weakens the union with God, "il est impossible que cette union se rompe entièrement, sans que notre être soit détruit"³ and what follows evokes the idea of the spiritual combat: "il faut résister sans cesse à l'effort que le corps fait contre l'esprit".⁴ It is not, however, a combat in the sense understood by Pico, Erasmus or even François de Sales, but the beginning of a process of Bérullian self-annihilation so that the soul may become more receptive to the ever-shining light of divine truth: "L'esprit devient plus pur, plus lumineux, plus fort et plus étendu à proportion que s'augmente l'union qu'il a avec Dieu: passe que c'est elle qui fait toute sa perfection".⁵ This has a Neoplatonic ring, but for the moment the doctrine of illumination and union remains undeveloped as Malebranche is more concerned with simple self-knowledge.

"La plus belle, la plus agréable et la plus nécessaire de toutes nos connoissances est sans doute la connoissance de nous-mêmes. De toutes les sciences humaines, la science de

1 In OC, vol. I, p. 10.

2 See especially Recherche, IV, 1.

3 In OC, vol. I, p. 15.

4 Ibid., p. 18. Cf. Recherche, V, 5.

5 Ibid., pp. 15-16.

l'homme est la plus digne de l'homme".¹ The injunction of the Delphic Oracle figures prominently in the works of many, if not all, religious writers of the seventeenth century, and it is no less the subject of Recherche. For all its superficial Cartesianism, Recherche really belongs to a long-established tradition treating the common theme of γνῶθι σεαυτόν. Matter may be defined as extension and thought the attribute of the immortal soul, but the essential point of departure is not the hyperbolic doubt of Descartes's malin génie, but simple self-knowledge. One can allow that, for Malebranche, self-knowledge serves a double-function as it also leads to the immediate perception of an ontological first truth,² but the Augustinian interpretation predominates, as self-knowledge is the first step not towards knowledge of the world, but towards knowledge and love of God. This Augustinianism is to some extent related to Cartesianism in the radical dualism of mind and matter and the method that aims to liberate the soul from the senses, to eliminate error and to follow only clear and distinct ideas,³ but the conclusion of the "Préface" underlines the fundamental differences: "Que l'on rentre dans soi-même, et que l'on s'approche de la lumière qui y luit incessamment, afin que notre raison soit plus éclairée. Que l'on évite avec soin toutes les sensations trop vives, et toutes les émotions de l'âme qui remplissent la capacité de notre foible intelligence".⁴ This is not the scientific

1 In OC, vol. I, p. 20.

2 See Entretiens, I, 1, in OC, vol. XII, p. 32.

3 "Car la principale cause de nos erreurs, c'est que nos jugemens s'étendent à plus de choses que la vue claire de notre esprit" (in OC, vol. I, p. 24) and "il faut que l'esprit juge de toutes les choses selon ses lumières intérieures, sans écouter le témoignage faux et confus de ses sens, et de son imagination" (ibid., p. 22).

4 Ibid., p. 25.

rationalism of Descartes, retreating into the self to find the basis of the certainty with which he can then turn to seek greater understanding and mastery of this world, but the ascetic, speculative method of Malebranche looking into himself as the first stage in finding God.¹ Although the anthropological accent of Recherche, with its enquiry into how man can know the outside world, is still under the strong influence of his Cartesian studies, Malebranche increasingly identifies reason and the Word so that ultimately philosophy and theology become one and the same; this is not true of all of Recherche, but in the later books² one begins to see the culmination of a tendency heralded implicitly in the "Préface" and which is fully expanded in the mature works.

Malebranche's idealism is most pronounced in the Eclaircissements and Entretiens. The former especially serves to revise and develop the theories propounded in the original two volumes of Recherche. In the early stages of Malebranche's thought, his rejection of Scholastic empiricism had both as cause and effect his acceptance of the a priori Cartesian epistemology of clear and distinct ideas. By the end of Book III of Recherche, however, he is already formulating his own theory, "Que nous voyons toutes choses en

1 Cf. M. Blondel: "Tandis que Descartes, sous de prudentes apparences et aussi à travers les sincères désirs de sa foi, cherche dans la connaissance de Dieu, de nous-même et du monde un moyen d'obtenir, de justifier, d'assurer, d'étendre l'emprise de l'homme sur la nature, un moyen donc d'améliorer ou même de prolonger notre existence terrestre et de conquérir l'avenir, Malebranche, lui, ne considère la vie présente, la science humaine, la philosophie que comme des échelons de notre réintégration en Dieu, comme la préparation et anticipation ébauchée de l'autre vie, comme le moyen de conquérir, ou si ce mot évoque une idée d'activité qui répugne à sa doctrine, d'accueillir l'éternité" ("L'Anti-cartésianisme de Malebranche" in RMM, 23 (1916), pp. 1-26, at p. 3).

2 See especially the conclusion of Book VI.

Dieu".¹ D. Connell argues persuasively that Malebranche's dismissal of Scholasticism and dissatisfaction with Cartesian innate ideas were reconciled, perhaps surprisingly, through a return to Scholastic teachings.² This need not be as paradoxical as it seems, for Malebranche's early teachers had all been Thomists and, even when rejecting the complexities of Scholastic ontology, he still persists in approaching philosophical problems ontologically. Furthermore, twentieth-century scholarship has revealed the considerable influence of Neoplatonism on much Scholastic thought and Connell states that "the Scholastic doctrines of creation and divine exemplarism, on which their discussions of angelic knowledge extensively depend, are deeply influenced by Augustinian and Neoplatonic thought".³ The content, if not the form, of Scholasticism need not therefore have been opposed to Malebranche's idealism and Connell detects the direct influence of Suarez's De angelis on the earliest version of the theory of vision in God. Nevertheless, Connell also stresses that the full, final version of Malebranche's epistemology owes more to Augustine's teachings on eternal truths than to Scholastic angelology.

Having taken for granted the existence of a material world represented by the clear ideas of pure understanding in the first edition of Recherche, Malebranche became concerned lest doubt about the existence of matter threaten the foundation of vision in God, and realized the necessity of demonstrating the objectivity of all ideas. This

1 Recherche, III², 6, in OC, vol. I, pp. 437-47.

2 D. Connell, The Vision in God: Malebranche's Scholastic Sources (Louvain/Paris, 1967).

3 Ibid., p. 358.

demonstration of the objective reality of ideas is to be found in the Eclaircissements, particularly Eclaircissement X.¹ The Eclaircissements represent a complete rupture with Cartesian subjectivism, as Malebranche distinguishes between "connaissance" of clear and distinct objective ideas and "sentiment" which is the obscure, confused knowledge which the soul has of itself. These objective ideas subsist in God. Malebranche's theory of knowledge is adumbrated in Recherche III, 2, "De la nature des idées", where he provides a critique of four false theories before turning to his own, and also in Conversations chrétiennes III, but the full exposition of the theory of vision in God is in Eclaircissement X:

Je suis certain que les idées des choses sont immuables, et que les vérités et les lois éternelles sont nécessaires: il est impossible qu'elles ne soient pas telles qu'elles sont. Or je ne vois rien en moi d'immuable ni de nécessaire: je puis n'être point, ou n'être pas tel que je suis: il peut y avoir des esprits qui ne me ressemblent pas; et cependant je suis certain qu'il ne peut y avoir d'esprits qui voyent des vérités et des lois différentes de celles que je vois: car tout esprit voit nécessairement que 2 fois 2 font 4, et qu'il faut préférer son ami à son chien. Il faut donc conclure que la raison que tous les esprits consultent, est une Raison immuable et nécessaire ... S'il est vrai que la Raison à laquelle tous les hommes participent est universelle; s'il est vrai qu'elle est infinie; s'il est vrai qu'elle est immuable et nécessaire: il est certain qu'elle n'est point différente de celle de Dieu même: car il n'y a que l'être universel et infini, qui renferme en soi-même une raison universelle et infinie.²

If Malebranche here draws largely on Augustine's argument for divine illumination from eternal truths, there is no doubt that behind the doctrine of both men there lies the fundamental doctrine of Plato, the transcendent reality of

1 "Eclaircissement sur la nature des Idées. Dans lequel j'explique comment on voit en Dieu toutes choses, les vérités et les lois éternelles" (in OC, vol. III, pp. 127-61).

2 In OC, vol. III, pp. 130-31. Cf. Méditations chrétiennes, IV, 4 (in OC, vol. X, pp. 37-38).

universal, necessary, immutable, eternal Ideas.¹ The theory of vision in God developed out of Augustine's theory of divine illumination which in turn developed out of his encounter with Plato, but, whilst Malebranche rejected Cartesian innate ideas and Augustine rejected the Platonic theory of reminiscence, both retain the essence of the theory of Ideas. The opposition of being and becoming, between the ideal world and the sensible world, is at the heart of Malebranche's philosophy, as it is at the heart of Augustinianism and Platonism, and this is clear in the Entretiens sur la Métaphysique where Théodore sets out to convince Ariste

que les objets sensibles ont bien moins de réalité qu'on ne s'imagine, et qu'ils n'ont sur nous aucune action: que toutes les sensations que nous en avons viennent uniquement de l'efficace des idées divines; que l'âme n'est directement, immédiatement unie qu'à Dieu, qu'à la souveraine Raison, en qui se trouve, dit S. Augustin, la puissance qui nous donne l'être, la lumière qui nous éclaire, et la règle immuable de nôtre conduite: causa subsistendi, ratio intelligendi, et ordo vivendi [De civitate Dei, VIII, 4].²

Through Théodore, Malebranche emphasizes the only true reality of the ideal world in patently Platonic terms:

C'est que les idées ont une existence éternelle et nécessaire, et que le monde corporel n'existe que parce qu'il a plu à Dieu de le créer. Ainsi, pour voir le monde intelligible, il suffit de consulter la Raison qui renferme les idées intelligibles, éternelles et nécessaire, l'archetype du monde visible: ce que peuvent faire tous les esprits raisonnables, ou unis à la Raison.³

In his reply to Faydit's criticism of his doctrine, Malebranche denied that he was influenced by Platonic

1 Cf. S. Banchetti: "Il riferimento ad una entità a noi trascendente, ma con noi pur sempre in contatto o direttamente, o indirettamente, è il tratto il più significativo del Platonismo" in Il pensiero e l'opera di Nicola Malebranche (Milan, 1963), p. 316.

2 In OC, vol. XII, p. 9.

3 Ibid., pp. 36-37.

teachings in what Faydit described as "les raisonnemens d'une métaphysique creuse et alambiquée",¹ but, whilst Gouhier's caveat on the originality of Malebranche's thought should not be forgotten,² its essential features bear the unmistakable stamp of Platonism: "Tutta l'impostazione del pensiero di Malebranche ... è chiaramente platonica. La svalutazione del sensible in se stesso considerato, l'esaltazione conseguente della realtà superiore, insomma il platonico dualismo che, in forme sempre nuove e diverse, è continuamente nella storia del pensiero, sono i tratti basilari e caratteristici del Malebranchismo".³

The traditional difficulty with Platonism has always resulted from the "separation" of the Ideas.⁴ Augustine's rejection of the theory of reminiscence threatened to compromise the objective reality of separate ideas, but, by placing them in the divine mind and making God the light of eternal reason that illuminates the human soul, he effectively assimilated Platonic epistemology into Christian thought. Having rejected the Cartesian theory of innate ideas as a proud doctrine attributing to created man the power to draw all knowledge from within itself, which is the sole prerogative of the Creator, Malebranche must likewise face the problem posed by the gulf separating the transcendent

1 Quoted in the "Préface" to the Entretiens (in OC, vol. XII, p. 22).

2 "On a trop souvent essayé de retrouver sous les paroles de Malebranche la pensée de saint Augustin ou de tel autre; or sous les paroles de Malebranche, il y a la pensée de Malebranche" (La Philosophie de Malebranche, p. 388).

3 S. Banchetti, Il pensiero e l'opera di Nicola Malebranche, p. 315.

4 Cf. J. Moreau, "Saint Augustin et Malebranche" in La Philosophie et ses problèmes (Lyon, 1960), pp. 109-36, and also P.E. Elungu, Étendue et connaissance dans la philosophie de Malebranche (Paris, 1973), especially pp. 40-41.

ideas (immortal and divine but existing in the material world) from the human soul. It was his solution to this problem that produced two of the most strikingly original aspects of his philosophy: the theory of vision in God and, especially, the notion of intelligible extension.

The first full account of Malebranche's solution to the problem of how man knows infinitely divided extension perceived in an infinity of bodies is the Second and Third Objections of Eclaircissement X:

Lorsque j'ai dit que nous voyons les differens corps, par la connoissance que nous avons des perfections de Dieu qui les representent, je n'ai pas prétendu précisément, qu'il y eût en Dieu certaines idées particulieres, qui representassent chaque corps en particulier, et que nous vissions une telle idée, lorsque nous voyons un tel corps ... Mais je dis que nous voyons toutes choses en Dieu par l'efficace de sa substance, et en particulier les objets sensibles, par l'application que Dieu a fait à nôtre esprit de l'étenduë intelligible en mille manieres differentes; et qu'ainsi l'étenduë intelligible renferme en elle toutes les perfections, ou plutôt toutes les différences des corps, à cause des differentes sensations que l'ame répand sur les idées qui l'affectent à l'occasion de ces mêmes corps.¹

The divine mind, then, contains not just the ideas of eternal truths, but even the exemplar of extension, the abstract, unified principle or archetype from which the divine will created the variety of bodies in the material world.² This concept of intelligible extension was central to the controversy with Arnauld, a more orthodox Cartesian, who feared that Malebranche was tending towards the Spinozistic belief that God was Himself an extended substance.³ Certainly, there

1 In OC, vol. III, p. 154.

2 Ginette Dreyfus regards the concept of intelligible extension as being of largely Platonic derivation, relating the opposition of the homogeneity of intelligible extension and the specificity of forms to the Platonic distinction between *ἄπειρον*, the undifferentiated dyad of large/small, and *μέγας*, the rational principle of measure (La Volonté selon Malebranche, Paris, 1958, p. 127).

3 In Des vraies et des fausses idées (Cologne, 1683).

is an element of quasi-pantheism about man's participation in divine reason, but, after the publication of Spinoza's posthumous works in 1677, Malebranche quickly refuted (in the Méditations chrétiennes of 1683) any suggestion that he upheld the infinity of the world and the impossibility of creation¹ and redefined intelligible extension as "l'immensité de l'Etre Divin, entant qu'infiniment participable par la créature corporelle".² Whatever the controversial difficulties of Malebranche's doctrine, though, its essential features remain constant throughout its amplifications and explanations, and, in the words of P.E. Elungu, our "connaissance relationnelle de l'étendue intelligible" is defined as: "1° Objet immédiat de notre vision. 2° Lequel mène à Dieu sans le représenter, parce qu'il est saisi sur le fond de Dieu. 3° Lequel, bien qu'objet de l'intelligence, en tant qu'être de Dieu, produit en nous la connaissance en tant que forme. 4° Lequel est essentiellement représentatif du monde des choses ou corps invisibles".³ And: "Pour nous résumer, nous pouvons dire qu'il prédomine, chez Malebranche, le réalisme des idées et de l'étendue intelligible. C'est le monde objectif que je vois immédiatement. Ce ne peut être une illusion. La vision de l'étendue intelligible en Dieu s'accompagne toujours de la

1 Cf. Méditations chrétiennes IX, "De la puissance de Dieu. Que la création est possible: deux causes de l'erreur de certains philosophes sur ce sujet: la première, qu'on n'a point d'idée claire de puissance; la seconde, que l'idée de l'étendue ou l'étendue intelligible est éternelle et infinie, mais que l'étendue matérielle est créée. Que les esprits ne sont point des modifications particulières de la Raison universelle: que n'ayant point d'idée claire de notre âme, nous ne pouvons éclaircir les difficultés qui la regardent".

2 In OC, vol. X, p. 99.

3 P.E. Elungu, Étendue et connaissance, p. 108.

vision de Dieu ou plus exactement se fait sur fond d'étendue, et celle de l'étendue intelligible sur fond de Dieu".¹ Man can have no clear idea of intelligible extension as it is not differentiated from God, but it is nonetheless in God that man sees all things: "Résorber la réalité du corps dans celle de l'idée, la réalité de l'idée dans celle de la Raison divine: tel est le mouvement naturel que révèle la philosophie de Malebranche".²

The theory of vision in God is the very foundation of Malebranche's system. He has effectively substituted it for the Cartesian cogito as his fundamental premiss and, starting from seemingly Cartesian principles, he has proceeded to demolish the philosophy of clear and distinct ideas (although he retains Descartes's terminology).³ Clearly, though, this new system stands firmly in the tradition of Platonic and Augustinian idealism. There is no evidence that Malebranche actually knew the works of Plato directly, and, when he refers to him in Recherche, it is usually disparagingly⁴ and without really distinguishing him from other pagan philosophers; he never mentions Plotinus. Nor is it certain that he even read Augustine, as his knowledge of the Bishop of Hippo is largely gleaned from André Martin's Philosophia christiana.⁵ Still, "le platonisme de Malebranche est chose

1 P.E. Elungu, Étendue et connaissance, p. 100.

2 E. Rolland, "Le Surnaturel dans la philosophie de Malebranche" (in Archives de philosophie, 14 (1938), pp. 1-106), p. 63.

3 This is the main thesis of M. Gueroult's Malebranche (3 vols., Paris, 1955-59). See also Blondel's article, "L'Anti-cartésianisme de Malebranche".

4 "Si l'on écrit sur Platon, c'est le divin Platon" (in OC, vol. I, p. 297) sounds rather like an entry in Flaubert's Dictionnaire des idées reçues.

5 Malebranche's use of Martin's work is discussed by Gouhier in La Philosophie de Malebranche, pp. 279-311 and 411-20.

incontestable", even if it is "un platonisme indirect, tel qu'il résulte du contact avec saint Augustin et avec une ambiance philosophique imprégnée d'influence platonicienne".¹ Both in general and in certain details, Malebranche's philosophy is typical of Oratorian Platonism, and, indeed, seems to become increasingly Platonic, perhaps as a result of the influence of contemporary Oratorians such as Thomassin and Lamy, quite apart from the overall atmosphere of the Congregation.² It may be no more than a coincidence but, after his close friend, Bernard Lamy, had published the first edition of the Entretiens sur les sciences with its famous eulogy of Plato in 1683, Malebranche appears much better disposed towards Plato and even the Neoplatonists in the Entretiens sur la métaphysique. In the "Préface", for example, he makes the common association of Plato and Augustine: "Et si Platon n'avoit point cru que les idées étoient séparées de l'essence Divine, comme on l'en accuse, saint Augustin en cela seroit Platonicien"³ and goes on to admit that Augustine and the Fathers had found the theory of divine light and illumination in the works of the Platonists, mentioning Philo by name.⁴ Moreover, his treatment of the idea of God, His attributes and the notion of the Logos, the light of the intelligence and universal reason, elaborated in the first three Entretiens, seem distinctly Neoplatonic and, specifically, Plotinian.

The establishment of the theory of vision in God as his

1 E. Rolland, "Le Surnaturel dans la philosophie de Malebranche", p. 60.

2 A brief and very general account of Malebranche's Platonism can be found in P. Rotta's "Il Platonismo nel Malebranche" in RFN, 30 suppl. (1938), pp. 233-42.

3 In OC, vol. XII, p. 12.

4 Ibid., p. 15.

fundamental doctrine effectively determined the direction of Malebranche's entire philosophy, as everything is ultimately reduced to God as the cause of all things. Thus, "la théorie de la vision en Dieu introduit à la doctrine de la nature et de la grâce, et aux principes qui la rendent possible, à savoir la simplicité des voies et l'occasionalisme".¹ The corollary of Malebranche's epistemological first premiss is the doctrine of occasional causes (which is fully expounded in Entretiens VII), but, even though the theory of occasionalism was to involve him in almost interminable controversies, particularly with regard to its implications for the theology of grace, it was really only secondary to his main purpose and the product of the logical consequences of his initial premisses. Ironically, as Alquié illustrates,² his attempt to place God at the very centre of his system served to hasten the progress of eighteenth-century deism and atheism, but, although total mechanism is the unfortunate logical progression from his Theocentric occasionalism, such was far from being the direction of Malebranche's thought. When Théodore promises to transport Ariste into an enchanted world as yet unknown to him in the first Entretien, he is referring to a realm of spiritual truth, not of scientific mechanism.³

In following Augustine in placing the Ideas in the mind of God, Malebranche goes far beyond both his immediate predecessors and his contemporaries (most seventeenth-century spiritualists accepted the Cartesian theory of innate ideas),

1 M. Gueroult, Malebranche, vol. II, p. 7.

2 F. Alquié, Malebranche et le rationalisme chrétien (Paris, 1977), pp. 77-78.

3 In OC, vol. XII, p. 47.

but in so doing he retains an essential element of the Oratorian tradition, namely its tendency towards mysticism. Man's perception of bodies (and ideas) is at once explicable, clear and distinct, and inexplicable, obscure and confused, for "l'étendue intelligible, claire et éclairante, reste, comme principe de perception tout court, enracinée sur un mystère: l'Être et l'Être même de Dieu".¹ Malebranche's theory of the Word, the light which illuminates man in the world in a Neoplatonic manner, ultimately rests on a paradox: that the source of clarity is itself obscure. This is a mystical theme, and it is the conclusion underlying Gueroult's Malebranche that the light of clear and distinct ideas finally gives way to a vast mystical intuition in the philosophy of Malebranche:² the clarity of ideas leads to their unknowable source and Malebranche rejoins, through his theories of vision in God and occasional causes, the tradition of Bonaventure.³

There is nothing to suggest that Malebranche ever experienced mystical ecstasies or revelations at any stage in his life, and yet it is not necessarily wrong to describe him as a mystic. Although Robinet denies that he can be called a mystic, however the term may be defined, and insists that he is a rationalist theologian whose theology is Cartesian,⁴

1 P.E. Elungu, Étendue et connaissance, p. 139.

2 Cf. Blondel, "L'Anti-cartésianisme de Malebranche", and J.M. Gaonach, La Théorie des idées dans la philosophie de Malebranche (Brest, 1908).

3 "La filosofia di Malebranche, come quella di S. Bonaventura, si prospetta come itinerarium mentis in Deum" (S. Banchetti, Il pensiero e l'opera di Nicola Malebranche, pp. 321-22).

4 A. Robinet, Système et existence dans l'oeuvre de Malebranche (Paris, 1965), pp. 497-501. J. Wehrle (in his article "Malebranche" in DTC, vol. IX, cols. 1776-1804) and Gouhier (in La Philosophie de Malebranche) also deny that Malebranche can be deemed a mystic.

it does not require excessive casuistry to argue the opposite. Malebranche's reputation rests largely on three works, De la Recherche de la Vérité, Entretiens sur la métaphysique and Traité de la nature et de la grâce, but these, together with the associated replies and explanations, constitute no more than half his total output; the remainder, although inevitably bearing the mark of his philosophy, consists primarily of works of Oratorian spirituality. Blampignon, and after him Barbedette and Niccolini,¹ suggests that his mother, Cathérine de Lauzon, who was incidentally a relative of Mme Acarie, was instrumental in leading Malebranche "vers la méditation des choses divines",² and that she nurtured in him a taste for spiritual writers. Whatever the biographical truth of such assertions,³ there is no doubt that he could not have escaped the mystical atmosphere of the Congregation that he deliberately chose to enter and the influence of a long tradition of spirituality stretching back from the École française to the mediaeval mystics and the Fathers. If Malebranche's work does not align itself explicitly with the spirituality of a John of the Cross or a Theresa of Avila, it is because of his own personality; his scientific cast of mind insisted on clear, demonstrable, certain knowledge. And yet, for all his

1 E.-A. Blampignon Étude sur Malebranche (Paris, 1862); L. Barbedette, "La Formation religieuse de Malebranche: I Ses premières études" in RHR, 96 (1927), pp. 61-77; E. Niccolini, "Il misticismo di Niccolò Malebranche" in Giornale critico della filosofia italiana, 14 (1933), pp. 385-94.

2 Blampignon, Étude sur Malebranche, p. 2.

3 It should be noted that Malebranche's personal library contained no mystical works except the Imitation and few works of spirituality. The inventory (Archives Nationales, S 6770, 128, ff. 4-15) is reprinted in OC, vol. XX, pp. 231-290.

intellectual rigour, he shares many basic concerns with the mystics: the vanity of the world, the nothingness of man, the only true reality of God.

Moreover, there is an interesting, though little known, episode in Malebranche's career which perhaps casts some light on the question of his mysticism.¹ On 9 April 1672, Armand-Jean de Rancé, Abbot of La Trappe, wrote to Malebranche in response to two letters from the Oratorian (now unfortunately lost) apparently requesting to join Rancé's Cistercian reform.² It may be, as G. Rodis-Lewis holds,³ that the addressee was Charles (Des Periers) Malebranche, the philosopher's brother, who also entered the Oratoire in 1660 and is known to have been uncertain of his vocation, leaving the Congregation for some while before returning and finally departing definitively in 1672 to live out his life in obscurity. The editors of Malebranche's Oeuvres complètes, however, reject this hypothesis, insisting on the authenticity of the letter.⁴ Indeed, there seems no reason to doubt that Nicolas Malebranche was the intended recipient. It is known that Malebranche was a regular visitor to Perseigne from 1674 onwards and even wrote a substantial part of the Méditations chrétiennes there in 1680, and that

1 See J. Doinel, "Un Épisode inconnu de la vie de Malebranche, d'après une lettre inédite de l'abbé de Rancé" in Revue des questions historiques, 2 (1876), pp. 553-59.

2 In OC, vol. XVIII, pp. 72-74.

3 G. Rodis-Lewis, Nicolas Malebranche, p. 12.

4 See OC, vol. XX, p. 89. The English translator of Rancé's letters (2 vols., Kalamazoo, 1984), A.J. Krailsheimer, also maintains that Nicolas was the probable (if, in a sense, unlikely) postulant. Dr Krailsheimer is the author of the only authoritative study of Rancé, Armand-Jean de Rancé, Abbot of La Trappe (Oxford, 1974), and the more general introduction, Rancé and the Trappist Legacy (Kalamazoo, 1985) and is currently preparing the French edition of Rancé's letters.

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he regularly went on retreat at La Trappe. If the letter is genuine, then, this would suggest some sort of spiritual crisis or personal difficulties during the composition of Recherche leading to serious consideration of a possible conversion to Cistercianism, of which there is no other indication, but, in any case, this apparent attraction to the strong anti-rationalism of La Trappe, together with his frequent retreats to the austere solitude of the Cistercian Abbeys of the Strict Observance, points to a significant spiritual (if not quite mystical) strain in Malebranche's psychological make-up and religious practice, both before the beginning of his philosophical activity and after, and which is typical of the Oratorian.²

Barbedette regards Malebranche's achievement in metaphysics primarily as "une intellectualisation de la théologie mystique";³ the ecstatic mystery has disappeared in the quest for certain knowledge, and yet, au fond, the eternal mystery remains as the search for truth takes Malebranche along the anagogic way:

Son mysticisme paraît celui du chrétien pieux, pénétré de la vanité des choses d'ici-bas, mais très éloigné d'admettre qu'il est parvenu au sommet de la voie illuminative ... L'union à Dieu, dont il parle sans cesse, n'a rien d'extatique et n'implique pas l'élan supra-intellectuel observé chez les grands mystiques. Elle se réduit à la connaissance de la vérité et à

1 Rancé wrote that "la grandeur de vostre resolution m'épouvantoit" (in OC, vol. XVIII, p. 72), conveying both the insistence of the enquiry and his surprise, even shock, at receiving it.

2 As A.J. Krailsheimer points out, Rancé had very strong ties with the Oratoire throughout his life (see Armand-Jean de Rancé, especially pp. 246-55).

3 L. Barbedette, "L'Influence augustinienne dans la philosophie de Malebranche" in RHR, 95 (1927), pp. 60-79, at p. 75. Blondel also talks of the "mystique intellectualiste" of Malebranche ("L'Anti-cartésianisme de Malebranche", p. 24).

l'amour de la vertu.¹

If there is no direct influence of the German or southern mystics, the formative significance of the Oratoire cannot be overstated. Breton has argued persuasively that Bérulle not Descartes was the true master of Malebranche,² and certainly the spirit of Bérullianism had by no means diminished by the time Malebranche entered the Oratoire in 1660. Condren, Bourgoing and Senault all sought to promote the essential doctrines of Bérulle: the divine immensity and the nothingness of the creature, the absorption of the soul in God and adherence in Christ. The pious novice would have breathed in such teachings if only unconsciously, and in regarding true philosophy as religion (indeed in rendering philosophy exclusively religious by making God the sole true cause and end),³ Malebranche is very much following in the tradition of Bérulle, perhaps even achieving precisely that mission in Christian philosophy that Bérulle had hoped Descartes would fulfil.

As has been seen, De la Recherche de la Vérité is basically a semi-Cartesian, semi-Augustinian exploration of the theme of self-knowledge, from which Malebranche ascends to knowledge of God. This is the starting-point of all

1 L. Barbedette, "Malebranche, l'homme" in RHR, 98 (1928), pp. 23-40, at pp. 38-39.

2 G. Breton, "Les origines de la philosophie de Malebranche" in BLE, 4 (1912), pp. 214-30. Cf. L. Lavelle's "Bérulle et Malebranche" in Bulletin de l'Association Fénelon, juillet 1948, pp. 1-43.

3 See especially Recherche VI², 3, and Eclaircissement XV. P. Nicéron in his "Notice nécrologique" wrote: "Ce qui me plaît davantage dans les ouvrages de notre philosophe, c'est qu'à l'exemple de saint Augustin, son héros, il a rendu la Philosophie Chrétienne; dans son système, tout mène à Dieu comme à la fin unique" (in Journal des Savants, 1715, p. 653, and cited by A. Cu villier in Essai sur la mystique de Malebranche, (Paris, 1954), p. 7).

mysticism, the first "demeure", in Saint Theresa's terms,¹ in the journey of the soul along the triple way, for knowledge of self reveals the basic inquiétude of the soul. As with many spiritualists of the seventeenth century, Augustine's "inquietum est cor nostrum" is the point of departure of the mystical life, leading to the self-renunciation, mortification of the senses and asceticism of the purgative life which precedes the illuminative and unitive lives.

This theme occurs frequently throughout Malebranche's work, but is best illustrated by the Méditations pour se disposer à l'humilité et à la pénitence, written to follow on from the Conversations chrétiennes.² The Méditations are short, simple pieces containing "certaines vérités essentielles",³ and what these truths are is made clear in the "Avertissement": "Le dessein des Méditations suivantes est d'abattre l'orgueil de l'esprit, et de le disposer à l'humilité et à la pénitence. L'homme est si peu de chose, qu'il suffit de le connoître pour le mépriser".⁴ Whereas the "Préface" to Recherche had begun with the grandeur of man and Recherche II³,⁵ had criticized Montaigne for degrading man to the level of animals, Malebranche now stresses the reverse side of Bérullian duality, namely the nothingness of man and reparation through Christ alone. The first Méditation⁵ elaborates this theme: "L'homme n'est qu'un pur néant par

1 In Arnauld d'Andilly's translation of the Château de l'âme (in Oeuvres, pp. 659-60).

2 The Méditations were first published in the second edition of the Conversations chrétiennes (Brussels, 1677).

3 Méditations, ed. A. Cuvillier (Paris, 1944), p. 103. This edition uses the text of the Méditations published in Paris in 1702, plus "Au lecteur" which is contained only in the 1715 edition; it is to Cuvillier's edition that reference is made here.

4 Ibid., p. 105.

5 "De l'homme considéré comme créature".

lui-même: il n'est que parce Dieu veut qu'il soit: et si Dieu cessoit seulement de vouloir que l'homme fût, l'homme ne seroit plus".¹ Man's existence depends wholly on the will of God; God can destroy man, not because He wants nothingness (He cannot want anything that is not good), but because - and here Malebranche follows the traditional Scholastic doctrine of continuous creation² also taken up by Bérulle and Descartes - He can cease to will man to be. Man is weak and corrupt, and can only will good "par l'impression continuelle de Dieu, qui le tourne et qui le pousse sans cesse vers lui".³ This is clearly related to the theory of occasional causes, but the emphasis is wholly on the theological, not the philosophical, implications of the doctrine, namely the necessity of grace in man's total dependence on God. Then, as Malebranche pursues his subject, there occurs one of the most thoroughly Neoplatonic passages in his entire output:

L'homme n'est que ténèbres par lui-même. Ce n'est point l'homme qui produit en lui les idées par lesquelles il apperçoit toutes choses: car il n'est pas à lui-même sa lumière. Et la philosophie m'apprenant que les objets ne peuvent pas former dans l'esprit les idées qui les représentent, il faut reconnoître qu'il n'y a que Dieu qui puisse nous éclairer. C'est le grand Soleil qui pénètre tout, et qui remplit tout de sa lumière. C'est le grand Maître qui instruit tous ceux qui viennent en ce monde: C'est et par lui et dans lui que nous voyons tout ce que nous voyons, et que nous pouvons voir tout ce que nous sommes capables de voir: parce que Dieu renfermant les idées ou les ressemblances de tous les êtres, et étant en lui comme nous sommes, in ipso enim vivimus, movemur, et sumus [Acts 17.28], nous y voyons, ou nous y pouvons voir successivement tous les êtres. Enfin c'est le monde intelligible dans lequel sont les esprits, et dans lequel ils apperçoivent le monde matériel qui n'est ni visible, ni intelligible par luy-même.⁴

This is a condensed version of the theory of vision in God,

1 Méditations, p. 107.

2 Cf. Entretiens VII, 7 (in OC, vol. XII, p. 157).

3 Méditations, p. 109.

4 Ibid., pp. 112-13.

but its tone is distinctly Neoplatonic (or at least Augustinian and, by extension, Neoplatonic). From the shadows of this world to the divine exemplars and the image of the sun illuminating the soul, both form and content are Neoplatonic. The Bérullian inspiration is fully apparent, underlined by the "élévations à Dieu" following each "Considération" and written in the lyrical, ecstatic language that Malebranche employs in his evocations of the love of truth,¹ but behind Bérulle is the long tradition of mysticism inspired by Neoplatonism.²

The movement of self-knowledge is two-fold.³ On the one hand, it recommends asceticism in the purgative life and Malebranche treats the passions at length in Recherche V,⁴ and insists on the necessity of the Christian losing himself totally in God as exemplified by the Oratorian ideal of the priest emulating the sacrifice of Christ; the Bérullian theme of annihilation occurs repeatedly in the works of practical piety even to the degree of total abandonment of intelligence in the manner of Saint Theresa's mystical passivity,⁵ although Malebranche takes care to dissociate himself from Quietism. On the other hand, it provides the introduction to the second

1 Cf. Recherche VI¹, 3, in OC, vol. II, pp. 260-61.

2 Similar "élévations" are to be found in the Méditations chrétiennes. That at the end of the fourth Méditation epitomizes Malebranche's synthesis of Neoplatonic and Christian motifs: "Aiez donc pitié de nous, et nous délivrez de la tyrannie de ce corps qui jette le trouble et la confusion dans toutes les facultez de nôtre ame" (in OC, vol. X, p. 44) - this reference to the Platonic notion of imprisonment and Plotinian plea for deliverance is equally a Pauline theme (Romans 7.24).

3 Cf. Eclaircissement X: "Il faut mourir pour voir Dieu, car l'âme s'unit à vérité à proportion qu'elle se détache du corps" (in OC, vol. III, p. 158).

4 A.H.T. Levi (in French Moralists, p. 337) discerns a similarity here with the Neostoic ethic, especially in Recherche V, 9 (in OC, vol. II, pp. 213-19).

5 Cf. Méditations chrétiennes IV, 1.

stage of the triple way, the illuminative life for which the purgative life prepares the soul; as Cuvillier writes:

"L'expérience spirituelle consiste chez lui, non pas dans l'abandon d'un moi qui se laisse vivre, à un instinct ou à une sympathie dirigée vers l'unique, mais tout au contraire en un effort pour se libérer du sensible, dans tous les sens de ce mot, pour déjouer les mirages trompeurs de l'imagination, pour s'élever vers le rationnel, l'abstrait et l'universel, - en un mot, en une ascension de l'esprit vers le pur intelligible".¹

There is a suggestion here of an abstract Neoplatonic mysticism, but this is not the whole truth, for Malebranche understands illumination in a very special way, as is made clear in the "Prière" that precedes the Méditations chrétiennes in which he addresses Christ as the Word or Light of Reason:

O sagesse éternelle, je ne suis point ma lumière à moi-même; et les corps qui m'environnent ne peuvent m'éclairer; les intelligences mêmes ne contenant point dans leur être la Raison qui les rend sages, ne peuvent communiquer cette Raison à mon esprit. Vous êtes seul la lumière des Anges et des Hommes: Vous êtes seul la Raison universelle des esprits: Vous êtes même la Sagesse du Père, Sagesse éternelle, immuable, nécessaire, qui rendez sages les créatures et même le Créateur, quoique d'une manière bien différente. O mon véritable et unique Maître, montrez-vous à moi: faites-moi voir la lumière en votre lumière ... Mais, ô Jesus, je vous prie de ne parler en moi que pour votre gloire, et de ne me faire connoître que vos grandeurs, car tous les trésors de la sagesse et de la science de Dieu même sont renfermez en vous [Col. 2.3]. Celui qui vous connoît, connoît votre Père: et celui qui vous connoît et votre Père, est parfaitement heureux [John 14.9 and 17.3]. Faites-moi donc connoître, ô Jesus, ce que vous êtes, et comment toutes choses subsistent en vous [Col. 1.16-20]. Pénétrez mon esprit de l'éclat de votre lumière: brûlez mon coeur de l'ardeur de votre amour: et donnez-moi dans le cours de cet Ouvrage, que je compose uniquement pour votre gloire, des expressions claires et véritables, vives et

¹ A. Cuvillier, Essai sur la mystique de Malebranche, p. 54.

animées, en un mot dignes de vous, et telles qu'elles puissent augmenter en moi et dans ceux qui voudroient bien méditer avec moi, la connoissance de vos grandeurs, et le sentiment de vos bienfaits.¹

This passage is thoroughly Bérullian in its inspiration and is rooted in Oratorian Christocentrism. And yet it is also profoundly original, for Malebranche has made reason itself a mystical concept.² Reason is not a human faculty nor even a human participation in divine Reason, but the direct illumination of the soul by the divine Word through Christ; it is "une véritable présence de Dieu en nous".³

Malebranche's epistemology of vision in God thus has the mystical consequence that all knowledge becomes contemplation, the union of the soul with the Word, the penetration of the soul by God, and the presence of God in the soul.⁴ It is, perhaps, for this reason that there is little place in Malebranche's spirituality for the mystical ecstasies of a Mme Acarie: by effectively combining the illuminative and unitive lives of the triple way, he has in fact made knowledge itself a state of unitive ecstasy.

The implications of such mystic passivity are clearly adjacent to Quietism, and the advocates of pure love were quick to claim Malebranche for their party. His reply to the Quietist interpretation of his work by the Benedictine, François Lamy, was the Traité de l'amour de Dieu.⁵ Here, and

1 In OC, vol. X, pp. 9-10.

2 Cf. Cuvillier: "Aux yeux de Malebranche, la connaissance elle-même est quelque chose de mystique: elle est une union avec la vérité, une illumination, une pénétration de l'âme par Dieu" (Essai sur la mystique de Malebranche, p. 69).

3 Ibid., p. 71.

4 Malebranche avoids ontologism, however, because the soul does not actually see God, but only receives the light of illumination from or, rather, in God.

5 First published at the end of the Traité de morale (Lyon, 1697).

in the associated letters and replies, Malebranche sets out to assert his orthodoxy and does so by defining the will in such a way as to make the notion of pure love, as understood by the Quietists, an impossibility. Preceding the act of will in Malebranche's logic, however, is what Blanchard regards as the single key doctrine that serves to situate him in the history of philosophy¹ and which is present in his thought from the opening pages of Recherche, namely the notion of attention. Indeed, his entire method is defined in terms of this concept: "Toute ma methode se reduit à une attention serieuse à ce qui m'éclaire et à ce qui me conduit".²

Attention occupies a central position in Malebranche's spirituality, and his definition of it reveals its significance: "L'attention de l'esprit n'est que son retour et sa conversion vers Dieu".³ Within the terms of this Neoplatonic dialectic of *ἐπιστροφή*, the soul's return to God, attention is the effort made by the soul to turn away from the material world of the senses, to perceive its true end and to apply itself to the love of truth. It is, thus, the constant state of the enlightened soul, the necessary condition of annihilation and asceticism, of the grace of illumination, and of perfect love.

The converse of attention is obviously inattention. In the perspective of the pessimistic Augustinian, the misery of fallen man is due to the perversion of attention as a result of Original Sin which turned man away from God and spiritual truth to being the slave of the body and sensible goods.

1 P. Blanchard, L'Attention à Dieu selon Malebranche (Bruges, 1956), p. 11.

2 Entretiens XIV, 4, in OC, vol. XII, p. 337.

3 Recherche "Préface", in OC, vol. I, p. 17.

Arguing back from here, though, it appears that the Fall itself was a kind of inattention and that Adam's sin lay in turning his attention away from God's light and trusting too much in his own light:

Adam, qui connoissoit clairement toutes ces choses [i.e. wherein lay his sovereign good], devoit incessamment estre sur ses gardes. Il devoit ne point s'arrêter au plaisir qu'il goûtoit, de peur de se laisser distraire, et de se perdre en se laissant corrompre. Il devoit rester ferme dans la présence de Dieu, ne s'arrester qu'à sa lumière, et faire taire ses sens. Mais se fiant trop à soi-même: sa lumière s'étant dissipée par le goût des plaisirs sensibles, ou par un sentiment confus d'une joye présomptueuse; et s'étant ainsi distrait insensiblement de celui qui faisoit véritablement toute sa force et toute sa félicité; un sentiment vif de complaisance pour sa femme, l'a fait tomber dans la désobéissance: et il a été justement puni par la rébellion de ses sens, auxquels il s'étoit volontairement soumis.¹

Considered thus, the Fall has been intellectualized; it has become something of a Neoplatonic Fall, a loss of divine light brought about by a lack of attention to spiritual good and a preoccupation with material things, and, as such, it suggests the fall of Plotinus (Enneads V, 1) and more particularly that described by Aristophanes in Ficino's De Amore: "Cecedit autem animus noster in corpus, cum, praetermisso divino, solo suo usus est lumine ac se ipso cepit esse contentus".²

Although the systems of Malebranche and Bérulle are in some respects quite different (Bérulle, of course, has no theories of vision in God or occasional causes), both share this same basic perspective. It has been seen how the fundamental significance of self-knowledge is the same for Malebranche as for the École française as a whole. Another equally important parallel is in the idea that man is defined

¹ Méditations, ed. Cuvillier, pp. 121-22.

² Ficino, De Amore, ed. Marcel, pp. 172-73.

"par sa référence à Dieu".¹ Both Bérulle and Malebranche centre their view of the human condition on God and the Incarnate Word. As a philosopher, though, Malebranche develops the consequences of his Theo- and Christocentrism in a more radical and thorough-going manner than the mystical theologian. This is most obvious in his epistemology, but also in the idea of attention. Self-knowledge is essential as the first stage of attention, but it is no more than the prelude to attention to God. Equally, attention is vital to the process of acquiring knowledge; it is in effect the occasional cause of illumination. Attention is thus an indispensable feature of the spiritual life, the foundation of the anagogic way guiding man at every stage. Blanchard arrives at a definition that makes it "un moment d'une dialectique totale",² but really it is more than a moment: it is a continuum within a dialectic of its own. Indeed, it is very like a Bérullian état. For attention to the Maître intérieur reveals the principal truths about man, and the existence and attributes of God,³ and so gives the initial impulse to the soul's journey in the intelligible world, but whilst it is the constant state of the soul in the acquisition of truth in the purgative and illuminative lives, it is also the means to the consummation of the unitive life.

1 P. Blanchard, L'Attention à Dieu selon Malebranche p. 87. See especially Recherche I.

2 Ibid., p. 27. Cf. Blanchard's attempt at a general definition: "L'attention est l'effort, le travail, le combat de l'esprit, aidé par la grâce, par lequel, se détachant de l'apparent et du vraisemblable, il se tourne résolument vers le solide et le vrai, pour le fixer, se l'approprier et en jouir" (ibid., p. 24).

3 Malebranche has a preference for the ontological proof, as it is "une preuve de simple vue" for "les esprits attentifs" (see: Recherche III², 6; IV, 9; VI², 6; Entretiens II and VII).

Attention to God opens the way for the conquest of the will and its application to pure and unifying love: without continuous attention man is liable to be seduced by the sensible world; with it he can ascend to the intelligible.

Malebranche's definition of the will, whether divine or human, is unequivocal: to will is to love.¹ In God, the will is reflexive for, if the will is love of perfection and God is perfection, God must love Himself.² Similarly, the human will is the soul itself in its capacity to love. Man cannot have a clear idea of the will, any more than he does of the soul proper (which, though intelligible in itself, is unintelligible to human intelligence), but only a confused sentiment of it derived from his conscience de soi. The general features of the will in Malebranche are, however, invincible love of God and order, the desire for happiness or beatitude, freedom and what Mme Dreyfus describes as "pouvoir sans efficace".³ The latter two characteristics relate to Malebranche's doctrine of grace, and his reconciliation of occasionalism with free will is a strictly theological problem;⁴ the former, however, especially because of their identification or amalgamation in the definition of the will, combining both end and motive in an Augustinian manner, are of greater significance here.

1 Malebranche's theory of the will is treated at length in G. Dreyfus's La Volonté selon Malebranche (Paris, 1958).

2 Traité de l'amour de Dieu in OC, vol. XIV, p. 7. This divine self-love is the foundation of God's wholly independent voluntarism in creating and continuously sustaining the world in which he acts uniquely "pour sa gloire" (Traité de la nature et de la grâce, ed. Dreyfus, p. 181).

3 La Volonté selon Malebranche, p. 215.

4 Briefly, Malebranche achieves this reconciliation by denying the physical reality of sin and defining it as the love of particular goods, rather than the universal, infinite Good, which is God.

Whatever Bossuet's initial reservations and fears concerning Malebranche's system - and they were at first considerable - they were tempered by his reading of the Entretiens and there can be no doubt that he would have been greatly pleased by the Traité de l'amour de Dieu which he read in manuscript in 1697 and which supported his opposition to Fénelon in the Quietist controversy.¹ Malebranche's writings on Quietism are to a large extent écrits de circonstance, written to elucidate his position on the problem of disinterested love after François Lamy had claimed him for the Quietists in the third volume of La Connaissance de soi-même.² Still, as befits an Oratorian constantly preoccupied with spiritual problems, Malebranche's theology of love in the Traité de l'amour de Dieu is both fully developed and wholly consistent with his metaphysics.

Malebranche's basic attitude towards disinterested love is summarized succinctly in his Réponse générale aux lettres du R.P. Lamy (15 February 1700) which further expands the argument of the Traité: "Dire qu'il y a un Amour indépendant du désir d'être heureux; et que la volonté, entant qu'elle est capable d'aimer, est autre chose que ce desir ... me paroît une contradiction manifeste".³ The Quietist notion of pure love is excluded by Malebranche's very conception of the will and its corollary that grace is a delectation, as is made clear in the "Advertissement" to the Traité (which, though written in the third person, is probably by

1 Malebranche's involvement is treated by Y. de Montcheuil in Malebranche et le quiétisme (Paris, 1946) and "Amour désintéressé et désir du bonheur selon Malebranche" in Deucalion, 2 (1947), pp. 253-69.

2 5 vols., Paris, 1694-98 (vol. III appeared in 1697).

3 In OC, vol. XIV, p. 178.

Malebranche himself):

Pour bien comprendre de quoi il s'agit dans les pièces qui sont ici recueillies, il faut sçavoir que le P. Malebranche soutient que l'amour désintéressé, ou tout à fait indépendant du désir d'être heureux, est impossible. Il croit que l'amour de bienveillance qu'on se porte naturellement à soi-même, ou ce désir invincible que nous avons pour la perfection, et la félicité de nôtre être, est le motif général ou le principe naturel de tous les mouvemens de l'ame: et que la volonté, entant qu'elle est capable d'aimer, n'est que ce désir du solide bonheur que Dieu imprime sans cesse en nous pour nous porter à l'aimer comme nôtre fin. Le P. Lami Bénédictin au contraire prétend que cet amour désintéressé est possible, et que la volonté est différente du désir d'être heureux. Voilà la différence essentielle des sentimens de ces deux Auteurs.¹

Montcheuil provides the following gloss:

Pour bien comprendre l'impossibilité de l'amour indépendant du désir d'être heureux, Malebranche fait appel à deux ordres de considérations qui engagent sa philosophie et sa théologie. Il argumente d'abord en partant de la nature de la volonté: notre volonté est constituée par le désir même du bonheur; ensuite, en partant de la nécessité de la grâce pour aimer Dieu: la grâce est un saint plaisir dont l'attrait nous fait agir.²

For all the rigour of his occasionalism and theory of grace, there is something here that is redolent of François de Sales, and it is that - to borrow Malebranche's own terminology - grace has become the occasional cause of man's (natural) movement to God. In defining the will as love of perfection and grace as a delectation, Malebranche is following François de Sales who in turn follows Ficino; indeed, the Traité de l'amour de Dieu seems directly indebted to the Florentine master of spiritual love.³ This sets Malebranche well apart from Jansenists and Quietists alike and leads towards a reconciliation with the semi-Pelagian position, although his insistence on the necessity, gratuity

1 In OC, vol. XIV, p. 3.

2 Malebranche et le quiétisme, p. 16.

3 This is certainly Levi's contention (French Moralists, pp. 314-16 and p. 333).

and efficacy of grace arrests any tendency towards the hyper-rationalism of Pelagianism.¹

Starting from God's knowledge and love of his own perfect, self-sufficient substance, and the definition of His will as this love of Himself,² Malebranche proceeds to consider man's will or love as parallel to divine love and even identical to it, though not in the Canfieldian sense of semi-passive conformity, but because the object of both is the same, namely "l'ordre immuable des perfections divines".³ Thus he continues:

Comme Dieu n'agit que pour lui, il n'a fait les Intelligences capables de connoître et d'aimer que pour le connoître et pour l'aimer, que pour connoître la vérité et l'ordre, juger selon la vérité, aimer selon l'ordre; pour juger en un mot comme il juge, aimer comme il aime. La perfection de nôtre nature consiste donc à consulter la Raison et à la suivre: j'entens cette souveraine Raison qui éclaire tous les hommes, cette lumière intérieure qui nous fait distinguer le vrai du faux, le juste de l'injuste.⁴

34

It is in this idea of "lumière intérieure" that one can see how illumination and love are necessarily closely related, and this is reflected in the duality of grace elaborated in the Traité de la nature et de la grâce:

La lumière est la grace du Créateur: la délectation est la grace du Réparateur. La lumière est communiquée par Jesus Christ, comme sagesse éternelle; la délectation est donnée de Jesus Christ comme sagesse incarnée. La lumière dans son origine n'étoit que la nature: la délectation a toujours été pure grace. La lumière après le péché ne nous est accordée, qu'à cause des mérites de Jesus Christ: la délectation nous est donnée à cause des mérites et par l'efficace de la puissance de Jesus Christ. Enfin la lumière se répand dans nos esprits, selon nos diverses volontés, et nos diverses applications, ... mais la délectation de la grace ne se répand dans nos coeurs, que selon les divers desirs de

1 Cf. G. Dreyfus's "Introduction" to her edition of the Traité de la nature et de la grâce, p. 45.

2 In OC, vol. XIV, p. 7.

3 Ibid., p. 8.

4 Ibid., pp. 8-9.

l'ame de Jesus Christ.¹

"Grâce de lumière" and "grâce de sentiment" belong to distinct orders, but they are linked through Christ, the Incarnate Word, who is both the means of illumination and the (occasional) cause of grace.

As God wants man to want perfection, man must first be made to recognize wherein lies his true perfection and hence beatitude; man must then like what he knows or perceives, for he can love only what pleases him: "Il faut bien remarquer qu'on ne peut aimer que ce qui plaît; ni haïr que ce qui déplaît. Si l'on aime l'ordre, c'est que la beauté de l'ordre plaît; si l'on aime les objets sensibles, c'est parce qu'ils plaisent. Il faut dire la même chose de ce qu'on haït. C'est qu'il est absolument impossible de rien vouloir, si rien ne nous touche: il est impossible que l'ame soit ébranlée, qu'elle recoive quelque impression, quelque mouvement, si rien ne la frappe".² Platonic resonances can be detected here, particularly Ficino's De Amore, and when Malebranche defines the true delectation as the "plaisir éclairé, lumineux, raisonnable, qui porte à aimer la vraie cause qui le produit, à aimer le vrai bien, le bien de l'esprit",³ the Platonic echoes are again unmistakable.

Malebranche's basic argument, then, is that God has implanted in man the love of beatitude, and that, as man can love only by movement of the will desirous of beatitude, all love of beatitude is therefore interested. Man seeks through the will the divine perfection which illuminates the mind.

1 Traité de la nature et de la grâce, ed. Dreyfus, p. 224.

2 Traité de l'amour de Dieu in OC, vol. XIV, p. 9.

3 Ibid., p. 9.

Accordingly, contemplation, pleasure and love are inextricably linked:

Les Saints contemplent les perfections divines: la beauté de ces perfections leur plaît, c'est-à-dire que la vûë ou la perception dont ces perfections les affectent est vive et agréable, car le plaisir n'est qu'une perception agréable. Cette contemplation agréable est donc leur béatitude formelle, ou les rend heureux. Or, cette contemplation est certainement inséparable des perfections contemplées: car la perception est inséparable de l'idée qui la cause, et ne peut se rapporter qu'à cette idée. Donc l'amour du plaisir est le motif qui fait aimer Dieu comme la fin: c'est le motif qui fait aimer ce qui plaît, ou ce qui produit la perception agréable. Car enfin, une perception sans idée n'est point une perception: il n'y a point de plaisir dans l'ame, lors que rien ne lui plaît.¹

This is the true theological significance of vision in God: because there is no distinction between types of perception, as all ideas are in the mind of God,² the act of knowing is both the beginning and the culmination of the act of loving. The circularity of progression and return is thus complete, and God is loved both for Himself and as man's summum bonum: "C'est nôtre souverain bien, c'est la fin où doivent tendre tous les mouvemens dont il est la véritable cause".³

When Malebranche defines pure love as the conformity of the will to the will of God,⁴ then, he differs from the Quietists in the interpretation of this formula in that both the end and the motive come from God: "Tout amour de Dieu est nécessairement intéressé, en ce sens que le plaisir en est le motif, en prenant le plaisir généralement pour la modification de l'ame, pour la perception agréable qu'excite en elle tout ce qui plaît"⁵ and "le desir d'être heureux est

1 In OC, vol. XIV, p. 11.

2 Ibid., pp. 12-13.

3 Ibid., p. 15.

4 "L'amour pur n'est qu'une entière conformité de nôtre volonté avec celle de Dieu" (ibid., p. 17).

5 Ibid., p. 21.

un motif dont Dieu seul est la cause".¹ This follows logically from the theory of vision in God, but what allows Malebranche to avoid the Quietist position is primarily a Neoplatonic conception of the will which, despite his adherence to Bérullian Christocentrism in spiritual practice, tends to diminish the importance of grâce de sentiment of which, in theory at least, Christ has become no more than the occasional cause within the immutable laws of eternal order, and to emphasize grâce de lumière and the pleasure of the illuminated mind in what it perceives. By making grace a delectation that prompts the natural movement of the will, Malebranche is able to adopt a compromise between the standpoints of Bossuet and Fénelon:

Je croi donc et j'ai toujours crû, que la volonté, entant qu'elle est capable d'aimer, n'est que le desir d'être heureux: que l'amour desinteressé indépendant de ce desir est impossible; et qu'ainsi tout amour libre de Dieu est amour de concupiscence ou interessé en ce sens, que le saint plaisir de la grace est nécessairement préalable à cet amour, parce qu'avant de consentir à ce saint plaisir, il le faut sentir, ou actuellement ou en esperance. De sorte que c'est du desir naturel d'être heureux, solidement heureux, que Dieu par sa grace tire les motifs qui nous portent à l'aimer.²

If Malebranche's definition of the will is seemingly influenced by Ficinian Neoplatonism,³ then so too is his treatment of the dynamic of love: "L'ame est poussée sans cesse vers le bien en général: elle desire de posseder tous les biens: elle ne veut jamais borner son amour: il n'y a point de bien qui lui paroisse tel, qu'elle refuse d'aimer".⁴ In the Traité de la nature et de la grâce,⁵ Malebranche

1 In OC, p. 22.

2 Ibid., p. 165.

3 Cf. A.H.T. Levi, French Moralists, p.316.

4 Traité de la nature et de la grâce, ed. Dreyfus, p. 244.

5 Especially Traité III¹, 6-8 (ed. Dreyfus, pp. 244-46).

develops what Levi describes as "the notion that love is a dynamism which carries us on to our supreme good unless stopped by the soul from going beyond some particular and partial good".¹ This suggests both the Augustinian doctrine of two delectations and the Neoplatonic conception of the ascent of the soul. The former is to be found in Entretiens IV, 20-21, especially, where Malebranche distinguishes between the two opposing goods of instinct and of reason and places them in balance, thereby evoking the idea of the spiritual combat: "C'est que pour acquérir l'équilibre d'une liberté parfaite, puisque nous avons un poids qui nous porte vers la terre, il nous faut un poids contraire qui nous relève vers le ciel".² This is immediately followed by an exhortation to the spiritual life: "Rentrions donc incessamment en nous-mêmes, mon cher Ariste, et tâchons de faire taire non seulement nos sens, mais encore nôtre imagination et nos passions ... suivons la lumière de la Raison, qui doit conduire les jugemens de nôtre esprit, et régler les mouvemens de nôtre coeur".³ Echoes of Du Vair, Lipsius, Charron, Camus and other moralists of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries are clearly discernible, but the emphasis on the inner light of reason is also an aspect of the typically Malebranchian attention to the voice of the Maître intérieur; the Neoplatonic connotations of both, however, are fully apparent.

Equally, if the ascent of the soul does not begin with the beauties of this world in Malebranche's system, as it does in the Platonic theory, because his Theocentric

1 In French Moralists, p. 82, n. 1.

2 In OC, vol. XII, pp. 105-106.

3 Ibid., p. 106.

epistemology immediately and directly associates the soul with the realm of the divine Ideas, there is no mistaking the Neoplatonic overtones when he writes of contemplation and the return of the soul to its divine origin: "La meditation vous affermira l'esprit, et vous donnera de l'ardeur et des ailes pour passer les créatures et vous élever jusqu'à la presence du Créateur".¹ For all the metaphysical foundations and superstructure of le malebranchisme, there lies at its heart a simple, lyrical spiritualism which, in its élévations and affirmation of the contemplative life, links Malebranche, if only indirectly, with the Neoplatonic tradition of Ficino. Ultimately, meditation of the divinity is the irreducible core of Malebranche's system, and it is this profound spirituality with which Bérulle impregnated the Oratoire as a whole.

J. Wehrlé sums up the philosophy or rationalist theology of le malebranchisme in the three words, "complexité, systématisation, hétérogénéité",² and such are certainly its salient characteristics. In a historical perspective, his ambition attempt to place God firmly at the centre of all human activity can be regarded as deeply flawed, if not exactly a failure, but his highly original synthesis and transformation of many doctrines inherited from very diverse sources nonetheless marks the apogee of French Christian philosophy in the seventeenth century. It is, of course, this very originality of Malebranche in developing the theory of vision in God and doctrine of occasional causes, which constitute the central features of his Theocentric system,

1 In OC, vol. XII, pp. 47-48.

2 J. Wehrlé, art. "Malebranche", in DTC, vol. IX, col. 1802.

that makes it difficult to pinpoint specific influences, and not least because, like Descartes, he does not cite sources that are not biblical or patristic. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the spirit of le malebranchisme was informed by the intellectual and religious climate of Bérulle's Oratoire and that its essential teachings stand in the broad tradition of (Neo)-Platonic idealism: the metaphysics of Plato, Plotinus and, more directly, Augustine lie at the heart of Malebranche's philosophy, its exemplarism and its idealist epistemology. No doubt, it was Cartesianism that first roused his interest in philosophy and provided a method and a terminology, but this Cartesian chiquenaude served mainly to set in motion a theology of which Bérulle was already the true master, and, as Malebranche's thought grew away from the impetus imparted by his original philosophical conversion, the more profound influence of the Oratoire, with its preference for Plato, Augustine and the Neoplatonists, can be discerned more readily in the spiritual writings of his mature years.

Yet, even if le malebranchisme is to a large extent a rational exposition of the Oratorian spirit that Malebranche had imbibed since 1660, it is important to stress the way in which he differs fundamentally from his Oratorian predecessors, indeed even from his Cartesian confrères, Thomassin and Lamy. For many so-called Cartesians, including Malebranche's Oratorian predecessors and contemporaries, the philosophy of Descartes represented less an intellectual revolution than a source of clear ideas on God and the soul that did away with the aridities of Scholasticism. Malebranche, however, was the first major theologian to confront directly the fundamental problems posed by the

philosophy of Descartes, and it is his reaction to the consequences of this revolution that sets him apart. For, on the one hand, he is the last great representative of the ontological approach, the culmination of a long tradition of Neoplatonic metaphysics, epitomized by the Oratoire in France, but, on the other, he is a key figure, perhaps the key figure, in the transition to the cause-effective approach of eighteenth-century philosophy. That Malebranche has a foot in both camps explains his position as the aboutissement of the distinctly philosophical, as opposed to Humanist or mystical, tradition of Neoplatonism in the seventeenth century: the imprint of the Oratoire inevitably remains, but a certain amount of excavation is necessary in order to uncover its vestiges; moreover, by adopting and adapting Cartesian premisses in an original manner, interpreting Descartes in the light of his own spiritual training and attempting to resolve systematically the inherent difficulties of his thought, Malebranche confirms that the entire framework within which philosophical and theological questions were to be asked and answered had changed drastically. What the consequences of this are for the religious thought of Bossuet and Fénelon will be seen in the following chapters.

8. BOSSUET

It has been seen in our study of Malebranche how the theological edifice of the Counter-Reformation and its immediate inheritors has finally been superseded.

Neoplatonism had been a central feature of much of Counter-Reformation theology and so, if le cas Malebranche does not mark an explicit rejection of Neoplatonism along with the unificatory theology of the Renaissance and the early seventeenth century, then, at least, a distinct shift is discernible from the causality of an inherited tradition to what is in effect no more than a certain, rather elusive compatibility with it. What has brought this about is no less than an intellectual revolution. Clearly Descartes appears as the foremost representative of the revolt, but he was not its sole instigator. Instead, rather paradoxically, Descartes forms both the culmination of a long movement in French thought and a thoroughly new point of departure. For, in a historical perspective, the reaction against the speculative, Aristotelian theology of the Schools, instituted by Aquinas,¹ which reached crisis-point at the time of Descartes, really dates back to the late fifteenth

¹ Summa Theologiae, Prima Pars, q. 1, art. 1-8.

century when an intellectual and spiritual revival began within the Catholic Church which was ultimately to spawn both the Reform and the Counter-Reformation as consequences of the same tendency.

The Renaissance, in its quest for a simple, effective theology, found in Neoplatonism a structure to support its unificatory spirit, and it was thus that Neoplatonism survived into the seventeenth century as a continuous, indeed increasingly potent presence. The Counter-Reformation represents the culmination of this long movement, and not just the revival of an old force.

In his article "La crise de la théologie au temps de Descartes",¹ Henri Gouhier identifies two currents within this movement against speculative Scholasticism, namely mysticism and positive theology. To these two categories, we would add a third, namely that of a unificatory theology inspired by and based in Neoplatonism, which both overlaps with the mystical tendency and constitutes a distinct tradition of Humanist apologetics. Nevertheless, this amendment made, we would agree with Gouhier's conclusion: "La théologie positive et la théologie mystique ont permis de congédier la vieille servante sans la remplacer: Descartes propose les services d'une plus jeune".² Positive theology, of course, continued to flourish in the late seventeenth century with the Oratorian Richard Simon

1 In RTP, 4 (1954), pp. 19-54.

2 Ibid., p. 54.

its leading exponent, but Cartesianism did indeed serve to dismiss unificatory, Humanist theology, and to a lesser degree mystical theology, along with the sterile complexities of Scholasticism. It is this "new servant" that Malebranche employs and with which all the theologians of his generation had to come to terms. The modern theology ushered in by Descartes and exemplified by Malebranche may not have been universally accepted, but it could not be ignored as it had radically altered the nature of questions of theology and philosophy and introduced a new framework within which they were to be answered.

Our final two religious thinkers illustrate perfectly the consequences of this revolution. For both Bossuet and Fénelon were active during the period of the triumph of Cartesianism in France and were constrained to confront the problems posed by Descartes and Malebranche, and yet, although both embrace much of Cartesianism, they rather belong to an earlier intellectual generation. Fénelon is, if you like, something of an epigone, the foremost spiritual writer of an age increasingly less noted for its spirituality; Bossuet, on the other hand, is quite simply a conservative. As a pair, though, they represent the aboutissements of the two strains of the Neoplatonic heritage with which we have been largely concerned, the mystical and the Humanist or apologetic tendencies, just as Malebranche epitomizes the subsumption of the more purely philosophical aspects of Neoplatonism in the blend of

Augustinian and Cartesian theology which increasingly serves to characterize the thought of late seventeenth-century France. More importantly, however, Bossuet and Fénelon are the last links in the chain of causality within the Neoplatonic tradition, which, in the case of Malebranche, has been reduced to a mere compatibility.

Born in Dijon in 1627 "dans un moment du siècle où le sentiment religieux paraît avoir été très vif dans la bourgeoisie française",¹ Bossuet is very much the son of the French Counter-Reformation. His family seems to have been particularly devout and his father had close connections with the Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement; in 1635, at the age of seven, he was tonsured, and perhaps also confirmed, by Sébastien Zamet, Bishop of Langres and a close friend of Condren, who seems to have played a significant part in forming the fundamental religious sentiments of a young man destined for the priesthood.² For six years, then, from 1636 to 1642, Bossuet studied lettres humaines at the Collège des Godrans in Dijon, which was at that time run by the Jesuits, where he acquired the basis of his thorough classical training and perhaps also a more optimistic Humanism which was to counter-balance his essential

1 A. Rébelliau, Bossuet, 5th ed. (Paris, 1922), p. 6. The bibliography of secondary works on Bossuet is vast, but of distinctly variable quality; the best studies are the modern, scholarly works of Thérèse Goyet, Jacques Truchet and J. Le Brun.

2 See J. Le Brun, La Spiritualité de Bossuet (Paris, 1972).

Augustinianism, before moving to Paris in October 1642 to study philosophy, and then theology at the Collège de Navarre, where he finally gained his bonnet de docteur on 16 May 1652, shortly after his ordination (16 March 1652). During his years at the Collège de Navarre, his great mentor was the prominent scholar and critic of Jansenism, Nicolas Cornet.¹ Other important influences on his spiritual and intellectual development were Philippe Cospéan, Bishop of Aire, then of Lisieux, a close friend of Bérulle and François de Sales, and an habitué of the Hôtel Acarie, the Dominican reformer P. Antoine Lequieu, and, in particular, Saint Vincent de Paul whose inspiration affected the active apostolate of the young priest. At the same time, Bossuet developed many friends in erudite circles and was introduced into the Cabinet Dupuy, but, although he was encouraged to embark on a life of scholarship and enjoyed many powerful patrons in the capital, he left Paris for Metz immediately after the defence of his thesis. Bossuet had been a canon of Metz since 1640, and it was there that, inspired by the spirit of the Catholic Reform, he began the first stage in his long career in the Church, undertaking a wide range of apostolic activities "selon l'esprit et suivant les directives de M. Vincent".² The period 1652-70, then, first in Metz and then in Paris, saw Bossuet highly active

¹ Bossuet pronounced his Oraison funèbre on 27 June 1663.

² Le Brun, La Spiritualité de Bossuet, p. 59.

as a preacher, waging a theological crusade against libertins, Protestants and Jews alike, in the manner of a François de Sales or any other prominent representative of the Counter-Reformation.¹

¹ It is noteworthy that Bossuet pronounced the Oraison Funèbre of François Bourgoing, Condren's successor as Supérieur Général of the Oratoire, at the Oratoire in Saint-Honoré on 4 December 1662. This encomium contains the finest evocation of the aims and achievements of Bérulle and the spirit of the Oratoire: "En ce temps, Pierre de Bérulle, homme vraiment illustre et recommandable, à la dignité duquel j'ose dire que même la pourpre romaine n'a rien ajouté, tant il était déjà relevé par le mérite de sa vertu et de sa science, commençait à faire luire à toute l'Eglise gallicane les lumières les plus pures et les plus sublimes du sacerdoce chrétien et de la vie ecclésiastique. Son amour immense pour l'Eglise lui inspira le dessein de former une compagnie, à laquelle il n'a point voulu donner un autre esprit que l'esprit même de l'Eglise, ni d'autres règles que ses canons, ni d'autres supérieurs que ses évêques, ni d'autres liens que sa charité, ni n'autres vœux solennels que ceux du baptême et du sacerdoce. Là, une sainte liberté fait un saint engagement: on obéit sans dépendre, on gouverne sans commander; toute l'autorité est dans la douceur, et le respect s'entretient sans le secours de la crainte. La charité, qui bannit la crainte, opère un si grand miracle; et sans autre joug qu'elle-même, elle sait non seulement captiver, mais encore anéantir la volonté propre. Là, pour former de vrais prêtres, on les mène à la source de la vérité: ils ont toujours en main les saints livres, pour en rechercher sans relâche la lettre par l'étude, l'esprit par l'oraison, la profondeur par la retraite, l'efficace par la pratique, la fin par la charité, à laquelle tout se termine, et qui est l'unique trésor du christianisme: Christiani nominis thesaurus, comme parle Tertullien" (Oeuvres Orautoires, ed. J. Labarcq and revised by Urbain and Levesque, 7 vols. (Paris, 1914-26), vol. IV, pp. 407-8. This marks the beginning of Bossuet's long relation with the Oratoire. His Oratorian friends included Senault, Thomassin, Lamy and Mascaron, and P. Leconte placed the Oratorian library at his disposal. After his enthronement as Bishop of Meaux, Bossuet's links with the Oratoire, especially the Collège de Juilly where he preached frequently, became still closer. Even Malebranche, reconciled with Bossuet after early differences, attended his funeral. See A. Ingold, Bossuet à Juilly (Paris, 1883).

Much has been made of the apparent contradiction or ambiguity in Bossuet's attitude to reason.¹ It is frequently maintained that, at the beginning of his career, Bossuet was wholly hostile to any degree of autonomy of reason, rejecting the idea of all Christian philosophy, including even Aquinas's Aristotelianism, but that, during his years as tutor to the Dauphin, his attitude softened to the extent of becoming favourable even to Cartesianism. Certainly it is true that, in the period prior to 1660, one finds in the Oeuvres Oratoires a strong proclamation of the folly of the Cross.² Yet, the fact that in the Discours sur l'histoire universelle Bossuet scorns reason and insists on the triumph of faith alone³ and in the much later Traité de la Concupiscence (written in 1694) he attacks "la science curieuse" and again insists that "la foi et l'humilité sont les seuls guides qu'il faut suivre",⁴ argues against the notion of a simple development in his attitude. On the contrary, any evolution is really no more than a shift of emphasis according to changing circumstances. For Bossuet was essentially a professional militant of the Church, and, as such, he adapted his writing to the needs of a particular occasion, whether preaching to

1 Cf. J. Truchet, La Prédication de Bossuet, 2 vols. (Paris, 1960), vol. II.

2 Cf. Panégistique de saint François d'Assise (OO, vol. I, pp. 188-194) and Sermon sur la Loi de Dieu (OO, vol. I, p. 327).

3 Discours II, 25.

4 In Oeuvres Complètes, ed. F. Lachat, 31 vols. (Paris, 1862-66), vol. VII, p. 429.

Protestants or libertins, teaching history or philosophy to the Dauphin, or inveighing against the Quietists; different occasions clearly require different, rational or anti-rational, arguments.

Although the Traité de la Connaissance de Dieu et de Soi-Même in particular stands apart with its Thomist, or perhaps rather Cartesian, confidence in reason capable of advancing alone with faith coming after to crown the edifice constructed by a largely independent reason, Bossuet's attitude to faith and reason is largely consistent and essentially Augustinian. He is wary of reason,¹ but at the same time he accepts that authority can be confirmed by both faith and reason, for both are the product of divine illumination which reveals the fundamental Truth which is his constant goal. Considered thus, then, the true conflict is not between faith and reason, but between faith and the passions, and this perspective explains Bossuet's hostility to reason in his Traité de la Concupiscence where he attacks not the divine reason which supports faith, but the amour-propre of vain intellectual curiosity. For Bossuet, both faith and reason are an adhesion to eternal Truth, with, at the heart of this fundamental doctrine, the image of God as the source of all light that illuminates man's soul. Thus,

¹ Note the significant article of the Catéchisme de Meaux, "Ne peut-on pas aussi excéder dans la recherche des sciences honnêtes? - Oui, quand on les désire avec trop d'ardeur, et qu'on s'y applique davantage qu'à la piété" (OC, vol. V, p. 101.)

in the Sermon sur le Dimanche de la Quinquagésime of 1667, he refers to the pseudo-Dionysius's humiliation of reason,¹ but then returns to the central Augustinian theme of illumination: "La foi est le chemin à l'intelligence. Si nous présentons à Dieu un esprit vide de ses pensées propres, Dieu le remplira de ses lumières".² This is the true method of Bossuet epitomised in the "Prière à Jésus-Christ" which heads the Elévations sur les Mystères: "... toute ma connoissance ne consistera qu'à réveiller et à me rendre attentif aux simples et pures idées que je trouverai en moy-mesme, dans les lumières de la foy, ou peut-estre dans celles de la raison, aidée et dirigée par la foy mesme".³ Bossuet's Augustinianism is perhaps tinged here with the Cartesian doctrine of innate ideas, but the essential Neoplatonic notion of illumination remains apparent, and it is this that characterizes his attitude to reason throughout his work. For, "celui qui a le mieux saisi la thèse augustinienne, celui qui l'a développée le plus fortement, c'est Bossuet".⁴

If this is the theory, then it is an important biographical fact that in practice Bossuet was a notably scholarly and erudite man of the Church. Even when

1 "[Saint Denis Aréopagite] dit que nous ne sommes capables d'entendre Dieu que par une entière cessation de toute notre intelligence: Πάσης τῆς γνώσεως ἀνενεργηστέ" (OO, vol. V, pp. 234-5.) The reference is to the Mystical Theology I (in PG III, col. 1001).

2 Ibid., p. 238.

3 Elévations sur les mystères, ed. M. Dréano (Paris, 1962), p. 76.

4 C. Chesneau, Le P. Yves de Paris, vol. II, p. 276.

fulminating against the misuse of reason in his early apologetic sermons against the libertins, he could not deny or disguise his erudition. It is in his Humanist-inspired erudition that one can see how the Augustinian Bossuet is still the inheritor of the Renaissance spirit. Indeed, in many ways, he reflects the duality within Augustine himself. For, on the one hand, there is the pessimistic Augustine of the anti-Pelagian writings with their emphasis on the Fall, sin, and the discontinuity between Creator and Creation, but, on the other hand, there is the more optimistic, Humanist Augustine of the early philosophical dialogues. It is the latter aspect of Augustine's work which is consonant with, and indeed largely inspired by, Neoplatonism, and which Bossuet inherited from the Renaissance and the early seventeenth century, if tempered by the more severe Augustinianism of the later seventeenth century. It is this Humanist Augustinianism with its Neoplatonic core which tends to render Bossuet something of an anachronism, or at least a thorough conservative, the product of a generation now largely superseded.

The profound erudition of Bossuet is best illustrated by the Discours sur l'histoire universelle, a review of world history based on Augustine's notion of Providence in De Civitate Dei. In his survey of ancient history, he draws widely on Polybius, Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon and many other classical sources, including of course Plato. Thérèse Goyet has assessed Bossuet's "utilisation de Platon" in the

Discours,¹ and it is worth noting, with her, the way in which he has exploited the Laws and the Republic in particular, for it typifies his attitude to non-scriptural or non-patristic authority. Although Plato was not at all regarded as a political philosopher in seventeenth-century France,² Bossuet's close reading of the works of Plato has provided "quelques appuis visibles"³ for his political history. It has been seen how the seventeenth-century mystics came to Plato through the pseudo-Dionysius and the mediaeval mystics, the positive theologians through the Fathers, and the Humanists through the Renaissance tradition; Bossuet's acquaintance with Plato, however, is direct and profound, as his Notes de Lecture reveal.⁴ Thus, although there is a general spirit of Neoplatonism in the work of Bossuet, imbibed from the contemporary ambiance amongst scholars, there is also a detailed knowledge of Plato himself, derived from intense personal reading. Yet, Bossuet is not interested in the whole system of Platonism, any more than he is interested in the entire Neoplatonic edifice of Ficino; he is simply widely read and

1 "Autour du Discours sur l'Histoire Universelle" in Annales littéraires de l'Université de Besançon, 3 (1956), pp. 43-80.

2 The only French translation of the Republic in the seventeenth century was that of Loys le Roy (Paris, 1600), and there was no French translation of the Laws until that of de Grou (Amsterdam, 1769).

3 Goyet, art. cit., p. 80.

4 J-B Bossuet. Platon et Aristote: Notes de Lecture, edited and published from BN MS F.fr. 12830 by T. Goyet (Paris, 1964).

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eclectic.¹ He does not construct a philosophical system as such, but exploits what he regards as eternal truths from whatever source whenever he finds them useful for his present purpose. Accordingly, in the Discours, it is the notion of sovereign law above all else which he takes from Plato, without at all adopting Platonism as a whole, just as the Humanist pedagogy of the Dauphin's tutor has its origins in the educational theories of the Republic, without attributing to Plato a disproportionately important role in the overall approach.² It is such scholarly eclecticism which characterizes Bossuet's method.

The catalogue of Bossuet's library³ records that he possessed the works of Plato in the editions of Jean de Serres⁴ and of Ficino,⁵ but it would appear that the edition which he actually used was the later Greek-Latin

1 "[Les] précédents historiques si considérables et l'ambiance contemporaine influencent Bossuet sans doute; cependant il faut remarquer: (i) que les néoplatoniciens de toute époque, Marsile Ficin inclus, ne l'intéressent pas même quand ils sont passés dans la mystique chrétienne; (ii) que, comme Pascal, il attache plus de prix à la fréquentation de Platon qu'à la connaissance du système, et il fait durer longtemps cette fréquentation par la lecture" (T. Goyet, art. cit., p. 49, n. 19.) As will be seen below, we would contest the first, rather sweeping, assertion; the lack of any systematization of Neoplatonic themes precludes neither a thorough knowledge of Neoplatonism nor any Neoplatonic influence in Bossuet's work.

2 Cf. Letter to Innocent XI in Correspondance (ed. C. Urbain and E. Levesque, 15 vols., Paris, 1914-26), vol. II, pp. 135-161, and also in OC, vol. XXIII, pp. 1 ff.

3 Published in Paris, 1742.

4 3 vols., Geneva, 1578.

5 2 vols., Basel, 1561.

edition of Ficino.¹ That he possessed two editions of Ficino might suggest some influence of the Italian Neoplatonist on Bossuet. Mme. Goyet, however, insists that this is not the case: "... il ne lit pas les arguments de Marsile Ficin qui précèdent, dans son édition, les dialogues de Platon, et il se détourne de sa traduction latine"² and "il n'utilise l'édition de Ficin qu'avec précaution".³ Certainly a competent Hellenist would prefer to consult the original Greek text rather than an old translation; however, it is not entirely true to claim that "[Bossuet] est sans contact avec le néo-platonisme".⁴ Even if Bossuet's acquaintance with Neoplatonism were no more than an indirect acquaintance through Augustine and the Fathers, this would not be true. He does not embrace the totality of Neoplatonism, any more than he is seduced by the aesthetics of the Phaedrus, the philosophy of love of the Symposium⁵ or the doctrine of the transmigration of souls,⁶ and yet traces of Neoplatonism are readily apparent.

When the Jesuit René Rapin published his scathing attack on Plato and Ficinian Neoplatonism in 1671,⁷ and Claude Fleury pronounced his limited defence of Plato as a logician

1 Frankfurt, 1602. See Goyet Notes de Lecture, "Introduction", pp. xxvii-xxviii.

2 L'humanisme de Bossuet (Paris, 1965), p. 142.

3 Notes de Lecture, "Introduction", pp. xxxvii-xxxviii.

4 L'Humanisme de Bossuet, p. 142.

5 Examination of the Notes de Lecture reveals his clear lack of enthusiasm.

6 See Discours II, 19 (ed. Truchet, Paris, 1966, p. 237).

7 La Comparaison de Platon et d'Aristote (Paris, 1671).

and moralist, and critique of Ficino's speculative system at the Académie Lamoignon in 1670,¹ the classicism of the Grand Siècle had left the world of Renaissance Platonism far behind. The eminent Hellenist, André Dacier still maintained the Neoplatonic interpretation of Plato, revealing a thorough knowledge of Ficino and the ancient Neoplatonists, especially Plotinus and Proclus, in the introduction to his translation of ten of the Platonic Dialogues,² but this was very much the final flourish of a long tradition which had by then outlived its usefulness. Malebranche, and not Yves de Paris, was the theologian of post-Cartesian France. Nevertheless the Neoplatonic movement inaugurated by Ficino did not come to an abrupt end. Traces persist in French religious writing until the end of the seventeenth century, and Bossuet illustrates their survival in a less prominent manner, though still not actually submerged within the broad movement of Augustinianism or Cartesianism.

Counterbalancing Bossuet's pessimistic Augustinianism, then, there are certain distinctly Neoplatonic themes, particularly in the Oeuvres Oratoires from the Sermon sur la Mort and the Panegyrique de Sainte-Catherine onwards where the optimistic Humanism of Bossuet is to the fore. The doctrine of Providence, celebrating divine transcendence in

1 Discours sur Platon, publ. at the end of the Traité du choix et de la Méthode des études (Paris, 1686).

2 Les Oeuvres de Platon, 2 vols. (Paris, 1699).

its continuous attention to creation, has already been mentioned, but one can also discern such important themes as the apophatic attributes of God, the notion of hierarchy and order, illumination and the Ideas, arguments for the immortality of the soul, self-knowledge and the celebration of man and his place in the world which are greatly influenced by Neoplatonism. Indeed, the traditional theme of the dignity of man, which lay at the heart of Renaissance Neoplatonism, is a central aspect of Bossuet's apologetics, and a basic Socratism lies at the heart of much of his pulpit-oratory in the period 1652-1670.

If one accepts the authenticity of the Panégistique de Saint Sébastien as an early work of the young Bossuet, possibly written in 1652,¹ it might seem surprising that it should contain a reference to Hermes Trismegistus:

Il faut que vous entriez d'abord dans la pensée du Trismegiste, qui a, ce me semble, divinement exprimé la querelle que Dieu a suscitée contre l'homme. Les créatures sans raison, comme elles sont toutes limitées, elles ne peuvent aspirer à quelque haut degré de perfection ... Mais l'homme, à qui Dieu a voulu donner la conduite de ses affections, comme il ne voit pas de bornes à ses perfections, il peut aussi toujours aspirer plus haut, sans jamais restreindre ses prétensions. C'est pourquoi il peut toujours mériter de plus en plus, tout le cours de sa vie n'étant qu'une guerre perpétuelle, qui lui fournit sans cesse des occasions pour faire paraître sa vertu. Cette guerre n'est autre que la répugnance de la chair et de l'esprit.²

The Hermetic corpus had enjoyed considerable popularity since Ficino's Latin translation and especially since the

¹ See J. Truchet, Bossuet Panégyriste (Paris, 1962), pp. 157-166.

² In OO, vol. VI, p. 558.

commentary of François de Foix, and its influence on Bérulle in particular has been noted. It is hardly surprising, then, that a young scholar should be acquainted with the Hermetica or that he should wish to show off his erudition in a domain outside the strict confines of his university education in support of his theological argument. Moreover, this exploitation of a pagan authority is typical of Bossuet's eclectic method. Jean Dagens has pointed out how he uses several Hermetic themes,¹ in particular the traditional Renaissance theme of the dignity of man, and this allusion to the spiritual combat in Hermes Trismegistus is but a prelude to a thoroughly Neoplatonic development of the theme.

In the Sermon sur le culte de Dieu (1666), then, Bossuet writes: "L'homme, animal divin, plein de raison et d'intelligence, et capable de connaître Dieu par lui-même et par toutes les créatures, est aussi pressé par lui-même et par toutes les créatures à lui rendre ses adorations. C'est pourquoi il est mis au milieu du monde, mystérieux abrégé du monde, afin que, contemplant l'univers entier et le ramassant en soi-même, il rapporte uniquement à Dieu et soi-même et toutes choses".² Here then is the Neoplatonic conception, found in Ficino, Pico and their successors, of man as vinculum mundi, a rational creation who is capable de

1 "Hermétisme et Cabale en France de Lefèvre d'Etaples à Bossuet" in RLC, 35 (1961), pp. 5-16.

2 OO, vol. V, p. 107.

Dieu, a contemplative being with a special relation with the Divinity. Nor is this an isolated instance; it is scattered throughout the Oeuvres Oratoires and still occurs in the Elévations sur les Mystères.¹ Furthermore, the Neoplatonic notion of man as abrégé du monde must be set within the context of a Neoplatonic, especially Dionysian or Ficinian, hierarchy of the universe, as elaborated in the early Sermon sur les Démons (1653):

[La lumière divine] ne s'est pas toute jetée en un lieu, mais elle s'est répandue par divers degrés, descendant peu à peu depuis les ordres supérieurs jusqu'au dernier étage de la nature. Ce que nous observons aisément, si nous prenons garde qu'au-dessus des choses insensibles et inanimées Dieu a établi la vie végétante, et un peu plus haut le sentiment, au dessus duquel nous voyons présider la raison humaine d'une immortelle vigueur, attachée néanmoins à un corps mortel. Si bien que notre grand Dieu, pour achever l'univers, après avoir fait sur la terre une âme spirituelle dans des organes matériels, il a créé aussi dans le ciel des esprits dégagés de toute matière, qui vivent et se nourrissent d'une pure contemplation. C'est ce que nous appelons les anges, que Dieu a divisés en leurs ordres et hiérarchies.²

As in the pseudo-Dionysius, Bonaventure, Ficino, and Yves de Paris, the divine unity contains within itself the principle of multiplicity,³ and it is through this emanation of the one light that the hierarchy of being is created and sustained.

Although Bossuet's hierarchy is not the grand metaphysical construction of Yves de Paris, the idea of a

¹ See OO, vol. II, pp. 95, 200; vol. IV, pp. 114, 116, 272, 294-5; vol. V, pp. 654; vol. VI, p. 46; and EM (ed. Dréano), pp. 111, 145. See also Corr., vol. IV, p. 38.

² OO, vol. I, p. 347. Cf. OO, vol. IV, p. 560.

³ See EM (ed. Dréano), p. 111.

hierarchical, dynamic order is a fundamental premise in his thought, just as the notion of law lies at the heart of the Discours. Occasionally, it appears as a hierarchy of causality as in Augustine or Aquinas, but essentially it is a hierarchy of illumination. The microcosm's capacity for God is a Neoplatonic capacity to receive divine light, for, as in Ficino whose formulation Bossuet borrows, the rational soul should feed off truth: "Qui ne sait que nous sommes faits pour nous nourrir de la vérité? C'est d'elle que doit vivre l'âme raisonnable: si elle quitte cette viande céleste, elle perd sa substance et sa force".¹ The medium for this illumination, then, is the Incarnate Word. Christ is the true exemplar, the ideal sacrifice, and the ideal of priesthood, but he is also the light of reason and intelligence illuminating the rational soul, as in Ficino and Bérulle. It is essentially through Christ, but also through the Church,² that divine light is communicated to man, and in this mystery Bossuet finds that Plato, even though he states in the 6^e Avertissement aux Protestants (LXXIII) that there is more truth in one chapter of the Fathers than all of Plato, is half-way to the truth:

Et à ce propos [i.e. the authority of the Word],
 Chrétiens, je ne puis m'empêcher de vous rapporter une
 chose qui m'a surpris dans Platon. Donnez-moi cette
 liberté de vous alléguer aujourd'hui un auteur profane
 ... Ce philosophe, parlant de l'obscurité des choses

¹ Pour la Fête de la Visitation de la Sainte Vierge (1659), in OO, vol. III, p. 14. Cf. Ficino, TP VIII, 2, "Anima alitur veritate".

² See OO, vol. I, pp. 487-8. Cf. the pseudo-Dionysius and the Renaissance tradition from Ficino to Bérulle and Yves.

divines, et du peu de connaissance que nous en avons, conclut qu'il s'en faut rapporter aux enfants des dieux. Tu reconnais donc, ô philosophie, que nous ne connaissons pas les choses divines; ensuite tu te sens forcée à recourir à l'autorité supérieure. Afin que tu puisse fléchir sans crainte, tu confesses qu'il faut qu'elle soit divine. Jusques ici, tu es chrétienne. Mais il en faut croire, dis-tu, les enfants des dieux. Laisse ces dieux: il n'y en a qu'un, tu ne l'ignores pas. Laisse-moi ces enfants des dieux, enfants de leurs adultères et témoins de leur intempérance. Voici le fils unique du Dieu vivant.¹

The Word, then, is the sole true source of light for man and the light in which the divine Ideas are perceived directly by the blessed:

En cette lumière, [les bienheureux] s'y contemplent eux-mêmes, parce qu'ils se trouvent en elle plus heureusement qu'en eux-mêmes: ils y voient les idées vivantes, ils y voient les raisons des choses créées, raisons éternellement permanentes. Et de même qu'en cette vie nous connaissons les causes par les effets, l'unité par la multitude, l'invisible par le visible, là, dans ce Verbe, qui est dans les bienheureux, qui est leur vie, qui est leur lumière, ils voient la multitude dans l'unité même, le visible dans l'invisible, la diversité des effets dans la cause infiniment abondante qui les a tirés du néant, c'est-à-dire dans le Verbe qui en est l'idée, qui est la raison souveraine par laquelle toutes choses ont été faites.²

In the same sermon, man is depicted as an exalted creature in the divine image, containing in his immortal soul the image of the Trinity in his memory, intelligence and will, as in Augustine.³ Man must, however, be aware of his grandeur. It is thus that the Socratic injunction to know oneself appears as the essential point of departure.

¹ Sur la soumission due à la parole de Jésus-Christ (1660), in OO, vol. III, pp. 249-50.

² Sermon sur le mystère de la Sainte-Trinité (1655), in OO, vol. II, p. 61.

³ Ibid., pp. 49-51.

As with Pascal, misery results from a lack of self-knowledge in man who does not recognise the spark of the divine that is in him: "Tout notre malheur vient de ce que nous ne nous estimons pas assez, si l'on peut reprocher cela à des hommes orgueilleux et superbes! Non, nous n'estimons pas assez nos âmes!".¹ Bossuet then continues: "Vous devez donc reconnaître votre noblesse. O noblesse de l'âme! Elle est capable de Dieu ... Une âme remplie de Dieu, capable de Dieu! Quelle capacité! Quelle grandeur! Capable de jouir de Dieu dans l'éternité!".² Although, as in Bérulle, the implications of self-knowledge are a comprehension of the nothingness of man without God on whom he depends wholly and the necessity of ascetic self-annihilation in order that man may be filled with God, the emphasis is less existential than moral, less pessimistic than optimistic. It is the joyful spirituality of François de Sales rather than the mystical Christocentrism of Bérulle:

Homme fait à l'image de Dieu, tu cours après les plaisirs mortels, tu soupîres après les beautés mortelles; les biens périssables ont gagné ton cœur. Si tu ne connais rien qui soit au-dessus, rien de meilleur ni de plus aimable, repose-toi à la bonne heure en leur jouissance. Mais si tu as une âme éclairée d'un rayon de l'intelligence divine, si, en suivant ce rayon, tu peux remonter jusques au principe, jusques à la source du bien, jusques à Dieu même, si tu peux connaître qu'il est, et qu'il est infiniment beau, infiniment bon, et qu'il est toute beauté et toute bonté, comment peux-tu vivre et ne l'aimer pas?³

¹ Précis d'un Discours aux Visitandines de Meaux (1685), in OO, vol. VI, p. 273.

² Ibid. Cf. Sermon pour la Toussaint (1669), in OO, vol. V, p. 509, and Oraison Funèbre de Henriette d'Angleterre (1670), in OO, vol. V, pp. 654, 666, 669-670.

³ Sermon sur l'ardeur de la pénitence (1662), in OO, vol. IV, p. 325.

For Bossuet, as for François de Sales, it is folly not to love ~~god~~ who wants man to love Him and who is the perfect object of man's love, and this is the epitome of Neoplatonically inspired Christian Humanism. Indeed, the dialectic whereby the rational soul is attracted to the source of all beauty, truth, and goodness is thoroughly Platonic in inspiration. 6

Bossuet's awareness of the threat posed to Christian orthodoxy by the libertins in their denial of the immortality of the soul naturally led to demonstrations of immortality in his preaching. It has been seen how philosophical interests can be discerned even in the works of his early, supposedly anti-rationalist phase, but it may be that increased acquaintance with libertin opposition did lead to great acceptance of rational argument in his apologetic sermons of the 1660s. Certainly, the Sermon sur la Mort (1662) preached at court marks a full embracing of the rational exposition of Christian truth.

The first demonstration of immortality occurs in the second part of the Sermon sur la Mort which begins with a celebration of man's grandeur. In fact, the "Second Point" commences with the Platonic opposition of the worlds of being and becoming, for, whilst man spends this life in "le théâtre des changements et l'empire de la mort", he also finds within himself "quelque principe qui montre bien par une certaine vigueur son origine céleste, et qui

n'appréhende pas la corruption".¹ Then, after a disclaimer deprecating human knowledge² recalling other anti-rationalist statements elsewhere, Bossuet proceeds to expound three basic arguments for immortality: man's discoveries and inventions which have transformed the world;³ the soul's dominion over the passions of the body;⁴ and, finally, the soul's capacity to comprehend the eternal, the infinite, and pure spirit, through which man appears as truly in God's image, "le miracle de la Sagesse"⁵ and a great edifice bearing the mark of the divine hand.

Sans doute il y a au dedans de nous une divine clarté: Un rayon de votre face, ô Seigneur, s'est imprimé en nos âmes C'est là que nous découvrons, comme dans un globe de lumière, un agrément immortel dans l'honnêteté et la vertu: c'est la première Raison, qui se montre à nous par son image; c'est la Vérité elle-même, qui nous parle et qui doit bien nous faire entendre qu'il y a quelque chose en nous qui ne meurt pas, puisque Dieu nous a fait capables de trouver du bonheur, même dans la mort. Tout cela n'est rien, Chrétiens; et voici le trait le plus admirable de cette divine ressemblance. Dieu se connaît et se contemple; sa vie, c'est de se connaître: et parce que l'homme est son image, il veut aussi qu'il le connaisse être éternel, immense, infini, exempt de toute matière, libre de toutes limites, dégagé de toute imperfection.⁶

1 OO, vol. IV, p. 271.

2 "Je ne suis pas de ceux qui font grand état des connaissances humaines" (Ibid., p. 271.)

3 Ibid., pp. 271-4. The mechanism of Bossuet here suggests that he has already been influenced by Cartesianism (see p. 273).

4 Ibid., pp. 274-5.

5 Ibid., p. 278.

6 Ibid., p. 275.

Given the plethora of treatises on the immortality of the soul in the early seventeenth century in France,¹ it is difficult to point definitively to the precise sources of these arguments. They can be found in the work of Richeome, Du Hamel, Caussin and other apologists; all occur in Yves de Paris's Théologie Naturelle, which was directly influenced by Ficino's Theologia Platonica and may indeed be the intermediary, for it was well known and Sorel recommended it, along with Sebond's work of the same name, as one of the best philosophical books treating divine things.² Certainly, though, we would agree with Henri Busson when he states that "le tout vient d'abord de la Théologie Platonicienne de Marsile Ficin que Bossuet avait dans sa bibliothèque et qui fournissaient d'arguments tous les traités de l'immortalité; en sorte qu'il est vain d'essayer de trouver la vraie source de Bossuet".³ Thérèse Goyet however insists that "Bossuet néoplatonise seulement par les Pères de l'Eglise. De plus la fréquentation de son MS F.fr. 12830 nous oblige à dire qu'il a même refusé de lire Marsile Ficin, éditeur-traducteur de Platon".⁴ It is more than likely that Bossuet would have had little sympathy for the totality of Ficino's Neoplatonic system, but equally it is most unlikely that a scholar such as Bossuet would have

1 See the list in Busson's La Pensée religieuse française de Charron à Pascal, pp. 119-121.

2 La Bibliothèque Française, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1667), p. 32 - p. 23 in the first edition (Paris, 1664).

3 La Religion des classiques, p. 401.

4 L'Humanisme de Bossuet, p. 601n.

failed even to read such an important work that he possessed in his library. In any case, whether Bossuet absorbed his arguments for immortality directly from Ficino or through an intermediary, there is no doubting their ultimate source: behind Bossuet, as behind Yves, there is Ficino, and behind Ficino, the Phaedrus and the Timaeus. This is underlined again by the Sermon sur la Résurrection (1669),¹ where, arguing from the concept of the chain of being and man's place in it as microcosm, Bossuet stresses that, although it is natural that the rational soul should be united with lower creation, it is not dependent on matter, but united with the divine as the last order of intelligent substances.²

In 1670 began the second phase in Bossuet's long career, when, before he had been enthroned as Bishop of Condom to which position he had been appointed a year previously, he was chosen to become tutor to the Dauphin on 5 September. It was a task which, as ever, he approached with great seriousness, developing his own pedagogy and preparing his own teaching manuals. The former is fully set out in his letter to Pope Innocent XI of 8 March 1679.³ With regard to philosophy in general, Bossuet defines it here in simple terms of knowledge of oneself and of God: "La philosophie

1 In OO, vol. V, pp. 464-485.

2 In OO, vol. V, pp. 472-3.

3 In Corr., vol. II, pp. 112-161. The French translation which follows the Latin original is by Bossuet himself and was probably written for the King.

consiste principalement à rappeler l'esprit à soi-même, pour s'élever ensuite comme par un degré sûr jusqu'à Dieu" and "pour devenir parfait philosophe, l'homme n'a besoin d'étudier autre chose que lui-même".¹ This, then, is the principal theme and purpose of the Traité de la connaissance de Dieu et de soi-même, Bossuet's main philosophical work.

As Henri Busson has observed,² the transition from Plato to Descartes can be easily achieved. Bossuet represents an exemplary illustration of this facility, as he absorbs elements of Descartes's philosophy into his own way of thinking perfectly smoothly without any danger of ever undermining its orthodoxy. His acquaintance with Descartes's thought goes back, if not to his student days, then certainly at least to his friendship in Toul with Dom Robert Desgabets in 1655 (Bossuet's father then lived in Toul, whilst he himself was in Metz),³ but Cartesianism would appear to have made little impact on him, if any, until the period of the préceptorat, when, besides frequenting the Académie Lamoignon, he also formed his own circle of prominent friends including, apart from La Bruyère and Fénelon, many leading Cartesians, not least Cordemoy and Huet (who was sous-précepteur of the Dauphin). Bossuet's attitude to Cartesianism can be stated quite briefly: like Arnauld, he found in Descartes's metaphysics a sure defence

¹ Corr., vol. II, p. 152.

² La Religion des classiques, p. 403.

³ Cf. letter of Desgabets to Bossuet of 5 September 1671 (in Corr., vol. I, pp. 223-8).

of the immortality of the soul and solid proofs of the existence of God.¹ However, again like Arnauld (if more discreetly in his private correspondence rather than overtly in public statements), he was implacably hostile to what he saw as the dangerous tendencies of Malebranche's system as propounded in De la Recherche de la Vérité and Traité de la Nature et de la Grâce, especially his theories of order, providence, grace and divine will,² and warned: "Je vois non seulement en ce point de la nature et de la grâce, mais encore en beaucoup d'autres articles très importants de la religion, un grand combat se préparer contre l'Eglise sous le nom de la philosophie cartésienne".³

Despite its complex architecture, a striking feature of the Traité de la Connaissance is its philosophical simplicity, for, if it is a work of primarily Cartesian inspiration, it does not have a profound metaphysical, spiritualist or mechanist emphasis. Instead, it remains a Humanist contemplation of man and God, though now adopting the Cartesian criteria of clear and distinct ideas.⁴

1 Cf. letters to Huet of 18 May 1689 (in Corr., vol. IV, pp. 19-20) and Postel of 30 March 1701 (in Corr., vol. XIII, p. 49).

2 Cf. OF de Marie-Thérèse d'Autriche (in OO, vol. VI, p. 176) and letter to abbé Nicaise of 8 July 1681 (in Corr., vol. II, p. 243).

3 Letter to "un disciple du P. Malebranche" (i.e. M. d'Allemands) of 21 May 1687 (in Corr., vol. III, p. 372).

4 This is most apparent in the largely Thomist Traité du Libre Arbitre, where both Providence and Free Will are asserted as equally self-evident.

Bossuet's starting-point is again a basic Socratism: "La sagesse consiste à connoître Dieu et à se connoître soi-même. La connoissance de nous-mêmes nous doit élever à la connoissance de Dieu".¹ The dualism is now seen in more Cartesian terms and the survey of the body in Chapter II is an excellent résumé of Cartesian physiology, but all in all his attitude to Cartesianism (then still officially proscribed) is reserved and orthodox; there is no hyperbolic doubt, no radical separation of mind and body, no infinity of the world. Besides, he retains from his Jesuit education and the influence of Cornet a Scholastic attitude to animal soul and much of the Aristotelian analysis of the rational soul; he also exploits the finalist argument for the existence of God, whilst still continuing to develop significant Platonic themes. What makes Bossuet a Cartesian apologist is his adoption of the doctrine of reason, eternal truths and clear, distinct ideas. For the rest, though, he remains, as ever, wholly eclectic, and the heart of his method lies elsewhere than in the doubt of Descartes.

Bossuet's method in the Traité de la Connaissance, then, is essentially psychological, the ascent of a certain reason from self-knowledge to knowledge of God. It is a method of Platonic dialectic rather than Cartesian logic: "Il n'y a donc pas lieu à démontrer l'existence de Dieu, à proprement parler; il s'agit seulement de constater, d'éclairer et de

¹ OC, vol. XXIII, p. 33.

justifier l'élán naturel de la raison qui nous élève à Dieu. La théodicée doit être une conséquence très-simple de la bonne psychologie".¹ From a consideration of the faculties and functions of the soul (Chapter I) and the organisation of the body (Chapter II), then, Bossuet proceeds to a consideration of the union of soul and body in Chapter III. Here, man again appears as vinculum mundi:

Il étoit convenable, afin qu'il y eût de toutes sortes d'êtres dans le monde, qu'il s'y trouvât et des corps qui ne fussent unis à aucun esprit, telles que sont la terre et l'eau et les autres de cette nature; et des esprits qui, comme Dieu même, ne fussent unis à aucun corps, tels que sont les anges; et aussi des esprits unis à un corps, telle qu'est l'âme raisonnable, à qui comme à la dernière de toutes les créatures intelligentes, il devoit échoir en partage ou plutôt convenir naturellement de faire un même tout avec le corps qui lui est uni.²

Maintaining the superiority of soul over body, Bossuet later cites the Platonic definition of man as "une âme se servant du corps",³ but always the emphasis is on the perfect totality of this essential union which leads, in Chapter IV, to the finalist argument for the existence of God: He reveals Himself and His divine purpose in the perfect creation of man.⁴

More important than the argument from final causes, however, are the proofs based on the study of the rational soul itself, for "rien ne sert tant à l'âme pour s'élever à

1 A. Delondre, Doctrine philosophique de Bossuet sur la connaissance de Dieu (Paris, 1855), p. 35.

2 OC, vol. XXIII, p. 111.

3 Ibid., p. 167.

4 Cf. Traité des Causes on the "exemplary cause" (Paris, 1857), p. 450.

son auteur que la connoissance qu'elle a d'elle-même et de ses sublimes opérations, que nous avons appelées intellectuelles".¹ With regard to the ascent of the soul to God through its intellectual operations, there are essentially two proofs: a Platonic proof based on the Ideas of eternal truths (in the Traité de la Connaissance IV, 5);² and a more Cartesian, though still fundamentally Platonic, proof from the idea of perfect being (in Traité IV, 6).³ The former is expounded more fully and is of greater interest here. In Bossuet's epistemology the general influence of Plato's theory of Ideas can be readily discerned, and this is perhaps best illustrated by La

Logique:

Ces vérités éternelles que nos idées nous représentent sont le vrai objet des sciences; et c'est pourquoi pour nous rendre véritablement savans, Platon nous rappelle sans cesse à ces idées, où se voit, non ce qui se forme, mais ce qui est: non ce qui s'engendre et se corrompt, ce qui se montre et passe aussitôt, ce qui se fait et se défait; mais ce qui subsiste éternellement. C'est là ce monde intellectuel que ce divin philosophe a mis dans l'esprit de Dieu avant que le monde fût construit, et qui est le modèle immuable de ce grand ouvrage. Ce sont donc là ces idées simples, éternelles, immuables, ingénérables et incorruptibles, auxquelles il nous renvoie pour entendre la vérité. C'est ce qui lui a fait dire que nos idées, images des idées divines, en étoient aussi immédiatement dérivées, et ne passaient point par les sens, qui servent bien, disoit-il, à les réveiller, mais non à les former dans notre esprit. Car si sans avoir jamais vu rien d'éternel, nous avons une idée si claire de l'éternité, c'est-à-dire d'être toujours le même; si sans avoir aperçu aucun triangle parfait, nous l'entendons distinctement et en démontrons tant de vérités incontestables: c'est une marque, dit-il, que ces idées ne viennent pas de nos sens.⁴

1 OC, vol. XXIII, p. 187.

2 Cf. La Logique I.

3 Cf. especially Elévations sur les Mystères I, 1-3.

4 OC, vol. XXIII, p. 292.

The significance of Plato in establishing the eternity of all ideas is thus clear, just as Bossuet relies on Plato for his thoughts on the subject of the exemplary cause in the brief Traité des Causes.¹ In effect, though, Bossuet is more directly indebted to Augustine whom he uses to "correct" Plato, as he goes on in La Logique to reject the Platonic theories of reminiscence and the pre-existence of souls as "[des] excès insupportables".² Instead, following Augustine, he places the Ideas in the mind of God, identifies them with God, and expounds the theory of divine illumination: "... apprendre c'est se retourner à ces idées primitives et à l'éternelle vérité qu'elles contiennent, et y faire attention"³ and "il suffroit de concevoir que Dieu en nous créant a mis en nous certaines idées primitives où luit la lumière de son éternelle vérité".⁴ There is here a brief moment of confusion, as this suggests that ideas are innate in the Cartesian sense and waiting to be awakened by sense-experience, but the conclusion is quite unequivocal: "Toute idée a pour objet quelque vérité; cette vérité est immuable et éternelle, et comme telle est l'objet

1 Where Bossuet gives the following definition: "La cause exemplaire est le modèle ou l'original sur lequel une chose est faite" (p. 449). Traité de la Connaissance IV, 8 and La Logique I, 38 provide a commentary on and elaboration of this notion of the exemplary cause.

2 OC, vol. XXIII, p. 292.

3 Ibid., p. 293.

4 Ibid., p. 293.

de la science; cette vérité subsiste éternellement en Dieu, dans ces idées éternelles, comme les appelle Platon; dans ses raisons immuables, comme les appelle saint Augustin; et tout cela, c'est Dieu même".¹ 5

Having placed the eternal ideas in the mind of God and identified these, man's means to knowledge, with God, Bossuet is clearly tending towards Malebranche's interpretation of Augustinian illumination, namely the vision in God. Certainly the Jesuit critic of the Traité de la Connaissance felt so and accused Bossuet of falling into the errors of Malebranche's theory of knowledge: "Je ne crois pas que l'Auteur soit plus heureux que le Pere Malebranche dans les preuves qu'il employe, pour persuader que les veritez éternelles et immuables, que les principes des sciences et de la morale, s'apperçoivent nécessairement dans la substance de Dieu même ..."² In fact, however, whether through customary caution or simply a lack of the philosophical rigour of Malebranche or even Fénelon, Bossuet leaves his theory rather vague: "C'est [...] en lui, d'une certaine manière qui m'est incompréhensible, c'est en lui, dis-je, que je vois ces vérités éternelles; et les voir, c'est me tourner à celui qui est immuablement toute vérité et recevoir ses lumières. Cet objet éternel, c'est Dieu éternellement subsistant, éternellement véritable,

¹ Ibid., p. 294.

² Journal de Trévoux, avril 1723, art. 38, p. 622.

éternellement la vérité même".¹ There is no explanation whatsoever of quite how man sees truth in God who is truth; God is simply the great sun whose rays of intelligence somehow illuminate the rational soul. It may be, as Delondre suggests,² that one can discern here the influence of Aquinas as a possible source of this compromise: "Omnia dicimus in Deo videre, et secundum ipsum de omnibus judicare, in quantum per participationem sui luminis omnia cognoscimus et dijudicamus".³ Equally, though, it is far from impossible that Bossuet was attracted by the theory of vision in God whilst still not adopting the doctrine in its full form; it was, after all, the occasionalism of Malebranche and its theological consequences that Bossuet really found most suspect.

Again as with Malebranche, the necessary condition for illumination is a certain attention, or perhaps rather attachment, which, if less fully developed than in the Oratorian's system, is still a concept that occupies a central position in Bossuet's thought. On its simplest level, it is related to the Augustinian doctrine of the two loves, as set out in the Traité de la Concupiscence,⁴ an exposition of Saint John's "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world".⁵ Here the body is once

1 Traité de la Connaissance, in OC, vol. XXIII, pp. 188-9.

2 Op. cit., pp. 88-9.

3 Summa Theologiae, Prima Pars, q. 12, art. 11.

4 In OC, vol. VII.

5 I John 2.15.

more represented as a prison and man as a slave, but the corollary is a plea for deliverance that is clearly inspired by Saint Paul¹ rather than Plotinus.² Nevertheless, although the Traité de la Concupiscence is rooted in Scripture and forms a thoroughly Augustinian denunciation of self-love and all that is not of the City of God, a Humanist element still persists with its Platonic connotations. For the notion of man as vinculum mundi recurs, this time more specifically with its implication of the spiritual combat:

On ne comprendra jamais la chute de l'homme, sans entendre la situation de l'âme raisonnable, et le rang qu'elle tient naturellement entre les choses qu'on appelle biens. Il y a donc premièrement le bien suprême qui est Dieu, autour duquel sont occupées toutes les vertus, et où se trouve la félicité de la nature raisonnable. Il y a en dernier lieu les biens inférieurs, qui sont les objets sensibles et matériels, dont l'âme raisonnable peut être touchée. Elle tient elle-même le milieu entre ces deux sortes de biens pouvant par son libre arbitre s'élever aux uns ou se rabaisser vers les autres, et faisant par ce moyen comme un état mitoyen entre tout ce qui est bon.³

How this notion of the ascent or descent of the soul from its mean position is related to attention can be seen in Elévations sur les Mystères: "D'où vient donc que l'impie ne connoist pas Dieu et que tant de nations ou plustost que toute la terre ne l'a pas connu, puisqu'on en porte l'idée en soy-mesme avec celle de la perfection? D'où vient cela, si ce n'est par un défaut d'attention et parce que l'homme livré au sens et à l'imagination ne veut pas, ou ne peut pas

1 Rom. 7.24.

2 OC, vol. VII, pp. 414-5. Cf. p. 426.

3 Ibid., p. 443. Cf. pp. 417-8.

se recueillir en soy-mesme, ni s'attacher aux idées pures dont son esprit, embarrassé d'images grossières, ne peut porter la vérité simple?".¹ This reflects the Bérullian prayer to Christ which heads the Elévations, in which Bossuet prays to attain love of Christ through knowledge, where "toute ma connoissance ne consistera qu'à réveiller et à me rendre attentif aux simples et pures idées que je trouverai en moy-mesme, dans les lumières de la foy, ou peut-estre dans celles de la raison, aidée et dirigée par la foy mesme".² In this, it is the Incarnate Word which, as itself an emanation of divine light, forms the means of illumination, so that the desire to know becomes a desire for attachment to Christ, and through him to God.³ For Bossuet, then, knowledge is thus inseparable from love.

In this sense, then, it is, as with Malebranche, the concept of attention which links knowledge with love. It is the single idea which binds man to God through both the intellect and the will, thereby revealing the way in which Bossuet's epistemology is connected to his essential voluntarism. Returning to the Traité de la Connaissance, this can be seen in the later sections of Chapter IV. Beginning with a Bérullian opposition of All and Nothing, imperfect because created being, which is nothing, appears

¹ Elévations I, ii (ed. Dréano, p. 78).

² Ibid., p. 76. Cf. Lettres à une demoiselle de Metz in Corr., vol. I, pp. 42-74.

³ Elévations XI, ix (ed. Dréano, pp. 280-1). Cf. Traité de la Concupiscence XXXIII (in OC, vol. VII, pp. 482-3).

as wholly dependent on perfect Being,¹ but, at the same time, because created in the divine image, it is nonetheless "capable de recevoir l'impression de la vérité"² directly from the source of truth itself. This is divine illumination.³ However, in being attentive to the ideas of truth, goodness and beauty, man is in fact being attentive to God Himself who contains, or rather is, those eternal truths which man naturally sees in the intellect and loves in the will; thus, in seeking truth, man necessarily seeks God, and becomes closer to God as he comes closer to truth. Accordingly the reception of divine light, which is the knowledge of truth, leads to "la conformité de l'âme avec Dieu",⁴ which is beatitude. The two operations of knowing and loving, then, tend towards identity: "C'est donc là mon exercice, c'est là ma vie, c'est là ma perfection, et tout ensemble ma béatitude, de connoître et d'aimer celui qui m'a fait. Par là je reconnois que tout néant que je suis de moi-même devant Dieu, je suis fait toujours à son image, puisque je trouve ma perfection et mon bonheur dans le même objet que lui, c'est-à-dire dans lui-même, et dans de semblables opérations, c'est-à-dire en connoissant et en

1 Traité de la Connaissance IV, 7, in OC, vol. XXIII, p. 193 especially. Cf. "L'homme, qui n'est rien de soi, n'a rien de soi; son bonheur et sa perfection est de s'attacher à connoître et à aimer son auteur" (Traité IV, 10, in OC, vol. XXIII, p. 198.)

2 Ibid., IV, 8, p. 195.

3 Ibid., IV, 9.

4 Ibid., IV, 10, p. 198.

aimant".¹ Bossuet concludes: "Si mon âme connoît la grandeur de Dieu, la connoissance de Dieu m'apprend aussi à juger de la dignité de mon âme, que je ne vois élevée que par le pouvoir qu'elle a de s'unir avec son auteur avec le secours de sa grâce. C'est donc cette partie spirituelle et divine, capable de posséder Dieu, que je dois principalement estimer et cultiver en moi-même. Je dois par un amour sincère attacher immuablement mon esprit au père de tous les esprits, c'est-à-dire à Dieu".² Such is the full force of Bossuet's original Socratic precept.

In effect, this marks the triumph of the Platonic dialectic. Although it would be an exaggeration to claim with Delondre that "Bossuet est dans la philosophie française le plus grand et le plus fidèle interprète de Platon",³ it is nonetheless true that Bossuet has indeed retained a significant aspect of the Platonic dialectic, central to the Symposium, which was largely ignored by Malebranche, namely the love of Beauty and the Good, which is the corollary of the knowledge of Truth. One can agree, then, with Delondre that Bossuet expresses in a noble language "ce mouvement sublime de l'âme humaine qui, secouant les chaînes du corps, aspire à s'élever des réalités grossières de ce monde mortel à un immortel idéal, qui poursuit ce type divin du vrai, du bien et du beau à

1 Ibid., IV, 10, pp. 198-9.

2 Ibid., IV, 12, p. 203.

3 Delondre, p. 140.

travers les ombres de la vie présente, et s'élance jusqu'à Dieu par les efforts réunis de la raison et de l'amour".¹ When Bossuet writes of the unknowability of God and of the divine attributes, he follows in the Neoplatonic tradition of the pseudo-Dionysius, but equally in his dynamic of contemplation, where the desire for Beauty and the Good stand alongside knowledge of eternal truth, he is following directly in the tradition of Plato himself.

Bossuet's exhortation to divine love and conformity with God is, however, despite a similarity of terminology, much more closely related to François de Sales's Traité than to the abstractions of the mystics. His doctrine of delectation as an attraction of the will with coeur as the central element of human personality is strictly Augustinian, and his psychological approach to spirituality consistently sets him apart from most, if not all, schools of mysticism. It is not surprising then that Bossuet's initial indifference towards mysticism, followed by steadily increasing reservations, should lead finally to complete opposition to the nouveaux mystiques by the time of the Quietist controversy. The prolonged, increasingly bitter and personal polemic conducted by Bossuet against Fénelon from July 1694 after the Conférences d'Issy need not detain us,² but Bossuet's well-defined position in the affair

¹ Delondre, p. 141.

² See L. Cognet, Crépuscule des Mystiques (Tournai, 1958).

does serve to confirm and elucidate his basic spiritual standpoint, and to underline the nature of his underlying Platonism.

A thorough conservative in all things, Bossuet was at pains to stress in all his writings on the subject the novelty of the Quietist movement,¹ and it is this that lies at the heart of his Tradition des nouveaux mystiques,² written in reply to Fénelon's Le Gnostique de saint Clément d'Alexandrie, in which he sets out to refute the claim that the Quietists were the inheritors of a continuous tradition of abstract mysticism going back to the Gnosticism of Clement of Alexandria. His aim is to isolate the "new mystics" and to set them apart from what he regards as "true" mysticism, such as that of John of the Cross or Theresa of Avila. In his onslaught, Bossuet reveals himself as being well-acquainted with the work of his immediate opponents - Malaval, Molinos, Falconi, Lacombe, Mme Guyon -

¹ Cf. letter to Rancé of 17 March 1692: "Je suis parfaitement touché de ce que vous dites des études. Vous parlez divinement des Écritures divines et de leur plénitude. Vous attaquez la fausse critique, qui est la maladie et la tentation de nos jours, avec une efficace invincible. L'esprit de la [tradition], ennemi de [la] curiosité et des nouveautés, se fait sentir partout et en un mot l'ouvrage [Réponse (Paris, 1692)] est parfait, quoi que le monde, dont le goût est si bizarre et si injuste, en puisse juger". (Corr., vol. V, p. 62.) Bossuet was a great admirer of Rancé (cf. letters to M. de Saint-André of 28 Jan. 1701 (in Corr., vol. XIII, p. 27) and P. Jacques de la Cour of 3 Nov. 1700 (in Corr., vol. XII, p. 357), and various correspondence with the Abbot of La Trappe; in the Oraison funèbre d'Anne de Gonzague he described Rancé as "un saint abbé, dont la doctrine et la vie sont un ornement de notre siècle," (OO, vol. VI, p. 303).

² In OC, vol. XIX.

but his reading of the Rheno-Flemish mystics is functional rather than profound; moreover he pays no attention at all to more modern mystics such as Benoît de Canfield, Jean de Saint-Samson and Constantin de Barbanson, and nor does he refer to the Eastern tradition at any length. This is instructive, for it suggests Bossuet's basic lack of interest in mysticism as a whole, except in so far as it threatened the stability of present orthodoxy: essentially un-mystical, Bossuet became anti-mystical once involved in the controversy surrounding Mme. Guyon, and this serves to clarify and define his own spirituality in his Instruction sur les états d'oraison.¹

As is the case with Nicole, an essentially rationalist, Cartesian anthropology renders it difficult, if not impossible, for Bossuet truly to understand the mystics; the "intellectualist" Bossuet retreats from a non-conceptual spirituality, and so is driven to condemn the passivity of the Quietists. Accordingly, in Instruction sur les états d'oraison, in conformity with his intellectualist definition of the spiritual life, he insists on the theological virtue of hope, which is the active desire for beatitude, as opposed to the total indifference of the Quietists which requires the abandonment of the soul and the suppression of all desires including hope. Bossuet's critique of false oraison in the Instruction thus underlines his fundamental

1 In OC, vol. XVIII.

spiritual standpoint: that the desire for beatitude, for Beauty, Truth and the Good, lies at the heart of all nature. After years of opposition to the infelicities of Malebranche's system, it was Bossuet's reading of the Traité de l'Amour de Dieu in manuscript in August-September 1697 that effected a full reconciliation,¹ based on their agreement on the definition of the will and man's necessary desire for beatitude. It is the purpose of the Instruction to recommend truly perfect oraison, that which consists not in passive contemplation and the (proud) direct union of the soul with God in this life, but in the acts of faith, devotion to God through Christ, and the active desire for beatitude through the exercise of the will in accordance with the will of God. This is the spirituality of François de Sales, whom Bossuet greatly admired² and whose authority on true indifference and contemplation he frequently adduces in the Instruction, and it is a spirituality based in the double movement of Platonic dialectic - the intellect's knowledge of truth and the will's desire for beauty and the good - which has a single, unified object in the Christian God.

1 See Montcheuil, Malebranche et le quiétisme, pp. 75-6.

2 This is exemplified by his Panegyrique du Bienheureux François de Sales pronounced in Paris at the Visitation on 28 December 1660 (in OO, vol. III, pp. 575-592). Of his friend and disciple, the Bishop of Belley, on the other hand, Bossuet had a rather lower opinion, particularly of his contribution on the subject of pure love (see the letter to abbé Bossuet of 13 October 1698 in Corr., vol. X, pp. 230-1).

Both in specific details, then, and in the broader scheme of his spiritual dynamic, Bossuet reveals himself as the inheritor of the spirit of the French Counter-Reformation and its Neoplatonism; the parallel with François de Sales is readily apparent. Neoplatonic themes recur frequently throughout his work, particularly the dignity of man, the beauty of the world, the notions of order and hierarchy, the doctrine of Providence and the conception of unknowable God, man's All, whilst the theory of ideas and of illumination are fundamental to his thought. The more optimistic themes of the Renaissance tradition balance his Augustinian moral pessimism, but, at the same time, they no longer form part of a total system in the Ficinian manner. If anything, it is Bossuet's thorough acquaintance with the work of Plato himself, perhaps suggesting a revival of interest in the Athenian philosopher at the time of the Querelle despite the demands and advances of the moderns, that lends to his spiritual doctrine a certain Neoplatonic unity to accompany his essential Augustinianism and semi-Cartesianism.¹ Still, it is important to note the survival of Neoplatonic ideas in Bossuet's work, underlining the force of Renaissance Neoplatonism whose influence was

¹ On this "syncretism" of Bossuet, J.F. Nourrisson has written: "Sans répudier Aristote, Bossuet, grâce à saint Augustin, sut le tempérer par Platon. Sans cesser un instant d'être fidèle aux Écritures et aux Pères, Bossuet sut se montrer le promoteur à la fois et le correcteur du cartésianisme" (Des sources de la philosophie de Bossuet, Paris, 1862, p. 20.)

still inescapable even in the late seventeenth century. The prominent utilisation of Neoplatonic apologetics and the development of a largely Platonically inspired spirituality in an age of Augustinianism and Cartesianism, however, do appear as something of an anachronism; as Le Brun writes: "Ce n'est pas un hasard si nous retrouvons chez Bossuet ... bon nombre de ces thèmes néoplatoniciens, mais ils apparaissent au moment même où le platonisme est, en France du moins, en net déclin, et, s'ils sont perceptibles, ce sont les témoins d'un âge révolu de la pensée: ils n'arrivent plus à jouer le rôle de schèmes vraiment dynamiques. C'est une tradition que Bossuet suit encore, tout en la refusant".² The apogee of Neoplatonism has indeed passed, and yet the example of Bossuet reveals that its influence persisted, if to a lesser degree. In his conservatism, however, Bossuet does rather look back to an earlier age so that his Neoplatonism indeed appears an anachronism. In the spiritual vitality of Fénelon, on the other hand, it will be seen that Neoplatonism still has an important contribution to make, even if it is perhaps its final flourish in seventeenth-century France.

1 J. Le Brun, Bossuet (Bruges, 1970), pp. 29-30.

9. FÉNELON

"Bossuet est l'homme du XVII^e siècle ... Fénelon est déjà l'homme du XVIII^e siècle". Such is M.-H. Guervin's conclusion in his brief comparison of the characters and characteristics of the two most prominent prelates of the latter part of the reign of Louis XIV.¹ However fanciful ~~this~~ metaphorical opposition of the eagle and the swan, the
however simplistic (if not misleading) ~~this~~ contrast of the
Bossuet as the paragon of classicism with Fénelon as the precursor of the Enlightenment, there is indeed a significant respect in which, for all their essential community of purpose,² the Bishop of Meaux and the Archbishop of Cambrai are fundamentally incompatible: it is that Bossuet was above all a pragmatic militant of the (Gallican) Church, whilst Fénelon was indisputably an idealist in every sense. Both can be fairly described as the successors of François de Sales, but in very different ways, reflecting the multiple facets of the achievements of the Bishop of Geneva himself. This divergence is epitomized by their respective attitudes towards Neoplatonism. For,

¹ M.-H. Guervin, "Bossuet et Fénelon" in DSS, 16 (1952), pp. 567-8.

² Cf. H. Bremond, Apologie pour Fénelon (Paris, 1910).

whilst Bossuet's work reveals an acquaintance with Neoplatonic apologetics and a thorough knowledge of Plato himself, complementing his basic Augustinianism, Fénelon is related to the very origins of Neoplatonism. The name of Ficino is absent and there is little suggestion of any interest in the Humanistic concerns of the Renaissance; instead, Fénelon follows directly the tradition of Neoplatonic mysticism inherited from Plato and Plotinus through the Greek Fathers and the mediaeval spiritualists. It is this tradition which, for all his awareness of other, especially modern systems (notably the philosophies of Descartes and Malebranche), and, even if its full implications appeared only after his meeting Mme Guyon in 1688, lies at the heart of his thought in all its manifestations, with the spirit of Plato himself permeating both the form and the content of his entire output.

The early biographers of Fénelon¹ have established the largely unverifiable tradition, accepted and perpetuated by subsequent scholars, that Fénelon was taught humanities by a private tutor from the age of eight to twelve, then, from 1663, was educated by the Jesuits in Cahors until he entered the Collège du Plessis in Paris two years later to study philosophy and theology, and finally joined Saint-Sulpice in

¹ A.M. Ramsay, Histoire de la vie de messr. François Salignac de la Motte-Fénelon (The Hague, 1723); Y.M.M. de Querbeuf, Vie de Fénelon (in Oeuvres de Fénelon, Paris, 1787-92, vol. I); L.F. de Bausset, Histoire de Fénelon, 3 vols. (Paris, 1808).

1672-3, taking orders a couple of years later. Jean Orcibal, however, has explored the evidence for this received biography and exposed our real ignorance surrounding Fénelon's années de formation.¹ Whatever the true facts and dates concerning his education and career before his appointment as the Superior of the Nouvelles Catholiques de Paris in 1678, there remain two significant verities: the profundity of his classical studies and the determining spiritual influence of M. Tronson and Saint-Sulpice.

For the latter we have Fénelon's own testimony, writing to Tronson: "Souvenez-vous que vous m'avez tenu lieu de père dès ma première jeunesse ... On ne peut vous honorer, Monsieur, avec plus d'attachement et de vénération que je le ferai toute ma vie";² and of Saint-Sulpice: "C'est une maison où j'ai été nourri, que ma famille a toujours chérie et révérée, long-temps avant que je fusse au monde. Je connois la piété et l'exactitude qui y règnent";³ and "On ne peut rien voir de plus apostolique et de plus

1 In vol. I of his edition of the Correspondance de Fénelon (Paris, 1972-6, 5 volumes to date, with further volumes (VI-XVII) to appear chez Droz). Cf. H. Gouhier, Fénelon Philosophe (Paris, 1977), "Introduction", pp. 10-11. e

2 Letter to Tronson of 6 Nov. 1694 (in Corr., vol. II, p. 302). Cf. letter to Clement XI of 20 April 1706.

3 Letter to l'abbé de Beaumont of 1 Dec. 1706 (in Oeuvres Complètes, ed. J.E.A. Gosselin (the so-called "édition de Saint-Sulpice"), 10 vols., Paris, 1848-52 (repr., Geneva, 1971), vol. VIII, p. 397. This is one of a series of letters on the foundation of a seminary in Cambrai, to be run by Sulpiciens, which had occupied Fénelon from the beginning of his exile (see OC, vol. VIII, pp. 386-399).

vénérable".¹ Orcibal records that, besides the future Archbishop of Cambrai, four members of the Fénelon family passed through Saint-Sulpice,² and, although it is not clear precisely what Fénelon's relations with the Company were, there is no doubt that, after the death of his father, he was greatly influenced by his uncle Antoine, marquis de Fénelon, a leading member of the Compagnie du Saint Sacrement and an intimate friend of both Vincent de Paul and Olier. It was he who introduced Fénelon to Gobinet (Superior of the Collège du Plessis) and Tronson (Superior of the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice from 1657 and third Superior General of the Company of Priests from 1676). The actual nature of the latter's influence is uncertain, but Fénelon's undoubtedly close connection with Saint-Sulpice throughout his life serves to underline the continuity within the movement inspired by the Catholic revival of the early seventeenth century: through Saint-Sulpice and Tronson, the disciple of Condren and Olier, Fénelon is the direct inheritor of the very spirit and doctrine of le cercle Acarie, the spirit and doctrine of Canfield, Bérulle and François de Sales. He perpetuates the ideals of the École française, representing both the triumph and the final great flourish of the spiritual renewal embarked upon by the French Counter-Reformation, the successor to François de

1 Letter to P. Le Tellier of 6 Jan. 1715 (in OC, vol. VIII, p. 283). These were Fénelon's last words, dictated on his death-bed.

2 Corr., vol. I, p. 144.

Sales and Bérulle and a product of the most lasting achievement of M. Olier, the seminary of Saint-Sulpice.

The Council of Trent had first sought the foundation of diocesan seminaries in a decree of 15 July 1563, but it was only decades later, through the efforts of Bérulle and his disciples, that the goal came to be realized. The establishment of the Oratoire marked the first step in this direction, but the aims of Bérulle and Condren were frustrated as the energies of the Oratoire were diverted (largely into spiritual direction and general education in the colleges). Thereafter the significant advances made by Vincent de Paul's Prêtres de la Mission (also known as Lazaristes) and Jean Eudes's Société de Prêtres de Jésus et Marie (or Eudistes) cannot be denied. It was, though, M. Olier's establishment of the seminary of Saint-Sulpice in 1642 that crowned the movement set in motion by Trent, for by the end of the seventeenth century the majority of French seminaries were directed by Sulpiciens.¹ Indeed, as if to emphasise the strong sense of continuity which, despite manifold doctrinal disputes, can be identified within seventeenth-century French religious thought, Fénelon himself finally succeeded in introducing the Sulpiciens, even though their resources were badly stretched, to the

¹ See G. Letourneau, La mission de Jean-Jacques Olier et la fondation des grands séminaires en France (Paris, 1906), and M. Cagnac, Fénelon. Etudes critiques (Paris, 1910), "Chapitre préliminaire".

diocesan seminary of Cambrai shortly before his death,¹ thereby further perpetuating the achievement of his mentor, M. Tronson, the legislator and organiser of Saint-Sulpice who consolidated the original foundation of Olier and gave a permanent reality to his ideal. "Le séminaire, pour M. Olier, n'est pas seulement un lieu de formation aux vertus et à la vie ecclésiastique, il est aussi une maison d'études où les clercs doivent acquérir les connaissances théoriques et pratiques nécessaires pour exercer dignement le ministère".² If that, then, is the ideal of Saint-Sulpice, it could have no more perfect incarnation than Fénelon, the highest combination of scholarship and humility, pious personal devotion and churchmanship.

The first of the twenty-two paragraphs of Olier's Pietas Seminarii Sancti Sulpitii, summarising the spiritual aims and doctrines of the Company, states the perfection sought by its founder: "Primarius et ultimus finis huius seminarii est vivere summe Deo in Christo Jesu Domino nostro; adeo ut interiora filii eius intima cordis nostri penetrent, liceatque cuilibet dicere quod de se Paulus fiducialiter praedicabat: vivo jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus [Galat. 2.20]".³ This is the epitome of the sacerdotal spirituality of the École française with its emphasis on Pauline exinanition, the nothingness of man and his all in

1 See H. Druon, Fénelon, archevêque de Cambrai, 2 vols. (Paris, 1905) and M. Sackebant, Fénelon et le séminaire de Cambrai (Cambrai, 1902).

2 J. Monval, Les Sulpiciens (Paris, 1934), p. 42.

3 In Oeuvres Complètes de M. Olier, ed. Migne (Paris, 1856), col. 1247.

Christ, and nothing, it would seem, could be more hostile to the fundamental optimism of Humanism. Yet, as has been seen, the great majority of seventeenth-century spiritual writers received a thoroughly Humanist education. The case of Fénelon exemplifies this paradox, for his religious preoccupations could no more deprive him of his inherent culture than they could François de Sales, Bérulle or even Bossuet. Indeed it is perhaps this that Bossuet and Fénelon have most evidently in common; both assimilated profound classical learning into their preter-essentially Christian doctrines. There is, however, quite apart from the obvious differences of opinion between the two main protagonists in the Quietist controversy, a significant divergence in their attitudes to their classical learning that is of special interest here: it is that Bossuet's work reveals specific instances of Neoplatonic influence and only secondarily bears the stamp of a general Platonism, whereas the philosophy of Plato and his disciples underpins the broad scheme and dynamic of Fénelon's thought without being readily apparent in particular instances. In the brief article "L'humanisme de Fénelon", F. Gope insists on the pessimistic, anti-Humanist features of Fénelon's work and perceives a more modern concept of Humanism, founded less on Hellenistic culture than on a personal, spiritual, ascetic evolution.¹ Such a joyless view is surely a perversion of

1 In Les études philosophiques, 8 (1953), pp. 99-100.

the term. Regardless of whether the author of Télémaque can be seen as the ancestor of eighteenth-century optimism, his entire output is nonetheless permeated with ancient culture, which is if anything the touchstone of Humanism.

Throughout his career Fénelon was inspired by Plato in particular. It is a fact noted firstly by his contemporary, the prominent Hellenist André Dacier: "Il avait pris l'esprit des plus grands poètes et des plus excellents orateurs: il s'était rendu propres toutes leurs beautés et toutes leur grâces. Il s'était surtout attaché à Platon, pour lequel il avait une admiration particulière. Me pardonnera-t-on cette expression? Il avait mis son esprit à la teinture de la plus saine antiquité. De là cette force, cette grâce, cette légèreté, cette âme qui éclate dans ses écrits".¹ Nor has the fact escaped modern critics from Crouslé² and Boulvé³ to Goré⁴ and Cagnac.⁵ The latter has well summarized Fénelon's attitudes to antiquity: "Fénelon aimait les Grecs au point de tout juger à leur lumière et de paraître injuste pour les modernes. Il nous semble le voir à chaque question délicate et controversée se tourner vers l'Hellade et demander l'avis de Platon ... C'est Platon qui est son maître en littérature comme en

¹ Eloge funèbre de Fénelon, in OC, vol. I (Histoire littéraire de Fénelon), p. 93.

² L. Crouslé, Fénelon et Bossuet: Etudes morales et littéraires, 2 vols. (Paris, 1894-95).

³ L. Boulvé, De l'Hellénisme chez Fénelon (Paris, 1897).

⁴ J.-L. Goré, L'Itinéraire de Fénelon: humanisme et spiritualité (Paris, 1957).

⁵ M. Cagnac, Fénelon. Etudes critiques (Paris, 1910).

politique".¹ One might only be a little reluctant to restrict this influence to just literature and politics.

Fénelon's acquaintance with antiquity most probably dates from his early years. It is possible that he perfected his knowledge of Greek at Saint-Sulpice, though it would hardly have been a priority, and it is very unlikely that he would have studied much Greek at the Collège du Plessis; he must therefore have made considerable progress in learning the ancient languages before coming to Paris. Certainly a letter of 9 October (?) 1676 confirms the vigour of his Greek enthusiasms around the time of his ordination.² Moreover his Humanist interests could only have been further encouraged when he joined the circle of erudite Anciens, the Petit Concile, grouped around Bossuet. The most important of these was doubtless Claude Fleury, a highly cultivated scholar of mystical bent. Mme ^{de} Goré regards his influence as significant in the Platonic education of Fénelon: "Le platonisme de Fleury nous semble surtout susceptible d'avoir marqué Fénelon"³ and "Comment Fénelon ne se serait-il pas entretenu avec Fleury de la morale platonicienne que celui-ci admirait tant et surtout de la dialectique et de la poésie des Dialogues? Les deux amis auront lu le Phèdre, la République et le Banquet, non par vaine curiosité, mais pour s'en pénétrer comme d'une

¹ Cagnac, p. 51.

² In OC, vol. VII, pp. 491-2. Bausset suggests the addressee is Bossuet (Histoire I, n. 15).

³ Itinéraire, p. 108.

manne indispensable à la formation de leur esprit; Platon enfin garantit même la sainteté du peuple hébreu dont les mœurs sont l'exacte réplique des coutumes que le philosophe jugeait idéales".¹ The apostolic activity and metaphysical enquiry of the years up to the encounter with Mme. Guyon and appointment as précepteur to the duc de Bourgogne (in whose education he was to collaborate with Fleury and the abbé de Langeron) allowed Fénelon seemingly no more time to pursue his classical interests than the bitter Quietist controversy, and yet, not even during the latter anti-intellectual, anti-Humanist period, nothing could deprive him of his basic culture which remains, whatever the particular emphasis of the moment, the constant feature of Fénelon's thought. Cagnac states that "pour Fénelon comme pour Platon, le beau se confond avec le bien",² and this is indeed a revealing perception.

It is in Fénelon's pedagogic and literary output that his Hellenism, especially his Platonism, is most explicit. From his first published work, De l'éducation des filles (1687), to the aesthetic statement of the Lettre à l'Académie (1714), the influence of Plato is readily apparent, of the Gorgias on his conception of rhetoric, of the Republic and the Laws on his ideas on politics, morality and education, and it is the same idealist doctrine that lies behind his more strictly philosophical and spiritual

¹ Itinéraire, pp. 110-1.
² Cagnac, p. 151.

works. One of the earliest works to be written (though not published until 1718) was the Dialogues sur l'Éloquence. Bossuet, Fleury and Fénelon had preached together in Meaux at Lent in 1684, and it may be, as Mme[̂] Goré suggests,¹ that Fénelon's Dialogues grew out of discussions on rhetoric that may have taken place at that time. Certainly the mark of the Gorgias is quite clear, especially in the first Dialogue ("Contre l'affectation de bel-esprit dans les sermons. Le but de l'éloquence est d'instruire les hommes, et de les rendre meilleurs: l'orateur n'atteindra pas ce but, s'il n'est désintéressé") where Plato is described as "le plus éloquent écrivain de l'antiquité"² and the nature of true rhetoric is explored in Socratic fashion. Of course, the very form of the Dialogues pays tribute to Plato with Fénelon ('A') playing the part of Socrates in discussion with a sophist ('B') and a rather dull man of the world incapable of real debate ('C'), but the content is equally indebted to the works of Plato, especially at the end of the first Dialogue. Here, Fénelon proposes the authority of the Gorgias, whilst also referring to the Phaedrus, on the purpose of rhetoric and oratory as suggested in the title: "Il n'appartient qu'au philosophe d'être véritable orateur".³ In condemning empty rhetoric, Fénelon is advocating an austere doctrine of instructive

1 Itinéraire, p. 108.

2 In OC, vol. VI, p. 570.

3 OC, vol. VI, p. 578.

oratory in which wisdom is the pre-requisite of preaching:

"Platon, dans son dialogue où il fait parler Socrate avec Phèdre, montre que le grand défaut des rhéteurs est de chercher l'art de persuader avant que d'avoir appris, par les principes de la philosophie, quelles sont les choses qu'il faut tâcher de persuader aux hommes";¹ and in which wisdom lies primarily in self-knowledge: "Il faut savoir ce que c'est que l'homme, sa fin, ses intérêts véritables".²

From here he progresses to a definition of eloquence:

"Platon dit qu'un discours n'est éloquent qu'autant qu'il agit dans l'âme de l'auditeur".³ This idea is developed in the second Dialogue ("Pour atteindre ce but, l'orateur doit prouver, peindre et toucher. Principes sur l'art oratoire, sur la méthode d'apprendre et de débiter par coeur les sermons, sur la méthode des divisions et sous-divisions. L'orateur doit bannir sévèrement du discours les ornemens frivoles"), whilst the rhetorical ideal represented by Scripture and the Fathers is considered in the third Dialogue ("En quoi consiste la véritable éloquence. Combien celle des livres saints est admirable. Importance et manière d'expliquer l'Écriture sainte. Moyens de se former à la prédication. Quelle doit être la matière ordinaire des instructions. Sur l'éloquence et le style des Pères. Sur les panégyriques").

1 OC, vol. VI, p. 577.

2 OC, vol. VI, p. 578.

3 OC, vol. VI, p. 579.

Underlying such an austere, abstract conception of rhetoric in which purity and virtue are the principles of eloquence, is the fundamental notion that what is beautiful is also that which is good, the Platonic identification of τὸ καλόν and τὸ ἀγαθόν . The Greek idea of καλὸς καὶ ἀγαθός is, in its anthropocentrism, essentially opposed to the divine transcendence of Christianity, whether mystical or not, and yet this association lies at the heart of Fénélon's doctrine in both literary theory and theology. It may be transmuted in his later mysticism, but it remains intact in a pure form in the early, more Humanist works and has wide implications. For, if art is morally instructive, the converse is equally true, namely that what is instructive is also attractive, and this idea underpins one of the most prodigious areas of Fénélon's pre-Quietist output, his pedagogic works.

Even before he was appointed tutor to the duc de Bourgogne (17 August 1689), Fénélon had already formulated his educational theories. Written at the request of the duchesse de Beauvilliers, then, De l'éducation des filles was his first published work.¹ Whilst it would be entirely misleading to regard this treatise as a proto-feminist tract - Chapter I makes it clear that Fénélon advocates the proper education of women because of their

¹ Paris, 1687. Fénélon's letter to the duchesse de Beauvilliers of 28 Dec. 1685 reveals that it was already complete at that date.

natural weakness and the trouble caused by "empty-headed" wives, mothers and daughters, and not because of any sense of equality - it nevertheless contains significant liberal ideas which show him to be the successor of Erasmus, Rabelais and Montaigne, as of François de Sales and the Jesuit educators, and the precursor of eighteenth-century ideas of education. For he propounds the forward-looking theory of l'éducation attrayante, directly opposed to the mediaeval tradition and following on from the conciliatory theories of the Renaissance and the Christian Humanists of the Counter-Reformation. Above all, though, it has its roots firmly in Platonism.

Somewhat surprisingly, then, one finds that the starting-point is the Aristotelian notion of the tabula rasa: "Les premières images gravées pendant que le cerveau est encore mou, et que rien n'y est écrit, sont les plus profondes".¹ This Scholastic epistemology may be no more than a dialectical device in Fénelon's argument that a girl's mind should be filled with the right things from the outset, but, whatever the epistemological implications, the essence of the theory is wholly inspired by Platonism. For the guiding principles of Fénelon's pedagogy are reason and the love of Good-Beauty. Reacting against the antiquated view of education as rote-learning and blind obedience to authority, he aims to form the whole man or woman, not by

¹ In OC, vol. V, p. 568.

destroying the will, but by allowing it to develop properly and naturally: "Il faut se contenter de suivre et d'aider la nature".¹ Such optimism sits uncomfortably beside the mystical self-annihilation of the later Fénelon, but, as with Bossuet, it reflects the two sides of their mutual master, Saint Augustine. The natural guide of the will is reason and it is reason that reveals the Beauty (which is Good) that man should love. In the sphere of practical education this leads to the notion that learning should be enjoyable (Chapter V), but the connection between pleasure and virtue has a more profound origin in Fénelon's understanding of both the letter and the spirit of Platonism. For in the philosophical, as in the aesthetic, realm Beauty is Truth, and the truths that must appear attractive to the young mind are the themes of traditional Humanist apologetics: "Il faut ... sans les presser, tourner doucement le premier usage de leur raison à connoître Dieu".² Again the first stage in the progression to knowledge of God (and the mysteries of Christ, "auteur et consommateur de notre foi, le centre de toute la religion, et notre unique espérance")³ is self-knowledge. Dualism and the consequences of the distinction of body and soul form "les fondemens de toute la religion".⁴ For the immediate corollary is scorn of the flesh and the things of

1 In OC, vol. V, p. 567.

2 Ibid., p. 578.

3 Ibid., p. 584.

4 Ibid., p. 579.

this world, and the glorification and love of the soul and spiritual truth: "Finissez en concluant qu'une ame est bien foible et bien malheureuse, quand elle se laisse emporter par son corps comme par un cheval fougueux qui la jette dans un précipice. Faites encore remarquer que la beauté du corps est une fleur qui s'épanouit le matin, et qui est le soir flétrie et foulée aux pieds; mais que l'âme est l'image de la beauté immortelle de Dieu"¹ and "Concluez que nous ne sommes ici-bas que comme des voyageurs dans une hôtellerie, ou sous une tente; que le corps va périr; qu'on ne peut retarder que de peu d'années sa corruption; mais que l'âme s'envolera dans cette céleste patrie, où elle doit vivre à jamais de la vie de Dieu".² The Platonic influence is unmistakable here, but as with the Christian Humanists the several truths of Platonism are absorbed into the one Truth of Christianity and the movement of Fénelon's Humanist education culminates in Christian perfection.

Like Bossuet, Fénelon was required to put theory into practice as a royal tutor, and, as Bossuet prepared his own teaching manuals for the Dauphin, Fénelon too provided his own material for the application of l'éducation attrayante. However, whereas Bossuet wrote practical philosophical, historical, political and religious textbooks, Fénelon's texts are very much more literary, and reflect his predilection for Greek culture. His Hellenism, in both form

1 Ibid., p. 580.

2 Ibid., p. 581.

and content, produces attractive works of merit and charm, as well as pedagogic utility, in which Plato is again to the fore. The best-known of these is Les Aventures de Télémaque. Published in 1699, when its author was in exile in Cambrai, it was inevitably received as a satirical work containing a barely disguised critique of the reign of Louis XIV. Certainly when seen in connection with the Examen de conscience sur les devoirs de la royauté¹ and the famous Lettre à Louis XIV,² it does appear in a radical light, and yet it is less the liberal, democratic treatise that the Enlightenment took it to be than a utopian picture of the ideal monarch. It attacks neither monarchy nor even absolutism, but the abuse of (absolute) power in a manner which, for all the interpretations of Bossuet as a defender of despotism and Fénelon as a precursor of the Revolution, is not greatly different from the Politique of the Bishop of Meaux. Its point of attack is unambiguous: "Il y a deux choses pernicieuses, dans le gouvernement des peuples, auxquelles on n'apporte presque jamais de remède: la première est une autorité injuste et trop violente dans les rois; la seconde est le luxe, qui corrompt les mœurs".³ Effectively Télémaque is a work of moral and political education launched under the ensign of the Republic and Laws; as L. Boulvée writes: "Il est incontestable en effet

1 In OC, vol. VII.

2 In OC, vol. VII, pp. 509-13 and Corr., ed. Orcibal, vol. II, pp. 274-80.

3 In OC, vol. VI, p. 547.

que l'organisateur du gouvernement de Salente a médité profondément sinon exclusivement la République et les Lois".¹ A sequel to Book IV of the Odyssey, which Fénelon translated just prior to writing Télémaque (c. 1693), it has at its core the ideal of the philosopher-king: "Heureux, disoit Mentor, le peuple qui est conduit par un sage roi!".² It is the philosopher-king alone who can introduce the reforms advocated by Fénelon,³ and Idomeneus, King of Salentum, epitomises Minos's ideal of wisdom, justice and moderation as related by Mentor:

Je lui demandai en quoi consiste l'autorité du Roi; et il me répondit: Il peut tout sur les peuples; mais les lois peuvent tout sur lui. Il a une puissance absolue pour faire le bien, et les mains liées dès qu'il veut faire le mal. Les lois lui confient les peuples comme les plus précieux de tous les dépôts, à condition qu'il sera le père de ses sujets. Elles veulent qu'un seul homme serve, par sa sagesse et par sa modération, à la félicité de tant d'hommes; et non pas que tant d'hommes servent, par leur misère et par leur servitude lâche, à flatter l'orgueil et la mollesse d'un seul homme.⁴

The significance of Fénelon's Hellenism is fully apparent in the moral and political theories of Télémaque as in the very presence of Mentor as educator of Télémaque, but it also appears in the detailed knowledge of Greek mythology and history and the wider character of the classically inspired episodes (the descriptions of nature, the combats, the descent to Hell, the voyage itself). Such features also characterise the Fables.

1 Boulvée, p. 101.

2 OC, vol. VI, p. 404.

3 Ibid., p. 548.

4 Ibid., pp. 426-7.

Of the literary works, though, it is the series of Dialogues des Morts¹ that is in parts most strictly philosophical. Those discussing moral themes reiterate ideas found elsewhere, notably in Télémaque, but the dialogues between Plato and Aristotle (No. XXIV) and Aristotle and Descartes (No. LXXVIII) treat distinctly philosophical problems in a way which elucidates Fénelon's own metaphysical first premises. The former is the more significant for here one can discern, if in a rather jocular form, the essential principles that lie behind Fénelon's metaphysics and ultimately his mysticism. Firstly it forms "une critique de la philosophie d'Aristote". Although Fénelon's Plato accepts the clarity and exactitude of Aristotle's ethics and logic, and Aristotle answers Plato's repudiation of him as a true disciple with an insistence on his own original thought expressed in a non-poetic style avoiding falling into a galimatias of ideas, Plato's opposition to Aristotle is presented in the traditional terms of the anti-Scholastic reaction. Plato attacks Aristotle's physics as "un amas de termes abstraits qui n'expliquent point la nature des corps".² It is the charge of obscure jargon that is at the heart of Plato's case: "C'est une physique métaphysiquée, ou, pour mieux dire, des noms vagues, pour accoutumer les esprits à se payer de mots, et à

1 In OC, vol. VI.

2 OC, vol. VI, p. 268.

croire entendre ce qu'ils n'entendent point"¹ and "Votre philosophie n'enseigne que des mots; ce n'est pas une philosophie, ce n'est qu'une langue bizarre".² The same argument figures prominently in the dialogue between Descartes and Aristotle on Cartesian metaphysics and the question of animal automatism in particular, where Aristotle insists on the obscurity of their debate on "une cause bien embrouillée"³ and, although Descartes ripostes that there is nothing clearer than his system, it is Aristotle who has the last word: "Croyez-moi, ne disputons pas davantage; nous y perdrons tous deux notre latin".⁴ This allows Fénelon to avoid coming down clearly in favour of animal automatism, but his Cartesian sympathies will soon be apparent.

Such negative comments, however, form less a rejection of philosophical debate than a refusal to enter into sterile complexities, whether Aristotelian or Cartesian, and the corollary of this critique, the "solidité des idées éternelles de Platon", reveals the simple, uplifting movement of Fénelon's most profound philosophical principles. For Plato's reply to Aristotle's scorn of the abstraction of eternal ideas constitutes the essential spirit of his philosophical and religious beliefs:

Vous avez parlé, j'en conviens, d'une manière nette, précise, pure, mais sèche et incapable de faire sentir la sublimité des vérités divines. Pour les idées

1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 OC, vol. VI, p. 333.

4 Ibid.

éternelles, vous vous en moquerez tant qu'il vous plaira; mais vous ne sauriez vous en passer, si vous voulez établir quelques vérités certaines ... Qu'est-ce que la raison, sinon nos idées? Si nos idées changeaient, la raison serait aussi changeante ... Ces idées éternelles, que vous voulez tourner en ridicule, ne sont donc que les premiers principes de la raison, qui demeurent toujours les mêmes ... Faute de remonter aux idées, qui sont les premières et les simples notions de chaque chose, vous n'avez point eu de principes assez fermes, et vous n'alliez qu'à tâtons.¹

This insistence on "la sublimité des vérités divines" epitomises both the origin and the conclusion of Fénelon's philosophy and his spirituality.

It is the notion of sublimity that lies at the origin of Fénelon's natural predilection for Plato. Thus, the article "Platon" in the Abrégé des vies des anciens philosophes begins "Platon, que la sublimité de sa doctrine a fait surnommer le Divin".² Fénelon's analysis of his system sees it as composed under the influence of Heraclitus's physics, Pythagoras's metaphysics and Socrates's ethics and politics and constituting a new, elevated doctrine based on the three fundamental principles of God, matter and idea: "Dieu comme l'intelligence universelle; la matière, comme le premier suppôt de la génération et de la corruption; l'idée, comme une substance incorporelle et résidente dans l'entendement de Dieu".³ Yet the admiration is not all-embracing. Although Fénelon follows the common belief that Plato knew the Old Testament,⁴ he does not make him the

1 OC, vol. VI, p. 267.

2 OC, vol. VII, p. 42.

3 OC, vol. VII, p. 45.

4 See Vie de Platon d'après le manuscrit original de Fénelon (in OC, vol. VII, pp. 82-3), p. 83.

precursor of truly Christian revelation: "On a toujours cru que Platon avoit eu connoissance du vrai Dieu, soit par les lumières de son esprit, soit par celles qu'il avoit pu tirer des livres des Hébreux; mais il faut convenir aussi qu'il a été du nombre de ces philosophes dont parle saint Paul, qui, ayant connu Dieu, ne l'ont pas glorifié comme Dieu, mais se sont égarés dans la vanité de leurs sentimens".¹ Equally Fénelon points out that, although Plato holds that the world is the product of a divine Creator, it is only in the sense that God created order out of the chaos of pre-existent or eternal matter, as a mason builds a house out of unshaped stone, and not ex nihilo. Furthermore, and perhaps surprisingly given the popularity of the theme amongst seventeenth-century apologists, he has little respect for Plato's arguments on the soul. For, "quoique Platon ait fait un fort beau dialogue sur l'immortalité de l'âme", he also fell into the errors of metempsychosis, the pre-existence of souls, the substance of the soul as being composed of both a corporeal and a spiritual part, and the soul's reminiscences of its previous lives.² Such an attitude is unexceptional, but Fénelon goes further: "Il faut même avouer que Platon fait raisonner foiblement Socrate sur l'immortalité de l'âme".³ Bossuet was but the most distinguished of many apologists to have exploited

1 In OC, vol. VII, p. 45.

2 Ibid., p. 45.

3 Lettre à M. Dacier (in OC, vol. VI, p. 644).

Plato's arguments for immortality whilst still rejecting his errors, and, given Fénelon's essential sympathy with the ancient philosopher, it is perhaps surprising that he did not follow the same path. This need not be the case. If one considers that he is not primarily an apologist nor even a metaphysician, but a spiritual writer of personal genius it is obvious that he would have little need for external support for his faith or for complex argument to boost the faith of others; for Fénelon, simplicity, directness, nobility and elevation - the essence of the sublime, in which Beauty and Truth are one - are the central principles and these he finds in the broad movement of the dialectic of Platonic idealism, not in its incidentals.

Despite the great diversity of Fénelon's vast output, few of his works are specifically philosophical, but his philosophy is always related to his theology, spirituality and apologetics. His first philosophical work, then, was the Réfutation du système du P. Malebranche sur la nature et la grâce, a critique of Malebranche's Traité de la nature et de la grâce written ostensibly at the behest of Bossuet.¹ Fénelon's arguments against Malebranche's doctrine of grace, providence and divine freedom have been fully

¹ Gouhier dates its composition to the winter of 1687-88 (Fénelon philosophe, pp. 34-9) though it was not published until 1820 (in vol. III of the Versailles edition of the Oeuvres Complètes). L. Labbas describes the Réfutation as "le développement de la Lettre à un disciple de Malebranche" of Bossuet (La grâce et la liberté (Paris, 1931), pp. 338-9).

analysed by Gouhier,¹ Leclere,² and Montcheuil,³ and need not be considered here. It is sufficient just to note that the first eleven chapters attack Malebranche's first principle, namely the idea of order determining all things, including God, to produce the most perfect of all possible worlds, and its consequences, and that he then proceeds to criticize Malebranche's arguments for the necessary sovereign perfection of God's creation. Essentially, as Leclere points out,⁴ both Malebranche and Fénelon seek a middle path between the two extremes of the rigorous determinism of Spinoza and the irrational voluntarism of Descartes, and whilst Malebranche tends more towards the notion of necessity, Fénelon insists on a more traditional concept of divine freedom. Passing over the detail of Fénelon's critique, then, one can consider what the Réfutation represents in a broader sense.

It is not clear when or how Fénelon became interested in metaphysics. His first reference to Descartes is in a letter to the abbé de Langeron of 24 August 1684,⁵ and it seems likely that he would have encountered Cartesian ideas earlier still from the time he entered Bossuet's circle c. 1680. However, at first he would appear to have had little interest in pure philosophy, and certainly, like Bossuet

1 Fénelon philosophe (Paris, 1977).

2 H. Leclere, "Fénelon critique de Malebranche" in Revue thomiste, 53 (1953), pp. 347-366.

3 Malebranche et le quietisme (Paris, 1946).

4 Leclere, art. cit., p. 353.

5 In Corr., vol. II, p. 16.

whose respectful (if not intimate) disciple he was until the encounter with Mme. Guyon in 1688, he does at times seem ambivalent in his attitude to the use of reason. He is hostile to Scholastic Aristotelianism and sympathetic towards the new ideas of Cartesianism (despite his moderating advice in his letter to his great nephew, the abbé de Salignac),¹ but, for all his awareness of developments in contemporary philosophy, he is unequivocal in his condemnation of vain intellectual curiosity: "Malheur aux riches d'esprit, à ces savans qui entassent tant de connoissances, à ces philosophes sages en eux-mêmes, aux esprits qui veulent tout pénétrer, et jouir de leurs lumières comme un avare de ses trésors!".² Like Bossuet, Fénelon condemns not reason, but the misuse of reason independent of faith and it is this that forms the starting-point of his refutation of Malebranche whom he regarded as subjecting the mysteries of faith to philosophy: "Il m'a paru, en lisant la Recherche de la Vérité, que l'auteur du livre joignoit à une grande connoissance des principes de la philosophie, un amour sincère pour la religion. Quand j'ai lu ensuite son ouvrage de la Nature et de la Grâce, l'estime que j'avois pour lui m'a persuadé qu'il s'étoit engagé insensiblement à former ce système sans envisager les conséquences qu'on en peut tirer contre les

1 Letter of 18 May 1712, in OC, vol. VII, p. 438.

2 Letter to the duc de Chevreuse, in OC, vol. VII, p. 223. See also the other letters in this series (Nos. XXII-XXIX, pp. 221-8).

fondemens de la foi. Ainsi je crois qu'il est important de les lui montrer".¹

This distinction is significant. For the Réfutation attacks not the Cartesianism of Malebranche, but certain consequences of the internal logic of his system, in particular the philosophical theory of grace which Bossuet saw as a false interpretation of Augustine putting him in the service of a new Pelagianism.² If this is so, then the question poses itself of why Bossuet did not see the Réfutation through to publication. Montcheuil, and after him Varillon, suggests that it was because Bossuet found himself allied with Malebranche in the controversy over pure love;³ Gouhier, on the other hand, thinks it was because Fénelon, who then had a Jesuit confessor, appeared too accommodating in his attitude to Molinism.⁴ Certainly, already in the 1680s, Fénelon was growing increasingly hostile to Jansenism and his refusal to deal with Arnauld's critique of Malebranche is symptomatic of this: "Pour sa dispute avec M. Arnauld, je n'y entre point, ne connoissant pas celui-ci, n'ayant avec lui aucune liaison ni directe ni indirecte, et n'ayant pas même lu les livres qu'il a faits contre l'auteur".⁵ It is true that Malebranche denies,

1 In OC, vol. II, p. 70.

2 See Gouhier, Fénelon philosophe, p. 50.

3 Montcheuil, op. cit., p. 77, and E. Varillon, "Introduction" to Fénelon's Oeuvres Spirituelles (Paris, 1954).

4 Fénelon philosophe, pp. 39-40.

5 OC, vol. II, p. 72.

radically if implicitly, the passive life of the truly theopathic state and was finally reconciled with Bossuet as a result of his opposition to the spirituality of pure love in his Traité de l'amour de Dieu, but in effect Fénelon was to have much in common with him to the extent of being his disciple more than the disciple of Bossuet, as more than Bossuet he turns away from the empirical Cartesianism of Arnauld towards the idealism of Malebranche. Fénelon seems to have been wholly unaware of the mystical implications of Malebranche's theodicy at the time of writing the Réfutation, and yet, quite apart from the fact that both were distantly allied against Port-Royal and the Jansenist sympathies in the party-orientated religious disputes of the late seventeenth century, a fundamental spiritual idealism lies at the heart of both their systems.

In this respect it is worth noting Fénelon's attitude towards Augustine. During his years of exile, he was greatly preoccupied with Augustine. Exasperated by the Saint-Maur edition, he aimed to prepare a new edition with introductions, notes and commentaries of a rather different tone. It is possible that he would have collaborated with the Jesuits in this project, but, in any case, even though his work on Augustine is lost, it is certain that he was aligned with them in their conflict with Bossuet and Port-Royal. A fervent disciple of Augustine himself, Fénelon was wholly opposed to the Augustinus, regarding Jansenius's Augustine as no better than that of Luther or

Calvin.¹ What Fénelon wanted to reveal in his work was what he regarded as the authentic Augustine, the idealist Augustine whose faith sought and found understanding when guided by the light of divine reason. Paradoxically it is such an Augustinian attitude to reason that in fact unites Malebranche, Bossuet and Fénelon in the same basic approach to philosophy, an approach rooted in Platonic idealism and epitomized by Augustine's Christian metaphysics. All three place a different emphasis on their theological inheritance from the Bishop of Hippo, but all would subscribe to Fénelon's formulation of the metaphysical ideal which their spiritual master represented: "Vous dites, Monseigneur, que le christianisme n'est pas une école de métaphysiciens. Tous les chrétiens, il est vrai, ne peuvent pas être métaphysiciens; mais les principaux théologiens ont grand besoin de l'être. C'est par une sublime métaphysique que saint Augustin a remonté aux premiers principes des vérités de la religion contre les païens et contre les hérétiques. C'est par la sublimité de cette science qu'il s'est élevé au-dessus de la plupart des autres Pères".² In his defence and illustration of Christianity, Augustine is beyond comparison; influenced by Plato and influencing Descartes, he transcends both in his rational exploration of the faith which precedes and in turn illuminates reason. It is this path of reason seeking to explore the truths of

¹ See Fénelon's letters to the Benedictine, Dom François Lami.

² Deuxième Lettre à Mgr. l'archevêque de Paris (in OC, vol. II, p. 483).

religion in the light of faith that Fénelon follows. As Gouhier writes: "Cette foi qui cherche l'intelligence et qui la trouve est manifestement celle dont saint Augustin a donné l'exemple dans sa relation aux platoniciens".¹ Such is the inspiration of the Traité de l'existence et des attributs de Dieu and the Lettres sur divers sujets de métaphysique et de religion.

Though not published until 1718,² the second part of what was to become the Traité de l'existence et des attributs de Dieu entitled "Démonstration de l'existence et des attributs de Dieu, tirée des idées intellectuelles" was probably written at about the same time as the Réfutation.³ Certainly this work reveals the influence of Malebranche's brand of Cartesianism and it is here that one finds the profound metaphysical foundation of Fénelon's spirituality. It is also Fénelon's first attempt at religious apologetics, aimed at the intellectual libertins, to which he was to return during his years of exile.⁴ As

1 Fénelon philosophe, p. 19; cf. p. 15 also.

2 Fénelon, Oeuvres philosophiques (Paris, 1718).

3 Cf. Journal de Trévoux (janvier 1719): "... cette seconde partie n'est que l'ébauche d'un grand ouvrage que feu M. l'abbé de Fénelon avoit entrepris dans sa jeunesse, et qu'il n'acheva pas" (p. 7).

4 As M. Haillant points out (in Fénelon et la prédication (Paris, 1969)), the themes of traditional apologetics are absent from Fénelon's preaching, unlike Bossuet's pulpit oratory; instead, in a simple, popular, apostolic manner, he concentrates on the nothingness of man opposed to the All of God and, rather than proofs of the existence of God, the divinity of Christ and the immortality of the soul, one finds a pessimistic psychology of human misery founded on the essential polarity of All-Nothing, a gulf that can be bridged by pure love alone. Fénelon's apologetic as such is restricted to the Traité and the Lettres.

with Bossuet, the starting-point of Fénelon's quest for metaphysical certainty lies in the Cartesian method. For both, the philosophy of Descartes represented a return to a more ancient, pre-Scholastic tradition, typifying the seventeenth-century revival of interest in the Fathers,¹ but whereas, for Bossuet, Descartes marks a return to Augustine, for Fénelon the new philosophy stands rather in the tradition of the more mystical Fathers and the (Neo-)Platonism that lies behind them. Moreover the significance of Cartesian doubt is very different in the respective apologetic works of Bossuet and Fénelon: whilst the former's Cartesianism serves a typically conservative apologetic purpose, with its revolutionary consequences limited to proofs of the existence of God and the immortality of the soul against the libertins and sceptics, Fénelon's Cartesianism is far more radical, even to the extent of transcending the immediate dialectical intention.

Although Fénelon's doubt in Traité II, 1 is ultimately methodical rather than hyperbolic, his scepticism is in effect a more profound metaphysical crisis than that of Descartes as it questions even the logical necessity of the cogito and demands something of a leap of faith in order to establish the ontological certainty of the thinking self. In the crisis of doubt and the search for a certain truth beyond suspension of judgement, Fénelon halts the process

¹ See R. Spaemann, Reflexion und Spontaneität: Studien über Fénelon (Stuttgart, 1963), p. 99.

with an intuition, not a logical deduction but the revelation of "une espèce de lueur qui se présente à moi dans cet abîme de ténèbres où je suis enfoncé".¹ In the midst of darkness, the clarity of ideas in thought is perceived and this forms the foundation for truth. The syllogism of Descartes's cogito is thus transmuted. In Fénelon's scheme, it is not immediately certain, but depends on a contradiction, on the universal truth that nothingness has no properties and therefore cannot think: "Me voilà donc enfin résolu à croire que je pense, puisque je doute: et que je suis, puisque je pense: car le néant ne sauroit penser, et une même chose ne peut tout ensemble être et n'être pas".² Having first posited the certainty of clear ideas, Fénelon proceeds, by an affirmative leap of existential faith (which Spaemann relates to the influence of Pascal's pari)³ from human despair to divine truth:

Il est vrai que je suis quelque chose qui se connoît soi-même, et dont la nature est de connoître: mais d'où est-ce que je viens? est-ce du néant que je suis sorti; ou bien ai-je toujours été? qui est-ce qui a pu commencer en moi la pensée? ce qu'il me semble voir autour de moi est-il quelque chose? O vérité, vous commencez à luire à mes yeux. Je vois poindre un foible rayon de lumière naissante sur l'horizon, au milieu d'une profonde et affreuse nuit: achevez de percer mes ténèbres; débrouillez peu à peu le chaos où je suis enfoncé.⁴

1 Traité II, 1 (in OC, vol. I, p. 48).

2 Traité II, 1 (in OC, vol. I, p. 51).

3 R. Spaemann 'Fénelon et l'argument du pari' (in Archives de philosophie, 29 (1966), pp. 163-174).

4 Traité II, 1 (in OC, vol. I, pp. 51-2).

This is not the calm reasoning of the Cartesian method, but the desolation of the mystic in the soul's ascent to pure love seeking divine light in the darkness of human night and resolving to follow the glimmer of truth upon which all truth is ultimately founded. An acute consciousness of the mystical opposition of All and Nothing is thus the basis of Fénelon's apologetics, thereby underlining the close relationship between his metaphysics and his spirituality. Tending towards and beyond the ontologism of Malebranche, Fénelon has transformed the lucid rationality of Descartes's cogito into an ecstatic meditation on the "I am that I am" of Exodus 3.14 in the light of clear ideas: "O vérité, venez à moi, montrez-vous toute pure: que je vous voie, et je serai rassasié en vous voyant!".¹

There is here a double movement: the human quest for the light of reason amidst the despair of darkness and divine illumination as man perceives "les rayons de la vérité". Almost paradoxically Fénelon presents both the impotence of human reason and at the same time the validity of reason's search for truth in faith. The key to an understanding of this paradox lies in Fénelon's exploitation of two fundamental principles of Platonism and Augustinianism.² The first forms the introduction to the second and consists of the Platonic opposition of Being and Becoming: "Voilà le prodige que je porte toujours au-dedans de moi. Je suis un

¹ Traité II, 1 (OC, vol. I, p. 52).

² This is also true, to a lesser degree, of Malebranche.

prodige moi-même. N'étant rien, du moins n'étant qu'un être emprunté, borné, passager, je tiens de l'infini et de l'immuable que je conçois: par là je ne puis me comprendre moi-même. J'embrasse tout, et je ne suis rien; je suis un rien qui connoît l'infini: les paroles me manquent pour m'admirer et me ~~me~~réprouver tout ensemble. O Dieu! ...".¹ m

The form is Bérullian - indeed the frequent élévations clearly place Fénelon in the tradition of the École française - but the content is ultimately Platonic, resting on a pessimistic view of human time by which time is the impermanence of created being, a permanent state of metamorphosis or flux, of Becoming as opposed to true Being.² This theme also underlies the voyages of Télémaque, but more importantly it determines the entire course of Fénelon's metaphysics (and mysticism). The notion of man in a constant state of change - "Je ne sais comment m'assurer que le moi d'hier est le même que celui d'aujourd'hui" is the leitmotiv³ - looks forward to the theories of Bergson and Gide, but Fénelon's conception derives from an intense experience and contemplation of the truths of Exodus and Plato: the All of Being and the Nothingness of Becoming. This will influence his Augustinian, even Plotinian, treatment of the attributes of

1 Traité II, 2 (OC, vol. I, p. 57).

2 G. Poulet has explored this theme in Études sur le temps humain: IV Mesure de l'instant (Paris, 1968) and "Fénelon et le temps" (in Nouvelle revue française, 2 (1954), pp. 624-644).

3 III^e Lettre (in OC, vol. I, p. 117).

God (in Traité II, 5) and his refutation of Spinoza (in Traité II, 3),¹ but its original force lies in its significance for the ontological status of man: "Je ne suis ... qu'un être d'emprunt, qu'un demi-être, qu'un être qui est sans cesse entre l'être et le néant, qu'un ombre de l'être immuable. Cet être est tout, et je ne suis rien; du moins je ne suis qu'un faible écoulement de sa plénitude sans bornes".² A Bérullian theocentrism is the immediate corollary: "Voilà tout l'homme; ce n'est qu'un être entièrement relatif à Dieu, il n'est rien que par là, il n'est plus rien dès le moment qu'il déchoit de cet ordre essentiel".³ Whereas Descartes invoked the principles of divine veracity and continuous creation to guarantee the permanence of human thought (and hence, via the cogito, human existence), Fénelon's version of the cogito serves to emphasise the moment's lack of ontological certainty and

1 Fénelon argues that the Spinozistic infinite perfection of the world is irreconcilable with the notion of the world as being in a constant state of change. Gouhier discusses Fénelon's attitude to Spinoza in Fénelon philosophe and stresses the radical discontinuity between nature and supernature in Fénelon.

2 I^{ere} Lettre (in OC, vol. I, p. 96).

3 III^e Lettre (in OC, vol. I, p. 117).

man's lack of Being, from which he can escape only by a leap of faith.¹

Ultimately it is the act of pure love that releases man from time, not by suppressing it but by unifying its continual flow in the eternal moment of love,² and one begins to see how Fénelon's mysticism grows out of his metaphysics. The immediate consequences are more traditional and concern the existence of God and epistemology. Fénelon's first three proofs of the existence of God (in Traité II, 2) are a modification of Descartes's

¹ The texts illustrating this problem are manifold. Two of the most noteworthy are in E. Griselle's edition of the first draft of the III^e Lettre (in "Fénelon métaphysicien (Oeuvres inédites)", in Revue de philosophie, 4 (1904), pp. 23-50): "O Dieu, que suis-je? une ombre de votre être ... Est-il question de me trouver, je me cherche en vain. Je m'échappe à moi-même. Je fuis et je disparois comme une ombre ... Tout au plus je ne suis qu'un demi-être, toujours presté, et par un prest momentané. Je n'ai aucune consistance. Je ne suis jamais tout entier avec permanence. L'homme d'hier n'est pas précisément celui d'aujourd'hui, ni quant aux parties du corps, ni quant aux pensées de l'âme ... Le moi de l'instant où je parle n'est déjà plus, et un autre moi qui le pousse pour prendre sa place, à peine a le temps de paroître ..." (pp. 42-3); and in Traité II, 5: "Je ne suis pas, ô mon Dieu, ce qui est; hélas! je suis presque ce qui n'est pas. Je me vois comme un milieu incompréhensible entre le néant et l'être; je suis celui qui a été; je suis celui qui n'est pas encore ce qu'il sera; et dans cet entre-deux que suis-je? Un je ne sais quoi qui ne peut s'arrêter en soi, qui n'a aucune consistance, qui s'écoule rapidement comme l'eau; un je ne sais quoi que je ne puis saisir, qui s'enfuit de mes propres mains, qui n'est plus, dès que je veux le saisir ou l'apercevoir: un je ne sais quoi qui finit dans l'instant même où il commence; en sorte que je ne puis jamais un seul moment me trouver moi-même fixe et présent à moi-même, pour dire simplement: Je suis. Ainsi ma durée n'est qu'une défaillance perpétuelle" (in OC, vol. I, p. 78). Also in M. Raymond, Fénelon (Bruges, 1967), pp. 102-3.

² See Poulet, "Fénelon et le temps", pp. 637-41.

arguments from the ideas of perfection and infinity and the ontological proof,¹ but he goes on to add a fourth, "une nouvelle preuve ... tirée de la nature des idées", that is to say a demonstration from the presence in the mind of ideas that do not have their origin in the mind. This supposedly new proof is in fact derived from Augustine (in particular De libero arbitrio) and clearly owes much to Malebranche. Yet, whatever its source, it is nonetheless the necessary consequence of the logic of Fénelon's reasoning on the non-being of man which is the foundation of his system. By identifying the universal, eternal, immutable ideas with God, Fénelon achieves the perfect unity of his system, indeed its circularity with the opposition of All and Nothing as its focal point, and through this proof of the existence of God from man's knowledge of divine ideas he arrives at an epistemology of illumination that is very close to Malebranche's theory of vision in God:

Je conclus donc que l'objet immédiat de toutes mes connaissances universelles est Dieu même, et que l'être singulier ou l'individu créé, qui ne laisse pas d'être réel quoiqu'il soit communiqué, est l'objet immédiat de mes connaissances singulières. Ainsi je vois Dieu en tout, ou, pour mieux dire, c'est en Dieu que je vois toutes choses: car je ne connois rien, je ne distingue rien, et je ne m'assure de rien que par mes idées. Cette connoissance même des individus, où Dieu n'est pas l'objet immédiat de ma pensée, ne peut se faire qu'autant que Dieu donne à cette créature l'intelligibilité, et à moi l'intelligence actuelle. C'est donc à la lumière de Dieu que je vois tout ce qui peut être vu.²

¹ In Méditations III, the proof from perfection is a variation on the proof from infinity (with the ontological proof in Méditations V); for Fénelon, perfection precedes infinity.

² Traité II, 4 (OC, vol. I, p. 68).

Fénelon identifies intelligence with Being, and by extension intelligibility, with the result that both depend on God; man can only know when God illuminates both the object of thought, thereby making it intelligible, and the mind that perceives the object. Such a theory of "co-operative illumination" is essentially Augustinian in origin; the formulation of the doctrine is explicitly Malebranchian, but Fénelon has no concept of intelligible extension,¹ and, like Bossuet, avoids dealing with the problem of how man really knows the external world, preferring not to develop the Augustinian epistemology of illumination into a full-blown theory of vision in God. This chapter then concludes with an élévation on the light of truth that illuminates man in his darkness, and again the mystical implications are apparent. Fénelon returned to apologetics after the Quietist controversy had died down and wrote, apart from the Lettres which reiterate many of the themes already mentioned, what was to become the first part of the Traité. Published in 1712 as the Démonstration de l'existence de Dieu tirée de la connoissance de la nature et proportionnée à la faible intelligence des plus simples,²

¹ There is, however, a suggestion of the notion of intelligible extension in his treatment of the divine attribute of immensity: "Puisqu'il a tout l'être en lui, il a sans doute l'étendue; l'étendue est une manière d'être dont j'ai l'idée ... L'étendue est donc en lui; et il ne peut la produire au dehors qu'à cause qu'elle est renfermée dans la plénitude de son être" (Traité II, 5, in OC, vol. I, pp. 81-2) but the idea is not developed.

² Part I was finally entitled "Démonstration de l'existence de Dieu, tirée du spectacle de la nature et de la connoissance de l'homme".

the first draft of this work was probably written in 1701-2,¹ and it serves to complement the proofs of God of the second part of the Traité by providing a simple, popular, physical (rather than metaphysical) proof for those subject to the failings of the imagination who cannot follow the direct proofs from intellectual ideas.² The principle behind this perfect proof for everyman is hardly original: "Je ne puis ouvrir les yeux sans admirer l'art qui éclate dans toute la nature: le moindre coup d'oeil suffit pour apercevoir la main qui fait tout".³ It is, then, to be the cosmological proof, absent from Descartes, but well-represented in the seventeenth century in Polycarpe de la Rivière's Angélique (1626), Yves de Paris's Théologie

1 A letter to the comtesse de Montberon of 6 January 1702 refers to a work "où j'ai ramassé diverses preuves de la Divinité, tirées de l'art qui éclate dans toute la nature" (in OC, vol. VIII, p. 642) and Bossuet's letter to Antoine de Noailles, Archbishop of Paris, of 5 June 1702 refers to a work entitled De l'excellence de Dieu which he feared would lead to "le renouvellement de toutes les dangereuses maximes et illusions de la fausse contemplation" (in Corr. de Bossuet, vol. XIII, p. 342).

2 Traité I, 1 (in OC, vol. I, pp. 1-2). In the "Première rédaction de la troisième lettre" (ed. Griselle) this theme is related to the image of Plato's cave: "Combien y a-t-il d'hommes trop attachés à leur imagination, pour pouvoir s'élever aux intellection pures, et pour consulter sans aucune image corporelle l'idée du vrai parfait ou infini. De tels hommes, enfoncez dans la caverne de Platon... n'ont jamais vu le beau, le bon, le vrai, le parfait, l'infini en lui-même. Ils ne connoissent que des ombres à la lueur confuse d'une lumière réfléchée; ils ne sauroient consulter l'idée de l'être sans restriction, et contempler immédiatement celui qui est. Ils ne découvrent le Créateur que par ses créatures. Dieu a donné à ces hommes d'imagination un spectacle plein d'images de sa sagesse, de sa beauté et de sa puissance" (in "Fénelon métaphysicien", p. 40).

3 Traité I, 1 (OC, vol. I, p. 1).

Naturelle, Charles Morel's Les Rayons de la Divinité dans les créatures (1654) and Etienne Petiot's Démonstrations Théologiques (1674).

As he progresses from the cosmos, through plants and animals, to man, the motifs are largely traditional, and yet new ideas are not absent: Cartesianism influences the limited treatment of animal automatism and human physiology, and, even in the physical realm, Fénelon's metaphysical idealism still cannot be overlooked. There had been in the Réfutation a suggestion of a Neoplatonic hierarchy of perfection which was to become more explicit in the II^e Lettre;¹ in the first part of the Traité, though, the discussion of man's basic dualism places him explicitly at the centre of the chain of being as vinculum mundi in the image of God:

Je ne connois dans toute la nature que deux sortes d'êtres; ceux qui ont de la connoissance, et ceux qui n'en ont pas. L'homme rassemble en lui ces deux manières d'être: il a un corps, comme les êtres corporels les plus inanimés; il a un esprit, c'est-à-dire une pensée par laquelle il se connoît, et aperçoit ce qui est autour de lui. S'il est vrai qu'il y ait un premier être qui ait tiré tous les autres du néant, l'homme est véritablement son image, car il rassemble comme lui dans sa nature tout ce qu'il y a de perfection réelle dans ces deux diverses manières d'être.²

Indeed, although this image is but "une ombre du véritable être parfait",³ Fénelon even allows the dignity of man whose mind is capable of thought and the perception of

1 OC, vol. I, p. 114.

2 Traité I, 2 (OC, vol. I, p. 16).

3 Ibid., p. 16.

divine truth.¹ Such optimistic Humanism is, however, strictly limited as man, for all the splendour of his soul, is forever plunged into "un abîme de ténèbres",² and it is the "maître intérieur", the voice of divine reason alone that is constant and perfect, not man's natural light: "En l'écoutant, je m'instruis; en m'écoutant moi-même, je m'égare".³ From a consideration of the art of man, his splendid construction, then, Fénelon returns once again to the one light of universal reason: "Il y a un soleil des esprits, qui les éclaire tous, beaucoup mieux que le soleil visible n'éclaire les corps: ce soleil des esprits nous donne tout ensemble et sa lumière et l'amour de sa lumière pour la chercher".⁴ This eternal light of truth is God Himself and man's soul is only "l'organe par où passe cette lumière originale, et qui en est éclairé".⁵ Almost inevitably Fénelon comes back to the fundamental notion of the total dependence, ontological and epistemological, of created being; the second half of Chapter II is taken up with an attempt to reconcile this dependence with free will (in which man is again in God's image) by positing them both as two certain, if mysterious, truths in a manner suggesting Bossuet's Traité du Libre Arbitre.⁶

1 Ibid., pp. 21-5.

2 Ibid., p. 26.

3 Ibid., p. 27.

4 Ibid., p. 29.

5 Ibid., p. 29.

6 Part III of the II^e Lettre also treats free will (and in a markedly Humanist manner).

In his Réflexions, which formed the "Preface" to the reprints of the first edition of Part I of the Traité and were also published at the end of the 1718 edition of the Oeuvres Philosophiques, the Jesuit P. Tournemine refers only to the magnificent apologetic design of this first part, describing it as "le meilleur ouvrage que nous aïons en ce genre"¹ and mentioning the enormous popularity of the first edition.² The author of the review of the Oeuvres philosophiques of 1718 in the Journal de Trévoux (January 1719), however, knew the whole work and concentrates on Part II. Whilst recognising that the work is probably unfinished, he nevertheless approves of its publication "à cause de la fécondité des principes sublimes, et de la beauté des veritez lumineuses qu'on y trouve".³ This is a revealing comment, and indeed the review as a whole is both enthusiastic and yet, at the same time, highly perceptive. It notes the significance of methodical doubt, not "un jeu subtil de l'esprit",⁴ but, although it sometimes goes too far, a necessity in establishing metaphysical truths: "Le doute de nôtre philosophe a tout un autre but; il nous conduit à des veritez plus solides"⁵ and "L'auteur ne nous conduit dans les abîmes du Pyrrhonisme que pour nous en faire sentir l'horreur, et nous donner une

1 Réflexions du Père Tournemine in Fénelon's Oeuvres philosophiques (Paris, 1718), p. 535.

2 Ibid.

3 Journal de Trévoux, janvier 1719, p. 7.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., pp. 7-8.

sincère envie d'en sortir".¹ If this does not quite suggest the crisis of Fénelon's pari, it nevertheless represents an essential step in setting up the criterion for truth, the évidence which is "la lumière même de l'intelligence infinie de Dieu, dont il éclaire tous les esprits finis, et par laquelle ils voyent toutes les veritez depuis les plus petites jusques aux plus grandes: évidence enfin, dont il ne nous est montré ici bas qu'un foible rayon, pour nous conduire au milieu de nos tenebres à la verité souveraine, qui se découvre de plus en plus, à proportion que nos ames se détachant du sensible et du fini, s'approchent par l'amour de ce soleil des intelligences, qui se montrera enfin à nous sans voile et sans nuage".²

Moreover, "C'est ainsi que nôtre philosophe en éclairant l'esprit nourrit le coeur; il ne nous amuse pas par des lumières impuissantes et des speculations infructueuses: mais en nous montrant la vérité il nous la fait aimer. C'est le caractere essentiel de tous les ouvrages de feu M. de Fénelon".³ Clearly the critic is wholly sympathetic to the work and doctrine of Fénelon, but he has not been blinded to its essential characteristic, the sublimity of his association of Beauty and Truth in one ideal known by the mind and loved in the heart. This is the key to the organic relationship between Fénelon's metaphysics and his

1 Ibid., p. 8.

2 Ibid., p. 9.

3 Ibid., pp. 9-10.

spirituality; his mysticism was given a direct impulse by the encounter with Mme. Guyon, but in fact it derives naturally and logically from his fundamental philosophical principles. Fénelon's very attitude to truth is mystical. As Mme. Goré writes: "Avec Cicéron et saint Augustin, Fénelon a assimilé l'essentiel d'un platonisme qui connaît alors un fort renouveau: sa pensée n'est pas sans lien avec la *θεωρία*, la contemplation grecque; quoiqu'avec un certain malaise il en défend l'idéal contre la rationalisation cartésienne, et avec un accent souvent pathétique. Se réjouir de son ignorance, admirer les voies impénétrables de Dieu, n'est-ce point s'acheminer vers l'amour désintéressé, vers l'*ἀγάπη*, vers cet extatisme dont l'Aréopagite a donné l'une des plus belles formules. La dialectique fénelonienne s'achève donc en mystique dès le Traité de l'Existence, dès la Réfutation".¹ Far from being an obstacle to his mysticism, then, Fénelon's culture - Hellenistic, patristic and Cartesian - forms the natural starting-point for the illumination of pure love, and it is a sense of the true spirit of Platonism that allows this transition to be effected so smoothly.²

¹ Itinéraire, p. 249.

² Cf. Goré: "Loin d'être un obstacle à son mysticisme, sa culture humaniste le nourrit, car Fénelon puise dans l'antiquité tout ce qui est susceptible d'attiser en lui l'Éros, l'aspiration au bien, sachant pourtant déjà que l'amour est un don et espérant recevoir un jour de l'Être même, comme Paul sur le chemin de Damas, l'illumination de l'*ἀγάπη*" (Itinéraire, p. 320).

Some consideration has already been given to Fénelon's attitude towards rational philosophy as a means of approaching truth. It is worth returning to the topic briefly as he devotes some space to it in the Lettres sur divers sujets de métaphysique et de religion written some years after the Quietist controversy had died down (probably in 1713 for the most part). The profound influence of Augustine is fully apparent here. Fénelon has well learnt the Cartesian lesson and rejects philosophical authority in favour of the light of universal reason;¹ if he had to choose a master in pure philosophy, though, he would opt for Plato, Aristotle or Augustine just as equally he respects Descartes, but the true guide is Augustine, superior to both Plato and Descartes: "Si on rassembleroit tous les morceaux épars dans les ouvrages de saint Augustin, on y trouveroit plus de métaphysique que dans ces ceux philosophes. Je ne saurois trop admirer ce génie vaste, lumineux, fertile et sublime".² Again he criticises the weaknesses of Socrates's arguments for immortality, which figure nowhere in his work: "Que peut-on voir de plus foible et de plus insoutenable que les preuves de Socrate sur l'immortalité?".³ Indeed he is forthright in this denunciation of rational speculation, condemning the "roman

1 IV^e Lettre (in OC, vol. I, p. 124).

2 V^e Lettre, p. 134.

3 V^e Lettre, p. 133. Cf. Fénelon's actual arguments, mainly scriptural, in II^e Lettre and Plans de dissertations sur divers points de philosophie et de théologie II "Sur l'immortalité de l'âme" (in OC, vol. II, p. 213).

de philosophie".¹ Instead man must follow the light of faith, of revelation and the Church. It is the weakness of man, proud, inconstant and blind that prevents him following the light of reason alone. Truth is neither difficult nor inaccessible, and the sage can attain contemplative truth, but most men are confined to Plato's cave: "Tous les autres hommes passent leur vie dans la caverne de Platon, à ne voir que des ombres".² Correction, then, lies in grace: "Je ne compte que sur la grâce pour diriger la raison même dans les bornes étroites de la raison, pour la découverte de la religion: mais je crois, avec saint Augustin, que Dieu donne à chaque homme un premier germe de grâce intime et secrète, qui se mêle imperceptiblement avec la raison, et qui prépare l'homme à passer peu à peu de la raison jusqu'à la foi".³ On the one hand, Lettres IV-VII constitute a simple attack on the pride of reason and the inadequacy and vanity of natural philosophy; on the other hand, however, they contain the beginnings of a mystical epistemology in which love and knowledge become one and grace is pre-eminent. Grace is seen as a preparation of the heart distinct from reason,⁴ and the germination of the natural seed of grace in man represents the birth of the new man. A Bérullian, Salesian and ultimately Pauline programme of self-annihilation thus

1 VI^e Lettre, p. 136.

2 VI^e Lettre, p. 135.

3 VI^e Lettre, p. 136.

4 "Il faut que le germe de la grâce commence à éclore, pour être distingué de la raison" (VI^e Lettre, p. 136.)

develops: "Il faut mourir à soi pour vivre à Dieu".¹ In this sacrifice of love of self to love of ~~god~~, however, the co-operation of reason with grace is not overlooked: "Tout homme qui ne sera point disposé par l'amour-propre, et qui suivra sa raison soutenue du premier attrait de la grâce, sentira d'abord sans discussion, qu'il n'y a qu'une seule religion qui mérite d'être écoutée. C'est celle qui fait aimer Dieu, et qui consiste toute dans cet amour".²

Reason, moved and supported by grace, thus attains ultimate truth through love which is the culmination of knowledge:

[La raison supérieure] est un soleil dont la lumière éclaire les esprits, comme le soleil éclaire les corps. Cette lumière est éternelle et immense; elle comprend tous les temps comme tous les lieux ... Cette raison suprême qui est la règle de la mienne; cette sagesse de laquelle tout sage reçoit ce qu'il a; cette source supérieure de lumières, où nous puisons tous, est le Dieu que nous cherchons. Il est par lui-même, et nous ne sommes que par lui. Il nous a faits semblables à lui, c'est-à-dire raisonnables, afin que nous puissions le connoître comme la vérité infinie, et l'aimer comme l'immense bonté. Voilà la religion; car la religion est l'amour. Aimer Dieu, et en communiquer l'amour aux autres hommes, c'est exercer le culte parfait.³

Knowledge of truth and love of the Good, and the identification of the two, such is the religion of Fénelon. It is that of François de Sales and the entire mystic tradition, and it is also the essence of Platonism.

The culmination of Fénelon's metaphysics, then, lies in his spirituality of pure love. From a modern standpoint, nearly three centuries after the Quietist controversy, the

1 VI^e Lettre, p. 140.

2 VI^e Lettre, p. 141.

3 VII^e Lettre, p. 143.

doctrine of pure love appears to be the very heart of his thought on which all else depends, and J. Rivière is not alone in claiming that "en dernière analyse, c'est l'amour pur qui est à l'origine de tout le système de Fénelon".¹ It is our present purpose to reverse the direction of this argument, and to situate the doctrine of pure love in its logical position, not at the origin of Fénelon's system but at its conclusion, as the veritable terminus ad quem of the movement initiated by Canfield, François de Sales and Bérulle and given a systematic philosophical basis in the wake of the Cartesian revolution by Malebranche. M. Matter insists that the mysticism of Fénelon is effectively opposed to the theosophy of Malebranche and that he has no place for those highly theosophical forms of mysticism which are Neoplatonism and Gnosticism in his wholly Christian doctrine.² Such a view, however, is not consistent with the organic development of Fénelon's thought as we have described it. After the encounter with Mme. Guyon, the doctrine of pure love does, of course, become pre-eminent, but before this significant moment in Fénelon's biography the metaphysical system from which it springs logically, if not necessarily, has already been developed. This metaphysical basis lies in the lessons of Malebranche's theosophy, which, though essentially unmystical with its emphasis on knowledge rather than love, and Truth rather

¹ "La théodicée de Fénelon. Ses éléments quiétistes" (in APC, 157 (1908-9), passim), p. 605.

² In Le Mysticisme en France au temps de Fénelon (Paris, 1865).

than the Good or even Beauty, nonetheless shares the anagogic movement common to all mysticisms and a feature of all idealism. His meeting Mme } Guyon at the duchesse de B  thune's Ch  teau de Beynes in October 1688 thus represents less a radical new point of departure than the impulse to develop his metaphysical idealism into the mysticism of pure love. Without entering into the Quietist controversy as such, or even presenting a full exposition of F  nelon's mysticism, then, it is our aim to indicate the way in which this transition or evolution, but not revolution, occurs naturally and thereby to suggest the broad influence of the (Neo-)Platonic tradition on F  nelon as on his spiritual predecessors.¹

The Explication des maximes des saints sur la vie int  rieure² is the best-known work of F  nelon's to have come out of the Quietist controversy. It is, however, as Marcel Raymond has said, "un livre aride o   l'on sent la g  ne".³ Given F  nelon's purpose in writing the work, though, a certain aridity is inevitable. For it is a work of justification. F  nelon was well aware that the danger of

1 L. Crousl  , in Bossuet et F  nelon. Etudes morales et litt  raires, 2 vols. (Paris, 1894-95), and Bremond, in Apologie pour F  nelon (Paris, 1910), present opposing partisan views of the Quietist controversy, whilst Louis Cognet's Cr  puscule des mystiques (Tournai, 1958) is the clearest, most thorough and most balanced account.

2 Paris, 1697. The Explication, as with Le Gnostique de saint Cl  ment d'Alexandrie which has been published in an edition by P. Dudon (Paris, 1930), is not included in the Saint-Sulpice edition of the Oeuvres Compl  tes.

3 F  nelon (Bruges, 1967), p. 58.

illusion follows closely on the heels of the inner way of perfect contemplation so that even the greatest of modern mystics from Ruysbroeck to Theresa of Avila and even François de Sales or Bérulle risked coming under suspicion of unorthodoxy, and his aim was therefore to emphasise the orthodoxy of Mme. Guyon's spirituality and his own interpretation of the Articles d'Issy by pointing to the immediate continuity of the mystical tradition from the Apostles to François de Sales without interruption. For Fénelon the ideal of pure love is non-negotiable; it is "le fondement et le comble de tout l'edifice"¹ of Christian perfection: "Toutes les voyes interieures tendent à l'amour pur ou desinteressé. Cet amour pur est le plus haut degré de la perfection chrétienne. Il le terme de toutes les voyes que les saints ont connu [sic]".² He identifies five main ways in which man can love God, of which the highest is pure love or perfect charity, "l'amour pour Dieu seul, considéré en lui-même et sans aucun mélange de motif intéressé ni de crainte ni d'esperance"³ and it is François de Sales's Traité de l'amour de Dieu which he claims as the most immediate authority for this ideal: "La sainte indifference si louée par saint François de Sales n'est que le desinterressement de cet amour qui est toujours indifferent et sans volonté intéressée pour soi-même, mais

1 Explication, "Avertissement" (non-paginated).

2 Ibid.

3 Explication, p. 13.

toûjours déterminé et voulant positivement tout ce que Dieu nous fait vouloir par sa loi écrite et par l'attrait de sa grace".¹ Indeed, Fénelon sees his own dispute with Bossuet as a repetition of J.-P. Camus's quarrel with the Jesuit Antoine Sirmond over pure love,² as if to narrow further the distance between himself and the saintly Bishop of Geneva. The articles of the Explication, setting out the true and the false interpretations of the Saints' spiritual doctrines, explore the nature of pure love and seek to define the true passive state as described in the "Avertissement": "L'état passif et la transformation avec les nopces spirituelles et l'union essentielle ou immediate ne sont que l'entiere pureté de cet amour, dont l'état est habituel en un tres petit nombre d'ames, sans être jamais ni invariable, ni exempt de fautes venielles". As in all mysticism, purification is the first stage in the journey of the soul, and contemplation and union the progression and culmination of purity, and it is this that Fénelon seeks at

1 Explication, "Avertissement".

2 See the Première Lettre de Monseigneur l'Archêvêque de Cambrai pour servir de réponse à celle de Monseigneur de Meaux: "M. le Camus, évêque de Belley, ami intime de saint François de Sales, et qui déclare avoir été son disciple pendant quatorze ans, fut accusé, depuis l'an 1639 jusqu'en 1642, d'enseigner l'illusion sous le nom du pur amour. On lui disoit, Monseigneur, presque tout ce que vous me dites. On assuroit qu'il voulait faire oublier le paradis et l'enfer, étouffer l'espérance et la crainte, enfin saper les fondemens de la religion ..." (OC, vol. II, p. 635); Fénelon goes on to cite Camus's La Caritée. On Camus and Sirmond, see H. Bremond, La Querelle du pur amour au temps de Louis XIII (Paris, 1932), and G. Joppin, Une Querelle autour de l'amour pur (Paris, 1938).

length to demonstrate and illustrate with particular reference to François de Sales, but also Clement, John of the Cross and especially the pseudo-Dionysius.

A more interesting and revealing work from the point of view of the development of Fénelon's thought, however, is the Instructions et avis sur divers points de la morale et de la perfection chrétienne, for it contains a perfect summary of the essence of Platonism interpreted mystically as the Fathers, Abelard and Ficino inter alios had done previously,¹ and underlines the implicit metaphysical foundations of the doctrine of pure love.

Here, having rejected man's solely natural inclination to seek beatitude as no less interested than his instinct for self-preservation, Fénelon turns, perhaps surprisingly, to the testimony of the pagans on friendship and hence (pure) love and discerns the teaching of Socrates as expounded in Plato's Dialogues as being the ultimate source. Once again the starting-point is the Platonic opposition of Being and Becoming: "Ces deux philosophes ... veulent que l'on s'attache à ce qu'ils appellent τὸ καλόν, qui signifie tout ensemble le beau et le bon, c'est-à-dire le parfait, par le seul amour du beau, du bon, du vrai, du parfait en lui-même. C'est pourquoi ils disent souvent qu'il ne faut compter pour rien ce qui se fait, τὸ γιγνόμενον, c'est-à-dire l'être passager, pour s'unir à ce qui est,

¹ Cf. Goré, Itinéraire, p. 410.

c'est-à-dire l'être parfait et immuable, qu'ils appellent τὸ ὄν , c'est-à-dire ce qui est".¹ From the object of love

he proceeds to consider the motive: "Platon fait dire à Socrate, dans son Festin, qu'il y a quelque chose de plus divin dans celui qui aime que dans celui qui est aimé."

Voilà toute la délicatesse de l'amour le plus pur. Celui qui est aimé, et qui veut l'être, est occupé de soi; celui qui aime sans songer à être aimé, a ce que l'amour renferme de plus divin, je veux dire le transport, l'oubli de soi, le désintéressement".² Then, continuing to expound the doctrine of the Symposium, Fénelon epitomises the transcendent ideal of Platonic love: "Il est aisé de voir que Platon parle d'un amour du beau en lui-même, sans aucun retour d'intérêt. C'est ce beau universel qui enlève le coeur, et qui fait oublier toute beauté particulière. Ce philosophe assure ... que l'amour divinise l'homme, qu'il l'inspire, qu'il le transporte".³

R. Spaemann insists that the Platonic idea of Beauty, as revived by the Italian Renaissance, occupies a central position in Fénelon's theory of pure love and of the ascent and return of the soul to the perfect unity of divine Being,⁴ and certainly it is this aspect of his thought that renders it more distinctly Platonic than that of

1 Instructions (in OC, vol. VI) p. 114.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 R. Spaemann, Reflexion und Spontaneität (Stuttgart, 1963), p. 77.

Malebranche, but at the same time it is no more than a symptom of a broader tendency: "Platon dit souvent que l'amour du beau est tout le bien de l'homme; que l'homme ne peut être heureux en soi, et que ce qu'il y a de plus divin pour lui, c'est de sortir de soi par l'amour; et en effet le plaisir qu'on éprouve dans le transport des passions n'est qu'un effet de la pente de l'âme pour sortir de ses bornes étroites, et pour aimer hors d'elle le beau infini".¹ In the Platonic scheme, love in this world is a valid introduction to a more perfect love. Fénelon, however, breaks this continuity by stressing the absolute transcendence of the divine. For Fénelon, the ideal of Beauty, the Beauty of Goodness, Order, Truth, Unity and Being, which is God Himself, is less an independent reality than representative of all that is universal as opposed to individual; it is all that is not "I" and tainted by particular interest. As he writes in De amore puro: "Prius est amare Dei pulchritudinem et perfectionem, quae est bonum commune totius universi, quam beatitudinem nostram, scilicet bonum privatum".² The concept of Beauty has replaced the Scholastic ideal of bonum universale, but, though the Lettre à l'Académie propounds a mystical aesthetic based on the desire for transcendent Beauty in unity, simplicity and order (as epitomized by the painting of Poussin), Fénelon's quest for the Absolute has immediate ascetic consequences

1 Instructions (in OC, vol. VI), p. 115.

2 De amore puro (in OC, vol. III), p. 358.

and from the principles of an abstract Platonism Fénelon rejoins the spirituality of the tripartite anagogic way of traditional Christian mysticism:

Voici donc le progrès de l'âme. Le premier degré est celui où elle se déprend des objets extérieurs pour rentrer au dedans d'elle-même, et pour s'occuper de son état pour son propre intérêt: jusque-là il n'y a encore rien que de naturel; c'est un amour-propre sage, qui veut sortir de l'enivrement des choses extérieures. Dans le second degré, l'âme joint à la vue d'elle-même celle de Dieu qu'elle craint. Voilà un foible commencement de la véritable sagesse; mais elle est encore enfoncée en elle-même: elle ne se contente pas de craindre Dieu, elle veut être assurée qu'elle le craint; elle craint de ne le craindre pas; sans cesse elle revient sur ses propres actes. Ces retours si inquiets et si multipliés sur soi-même sont encore bien éloignés de la paix et de la liberté qu'on goûte dans l'amour simple ... Dans le troisième degré, elle n'a plus ces retours inquiets sur elle-même; elle commence à regarder Dieu plus souvent qu'elle ne se regarde, et insensiblement elle tend à s'oublier pour s'occuper en Dieu par un amour sans intérêt propre. Ainsi l'âme, qui ne pensoit point autrefois à elle-même, parce qu'elle étoit toujours entraînée par les objets extérieurs qui excitoient ses passions, et qui dans la suite a passé par une sagesse qui la rappeloit sans cesse à elle-même, vient enfin peu à peu à un autre état, où Dieu fait sur elle ce que les objets extérieurs faisoient autrefois; c'est-à-dire qu'il l'entraîne, et la désoccupe d'elle-même, ϕ n l'occupant de lui.¹

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What Fénelon has achieved is the amalgamation of the two fundamental mystical concepts identified by A. Nygren.²

The first is the Platonic $\epsilon\rho\omega\varsigma$ of the Symposium whereby human reality, possessed by the desire for eternal beauty, ascends to divine reality; this notion is to be found in the Instructions as cited above. The second is the $\alpha\gamma\alpha\pi\eta$ of Saint John and Saint Paul, whereby the naturally insuperable

¹ Instructions (in OC, vol. VI), p. 154.

² In Agape and Eros, trans. P.S. Watson (London, 1953 and repr. 1982).

gulf between human and divine reality is bridged supernaturally by divine grace with which man co-operates through ascetic self-annihilation; this is the main theme of the Manuel de Piété and the Lettres de Direction. Mme. Goré, who has explored this area fully in La Notion d'indifférence chez Fénelon et ses sources,¹ discerns a gradual movement in Fénelon's thought away from the Hellenistic, Neoplatonic idea of eros to a Pauline concentration on agape. However, these two concepts are less opposed than complementary. Certainly there is an essential difference in that the anthropocentrism of the Greek notion of *καλὸς ἀγαθός* runs counter to the divine transcendence of Christian mysticism, but the implications of both are broadly identical, if with different emphases, notably because of the theocentrism of the latter. For, if Christian pure love is radically ascetic and ecstatic, the Neoplatonic notion of eros is equally ascetic and ecstatic in its lyrical ascent of the purified soul. Augustine and the pseudo-Dionysius gave this Neoplatonic concept a central place in Christian thought, as both eros and agape seek the mortification of sensual man and his replacement by spiritual man, and this is the central tenet of the spirituality of the École française of which Fénelon can be regarded as the final great representative.

1 Paris, 1956.

Mme } Goré describes Fénelon's conception of the inner }
 life as "une nouvelle forme d'un platonisme très généralisé
 en langage chrétien"¹ and sees a broad Neoplatonic
 inspiration at the origin of his mysticism: "Le moi est
 toujours haïssable parce qu'il brise l'unité de la
 contemplation, parce qu'il fait écran à la Réalité. D'où ce
 vertige d'anéantissement qui est une transposition
 chrétienne de la *μαρία*, de l'enthousiasme platonicien; le
 poète inspiré par la Divinité est hors de lui; l'attrait du
 Beau et du Bien est tel qu'ils possèdent ceux qui le
 cherchent. L'essence de la vie morale est une purification
 de l'âme et de l'intelligence. Un instinct tout platonicien
 guide donc Fénelon dans le dédale des écrits mystiques: il
 édifie sa conception de la *Θεωρία* avec les éléments les plus
 divers, sans jamais sombrer dans le détail vain. Il
 s'inspire à tous les grands courants de la tradition
 mystique: penseurs orientaux, chrétiens, littérature
 chrétienne latine, mystiques du moyen âge, mystiques
 rhéno-flamands, mystiques italiens et espagnols,
 spiritualité moderne".² This suggestion of a multiplicity
 of sources within a unity of thought is significant. On the
 one hand, it implies a certain inevitability in the
 evolution of Fénelon's thought once engaged on a particular
 course; as he takes the mystical implications of
 Malebranche's theosophy to its logical conclusion, he

1 Itinéraire, p. 412.

2 Itinéraire, pp. 393-4.

necessarily encounters the whole corpus of Neoplatonist-inspired thought. Thus, on the other hand, it epitomizes the attraction of this Neoplatonic tradition for the most profound pre-occupations of the French Counter-Reformation and its continuators.

At the simplest level the first premise of Fénelon's spirituality is the sage's ideal of ἀπάθεια . Fénelon reduces all the passions to one source which is self-love rather than providing a systematic study of separate vices (as François de Sales does, for example, in the Introduction), but the cult of indifference has a thoroughly ancient pedigree, both pagan and Christian, occupying a central position in the doctrines of the Alexandrian Neoplatonists (especially Plotinus and Philo), the early Fathers (especially Clement and the pseudo-Dionysius), the Victorines, Bonaventure and the Franciscans, and the Rheno-Flemish mystics down to the Spanish and Italian ascetics of the sixteenth century. It is, of course, as essential to the spirituality of the École française as the opposition of the All of God and the Nothingness of man. The vanity of the world and the corruption of the flesh are prominent themes in Fénelon's Sermons and Entretiens. The corollary of self-annihilation and pure love in the conformity of the will to the will of God, exemplified by the conversion of Saint Augustine, occupies much of the Instructions:

Il n'est pas juste que nous ayons quelque chose à nous, nous qui ne sommes pas à nous-mêmes. L'esclave n'a rien à soi; à combien plus forte raison la créature, qui n'a de son fonds que le néant et le pêché, et en qui tout est don et pure grâce, ne doit-elle rien avoir en propriété. Dieu ne lui a donné une volonté libre et capable de se posséder elle-même, que pour l'engager par ce don à se dépouiller plus généreusement. Nous n'avons rien à nous que notre volonté; tout le reste n'est pas à nous.¹

And hence: "Nous ne sommes véritablement raisonnables qu'autant que nous consultons la volonté de Dieu, pour y conformer la nôtre; c'est la véritable lumière que nous devons suivre, toute autre lumière est fausse: c'est une lueur trompeuse, et non une lumière véritable".² As with Bérulle, the essential motif is that "nous ne sommes que néant par nous-mêmes"³ and, as with Canfield, love is defined in terms of conformity of the will to the will of God.⁴ And yet the Plotinian eros is never entirely absent in the lyrical ecstasy of the soul's ascent to the vision of God:

O amour de mon Dieu, que n'avez-vous pas fait dans le coeur d'Augustin! En lui, on avoit vu l'amour aveugle, l'amour égaré, l'amour insensé; ô amour, vous êtes retourné à votre centre, vers la vérité et la beauté éternelle: cet amour, qui avoit si longtemps couru après le mensonge, est devenu l'amour parfait: c'est l'amour humble, c'est l'amour qui s'anéantit pour mieux aimer ... O profonde doctrine! la lumière la plus précieuse est cette lumière éternelle qui anéantit les lumières humaines: c'est cet état d'obscurité, où sans rien voir en l'homme, l'amour parfait voit tout d'une manière divine: c'est ce goût intime de la vérité, qui ne la met plus devant les yeux de la chair et du sang, mais qui la

1 Instructions (in OC, vol. VI). p. 147.

2 Instructions, p. 136.

3 Instructions, p. 83. Cf. p. 135.

4 Cf. III^e Lettre (in OC, vol. I), p. 117.

fait habiter au fond de nous-mêmes. O chère science de Jésus, en comparaison de laquelle tout n'est rien, qui vous donnera à moi? qui me donnera à vous? ... O amour, instruisez-moi par le coeur, et non par l'esprit. Désabusez-moi de ma vaine raison, de ma prudence aveugle, de tous désirs indignes d'une âme qui vous aime. Que je meure, comme Augustin, à tout ce qui n'est pas vous.¹

Founding his cogito on an acute consciousness of the creature's lack of Being, Fénelon tends like Malebranche to ontologism; like Malebranche too he finds the solution to the problem of knowledge in Augustinian illumination and the vision in God. Where Fénelon transcends Malebranche, however, is in his perception of the vision of God as the ultimate extension of vision in God. Fénelon has united ontology and epistemology in a single mystical perspective that perpetuates the teachings of Bérulle, now adapted in the wake of le malebranchisme. The association of self-annihilation, the pure light of Being and the ecstasy of contemplation appears particularly Plotinian, but it belongs in fact to the entire tradition of Neoplatonist-inspired mysticism in the Christianised version of Augustine and, especially, the pseudo-Dionysius.

It is, then, the pseudo-Areopagite that Mme } Goré sees }
as the most significant direct source for Fénelon's
mysticism.² There is no evidence to suggest which edition

1 Manuel de Piété, "Entretiens affectifs pour les principales fêtes de l'année. XIX Pour le jour de saint Augustin" (in OC, vol. VI), p. 70.

2 See especially "Néoplatonisme et quiétisme: Fénelon et l'Aréopagite" (in RHLF, 69 (1969), pp. 583-602), but also Itinéraire and La notion d'indifférence, passim, for a full analysis of the influence of the pseudo-Dionysius on Fénelon.

of the Dionysian texts Fénelon used,¹ but there is no doubt that he knew them at first hand and that the mystical theology of the pseudo-Dionysius permeates his own spiritual doctrine of the attributes of God, self-annihilation, illumination, the lyrical ascent of the soul to ecstatic contemplation through the via negativa. Bossuet found the abstract mysticism of the pseudo-Dionysius too rarefied and retreated into a more pragmatic Augustinianism; Fénelon, on the other hand, followed the example of the École française in fully embracing Dionysian mysticism (and suffered the consequences in an age when religious divisions were very marked and somehow political in implication). Yet, for all that Fénelon's thought is firmly in the tradition of the pseudo-Dionysius, as of Clement, John of the Cross and François de Sales, it is again Plato to whom one must return as the ultimate inspiration of this tradition of Christian mysticism. As Mme } Goré writes: "Or, parmi les auteurs cités par Fénelon, la plupart ont subi son influence [du pseudo-Denys], ou l'influence directe du néoplatonisme";² and then: "... dans la mesure où la pensée du Pseudo-Denys est d'origine plotinienne et néoplatonicienne, c'est proprement à la grande source du Phèdre, du Banquet et de la République que se rattache en fin de compte la mystique

¹ Apart from Ficino's edition, there were those of Lansell (1615), Hersent (1620), Hallois (1633), Cordier (1634) and Sancti Dion. Areop. Opera Omnia (2 vols., Paris, 1644).

² Itinéraire, p. 443.

fēnelonienne".¹ Even during the most un-Humanist (if not exactly anti-Humanist) period of his life, Fēnelon cannot escape his Humanist culture and his profound sympathy for the doctrines of Plato still shines forth. Attracted to Platonism from the outset in a wholly natural, almost inevitable, manner, Fēnelon illustrates the very experience of the spirit of Platonism in the most intimate sense and, thoroughly worked out in both theory and practice, it remains at the heart of his doctrine.

1 Itinéraire, p. 443.

CONCLUSION

A.J. Krailsheimer once suggested that "by the time one can state a problem clearly enough for an introduction it is virtually solved and the long presentation of argument and evidence filling the space between introduction and conclusion should perhaps be regarded as a monstrously swollen footnote".¹ In the case of a study à thèse, this is, no doubt, a contention that, if rather jocular (or at least self-deprecating), contains more than an element of truth. It is not, however, true of a heuristic study where the evidence must be everything. It was the original intention of this thesis to be both argumentative and heuristic; the aim was first to identify instances of strong Neoplatonic influence in seventeenth-century French religious thought, and second to provide a personal, highly synthetic interpretation of these texts, both little known or recently (re-)discovered and very familiar to dix-septiémistes. Accordingly, the evidence is itself of some considerable significance, but this is not to devalue the conclusion which it suggests.

With regard to the presence of Plato and the Neoplatonists in the religious thought of seventeenth-century France, then, our conclusions are several. Our study of the Capuchin authors, in particular, has revealed a clear strain of Humanist Neoplatonism directly inspired by the

¹ Studies in Self-Interest (Oxford, 1962), p. 1.

Florentines, whilst the Oratorian scholars who have been considered tend rather to embody the more mystical or strictly philosophical traditions of Neoplatonism under the influence of Augustine. More striking, perhaps, than the discovery of individual cases of Neoplatonic interests, however, is a sense of the pervasiveness of Neoplatonism in the period both within the two religious groupings with which we have been mainly concerned and outside. It is not just that La Bruyère, like so many other moralists who lie outside the scope of this thesis, refers to "le divin Platon"¹ and reads "les livres de Platon qui traitent de la spiritualité de l'âme et de sa distinction d'avec le corps",² but that the spirit and the teachings of Neoplatonism were to a certain extent unavoidable. This is particularly true of the Oratoire with its characteristic atmosphere created by Bérulle and continued by his successors, but also perpetuated by the very organizational structure of the Congregation as an educational institution and as a major centre of spiritual formation. A similar sense of internal consistency and continuity has been observed amongst the Capuchins.

Furthermore, both Oratorians and Capuchins helped to disseminate Neoplatonic ideas outside their own orders. The Neoplatonic theology of light is a prominent motif throughout the century, as is the Dionysian notion of hierarchy, and the problem of pure love recurs at regular intervals, not to mention the basic concerns of Christian apologetic centred on the soul and its immortality that are a constant preoccupation. Moreover, if one distinguishes between the

¹ Les Caractères, ed. Garapon (Paris, 1962), p. 371.

² Ibid., p. 182.

system of Neoplatonism and its language, one can see the ubiquitous significance of Neoplatonic terminology in devotional works both before and after Saint François de Sales, to the extent that it is the language of Neoplatonic spirituality that Molière's Tartuffe employs in his approach to Elmire:

L'amour qui nous attache aux beautés éternelles
N'étouffe pas en nous l'amour des temporelles;
Nos sens facilement peuvent être charmés
Des ouvrages parfaits que le ciel a formés.¹

There can be no greater testimony to the prominence of an intellectual movement than its being the object of satire, and that it should have come to the attention of Molière underlines the popularity of Oratorians, in particular, at Court (where their very proximity to the Louvre was a considerable advantage) and their extensive influence as spiritual directors.

Similarly, if one distinguishes between source and auctoritas, then the survival of the Neoplatonic tradition throughout the seventeenth century is readily apparent. No doubt, Augustine was the single most important auctor of the age, and to a lesser degree the pseudo-Dionysius, but behind both is the ultimate source of Plato and his successors. With the advent of Descartes's method, the problem of source against authority becomes still more complex. Yet, for all Descartes's claims of originality, his thought still stands in the broad tradition of Neoplatonic idealism, and our studies of Malebranche, Bossuet and Fénelon have attempted to show quite how so-called Cartesians or semi-Cartesians assimilated the Cartesian method and the doctrines of the

1 Le Tartuffe, Act III, scene 3, ll. 933-936.

self, the soul and God into their original Augustino-Platonic preoccupations with which Descartes was in any case largely in agreement.

The main argument of the thesis, then, follows from this. In La Religion des classiques, Henri Busson states that "à l'époque que nous étudions [1660-1685], Ficin me paraît en baisse" and adds: "On a abusé du néoplatonisme, et le cartésianisme l'a supplanté".¹ The former contention is certainly true; the day of the Ficinian apology had indeed passed² and, although the work of Dacier testifies to a continuing interest in Plato proper in the late seventeenth century, a more critical approach was being adopted towards Plato himself by the likes of Fleury and Rapin. The crude opposition of Neoplatonism and Cartesianism, however, is too simplistic and denies our major conclusions.

That Neoplatonism and Cartesianism are not opposed, in intention at least if not in implication or consequence, is demonstrated by their parallel fates in the eighteenth century. In this respect, it is instructive to consider the position of Fontenelle. A leading moderne in the famous Querelle of the late seventeenth century, and, like Bayle, a self-confessed Cartesian with little respect for Plato, Fontenelle was to become by the time of his death in 1757, if not well before, a philosophical conservative precisely because of his continued defence of Descartes; although he had revealed himself to be in the van by his adoption of

¹ La Religion des classiques, p. 323.

² Busson (*ibid.*, p. 324) cites F. de Morigny as one of the last writers to salute Ficino as "le Mercure de son aage, celui qui a ressuscité les sciences de l'Églie Latine, qui a transporté Athène dans l'Italie" (in De l'immortalité de l'âme raisonnable, Paris, 1668, pp. 77-79).

Descartes's mechanistic physics and sceptical rejection of his metaphysics in the late seventeenth century, his refusal to accept the Newtonian universe that superseded Descartes's cosmology of vortices made him something of a reactionary at the dawn of the age of Enlightenment. Fontenelle is thus something of a Janus-figure: harbinger of the new era, he is not quite wholly of it. As such he exemplifies a vital phase in the history of Cartesianism; the metaphysics had already been dismissed and only the increasingly untenable physical theories remained. By the middle of the eighteenth century, however, although the method could never be overlooked, the bulk of the Cartesian revolution, both physics and metaphysics, was completely outmoded.

It is for similar reasons that Neoplatonism also ceased to be a force after the end of the Grand Siècle. That Descartes's system outlived it at all was due not to his metaphysics (which, being idealist, ceased to be accepted at about the same time), but to his physics which had in turn supplanted Neoplatonic cosmology. Peripheral figures, for example the Quietist Caussade, continue the line of seventeenth-century spirituality and occasional historians of philosophy show some interest in ancient thought, but for the most part the eighteenth century saw a marked decline in enthusiasm for the classics.¹ Reaction set in and there was a return to antiquity in the Romantic era, to be followed in the late nineteenth century by a revival of interest in Neoplatonism itself, after Vatican I had made Aquinas the

¹ A general survey of the status of Platonic studies and scholarship in the eighteenth century is to be found in C. Huit's "Le Platonisme en France au XVIII^e siècle" in APC, 5-7 (1907-1909), passim.

authority of the Church, and it was this movement that Gilson epitomized, but throughout the eighteenth century it was Richard Simon's view of Platonism as "un galimatias pompeux" that prevailed. Metaphysical speculation was not in vogue in a sensualist or materialist climate, and sceptical empiricists disregarded all idealism.

Such reasons for the decline of Neoplatonism imply, apophatically, the reasons for its importance during the period generally known as the French Counter-Reformation. That the quest for truth is regulated by a transcendent ideal is the profound and eternal significance of Platonism. For all spiritualists this is as valid today as it ever was, but it was especially relevant in an age of re-emergent spirituality. For seventeenth-century France as for the Renaissance, Plato was the natural ally of spirituality, and this is the message of our epigraph, Pascal's "Platon pour disposer au christianisme". When quattrocento Florence inherited the Neoplatonic tradition, it immediately perceived its significance and utility in both the defence of the faith and the regeneration of philosophy. If the Renaissance adopted Plato somewhat uncritically at first and without a true sense of focus as to its aims in embracing Neoplatonism, then the French Counter-Reformation saw precisely the ends to which it might serve. The Catholic revival followed Ficino and Pico in uniting Neoplatonism with Christianity, but by tempering the Florentines with Augustine and the pseudo-Dionysius it ensured that the emphasis lay firmly on Christianity in both its Humanism and its mysticism, and even its philosophy. What Neoplatonism provided for the Catholic reformers was an intellectual underpinning of the nascent faith, a sympathetic rationalization of the innermost

yearnings of the soul and, at the same time, a powerful and respected weapon in both apologetics and polemics. That it remained an intellectual force throughout the seventeenth century was due to a large extent to the importance of the Oratorians in France as a whole who served to perpetuate its influence, but its prominence has a more profound explanation in the long-term perspective of spiritual and intellectual renewal stretching back over two centuries. Neoplatonism was, and is, quite simply a most uplifting disposition of the mind whose influence is discernible in all the greatest ages of human achievement, and the spiritual revival of the French Counter-Reformation was precisely such an epoch.

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This bibliography is divided simply into two sections comprising primary and secondary sources respectively. The former contains those works which have been discussed in the text itself, and which have been essential to the development of the argument; it does not include works of passing interest or which have merely been mentioned in the notes, nor classical or patristic works to which I have occasionally referred and of which there exists a standard edition (for example Migne's Patrologiae), but does include editions or translations of classical works which have served as primary sources. The bibliography of secondary material contains all monographs or articles which have been cited directly and also those general works of reference which have contributed significantly to my understanding of the subject; full bibliographies of topics and authors discussed may be found in the works listed here or indicated more specifically in the notes to the text.

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