PIERRE DE BÉRULLE

DISCOURSES ON THE STATE AND GRANDEURS OF JESUS

THE INEFFABLE UNION OF THE DEITY WITH HUMANITY

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Introduction

The Son of God sent him before his face, […] like a new St. John, to point to Jesus Christ, to make him known to the world; and not only his mysteries, his actions, words, miracles, and sufferings, but also his Person, states, and adorable grandeurs; to cause him to be revered, served, adored, and loved; to form in us the living image of his life. This, if I may use these terms, was his apostolate and his mission.[1]

Pierre de Bérulle (1575–1629) is one of the foremost personalities of early modern Catholicism. Considered the founder of the "French school" of spirituality, he has had an enormous continuing influence, although today his name is almost unknown. This volume provides the first complete English translation of his most extensive published work, first printed in Paris in 1623 and titled *Discourses on the State and Grandeurs of Jesus, by the Ineffable Union of the Deity with Humanity, and the Submission and Servitude that Is Due Him and His Most Holy Mother in Response to This Wondrous State*. Composed in Bérulle's maturity, these discourses express his theology of the Man-God, whose self-emptying has enabled us to become "capable" of God.

Bérulle's Life and Occasion for Writing

Bérulle entered the world on February 4, 1575, at the Château de Cérilly near Troyes in the French province of Champagne, in a family belong-

1. François Bourgoing, "Préface aux prêtres de la Congrégation de l'Oratoire de Jésus-Christ, notre Seigneur," in *Œuvres de l'éminentissime et reverendissime Pierre Cardinal de Bérulle*, ed. François Bourgoing (Paris, 1644), xx https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6568438c. Unless otherwise noted, translations of French and Latin texts are provided by the present translator.

ing to the nobility of the gown (*noblesse de robe*, a rank based on hereditary administrative positions). His father, Claude de Bérulle, died seven years after Pierre's birth. His mother was Louise Séguier, a member of the prominent family of this name. Louise was a pious woman, and under her influence and that of his Séguier uncles, Bérulle grew as a devout and serious young man. In about 1591 he began his studies at the College of Clermont, and a few years later he enrolled at the Sorbonne. His uncles decided that he would become a jurist as his father had been, and he embarked on the study of law.

In 1593 Bérulle began to associate with a group of Parisians who were seeking to infuse French Catholic life with the spirit of Tridentine reform. The group included Barbe Acarie, a figure of central importance to this movement and a relation of Bérulle's; Benoît de Canfeld, author of the influential spiritual guide *The Rule of Perfection*; Richard Beaucousin, a highly regarded spiritual director; and Pierre Coton, the king's confessor. In 1594, Bérulle's uncles acceded to his desire to abandon study of the law and enter instead into theological study. Bérulle became a priest in 1599. He made a retreat with the Jesuits in 1602 to further discern his vocation; the resulting conviction was that he should remain a secular priest.

One project of Barbe Acarie and her circle was to bring some of Teresa of Ávila's reformed Carmelites to establish communities in France. Bérulle travelled to Spain for this purpose, and by dint of much negotiation with the religious authorities, the first community of Carmelite women was established in France in 1604. By the time of Bérulle's death in 1629, there were forty Carmelite convents in the kingdom. Clement VIII's bull authorizing the French Carmelite foundation placed these religious under the charge of three non-Carmelite priests: Pierre de Bérulle, Jacques Gallemant, and André Duval. Teresa, however, had specifically indicated in her *Constitutions* that Carmelite sisters were to be under the jurisdiction of Carmelite brothers. The Acarie circle's reasons for urging the pope to place the French Carmelites under the authority of Bérulle and his colleagues were that no Carmelite brothers were established in France at that time and that such an arrangement would be politically prudent in light of the tense political relations between France and Spain. Further, such an arrangement had prece-

dent; Clement VIII's bull was modelled on a rule already in place for a Carmelite foundation in Rome. But the irregularity of the situation provoked controversy. For those who opposed the arrangement, "The question was raised whether Pierre de Bérulle's jurisdiction over the Carmelites was legitimate, and whether the transmission of the order's 'charism' depended more or less exclusively on their being governed by the discalced order of men."[2]

In 1611, Bérulle founded the French Oratory, a congregation of priests with a particular focus on Marian devotion, prayer, and the renewal of the priesthood. This community was modeled on the Roman Oratory of Philip Neri. Bérulle introduced to his Oratorian colleagues a "vow of servitude" that he had composed, perhaps inspired by a similar vow to the Blessed Virgin Mary that he had encountered in Spain. He also encouraged some of the Carmelites to profess it, and in 1615 he took the step of introducing it to the Carmelites at Chalon "in the form of an ordinance." He did not consult Gallemant and Duval before doing so (an act of unilateralism that he may have regretted), and a serious ambiguity was introduced from the start by his referring to the vow as "particular" yet "essential and original to the order."[3]

Was Bérulle intending this as a fourth Carmelite vow, another and more momentous departure from Teresa's *Constitutions*? Bérulle's critics were suspicious, and for many years Bérulle was not particularly concerned with explaining himself. Denys de la Mère de Dieu, the head of the Carmelite men's congregation that had been established in Paris in 1610, pressed the issue. When a Carmelite of the convent in Bordeaux gave Denys a copy of the vow she had found in a sister's cell after the latter's death, Denys seized upon it to attack not only Bérulle's right to impose this vow but now also Bérulle's doctrinal orthodoxy, since a transcription error in the copy appeared to open Bérulle to a charge of monophysitism. Whether Denys knew that the copy had

2. Stéphane-Marie Morgain, *Pierre de Bérulle et les Carmélites de France: La querelle du gouvernement 1583–1629* (Paris: Cerf, 1995), 18. Morgain's book provides an in-depth study of the controversy.

3. Rémi Lescot, "Introduction historique et théologique," in Pierre de Bérulle, *Discours de l'état et des grandeurs de Jésus*, ed. Joseph Beaude, Blandine Delahaye, Michel Join-Lambert, and Rémi Lescot, *OC*, 7:xxix.

been imperfectly transcribed is unknown, but he sent the document to Louvain and Douai and succeeded in obtaining its condemnation by these faculties of theology. He wrote letters to Rome, charging Bérulle with heresy and other failings and issued pamphlets to stir up opposition in Paris. The title of one pamphlet neatly conveys the charges of innovation and unilateralism: "Observations on a Certain Fourth Vow, Added to the Three Solemn Vows by Master de Bérulle, Who Is Currently Proposing It to the Carmelite Nuns in the Kingdom of France and Introducing It into Convents on His Own Personal Authority."[4]

Bérulle waited many years before responding publicly. This response was his *Discourses*, a sweeping expression of his doctrine of the Incarnation and its relation to his vow of servitude. The discourses demonstrated his deep knowledge of Scripture and of the Church Fathers and were buttressed by several dozen approbations of his orthodoxy supplied by such prominent churchmen and theologians as the Cardinal Richelieu (who later turned against him politically), Joseph Tremblay (the Gray Eminence), Jean-Pierre Camus, Sébastien Zamet, Cornelius Jansen (not yet under theological suspicion), and Jean Duvergier de Hauranne (the Abbé de Saint-Cyran).

The discourses were printed along with a "Narrative of What Has Occurred Concerning a Piece of Devotional Writing Composed in Honor of Jesus Christ Our Lord and of the Mystery of the Incarnation," followed by the text of the vow to Jesus and the vow to Mary and an additional set of approbations specifically for the vows. By describing the vow as "essential and original [*essentiel et primitif*] to the order," he explained, he meant that it transcended the Carmelite order: it was founded not in this or that religion (way of devotion) but in "the religion of Jesus," in the primitive Church, in what came before all religious orders and was foundational to them all. In fact, "this vow and this elevation to Jesus is only a recognition and ratification" of our baptismal vows, he said; and to support this point he cited a passage from the Catechism of the Council of Trent:

> The pastor will have the Christian people understand that it is right and appropriate for us to consecrate and render ourselves subjects, even slaves, to

4. Morgain, *Pierre de Bérulle et les Carmélites de France*, 360.

our Redeemer and Lord, forever; and in fact, when we received the baptism we did so profess, for we declared that we renounced Satan and the world and dedicated ourselves completely to Jesus Christ.[5]

The vow was not necessary, Bérulle explained, but it could be useful. What was essential was to cleave to Jesus Christ and accept his power over oneself, not only by constraint and necessity (for even the damned must do this much) but "by the choice and movement of our will, [. . .] as the captives of his love as well as of his power."[6]

While continuing as Superior and Visitor of the French Oratorians and Carmelites, Bérulle was also active in public life. In his earlier years he was engaged in disputations with French Protestants, and he served as the Jesuits' informal liaison in France during their expulsion from the kingdom from 1594 to 1603. In later years, Bérulle represented the king and court on several diplomatic missions. In 1619 he participated in negotiating the Treaty of Angoulême, which reconciled Marie de Medici and her son Louis XIII. He negotiated the marriage between Henrietta Maria, daughter of Henri IV, and Charles I of England in 1624. In the following year, he was instrumental in concluding the Treaty of Monçon between France and Spain. He was made a cardinal by Urban VIII in 1627. René Descartes's early biographer Adrien Baillet also records that Bérulle was instrumental in encouraging Descartes at a pivotal moment in 1628 to pursue his new philosophy.[7] Bérulle died on October 2, 1629, of an apparent heart attack while celebrating the Mass, at the moment that he was "proffering these words of oblation of servitude, *Hanc igitur oblationem servitutis nostrae*," thus "confirming his vow by his death."[8]

Bérulle's disciple François Bourgoing collected and published Bérulle's works in 1644, but attention to his writings did not long survive his death.[9] There are several reasons that we might posit for its

5. Bérulle, "Narré," *OC*, 8:39–41, 44. The citation given was to pt. 1, art. 3 of the Catechism. The quoted passage in fact comes at the end of art. 2.

6. Bérulle, "Narré," 43.

7. Adrien Baillet, *La Vie de monsieur Descartes* (Paris, 1691), pt. 1, bk. 2, chap. 14, vol. 1, pp. 160–66, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k75559n.

8. "This oblation therefore of our service." Bourgoing, "Préface," v.

9. "Much evidence suggests that Bérulle had been forgotten by the 1640s, and

fading. One is that Bérulle, although learned, did not dedicate himself particularly to authorship but to establishing institutions and exerting influence through personal relationships. Bourgoing has recorded that Bérulle believed that "our Lord asked of him works rather than words, and that he did not send him to speak, but to act."[10] Other than the discourses, the writings of his mature years consist primarily of meditations on the lives of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and Mary Magdalene, as well as talks or sermons he delivered to the Carmelites or Oratorians that were taken down by listeners and later printed. Perhaps also his literary style associated his writings with the past, for it would soon be discarded by other authors in favor of the new elegance of modern French.

His ongoing influence, however, was substantial, as successive generations of priests and religious diffused and adapted his teachings. The following are only the most prominent of his many followers: Charles de Condren (1588–1641) succeeded Bérulle as head of the Oratory, continued to found seminaries, and was deeply involved in domestic missions. Jean-Jacques Olier (1608–57) likewise continued Bérulle's emphasis upon priestly formation, founding the Compagnie de Saint-Sulpice (Sulpicians) and supporting missions domestically and in New France (Canada). Olier's *Treatise on Holy Orders* was used for centuries as a primary text for priestly formation. Jean Eudes (1601–80) founded the Congrégation de Jésus et de Marie. In the following century we find Jean-Baptiste de La Salle (1651–1719) and Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort (1673–1716), among others, deeply influenced by Bérulle. The present-day theologian Yves Krumenacker has estimated that "in 1789, more than two-thirds of French seminaries were in the hands of inheritors of Bérullism,"[11] and many religious congregations that began or re-

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inventories made after death indicate that his works were rarely found in libraries, even those belonging to members of the Oratory." Yves Krumenacker, "Entre histoire et mémoire: L'École française de spiritualité," *Théophilyon* 4, no. 1 (1999): 48. Yet Bérulle's writings did not enter complete oblivion, as they were reprinted several times in the following centuries. The most recent edition is that of Cerf, 1995–.

10. Bourgoing, "Préface," iii.

11. Yves Krumenacker, "École française de spiritualité," in Alain Tallon et al., *Histoire du christianisme en France* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2014), chap. 16, p. 273. See also Krumenacker, "Entre histoire et mémoire," 58.

emerged after the Revolution likewise found themselves in conformity with it. In the early twentieth century, the historian Henri Bremond revived interest in the person of Bérulle by the emphasis he placed on the cardinal in his landmark *Literary History of Religious Thought in France*, a multivolume work published between 1916 and 1936.[12]

Bremond is typically cited as the creator of the epithet *French school*. Krumenacker has demonstrated, however, that the term likely came into existence as far back as the mid-nineteenth century (being first applied narrowly to the Sulpicians) and that in 1913 the Sulpician Georges Letourneau "broadened its meaning to include the whole group of spiritual writers from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century that were read in Sulpician, Oratorian, Eudist, and Lazarist seminaries."[13] Bremond modified the term's meaning once again by extending it back to Bérulle and the Oratory. The precise nature and scope of the school has been contested among scholars since Bremond's day. We will not focus on the term but on what the discourses reveal of Bérulle's personal synthesis of theological and spiritual influences and emphases.

The Discourses

Within Bérulle's lifetime, the discourses were first printed in 1623, reprinted in that same year, and then a third time in 1629. The 1629 printing has been used as the source for this translation, given that it is the last one printed before Bérulle's death and therefore the last that can reasonably be supposed to have benefited from his review.

This is a work of mystical theology and doxology, not an expression of Bérulle's own mystical experience. Bourgoing remarked that the work could have been titled *Panegyric on the Incarnation, or, the Faith by This Mystery Explained*.[14] In expounding the theology underlying his vow of servitude, Bérulle ranges over a vast territory, often circling around his themes, sometimes spiraling closer in and other times further out, sometimes returning to and amplifying earlier points, and

12. Henri Bremond, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France depuis la fin des guerres de religion jusqu'à nos jours*, 11 vols. (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1916–36).

13. Krumenacker, "L'École française de spiritualité," 263–64.

14. Bourgoing, "Préface," xiv.