"Between You and Us": Nuns and Spiritual Discernment in Seventeenth-Century France

Cynthia J. Cupples
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

In May 1630, Prioress Marie de Saint-Joseph (Ménard du Tertre) of the Benedictines of Notre Dame du Calvaire was "vacillating in her mind over the novelty and multitude" of seemingly supernatural behaviors her newest postulant had displayed since entering the Calvaire at Morlaix the previous summer. "A little knowledge," wrote the Breton Capuchin Joseph de Vitré in 1632, had given the prioress "all sorts of distrust but little satisfaction" about whether the "ecstasies, transports, and raptures" experienced by Sister Anne-Marie de Jésus Crucifié (Goulaine) were divinely or diabolically inspired. The Capuchin emphasized that the limitations of the prioress's knowledge made her welcome his expert assistance, but the manuscript biography of Sister Anne-Marie and his own description of the investigation into the source of her spirituality also reveal prioress Marie de Saint-Joseph's active collaboration in observing, questioning, and testing the would-be Calvairienne.¹

¹ "Lettre du Rd. P. Joseph de Vitré o.m.c. à la R. de Mère Directrice, où il dit approuver les cahiers du Rd. P. Georges d'Hennebont o.m.c., traitant de la vie de la Mère Anne de Jésus Crucifié de Goulaine," Ms. 655.10.12, p. 5, Monastère des Bénédictines de Notre-Dame du Calvaire, Saint-Jean-de-Braye, France. This twentieth-century manuscript conforms very closely to the early seventeenth-century manuscript "Lestre du R.P. Joseph de vitré q[u'î]l escrit a
Although more guarded, letters written in 1637 by the Oratorian priest Guillaume Gibieuf, one of three Superiors of the Discalced Carmelites in France, to the Carmelite prioress at Beaune also strike a collaborative note. Discussing a prophetic revelation that Beaune Carmelite Marguerite du Saint-Sacrement (Parigot) had shared with prioress Marie de la Trinité (Mignard), Gibieuf praised the prioress for "keeping secret all the extraordinary things that are happening in this good soul" and cautioned, "even though the further we advance, . . . the more we see that these things are evidently from God, it is nevertheless not proper that they be divulged." Both Gibieuf's caution and his praise imply that the Superior and the prioress shared an understanding of what constituted "extraordinary things" and how they were to be evaluated in Marguerite's case. When Gibieuf wrote two months later, asking "what that little soul has seen," he trusted the prioress to exercise this understanding. His closing infuses their collaboration with a kind of intimacy: "I beg of you that all of this remain between you and us."  

Composed while their subjects were still alive and the evaluation of their spirituality still open, these sources permit us to see interactions between local clerics, prioresses, and their orders' distant Superiors. That we can glimpse collaboration between prioresses and authoritative clergymen applying the arcane science of spiritual discernment challenges views of the Catholic Reformation as clerically dominated and repressive to cloistered and silenced contemplative women, views that have prevailed in historical scholarship until recently. In the past five years, historians Alison Weber and Barbara Diefendorf have called attention to the largely unremarked roles of prioresses in assessing the spirituality of their sisters in religion among Discalced Carmelites in early modern Spain and in the reformed convents of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Paris. Diefendorf explains that the historiographically unexpected latitude allowed for the prioresses' spiritual guidance of their nuns (and even lay women and men) was essential to the Catholic Reformation for reasons both commonsensical and profound: "the high

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3 See the historiographic discussion in my "Âmes d'Élite: Visionaries and Politics in France from the Holy Catholic League to the Reign of Louis XIV" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1999), in which I suggested that the powers ascribed to visionaries in seventeenth-century France could replicate and supplement priestly functions (8-15, 135-6).

spiritual ideal that was at the very heart of the Catholic Reformation's project would have been unattainable if the convents had to depend for spiritual guidance on the rare visits of their male superiors and guest preachers, or even the sporadic attentions of their regular confessors." Moreover, she suggests, long association with "spiritually gifted women" gave leading clerical reformers high regard for prioresses' abilities. Although Diefendorf limits her study to Paris, she speculates that "the close communication and overlap of personnel" among the houses of newly reformed and expanding orders made provincial prioresses "just as respected for their spiritual insights and authority as their Parisian sisters were."

This essay pushes the limits of Diefendorf's analysis by considering the evaluation of extraordinary spirituality in provincial France. The Calvaire of Morlaix and the Carmel of Beaune provide good test cases for the provincial prioress's authority in spiritual discernment. Established in 1617, the Congregation of Notre Dame du Calvaire grew out of the collaboration of the Capuchin Père Joseph de Paris, later known as the Eminence grise, and Princess Antoinette de Longueville d'Orléans in reforming Fontevraud's priory at Lencloître. Two decades later, the Congregation governed by Père Joseph and Supérieure Générale Mère Marie-Madeleine de la Passion (de Rieux-Sourdeac) in Paris and by Philippe de Cospeau, bishop of Nantes and later Lisieux, had grown to sixteen monasteries in the capital and western France. The Calvaire of Morlaix

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5 Diefendorf, From Penitence to Charity, 156, 249.
6 Les premières Mères de la Congrégation bénédictine de Notre-Dame du Calvaire par une religieuse du même ordre (Poitiers: Henri Oudin, 1865), xv-xx; locations and dates listed at http://www.benedictines-bouzey.com. For Père Joseph's narrative of the collaboration and the eventual Congregation as divinely inspired, see

Volume 33 (2005)
was founded in 1625, only four years before the entry of Anne de Goulaine.\(^7\) The Discalced Carmelites had grown even more rapidly, from the first Parisian foundation in 1604 to fifty-two monasteries supervised by the three French clerical superiors in 1636. Founded in 1619, the Carmel of Beaune was eleven years old when Marguerite du Saint-Sacrement entered in 1630. Locally, ties of friendship and history linked the Calvaire of Morlaix to the Capuchins and the Carmel of Beaune to the Oratorians.

In focusing on extraordinary spirituality, I employ a narrower definition of spiritual discernment than that used by Diefendorf. Medieval and early modern theologians ascribed the capacity of spiritual discernment to various combinations of prudence, experience, art, theological learning, and divine gift. Spiritual discernment could be applied to a wide spectrum of problems, from determining the true motives behind thoughts and actions to identifying the divine or diabolical origins of visions, miraculous states, or mystical raptures.\(^8\) While Diefendorf has emphasized the determination of motives as essential to ordinary spiritual direction, I focus on the identification of supernatural origins, because the presumption that male clerical authorities would be the ones exercising spiritual

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discernment is most pronounced in the extraordinary range of the spectrum. The Minim theologian Louis de la Rivière, for instance, gendered as male each of the "three means" for distinguishing divine revelations from diabolical illusions: "hierarchical authority, the doctrine of the Church, and experience." The first, he explained,

has a great gift from God for discerning in this matter . . . for ecclesiastical prelates in virtue of their character and sacred dignity, are appropriate and competent judges of spiritual things, so much so that – if they do not put up obstacles from their side – the Holy Spirit will assist them.

For the second, "a learned man knowledgeable in theology has a fine advantage." As for the third, "spiritual men, who have the secret experience of graces from on high . . . can judge better than others what happens inside devout souls."9 Similarly, the Calvairiennes' Superior Philippe de Cospeau left little doubt that clergymen were "those who by their offices and . . . long experience . . . were most capable" of judging "rare and extraordinary visions, admirable raptures, and prodigies."10

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10 "Oraison funèbre sur la mort de monseigneur l'ill[ustrissi]me et Révérendissime Cardinal de Berulle," Archives nationales M234, no. 3. On Philippe de Cospeau, also spelled Cospéan, see Siméon Mallevaud,
Yet the lengthy title of the manuscript life of Sister Anne-Marie de Jesus-Crucifié attests to collaboration between the prioress, her nuns, and local clerics: the manuscript was "put in order by the venerable father Georges de Hennebont, having extracted . . . it from the . . . memoirs that the Reverend Mother Marie de Saint-Joseph . . . and the nuns had written according to what happened each day." The accompanying letter from Joseph de Vitré, Definitor for the Capuchin province of Brittany, to the Supérieure Générale affirms Sister Anne-Marie's conduct as divine and generally approves Georges d'Hennebont's compilation. The Definitor nevertheless criticized and supplemented his junior colleague's assessments of the new Calvairienne's supernatural states.\textsuperscript{11} Together, letter and


\textsuperscript{11} Joseph de Vitré criticized "what has been carelessly (légèrement) written" about the devil's attacks and regretted that he had not written about Anne's suffering, "for it is an entirely different thing from what has been put in writing about it." "Lettre," Saint-Jean de Braye ms., 66, and Kerbénéat ms., 5, 8. Joseph de Vitré (ca. 1594-1662) had been a Capuchin more than twice as long as Georges d'Hennebont (d. 1642), who had entered the Order only in 1622. Joseph de Vitré's successive reelectios as Definitor in the 1630s and his 1633 selection as a delegate to the Capuchin General Chapter meeting in Rome suggest that he was highly regarded among Breton Capuchins. Georges d'Hennebont, described on the title page of the "Vie" as "Capuchin priest and Estutial in Theology," seems not to have held office in the Capuchin province of Brittany. See Emmanuel de Lammodez, ed., \textit{Le Manuscrit 776 de la Bibliothèque de la ville de Rennes} (Paris: Chéronnet, 1895), 37, 41; "Vie," bk. 3, ch. 3; and Joseph de Vitré, "Lettre," Saint-Jean de Braye ms., 5.
biography bring into focus both the prioress's authority in spiritual discernment and its limits.

By the time Anne de Goulaine came to the professional attentions of the Breton Capuchins and Calvairienne prioress, she had been struggling for years to enter the cloister against the opposition of her noble family, one of Brittany's oldest and most ardently Catholic, and according to her biographer, against the violent physical and psychological attacks of demons. At home in Poulmic, Anne was variously diagnosed as mad or possessed, ridiculed for her moral reforms, and praised for her piety.\(^{12}\)

Sharply contrasted to this strife are the "great confidence and openness" with which, on her first visit to the Calvaire of Morlaix in 1626, Anne entrusted the spiritual direction of her soul to prioress Marie de Saint-Joseph.\(^{13}\) Georges d'Hennebont's matter-of-fact presentation of this decision suggests the kind of respect for nuns as spiritual directors that Diefendorf has found in Paris – though he seems less comfortable with Marie de Saint-Joseph's exempting Anne from communicating to her family chaplain her plans to enter the convent. "Advice would be taken from persons more experienced and less self-interested in this matter," he explains, and besides, Anne's praiseworthy "simplicity" made her continue to seek advice from her confessor/director at home.\(^{14}\)

During Anne's second visit early in 1629, the Calvairiennes of Morlaix witnessed the spectacular effects

\(^{12}\) "Vie," bk. 1, ch. 22.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., ch. 32. That Anne's sister was assistant prioress of the convent and her mother one of its patrons facilitated the visit and perhaps Anne's bonding with the prioress. Les Premières Mères attributes the decision to a vision in which Anne saw the Virgin Mary presenting Marie de Saint-Joseph as her spiritual director (278).

\(^{14}\) "Vie," bk. 1, ch. 32.
of the devils' attacks on Anne: they heard the blows as she was beaten, saw the breviary snatched from her hands, and watched as she was thrown to the ground. Georges d'Hennebont depicts Marie de Saint-Joseph as a good spiritual director; keenly attentive to Anne's preoccupations during Mass, she summoned Anne to the grille, elicited Anne's descriptions of her diabolic torments, then prescribed rest, a spiritual exercise, and the use of a relic to help Anne withstand them.\textsuperscript{15} Yet, according to the biographer, fear of "so many strange things" led the nuns to seek out the greater expertise of "persons with more understanding in these matters, both according to the spirit of devotion and in doctrine." For these two kinds of understanding, which correspond to the second and third of La Rivièrè's means of discernment, quoted above, the nuns turned to Louis-François de Rennes, Superior of the Capuchin monastery at Morlaix, and Venerable Père Columbin de Nantes, "so that together they could be more amply enlightened."\textsuperscript{16} Despite the presumption of mutuality expressed in that goal, the Capuchins seem to have pulled rank when Columbin de Nantes told the prioress, "I believe that you are ignorant of . . . the perfection in which this soul is . . . [and] I fear lest you write to your superiors according to what you know and not what is . . . I believe that you

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., ch. 33, bk. 2, ch. 2.

could not get to the door quickly enough to open it for [Reverend Père Joseph de Paris] if he knew about it.  

Columbin’s condescension notwithstanding, in Georges d'Hennebont's narrative, Marie de Saint Joseph seems very much in control as spiritual director, her discernment of spirits intermittently assisted by divine providence but not emanating from infused grace or personal holiness. She responded to Anne's pleas for help against her demons and her family, strategically dispatching Capuchin priests to the Goulaine estate to ensure Anne's entry into the convent in August 1629. When devils prevented the novice from singing the litanies of the Virgin Mary, the prioress even improvised an exorcism, applying saints' relics, a priest's stole, and the Eucharistic paten and chalice—although only dragging Sister Anne-Marie before the Holy Sacrament silenced the demons. To soothe her frightened nuns and

17 "Vie," bk. 1, ch. 33. The biographer credits Columbin with speaking "by a strong prophetic movement."

18 On the one occasion when the prioress succumbed to fear, according to Georges d'Hennebont, God permitted the fear to "make known the weakness of nature, if [God] did not supernaturally put his hand to it." He reports that the prioress was subsequently divinely fortified against such weakness, perhaps an echo of the Gersonian idea that divine gifts would follow office to enable spiritual discernment. He also attributes to Sister Anne-Marie great confidence in the prioress' ability to chase away the demons: Ibid., bk. 2, ch. 1. By contrast, the nineteenth-century compilation Les Premières Mères ascribes divine gifts of contemplation and "knowledge of hearts" to Marie de Saint-Joseph (234, 243-5).

19 "Vie," bk. 1, ch. 35.

also to reassure herself, the prioress consulted "a few more capable (plus entendus) religious" and had Anne speak with a priest "rather fastidious (difficille) about believing in the extraordinary." However, she dismissed the latter's verdict that Sister Anne-Marie suffered from "imagination and pure weakness of mind" and denied him further contact with the novice. Instead, she turned to priests with "a more particular knowledge of Anne's past life:" Georges d'Hennebont and other Capuchins, who assured her that the "very extraordinary test[ing]" of Sister Anne-Marie was the divine "purification" of an exceptional soul.

In addition to selecting by whom and by what criteria her newest charge would be judged, prioress Marie de Saint-Joseph asked the question that enabled Sister Anne-Marie to be seen as saintly and allowed the Capuchins' prediction to prove true: "Was it possible that . . . God could have failed in his usual mercy and . . . not given her some special . . . assistance to bear so much pain?" Freed

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Henri-Marie Boudon cited Jean-Joseph Surin's recommendation of relics as efficacious against obsessing or possessing demons: Les Saintes voies de la croix, in Œuvres complètes de Boudon, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1856), 2:187. Interestingly, Georges d'Hennebont does not gloss the contrast between the failure of the prioress's attempted exorcism and the effectiveness of the consecrated Host as a triumph of properly exercised, male, priestly authority. Sister Anne-Marie's described behavior disrupted monastic routine and replicated some of the symptoms exhibited in well-publicized sixteenth- and seventeenth-century cases of demonic possession: the devil threw her to the ground when she approached to take Communion, inserted blasphemies into her breviary, and stopped her ears so that she could not hear devotional readings. See my "Âmes d'Élite," 433-65.

21 "Vie," bk. 2, ch. 2.
22 Ibid., chs. 2 and 10. Joseph de Vitré claimed that he had been asked to speak to Anne while he was passing through Morlaix at the end of August. Joseph de Vitré, "Lettre," Saint-Jean de Braye ms., 2.
by her superior's command from the suspicion of pride, Sister Anne-Marie was able to answer that she had received divine graces. Georges d'Hennebont depicts the question as providential and the answer as initiating divine confirmation of the Capuchins' discernment: "in order to give credibility to (authoriser) . . . what had been assured to these good Mothers, it pleased God to begin to mix some visions among the horrible views she had of the Enemy."²³ The prioress similarly extracted proof of Anne's humility and divine graces when she commanded the postulant to record her sentiments on entering the Calvaire, to answer whether she had minded the mockery that she had endured in the world, and to show her stigmata.²⁴

Perhaps the prioress also elicited the prompt fulfillment of the prediction made to her by Capuchin Definitor Joseph de Vitré during his visit to Morlaix in January 1630, that Sister Anne-Marie "could soon enter a state in which raptures, ecstasies, and revelations would be very

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²³ Georges d'Hennebont dates the question to the Feast of St. Michael (29 Sept.); he reports that already in the first week of September, the prioress had noticed Anne's rapt attention to a vision of the Virgin Mary: "Vie," bk. 2, ch. 2.

²⁴ Like the command to write spiritual autobiography in the early modern Spanish convents studied by Isabelle Poutrin, Marie de Saint-Joseph's commands seem aimed more at gleaning evidence of sanctity than at surveillance or the repression of heterodoxy. Anne's testimony that on entering the Calvaire she "wanted to give [her]self up like soft wax in [the prioress's] hands" demonstrated her obedience. Her response that she saw in her detractors the image of God showed humility and charity. The command that Sister Anne-Marie show her stigmata elicited further proof of humility and freedom from dangerous curiosity when Anne reported that until then she had never looked at or felt them: "Vie," bk. 1, chs. 36 and 22; Joseph de Vitré, "Lettre," Kerbénéat ms., 7; and Isabelle Poutrin, Le Voile et la plume: Autobiographie et sainteté féminine dans l'Espagne moderne (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 1995), 14-6, 126-7.
frequent. Joseph de Vitré's advice that the visionary should test the angels she envisioned by asking them to adore Jesus Christ marks a collaboration with the prioress that intensified in May 1630, when Joseph de Vitré moved to Morlaix. "Troubled" by what he had learned from Georges d'Hennebont about the "great frequency" of Sister Anne-Marie's "ecstasies, transports, and raptures," Joseph de Vitré found prioress Marie de Saint-Joseph "vacillating in her mind." "We consulted together (nous avisâmes donc par ensemble)," he recalled, on how to discover their source with more certainty. Together prioress and priest questioned and observed the novice until they had no doubt that "God was the author of so many good things." To convince the Congregation's superiors that Sister Anne-Marie should be permitted to make her profession, however, they further resolved to test her humility by "mortifying her very harshly" and to make sure that her raptures were involuntary by commanding her to reject them. The Definitor's reliance on the indefinite pronoun on (one, I, we . . .) and his habit of referring to himself in the first person plural leave unclear exactly who performed these tests. Yet the prioress must have participated when

25 Joseph de Vitré, "Lettre," Saint-Jean de Braye ms., 4. The Definitor recorded that Sister Anne-Marie's raptures and ecstasies began "eight or ten days later" on the Feast of the Purification (2 Feb.).

26 "Vie," bk. 3, ch. 3; Ibid., 5. Joseph de Vitré recalled that his move easily obtained the blessings of the Capuchin Provincial of Brittany, Anastase de Nantes, who had "some light acquaintance" with sister Anne-Marie, and of his fellow Definitors – especially the two who had lived in Morlaix, Raphael de Nantes (Capuchin Provincial of Brittany in 1632-34) and Séverin de Morlaix (1597-1638). The latter was the son of the Morlaix Calvair's foundress and the elder brother of Capuchin Joseph de Morlaix, who was sent to Anne at Poulmic. See "Manuscrit du frère Baltasar de Bellèmes," ms. 57, 119v-22r; Lanmodez, 56-8; Goudelin, 19; and Mallevaud, 691-2, 713-4, 745.
"on pretended to want to send [Sister Anne-Marie] away" for insincerity, and Joseph de Vitré specifies that they listened together for days as the frightened novice demonstrated her sincerity by "recount[ing] her whole life." Nevertheless, the Definitor does not seem to have regarded Marie de Saint-Joseph as an entirely equal partner in discernment. He concealed from her that he was probing the novice's ecstasies for inspired advice. His letter emphasizes his own expertise, his office, and Sister Anne-Marie's divine revelations confirming his direction.

In the end, neither the assessments by Joseph de Vitré and Marie de Saint-Joseph nor the letters written by other Breton Capuchins experienced in spirituality and familiar with Sister Anne-Marie sufficed as definitive spiritual discernment. The Congregation's Superiors were alarmed by what they had heard of the novice. In September 1630,

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28 Joseph de Vitré reports that at the beginning of July 1630, when Sister Anne-Marie entered a deep rapture while talking to him, he asked the prioress to "withdraw a little and leave me with her." The Capuchin "commanded Sister Anne to give me enlightenment (lumière) from God" when the prioress was at "the [other] end of the infirmary." On another occasion, he writes, "No one but me . . . knew the thing that I had recommended to her nor even that I had recommended anything to her." "Lettre," Saint-Jean de Braye ms., 9-10; and Kerbénéat ms., 7.
29 "Lettre," Saint-Jean de Braye ms., 5 and 9.
30 "Vie," bk. 5, ch. 8.
31 The Breton sources focus on the opposition of Père Joseph de Paris to Sister Anne-Marie's profession, but Superior Philippe de Cospeau had also urged rigor against "those reveries, too ordinary in our time, in which solid and true virtue is so degenerated into the subtle intrigues of the spirit of horror" in the 1629 funeral oration for Pierre de Bérulle quoted above, note 10. In contrast to the experienced and outspoken male Superiors, Marie-Madeleine de la Passion, not yet thirty, had just been elected Supérieure Générale in 1629: *Premières Mères*, 173.
Père Joseph de Paris forbade her profession until he had examined her himself, a task to which, he wrote, he felt himself called by divine impulse as well as by the Congregation's request.\textsuperscript{32} The Goulaine family's refusal to allow the novice to travel obliged the \textit{Eminence grise} to conduct the examination by correspondence, an expedient that acquaintance with Marie de Saint-Joseph's successful term as prioress in Paris a few years before may have rendered more tolerable.\textsuperscript{33} Yet Père Joseph's letters offer few signs that the spiritual discernment exercised by Marie de Saint-Joseph and the Breton Capuchins counted for his own analysis.\textsuperscript{34} Indeed, Père Joseph seems to have started on ground already covered by the prioress and Definitor. Withholding judgment on whether Anne's mystical experiences came from God "or from His opposite," Père Joseph de Paris directed Anne to "pray to be delivered from all interior and exterior impulses (\textit{mouvements}) that could weaken her health." The obedience imposed by her Superiors, he reminded Anne, was "a much surer path than that of [her] own impulses, impressions (\textit{touchements}), and crucifixions." As late as March 1631, though evoking the divine assistance Sister Anne-Marie had received "ever since [her] birth" and acknowledging that the "blindness and error" of disobedience were "far from [her]," the Superior was still suggesting that her torments could be


\textsuperscript{33} Not yet bound by a formal profession, Anne could not be commanded to make the journey. "Vie," bk. 5, ch. 8. Marie de Saint-Joseph and Supérieure Générale Marie-Madeleine de la Passion shared approximately five years (ca. 1620-1625) in the first Parisian Calvaire: \textit{Les Premières Mères}, 172-4, 235.

\textsuperscript{34} Letters of 2 June and 19 Aug. 1630 in BFP ms. 2360 and BM ms. 1206.
"marks that God is permitting the evil spirit to work . . . for the punishment of your faults, without which punishment and humiliation you would be more proud than the others."35 Only in May 1631, after Sister Anne-Marie had written Père Joseph "a very ample letter . . . about the state of her pains and how she was conducting herself," did the Superiors grant permission for her profession on the condition that she go to Paris immediately afterward.36

The authority exercised by Prioress Marie de Saint-Joseph in the multiple evaluations of Sister Anne-Marie's extraordinary spirituality is striking. So, ultimately, are its limitations. The good will and respect that she enjoyed in Morlaix, especially among local Capuchins, did not guarantee the full respect of the province's Capuchin Definitor. Her ability to collaborate with the Definitor did not ensure the acceptance of their verdict by the Congregation's Superiors. Lacking correspondence between the Superiors, the prioress, and the Breton Capuchins, it is difficult to assess whether the prioress's Parisian experience affected the fate of Sister Anne-Marie.

The correspondence focused on Carmelite Marguerite du Saint-Sacrement in Beaune may shed some light on the attitudes of Parisian superiors toward provincial prioresses and local clergy. Like Sister Anne-Marie, Marguerite reportedly experienced visions, raptures, and supernatural states; her holiness impressed both the Carmelites and the

35 Letter of 17 Mar. 1631, BFP ms. 2360.
36 Written "around the month of April," according to Georges d'Hennebont, this letter may have responded to Père Joseph's letter of 17 Mar., quoted above. "Vie," bk. 5, ch. 9. The manuscripts at the BFP and BM do not contain any letters from Joseph de Paris between 17 Mar. and 7 June 1631.
Oratorians of Beaune. Unlike Père Joseph de Paris, the Carmelites' superiors do not seem to have insisted on a rigorous examination by a central authority. Rather, the gaps in the published correspondence suggest considerable autonomy for Marie de la Trinité (Mignard), prioress 1635-1642, and Elisabeth de la Trinité (de Quatrebarbes), prioress 1628-1635 and 1642-1648. Superior Gibieuf wrote to Elisabeth de la Trinité at Beaune in 1643 that "it has been a long time since I have received her particular news, and I think it very appropriate that you send the principal points of what has happened to her in the last few years." He was clearly not prepared for the manuscript account of Marguerite's graces that he received in 1644. His scathing response highlights as it denounces the prioress's effective authority in spiritual discernment:

"All persons charged with a subject extraordinary in the ways of God have been accustomed to mistrust themselves and to ask for advice. This subject is one of the most extraordinary, and yet the two mothers who have been responsible for guiding her have never been seen to have doubted nor asked for advice."

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37 In addition to the correspondence, see Jacques Roland-Gosselin, *Le Carmel de Beaune, 1619-1660* (Rabat: Imprimeries Françaises et Marocaines, 1969).

38 Gibieuf to Marie de la Trinité, 30 Sept. 1639 and 25 June 1642, and Gibieuf to Elisabeth de la Trinité, 19 June 1643, in *Marguerite du Saint-Sacrement, Correspondance*, 125-6, 177, 223.

Not her long tenure as prioress, nor her familiarity with Parisian Carmelites encountered as the order expanded, nor even the mutual friendship with Gaston de Renty that she shared with Gibieuf prevented Elisabeth de la Trinité from experiencing first hand that prioresses' ventures into the extraordinary range of spiritual discernment risked the forceful reassertion of male clerical authority.  

40 On Elisabeth de la Trinité's career, see Marguerite du Saint Sacrement, *Correspondance*, 46-9. The prioress' apprehensions and Gibieuf's severity can be inferred from the letters of Gaston de Renty to Elisabeth de la Trinité surrounding the Superior's visit to Beaune in mid-June. Even after writing the Declaration, however, Gibieuf apparently did not regard the visit as a necessity. By October, Renty could reassure the prioress after giving the Superiors her letters that "everything will go well in the end." Letters of 10 Mar., 12 May, 2 June, 16 June, 22 June, 30 June, 21 July, and 2 Oct., Gaston de Renty, *Correspondance*, 519-20, 546-8, 558-9, 561-5, 567-9, 576-7, 591-3.