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Abstract

Members of the Parisian *robe* Lamoignon family were amongst the most prominent *dévots* of the French Catholic Reformation. This article explores the family's religious engagement through six substantial biographies or *vies* written by close relatives between 1663 and 1688-90, which reflected on the devotional lives of Chrétien and Marie Lamoignon and three of their four children, Guillaume, Anne and Madeleine. It analyses how the authors adopted the popular strategy of life-writing to recall, reflect on and interpret the significance of their religious choices and experiences for themselves and for the family as a whole. Appraisal of their habits became building blocks for the construction of what the authors defined as a Lamoignon 'family spirit', which included a rhetoric of humility that was designed to withstand pride, deflect accusations of venality, validate the family's advancement, and to inflect their history with a cohesive spiritual identity.

I

As part of a surge in life-writing during the Catholic Reformation, many individuals wrote accounts of the devotional lives of their relatives, friends and other close associates.¹ Commonly known as *vies* or *vitae*, the composition of these spiritual biographies was especially popular amongst the spiritual brothers and sisters of religious orders, where it became routine for the lives of deceased members to be written up and passed around in manuscript form as edifying examples of piety for their fellow religious.² Laypeople also saw value in the writing and dissemination of these *vies*, even if they did not generate them in

¹ Jodi Bilinkoff, *Related Lives: Confessors and their Female Penitents 1450 – 1750* (Ithaca, 2005); Anne Jacobson Schutte, 'Ecco la santa! Printed Italian biographies of devout laywomen, seventeenth-eighteenth centuries,' in *Devout Laywomen in the Early Modern World*, ed. Alison Weber (London, 2016), Ch. 5.

² Caroline Bowden, 'Collecting the lives of early modern women religious: Obituary writing and the development of collective memory and corporate identity,' *Women's History R*, 19 (2010), 7–20; Jacques Le Brun, *Soeur et amante: les biographies spirituelles féminines du XVIIe siècle* (Geneva, 2013).

such large numbers. Though some were printed, most circulated in manuscript form amongst a limited number of people who had known the subject. Designed to be memorials of their life or to offer inspiration to the reader, they were usually written by friends, family members or spiritual directors, or a combination of these.³

Amongst the most extraordinary surviving examples of this type of literature are six substantial biographies or *vies* written by four members of the Parisian *robe* Lamoignon family between 1663 and 1688-90. Although it is obvious that the authors of these were following a trend prevalent during the Catholic Reformation in France, the level of productivity and intensity of their engagement with this form of devotional writing is remarkable. The first, written by Guillaume de Lamoignon in 1663, stretched to thirty-two folios. Those that followed display the same ambitious commitment to record, with a median length of thirty-two folios: the longest of all at ninety-two folios (albeit in a very large script) was the *vie* of her aunt written by Anne-Elisabeth de Lamoignon between 1688 and 1690, but even the shortest, a *vie* of the same aunt by Anne-Elisabeth's brother Chrétien-François, was still a sizeable text of twenty-five folios in a tightly-written hand. As a result, the Lamoignon *vies* offer unparalleled riches as records of this prominent family's religious engagement. The individuals whose lives provided the basis for them shaped the family's religious sympathies and traditions; as leading *dévots* during the epoch of Catholic Reformation, they had established new religious affinities and practices for the family. This article will explore how their relatives adopted the strategy of life-writing to recall, reflect on and interpret the

³ See, for example, the analysis of biographies about Anne de Xaintonge (1567-1621), lay founder of the Society of the Sisters of Saint Ursula of the Blessed Virgin, by Marie-Amelie Le Bourgeois: *Ursulines d'Anne de Xaintonge: 1606: contribution à l'histoire des communautés religieuses féminines sans clôture* (Saint-Étienne, 2003). Also enlightening is Jennifer Hillman, 'The Contagiousness of the Sacred': Writing Spiritual Biographies in Seventeenth-Century Le Puy-en-Vélay', in Jennifer Hillman and Elizabeth Tingle (eds), *Soul Travel. Spiritual Journeys in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Berne 2019), 235-62. This examines biographies of Anne-Marie Martel (1644-73), lay foundress of the Sisters of the Child Jesus, written by her Sulpician associates in the 1670s.

significance of their devotional choices and experiences for themselves and for the family as a whole. It was not only the actual habits of piety that contributed to the creation of Lamoignon religious identity: in the *vies*, appraisals of such became building blocks for the construction of what the authors defined as a Lamoignon family ‘spirit’.

II

The subjects of the Lamoignon *vies* were five closely related individuals from two generations of this family. Of bourgeois origin, its male heads soared to the highest parliamentary ranks over three generations from the mid-sixteenth century. In the seventeenth century, father and son, Chrétien (1567-1636) and Guillaume (1617-77), acceded to the prestigious post of *Premier Président* in the Paris *parlement* in 1633 and 1658 respectively, while making advantageous marriages with the daughters of wealthy *Conseillers de Parlement* from the well-established Des Landes and Potier families. The family maintained a Parisian residence in St-Leu and Gilles parish, but also held a seigneurie in Basville, south-west of Paris, and regularly stayed at their *château* there. This became a marquisate in 1670.⁴

Guillaume de Lamoignon was one of four siblings to survive the perils of an early seventeenth-century childhood, and it was he who wrote the first *vie* in the family; a few days after the death of his eldest sister, Anne (1605-63, m. Théodore de Nesmond) in 1663, he sat down to write about her and their parents.⁵ Around the same time, Marie de Miramion (1629-96), whose daughter (Marie-Marguerite) had married Anne’s son, wrote the second *vie* on Anne. She had developed a close friendship with Anne after she was widowed in 1646;

⁴ Chrétien de Lamoignon began his career as *Conseiller* in the Paris *parlement* in 1595, before becoming *Président des Enquêtes* in 1623 and *Premier Président* a decade later. His son became a *Conseiller* in 1633, and a *maître des requêtes* in 1642: Yves Lemoine, *La Grand Robe, le mariage et l’argent. Histoire d’une grande famille parlementaire (1560-1660)* (Paris 2000), 112-4, 176-8; Louis Vian, *Les Lamoignon. Une Vieille Famille de Robe* (Paris 1896), 29- 68.

⁵ A[rchives] N[ationales,] 399AP/3, ‘Fragmens dans l’original est de la main du Pr President de Lamoignon, sur la vie de son pere, mere, et soeur’ [hereafter ‘Fragmens’]. Guillaume does not appear to have finished his text, since it does not include a lot of material on his sister.

withstanding pressure from her family to remarry, she had decided to live a life of chastity, prayer and good works, some of which she completed alongside Anne in the confraternity of charity at the *Hôtel-Dieu*.⁶ Though she was not a blood relative, the Lamoignon called her the sister of Anne, Madeleine and Guillaume, and she enjoyed warm relationships with Guillaume's children as well. For this reason, her *vie* is included in this study too.⁷

More reflections on family members followed in the next generation of the family: in 1688 or 1689, two of Guillaume's children, Chrétien-François (1644-1709), and Anne-Elisabeth (1654-1734) each penned *vies* of their father and the youngest of his three sisters, their late aunt, Madeleine (1609-87).⁸ Chrétien-François succeeded his father as head of the family and also enjoyed an illustrious judicial career, capped by the post of *President à mortier* in 1690. Anne-Elisabeth was a nun at the Visitation of Saint-Jacques, where she served a number of terms as superior. In total, therefore, the six works treated of five family members: Chrétien and Marie, and three of their four children.

In general, members of the Parisian *robe* were driving forces in initiatives to improve religious discipline during the period of Catholic Reform, as they ploughed resources into the foundation of convents or the funding of missions, seminaries and charitable ventures, and explored new trends in spiritual reflection.⁹ From the 1620s, Lamoignon family members

⁶ Alfred Bonneau, *Madame de Beauharnais de Miramion. Sa Vie et ses œuvres charitables, 1629-1696* (Paris 1868), *passim*.

⁷ AN 399/AP3, 'Petit abrégé de la vie de feüe Madame la Presidente de Nesmond' [hereafter 'Nesmond'].

⁸ By Chrétien-François: AN 399AP/3, 'Vie du P^r President de Lamoignon par Chretien François de Lamoignon' [hereafter 'President']; 399AP/5 'Memoires du President de Lamoignon sur sa tante Mlle de Lamoignon' [hereafter 'Memoires'].

By Anne-Elisabeth: AN 399AP/3, 'Recueil de la conduit de feu Monsieur le premier president, de ses sentiments et des actions de vertu qui sont venue a ma connoissance' [hereafter 'Recueil']; 399/AP/ 5, 'Vie de Mlle de Lamoignon par sa niece Elisabeth de Lamoignon' [hereafter 'Mlle'].

Chrétien-François later wrote notes on the broader historical context of his aunt's life to help a biographer assigned to write her life for publication, but these should not be confused with the original memoir under review here: AN 399/AP/5, Jacques de Marsollier to Anne-Élisabeth de Lamoignon, 4 October 1703.

⁹ Joseph Bergin, *Church, Society and Religious Change in France 1580-1730* (New Haven and London 2009), Ch. 15.

stepped into particularly prominent positions amongst this cohort of *dévots*, and the subjects of the family *vies* played sizable roles in reform initiatives. Like many *dévots*, the Lamoignon benefited from the spiritual variety that existed in the Catholic Reform movement, which allowed for strands of devotional thought and activity to co-exist or braid into adapted forms. Thus, the family plumped for the Society of Jesus to educate its sons, and generally preferred Jesuits as confessor-directors. The Visitation convent on rue Saint-Jacques became an important site in the family's religious practice. This attachment stemmed from Anne-Elisabeth's grandparents, especially her grandmother, Marie des Landes (1576-1651), who had encouraged her husband and children to bend to the devotional influence of its founders, François de Sales and Jeanne de Chantal, after she met de Sales when he visited Paris in 1618-9. This had soon led Marie and her husband to contribute lavishly to the foundation of a second convent of the Visitation in 1626 (the first having opened on rue Saint-Antoine seven years earlier), and to offer more gifts to it once their daughter entered it in 1635. From 1651, family members began to leave bequests to it in their wills, and from 1677 to incorporate the convent's church into their funerary practices.¹⁰

Family members also became extremely active in collective devotional ventures to assist the sick and poor and to improve religious and moral standards, of which the Jesuit and Salesian emphasis on salvific works of merit and lived virtue could only approve. Chrétien and Guillaume were confreres in the Company of the Holy Sacrament, which was established in 1627, and Guillaume particularly supported its efforts to end duelling and encourage missions in Canada. He was also one of the administrators of the Parisian *Hôpital Général*, a foundation whose origin owed much to the Company.¹¹ His mother, wife and lay sisters were

¹⁰ AN 399AP/3, 'Testament de Marie de Landes femme de feu Chrestien de Lamoignon' (5 October 1642); AN 399AP/5, 'Mlle', 174-5.

¹¹ René de Voyer d'Argenson, *Annales de la Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement* (Marseille 1900), 83-6, 103; Tim McHugh, *Hospital Politics in Seventeenth-Century France. The Crown, Urban Elites and the Poor* (Aldershot 2007), 91.

committed members of confraternities of charity established in the parishes of Saint-Leu et Gilles and Saint-Nicolas du Chardonnet (where Anne resided) under the influence of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac, as well as active members of the confraternity of charity at the Paris *Hôtel-Dieu*. They also promoted these confraternities on their lands in Basville (Lamoignon) and Couberon (Nesmond).¹²

III

Such active engagement in devotional activities may have offered abundant evidence for a *vie*, but it did not in itself ensure the writing of such. Addressing the question of inspiration early in their texts, the Lamoignon authors gave a number of motivations for writing. They explained first that they were driven to write by the sense of loss that they felt in the wake of their relative's death, and that they wished to draw consolation from the process of reflection on their lives. But they went on to state that they wrote for other members of their family too, who they hoped would take inspiration from the record of their relative's life. Thus, Guillaume de Lamoignon emphasized that it was his wish to preserve his family's spiritual stability and inheritance that had driven him to write the first of the *vies* that became such a feature of the family's self-expression in the decades that followed. In the opening paragraphs of his account of the lives of his parents and late sister, Guillaume revealed that he had often spoken with Anne about their parents and regretted that she would not be able now to help him write about them. But in persevering with this testament of the holy lives of his relatives, he believed that he was offering a loving present to his children, who could use its insights to venerate them as he did.¹³

¹² For Anne's donations to the confraternities in Saint-Nicolas du Chardonnet, Couberon and Saint-Chéron (near Basville): AN 399AP/3, 'Testament d'Anne de Lamoignon, femme du President de Nesmond' (18 January 1661); for Marie and Madeleine's activities: Alison Forrestal, *Vincent de Paul, the Lazarist Mission, and French Catholic Reform* (Oxford 2017), Chs. 9 and 10.

¹³ AN 399AP/3, 'Fragments', fos 2v-3r.

The endurance of this concern to harness the family lives in this way can be seen in its repetition in a letter that the elderly Guillaume wrote fourteen years later to his daughters, both Visitation nuns. As he confronted his own mortality, he was reminded, he mused, of his duty as a father to conserve the children that Jesus had given to him, so that in the words of Josiah 24, ‘My house will always serve you, Lord.’ He strongly encouraged his daughters to continue to foster the precious spiritual heritage that he had cultivated in the family, so that it would unite them eternally ‘in heart and affection’ in God’s love.¹⁴ In turn, one of these daughters, Anne-Elisabeth, and her brother Chrétien-François, showed that they had absorbed his faith in the value of these reflections as pieces of the family’s ‘most precious heritage’ for the next generation when they later offered their perspectives on their father in *vies*. Each noted that they wrote for their own spiritual assistance and consolation but also so that Guillaume’s grandchildren could benefit from the examples of his virtues. He had been, Anne-Elisabeth added, the ‘master of our hearts’, and so he should be for them too.¹⁵

The goal, therefore, was to uncover meaning in the life of the deceased and to position them within the family’s history of spiritual development. In this regard, the *vies* bear comparison in kind if not in quantity with the many *vies* composed in new religious orders in this period, each of which had, according to Jacques Le Brun, a ‘founder function’. Cumulatively, they contributed to the founder story of the order, as the features of the lives described within recounted the story of the order as a whole through what were often setpiece tales of parental pressure, conversion, temptations and interior martyrdom.¹⁶ As personal reflections written for family usage, the Lamoignon *vies* were generally less formal in structure and had a more intimate tone than these kind of spiritual biographies. They also did

¹⁴ AN 399AP/3, Guillaume de Lamoignon to Anne-Elisabeth and Marie-Elisabeth de Lamoignon, 20 October 1677.

¹⁵ AN 399AP/3, ‘President’, fo. 1r; ‘Recueil’, fo. 1r.

¹⁶ Le Brun, *Soeur*, 10-11.

not rely to the same extent on identical setpieces. Yet they had a similar function. Their authors sought to use events and experiences from the recent past to transmit devotional lessons, values and ideals that were intergenerational, indeed perennial.

It is clear too that the reflections were intended mainly for family use rather than for a wider public audience.¹⁷ In this, the authors' hopes appear to have been met, for none of the texts were published, but did circulate amongst family members. Anne-Elisabeth de Lamoignon read Marie's life of Anne, for example. Another copy at the Franciscan Third Order monastery of the Conception de Notre-Dame in Paris probably belonged to Anne's daughter Olive who was a member of the community there.¹⁸ That the *vies* may have continued to function in this regard amongst succeeding generations is suggested by their survival in the family's *archives privées*.

It is all the more significant, therefore, that those who might be considered the original 'founders' of *la famille Lamoignon* were not awarded much attention, even by way of context or preamble. The authors did not seek to authenticate their family's standing by anchoring it to an older origin story, which was rather unusual in an age when genealogical histories were in vogue and those piecing them together them made every effort to trace the illustrious origins of familial pedigrees. Noble families regularly sponsored the composition and publication of genealogical works for which they often supplied 'documents, opinions and encouragement.'¹⁹ In contrast, Guillaume insisted several times in the introduction to his

¹⁷ The texts that Chrétien-François and Anne-Elisabeth wrote on their aunt formed part of a corpus that the family gave to outsiders in the early eighteenth century to help them write a biography of Madeleine for publication (this was never published). For the later biographies of Madeleine, see Jennifer Hillman, 'Writing a Spiritual Biography in Early Modern France: The "Many Lives" of Madeleine de Lamoignon', *French Historical Studies*, 42 (2019), 1-34. Although the Lamoignon commissioned these works, their authors were not family members, and are therefore not included in my analysis.

¹⁸ AN 399/AP/ 5, 'Mlle', 2.

¹⁹ Hilary Bernstein, 'La Rochepozay, Ghost-Writer: Noble Genealogy, Historical Erudition, and Political Engagement in Seventeenth-Century France', *Journal of the Western Society for French History*, 32 (2009), 1-20. This study focuses on the *Histoire genealogique de la Maison des Chasteigner* commissioned by Henri-Louis Chasteigner de La Rochepozay, bishop of Poitiers, and written by André Duchesne in the 1630s.

reflection that he did not want to fall into the trap of giving genealogical information because it was not his intention to write a genealogical or family history. Rather, he was writing a tripartite ‘eulogy’ to record its spiritual history, and he was in no doubt that the chronological framework for this was the current century.²⁰ Subsequently, the other authors all worked hard to locate a family spirit in the devotional ideas and practices of their recently deceased relatives, to which their descendants should conform.

It was common for high-ranking families of the *robe* to associate themselves with religious virtue in a variety of ways, for example, by sponsoring the publication of texts written by their members. In the 1650s, *Chancelier* Pierre Séguier paid for the publication of his grandfather’s composition on knowledge of God; to be sure, this was a bid to share his grandfather’s faith experience, but it was also a calculated homage to his family’s glory in the *dévo*t milieu.²¹ Others interlaced a supposedly characteristic virtue with a genealogical history: among the points that Pierre de Bragelongne, then *président aux enquêtes* in the Breton *parlement*, made in his 1689 discourse on his family’s history was one that highlighted their God-given zeal, the gift of which enabled them to love the church and justice and to live with moral regulation through successive generations.²² In concentrating their attention on the two most recent generations of their family, however, the Lamoignon set out a spiritual pedigree based less on the longevity of virtue and more on its intensity of operation. At the heart of this, they placed the family’s spirit.

IV

²⁰ AN 399AP/3, ‘Fragmens’, fos. 1r-9v.

²¹ Yannick Nexon, *Le Chancelier Séguier (1588-1672). Ministre, dévot et mécène au grand siècle* (Paris 2015), 292.

²² Martine Bennini, ‘“L’Audace” de la généalogie de Bragelongne’, in *Epreuves de Noblesse. Les expériences nobiliaires de la haute robe Parisienne (XVI^e-XVII^e siècle)*, eds. Robert Descimon and Elie Haddad (Paris 2010), 161-89.

References to the spirit of an individual or family were not uncommon in Louisquatorzieme France. As to how it might function in individuals, in the 1650s Blaise Pascal distinguished in his widely-read *Pensées* between two types of intelligence (knowing), the *esprit de geometrie* and the *esprit de finesse*, or the spirit of reasoning and intellect and that of intuitive and experiential judgement, which concerned religious belief.²³ In regard to families, the duke of Saint-Simon subsequently suggested in his *Mémoires* of the French court that the unity that he observed in the family of the duchess of Montespan was due to a hereditary *esprit fin/finesse*; this was a gift of nature which was exhibited through the particular qualities, notably smart mocking humour and mischief, that distinguished its kin.²⁴ However, though all of the Lamoignon authors wrote of the family spirit in terms similar to each other, none of them provided a strict theoretical definition of what they meant when they used the phrase. Guillaume came closest to doing so:

‘All bodies composed of several persons, all the companies and communities, must have a particular spirit of their institution which formed them from the start, and which gives their perfection, of such sort that as much as they conserve themselves in this spirit, they remain in their strength and vigour.’²⁵

His meaning is best understood by considering two explicit influences on his thought process. First, Guillaume was alluding to a Platonic tripartite framework of the soul as spirit, reason and appetite, in which the spirit governed reason and appetite and offered vitality to the individual.²⁶ Then taking Plato’s assumption that the community had the same three parts he

²³ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (New York, 1958), 21, 24, 79, 81.

²⁴ D.J.H. Van Elden, *Esprits fins et esprits geometriques dans les portraits de Saint-Simon* (The Hague, 1975), 45-54.

²⁵ AN 399AP/3, ‘Fragmens’, fos 5v-6r.

²⁶ Hendrik Lorenz, ‘Plato on the Soul’, *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, ed. Gail Fine (Oxford, 2009), Ch. 10.

attempted to apply this to the family, to suggest that a spirit could exist within this group as a whole. However, to allow for this, he resorted to an understanding of spirit as ethos, which was often used to distinguish the spirit, that is, the purpose, values and methods of religious orders, at this time.²⁷ Indeed, Guillaume followed the above quotation with a reference to this, indicating its primacy in his thinking:

If the Carthusians went to preach the gospel to the infidels, this action is heroic in itself, and the most sublime that Christianity conquers, and nevertheless everyone remains in agreement that they would ruin their order in doing so, because they would act in a spirit totally different from that of their institution.²⁸

In this case then, the family spirit referred to particular shared values that were expressed in behaviours appropriate to the family and which led to God. Implicit is the assumption that the spirit could be transmitted in some way from generation to generation as a ‘most precious treasure’. In explaining how this was possible, Guillaume claimed that children received it from their parents who offered guidance on and examples of thinking and behaviour for them to reflect on, learn and imitate. Fundamentally, however, it was God-given grace that enabled them all of them to behave well in the first place. Thus, the spirit was not a product of nature. In addition, it was primarily spiritually defined, even though it passed between blood relatives. The qualities it gave were a special result of co-operating with divine grace, so that they were spiritually sourced, charged with grace, cultivated, experienced, and demonstrable.

It is important to note here too that Guillaume and the other authors were specific in limiting the transmission of the spirit from parents to children in the natal family. Thus, while Anne de Lamoignon could inherit the spirit from her Lamoignon parents, the authors did not

²⁷ Forrestal, *Vincent de Paul*, 95.

²⁸ AN 399AP/3, ‘Fragments’, fo. 6r.

seem to think that she could pass it to her Nesmond children, or at least never suggested that she could. On the other hand, women like Marie des Landes who had joined the family by marrying its male heads could do so. How this was possible for an incomer was not explained, probably because the authors were mainly pre-occupied with parents and offspring. It may rest on a traditional view of spousal authority which expected the husband to guide his wife in acquiring the spirit, or on an understanding that the grace of the marital sacrament itself would enable her to act according to it and help her children to learn and practise it. The *vies* therefore reveal a strong disposition towards parent-child relations, but also to those of the siblings who featured prominently in them. The latter points towards a domesticated family model that is usually thought to be a development of the eighteenth century – in which siblings maintained strong attachments into adulthood and their lives remained closely interwoven and affectionate.²⁹

Given the care that their father had taken to instruct his children about the spirit and their heritage, it is likely that they had Guillaume's text to hand or in mind when writing their own reflections. Rather than quoting from it directly, however, they incorporated references on how essential they were to the family. Anne-Elisabeth devoted most space to explaining their nature. Speaking directly to her relatives in her reflection on her aunt Madeleine, she reminded them that they were members of 'a race of saints', with a responsibility to uphold the family spirit, as Madeleine had. She went on to set this appeal in a practical context by describing an event in Madeleine's life that proved that her mother, Marie, had passed the spirit down to her. Though she did not remember directly the details of the event directly as she had been quite young at the time, she wrote, she knew of it because her aunt had brought it into conversations in order to reassure herself when she was worried. It went thus: after

²⁹ Christine Adams, 'Devoted Companions or Surrogate Spouses? Sibling Relations in Eighteenth-Century France', in *Visions and Revisions of Eighteenth-Century France*, eds. Christine Adams *et al* (Pennsylvania, 1997), 59-75.

Marie's death in 1651, Madeleine had been inconsolable because of her 'tenderness and amity', both of which, she stressed, 'always made the particular character of their family' (and were terms that her father had also used to describe it). Only an unsigned letter delivered by a child in rags, could shake Madeleine out of her desperation, for in it she read of her duties as the child of a member of the race of saints. Questions of human authorship were irrelevant here, for the pauper was the messenger of Christ, who told Madeleine that she could not 'deviate from this quality.' Their arrival reminded her that she should continue to carry on helping the sick and poor as her mother had taught her to do from a young age. The effect was apparently immediate, for recognising the letter as a particular grace from God, Madeleine grew calm in her pain and kept it as a source of strength in affliction and a reminder of her obligations.³⁰

V

If the Lamoignon authors could agree on the existence of a family spirit, what features did they ascribe to it, and what evidence did they find for it in the lives of their close relatives? In the episode above, Anne-Elisabeth referred to tenderness and amity as being features associated with the family, but in the texts at large these were presented as expressions or consequences of more fundamental or essential qualities of the family spirit: faith, charity and humility. These were traditional virtues found in many spiritual biographies of the period, but the Lamoignon *vies* are distinguished by the manner in which they used the third of these.

The authors rarely described the family spirit in abstract ways, choosing instead to present episodes that demonstrated how their subjects cultivated it or were guided by it in making decisions. This obviously meant that analysis of the spirit was not formulaic and that the authorial voices allowed for variety in the ways in which it was supposedly articulated.

³⁰ AN 399AP/5, 'Mlle', 67-8.

Yet the common feature across the texts was the reliance on humility as an explanatory motif. In Catholic theology, humility was commonly considered as a universal virtue, which could be put to diverse applications, such as submission, abasement, a sense of lowliness or unworthiness, and detachment from ambition, pride or greed. This afforded to it the critical function of acting alternatively as an explicator or motivator for other virtues in the *vies*, while providing an invaluable way of showing a uniformity of spirit amongst the Lamoignon, despite their different stations in life. As a result, it was not so much the Lamoignons' faith and charity that differentiated their spirit, but the extraordinary degree of humility that underpinned them. This convention can be seen at work in explanations of events or actions in the family that were ostensibly religious, such as practices of welfare, but also in those which were primarily or partly secular and patrimonial, such as inheritance and succession.

In their recourse to humility, the authors did not refer to the writings of Saints Bernard or Thomas Aquinas, although they were the principal theological authorities on it. But the women incorporated quotations from texts that were widely read by Catholics: both used Thomas à Kempis *Imitation of Christ*, while Marie also preferred Jean Gerson's *The Mountain of Contemplation*. Staples of the devout in this era, they proved enduringly popular because they translated theological subtleties into accessible pastoral advice for everyday life. It should not be assumed, however, that either woman did not know their Bible or, as women, were reluctant to use it. Marie referenced the letters of Saint Paul, and all four authors resorted to the Old Testament, especially the Book of Psalms. Psalm 27, David's ode to the greatness of God and an expression of humble trust in his protection, was a firm favourite. For example, Guillaume quoted from Psalm 27 to support his claim that his father had turned down Cardinal Richelieu's suggestion that he become superintendent of finances because he thought he could not serve God modestly and unambitiously amid its material temptations.³¹ His concern with

³¹ Ps27:10: 'Though my parents forsake me, Yahweh will gather me up.'

detachment from worldly values and interests ran through this short commentary, but Psalm 27 popped up again when he moved to another part of his father's life to show that he cared not for self-promotion but for humbly serving God. Here he used what had become an important date of charity in the family's calendar not only to point this out, but to indicate that it was inter-generational.

With Basville as the family's country seat, it cropped up in all of the accounts as an important location for the practices of charitable welfare in which members of the family engaged. For Anne and Madeleine, the reflections praised their efforts in the confraternities of charity, which they had joined at the same time as their mother and at her suggestion. Obviously, these did not feature in the reflections on Guillaume. Even so, his children emphasized the fact that he had regularly given generously to the poor, even redoubling his efforts 'well beyond what he could afford' in Basville during the 1640s and 1650s. He confessed that he had been formed in this habit by his father, and highlighted a family custom that originated with Chrétien. This was the family's annual distribution of clothing to the poor of Basville on Guillaume's birthday, which was an event that had been initiated by his father to give thanks for the safe birth of his son in 1617. Since he went on to advise his own son to continue the practice in this account, Guillaume would have been happy to find Chrétien-François later urging his children in his *vie* 'to execute the same thing very religiously after my death', so 'that the day of my father's birth is considered as a day of celebration in my family.'³² The allusion to the birth and perpetuation of the family spirit could not be clearer: this was a day on which the family assembled to revisit, remember and reinvigorate for the year to come what their forefathers had first established as a Lamoignon custom.

It should be recognized that tethering the family so tightly to public works of charity at Basville was critical to defining its religious and noble identity. It was customary for noble

³² AN 399AP/3, 'President', fo. 1r-v.

landholders to assume some responsibility for ensuring the upkeep of religious infrastructure and practices on their lands, and it was considered, as Elisabeth Tingle comments, an important part of living ‘nobly’.³³ Yet the family’s position in Basville could, of course, be an Achilles’s heel, for even the possession of this sprawling estate could give rise to accusations of ambition, greed and excess. For this reason, Guillaume and his children used it to demonstrate precisely the opposite, that is, as an opportunity to reveal the family’s humility or, more specifically, to show that despite their position in society, its members thought themselves personally lowly, and as a result immune to prideful display and worldly interests. This enabled them to defend the family’s position as wealthy and privileged landowners as well as modest and selfless Christians. Indeed, they were adamant that their relatives were so committed to serving God through charitable welfare that they hardly spent a *sou* on anything that would have improved their personal comforts. In reality, however, Chrétien had built a splendid *château* to replace the existing *manoire*, and his son and grandson undertook substantial work in its gardens and parkland, including the construction of a building known as the ‘hermitage’ to which Guillaume liked to retreat during Lent.³⁴ His descendants chose not merely to downplay this in the family *vies*, but to deny it completely.

This was an act of deliberate forgetfulness, made virtuous in the service of a superior spiritual truth that the authors were keen to apply to other aspects of family life. The compositions on Chrétien and Guillaume included some discussion of their work as magistrates, while those on Anne and Madeleine could not ignore the fact that they had on occasion been obliged to appear at the royal court. These facts were as well known as the grandeur of Basville, but the authors took a different tack in dealing with them. Rather than

³³ Elisabeth Tingle, ‘Rural Seigneurs and the Counter Reformation: Parishes, Patrons, and Religious Reform in France, 1550-1700’, *Church History*, 87 (2018), 31-62; Patrice Berger, ‘Rural Charity in Late Seventeenth-Century France: The Pontchartrain Case’, *French Historical Studies*, 10 (1978), 393-414.

³⁴ Chrétien paid Villedo, the royal director of works of *maçonnerie*, 35,000 *livres* to oversee work on the *château*: Vian, *Lamoignon*, 42-3.

blanket denial, they opted to construe them as occasions in which the trio exhibited their detachment and purity amidst the dangers of the world. Thus, Madeleine's nephew and niece were sure that she had attended court only with the greatest repugnance and to request alms from the royal family for the sick and poor.³⁵ Along with their father, however, they displayed greater anxiety about the roles that the men in the family had assumed, and wished to set the record straight in regard to episodes in their pasts. Of these, there was one whose roots lay in Chrétien's lifetime, but which had grown to poison relationships and leave a residue in his family. In all of the *vies*, this took primary position. While, in practical terms, it was a dispute over succession and patrimony, the authors elaborated exclusively and at length on its moral significance for the family spirit. From their perspective, it offered the greatest test of the rule of humility in the family's history, but comparison of the texts brings to light their differing judgements of who had passed it with best colours.

Shortly before his death in 1636, Chrétien de Lamoignon succeeded in obtaining the prestigious office of *président à mortier* for his son, Guillaume. Since he was too young to accede to it, his father arranged with his son-in-law, Théodore de Nesmond, that he should hold this office until Guillaume came of age. When the time came in 1652, Nesmond refused to cede it. Since this office often acted as a steppingstone to presidency of the *parlement* itself, the two also became rivals for this post when it became vacant on the death of Pomponne de Bellièvre in the later 1650s.³⁶ Ultimately, Guillaume won out, because Mazarin and the king selected him over Nesmond. However, he was later offended by the fact that Nicolas Fouquet, the disgraced *surintendant des finances*, claimed during his trial that he had been responsible

³⁵ AN 399AP/5 'Memoires', 34, 48; 'Mlle', 219-20.

³⁶ Guillaume's cousin, Nicolas Potier de Novrion, was also in consideration for the post for a time, but Guillaume did not seem to bear the same ill-will towards him, probably because there was no history of an agreement gone sour: Vian, *Lamoignon*, 68, 87-90.

for his appointment to the presidency, thereby inferring that Guillaume owed his promotion to venal bureaucracy.³⁷

When Guillaume discussed this quarrel in his reflection on his parents and sister, he was willing to concede that his family had paid for the office of *président à mortier*.³⁸ Otherwise, however, he anticipated any accusation that he owed his promotion to Fouquet, venality or even to its corollary, heredity. Thus, he knitted his advancement into a broader pattern that presented the family's rise over the century as the reward for humble detachment from the world and trust in God's providential protection. He observed that he and his parents had 'great faith and confidence in God's providence' and stated his belief that his own 'establishment' was due to God's 'bounty and mercy'. This presented him with yet another occasion to quote from Psalm 27:10, and he went on to reiterate several times that God would 'gather up' those who no longer had living parents to help them.³⁹

These convictions ran throughout the other Lamoignon accounts of the Nesmond affair. For Chrétien-François it was only when Guillaume resigned himself to God's will that he exited the 'abyss' into which he had fallen when Nesmond threatened his future. In doing so, he showed that he viewed the post of president purely as a means to serve justice, and not as a way to grow or show off his 'personal valour'.⁴⁰ Conscience, therefore, rather than worldly ambition, was his guide as he moved into the second highest charge of the *robe*.

³⁷ Nesmond's son, Guillaume, eventually inherited his father's office of *président à mortier* in 1664: Daniel Dessert, *Fouquet* (Paris 1987), 179, 193; Jacques Longuet, *Une Famille de magistrats Parisiens au XVII^e siècle: les de Nesmond, 1624-1674* (MA, Sorbonne, 1970), 53.

³⁸ In his brief study of a *relation* that Guillaume wrote about a year earlier to refute Fouquet's claim (1662), Robert Descimon points out that Guillaume was determined to attribute his promotion to royal favour. However, although it is true that the office of *président* was not, strictly speaking, a venal one, Guillaume had loaned 360,000 *livres* to the royal treasury to secure it: Robert Descimon, 'La relation de la nomination de Guillaume de Lamoignon à la place de premier président du parlement écrite par lui-même', in *L'Office du juge: Parat de souveraineté ou puissance nulle*, eds. Olivier Cayla and M.-F. Renoux-Zagaté (Rouen 2002), 73-88.

³⁹ AN 399AP/3, 'Fragments', fo. 13r-v.

⁴⁰ AN 399AP/3, 'Président', fo. 7v.

Anne-Elisabeth made the same case but stressed especially that her father's openness to God had ensured that blessings also rained on his children. Human rules of prudence had no place in his decision-making, she remarked, before going on to recall that he had often told his children of the care that a provident God had taken to 'lead him by the hand, in an infinity of very difficult affairs, to the point of elevation of reputation and prosperity he had reached.'⁴¹ She also drew attention to texts that he had used to explain his faithful passage, including quotations from the book of Psalms (as had her brother) and Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*.⁴² While her brother was more matter of fact in his comments, Anne-Elisabeth was markedly keen to use it to elaborate on how her father had embedded the value of humble abandonment in service to God in his children, thereby offering a captivating example of how the family spirit had been and should be perpetuated:

And explaining it to us he said that...our soul [should] be without desire or will, simply leaving itself in the order of divine providence, walking in the various events of life, of sadness, or of joy, of illness or faults, without wanting or refusing anything, and that by this means we will always be with his divine majesty.⁴³

At this juncture, it is important to note that the commentators on the quarrel cannot have been ignorant of how impractical and wasteful a rupture in family relations could be, even though they chose to interpret its course and impact in spiritual terms: after all, Anne was the only female in two generations of Lamoignon to marry, and her marriage to Nesmond had therefore been an important block in the family architecture of social ascent. In addition, as

⁴¹ AN 399AP/3, 'Recueil', fo. 18v.

⁴² Ps 73:22-3: 'I became like a beast of burden in your presence, but I will always be with you.' (Elisabeth mistakenly wrote that this was a quotation from the Book of Daniel); Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, Book 3, Ch. 15: 'Turn me about whichever way you will. Behold, I am your servant', quoted by Elisabeth as 'Turn me return me, o my God I am yours.'

⁴³ AN 399AP/3, 'Recueil', fo. 18r-v.

the marriage party with an existing foothold in the Parisian robe, the Lamoignon had been the dominant party in the alliance, and it must have been galling to them to see this challenged later when Nesmond refused to follow through on the agreement made for succession. This meant that his wife, Anne, was at least as much caught up in this dispute as her brother and husband. Yet a detailed comparison of the texts reveals differences in the roles that the authors assigned to her.

There are hints of understanding about Anne's difficulty in meeting marital obligations in the angle from which one of the female writers approached her position in the dispute. For Marie, Anne had a pivotal role in the restoration of proper relations between the parties. She portrayed her as deeply troubled because she was torn between her fondness for her brother and her duty to submit to her husband. After praying constantly to God to intervene, he had responded by using her as a mediator between her brother and husband, and she eventually managed to soften their stances when she humbly expressed her pain through entreaties to them.⁴⁴ For Chrétien-François and his sister, however, it was their father who took centre stage. Anne-Elisabeth did allude briefly to her aunt's role, but only to highlight once more her father's primacy: after his sister's death, she explained, Guillaume, fearing that the dispute would have repercussions for the next generation, had assembled his children and nephews to speak to them about his hope that they would imitate her charity, so that 'fear and awe of God' would once again reign over them all. And, it had happened as he wished, according to his daughter, for they had since lived they lived 'in peace.'⁴⁵ Similarly, her brother Chrétien-

⁴⁴ AN 399AP3, 'Nesmond', fo. 36r-v.

⁴⁵ AN 399AP/3, 'Recueil', fos 9v-10r. Both Anne and Guillaume also raised the dispute obliquely in their wills, which must have made their children more attuned again to their father's wishes as they contemplated his life in their writings at this time: AN 399/AP3, 'Testament et codicille de Anne de Lamoignon femme du President de Nesmond' (18 January 1661), 14; Testament de Messire Guillaume delamoignon' (20 October 1676), 15.

François also focused on his father's achievement and the happy result of the final reconciliation. Indeed, he never mentioned Anne at all.⁴⁶

The differences in these accounts can be explained by the perspectives from which the authors saw the event and those involved in it. Guillaume's children were young when it happened and it is not surprising that they saw it as one in which their father had been wronged, and the family upset before being set right again by their father, who had gone on to explain its significance to them. These memories probably shaped their opinions as adults, when they wished to press home the danger of quarrels and the need to move past them in order to protect the family. Their message was one of lessons learned, and it was their father's adherence to the values of the family spirit that offered the evidence for this. Peace was also important to Marie, but she had witnessed the conflict as an adult and intimate of Anne. Consequently, she gave credit for its resolution to her. Furthermore, by placing Anne at the centre of the dispute, Marie was able to communicate that her status as a married woman did not prevent her from acting as her devotional sensibility demanded, in fact it facilitated it: in this case, Anne had used her humility to soothe the familial relations that had been instituted when she became Nesmond's wife. In doing so, Marie argued that it was possible for a married woman to carve out a life that contributed to the family's social ascendancy but adhered to the family spirit in its expression and merit. She was sympathetic to Anne's dilemma and insisted on her successful resolution of it, perhaps because she heard echoes of her own experience in it.

VI

Anne's near absence from her niece's and nephew's accounts of the Nesmond dispute serves as a worthy preamble to the final objective of this article: an analysis of the *vies*' perspectives

⁴⁶ AN 399AP/3, 'President', fos 7r-v and 11v.

on female vocational expression and the family spirit. Amongst elite families like the Lamoignon, it was rather unusual to bank so heavily on the marriage of one daughter, when others could be enlisted into marital alliances that would augment their family's social and political position.⁴⁷ However, the treatment of daughters in this regard was not a straightforward issue, especially since the Council of Trent had anathemized anyone who forced women into monasteries or marriage.⁴⁸ The question of vocational choice had since become a lively source of pastoral commentary over the course of the Catholic Reformation in France. Jesuit and Salesian writers in particular insisted that individuals should be given scope to 'discern' their call through prayer, reflection and consultation with expert spiritual advisors. These writers included the renowned Jesuit preacher Louis Bourdaloue, who was a friend of the Lamoignon family.⁴⁹ It was vital to allow individuals to complete the process 'of choosing well the state in which one should live', he and others warned, because a failure to follow the right calling from God would lead to suffering and damnation. It was also a common feature of the thousands of manuscript *vies* of Visitation nuns, with which Anne-Elisabeth would have been familiar.⁵⁰

Although the Lamoignon authors did not refer to any specific pastoral texts, their comments indicate that they were cognizant of this influential spiritual trend. They raised the

⁴⁷ The Fouquet family provides another example of the few families that were willing to announce their celestial concerns with multiple vocations to religious life. Amongst the twelve surviving children of François and Marie, five daughters entered the Visitation, and three sons were ordained: Dessert, *Fouquet*, 51.

⁴⁸ *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman Tanner (Washington DC, 1990), vol ii, 755, 759, 781-2; Barbara Diefendorf, "'Give us back our children': Patriarchal Authority and Parental Consent to Religious Vocations in Early Counter-Reformation France', *Journal of Modern History*, 68 (1996), 265-307.

⁴⁹ Vian, *Lamoignon*, 90, 167.

⁵⁰ Louis Bourdaloue, *Exhortations et instructions chrétiennes*, (Paris: Rigaud, 1723), vol ii, 435; Christopher Lane, 'Vocational Freedom, Parental Authority and Pastoral Persuasion in Seventeenth-Century France', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 69, no 4 (2018), 768-84; *id.*, 'Gentle Holiness in the Vocational Culture of Seventeenth-Century French Visitandine Nuns', in *Lived Religion and Everyday Life in Early Modern Hagiographic Material*, eds. Jenni Kuuliala *et al* (Basingstoke, 2019), 51-75.

topic only in relation Lamoignon women, however, and, critically, the female authors addressed it much more extensively than the male. This infers they thought it an especially pressing issue for female family members, and one which they were keen to thrash out, even though, as Jotham Parsons concludes, choosing a proper secular vocation was also becoming a concern for devout laymen in this period.⁵¹ It also raised a more specific conundrum as they reconstructed their subjects' lives: was it possible to reconcile liberty of choice with the familial virtue of humility?

In the *vies* of Anne and Madeleine, three of the four authors reported that their decision-making had been paved with arguments with their father, who was adamant that they should marry. Many other accounts of female vocations in this period also adopted the trope of parental opposition to display the strength of their subject's desire and the final victory of grace or to explain why her wish was ultimately frustrated. When she married, the author often felt the need to offer an apologetic defence of the fact that she had joined a less perfect state.⁵² Neither Marie or Anne-Elisabeth felt the need to do this, although Anne-Elisabeth painted Chrétien de Lamoignon's conduct towards Madeleine in vivid and uncompromising terms. She wrote:

Her father gave her no repose, he taunted her before everyone...he made her talk with all the persons who had credit on her spirit. However she suffered cruel conflicts of uncertainty internally and interior pains which afflicted her day and night.⁵³

In contrast, Guillaume did not mention any acrimony between father and daughters at all, and Chrétien-François referred to it only in passing. Since they were successors to Chrétien

⁵¹ Jotham Parsons, 'Vocation in Seventeenth-Century France: The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of *Étatisme*', *French History*, 28 (2014), 322-42.

⁵² Marie-Ange Duvignacq-Glessen, *L'Ordre de la Visitation à Paris aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* (Paris 1994), 109.

⁵³ AN 399AP/5, 'Mlle', 9.

as heads of the family, perhaps they did not wish to raise suspicion that fatherly authority had been called into question or that he had been uncharitable in his attitude. However, when commenting on other scenarios, Guillaume characterized his father's conversations with his daughters as lively, probing and provocative, indeed so much so that he called them 'a continual war', in which the participants went to and fro in debate, with Chrétien often pretending his daughters were displeased with him in order to encourage them to form their opinions and develop their judgment. There are hints of Platonic argument in this approach to learning to live virtuously, and it was one of the ways in which, Guillaume noted, the family spirit was cultivated.⁵⁴ It also indicates that Guillaume may have considered that his father's seeming opposition to his daughters' vocations was simply an attempt to help them to work out their motivations and appraise their commitment.

It is also possible that the female authors exaggerated a genuinely negative reaction for dramatic effect to show the suffering that Anne and Madeleine endured in order to serve God. Indeed, for Anne, it might seem that her suffering was in vain, since she eventually submitted to her father. Marie, however, managed to turn this negative into a positive. The spiritual contentment that Anne found after she married could indicate either that her obedience to her parent's authority was correct or that she had found happiness, despite him. She presented further evidence in Anne's commitment to helping the sick and poor as a prime way to do God's will. Here Marie emphasized Anne's humility, which was so pronounced that she regarded the poor as superior to her, despite her actual social rank. When onlookers queried her willingness to allow social inferiors to sit in her presence or to speak in a familiar way with her, she resorted to favourite passages from Thomas à Kempis and Jean Gerson,

⁵⁴ AN 399AP/3, 'Fragmens', fo. 24v.

which, in the words of the latter, taught her to ‘Always look for the lowest place and submit yourself to all.’⁵⁵

Whatever Guillaume’s opinion on his sister’s path to marriage, he praised her for having later ‘reached a high degree of perfection’, and claimed that her expression of the family spirit made her a model to be emulated.⁵⁶ But how to assess the working of the spirit in a woman who did not fit either of the categories of married or conventual life, whose opinions might be seen as resting on pride, and whose choices could be condemned as wayward? Madeleine de Lamoignon did not obey her father, and lived as an unmarried and unprofessed woman, all the while ostensibly under the protection of her father, brother and latterly her nephew. This ‘third way’ or ‘third status’ was relatively rare, though not unknown, during this period.⁵⁷ As a result, even though they admired her faith, humility and works of charity, her brother and nephew found Madeleine’s situation ill-defined and difficult to categorize. They described her as living as a woman ‘without establishment’, a term that suggests lingering concerns that her position lacked the stability and order that the institutions of marriage or religious life provided.

In contrast, Madeleine’s niece Anne-Elisabeth, offered a fuller and more confident assessment of her aunt’s status. She characterized Madeleine as a *fille sans cloître*, by which she meant that she was an unmarried and celibate woman, who lived devoutly in a secular setting without the structures of religious life. Though she did not use the term, she may have meant that she thought she was what historians call a ‘semi-religious’.⁵⁸ For example, she noted that Madeleine had taken a private vow of chastity at age ten, and re-affirmed it once she had decided to live as a *fille sans cloître* at twenty-three. But this also lent legitimacy to

⁵⁵ AN 399AP3, ‘Nesmond’, fo. 7v.

⁵⁶ AN 399AP/3, ‘Fragmens’, fo. 1v.

⁵⁷ Gabriella Zarri, “‘The Third Status’”, in *Time, Space and Women’s Lives in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Anne Jacobson *et al* (Kirkville 2001), 181-99.

⁵⁸ Alison Weber, ‘Devout Laywomen in the Early Modern World: The Historiographical Challenge’, in *Devout Women*, ed. Weber, 1-28.

Madeleine's choice: the childhood vow suggested that she had a providential disposition for the type of life she led later, when God's will became manifest and accomplished.⁵⁹ The vows therefore represented important first and ultimate stages in the process of vocational discernment that Madeleine completed over time. In Anne-Elisabeth's reconstruction of the rest of the journey, the focal point was her battle with her humility. The reason, she wrote, that her aunt came to embrace God's fate for her only gradually was because her scruples led her to fear that she was both vain and unworthy of his love. In reality, however, it was her humility, combined with her love for God, that inspired her to wish to serve him in this way.

In this section of the text, Anne-Elisabeth carefully accentuated that her aunt had sought advice from her confessor-director during this period of turmoil.⁶⁰ Here she followed the custom of spiritual biographies of the time, for it was expected of elite pious women that they should have regular recourse to a spiritual director for matters of conscience. On other occasions, however, she chose a different tack, by prioritising her aunt's spiritual relationship with the nuns of her own convent. In this life-story, therefore, the Visitation convent became much more than a site where Madeleine might come to reflect and pray under the guidance of her director. It housed a community of nuns who 'penetrated' the depths of her interior with her. These women are persistently present in the text, witnesses to and helpers in every spiritual crisis, and truly her spiritual sisters.

In this scenario, the sisterly intimacy that the humble Madeleine enjoyed with the nuns was key to her overcoming every spiritual challenge that she faced. Her niece followed her

⁵⁹ This was a common ploy in spiritual biographies of the period, including those of the Visitation, by which Anne-Elisabeth may have been influenced: Le Brun, *Soeur*, 47-9.

⁶⁰ AN 399AP/5, 'Mlle', 10, 16. Madeleine had several confessor-directors over her lifetime, including the Jesuit Nicolas Suffren, L'Eguillier, *curé* of Saint-Josse, Jacques Aubery (d.1684), regular canon of the Sainte-Chapelle, and the Jesuit Pierre Du Bois. Elite women in this period often 'shopped around' to find confessor-directors who suited their spiritual needs and characters: Jodi Bilinkoff, 'Confessors, Penitents and the Construction of Identities in Early Modern Avila,' in *Culture and Identity in Early Modern Europe 1500 – 1800*, eds. Barbara Diefendorf and Carla Hesse (Ann Arbor, 1993), 83-102; Patricia Ranft, 'A Key to Counter-Reformation Women's Activism: The Confessor-Spiritual Director', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 10 (1994), 7-26.

account of her conversion with descriptions of periods of indecision and scruples during which she retreated to the convent for prolonged periods to find solace and guidance, for example, after the deaths of her father in 1636 and her mother seventeen years later. Anne-Elisabeth emphasized that Madeline had been blessed with enough time and tranquillity to discuss her spiritual needs with the nuns during these sojourns, but she was also adamant that they candidly opened their hearts in seeking her wise advice on theirs:

She did the community exercises, at which she was treated in perfect confidence, she was anxious to procure spiritual and corporal relief for the sisters' needs, each opened her heart to her and talked about these difficulties.⁶¹

For Anne-Elisabeth, this relationship of mutual appreciation, inspiration and support was especially significant for Madeleine because her humility and consequent delicacy of conscience rendered her so sensitive to scruples. But although she observed that her aunt continued to be troubled by her struggle to balance these throughout her life, she foregrounded one episode in particular as the most dangerous test endured. This took place during Madeleine's middle-age when, according to her niece, she was tempted by the teaching of Jansenism. It therefore must have occurred in the 1650s, when the quarrel over Cornelius Jansen's teachings on salvation and the papal condemnation of the five propositions said to be taken from his *Augustinus* was at its height in France. This episode also attracted Chrétien-François' attention, and a comparison of the accounts effectively illustrates the relentlessness with which Anne-Elisabeth sought to privilege Madeleine's relationship with the nuns in her *vie*.

⁶¹ AN 399AP/5, 'Mlle', 40. Anne-Elisabeth cautiously added that Madeleine sent the queries to 'persons of knowledge and virtue' when her modesty prevented her from assisting, but did not elaborate on what such enquiries entailed.

Chrétien-François began by admitting that his aunt had dabbled with some of the ideas associated with Jansenism, but then dismissed this without ado by saying that her interest was quickly quelled by conversations with ‘persons of piety’. Resorting to humility as an explanation, he wrote that Madeleine resolved from thereon to submit to the decisions of the church without digging into questions that even theologians sometimes could not or did not answer. He then dropped the topic, without revealing anything about what aspects of Jansenism had aroused Madeleine’s curiosity or with whom she had spoken about it.⁶² Yet that he chose to mention Jansenism at all in his reflection is notable. Perhaps he thought that his aunt’s sex had rendered her more likely to be seduced by it, having himself been seduced by the widespread assumption of the time that women were ‘more gullible than men’ and ‘more likely to fall prey to the deceptions of heretics, charlatans, and the devil.’⁶³ This is made more likely by the fact that he had not brought the issue up at all in his account of his father’s life a few years earlier, even though he must have known that Guillaume had been friends with Jansenist sympathizers for many years.⁶⁴ Yet it is also possible that he may not have felt the need to defend a father who had always argued the need for obedience to the papal condemnations of Jansenist teaching.⁶⁵ In any case, either Chrétien-François deemed his comments on Madeleine sufficient to protect her or he did not have further knowledge of her experience.

Turning to the folios of Anne-Elisabeth’s version of this episode, we find the ‘good people’ whom she credited with saving Madeleine from perdition. Once again, she underlined the part that the Visitation community enjoyed in her aunt’s devotional life: she revealed that Madeleine turned to the convent to reflect on the validity of her attraction to ‘the exact and

⁶² AN 399AP/5 ‘Memoires’, 40-41.

⁶³ Bilinkoff, ‘Confessors’, 85.

⁶⁴ The most notable of these was Godfrey Hermant, who attended a salon organised by Guillaume (later known as the *Académie* Lamoignon), while also enjoying correspondence with him. A selection of their letters can be found in AN 399/AP/4.

⁶⁵ AN 399/AP/4, Guillaume de Lamoignon to Godfrey Hermant, 20 December 1654.

severe morals' of Jansenism, but asserted that it was the nuns who had weaned her off these. Indeed, she stressed that their role was even more important than usual because Madeleine was without a regular male spiritual director at the time. While in the convent, Madeline followed the same penitential practices (including regular confession) and moderate bodily mortifications as the nuns 'with extraordinary application' and listened to them when they advised her against more severe discipline. As such, she integrated easily into Visitation religious life, while also meditating at length on her spiritual problem.⁶⁶

To illustrate further the closeness of the relationship at play, Anne-Elisabeth included an extract from Madeleine's retreat writings, in which she recorded her thoughts and the resolutions that she made before she finally departed in peace from the convent, along with her own commentary. In the absence of an original in Madeleine's hand, we cannot know if Anne-Elisabeth edited this. However, what is essential is that she believed that what she included exhibited a woman intent on moving away from any hint of heresy, and who was patient and persistent in this because she was humble. Madeleine wrote:

I felt a great confidence in approaching God to throw myself at his feet and to calm my fear by confidence and love, since Our Lord said that he did not come for the just, but for the sinners. It seems to me that I thought no more of paradise or hell but of God only who merits being loved.

The remainder of the notes revealed that Madeleine had reached her resolutions by meditating on the Infant Jesus, to whom devotion was very popular in Visitation circles.⁶⁷ For a woman in search of reassurance of her path in faith, this was a highly appropriate subject of reflection, for it propelled her to promise that she would learn to follow Christ from his childish examples

⁶⁶ Duvignacqu-Glessen, *Visitation*, 127.

⁶⁷ Jacques Le Brun, 'La Dévotion à l'Enfant Jésus au XVIIe siècle', in *Histoire de l'enfance en Occident*, eds. E. Becchi and Dominique Julia (Paris, 1998), 427-57.

of ‘humility and simplicity’. As a child would a parent, she would also refrain from valuing her own opinion over his or anticipating his providential plans for her. Then she reminded herself that the sacrament of penance was central to the process of salvation, for which God would allow her ample time.⁶⁸ All of these ideas, but especially the last, rejected what were commonly known to be Jansenist soteriological doctrines, and complemented the devotional practices that Madeleine was said to have completed alongside the nuns. These final resolutions on submission to God’s wishes and the sacrament were, her niece interjected, the most important that her aunt had made, for the self could only be conquered with God’s grace.

It was not, of course, only Madeleine who appeared in a positive light here, but also her niece and spiritual kin in the Visitation community itself, and Anne-Elisabeth had good reason to desire this. Three decades earlier, her convent had been implicated directly in the Jansenist quarrel when the Archbishop of Paris had asked its members to host a number of the nuns that he had expelled from Port-Royale in 1664. The entire Parisian community of Visitandines was dragged into the affair more generally, since the other two convents in the capital also took in a number of them, while some Visitation nuns were dispatched to the abbey of Port-Royale to re-establish discipline and encourage its nuns to sign the Formulary rejecting the five propositions. The Port-Royalists and their supporters lost no time in painting the Visitandines as severe and unjust jailers, and slaves to flawed devotional habits. Their literature had a negative effect on the order, which lasted into the next century, according to Marie-Ange Duvignacqu-Glessen.⁶⁹

This may partly explain why Anne-Elisabeth de Lamoignon commissioned her aunt to reject Jansenism and celebrate the value of humility, as well as validate a salvific regime based on progress in holiness through prayer, good works, and sacramental observance. That this

⁶⁸ AN 399AP/5, ‘Mlle’, 51-62.

⁶⁹ Duvignacqu-Glessen, *Visitation*, 272-7.

dovetailed with what she believed to be the family spirit was not coincidental, but a deliberate attempt to position the convent and the family together along the line of orthodoxy. Indeed, Anne-Elisabeth's attentiveness to Jansenism stands in stark contrast to her silence on Protestantism, about which she and the other authors had little to say. This is despite the fact that they wrote at a time when the crown was increasing pressure on the Huguenot population, culminating in the Edict of Fontainebleau in 1685. It suggests that the authors either did not regard the Protestant threat with the same dread as the Jansenist, or that they were unwilling to use it to define their spiritual pedigree for posterity.⁷⁰

Another aspect to Anne-Elisabeth's depiction of Madeleine's devotional life in the convent rewards scrutiny here. On many occasions in her text, she remarked on her aunt's charitable work, which she carried out mainly in Basville and Paris over many decades, having first been introduced to it by her mother when young. But as she got older, Anne-Elisabeth reported, she spent much longer periods in the convent.⁷¹ This meant that she began to direct many of her charitable works from her room there, and to meet with petitioners for her help in its parlour. Anne-Elisabeth inserted herself into this picture by recalling that she had seen this personally, and had regularly contributed by writing letters dictated by her aunt for her projects. This confirmed the personal harmony between aunt and niece, but also the similar values and interests that could tie a cloistered nun and uncloistered *filie*. Anne-Elisabeth appears to have had a special liking for nursing and welfare; after her profession, she worked for long periods in the convent infirmary and she made substantial improvements to its

⁷⁰ It is worth noting that Anne-Elisabeth's other brother went on to be accused of gross cruelty against Huguenots as *intendant* of Languedoc (1685-1724), but scholarship shows that he had misgivings about crown policy in this area and attempted to qualify the harshness of royal orders: Jean-Robert Armogathe and Philippe Joutard, 'Bâville et la guerre des Camisards', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 19 (1972), 45-72; Gregory Monaghan, 'Tyrant of Languedoc? Nicolas de Lamoignon de Basville in Public and in Private', *Journal of the Western Society for French History*, 37 (2009), 21-34.

⁷¹ AN 399AP/5, 'Memoires', 166.

facilities when she later became superior of the convent.⁷² In providing her with a means to extend herself to works of charity outside the convent walls, Madeleine enabled her to reach into a locale that was otherwise closed to her, and therefore bridge the environment of her convent and the world outside. Indeed, this may partly explain why she was so keen to identify and defend her aunt as a *fille sans cloître*. As she put it near the close of her text, the attachment of Lamoignon women to the convent over three generations showed that they had always regarded this monastery ‘as their own’.⁷³ By virtue of her aunt’s position in the convent and the world, Anne-Elisabeth could maintain her bond with her family, its spirit and its spiritual traditions, while not reneging on her obligations to her professed state.

VII

Historians of the Catholic Reform movement in seventeenth-century France have long puzzled over the paths that different families took within it.⁷⁴ In the Lamoignon *vies*, the family offers valuable evidence for answering this query: as the authors explained why their family developed the devotional interests and spiritual affinities that it did, they rendered their own opinions as visible as those of whom they wrote. Thus, the *vies* of Anne and Madeleine de Lamoignon suggest that living out the values of the family spirit within the family was often far from easy, at least in the eyes of their female interpreters. This was because they knew and approved of the fact that both women had been devout within the world, preferring to engage with its structures and relationships while being detached from them in spirit. In this regard, Anne-Elisabeth’s insistence that her aunt had rejected the erroneous teachings of Jansen should be viewed alongside her description of the life that Madeleine led between the

⁷² AN 399AP/5, ‘Mlle’, 108-9. Here Anne-Elisabeth wrote that she had witnessed her aunt giving money and instructions to a *curé* for establishing a confraternity of charity in his parish; AN 399AP/3, ‘Abregé de la vie et des vertus de feuë notre très-honorée Soeur la Déposée Anne-Elizabeth Delamoignon’ (Paris, 1735), 5, 13.

⁷³ AN 399AP/5, ‘Mlle’, 39.

⁷⁴ Bergin, *Church*, 368.

convent and the households in Paris and Basville. In her study of elite Jansenist women, Jennifer Hillman provides pages of evidence for their efforts to wholly withdraw from conventional social life in Paris and at the royal court by living in penitent isolation on their country estates, a pattern originally set by the solitaires at Port-Royal. This, she argues, was based on a sense of spiritual exclusivity and superiority that led them to assume their status as an elect whose salvation was pre-ordained.⁷⁵ At the other extreme, Jonathan Spangler argues for the Baroque piety of the Guise family, in which ostentatious display in religious practice was presented as a confirmation of devotion rather than an affirmation of worldliness.⁷⁶ The Lamoignon that the *vies* presented fell – male and female - between these strains of piety, neither withdrawing from the world nor embracing its wares entirely in order to express their faith. To steer their course between extremities, they had looked to humility – substituting the hope of mercy for the certainty of pride, and an attitude of personal lowliness for one of grandeur of rank.

It is also important to remember that the family was in the mid to late seventeenth century in transition - still in a state of ‘becoming’ – as its male heads rose to leading positions in the judiciary.⁷⁷ In the promotion of a family spirit that was stable in its essential features, the *vies* offered a rhetoric of humility that was designed to withstand pride, deflect accusations of venality, validate the family’s advancement, and to inflect their history with a spiritual identity that was cohesive and all-encompassing. The *vies* proved this pedigree to be spiritually real to the family but aimed to demonstrate that it was a credible social reality too,

⁷⁵ Jennifer Hillman, *Female Piety and the Catholic Reformation in France* (London, 2014), 66-8, 102-10.

⁷⁶ Jonathan Spangler, ‘Material Culture at the Guise ‘Court’: Tapestries, a Bed and a Devotional Dollhouse as Expressions of Dynastic Pride and Piety in Seventeenth-Century Paris’, *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 32 (2012), 158-75.

⁷⁷ This term adapts the ‘perpetual becoming’ that Jonathan Dewald uses to describe the constant evolution of noble families in this period, as they invented and re-invented themselves according to changing circumstances, needs and fortunes: Jonathan Dewald, *Status, Power. and Identity in Early Modern France: The Rohan Family, 1550-1715* (Pennsylvania, 2015), 12.

articulated and shared out in the relationships of the natal family. Its spirit was deemed to give purpose and meaning to individual lives within the collective and seemed to assume an easy convergence between personal and familial obligations and fulfilment. In this regard, it functioned much as other aspects of aristocratic lineage which, as Jonathan Dewald reminds, was generally regarded as ‘a basic social reality’, for it was from the family spirit that individuals were to derive their personal virtues and ought to preserve.⁷⁸

For the authors, however, it was often at the interface of the spiritual and secular that the family spirit was tested, when its values threatened to conflict with or inhibit the family’s material security and social ascendancy. If they could agree that a shared spirit should unite the family horizontally and vertically within and through generations, their analysis of particular episodes and experiences forced a more nuanced and dynamic outlook. This became apparent in particular when the authors assessed cases of family confrontation and dispute, when they chose to foreground particular individuals as having best exemplified its qualities – sometimes having lived up to social norms such as fatherly leadership and authority and sometimes having queried or circumvented them in the interests of spiritual liberty. To add complexity to complication, although the authors deemed the family spirit to be egalitarian in its dispensation of the same virtues to each sex, they assumed that their practice was subject to checks and balances. This reflected the challenges of upholding the ideals of the spirit and expressing its values in the face of the traditional expectations of elite society. In alleging differences of opinion amongst the people about whom they wrote, the authors revealed them amongst themselves too. Ultimately, the *vies* show that the convergence of individual and familial possessions of the spirit was neither straightforward nor untroubled.

⁷⁸ Jonathan Dewald, ‘Deadly Parents: Family and Aristocratic Culture in Early Modern France’, in *Culture*, eds. Diefendorf and Hesse, 223-36.