

# *Vocational Freedom, Parental Authority and Pastoral Persuasion in Seventeenth-Century France*

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*In seventeenth-century France, secular law favoured parents' authority in children's choices of marriage, religion or the clerical state, despite Catholic theology and canon law favouring individual freedom. Negotiating this tension led many clerical writers – in advice on choosing a state of life found in devotional treatises, sermons and catechisms – to reconcile parental involvement with vocational liberty. Believing that the right choice of a state was virtually necessary for salvation, they urged parents and children to cooperate in discerning and accepting God's call. Amid conflicts with French law and culture, pastoral persuasion helped to forge an enduringly influential strain in modern Catholicism.*

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Louis Bourdaloue (1632–1704), the ‘king of preachers and the preacher of kings’ who gave many invited sermons at Louis XIV’s court, had faced obstacles on his way to religious vows. An early biography recounts the young Bourdaloue stealing away from home to join the Jesuit novitiate at Paris. Bourdaloue’s father immediately set out to bring his headstrong heir back to Bourges. Nevertheless, the father soon became convinced that his son’s rash actions were rooted in an authentic vocation, and he promptly relinquished him to the Jesuits.<sup>1</sup> Whether or not this account approximates to the actual course of events, it reflects the preacher Bourdaloue’s own subtle position on parental involvement in vocational choices.

This article will examine clerical teaching in mid- to late seventeenth-century France on the proper role of parents in vocational discernment and the choice of a state of life – the married, the religious or the clerical

All translations are the author’s, apart from two brief scriptural quotations and as otherwise noted.

<sup>1</sup> [J.-M.] de Pringy, *La Vie du Pere Bourdaloue de la Compagnie de Jesus*, Paris 1705, 4.

state. Persuasive efforts to promote grown children's vocational liberty are evident both in literature consumed by devout elites and in texts destined for wider audiences. These texts were influenced by the social, cultural and legal conditions of early modern France; by longstanding canon law principles of free consent to vows; by increased theological attention to the concept of vocation; and by the rise of a theologically rigorist milieu in France. Insofar as the laws and the cultural habits of patriarchal elites were in tension with vocational freedom, these clerical writers sought to integrate parental oversight with children's liberty to follow God's call.

Much scholarship has focused on the legal and social conditions under which young men and women in early modern France made these choices, with special attention to coercion, freedom and the motivations of both parents and children. Entering into marriage or taking religious vows normally involved a wide array of family members and others.<sup>2</sup> During the 1990s historians shifted from positing a strong binary opposition between parents and children to exploring their shared values.<sup>3</sup> Individuals' vocational choices almost always involved familial property, status and emotions, and hence French elites generally favoured strong protections for parental authority.<sup>4</sup> With the help of a series of edicts and decisions, issued between 1556 and 1697 by the Crown and the *parlements*, parents could determine their children's future state not only through informal pressures and social expectations, but also through legal procedures.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> R. Pillorget, 'Vocation religieuse et état en France aux xv<sup>e</sup> et xvii<sup>e</sup> siècles', in *La Vocation religieuse et sacerdotale en France, xvii<sup>e</sup>-xix<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Angers 1979, 9-17; D. Dinet, *Vocation et fidélité: le recrutement des réguliers dans les diocèses d'Auxerre, Langres et Dijon (xvii<sup>e</sup>-xviii<sup>e</sup>)*, Paris 1988, 36-47; B. Dompnier (ed.), 'Vocations d'ancien régime: les gens d'église en Auvergne aux xvii<sup>e</sup> et xviii<sup>e</sup> siècles', special issue, *Revue d'Auvergne* dxliv/dxlv (1997); J. Hardwick, *The practice of patriarchy: gender and the politics of household authority in early modern France*, University Park, PA 1998, 75; J. M. Lanza, *From wives to widows in early modern Paris: gender, economy, and law*, Aldershot 2007, 21-50; A. J. Schutte, *By force and fear: taking and breaking monastic vows in early modern Europe*, Ithaca 2011; A. Roger, 'Contester l'autorité parentale: les vocations religieuses forcées au xviii<sup>e</sup> siècle en France', *Annales de démographie historique* cxxv (2013), 43-67.

<sup>3</sup> S. Hanley, 'Family and state in early modern France: "the marriage pact"', in M. J. Boxer and J. H. Quataert (eds), *Connecting spheres: women in the western world, 1500 to the present*, Oxford 1987, 53-63, and 'Engendering the state: family formation and state building in early modern France', *French Historical Studies* xvi (1989), 4-27; E. Rapley, 'Women and the religious vocation in seventeenth-century France', *French Historical Studies* xviii (1994), 613-31; B. B. Diefendorf, 'Give us back our children: patriarchal authority and parental consent to religious vocations in early Counter-Reformation France', *Journal of Modern History* lxviii (1996), 265-307.

<sup>4</sup> Poorer segments of the population were typically less interested in questions of parental authority over vocations: A. A. Tulchin, 'Low dowries, absent parents: marrying for love in an early modern French town', *Sixteenth Century Journal* xlv (2013), 713-38.

<sup>5</sup> Hanley, 'Engendering the state', 9-11; Lanza, *From wives to widows*, 27-8; Diefendorf, 'Give us back our children', 285-6, 288-93.

These secular norms in France were at odds with Catholic doctrine and canon law, which had long opposed parental control over the vocations of marriage, religion and holy orders. In 1563 the Council of Trent strengthened medieval canons on vocational liberty, imposing anathema on those who forced a woman into a monastery, prevented a woman from entering a monastery without good reason or, similarly, violated free consent to marriage; and it anathematised the view that parental consent was necessary for a marriage.<sup>6</sup> The decisions on marriage were especially galling to the French Crown, with whose encouragement the council's French delegation had pushed to require parental consent for valid marriages.<sup>7</sup>

Yet clerical views of family authority over vocational choices varied, and there was no strict secular-ecclesiastical divide. French Jesuits, for instance, were virtually alone among the French at Trent in opposing requirements of parental consent for marriage. The French bishops were not, however, mere hirelings of the Crown, as many Catholic reformers since the late Middle Ages had sought the requirement of parental consent.<sup>8</sup> French clergy found ways to impose stronger restrictions that served the mutual interests of parents, the Church and the State to curb the liberty of the young.<sup>9</sup> Church courts and many individual clergy usually cooperated in enforcing secular law, and later marriage edicts severely penalised priests who failed to do so.<sup>10</sup> Notwithstanding jurisdictional squabbles, the disobedience of refractory clergy and the complex relationship between law and practice, lay and ecclesiastical courts increasingly worked together over the course of the seventeenth century to bolster familial authority.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the scholarly attention paid to early modern French conflicts over parental consent and coercion of vocations, little has been written on the persuasive efforts of clerics who sought to dilute familial authority. Preachers and writers of devotional and catechetical works acted pastorally, rather than through the law, to promote the liberty of young men and women to choose a state. And yet, sharing the patriarchal values embedded in French society, these clerics sought to integrate those values with Catholic theology and church law. If familial will necessarily affected and

<sup>6</sup> *Decrees of the ecumenical councils*, ii, ed. N. P. Tanner, Washington, DC 1990, 755, 759, 781–2. On the debate over parental consent to marriage see C. Christensen-Nugues, 'Parental authority and freedom of choice: the debate on clandestinity and parental consent at the Council of Trent (1545–63)', *Sixteenth Century Journal* xlv (2014), 51–72.

<sup>7</sup> Lanza, *From wives to widows*, 28; Christensen-Nugues, 'Parental authority', 56, 58.

<sup>8</sup> Christensen-Nugues, 'Parental authority', 53–6, 58.

<sup>9</sup> J. R. Farr, *Authority and sexuality in early modern Burgundy (1550–1730)*, New York 1995, 93.

<sup>10</sup> Hanley, 'Engendering the state', 10–11.

<sup>11</sup> Farr, *Authority and sexuality*, 73, 88–9, 95–7, and at pp. 122–3 for the relationship between law and practice; Lanza, *From wives to widows*, 36–9, 44–50; M. P. Breen, 'Law, society, and the state in early modern France', *Journal of Modern History* lxxxiii (2011), 346–86.

even determined young people's choices, clerics who wrote and drew from these works maintained that individual freedom could fit with rightly understood parental involvement.

These vocational writers combined older traditions of theology and canon law with more recent developments in spiritual theology. Around the twelfth century, a consent-based model for marriage and religious vows became canonically normative, establishing the basis for later vocational teaching and practice. Popes and canonists of the high Middle Ages ultimately rejected parental will as having a role in the individual's consent to vows. They determined that the use of 'force and fear' to gain ostensible consent rendered marital vows null. Soon the same principles applied for monastic vows.<sup>12</sup> The Council of Trent strengthened these laws and enhanced ecclesiastical penalties for violators. With these principles established in law, the seed was sown for spiritual writers to assume individual discernment and choice, with freedom from familial coercion.

The Church's laws of liberty were supplemented by grassroots developments in early modern spirituality. Foundational were the *Spiritual exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), at the centre of which was the section on 'election' or 'choice', which included methods to discover God's calling to a state of life.<sup>13</sup> Later Jesuit writers further systematised Ignatius' approach and summarised the three elements of vocational discernment as prayer, deliberation and consultation with one's spiritual director.<sup>14</sup> Ignatian discernment also helped to inspire the 'brief method for knowing God's will' of Francis de Sales (1567–1622), the Jesuit-educated bishop-in-exile of Geneva.<sup>15</sup> In his *Treatise on the love of God* (1616), he elaborated the same essentials of prayer, deliberation and consultation,

<sup>12</sup> J. A. Brundage, *Law, sex, and Christian society in medieval Europe*, Chicago 1987, 34, 87–8, 175, 334–5, 414; J. H. Van Engen, 'Professing religion: from liturgy to law', *Viator* xxix (1998), 323–44 at pp. 324, 331–6.

<sup>13</sup> 'To make an election' or 'to make a choice' are common renderings of the Spanish 'hazer election' and the Latin 'electionem facere': Ignatius of Loyola, *Texte autographe des exercices spirituels et documents contemporains (1526–1615)*, ed. Édouard Gueydan and others, Paris 1986, sec. 169–89; original Latin unpaginated: Ignatius of Loyola, *Exercitia spiritualia*, Rome 1548. See P. F. Harman, 'Vocation and the *Spiritual exercises* of St Ignatius of Loyola', in J. C. Haughey (ed.), *Revisiting the idea of vocation: theological explorations*, Washington 2004, 112, 114–15. For the varied uses of the *Exercises* see J. W. O'Malley, *The first Jesuits*, Cambridge 1993, 127–33.

<sup>14</sup> For example see H. Platus [G. Piatti], *De bono status religiosi libri tres*, Ingolstadt 1590, chapter 36, and L. Lessius, *Disputatio de statu vitae deligendo et religionis ingressu*, Antwerp 1613, both cited in E. de La Croix, *Le Bon Choix: ou, instruction pour bien choisir un état de vie*, Lyon 1667, 34.

<sup>15</sup> 'Briefve methode pour connoistre la volonté de Dieu', in François de Sales, *Traité de l'amour de Dieu*, in *Oeuvres de Saint François de Sales évêque et prince de Genève et docteur de l'église*, v, Annecy 1894, 105–7. On his education see E. Stopp, 'St Francis de Sales at Clermont College: a Jesuit education in sixteenth-century Paris', in *A man to heal differences: essays and talks on St Francis de Sales*, Philadelphia 1997, 23–50.

followed by a prompt and confident choice. Both Ignatius and de Sales treated the choice of a state as an ordinary concern, as if all Catholics would have the liberty to choose freely.

Starting in the middle decades of the seventeenth century, clerical advice on the choice of a state of life proliferated in France, but this advice – rooted in canonical, Ignatian and Salesian principles – was coloured by the rigorist tendencies that had taken hold in French theology and pastoral practice.<sup>16</sup> Applying the label ‘rigorist’ to any given author or work is not always simple, and French rigorism is not coextensive with the Jansenist movement. Rigorism may be considered a spectrum, and French Catholic discourse began to be centred on the more rigorist side of this spectrum around the 1630s and 1640s. It is often best to ask whether an author or work is rigorist on a particular question of theology or pastoral care, such as views of grace, moral advice given in confession or withholding absolution from habitual sinners.<sup>17</sup>

This latter approach enables us to speak specifically of ‘vocational rigorism’, the idea that choosing a state of life wrongly – that is, choosing a state of life other than that to which one was called by God – would entail both great suffering in this life and likely damnation in the next. Charles Gobinet (1614–90), for example, a doctor of the Sorbonne and long-time rector of the Collège du Plessis-Sorbonne, wrote in his *Instruction for youth in Christian piety*:

If we search into the cause of the disorders which we see in each state – ecclesiastical, religious or secular – in which so many acquit themselves of their duties so poorly, we shall find that a great part of the evil comes from this source: namely, that their entry has been evil; and we find that a majority of people enter into the conditions of life lightly, without examining whether they are ... called there by God.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> For vocational advice in its rigorist context see J. Parsons, ‘Vocation in seventeenth-century France: the Catholic ethic and the spirit of *étatisme*’, *French History* xxviii (2014), 322–42.

<sup>17</sup> For various accounts of the chronology and definition of rigorism see J.-L. Quantin, ‘Le Rigorisme: sur le basculement de la théologie morale catholique au xvii<sup>e</sup> siècle’, *Revue d’histoire de l’église de France* lxxxix (2003), 23–43, and ‘Catholic moral theology, 1550–1800’, in U. L. Lehner, R. A. Muller and A. G. Roeber (eds), *The Oxford handbook of early modern theology, 1600–1800*, New York 2016, 119–34; J.-P. Gay, *Morales en conflit: théologie et polémique au Grand Siècle (1640–1700)*, Paris 2011, 35–6; A. D. Wright, *The divisions of French Catholicism, 1629–1645: ‘the parting of the ways’*, Farnham 2010; J. Bergin, *Church, society and religious change in France, 1580–1730*, New Haven 2009, 394–423, and *The politics of religion in early modern France*, New Haven 2014, 181–205; and R. Parish, *Catholic particularity in seventeenth-century French writing: ‘Christianity is strange’*, Oxford 2011, 140–61.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Si on recherche la cause des desordres que nous voyons en chacun des estats, Ecclesiastiques, Religieux, Laïques, dans lesquels plusieurs s’acquittent très-mal de leur devoir, on trouvera qu’une grande partie du mal vient de cette source: à sçavoir

Louis Bourdaloue's preaching echoed this view:

There is nothing on which salvation depends more than to choose well the state in which one should live, because it is certain that almost all the sins of men come from the engagement of their state ... For what will be if you should come to make a mistake in this, and take another way than that which God has prepared for you with graces to make your salvation?<sup>19</sup>

Claude Joly (1610–78), the bishop of Agen, spoke in similar terms:

Although God gives ordinary, common and sufficient graces to those who have chosen for themselves a state of life without his participation, it is to be feared that he will refuse them the extraordinary and chosen graces to which their salvation is attached. You ... have stopped your ears when God has called you ... You have not responded to the grace of your vocation; perhaps God will again give you another one, but, if he does not, how will you save yourself?<sup>20</sup>

Vocational rigorism cut across the theological and institutional divides of mid- to late seventeenth-century French Catholicism. Joly – ‘rigorist, anti-regular, and friend of Port-Royal’ – was a disciple of Jean-Jacques Olier at St-Sulpice, and he famously suspended all priests’ right to hear confession in his diocese, with an eye toward promoting rigorist reforms in sacramental practice.<sup>21</sup> Bourdaloue, even if he sometimes spoke severely, was a loyal Jesuit who defended his Society against accusations of laxism and rejected Jansenist theologies of grace.<sup>22</sup> The votes of the secular priest Gobinet at the Sorbonne show him an enemy of Jansenism, and his spiritual doctrine

de l'entrée qui a esté mauvaise; Et de ce que la plupart entrent dans les conditions legerement, sans examiner s'ils y sont ... appelez de Dieu': C. Gobinet, *Instruction de la jeunesse en la pieté chrestienne*, Paris 1655, 522.

<sup>19</sup> ‘Il n’y a rien dont le salut dépende davantage que de bien choisir l’état où l’on doit vivre, parce qu’il est certain que presque tous les péchés des homes viennent de l’engagement de leur état ... Car que feroit-ce, si vous veniez à vous y tromper, et à prendre une autre voie, que celle où Dieu vous a préparé des grâces pour faire votre salut?': L. Bourdaloue, *Exhortations et instructions chrétiennes*, ii, Paris 1723, 435–6. Bourdaloue died in 1704, and his collected sermons were published posthumously by a fellow Jesuit preacher, François de Paule Bretonneau.

<sup>20</sup> ‘Quoique Dieu donne des graces ordinaires, communes & suffisantes à ceux qui se sont choisis un etat de vie sans sa participation, il est a craindre qu’il ne leur refuse les graces extraordinaires & choisies ausquelles leur salut est attaché. Tu ... as fait la sourde oreille quand Dieu t’appelloit ... tu n’a pas repondu à la grace de ta vocation, peutetre [*sic*] Dieu t’en donnera-t’il encore une autre, mais s’il ne t’en donne pas comment te sauveras-tu?': C. Joly, *Prones de messire Claude Joli, eveque et comte d’Agen, pour tous les dimanches de l’année*, i, Paris 1693, 303–4.

<sup>21</sup> J. Bergin, *Crown, Church, and episcopate under Louis XIV*, New Haven 2004, 427.

<sup>22</sup> F. Castets, *Bourdaloue: la vie et la prédication d’un religieux au XVIIe siècle*, ii, Paris 1904, 315–24.

drew (somewhat cautiously) on the gentle François de Sales.<sup>23</sup> And yet all three of these authors were vocational rigorists, in that they held the right choice of a state to be a virtual prerequisite for salvation.

This rigorist sense of urgency about vocational choices explains the seventeenth-century proliferation of advice literature on how to discern God's call. Often, the advice was an elaborate variation on the Jesuit-inspired three consultations (consulting God in prayer, oneself in deliberation and one's spiritual director).<sup>24</sup> Yet Jesuits were not alone in promoting these commonplaces, as is clear from the variety of authors cited here. This type of vocational discernment advice remained a constant presence in western Catholic spirituality at least through the nineteenth century.<sup>25</sup> A more exhaustive study might reveal shifts in these tropes over time and the specific relationships between these works and legal or political events. An initial look at relevant texts suggests a basic tendency for concepts first aimed at *dévo*t elite readers of spiritual treatises later to appear in works directed toward a wider segment of the faithful, including

<sup>23</sup> J. M. Gres-Gayer, *Le Jansénisme en Sorbonne, 1643-1656*, Paris 1996, 317. The *Introduction à la vie dév*ote was high on Gobinet's suggested reading list for young men: C. Helms, 'Introduction', in *Fénelon: selected writings*, Mahwah 2006, 10; J.-L. Goré, *L'Itinéraire de Fénelon: humanisme et spiritualité*, Paris 1957, 51. Gobinet called his young reader 'Theotime', a reference to the reader addressed by de Sales in *Traité de l'amour de Dieu*. In 1668 Gobinet added to the *Instruction de la jeunesse* a second part, the *Instruction sur la pénitence, et sur la sainte communion*. There he both affirmed the sufficiency of imperfect contrition with confession and warned against the many ways in which a confession can be incomplete; he also both advised frequent communion and warned against ways of receiving communion unworthily: *Instruction sur la pénitence, et sur la sainte communion, seconde partie de l'instruction de la jeunesse*, Lyon 1674, 36-50, 131-57, unpaginated 'avant-propos' to *Instruction sur la sainte communion* (this later 1674 edition was consulted).

<sup>24</sup> Agnès Walch might suggest that this advice represents not 'rigorism' but 'moralism', a tendency to offer as strict moral rules what was seen by others as negotiable spiritual counsel: *La Spiritualité conjugale dans le catholicisme français (XVIe-XXe siècle)*, Paris 2002, 317-18. Jean Delumeau, for his part, did see clerical teachings on the married vocation as part of the discourse of 'intensification of guilt', but Larissa Taylor critiqued his overall framework for lack of attention to the 'optimistic soteriology' that counterbalanced a 'pessimistic anthropology': J. Delumeau, *Sin and fear: the emergence of a western guilt culture, 13th-18th centuries*, trans. E. Nicholson, New York 1990, 439-41; L. Taylor, *Soldiers of Christ: preaching in late medieval and reformation France*, Oxford 1992, 9-10, 86. 'Vocational rigorism' is defined specifically here as the tendency to connect vocational choice strongly with salvation, and this definition does not exclude a writer having hope of converting more of the faithful to habits of right vocational choice.

<sup>25</sup> Both older works featuring vocational discernment advice, such as that of Gobinet, and later texts promoting the same concepts, such as a treatise of Jean-Baptiste Malou, were frequently printed through the nineteenth century and beyond: J.-B. Malou, *Règles pour le choix d'un état de vie proposées à la jeunesse chrétienne*, Brussels 1860.

catechisms and model sermon collections.<sup>26</sup> Fundamentally, the theological, legal and social contexts of this literature were in place throughout the mid- to late seventeenth century. It is therefore fruitful to explore how a number of vocational advice texts from this period dealt with parental authority.

A basic contention of most clerical advice on choosing a state was that young people actually had choices. Bourdaloue argued that, although earthly fathers could determine a child's temporal affairs, only God's 'sovereign paternity' gave him authority 'over the spirits and wills of men':<sup>27</sup>

If all states of life are vocations from God; if there is a grace attached to each of these states, in order to attract us there according to God's ordering; if it is extremely dangerous for our salvation to take up a state without this grace, it therefore does not belong to a father to lead his children to a state, much less to engage them in it ... For, in the last resort, a father in his family is not the distributor of vocations. This grace is not at all in his hands, to distribute to whom he wishes, nor as he wishes ... Because every vocation is a grace, only God can give it.<sup>28</sup>

Vocational liberty was not thus an absolute good, but rather would serve as a means for young men and women to respond to God's call. If the right choice of a state of life was a moral imperative, then one must 'hate father and mother' (Luke xiv.26) and 'obey God rather than men' (Acts v.29).

Many others argued that parental authority simply did not extend to the choice of a state of life, despite the commandment to honour father and mother. The secular priest Jean Le Jau (1570–1631), in one of the earliest French-language treatises specifically on choosing a state of life, made puberty (fourteen for boys and twelve for girls) a turning point in children's liberty. Parents could nullify a prepubescent child's vows, but puberty marked the 'age of discretion' when young people became personally responsible for conforming to the divine will in all things, including the

<sup>26</sup> This is similar to a dynamic found specifically in advice literature on marriage, wherein catechetical works drew on earlier tropes of spiritual literature, while also presenting them more simply as 'rules' and 'obligations': Walch, *Spiritualité conjugale*, 160.

<sup>27</sup> 'Paternité souveraine'; 'C'est à lui, & non point à d'autres, d'exercer sur les esprits & sur les volontés des hommes cette supériorité de conduite, ou plutôt d'empire, qui fait l'engagement de la vocation': L. Bourdaloue, *Sermons du père Bourdaloue, de la Compagnie de Jesus: pour les dimanches*, i, Paris 1716, 9–11.

<sup>28</sup> 'Si tous les états du monde sont des vocations du Ciel; s'il y a une grace attachée à tous ces états, pour nous y attirer selon l'ordre de Dieu; s'il est d'un danger extrême pour le salut de prendre un état sans cette grace, ce n'est donc pas à un pere d'y porter ses enfans, beaucoup moins de les y engage ... Car enfin, un pere dans la famille, n'est pas le distributeur des vocations. Cette grace n'est point entre ses mains, pour la donner à qui il veut, ni comme il veut ... Parce que toute vocation étant une grace, il n'y a que Dieu qui la puisse communiquer': *ibid.* 14–15.



choice of a state.<sup>29</sup> Jean Cordier (1597–1673), a Jesuit, argued that, by the age of fourteen or fifteen, young persons were ready to choose, because the remainder of their lives would be their own spiritual responsibility, not that of their parents.<sup>30</sup> Defenders of vocational liberty further bolstered their claims by citing authorities from the Church's tradition. Le Jau referred to councils (such as the tenth synod of Toledo in 656), patristic writers (such as Ambrose, Chrysostom and Augustine), scholastics (such as Aquinas and Antoninus of Florence) and even Roman civil law.<sup>31</sup> The Jesuit writer Thomas Le Blanc (1599–1669) highlighted the examples of saints from different epochs who disobeyed their parents in entering religious life.<sup>32</sup> Some works reminded parents of the excommunication imposed by Trent in cases of vocational coercion.<sup>33</sup> Since parental authority seemed as old as humanity, successfully undermining it demanded arguments from yet stronger authorities.

Many of these clerics further challenged parental control by associating it with worldly motivations, especially of greed. Cordier and Bourdaloue compared forcing a young woman into religion to ritual human sacrifice.<sup>34</sup> Ecclesiastical benefice-seeking was especially highlighted as a common form of avarice. Post-Tridentine reformers sought to link the reception of tonsure more clearly with real intentions of priestly

<sup>29</sup> J. Le Jau, *Chemin royal pour conduire les ames à faire eslection d'un genre de vie qui soit conforme à la volonté de Dieu*, Paris 1628, 775, 777. Le Jau's positions included vicar general of the diocese of Evreux and *doyen* of the diocesan cathedral, and he dedicated the book to one of the most influential *dévots*, Michel de Marillac, *garde des sceaux* of France.

<sup>30</sup> J. Cordier, *La Famille sainte*, Lyon 1662, 621–2. Cordier served in a number of prominent teaching and leadership positions in the Society over the course of his career. *La Famille sainte* (originally published in Paris in 1643), was dedicated to Jean Bouchu, first president of the *parlement* of Dijon; the networks to which Bouchu belonged exemplify the ready audience of 'notables urbains' for these kinds of *dévo*t treatises: see Walch, *La Spiritualité conjugale*, 161–2. Charles Gobinet offered a similar argument: *Instruction de la jeunesse en la piété chrétienne*, nouvelle édition, Paris 1688, 523.

<sup>31</sup> Le Jau, *Chemin royal*, 777–85.

<sup>32</sup> T. Le Blanc, *Le Bon Escolier: ou, instruction pour la jeunesse qui estudie*, Paris 1664, 310–14. Le Blanc served in numerous Jesuit leadership positions, especially in scholarship and education: Walch, *La Spiritualité conjugale*, 140.

<sup>33</sup> Cordier, *La Famille sainte*, 466; J. Lindeborn, *Instructions chrestiennes sur le sacrement de mariage et sur l'education des enfans*, Paris 1679, 66; T. Cheminais, *Sermons du pere Cheminais de la Compagnie de Jesus*, 3rd edn, ii, Paris 1693, 342. Jan Lindeborn (1630–96) was a Dutch secular parish priest whose work was translated into French by Nicholas Fontaine, an associate of the Jansenist hub of Port-Royal: Walch, *La Spiritualité conjugale*, 163. Printed sermons of the Jesuit preacher Timoléon Cheminais (1652–89) experienced enduring popularity: F. Henryot, 'Le Prédicateur et ses livres: normes oratoires et sermonnaires dans les couvents mendiants urbains à l'époque moderne (Lorraine & Luxembourg)', in S. Simiz (ed.), *La Parole publique en ville, des réformes à la Révolution*, Villeneuve d'Ascq 2012, 39–60 at p. 53.

<sup>34</sup> Cordier, *La Famille sainte*, 464–5; Bourdaloue, *Sermons*, 21.

ordination. Reforms, however, took effect unevenly in France over a long period of time, and so persuasion was necessary, sometimes through parish-level catechesis.<sup>35</sup> The catechism for Luçon and La Rochelle stated that to put a child in orders ‘under the hope of some benefice’ and ‘to serve one’s avarice and ambition’ was ‘a very great sin that attracted the curse of God on parents and children’.<sup>36</sup> In the catechism for Agen, Bishop Joly excoriated parents who ‘force their children into the Church, even though they be unworthy of it, or only to have more wealth, or to keep some benefice in the family’: ‘They are the cause of the damnation of their children, and of the sins that they commit in that state, and they are damned with them ... They will answer before God concerning the scandal that their children have given to the whole Church.’<sup>37</sup> The Meaux catechism produced under the renowned pulpit orator Bishop Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704) said that the chief condition for receiving tonsure was ‘to be called by God’, explicitly opposing parental benefice-seeking to authentic vocations.<sup>38</sup> Such catechisms served as bases for catechesis even of rural laity in France, and so the influence of vocational theology extends here far beyond elite *dévot* circles.<sup>39</sup> Opposing vocation to avarice, these texts demonstrate the interconnectedness of institutional reform, spiritual theology and the catechesis of the laity.

Yet coercion did not stem only from the love of money, since natural human affection might also be prioritised over God’s call. Rather than dismissing emotional rhetoric as a mask for financial strategy, clerical advocates of liberty acknowledged the affective motives for parental pressure.<sup>40</sup> Some preachers cited favouritism among the

<sup>35</sup> Bergin, *Church, society and religious change*, 64–5, 75–6.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Sous l’Espérance de quelque Benefice?’; ‘Servir ... à son Avarice & à son Ambition’; ‘On doit dire que c’est un tres-grand peché qui attire la Malediction de Dieu sur les Peres & sur les Enfants’: *Catechisme ou doctrine chrétienne*, La Rochelle 1676, 320.

<sup>37</sup> ‘D. Les peres & les meres qui forcent leurs enfans d’estre d’Eglise, bien qu’ils en soient indignes, ou seulement pour avoir plus de bien, ou conserver quelque Benefice en leur famille offensent-ils Dieu? ... Ils sont cause de la damnation de leurs enfans, & des pechez qu’ils commettent en cet estat, & se damnent avec eux ... Ils répondront devant Dieu du scandale que leurs enfans donnent à toute l’Eglise’: C. Joly, *Les Devoirs du chrestien dressez en forme de catechisme*, 6th edn, Paris 1677, 243–4. See similar wording in *Catechisme nouveau, dressé en faveur de la jeunesse du diocese de Besançon*, Besançon 1687, 104–5.

<sup>38</sup> ‘D’y estre appellé de Dieu’: *Catechisme du diocese de Meaux*, Paris 1687, 173. For further examples see [F.-A. Pouget], *Instructions générales en forme de catechisme*, iii, Paris 1702, 254, and *Le Vray tresor du chrestien*, St Quentin 1648, 117.

<sup>39</sup> K. E. Carter, *Creating Catholics: catechism and primary education in early modern France*, Notre Dame 2011.

<sup>40</sup> This complements Barbara Diefendorf’s argument about parents’ integration of affection and authority: ‘Give us back our children’, 271–4, 277.

children.<sup>41</sup> Others noted parents' excessive attachment to their children's presence, which led especially to fear of a child's strict cloistering or faraway missions. Le Jau responded to this fear with a quotation from an early monastic Father, John Climacus: 'It is better to sadden one's parents than to sadden our Lord Jesus.'<sup>42</sup> Cordier suggested that parents who saw religious vows as a sorrowful separation should consider how they might respond to a child's accepting a faraway position at the royal court.<sup>43</sup> Quoting Jerome, Le Blanc advised children faced with their parents' 'pleadings' and 'tears' that 'cruelty, in this case, is the only true piety'.<sup>44</sup> If parents' authentic natural affection might undermine their children's supernatural good, true parental and filial love demanded putting divine love first.

Despite these principles of freedom from parental control, very few writers advocated excluding parents altogether. In a treatise published in 1667, however, Emanuel de La Croix took just such an extreme approach:

In this affair [parents] are our enemies and against our salvation, just as the Saviour taught when he said that he had come to separate the son from the father, and the daughter from the mother ... It is not necessary to consult one's parents, ... because they are interested, and they seek their own satisfaction and advantage ... Parents are blinded by natural affection ... For this reason, St Bernard not only does not find that one lacks respect for a father or a mother, when one does not consult them on this occasion, but he strongly affirms that it is an act of great piety to despise their counsel, in order to follow that of Jesus Christ.<sup>45</sup>

La Croix's position is one possible logical conclusion of the principles of liberty. And yet on the question of parental influence, his view is not representative of vocational advice in seventeenth-century France.

<sup>41</sup> For example, Joly, *Prones*, 178–9.

<sup>42</sup> 'Il vaut trop mieux contrister les parens, que nostre Seigneur Jesus': Le Jau, *Chemin royal*, 817.

<sup>43</sup> Cordier, *La Famille sainte*, 471–2.

<sup>44</sup> 'Prieres ... larmes'; 'La cruauté, dans cette occurrence, est la seule veritable piété': Le Blanc, *Le Bon Escolier*, 310, 314.

<sup>45</sup> 'En cette affaire ils sont nos ennemis & contraires à nôtre salut, ainsi que le Sauveur nous l'apprend quand il dit qu'il est venu separer le fils d'avec le Pere, & la fille d'avec la Mere ... Il ne faut pas consulter les parens, parce que ... ils sont interessez, & qu'ils cherchent leur satisfaction & leur avantage ... Les parens sont aveuglez par l'affection naturelle ... Et c'est la raison pour laquelle saint Bernard, non seulement ne trouve pas que l'on manque de respect envers un Pere ou une Mere, quand on ne les consulte pas en cette rencontre, mais il assure hautement que c'est un acte de grande piété, de mespriser leur conseil, pour suivre celui de Jesus-Christ': La Croix, *Le Bon Choix*, 44–6. This author is most likely to have been the Discalced Carmelite Emmanuel de La Croix, surnamed Cellot before his religious profession at the Paris convent in 1649. He was the brother of the Jesuit Louis Cellot and spent several years as vicar of the Carmelites at Mount Carmel in Palestine: C. de Villiers de Saint-Etienne, *Bibliotheca carmelitana*, i, Orleans 1752, 444.

Most advice sought to preserve parental involvement, asking parents and children to share responsibility for vocational choices. Above all, children were to listen, even if they need not always obey. Gobinet thought that parents' wishes could help spark the discernment process: 'If your parents wish that you be an ecclesiastic or a religious, examine first whether God calls you to one of these states.'<sup>46</sup> A young person who discerned no such calling could decline and 'make this resistance with all the respect that you owe to them, by remonstrating modestly with them, showing your inability to do what they desire, the reasons you have, and above all the repugnance you have toward the state to which they are carrying you'.<sup>47</sup> Gobinet applied the same principle when a young person followed a religious or clerical calling against parental wishes. By contrast, once a young person chose to remain in the lay state, he wrote that parental wishes should normally be obeyed in choosing among lay professions and conditions.<sup>48</sup> All vocational choices were to be made with consideration of parental counsel and with the utmost filial respect, even if disobedience became necessary.

Bourdaloue's position was similar. Despite having vehemently denied parental authority over vocations, he commanded young persons to consult their parents:

It would be a damnable independence, rather than an evangelical liberty, to wish, in the choice one makes of a state, to remove oneself absolutely from paternal authority ... One is not always obliged to conform oneself to the desires of a father and a mother too preoccupied with the spirit of the world, ... but at least it is necessary to listen to them, to weigh their reasons, even to defer to them when one has no stronger reasons to oppose to them; in the last resort, whether one accedes to their will, or, for the interest of his salvation, one deviates from it, it is necessary always to give them all the testimonies of a filial submission and of the respect that one acknowledges is due to them.<sup>49</sup>

This might leave young men and women struggling to discern whether their parents were too worldly to be obeyed or whether their own reasoning

<sup>46</sup> 'Si vos parens veulent que vous soiez Ecclesiastique ou Religieux, examinez premierement si Dieu vous appelle à l'un de ces états': Gobinet, *Instruction de la jeunesse*, nouvelle édition, 518.

<sup>47</sup> 'Souvenez-vous pourtant de faire cette resistance avec tout le respect que vous leur devez, en leur remonstrant modestement que vous ne pouvez pas faire ce qu'ils desirerent, les raisons que vous en avez, & sur tout la repugnance que vous avez à l'état auquel ils vous portent': *ibid.* 518–19.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 520.

<sup>49</sup> 'Ce seroit une indépendance condamnabile, plutôt qu'une liberté évangélique, de vouloir, dans le choix qu'on fait d'un état, se soustraire absolument à l'autorité paternelle ... On n'est pas toujours obligé de se conformer aux désirs d'un pere & d'une mere, trop préoccupés de l'esprit du monde ... Mais au moins faut-il les écouter, peser leurs raisons, y déférer même lorsqu'on n'en a point de plus fortes à y opposer; enfin, soit que l'on condescende à leurs volontés, ou que pour l'intérêt de son salut, on s'en écarte, leur donne toujours tous les témoignages d'une soumission filiale & du respect qu'on reconnoît leur devoir': Bourdaloue, *Exhortations et instructions*, 444–5.

should trump that of their parents. Bourdaloue's exhortation to parents was similarly ambivalent:

It does not belong to you to dispose of your children, in that which regards their vocation and the choice that they have to make of a state. And I add however that you are responsible to God for the choice your children make, and for the state that they embrace. It seems at first that these two propositions contradict each other, but ... they accord perfectly with one another.<sup>50</sup>

Good Christian parents were to 'intervene in this choice, to participate in it, to have in it a right of direction and of supervision'.<sup>51</sup> Whether coercive parents forced a bad choice or indifferent parents neglected to prevent a bad choice, the temporal and spiritual consequences would be dire. Bourdaloue thus laid a heavy moral burden on both parents and children, and he was not confident that many bore their burdens well.

Jean Cordier's advice was similar but markedly more hopeful. Without denying children's liberty, he advocated the combined efforts of parents and children, because young persons tended to be driven by inclination and parents tended to be driven by reason:

If fathers wish to have no faults, they will ease up considerably in order to follow the inclination of their children. If children wish to make a good choice, they will take account of their fathers' counsel. Reason will find itself weak, if it is not seconded by inclination; inclination will be rash, if it is not guided by reason ... To make a good choice, it is necessary that the reason of the father and the inclination of the son reach an agreement about it.<sup>52</sup>

If parents and children in seventeenth-century France typically co-operated in pursuing worldly ends in their choices of state, Cordier asked that they co-operate in pursuing God's purposes instead. The vision of Cordier,

<sup>50</sup> 'Il ne vous appartient pas de disposer de vos enfans, en ce qui regarde leur vocation & le choix qu'ils ont à faire d'un état. Et j'ajoute toutefois que vous êtes responsables à Dieu du choix que font vos enfans, & de l'état qu'ils embrassent. Il semble d'abord que ces deux propositions se contredisent, mais ... elles s'accordent parfaitement entre elles': idem, *Sermons*, 7–8.

<sup>51</sup> 'D'intervenir à ce choix, d'y participer, d'y avoir un droit de direction & de surveillance': ibid. 39.

<sup>52</sup> 'Si les peres ne veulent point faire de fautes, qu'il relasche de beaucoup pour suivre l'inclination de leurs enfans. Si les enfans veulent faire un bon choix, qu'ils fassent estat du conseil de leurs peres. La raison se trouvera foible, si elle n'est secondée de l'inclination: l'inclination sera temeraire, si elle n'est guidée de la raison ... Pour faire un bon choix il faut que la raison du pere, & l'inclination du fils en tombent d'accord': Cordier, *La Famille sainte*, 450–1. This particular passage concerned choosing among worldly professions, and he repeated the principle in reference to all kinds of vocational choices, such that of entering religion and that of entering marriage and selecting a particular spouse: Cordier, *La Famille sainte*, 470, 478–81, 623–4.

Bourdaloue, Gobinet and others was thus of devout families together seeking spiritual goods.

Such parental co-operation in children's vocational choices was not merely a vain hope; it was a practical necessity. Few young persons, even if they wished, could slip away to marry or to enter religion, much less successfully defy parental wishes in the long term. Without parental support, there were formidable legal and financial obstacles to committing to any state of life – married, religious or clerical. For this reason, these clerics still insisted on parents' responsibility to provide for their children's placement. According to Cordier, this provision should occur after the child had discerned God's plan for a right choice of state:

If anyone asks them, 'To what do you destine your son? What will your daughter become?' let them answer only this: 'God is their master; he will dispose of them as he wishes. When he will have made known to them what he desires, we will do our best to furnish them the means of putting it into action.'<sup>53</sup>

This principle demanded that the age of engaging in a profession match the age of vocational discernment, and so Cordier proposed an education that would delay apprenticeships and other professional endeavours until age twelve to fifteen. After a boy made a choice of state and even of a worldly profession, parents would facilitate the finances and logistics.<sup>54</sup> Thus, Cordier hoped to preserve a space for vocational discernment, while acknowledging the need for parents to provide for their children's future.

Diocesan catechisms likewise often emphasised parents' duty to establish children professionally, but here we see less attempt to reconcile it with vocational liberty. Joly's catechism for Agen and the Besançon catechism both attended to vocational questions, and both left unclear how parents' and children's roles fitted together. Parents were to have their children take up a fitting trade or profession, but, surprisingly, that meant that parents were to engage in vocational discernment on their children's behalf: 'Q. What should fathers and mothers do before engaging their children in a profession in life? A. They should pray and consult God, to know whether their children are called there and make known to them the obligations of their state.'<sup>55</sup> Joly's advice to young people on vocational matters was here simply redirected to their parents. His

<sup>53</sup> 'Si on leur demande à quoy destines-vous vostre fils? que deviendra vostre fille? qu'ils ne répondent rien sinon, Dieu en est le maistre, il en dispoera à sa volonté. Quand il leur aura fait connoître ce qu'il desire, nous nous efforcerons de leur fournir les moyens pour l'executer': *ibid.* 464.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* 453–5.  
<sup>55</sup> 'D. Que doivent faire les Peres & Meres avant que d'engager leurs Enfans dans une profession de vie? R. Ils doivent prier & consulter Dieu, pour sçavoir si leurs Enfans y sont appelez, & leur faire connoître les obligations de leur estat': Joly, *Les Devoirs du chrestien*, 93. See *Catechisme nouveau*, 43–4.

catechism was similarly ambiguous on discerning a clerical calling. He first mandated that the candidate himself deliberate and consult with his confessor to see whether he is ‘called to the ecclesiastical state’.<sup>56</sup> Then, on the next page, he instructed parents:

Q. What should fathers and mothers do before placing their children in the Church? A. They should: 1. Examine whether the inclinations of their children are fit for the ecclesiastical state. 2. Pray and do other good works in order to obtain from God the grace of knowing their vocation. 3. Consult their confessors. 4. Not engage them at all by constraint, nor before the proper time, nor for the present chance of some benefice. 5. Make them to understand in advance what the functions and obligations of this state are, and know from them whether they are resolved to satisfy them ... 7. Present them to the Bishop, and follow his counsels.<sup>57</sup>

Although some of the children’s liberties are here preserved, parents are the main actors who place, examine, pray, consult confessors, engage and present to the bishop.

There is a subtle persuasive method in leaving unresolved this tension between vocational liberty and parental involvement. Parents’ arrangement of financial and logistical matters for a vocation – whether marriage, religion or ordination – remained necessary in early modern France. If parents always dealt with the practical questions concerning entry into a state of life, Joly and others hoped that parents would simultaneously consider the spiritual questions of vocation, applying principles of right discernment together with their children. This was an attempt to integrate long-standing practice with more recently developed methods of discernment.

This literature advocating vocational liberty was ultimately a fruit of early modern Catholic reform. It was based largely on canon legal and theological principles of children’s freedom to choose a state of life, and these principles were enlarged and modified in the rigorist *milieu* of mid- to late seventeenth-century France. In the eyes of these clerical writers, reform efforts must encompass all members of the Church, which they thought only possible if laity, clergy and religious alike had embraced the

<sup>56</sup> ‘Il faut 1. S’examiner soy-mesme, & sçavoir de nostre Confesseur, si Dieu nous appelle à l’estat Ecclesiastique’: Joly, *Les Devoirs du chrestien*, 243.

<sup>57</sup> ‘D. Comment est-ce que les Peres & Meres doivent faire avant que de mettre leurs enfans dans l’Eglise? R. Ils doivent. 1. Examiner si les inclinations de leurs enfans sont convenables à l’estat Ecclesiastique. 2. Faire des prieres & autres bonnes oeuvres pour obtenir de Dieu la grace de connoistre leur vocation. 3. Consulter leurs Confesseurs. 4. Ne les point engager par contrainte, ny avant le temps, ny par l’occasion presente de quelque Benefice. 5. Leur faire entendre auparavant quelles sont les fonctions & les obligations de cet estat, & sçavoir d’eux s’ils sont resolu d’y satisfaire ... 7. Les presenter à l’Evesque, & suivre ses avis’: *ibid.* 244–5.

states to which God had called them. Thus, to understand fully this advocacy for children's *liberté*, it must be contextualised as part of a holistic and peculiarly Catholic vocational world view and indeed of a Catholic modernity.

Moreover, far from expressing disembodied ideals, pastoral literature on parental coercion developed from the concrete conditions of seventeenth-century France. In some ways, the legal and cultural forces arrayed against children's liberty pushed opponents of coercion towards a more vociferous opposition, not so much in law as in a battle of pastoral words. And yet these writers were men of their own place and time who expected and usually valued parents' involvement in their children's vocational choices. So, while insisting on individuals' free vocational choice, many writers also sought to bring parents into the process of right vocational discernment. Parents would be a help, rather than a hindrance if they cooperated in following right principles. It was for these reasons that vocational advice from Gobinet, Bourdaloue, Joly and Cordier addressed parents directly, rather than only addressing the young people themselves. And these texts were no dead letter. They were read by *dévo*t elites at home, heard in many pulpits as model sermons were imitated, learned in catechism classes and used as the basis of spiritual direction and confessional practice.<sup>58</sup>

All that said, many parents would remain hostile or indifferent to this holistic vocational world view. And so Cordier, who was so keen on

<sup>58</sup> There is evidence for the strong reception of most of these texts. Bourdaloue's lasting preeminence is well-known, and his sermons were frequently reprinted. Gobinet's *Instruction de la jeunesse* saw numerous editions in several languages into the nineteenth century, including the first English translation in 1687 and an 1879 Arabic translation. In 1847 the missionary priest Adrien Nampon still strongly recommended the work: P. Martin, *Une Religion des livres (1640-1850)*, Paris 2003, 461–2. Joly's sermons were reprinted several times over the course of the eighteenth century and appeared in Migne's nineteenth-century collection *Orateurs sacrés*: P. Hébrard, *Histoire de Messire Claude Joly, évêque et comte d'Agen (1610-1678)*, Agen 1905, 490–3. Cordier's treatise saw thirteen editions between 1643 and 1687, as well as at least one eighteenth-century and one nineteenth-century edition: Martin, *Religion des livres*, 351. La Croix's treatise – the least accommodating to parents – was reprinted in 1690, 1697 and 1699. Though more obscure, it had some audience, perhaps mediated by Carmelite priests. Diocesan catechisms, used both by *curés* and by lay schoolmasters, were at the heart of education in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France, especially of rural Catholics. Joly's catechism was in its fourteenth edition by 1751; Bossuet's was reprinted at least six times by 1781; the La Rochelle-Luçon catechisme was reprinted numerous times and the bishop of Angers soon added his sponsorship: Carter, *Creating Catholics*, 4–8, 12–14, 272, 280–3. Although Le Blanc's *Bon Escolier* appears to exist in only one edition, his approach to vocation undoubtedly affected those under his spiritual care, especially students at Jesuit *collèges* and members of Marian congregations: Walch, *Spiritualité conjugale*, 140. Ecclesiastical court records show that confessors sometimes successfully convinced family members to relent in the coercion of vocations: Schutte, *By force and fear*, 60.



parent-child cooperation, could also advise this: 'If the parents are neither of a humour nor of a degree of virtue to enjoy God's designs; if one knows that they will employ all their power to impede it, one can ... refrain from giving them notice until after the thing is done. Such has been the practice of the saints.'<sup>59</sup>

<sup>59</sup> 'Mais si les parens ne sont point ny d'humeur, ny de vertu à gouter les desseins de Dieu; si on sçait qu'ils employeront toute leur puissance pour les empêcher on peut (& je crois que c'est le meilleur) ne leur en point donner avis, qu'après la chose faite. Les Saints l'ont ainsi pratiqué': Cordier, *La Famille sainte*, 623.