

WOMEN OF PRAYER

There is a special value for the present day in Julie's example and teaching on prayer; for both were given by an active woman to an active congregation and they anticipate to a great extent the needs of the modern apostolic religious. There was no formal treatise, but as circumstances required Julie instructed the early Sisters in the stages of prayer from the proper recitation of the Our Father to the maintaining of union with God in and through a full day's work. Her instructions were simple and practical, as she was always addressing beginners. They were vital too and profound, drawing unconsciously on her own experience. Prayer was woven into the very tissue of her life and was so much a part of it that it was taken for granted; yet the ease with which she led others in the ways of prayer was the outcome of what she herself had lived through, and it is in her own experience that we find the first source of her teaching.

The main phases of her development were fairly clearly marked, since they corresponded to changing circumstances in her life. The first stage lasted from her childhood until the outbreak of the revolution, and included both the active years at Cuvilly and the long period of physical suffering. During all this time prayer was easy, and a joy to Julie. Then came a second, painful phase of darkness and spiritual privation during the persecution which began in 1791. Finally, from the founding of the institute, there was a third period in which strength and joy blended and in which she passed on to Notre Dame the fruits of her experience.

Julie herself left no record of her prayer during her childhood. The evidence for it is taken entirely from depositions made by her contemporaries at the time of the introduction of her cause. It is possible that some of the accounts of her childish prayers, given in these circumstances, may have been influenced by the finished holiness of the grown woman. There may have been a projection of the later Julie in the picture sketched of the little girl kneeling quietly in the corner of the cottage with her eyes closed and her palms pressed tightly together. But there is no play of fancy in the facts given by M. l'Abbé Dangicourt. Julie made her First Holy Communion at the age of nine, because her prayer was already so deep as to make her outstanding. Her plan of life was regular: an hour's meditation in the morning, some time during the day for spiritual reading, visits to the Blessed Sacrament daily. What was remarkable was her persistence in it. Rather than cut down her prayer, she would forgo her sleep; and this when she was still young and living an energetic life, with hard work during the day and works of charity taking up a good deal of her free time. The place of prayer did not matter. She loved the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, as she was to love it to the end of her life; but she would pray before the crucifix in her room or in the fields when she was working. The great fact was that the primacy of prayer was already established in her. She needed it as she needed air. It was as essential and as delicate, and she fostered it gladly.

Her chief reading at this time was the bible, particularly the gospels, the epistles and the psalms. She also used the *Imitation of Christ* and was later to add the writings of St. Teresa for which she had a special affection, *Christian Perfection* by Rodriguez and *Les Pensées Chrétiennes* by Père Bonhours. In externals she conformed to the devotional practices of the village for it was never her way to be singular. She went with everyone else to the evening prayers led by M. Dangicourt in the church of St. Eloi and recited the night prayers of the late Monseigneur le Maréchat de Bellefont that had been carefully copied for public use by her uncle Thibault Guibert the schoolmaster. She may have got her first love of hymn-singing from joining in the cantiques which the good Thibault intoned at the end of the service. She joined the Confraternity of the Sacred Heart which had been established at the Visitation Convent in Compiègne in 1738, and which had a branch in Cuvilly. She was confirmed with the other children when she was thirteen. Outwardly she was a thoroughly good girl; inwardly the deepening of her personal prayer-life, nourished by the sacraments, was leading her directly to that total commitment which found expression in the vow of chastity made in 1765, when she was fourteen. Daily communion, allowed to her six years later, was the climax of this first swift stage of her spiritual development. In embryo, it contained all that was to come: the effort and sacrifice made in order to pray well, prayer leading directly to union with God, that union overflowing in the apostolate, the apostolate involving the effort that was directed anew to prayer. The cycle was to remain constant throughout her life, but at this stage it had nothing of the pain that was later to perfect her. The early prayer-life was full of joy.

Nor was the joy diminished when, after the paralysis of 1774, she lost her outward activity. In the long years of illness she received Holy Communion daily and the Sacrament of the Sick five times and, in the strength that these meetings with Christ gave her, her prayer reached a new intensity. Père Sellier, S.J., writing of this period, said: "What struck me most in Julie at this time was her quite uncommon gift of prayer. I believe that she was raised to a very high degree of contemplation. She spent in this holy exercise four or five hours every day and at such times she was perfectly rapt in God, motionless, all use of her senses suspended and her face glowing with heavenly peace and sweetness. No noise made near her distracted her and she only came to herself when someone shook her or pulled her arm. Even then it was with a visible effort. All this was when she lay paralyzed on a bed of pain." In one of her own rare moments of self-revelation on the subject, Julie was later to tell Soeur Stéphanie Warnier that during the first eight years of her paralysis she had never known what it was to be either lonely or weary because God's presence filled her and she was borne up by the power and joy of a prayer whose effects were almost tangible. Prayer was intensified when Mass was said in her home, after the Civil Constitution of the Clergy had made it too dangerous for the non-juring Abbé Dangicourt to say it in the parish church; and prayer was the weapon Julie used to meet the situation created by the exile of the faithful priests and the intrusion of the schismatics. "We must pray. Pray that God may open their eyes," she said. At

the time, nothing seemed simpler. Prayer had been her recourse for as long as she could remember. In all her sorrows and physical anguish it had given her a serenity that nothing could touch. The highest point of her soul had enjoyed its union with God and, in that awareness, had lived in light and peace.

In God's providence, however, this state of things did not last. Julie was to guide others in prayer and needed to experience herself the darkness that she would one day explain to her sisters. Some anticipation of it was felt when the coming of the schismatical priest to Cuvilly, and the consequent deprivation of the sacraments, coincided with her first sense of loss of God's presence. The joy of her prayer was withdrawn and she was left to a long inward desolation. Circumstances seemed to conspire to increase the bitterness. The violence of the revolution was directed against her precisely on the score of her sanctity; she had to leave her family and go into hiding; she escaped death by a hair's breadth; she lost the security and affection she had known at Cuvilly as well as the relative independence of her own home; and for four years she was moved from place to place, always in danger and in a state of strain that cost her the power of speech. All the natural support to her prayer was gone. She had neither books nor companions, little peace and no regularity of life, and with rare exceptions, there was no question of receiving the sacraments. Throughout this time the interior anguish continued. Julie's prayer was purified in an experience that sifted her thoroughly; and the true colors of the years in Compiègne are not the brightness of the vision of the future congregation, which seems to have been an altogether exceptional experience, but the dark hues of the long, silent perseverance in desolation. The one source of help was the Abbé de Lamarche, the confessor to the Carmelites, who at risk to himself came regularly for several months during 1793. It was he who testified that, in the time he knew her, Julie's prayer was unceasing.

When did she emerge from this purifying trial? Julie is so reticent about her own inner life that it is not possible to say with accuracy when it came to an end, or indeed whether she ever again was completely free from it. She alluded so often to the need for faith and perseverance in prayer, for energy and courage, that there is the impression that the darkness returned at times. At any rate it was a powerful formative influence, and she could say later on: "It is good to have some desolation in prayer; it makes us cling to God."

By the time that she had founded the congregation in 1804, Julie was passing into the third and final phase of her own prayer-life, one that grew out of her previous experiences. It is the period which is most fully documented in her writings and, in giving instructions to the early sisters, Julie revealed herself more than she knew. Outwardly her practices were as simple as ever. She had the privilege of daily Holy Communion, and was ingenious in arranging her often inconvenient journeys so as to make sure that she was within reach of a church for morning Mass. Her visits to the Blessed Sacrament were frequent, made whenever the opportunity offered. She slipped into one of the parish churches of

Ghent with Marie Steenhaut on the way from the bishop's palace to the Steenhauts' home. She first met Ciska when she knelt behind her on a similar occasion of an impromptu visit. If she had to wait for Monsignor de Broglie to be free, she waited in his chapel. After the hard reception from Père Varin in Paris on account of the misrepresentations from Amiens, she spent two hours in the chapel of the Visitation. She always attributed "rest, strength and courage" to the time she spent before the Blessed Sacrament, and she seemed at this mature phase of her life to renew the external devotion she had had as a girl towards the holy Eucharist. She would also have received the Sacrament of Penance every day, had it been possible. Prayer was associated with everything: the missions of 1804 depended on it, the founding of the Institute in the same year was the fruit of it and the first corporate act of the first three Sisters was to make a novena for postulants. Julie never opened a school without a Mass of the Holy Ghost, and never took a step towards the solution of the problems at Amiens without asking for the prayers of the Sisters to guide her. She drew up a pattern of practices for the young congregation, and saw to it that prayer punctuated the whole day. "Be very earnest over your morning meditation, your examination of conscience, your spiritual reading and the recitation of the rosary," she wrote, "Never perform these spiritual exercises through routine or from habit, but renew your intention each time." To go by her directives to the Sisters it would seem that "spiritual exercises" were the main feature in the prayer-life envisaged by Julie for the congregation, yet this was not the case. They were a means to an end and what she wanted was a life of prayer, a state of prayer similar to her own in which "praying always" was not interrupted by the demands of incessant activity. She could write to Mère St. Joseph: "Let us go on praying for each other always, united in prayer! Not that either of us has time for prayers. I don't have a minute that is free from interruption."

In her instructions to the Sisters, Julie had to lead beginners from the first steps in prayer to that full flowering, when what she called "the rapture of action and operation" became the expression of their total union with God. She dealt therefore with all stages: briefly with vocal prayers, at greater length with meditation and most fully with the prayer of God's presence and union with his will.

The aspirants were most familiar with vocal prayers of the lengthy kind, typified by the Acts of the Maréchal de Bollefont, and with the elaborate devotions of the day. Julie therefore said little on these two points except to direct attention to what she considered essential in any prayer: simplicity and sincerity. There was always a danger, she thought, in long and elaborate formulas, of saying what one did not mean. Even in familiar vocal prayer, the voice could drone on and the mind be elsewhere. She tried to correct this by teaching the Our Father petition by petition with a pause after each one, or counting them to emphasize the distinction between them, and she did the same with the Creed.

About devotions she was restrained, a remarkable trait in a period which produced the excesses of the baroque and rococo schools of church-building. Shrines were everywhere in pre-revolutionary days; and the exuberance of statues like those in the cathedral of Antwerp where figures typifying virtues and vices lean with curious interest over the penitents in the confessionals, suggests that not all of them were in the best religious taste. Art for its own sake had taken over from religion, and the human interest eclipsed the element of worship. A certain superstition too clung to the innumerable local pilgrimages of France and to the many centers where the faithful revered relics, some of very doubtful authenticity. Julie seems to have had little sympathy with this kind of devotion, though she was careful to take charge of the shrine of Our Lady of Dolours at Zele so as not to alienate the people of the town. Her own devotions were few and based on sound theology. As might be expected from one who was obsessed with the desire to save souls, she centered them all on the mystery of the redemption, less of set purpose than by an instinctive need to unify all her being in the great truth that inspired her whole life and work. As a child she had known the devotion to the Sacred Heart, a newfangled and suspect practice in the eyes of many, though St. Margaret Mary's visions at Paray had occurred a hundred years before and the work of St. John Eudes in popularizing the devotion had been crowned by the Bull of Clement XIII in 1765, authorizing the devotion and giving it the papal blessing. In spite of the bitter Jansenist opposition to it, Julie grew up with a strong personal attachment to the doctrine of the incarnation and to the expression of divine love given by the devotion to the Sacred Heart. She preached it in Cuvilly, introduced it into Belgium and left it as a legacy to Notre Dame. Not for nothing was her miraculous cure worked in the name of the Sacred Heart. She also had a lifelong devotion to the precious blood, and to the Blessed Sacrament as a memorial of the passion. It is interesting too, that her favorite Marian mysteries were those in which our Lady rejoiced in her own anticipated redemption and co-operated with her divine Son in ours: the Immaculate Conception and the sorrowful mother at the foot of the cross.

In her devotions Julie remained free. There was no imposition of a special form of cult either on herself or on the congregation. The later month of Mary devotions, novenas, modalities and processions were part of the codification by Mère St. Joseph. Julie was content with the great mysteries and, if anything, she discouraged set formulas. To Soeur Angèle at Andenne, who had a weakness for long sessions of prayer, she wrote: "Yes, you may say prayers and give a talk before Vespers, but only for the time being, and don't overdo it." And to a later request that the children should all make a visit to church when school was over, she answered: "You may do it only if you get the cure's permission, and even then be careful that the villagers don't think you have developed religious mania." As for the Sisters, she was very definite: "I don't want to see you taken up with all kinds of special devotions and practices. I'm not finding fault with such things in themselves. Far from it! They may be very useful and praiseworthy for some people, but not for you. I want to lead you into much wider fields."

What were the wider fields she had in view? Principally meditation and mental prayer. For these the sisters were to stop “amusing themselves with pious devotions” and “set to work.” Julie laid tremendous emphasis on interior prayer for without it, she said, the institute would not continue, nothing would be done for God’s glory; there would be no true Sisters of Notre Dame. She realized with pressing urgency the need for it in her own time: “We must have women of prayer.” The old monastic concept of prayer as praise of God over one’s basket-making or in the fields, when one was not singing the office, had been supplemented during the counter-reformation by a more intellectual approach with set periods of concentrated attention to preludes and points in the study of revealed truths. This was necessary as the reformation clashed with the Church on the intellectual as well as on the social and liturgical levels. There was a need of a deep intellectual conviction in the individual man of prayer and of a firm, clear grasp of the dogmas of a faith that was henceforth besieged. Meditation, which aimed at stirring the will through the intellect, was a preliminary to prayer which the Holy Spirit inspired at this time. St. Ignatius, St. Francis de Sales and the seventeenth century French school were masters of it. In its form of prayerful study leading the mind to an appreciation of God by giving a theological background to those who lacked it, it was as necessary to Julie as it had been to the counter-reformers, for she was training Sisters who had far more goodwill than theology. They were destined, moreover, to teach others, so conviction and sound formation could not be over-emphasized.

Julie enjoined meditation as an obligation of rule. This form of prayer was to continue for as long as the individual Sister might have need of it, and it was certainly taught to all beginners. Julie expected it to be made with promptness and fidelity: “Great exactness in your meditation is the soul of all the rest ... We are not overloaded with spiritual duties and our fidelity in discharging this one, light as it is, will lighten the heavy burden of our other occupations.” The sisters were to look forward to it and desire it, “run to it as eagerly as a thirsty stag seeks springs of running water.” Anyone who cared little about meditation could not really have thought about what she was doing. Once in chapel, there was to be great attention, quietness and calmness, “all the baggage left at the door,” and none of the coughing, sneezing, blowing of noses and clearing of throats that made other people’s recollection impossible even if they did not unduly disturb the perpetrators. What were they to meditate on? The love of God, “our divine spouse hanging on the cross, God’s presence in our souls, in circumstances and in the orders of obedience,” the great truths of faith which they were to teach the children ... “Never give a religious instruction without having meditated in the presence of God on what you intend to teach.” Then there were the truths connected with the religious life: “Meditate on the choice God has made of you in order that he may reckon you among the ranks of his apostles ... on the fact that by our vow of obedience we promise Almighty God to have no will but his. It is all or nothing ... Spend your morning meditation thinking over the use to be made of our time during the day, the value of souls and the greatness of a vocation in

which every moment of our life has purchasing power for the greater glory of God.” Meditation was to follow the seasons of the Church’s year. Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, the great feasts all helped to form the mentality of the sister. In Julie’s estimation the element of instruction and formation ranked high at this stage, and it was a stage to which there was no cut and dried ending. The need for deeper penetration of doctrine through prayerful consideration could come at any time in life and Julie urged the sisters to remain open to it.

She had no illusions as to the difficulties involved. Her own experiences during the hard years in Compiègne gave her an understanding sympathy for those who found the first steps in meditation difficult, but she warned them that effort was absolutely necessary. “Pay great attention to what I have been telling you. Sustained efforts are necessary. If you spend your time pulling down with one hand what you build up with the other, you will never achieve anything. This is not the work of a day but of a lifetime, so it is no use just making one or two isolated efforts; you have to persevere. Remember what the Apocalypse says: ‘Be thou faithful *unto death* and I will give thee the crown of life.’ Nothing can be had for nothing. The kingdom of God suffered violence. And what about you? You don’t mind making a few attempts, but to keep the effort up costs too much altogether!” The touch of humor in the last remark broadened when Julie warned to the subject: “You think if you just kneel in chapel that you are meditating and leading a religious life. Not at all! Don’t delude yourselves! You don’t get to heaven on wheels.” At times, too, she showed a shrewd understanding of what went on in the minds of the distracted and the unprepared: “What do you go to meditation for if you pass your time sitting in judgment on everything, even on your superior? If you entertain yourself with your own imagination all the time you will always be quarrelsome and fickle. I know that you say that it is enough to go to meditation for your mind to be full of thoughts about your work; but that is a poor sort of excuse, because sisters who do their work well, meditate well. The one helps the other.” With those who were too easygoing, she was firm: “A sister who dispenses herself from meditation will get nowhere ... and if you only go to yawn, you would be better staying in bed.” But she was strong and encouraging to those whose best efforts seemed to produce no results, and she helped them to be aware of the freer prayer to which meditation led. “Don’t make the mistake of thinking that true devotion consists in having a relish for prayer and meditation. The very opposite is true. The more we suffer in it the more we show our love of God by being faithful to meditation ... Be particular never to omit it. Prepare it carefully, but then follow the action of the Holy Spirit within you humbly and faithfully ... In this way ... we fill our souls with the life of grace, with our Lord’s spirit. We become other Christs.”

This transforming prayer, in which the sisters “put on Christ” was that which Julie regarded as the characteristic prayer of the congregation. She spoke of it often and seemed to expect it to flower naturally from meditation faithfully made. She generally referred to it simply as “mental prayer,” but as she avoided technicalities, she often made no clear distinction between it and meditation. This

form, however, passed beyond the instructional phase of meditation. It opened out into a free, reverent and intimate converse with God which corresponded to Julie's own habitual prayer, so curiously elusive in its naturalness. There were no fixed acts and no formulas; sometimes with inward words, sometimes wordlessly, the sister was to be so constantly united with God that her prayer was a state, not an exercise, to be prepared and performed at certain times. Like St. Thérèse, Julie defined it as a familiar conversation with her Father: "What is more glorious than to devote ourselves to prayer, keeping ourselves thereby closely united to God and having familiar conversation with him! ... There we drink of God's Spirit in its fullness ... Without it all the rest is useless, for it is only in prayer that God communicates himself to us ... Mental prayer and mental prayer alone can teach us to live in God and for God. The fruit of it is the entire giving of ourselves to him, letting him do with us what he wills, as he wills and whenever he wills to do it ... Yes, it is a conversation with God that is very pleasing to him." In Julie herself this ease of divine conversation was very evident. In the middle of an instruction she would speak directly to God and then return to her sisters: "We shall never be sure, my dear sisters, that the whole human race is saved. Even if we were sure, my God, we would still have to devote our lives to bringing it closer to you. So take heart, my daughters!" This spontaneity characterized all her praying. "I was looking at you all," she said, "and seeing no improvement after so many Holy Communions; and I said to him, 'My God, my God! What are you going to do with souls like these?' When I see you with that army of children I beg him, 'Dearest Lord, give them that interior spirit which will keep them united to you while they are busy looking after their children' ... Sometimes I say, 'Lord, did you bring me into religion when I was already an old woman only to give me children who can't stand on their own feet?'"

She turned to God with the same uninhibited freshness whenever she was in doubt: "When I can no longer see what the best way of dealing with you is, I go and throw myself at our Lord's feet and beg him to enlighten me about you." Nor were her requests in vain. She frequently referred to the other side of the conversation: God's words to her which came, not as locutions as far as one can tell, but in the enlightening of her mind. Phrases such as: "These points which the good God has inspired me to make to you," or "The reign of the Spirit of God which our Lord made known to me that I should take as my subject today," reflect her dependence on God's communications to her. Those communications could bear on the most practical points. "Our Lord made me understand that I must not tolerate abuses like this in our houses," she once remarked. The abuse was fancy needlework. But treating with God of curriculum, of the moment to give Sister X a push forward, or of the salvation of souls and his own glory were all one to Julie. She led a life that was totally consecrated, and no detail of it lay outside the scope of her prayer.

There was preparation for this kind of prayer, as there had been for meditation, but it was of a different kind. Instead of the careful listing of materials to provide food for thought, an activity which was more definite and limited, the

freer prayer needed a general disposing of the whole being that was far more searching and less tangible. When Julie spoke of preparation now she was not thinking in a time sequence, dispositions first and prayer second, as night points preceded the morning meditation, but rather of essential conditions without which mental prayer could not exist at all. She taught in terms of attitudes and virtues which both prepared the heart for prayer and were in turn strengthened by the prayer itself. There had to be the resolute turning away not only from sin, for she assumed that that was already done, but from imperfections: "The best way of making mental prayer is to go to it with an upright heart and an ardent desire to humble oneself in God's holy presence, to destroy all one's passions and imperfections and everything that is an obstacle to spiritual growth in order that the reign of God may be established in us ... Go to God with a humble heart, for this is essential for making our prayer well. Acknowledge your spiritual poverty and lack of merits and remember that neediness and poverty of themselves don't make saints; only humility makes us pleasing in God's sight." Faith too was essential. For lack of it, she thought, some people did not realize the warmth and fullness of God's invitation. They hesitated on the doorstep instead of coming in. But those who did come in with gratitude, even when their prayer was wearisome, were repaid by the fullness of God's love. Surrender was the only fitting response: "Let us bless him in darkness, let us bless him in light, let us surrender ourselves utterly into his divine hands." In the life of union with God which followed, the key virtues were obedience and simplicity. "An obedient soul finds union with God easy," Julie said. "In her prayer she tells him about the things she has to do, promising him earnestly that, with the help of his grace, she will practice the virtues of which he has given the example and especially the heroism and simplicity of his obedience . . . Oh yes, a sister who is perfectly obedient is truly a soul of prayer ... The simple person goes straight to God like a child to her father . . . It is easy for her to draw near to him for she is so direct in her prayer, and God on his side loves to talk with one who is as candid and simple as a child."

Julie realized, however, that such broad lines of preparation might not suit all, and to the sisters who wanted a more definite program in the stage of transition between meditation and prayer proper, she suggested four practices. The first step was spiritual reading, which was to be made regularly and with care so as to steep the mind and heart in the things of God. While being content with something less than the Benedictine *lectio divina*, she nevertheless first questioned a sister's reading when there was a weakness in prayer. "The one thing that is wanting," she noted on one occasion, "is sufficient union with God. What is lacking? What about your spiritual reading?" Books were not plentiful in her day, but it is clear from her writings that Julie had read the spiritual classics: St. Teresa and St. Francis de Sales in particular, and it was these which she recommended to the sisters. The second step was silence: "A religious who neglects silence brings only a distracted heart and a preoccupied mind to her prayer and, instead of deriving new strength from it, she only makes herself guilty before God by going to him with a heart taken up by trifles ... Intimate

conversation with God is easily stifled if you do not first put an end to exterior chatter; but if you love silence and keep it well, your heart will be a temple where God will dwell. He will make his will known to you there; He will receive your constant adoration and will converse familiarly with you.” In the third place, the right disposing of the soul would inevitably mean a war on faults. This for Julie was the proper field of Christian mortification and, when she linked mortification and prayer as she frequently did, it was to this kind of spiritual asceticism that she alluded: “Mortification is the sister of prayer. If you want to be souls of prayer, souls closely united to God, be mortified; that is, be continually watchful over yourselves, your eyes, your ears, and your tongue. Without this, there can be no union with our Lord. Without it we cannot meditate, for in the spiritual life mortification is the dough which the furnace of Holy Communion transforms into supernatural food.” The fourth preparatory practice was fidelity, which involved attentiveness to the ordinary graces of the day and to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. Those would most quickly bring a soul to prayer.

Once the prayer of intimacy with God had been tasted and loved, Julie urged the sisters to live constantly in it, for it was the key to their vocation and the source of their apostolic efficacy: “The only means of becoming a good Sister of Notre Dame is to let yourself be filled with the Spirit of God. This divine Spirit will come upon you only when you live your prayer, for it is then that he communicates himself to your soul. But you must keep him. How? He will willingly dwell with you if you live a supernatural life, one of uninterrupted prayer. Let us give ourselves then to this life of the spirit.” Again she wrote: “It is by the uninterrupted remembrance of the presence of God that you will learn the true spirit of the institute: and without that, in our vocation, nothing you do will be pleasing to God.” It is clear, however, that when she spoke of uninterrupted prayer she meant it as she herself had experienced it during her active life, a state of union with God which in no way prevented her from having a very busy day and which was not itself interrupted by the demands of exacting duties. Any sister who thought that uninterrupted prayer meant uninterrupted prayers was soon corrected. Julie went so far as to say that the type of prayer which best suited the spirit of Notre Dame was apostolic prayer, the union which made the soul a channel of grace for others. Prayer was therefore the secret of success in the apostolate as a whole and the inspiration of work in each sister.

It was precisely because of its apostolic commitments that the congregation needed a spirit of prayer. Julie returned to the idea frequently. “The spirit of the institute is a spirit of intimate converse with God ... The end for which we were founded demands souls of prayer, filled with the spirit of the good God. We must cultivate this spirit of prayer by asking God for it, then we shall understand the spirit of the institute. The care which must come before everything else is the care necessary for making our prayer well, for it is in our prayer that we drink deep of the fullness of God’s Spirit and this alone guarantees success in our work.” The difference between teaching as a career and teaching as an apostolate was that the second flowed from the life of prayer

and gave to secular efficiency a supernatural value. "If we are truly united to God," Julie said, "we shall be able to imprint in the hearts of the children a great horror of sin and a loving fear of God. But if we are not souls of prayer we shall only instruct. We shall gain the hearts of the children in appearance only ... We cannot give what we have not got and if we are not filled with the good God we cannot let our fullness overflow into the hearts of those who come to us ... Prayer is the one means by which we can do good to souls and it is during the holy time of union with our Lord that we learn to use the arms necessary for success in the great work of education."

The individual sister had to combine her prayer and her work, and then as now she found it difficult. Julie's own example was her best solution. The foundress saw no dichotomy between the two. She passed from the sacramental presence of God in chapel to his mystical presence in work without any modification of that union with the divine will that was the foundation of her prayer. It is true that the children of Namur knew that she was praying when she used to wait for the coach to leave on her journeys, so she evidently caught at what opportunities she could to turn directly to God during the day, but for the greater part of her time her love had to be expressed by work. Rather than put herself forward as an example she quoted St. Teresa, but what she said of the great Spanish mystic applied equally to herself: "Look at St. Teresa, sisters. She lived by love because she was always united to God in prayer, and yet she was not always prostrate before the Blessed Sacrament or on her knees at the foot of the crucifix in her cell. Oh no! She was a busy woman! But when she had to discuss business with men, she spoke sweetly in her heart to her divine spouse at the same time. It is a mistake to think that we cannot imitate her. She was not even a simple religious, but had all the exterior works and troubles connected with her foundations and yet she was given up to prayer. A Sister of Notre Dame must be absorbed in prayer too, despite the varied occupations of a very full day." St. Teresa's interior conversation while transacting exterior business was not some kind of spiritual ventriloquism; rather it was the divine union in the depths of her soul that made her more tangible work effective. "We cultivate the spirit of prayer without ceasing to fulfill the duties of our work," Julie said. "Don't be anxious when prayer is dry, that is the time to prove your love more than ever by work ... We can live 'one to one' with God even in a class of very lively children because the spirit of faith does not stop at creatures. It sees hidden in these little ones the image of God, the souls for which our Lord Jesus Christ gave his life. When a sister is teaching the children, her heart is naturally one with the Heart of Jesus, asking him to protect the image of the Father in these little souls. It is by a practice like this that we are always united to God."

The general impression given by her writings, therefore, indicates that Julie conceived prayer as the key force in a cycle which bore the soul to God and then, in him, poured it out in the service of others. There it met the difficulties which brought it back to renewed prayer and deeper union. The one disposition on which she insisted absolutely was openness to the action of the Holy Spirit

and, once she had led her sisters to this point, she was content to let them go forward each in her own way. For them, as for her, prayer would then have become the direct contact with God which gave even on earth a foretaste in faith of the union that they would enjoy in vision in heaven.