

DEVOTION TO ST. GERARD MAJELLA IN  
NEWFOUNDLAND: THE SAINT SYSTEM IN  
OPERATION AND TRANSITION

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DEVOTION TO ST. GERARD MAJELLA IN NEWFOUNDLAND:  
THE SAINT SYSTEM IN OPERATION AND TRANSITION

BY

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ABSTRACT

In Newfoundland this century there has been considerable devotion to St. Gerard Majellá, who has been best known and most vigorously promoted as "The Mothers' Saint." St. Gerard has been particularly important to many women during pregnancy and childbirth, but what has been asked and expected of him has varied according to the needs and circumstances of the individual, and the manner of dealing with the saint has been very much a personal affair. This study investigates why and how St. Gerard achieved such popularity on the island, how relationships with him have been conducted, and why this devotion, like many others, is now in decline. In doing so, it provides a record of the saint system in operation and transition in twentieth century Newfoundland.

There has frequently been a significant gap between official theory and private practice in devotion to saints. What has become accepted belief and behaviour at popular level has not always tallied with the official standpoint, nor has the official position always been made clear at parish level. To get an accurate picture of the practice, as opposed to the theory, of religion, it is necessary to take into account folk and individual beliefs and practices. Using information from popular devotional literature, and interviews with people involved



in and peripheral to devotion to St. Gerard Majella, this study demonstrates the lack of uniformity below the surface of a standard feature of Roman Catholicism. It shows the complex interrelationship of official, folk, and individual religion, and the difficulties faced by laity, religious, and observers alike in distinguishing between them.

In addition to tracing a significant episode in the socio-religious history of Newfoundland, and examining one manifestation of a centuries' old devotional tradition, it is hoped that this account of devotion to St. Gerard Majella will contribute to the recognition of folk religion as an important, extensive, and inevitable element of religion per se.

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## INTRODUCTION

"The patron saint was an extra companion through life who healed hurts, soothed distress, and in extremity could make miracles."<sup>1</sup> Written of fourteenth century Europe, there are many Newfoundlanders for whom this could still hold true.

This study shows how Catholics have conducted relationships with a holy figure; St. Gerard Majella, and what part this devotion has played in their lives. It explores the complex interrelationship of official, folk, and individual religion, and provides a record of the saint system in operation and transition in twentieth century Newfoundland.

I first became aware of devotion to St. Gerard Majella when I was studying Folklore in Newfoundland. It seemed to me that a disproportionately high number of Newfoundlander's were named Gerard, and this impression was confirmed by others. A St. John's judge, for example, claimed that "every other young fellow hauled up" was a Gerard, while a St. Alban's woman declared that "practically every second chap in the community" was called

<sup>1</sup> Barbara W. Tuchmann, A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 33.



that. Although a number of Gerards thought their name was "probably traditional" or "just really popular round here," I was told by one that his mother was devoted to St. Gerard Majella and had named all her sons after the saint in some way. I talked to this lady about her devotion, and my interest grew from that.

Gerard Majella was born in Muro, Italy, on April 6, 1726, and was such a frail baby that it was thought necessary to baptise him the same day.<sup>2</sup> Gerard was a remarkably pious child and an exemplary adolescent, but although he twice applied for admission to the Capuchin order, he was refused on account of his delicate health. The Redemptorists were finally persuaded to accept him in 1749, and he made his profession as a Redemptorist brother in 1752. During his six years with the Redemptorists his piety, humility and obedience were exceptional, he persuaded many to make an honest confession, he assisted those wishing to enter a religious vocation, and on at least two occasions he helped women having difficulty with childbirth. Gerard died in 1755, was beatified in 1893, and was finally canonised on December 11, 1904.

<sup>2</sup> St. Gerard's biographical details are taken from Saint Gerard by Ronald G. Delaney, C.Ss.R., (Montreal: The League of St. Gerard, 1956) and The Mothers' Saint by Daniel Ehman, C.Ss.R., (Toronto: The League of St. Gerard, 1951).

Particular events during St. Gerard's lifetime and after his death caused him to be regarded as especially efficacious in certain spheres. His ability to persuade people to make a full confession resulted in the title "Patron of a Good Confession," and his initial difficulties in being accepted into the religious life and his help to others in this respect caused him to be regarded as "Patron of a Religious Vocation." In addition, the stories of his assistance to women in childbirth before and after his death led to his title "Patron of Expectant Mothers." Although a seemingly incongruous role for a sickly male virgin who died young, it is as "The Mothers' Saint" that Gerard Majella has been best known and most vigorously promoted, and it is primarily in this role that he gained a large and enthusiastic following in Newfoundland.

From the start of my investigation, I realised that devotion to St. Gerard in Newfoundland showed the mixture of official and folk religion and lack of uniformity frequently mentioned with disapproval by medieval historians and theologians commenting on the saint system in Europe prior to the Reformation. While the devotion was obviously not a "survival," it was part of a centuries old devotional tradition inclined towards "folk interpretation and expression."<sup>3</sup> However, in

<sup>3</sup> Don Yoder, "Toward a Definition of Folk Religion,"

the face of altering conditions on the island and changes within the Roman Catholic Church itself, this devotional tradition was losing its customary place in Newfoundland society.

Devotion to St. Gerard Majella has played a significant part in the socio-religious history of Newfoundland. As "The Mothers' Saint" Gerard has been important to many women during pregnancy--a "delicate" condition, in practical, social, and theological terms--and this predominantly female devotion has met a variety of personal and communal needs in the province. In addition to its intrinsic interest, I considered that the study of this devotion would be important in providing a record of the saint system in operation and transition in the twentieth century.

Much of what has been written of the saint system in the past has either been by Catholic apologists, or by theologians and historians complaining of the "abuses" of it at popular level.<sup>4</sup> As a result, we know comparatively little of how the saint system has operated in the lives of "ordinary" Catholics. The reason "unofficial" behaviour has been such a constant feature of

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<sup>3</sup> (cont) Western Folklore, 33, No. 1 (Jan. 1974), 13.

<sup>4</sup> A notable exception is the excellent work which has been done in Spain by William A. Christian, Jr. and Susan Tax Freeman.

nonliturgical piety, and the range of beliefs and practices associated with this type of devotion, have received comparatively little attention. This is because religion has generally been studied in terms of what people should do and think; whatever has not conformed to that ideal has either been condemned, or, more often, simply ignored. I felt that there was a need for a realistic account of the workings of the saint system, and an accurate assessment of the nature and extent of folk religious ideas and behaviour in nonliturgical piety. Because devotion to St. Gerard Majella in Newfoundland was a twentieth century phenomenon, I hoped it would be possible to trace its growth as a devotional vogue which swept the island, and because of its popularity I hoped it would be possible to find people willing to reveal how it was conducted and what part it played in their lives.

To study devotion to a saint it is necessary to explore the relationship between official, folk, and individual religion, and to be aware of the practice as well as the theory of religion. When scholars talk of religion they tend to mean official religion--usually perceived in terms of theology and ritual--which is just one aspect of most people's religious experience. Believers live according to their own perceptions of the religious tradition to which they adhere, and if their beliefs and practices do not always accord with the official

view they remain religious nevertheless; their faith does not become any less sincere or worthy of research. However, as Susan Tax Freeman points out, "Because we have allowed the Church to press on our analyses its own definitions of proper beliefs, parts of the belief system which have not received official sanction are treated as something less than religious. That the personal system of faith may elevate the unsanctioned objects of belief to at least the same level as the sanctioned ones and draw them coherently together has either been ignored or is obliterated by the definitions of religion in use."<sup>5</sup>

As an undergraduate specialising in Religious Studies at an English university, I was aware that the academic study of religion tended not to take into account the way ordinary believers interpreted and acted upon their particular brand of religion.<sup>6</sup> Christianity was represented by theological studies which were far removed from the beliefs and practices of millions of people

<sup>5</sup> Susan Tax Freeman, "Faith and Fashion in Spanish Religion: Notes on the Observation of Observance," Peasant Studies, 7, No. 2 (Spring 1978), 121.

<sup>6</sup> Yoder, p. 7, makes a similar point: "The teaching of religious studies in the United States has concentrated largely on the theological and institutional level, which either neglects folk practices and folk interpretations of religion as unimportant or it neglects them because the discipline has too rigid a framework to include such phenomena."

at parish level. After studying the more formal side of religion, I wished to investigate how people actually lived their religion and how beliefs affected outlook and behaviour in everyday life.

The practice as opposed to the theory of religion is the realm of folk religion, which is best defined as "the totality of all those views and practices of religion that exist among the people apart from and alongside the strictly theological and liturgical forms of the official religion."<sup>7</sup>

The study of folk religion was last century closely linked with the study of folklore itself. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, "evolution, from being a theory, had become an atmosphere."<sup>8</sup> In 1870 Sir John Lubbock, in The Origin of Civilization and the Primitive Condition of Man, applied the theory of unilinear evolution to religion, and in 1871 Edward Tylor, in Primitive Culture, posited the notion of "survivals." Put simply, while the study of contemporary "savages" could throw light on "stone age religion," the beliefs and customs of "the folk" could be seen as "survivals" of

<sup>7</sup> Yoder, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Eric J. Sharpe, Comparative Religion: A History (London: Duckworth, 1975), p. 89.

a previous level of civilisation. (The notion of the survival of older forms of religion was not entirely new. Among Protestants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for example, "Popery was portrayed as the great repository of 'ethnic superstitions,' and most Catholic rites were regarded as thinly concealed mutations of earlier pagan ceremonies.")<sup>9</sup> Very much in the spirit of the age, Lord Gomme defined folklore as the "scientific study of the survivals of archaic beliefs, customs, and traditions in modern times."<sup>10</sup> As Sharpe puts it, "folklore had come to serve as a kind of home missions department of anthropology."<sup>11</sup> Much of what we would now regard as folk religion therefore received "living fossil" status, and was of interest primarily for what it showed of some earlier stage of man's religious development.

The present folkloric concept of folk religion is based more on the notion of the German "religiöse Volkskunde," which can be translated "the religious dimension of folk culture or the folk-cultural dimension of

<sup>9</sup> Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 74.

<sup>10</sup> Alfred Nutt, "Recent Archaeological Research, No. II, Folk-Lore," Archaeological Review, III (1889), 74.

<sup>11</sup> Sharpe, p. 50.

religion."<sup>12</sup> This represents a far deeper understanding of folk religion and the nature of religion itself.

While the origins of many folk beliefs and customs are fascinating, folk religion is now recognised as a dynamic element in contemporary religious life.

Difficulties over definition and identification have in the past often inhibited the study of folk religion. Although Yoder has now provided an excellent working definition of folk religion, a number of the long-standing problems of studying it remain. I suspect that the vastness of the field embraced by Yoder's definition, and the complexity of the task of identification may still be widely underestimated. It can at times be very hard to judge whether some aspect of religious belief or practice is official, folk, or simply idiosyncratic; as I will demonstrate, the boundaries between official, folk, and individual religion can be virtually indistinguishable. Frequently folk ideas and behaviour are so much part of a religious tradition that participants and observers alike consider them normative.

As Gomme remarked of comparing church custom and folklore: "we cannot help observing that it is oftentimes difficult to define where the one begins and the other leaves off."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Yoder, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> George Lawrence Gomme, ed., The Gentleman's



In addition, much folk religious behaviour takes place outside a ritual setting and is not easily observable. Religion can be a very personal matter, and it is therefore frequently necessary to consult those involved in religious activity to ascertain what is actually happening. Devotion to a saint is such a case. It is an official feature of Roman Catholicism, but one with a history of and tendency towards folk religious beliefs and practices. Since the relationship between an individual and a holy figure is essentially a personal affair, the minutiae of devotion and the part it plays in the lives of individuals can only be discovered through consultation with devotees.

In gathering information concerning devotion to St. Gerard Majella in Newfoundland, the methodological basis of my research was phenomenology of religion, which is well suited to the study of folk and individual beliefs and practices. Although what follows may be obvious to the trained folklorist, it is worth noting the principles under which I operated, as they bear upon my relationship with my informants and my treatment of their testimonies. Phenomenology of religion begins by "accepting as proper objects of study all phenomena that are professed to be religious."<sup>14</sup> As it "attempts

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<sup>13</sup> (cont). Magazine Library: Manners and Customs (Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1883), p. vii.

<sup>14</sup> C.J. Bleeker, "Comparing the Religio-Historical and the Theological Method," Númen, 18 (1971), 16.

to describe religious behaviour rather than explain it,"<sup>15</sup> debate as to the "existence" or "reality" of the focus of devotion is futile, and inappropriate to a study such as this: "God is real for Christians whether or not he exists."<sup>16</sup> In this thesis neither the validity of the saint system nor the effectiveness of St. Gerard can be proved or disproved. The personal experience narratives of devotees provide evidence which must have the status of "religious fact." This is the only way to avoid subjecting it to any prejudice, conscious or unconscious, that one may harbour. The researcher in religion "is parasitic upon the Expresser, obviously, his advantage only is that he can survey a broad range of religious facts, and this is not the primary aim of, and often is not within the competence of, the Expresser."<sup>17</sup>

The information for this study has come primarily from interviews conducted in 1978 in St. John's, St. Mary's Bay, Placentia Bay, Bay D'Espoir, the Port au Port Peninsula, and Stephenville. (See Fig. 1) I also

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Dabney Bettis, ed., Phenomenology of Religion (New York & Evanston: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Ninian Smart, The Science of Religion and the Sociology of Knowledge (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 54.

<sup>17</sup> Ninian Smart, The Phenomenon of Religion (New York: Herder and Herder, 1973), p. 33.

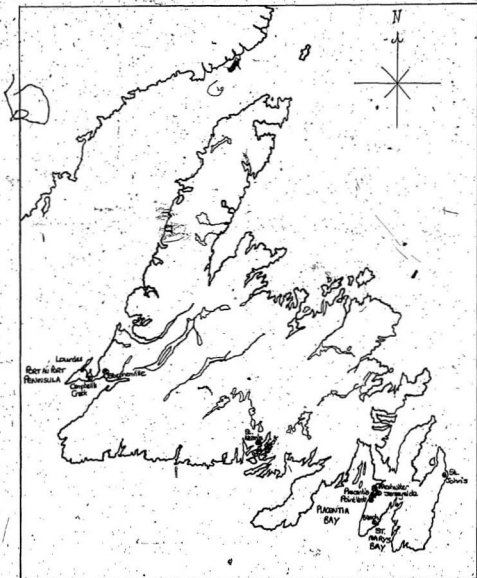


Fig. 1. Map of Newfoundland showing places where fieldwork was conducted.

gained much useful information on the Bay de Verde area from a priest who had worked there for many years, and corresponded with Redemptorists in Toronto, Beaupré, and Ligouri, Missouri. Informants included mothers, husbands, single women and men, priests, Redemptorists and nurses. While I wanted a reasonable cross-section of views and experiences of devotion to St. Gerard, I contrived to get a number of "core" informants, women similar in background, age, number of children, and suchlike, so that valid comparisons could be made. Generally when I met ladies with devotion to St. Gerard, not only did they give me their testimonies, but they recommended friends or relatives as potential informants; one recommendation almost invariably led to another. Three ladies were made known to me by priests, and one by a midwife, from experience of their great devotion to the saint. A simple but effective way of finding informants was to ask for introductions to the mothers of Gerards or Majellas I met on field trips, and some useful information was gathered in casual conversation when I explained why I was in an area.

It was my practice to telephone someone whom I had been told might help me, to explain what I was trying to find out, and to arrange a meeting. No-one ever refused to see me. I visited the majority of my informants once, the interview usually lasting an hour or so, according to circumstances. In six cases, however,

two or more visits were made. I had quite expected some reticence, since I was asking about deeply personal matters, but people were remarkably candid and forthcoming. Ladies who had devotion to St. Gerard generally seemed pleased to have the opportunity to share their experiences with a sympathetic listener. Casual conversations aside, interviews with twenty-seven people were recorded on tape, and notes were made of interviews with thirteen people.<sup>18</sup> I received three letters and a couple of telephone calls as a result of a letter published in the Catholic Monitor in which I asked for information regarding devotion to St. Gerard Majella. The warmth and enthusiasm with which informants devoted to the saint spoke of him convinced me that devotion to St. Gerard Majella was part of Newfoundland's religious history which should not be left unrecorded.

In addition to interviews, conversations, and letters, much useful information on the devotion was gained from popular devotional literature. Because this type of literature is not generally taken seriously by scholars, its influence at popular level tends to be underestimated.

<sup>18</sup> Copies of these tapes have been deposited in MUNFLA, where they bear the numbers 78-196/C3491 - C3505 inclusive, C5850, and C5851; when a tape is quoted, its MUNFLA number will be given. Material from field notes and correspondence will be cited according to date.

Popular devotional literature shows how religion has been presented to the masses, and although it emerges from "official" sources, its concern with popularising its message and contents seems on occasion to override strictly theological considerations.

Three magazines--Eikon (1928-1942), Mother of Perpetual Help (1942-1946), and Madonna (1947-1967)--have been particularly enlightening in relation to this study, for not only are past trends and emphases in devotion to St. Gerard demonstrated, the letters from Newfoundland readers provide contemporary evidence and give some indication of the geographic spread of devotion in the province. (See Fig. 2 and Appendix A) The personal experience narratives which appear in the magazines are treated in this study as "religious facts," and the information gained from devotional literature contributes significantly to our knowledge of the devotion.

This study of devotion to St. Gerard Majella in Newfoundland is to a considerable extent descriptive, for its purpose is to concentrate on the human element in religion which has so frequently been neglected. This is not an account of how devotion to a saint should be conducted; it is a record of how people have conducted relationships with a holy figure and what part this devotion has played in their lives. It gives equal

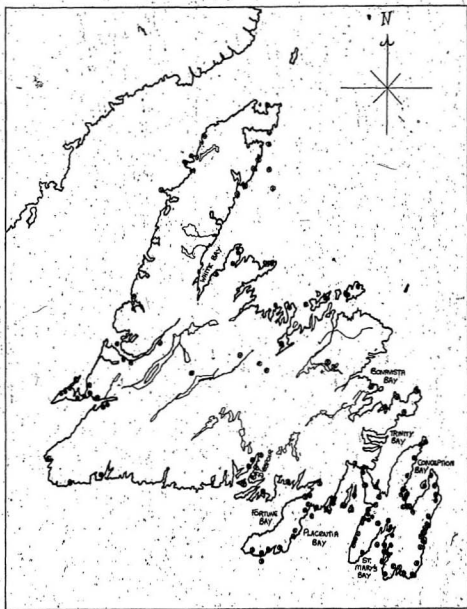


Fig. 2. Map of Newfoundland showing places from which Madonna magazine received correspondence.

weight to official, folk, and individual beliefs and practices, and demonstrates how these are intermingled in people's religious experience. It shows what has been happening in nonliturgical piety this century, how this relates to the historical tradition of popular religion, and what changes this type of devotion is now undergoing.

Both as a significant episode in the socio-religious history of Newfoundland, and as a record of the saint system in operation and transition, it is hoped that this study of devotion to St. Gerard Majella will contribute to the recognition of folk religion as an important element of religion per se.



CHAPTER IOFFICIAL, FOLK, AND INDIVIDUAL RELIGION: THE DYNAMICSOF DEVOTION

To understand human history and human life it is necessary to understand religion,<sup>1</sup> claims Ninian Smart. It is tempting to suggest the corollary that to understand religion it is necessary to understand the relationship between official, folk, and individual beliefs and practices. In religion, as in so many areas of human enterprise, theory and practice do not necessarily coincide, nor do people behave in exactly the same way. It is no more realistic to believe that accounts of religious doctrine reveal how people actually behave, and that all Moslems and Jews act the same way, than to believe that there are no fouls or faults in sports because they are against the rules, and that all footballers and golfers are similar because they play the same game. To study the practice as opposed to the theory of religion, folk ideas and behaviour must be taken into account, and the human element in religion recognised.

Religion can be viewed in terms of three basic components--the official, the folk, and the individual.

<sup>1</sup> Ninian Smart, The Religious Experience of Man-kind (Glasgow: Fount Paperbacks, 1977), p. 11.

The official is concerned primarily with theology and ritual, and is the aspect of religion which receives most scholarly attention. The folk can be described as "the totality of all those views and practices of religion that exist among the people apart from and alongside the strictly theological and liturgical forms of the official religion,"<sup>2</sup> a vast but comparatively neglected field. The individual component is basically each person's understanding of religion and the part it plays in his or her life.

These components are rarely analysed, or indeed recognised, in relation to each other. Believers and observers have tended to be unaware of the extent to which these components are interrelated, and this has led to inaccurate or misleading appraisals of religious phenomena. In order to comprehend religion in its broadest sense it is necessary to appreciate how official, folk, and individual ideas and behaviour interact with each other.

There is a carefully cultivated "solidity" about official religion, but it is not a well-defined, static entity. Theological notions can be developed, modified,

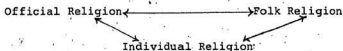
<sup>2</sup> Yoder, p. 14.

or abandoned. Previously condoned ideas or practices can be actively opposed, or just quietly dropped. However, a belief can continue to be held and acted upon, regardless of the fact that it is no longer officially approved. It slips from official to folk religion. Conversely, folk religious beliefs and practices can gain approval and become official. The process works both ways. Folk religion thus "exists in creative tension with official religion and involves a body of belief and practice that overlaps with that of official religion in both directions--the permitted forms overlapping inward into official religion, the unpermitted or unsanctioned forms remaining outside the strict edge of official religion."<sup>3</sup>

At the individual level, religion is a mixture of a received religious tradition, and a personal belief system. In talking of the received tradition, I am making the point that in many cases what the individual learns of religion does not come from purely orthodox sources. Relatives, contemporaries and others make their mark by example and by passing on their interpretations of religious matters, and it can be quite difficult for the individual to know what actually comprises official religion.

<sup>3</sup> Yoder, Introduction, Western Folklore, 33, No. 1 (Jan. 1974), 1.

The personal belief system evolves from the received tradition, but it is affected by the individual's outlook, experience, and suchlike. Even if a number of people were to receive a similar tradition, there would still be scope for individual interpretations of it, "for each person's religion has to do with himself and his own autonomous needs."<sup>4</sup> On occasion the ideas of an individual, such as St. Augustine or Aquinas in the Christian tradition, can radically affect official religion; a personal belief or practice could likewise pass into folk religion. In diagrammatic form the relationship between official, folk, and individual religion can be expressed thus:



In drawing attention to the relationship between official and folk religion, and the lack of standardisation in people's received traditions and personal belief systems, I wish to make the point that there is considerable scope for variety and variation in religion.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Mary Douglas, Natural Symbols (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> Neither this variety, nor the reasons why it arises, are confined to religion. See Paul S. Smith, "Communication and Performance: A Model of the Development of Variant Forms of Cultural Traditions," in Language, Culture and Tradition, ed. A.E. Green and

Indeed, it seems almost inevitable. As Gizelis points out, "A religious system is first and above all a cognitive system. --Granted that everyone has his own cognitive system, it would indeed be a great mistake to state that an entire community holds one or another belief."<sup>6</sup> However, "the Church's own preferences, along with our time-worn emphasis on public ritual"<sup>7</sup> have tended to lead to concentration or homogeneity in religion and minimisation of diversity. The study of one manifestation of the saint system, devotion to St. Gerard Majella in Newfoundland, will demonstrate the lack of uniformity below the surface of a standard feature of Roman Catholicism. It will also show the complex interrelationship of official, folk, and individual beliefs and practices, and the difficulties faced by participants and observers in distinguishing between them.

In the context of this study, official religion is embodied by the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>8</sup> At every level in the Church there is scope for diversity. The Church "provides symbols and words that its members utilize

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<sup>5</sup> (cont) J.D.S. Widdowson (Sheffield: The Institute of Dialect and Folklife Studies and The Centre for English Folk Cultural Tradition and Language, 1981), pp. 16-32.

<sup>6</sup> Gregory Gizelis, "The Function of the Vision in Greek-American Culture," Western Folklore, 33, No. 1 (Jan. 1974), 65.

<sup>7</sup> Freeman, p. 120.

<sup>8</sup> "The Church" throughout this study refers to the Roman Catholic Church.

and interpret in accordance with the cultural and spiritual climate of the group to which they belong."<sup>9</sup>

Nuns, priests, and other Church personnel are looked to as figures of authority, but for these as for everybody else "rationalistic attitudes, orthodox religious opinions, and folk-religious reactions can co-exist in the same person."<sup>10</sup>

Historically, "the unity of the Church has been primarily in its worship rather than in its belief"; "strong emphasis has been placed on conformity in ritual and worship, or at least on conformity in official liturgy with some room for diversity in nonliturgical piety."<sup>11</sup> It is this diversity which has frequently been neglected, and which provides great potential for folk religious research. In the Roman Catholic tradition, devotion to saints has for the most part been conducted outside a ritual setting. It is not folk religious behaviour per se, but because of the nature of nonliturgical piety there has always been abundant opportunity for "folk interpretation and expression of religion."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Gizelli's, p. 67.

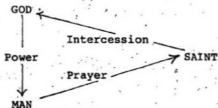
<sup>10</sup> Yoder, p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> James Hitchcock, The Recovery of the Sacred (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), p. 121.

<sup>12</sup> Yoder, p. 13.

To a great extent, devotion to saints has traditionally been based on "the belief that the holy men and women of the past had not merely exemplified an ideal code of moral conduct, but could still employ supernatural powers to relieve the adversities of their followers upon earth."<sup>13</sup> The saint has been seen as the ideal intermediary between God and man, being considered both physically and spiritually nearer to Him than the individual. As one of my informants said, "I mean, the saints are closer to God than we are--we're supposed to believe that, aren't we?"<sup>14</sup>

In diagrammatic form the role of the saint might be presented as follows:



Although it is God who is powerful, the power seen to come through the intercession of the saint is taken as proof of the saint's efficacy as mediator. The saint is turned to in preference to the source of power itself.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas, p. 30.

<sup>14</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C5851.

Countless worshippers have been able to develop with saints close relationships of a type deemed largely unthinkable with the Almighty. As Christian comments, "It is clearly understood that the saints and Mary are not the same as God, but they are the ones whose attention is cultivated. They are the ones to whom the various secular techniques of exchange and intimacy are applied."<sup>15</sup>

Devotion to the saints has been recognised as an integral part of medieval society, but its importance is generally considered to have faded with the Reformation. However, it should be remembered that for those who remained within the Roman Catholic Church, the basics of popular devotion did not change. Between believers and saints there have been relationships whose premises and mechanics have remained largely unchanged since before the Middle Ages. While we are not dealing in Newfoundland with "survivals" of medieval Christianity, devotion to a saint is part of the same tradition, based upon a similar world view, governed by the same internal logic.

The Church has always found it very difficult to control

<sup>15</sup> William A. Christian, Jr., Person and God in a Spanish Valley (New York and London: Seminar Press, 1972), p. 174.



the ways in which people conduct their relationships with saints, and their expectations of them. Indeed, the Church's own stance in relation to devotion to saints has itself been somewhat ambiguous at times. Traditionally the Church "stressed that the saints were only intercessors whose entreaties might go unheeded, but it readily countenanced the innumerable prayers offered to them on more optimistic assumptions."<sup>16</sup>

Since the Second Vatican Council (usually referred to as Vatican II), popular devotion to saints has been the subject of considerable critical appraisal and aspects of it have come under varying degrees of attack. Nevertheless, as Susan Tax Freeman points out, "The transactional field in which humans deal with holy figures is . . . enormously wider than anything offered by the Church per se; the depth in which divine personalities figure in many human lives is far greater than the Church might estimate and the number of holy people in intimate relation to humans probably far greater than the Church would encourage."<sup>17</sup>

The range of potential foci for the believer's devotion is immense. He might be attracted to a particular

<sup>16</sup> Thomas, p. 28.

<sup>17</sup> Freeman, pp. 108-109.

become accepted folk religious practice.<sup>18</sup> However, for the deceased to be officially recognised as a saint, three main stages would have to be gone through.<sup>19</sup>

Firstly, the clergy of the area would have to make a statement concerning the popular regard for the deceased, and this would be followed by a prohibition of public veneration. Evidence would then be sent to the Vatican for consideration and if this was favourably received the deceased would be awarded the title "Venerable." After a Papal commission had collected and tested further evidence of the deceased's life and miracles, the next stage would be beatification, when the person could be described as "Blessed." Only then could the "beatus" officially form the subject of a limited public cult. Much deliberation and an average of two further miracles would then generally be required before canonisation itself could take place. At this point the saint would be entitled to a full public cult and the devotion of those who had been praying to him all along would

<sup>18</sup> In the course of my fieldwork I discovered that a number of people in the St. Alban's area pray to the late Father Joseph Hayes, a former parish priest. He is believed by them to be an "unrecognised" saint, and I was assured of his efficacy as an intercessor.

<sup>19</sup> For a full exposition of beatification and canonisation, see W.H. Hutton, "Beatification" and "Canonisation," *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, M.A., D.D. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951).

advocation of the Virgin Mary (e.g. Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Our Lady of Lourdes, and so on), to St. Anne, to St. Joseph or to the Holy Infant of Prague. Beyond the Holy Family there are vast numbers of saints to choose from. The individual might be influenced in his choice by family or community, occupation or marital status. He might direct his devotion to one particular favourite, or he might prefer "specialists," saints who are considered especially efficacious in a particular sphere. (The better known specialists include St. Christopher for travellers, St. Jude for hopeless cases, and St. Anthony for items which have been lost.) The form, intensity and duration of a devotion would be a matter of personal choice, and at various points in life one might have devotion to different saints, or to the same saints in differing degrees of importance. There are thus innumerable variables and considerable autonomy within devotion to saints.

The element of folk selection and participation in the creation of saints should not be overlooked. An individual might pray to a deceased person not officially recognised as a saint. If the supplicant feels that he achieves success through the intercession of the deceased he might encourage family and friends to pray also, and if sufficient numbers are convinced of the deceased's efficacy as intercessor that devotion could

at last be vindicated.

In cases where a person's canonisation is long delayed, or indeed never comes about, those devoted to him are likely to continue their devotion regardless. There was, for example, a lapse of one hundred and forty-nine years between Gerard Majella's death and his canonisation. While the Redemptorists doubtless had a vested interest in encouraging devotion to one of their brothers, much of Gerard's popularity must have been due to the dissemination of memorates, legends, and the like concerning his powers before and after death. There is thus a considerable degree of interaction between personal, folk, and official religion in the creation of a saint, the folk element being an implicit part of the official process.

Official, folk, and individual components interact to produce what, for each person, constitutes religion. To understand religion in its broadest sense it is therefore necessary to take into account not just theology and ritual, but the perceptions, beliefs, and behaviour of those involved in religious activity. Variety and variation are natural features of religion, and are particularly obvious in nonliturgical piety, for at every level in the saint system folk and official ideas and practices intermingle, and the individual enjoys a considerable degree of autonomy.

To give a realistic account of devotion to a saint, "instead of looking for the extent to which the members of society learn the same things and behave in the same way, it may be more profitable to pursue the possible variations of custom and behavior which a society can manifest."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> John Szwed, Private Cultures and Public Imagery: Interpersonal Relations in a Newfoundland Peasant Society (St. John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research, MUN, 1966), p. 6.

CHAPTER IIPROPAGANDA AND PIETY: THE SPREAD OF DEVOTION TOST. GERARD MAJELLA IN NEWFOUNDLAND

There is a considerable degree of personal choice in devotion to saints, and vast numbers of saints to choose from. For every holy figure who gains widespread popularity, hundreds are rejected or ignored. In order to understand how and why one particular saint becomes popular in a specific situation, it is necessary to examine the devotion "in situ," for religion both affects and is affected by the context in which it is conducted.

Devotion to a holy figure should be viewed in relation to social and environmental factors, external influences, and the means by which knowledge of the saint is spread. These may not in themselves explain a saint's popularity, but they contribute to the perceived appropriateness and popular appeal of a devotion. The establishment and continuance of the devotion depend largely upon personal experiences of the saint and the reputed efficacy of the holy figure in that situation. Only if he is considered successful will his following grow.

For much of this century many Newfoundland outports have been rather isolated. This is not to say that outport life was carried out in a cultural vacuum, for

links with the outside world were provided by sea routes, the mail service, and, from the late 1930s, the radio.<sup>1</sup> However, as many outports lacked electricity and roads until the 1960s (and later), they were often physically remote, and bad weather could cut a community off completely. There was considerable vulnerability in the face of illness and the elements, and a physically harsh environment. As one woman said, "It was the roughest kind of life."<sup>2</sup>

When devotion to St. Gerard Majella was introduced into Newfoundland around the turn of this century, 34.4% of the population was Roman Catholic.<sup>3</sup> While Catholics in St. John's, Placentia, and larger communities had long enjoyed the ministrations of clergy, numerous outports had for years lacked a resident priest and relied upon visiting clergy and missions for contact with official religion. Nonliturgical piety was well developed, and relationships with holy figures were very important.

From descriptions of outport life before the advent

<sup>1</sup> See Michael Taft, "The Itinerant Movie-Man and His Impact on the Folk Culture of the Outports of Newfoundland," Culture and Tradition, 1 (1976), 107-119.

<sup>2</sup> MUNFLA, tape, 78-196/C3501.

<sup>3</sup> Province of Newfoundland--Statistical Background (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Department of Trade and Commerce, 1949).

of electricity, improved communications, and medical facilities, one gets an impression of the integration of religion in virtually every aspect of life. A Freshwater man claimed that, "out around the bay," "Your life was built around the Church . . . Now, you'd be out in the fields or down gutting fish or something, and once the bell'd ring you'd stop and say the Angelus, see. And then at night, you know, the bell'd ring at nine o'clock and you'd say the what do you call it, the Profundus. You'd all pray, everyone would pray."<sup>4</sup> There was perhaps a certain amount of pressure towards religious conformity in a community where people's business was not altogether their own. It was interesting that after the gentleman had insisted "You'd all pray, everyone would pray," he added "You mightn't Believe it, but you'd pray it."<sup>5</sup>

Religion was learned not simply at church, but at school, in the home, and in daily life. Tales of divine intervention were accepted and recounted as a matter of course. Stories of saints and devotional literature could be entertaining as well as didactic in an environment where leisure activities might be limited. Talking of her community before the road was opened and electricity was laid on, a woman from Branch said, "'Twas

<sup>4</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3497.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



only religion then, and your day's work. There was no television and there was no cars coming. You done your day's work and then there was your religion, and the rosary, and your religious books. You know, it would be only just religious books coming into the house. It was a different type of life then altogether."<sup>6</sup>

While one has to take into account the possibility of nostalgia for a way of life that is generally thought to have passed, I believe that such comments do reflect the important position of religion--in its broadest sense--in many Newfoundlanders' lives.

The priest was a figure of considerable importance in Roman Catholic circles. It was, Thomas claims, "inevitable that the priests, set apart from the rest of the community by their celibacy and ritual consecration, should have derived an extra cachet from their position as mediators between man and God."<sup>7</sup> Priestly influence extended beyond the church itself into education and many other spheres. Taft, for instance, reports "a case of local censorship in which a priest ordered the movie-man to blur the image during a child-birth scene in a film called 'The Interns.'"<sup>8</sup> One woman said she

<sup>6</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C5851.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas, p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> Taft, p. 114.

would almost have laid her head on the block for Father Hayes, a former parish priest in St. Alban's: "I was that much scared of him, you see."<sup>9</sup> This woman had been told by another cleric that whenever anyone did something for a priest they gained three hundred days' indulgence. This sort of belief naturally served to strengthen the special status of the priest.

Large families have tended to be the norm in Newfoundland. Murray points out that "A dozen children or more per family was not uncommon in the early part of the century,"<sup>10</sup> and in 1949 it was claimed that "Newfoundland's birth rate is one of the highest among the white peoples of the world."<sup>11</sup> A midwife who started practice in St. Alban's as late as 1959 told me: "Sometimes I'd get three a night. Yes, a lot of people used to have babies then, my dear, you know, big families and everything. And there was no phones or anything, and knock, knocking at the door all night long, would I come . . . And I'd get out and walk right up on them hills, all over there, and deliver babies."<sup>12</sup> (Indicative of the

<sup>9</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3502.

<sup>10</sup> Hilda Chaulk Murray, More than 50%: Woman's Life in a Newfoundland Outport, 1900-1950 (St. John's: Breakwater Books, 1979), p. 93.

<sup>11</sup> Province of Newfoundland--Statistical Background, p. 16..

<sup>12</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3502.

pervasiveness of religion was this woman's remark that, as she went to perform her first delivery after qualifying, "I said to me husband, 'Say some prayers,' I said, 'Go to the church and light some candles, 'cause I don't know if I'm going to do this job or not.'"<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the general risks of accident and illness, women thus faced repeated health problems, and there was frequently no qualified help to turn to. A priest commented, "Until recently, most areas of Newfoundland were without any real medical assistance at all. For years and years and years we had areas where there was no way of getting medical help, not only in childbirth but in other needs as well."<sup>14</sup> A St. Alban's woman recalled that, in the past, "We had no doctors round here, so we only had our faith to rely on."<sup>15</sup>

Because of the large families, "most women were more or less regularly occupied with problems of pregnancy, childbirth and infant care."<sup>16</sup> They generally tended to lack mobility, being for the most part tied to the home and unable to participate in the fishing, hunting,

<sup>13</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3502.

<sup>14</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3503.

<sup>15</sup> Fieldnotes, May 4, 1978.

<sup>16</sup> Murray, p. 80.

sealing, or lumbering activities which might take men away from their communities according to the season. However, although it was in many respects a male-dominated society, in Roman Catholic families the woman tended to be the "spiritual" head, developing relationships with holy figures to a greater degree than men, and taking responsibility for the spiritual well-being of the family.

Devotion to saints was an important feature of many people's received tradition and personal belief system. In town and outport alike, devotion to saints was encouraged by priests, nuns, teachers and missions. Statues to numerous saints appeared in Catholic churches, while pictures, statues, and medals of saints could be found in Catholic homes throughout the island. As a young Placentia man said of devotion among his parents' generation, "In those days, the saints were everything."<sup>17</sup> Although human resources were frequently inadequate, saints were considered able to deal with any eventuality. A saint whose efficacy was well attested would readily be added to the individual's pantheon. Redfield's comments on the cult of the santos in Yucatan could be applied to innumerable Newfoundlanders' devotion to saints: "It flourishes in a situation where a need is felt for supernatural aid in the course of

<sup>17</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C5850.

daily existence and where the common experiences of all members of the community reaffirm the efficacy of such aid and the rightness of seeking it.<sup>18</sup>

While social, environmental, and religious conditions in Newfoundland might provide a ready clientele for a saint whose special area of interest was pregnancy, there were already holy figures for whom such expertise was claimed, most notably St. Anne, the Virgin, and St. Anthony. How, then, did the Italian newcomer, St. Gerard Majella, gain popularity in Newfoundland? The spread of devotion to St. Gerard on the island involved an interesting combination of official propagandism, folk transmission and personal recommendation.

Gerard Majella had been a Redemptorist Brother. The Redemptorists, as they are most commonly known, are members of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (Congregatio Sanctissimi Redemptoris), an order founded in Italy by St. Alphonsus Ligouri in 1732. Their main activity has traditionally been the preaching of missions for "the powerful renewing of the Christian spirit among the faithful who are already members of the Church."<sup>19</sup> Canadian Redemptorist houses were

<sup>18</sup> Robert Redfield, *The Folk Culture of Yucatan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 267.

<sup>19</sup> "Redemptorists and Parish Missions," *Madonna*, 28, No. 2 (Sept. 1955), 22.

established in Quebec in 1847 and Toronto in 1881. For administrative purposes, the Congregation is divided into territorial blocks called Provinces. The Toronto Vice-Province was founded in 1912, and in 1918 it became the Toronto Province, with responsibility for all of Eastern, English-speaking Canada. The first Redemptorist house in Newfoundland was established at Corner Brook in 1927. In 1947 the Congregation moved from there to St. George's, where they remained until 1953. From 1950 until 1968 there were Redemptorists at Whitbourne, and in 1950 they were also invited to take charge of St. Theresa's Parish in St. John's. St. Theresa's is now the only remaining Redemptorist settlement in Newfoundland, but missions still continue to be preached throughout the island.

Paucity of records unfortunately prevents an exact reconstruction of Redemptorist activity in Newfoundland,<sup>20</sup> but it appears that the first Redemptorists to visit Newfoundland came up from Boston around 1881 to preach missions in St. John's and Harbour Grace. Further missions were preached by Boston Redemptorists in 1884

<sup>20</sup> I wrote to the Redemptorists in Canada and America, but, although interested in my research, they were unable to help me. To quote from one Canadian response, "Specific details of the missions preached would be in the houses from which missionary priests came at the time of the missions. And all those involved in the first work there have long since died." (Correspondence, April 7, 1978) Without knowing who had been involved in the earliest missions, I could not find out when such missions had taken place.

at Harbour Main, North River, and Bay Roberts. When the earliest missions were held in Newfoundland Gerard Majella had not even been beatified, but we can reasonably assume that after 1893 he would have been mentioned in missions, as miracles to secure his canonisation were being sought. There is, for example, evidence of devotion to Gerard in Newfoundland as early as 1900. While there is some difficulty in pinpointing the introduction of devotion to St. Gerard Majella into Newfoundland, the Redemptorists seem the most probable initiators because of their connection with the saint, and there is undoubtedly a strong connection between Redemptorist missions and the spread of the devotion.

The Redemptorist mission should complement the work of the parish priest by "calling the faithful to a fuller practice of the Christian life and a deeper love for God."<sup>21</sup> As Christian comments, "The parish priest is too familiar a figure to get the people stirred up or to put the fear of death and fear of God into his parish. So an outside speaker is called in from time to time to rouse the parishioners from what the Church considers to be their apathy."<sup>22</sup> A few informants recalled the Redemptorists primarily for their "Hell

<sup>21</sup> "What is a Redemptorist? (Ligouri: Ligouri Publications, 1976), p. 22.

<sup>22</sup> Christian, p. 98.

fire and damnation" style of preaching. A student in his late teens remembered being in the choir at a mission in Placentia and resolving never to do anything bad again for fear of being "roasted in Hell." He remarked that the Redemptorists probably wouldn't get away with the "Put your hand in the flame of the candle and feel" type of rhetoric nowadays, but that it had made a great impression on his parents' generation. Christian claims that the missionaries' emphasis upon the more unpleasant possibilities after death is calculated to jolt the villagers into a new awareness, leading to a new level of consultation with divine intermediaries.<sup>23</sup>

A Redemptorist mission would normally last about one week. The coming of the mission priests could be a great social as well as spiritual event, especially in isolated communities. One woman in her 60s recalled that when she was growing up in St. Joseph's, Bay D'Espoir, "Everything had to be just so" for the priests coming. After a week of preparations, the children would be posted to look out for the missionaries' boat, and when it was spotted a flag would be hoisted: "The priests was honoured then, like, you know."<sup>24</sup> More

<sup>23</sup> Christian, p. 132.

<sup>24</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3502.



recently, her son (in his late twenties) said of St. Alban's, "One time when the priests used to come, I remember that, sure they used always to erect . . . a big arch over the wharf. . . where you land. They had trees, and flags all up along. They'd come in by boat, and everyone would be out, the whole town would be out, you know, getting ready for them."<sup>25</sup>

The Redemptorist missionaries would direct their efforts towards personal behaviour, the state of the individual's soul. They would encourage people to confess and receive the sacraments frequently, and to hear "the word of God" as often as possible, but they would also promote private devotions in which they had some vested interest. Pope Pius IX made the Redemptorists responsible for the promotion of devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help, for example, and they would naturally be keen to mention "their" man Gerard. The Redemptorist missions were a considerable force in the promotion of devotion to St. Gerard Majella, and because the missions played an important part in the religious life of Newfoundland the saint got a lot of exposure throughout the island.

Father S., C.Ss.R., who first came to Newfoundland in 1954 and still preaches missions round the island,

<sup>25</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C332.

recalled:

When we used to travel round the missions, we would always, we'd always mention St. Gerard. Like on Tuesday nights we always had the special instruction for married people, eh? And in the course of the sermon you'd always build up devotion to St. Gerard, you see, and tell them he was known as the patron saint of mothers. . . .

And I don't know why, but I can remember especially up in Fleur de Lys. I can remember up there that people somehow or another, during the mission I talked about St. Gerard, they were kind of impressed by it. I remember mothers bringing their babies there to me, you know, and . . . I had a relic [of St. Gerard] you know, and I blessed them with the relic up there.<sup>26</sup>

I asked an informant in Branch if she remembered hearing about St. Gerard at Redemptorist missions, to which she replied, "When the mission fathers would come, and when they'd have their sermons, you know, they'd have separate sermons for women, and ones for men. Now they'd do a lot of talking about St. Gerard then, when they had the women's service, see. Like about women, now, expecting, or like women that couldn't have children, he'd tell them to pray to St. Gerard."<sup>27</sup> Even this lady's husband recalled that "St. Gerard used to be a lot tangled up with the Redemptorist fathers."<sup>28</sup>

The missions provided an opportunity not only for preaching about St. Gerard, but for the sale of brief biographies of the saint and devotional objects such as

<sup>26</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3492.

<sup>27</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C5851.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

medals and statues connected with him. Such items might be sought by those with devotion to the saint, or they could even serve to help promote St. Gerard in the absence of the Redemptorists. A ~~Poly~~ Verde woman mentioned that whenever there was a Redemptorist mission in her area she would get a supply of St. Gerard medals: "You know, you'd get so many, probably half a dozen or something, then if you knew that some of your friends were expecting, well, I mean . . . you'd offer them then, you know, you help spread devotion."<sup>29</sup>

Missions were not the only means employed by the Redemptorists to encourage devotion to St. Gerard Majella. Devotional magazines were extremely important in this respect. A former resident of Argentia, for example, was of the opinion that devotion to St. Gerard had come "through the mail, through the magazines."<sup>30</sup> For the laity, devotional magazines were often the only "theological" literature encountered, and what appeared in them was taken very seriously. Popular devotional literature tends to be strongly hagiographic, and its role in the promotion and consolidation of devotion to St. Gerard Majella in Newfoundland has been considerable.

<sup>29</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3499.

<sup>30</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3500.

The earliest magazine with which the Canadian Redemptorists seem to have been connected was Les Annales de la Bonne Sainte Anne de Beaupré, which they took over in 1898. The first mention of Brother Gerard appears to have been in October 1902.<sup>31</sup> An advertisement for The Annals of St. Anne (the English language version of Les Annales) appears on the back of a 1922 booklet containing a "Novena to Saint Gerard Majella:"

One of the most useful and pious exercises, for any one desirous of saving his soul, is spiritual reading. This exercise consists in often reading pious books, either the life of a Saint or some review treating seriously of matters pertaining to the salvation and perfection of the soul.

It is a kind of home preaching which [sic] each can choose according to his fancy, and which often produces amazing results. But here, as in all things, variety and actuality give pleasure. People like to read from time to time something written to suit the time and place where they live.

The Annals of St. Anne endeavour to meet this need. Besides articles on Christian Life, Liturgy, and the feasts of the Church, they contain letters from the missionaries, miscellaneous matter, and a monthly account of all that takes place at the shrine of St. Anne de Beaupré. . . . They give an account, every month, in a special bulletin, of the graces obtained through S [sic] Anne's intercession and of the progress of devotion to her.

The Annals have enjoyed great popularity in Newfoundland. The magazine has been widely subscribed to and the annual calendar of The Annals can be found in Catholic homes throughout the island. There is even an instance recorded of a copy of The Annals being tied round a

<sup>31</sup> Les Annales de la B.S. Anne de Beaupré, 30, No. 7 (Oct. 1902), 204-207.

Newfoundlander's leg for curative purposes.<sup>32</sup> A Newfoundland priest, when asked about the origins of devotion to St. Gerard in the province, speculated:

From my own experience, I would say that it stemmed first of all from the devotion that our people had to St. Anne, which originated with St. Anne de Beaupré, and The Annals. And eh, just about every home in Newfoundland had, every Catholic home, had The Annals coming into it. . . . I can remember in my own home seeing The Annals . . . and there was always in The Annals at that time [c. 1930] a section where people offered thanks for many favours that they received, and you would always see, especially from mothers, thanks for safe delivery. And probably from Newfoundland there were more thank-you notes to St. Gerard than from any other part of Canada.<sup>33</sup>

Informants frequently mentioned that thanksgivings to St. Gerard appeared in The Annals, and the following are typical of such "thank-you notes": "Thanks to St. Anne and St. Gerard for safe delivery,"<sup>34</sup> and "Offering in thanks to St. Anne and St. Gerard for safe delivery of healthy baby girl."<sup>35</sup>

There were, however, three other magazines which were particularly influential in the promotion of devotion to St. Gerard--Eikon (1928-1942), Mother of Perpetual Help (1942-1946), and Madonna (1947-1967). These publications have proved extremely useful, for not only are past trends and emphases in devotion to St. Gerard

<sup>32</sup> MUNFLA, Survey Card, 66-1/75.

<sup>33</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3503.

<sup>34</sup> The Annals, 69, No. 1 (Jan. 1955), 29.

<sup>35</sup> The Annals, 74, No. 9 (Sept. 1961), 285.

demonstrated in the magazines, the readers' letters provide contemporary evidence and indicate the geographical distribution of devotion in Newfoundland. (See Appendix A)

Father S., C.Ss.R., told me, when talking of the spread of devotion to St. Gerard, "We used to have a publication in honour of Our Lady, the Redemptorists in Canada, called the Eikon, you know. And there was a section in that for St. Gerard, and eh, I think that's where the Newfoundland people learned a lot about this. And they used to write in to Toronto, eh, to headquarters, you know, for medals and so on, and for prayers, and acknowledge favours received, and so on."<sup>36</sup> Eikon first appeared in October, 1928. The "eikon" which appeared on the cover of the magazine was that of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, for the promotion of devotion to this advocacy of Mary is the particular responsibility of the Redemptorists. Like The Annals, its purpose was edificatory.

St. Gerard was first mentioned in October, 1929 in an article entitled "The Mothers' Saint--Saint Gerard". This condemned the growing unpopularity of motherhood, cited miracles attributed to St. Gerard, and concluded,

<sup>36</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3492.

"It is our earnest hope that the Catholic mothers of our country will turn to this humble but great Saint in all their needs."<sup>37</sup> The article quoted a letter which had appeared in The Annals of June 1929, telling of the recovery of a Montreal woman who, when critically ill, had drunk only water in which a St. Gerard medal had been dipped.<sup>38</sup> In October 1930 Eikon contained a picture of St. Gerard and a novena in his honour. From 1931 onwards requests from readers for St. Gerard medals were printed, as were letters thanking the saint for favours received.

Unfortunately, the Redemptorists do not have Volumes 5-11 of Eikon (1933-1938). This is particularly regrettable as The League of St. Gerard was started in 1936. The League was not only of great importance in promotion; for many it became a vital element in the conduct of devotion to St. Gerard. Daniel Ehman, C.Ss.R., was largely responsible for the founding of The League. Father S. commented:

See, it was about that time that . . . this birth control business came very much to the fore, and so on. It was at that time that Pius, Pius IX, published his Encyclical on Marriage, [Casti Conubii, 1930] and in that Encyclical on Marriage we had spoken very vehemently against artificial contraceptives, you know, and in that encyclical declared that the rhythm method was the one, eh,

<sup>37</sup> Eikon, 2, No. 1 (Oct. 1929), 18.

<sup>38</sup> I was told a version of this story, without location, from a Branch teenager who had heard it from his mother.

as far as Catholics were concerned and so on.

And so that's why Father Dan, I presume that's what influenced him a lot in that, you see. . . . Now of course I heard Dan preach on the missions, and he was very vehement when it came to that birth control business.<sup>39</sup>

Ehman was particularly concerned about the "forces of anti-life," which to him were "all forces, propaganda, movements, agencies or crimes that directly or indirectly attack the Christian family, or debase lawful motherhood. Hence we include in this category: Birth-control propaganda--practises [sic] or devices; human sterilisation methods and propaganda; divorce legislation and propaganda."<sup>40</sup> St. Gerard was chosen as patron of The League "because he has long been known and invoked as 'The Mothers' Saint,' as well as the protector of the unborn child in every part of the Catholic world."<sup>41</sup> There was obviously a strong element of propagandism in The League's inception; St. Gerard was to be a rallying point against encroachments on the Roman Catholic doctrine on marriage and birth control. Devotion to St. Gerard was to be an expression of values and a means of shaping them.

There are different degrees of League membership, as

<sup>39</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3492.

<sup>40</sup> Ehman, p. 58.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 58-59.



explained in Ehman's booklet, The Mothers' Saint:

(1) Promoters - Share in the daily memento of the Priest-Director at Holy Mass, as well as in the annual Mass on the feast of St. Gerard, October 16. NO OFFERING IS REQUIRED. But the members do all in their power to make St. Gerard known, invoked and loved.

(2) Crusaders - Share in the daily memento of the Priest-Director at Holy Mass, as well as the annual Mass on the feast of St. Gerard, October 16. NO OFFERING IS REQUIRED. The Crusaders promise to recite daily the prayer to St. Gerard against the forces of anti-life, thereby gaining the indulgences granted - and try to do all in their power to spread a knowledge of The League, and to do battle in their district in every lawful way against the forces of anti-life.

(3) Annual Members - Share in a weekly Mass in honour of St. Gerard every Monday, as well as in the daily memento of the Priest-Director at Holy Mass - for one year. The offering for membership is one dollar.

(4) Perpetual Members - Share in a weekly Mass in honour of St. Gerard every Monday, as well as in the daily memento of the Priest-Director at Holy Mass. This holds good for their whole life and even after death as long as The League shall exist. The offering for membership is ten dollars.

"Naturally," it was added, "the greatest merit will go to him or her who works with the greatest zeal and the strongest love."<sup>42</sup>

In order to understand what Ehman was trying to do, it is necessary to consider briefly the status of pregnancy within the Roman Catholic Church. The ritual of the Church makes no special provision for the expectant mother; spiritual reinforcement has to be sought

<sup>42</sup> Ehman, pp. 59-60.

privately. Furthermore, the Church's attitude to pregnancy has traditionally been somewhat ambivalent. As Marina Warner maintains, "Accepting the Virgin as the ideal of purity implicitly demands rejecting the ordinary female condition as impure. Accepting virginity as an ideal entails contempt for sex and motherhood."<sup>43</sup> Consider, for example, the proportion of pregnant Madonnas there are among the immense number of representations of Mary. Even during Advent, although there is scriptural reference to Mary being "great with child" (Luke 2:5), she is rarely depicted thus. The Mosaic notion of the impurity of menstruating and pregnant women, though not officially condoned, persists.

In Newfoundland, "People would expect a woman to be 'in the family way' within a year of marriage, since motherhood was considered a woman's central role."<sup>44</sup> However, although childbearing was considered the natural, indeed desired, concomitant of marriage, the status of pregnancy itself was ambiguous. It was proof of the loss of "innocence." A Ship Cove lady in her sixties told me that attitudes towards pregnancy have changed considerably since her day. She complained that expectant mothers nowadays wear clothes that

<sup>43</sup> Marina Warner, Alone of All Her Sex (London: Quartet Books, 1978), p. 77.

<sup>44</sup> Murray, p. 80.

emphasise their condition instead of trying to conceal it, and remarked, "They have no shame any more."

In order to combat the threats posed by "the vile forces of anti-life" it became necessary to assert the correctness and desirability of pregnancy within the orthodox Roman Catholic marriage. Ehman, in The Mothers' Saint, recounts an incident in which a false accusation of unchastity was levelled against St. Gerard; the saint suffered silently until the accuser became ill and retracted the charge. He then claims, "As a reward to His faithful servant for this great humiliation, God seems to have given Gerard the special power of assisting mothers in their most anxious hour. He who was reputed unchaste, now chaste assists the chaste in bringing forth 'the chaste generation with glory.'<sup>45</sup> Ehman is thus elevating the status of pregnancy and motherhood within the properly conducted marriage to that of saintly chastity.

Writing on "The Use and Abuse of Medieval Miracles," Finucane makes the point that "Posthumous miracles are events arising not in the presumed actions of the saint--now dead--but in the needs of the people. While he lived, a saint himself took part in and in a way

<sup>45</sup> Ehman, p. 4.

encouraged 'miracles,' but after his death it might be said that the pilgrims took over; they themselves worked the miracles."<sup>46</sup> We might see something of this in the use of St. Gerard to fulfil a need arising out of specific socio-religious conditions. An exceptionally pious virgin saint was made the figurehead in the fight for Christian (i.e. Roman Catholic) motherhood, increasing the spiritual status of that vocation and providing the promise of help for mothers through intercession.

Ehman wrote that one of the aims of The League was "to make St. Gerard known, loved and invoked as 'The Mothers' Saint.'"<sup>47</sup> The devotional magazines published by the Redemptorists were to become powerful and popular instruments in the attempt to fulfil this aim.

In 1942 Mother of Perpetual Help replaced Eikon, although the contents of the two magazines were virtually the same. Mother of Perpetual Help in October 1943 contained a picture of St. Gerard with the captions "Patron of a Good Confession," "Patron of a Religious Vocation," "Patron of Mothers," and "The Wonderworker of Our Day," as well as an article on the saint's life. The

<sup>46</sup> Ronald C. Finucane, "The Use and Abuse of Medieval Miracles," History, 60, No. 198 (Feb. 1975), 6.

<sup>47</sup> Ehman, p. 58.

following October (the month of St. Gerard's feast day) another article appeared encouraging people to pray to St. Gerard. It was from 1945 onwards, however, that The League's point of view was strongly put over, and the magazine became more obviously propagandist. In October 1945 it was stated that "The aim and purpose of this and succeeding articles is to promote God's honour and glory through knowledge of and devotion to St. Gerard, and at the same time to further mankind's betterment and relief through the holy example and miraculous intercession of St. Gerard Majella, who was called 'The Wonder Worker' even in his life time. By means of the printed word we hope to bring information and inspiration to the thousands we could not otherwise reach."<sup>48</sup>

"Anti-life" was repeatedly condemned, and motherhood extolled as a divine vocation. The following are typical examples of the rhetoric employed:

Something must be done, and must be done QUICKLY to stop and smash the ghoulish army of anti-life if the white races are to continue to exist. It is our hope that St. Gerard by his tender yet powerful assistance to mothers in the hour of need will prove to be the bulwark of the Church in her battle to preserve Christian mothers in a pagan world.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Mother of Perpetual Help, 3, No. 10 (Oct. 1945), 319.

<sup>49</sup> Mother of Perpetual Help, 3, No. 11 (Nov. 1945), 351.

The expectant mother is therefore, in a special manner, the temple of God, where stands the workshop of God's masterpiece of creation, a human being destined for heaven.<sup>50</sup>

In January 1947 Madonna appeared, and continued until 1967. This was of considerable importance to the spread and consolidation of devotion to St. Gerard in Newfoundland. One woman said of her devotion to St. Gerard: "Well, I was introduced to it through the Madonna magazine. . . . They never preached very much about St. Gerard when they were here . . . but they used to promote the Madonna magazine, so that's where it came, out of that. There used to be a section in that."<sup>51</sup>

An article entitled "St. Gerard and the Madonna" appeared in Vol. 1, No. 1, stressing St. Gerard's intense devotion to the Madonna, and urging readers to a similar ardour. Madonna naturally encouraged devotion and printed letters of thanksgiving to Our Mother of Perpetual Help. Many informants with devotion to St. Gerard had a picture of prayer card of Perpetual Help in their home, and generally medals with St. Gerard on one side have Perpetual Help on the other. (See Frontispiece) Some novena books contain prayers to both St. Gerard and Our Lady of Perpetual Help. One lady said of Madonna, "Our Lady of Perpetual Help, that's who used

<sup>50</sup> Mother of Perpetual Help, 4, No. 9, (Sept. 1946), 287.

<sup>51</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C5851.

to come out on the covers, see. . . . Now that's who St. Gerard was devoted to, see. This is how she come to be on the Madonna magazine cover, you know. He was really devoted. They goes together, see.<sup>52</sup> The magazine also contained informative, "uplifting" articles such as "Medals in Your Life" and "What do you know about Relics?"

From 1950 a League of St. Gerard section became a regular feature of Madonna. This basically contained exhortative articles and letters from readers thanking St. Gerard, asking for some favour, or requesting devotional objects. On a number of occasions it offered reasons for St. Gerard's special relationship to mothers. It was pointed out that before the saint's birth his mother had lost a baby, and that Gerard had been so frail at birth that he had been hurriedly baptised. During his lifetime he had prayed for the recovery of a woman dying in childbirth, and the touch of his handkerchief had aided an expectant mother. After Gerard's death the application of his relic or his picture had helped women having difficulty in childbirth, and after his canonisation St. Gerard had continued to aid mothers. On a somewhat different tack, it was noted that most gynaecologists are men.

<sup>52</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3501.

The first identifiable Newfoundland letter appeared in January 1950. The writer, "B.B., Newfoundland," was asking for St. Gerard's help as her daughter was suffering from shadows on the lungs, and she promised "to publish" if the next X-ray was clear. In April 1950 a second letter confirmed a clear X-ray, and thanked St. Gerard.

In June 1950 it was remarked in the League section of Madonna: "We often wondered why there were so many war-time members of the League from Newfoundland and then we found out that during the war years Father Michael MacIsaac the Chaplain of the Fleet, and Chaplain Saunders of the American air corp [ sic ] had talked about St. Gerard to their men. . . . In Newfoundland again Fathers Gerry Murphy and Jos. O'Donnell, and on the west coast Father Pat Gallery have been gaining a host of new friends for Gerard."<sup>53</sup> In the League section of October 1954 it was declared that Roman Catholics were "winning the battle of the cradle" and that "It seems safe to say that the vice of birth control has made slower advances in Newfoundland than in other provinces with a non-Catholic majority. Family and community life is still at a high peak in this Atlantic Province."<sup>54</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Madonna, 23, No. 6 (June 1950), 188.

<sup>54</sup> Madonna, 27, No. 10 (Nov. 1954), 318.



Roughly two Newfoundland letters per year were printed in The League of St. Gerard section of Madonna between 1950 and 1954, but from early 1955 onwards these numbers increased significantly. In October 1955 it was remarked, "Of late Newfoundland is fast being 'covered' for subscriptions by some active promoters."<sup>55</sup> Mothers were repeatedly encouraged to write to Madonna, as "These authentic letters appear in these pages each month and help, probably more than anything else, to sell St. Gerard to families in need of his help."<sup>56</sup> A feature entitled "My Name is Gerard" appeared regularly in the League pages from the summer of 1958 onwards. The names of children called after the saint were simply listed with their community, and in this Newfoundlanders were always well represented. In the summer of 1959 a letter from Bellevue was captioned "Community Devotion to St. Gerard;" the writer claimed that "nearly every mother in my community is a subscriber to the Madonna magazine and has special devotion to St. Gerard."<sup>57</sup>

In 1959 and 1960 a series of eleven articles under the heading "Are There Too Many of Us?" appeared in Madonna, explaining and defending the Roman Catholic Church's stand on birth control. Madonna continued to inveigh

<sup>55</sup> Madonna, 28, No. 9 (Oct. 1955), 257.

<sup>56</sup> Madonna, 31, No. 1 (Jan. 1958), 30.

<sup>57</sup> Madonna, 32, No. 7 (Summer 1959), 31.

against "anti-life," while stressing "the nobility and greatness of the vocation of a mother."<sup>58</sup> League membership was repeatedly encouraged, and readers were urged to write in for statues, pictures, medals, and biographies of St. Gerard. However, the summer 1966 issue of Madonna claimed that although eight hundred League renewal notices had been sent out in May, only twenty-five had been returned. In September 1966 there was comment on "the success that Lucifer is having persuading members of the League to put off or neglect entirely the acknowledgement of their yearly renewals."<sup>59</sup> Throughout 1967 there were as usual League articles extolling motherhood and large families and promoting devotion to St. Gerard, but although no warning was given, the December 1967 Madonna was the last issue of the magazine. Redemptorists informed me that they were forced to cease publication on economic grounds, but I have been unable to ascertain whether this was due to increased publication costs, under-subscription, or a combination of both.

The League of St. Gerard continued after the demise of Madonna and still exists. However, The League and Madonna together had formed a powerful partnership in

<sup>58</sup> Madonna, 40, No. 10 (Nov. 1967), 26.

<sup>59</sup> Madonna, 39, No. 8 (Sept. 1966), 22.

the promotion of devotion to St. Gerard. Madonna magazine ceaselessly encouraged membership of The League, while The League promoted Madonna in its booklets containing a brief biography of or prayers to St. Gerard. Such was the association between them that some mothers with devotion to St. Gerard called their daughters Madonna in his honour. One of my informants had the cover of an issue of Madonna framed, and still has it hanging on her bedroom wall. Another woman commented, "I miss the Madonna magazine quite a lot, because that was a lovely magazine."<sup>60</sup>

Through The League and Madonna, Newfoundland women could participate in and be helped by a wide devotional (and to some extent therapeutic) community. They could give personal testimony and receive inspiration from that of others; they could relate to women with similar concerns and aspirations in the "vocation" of motherhood. A Fishot Islands woman who wrote to Madonna with an offering for St. Gerard, asking for prayers for herself and her family as she was expecting another child in winter, concluded, "I place all my trust in your prayers and the League Members."<sup>61</sup> A Branch lady wrote in connection with her devotion to St. Gerard, "I also

<sup>60</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C5851.

<sup>61</sup> Madonna, 35, No. 3 (March 1962), 32.

received the 'Madonna Magazine' and had my petitions and thanksgivings prayed for at the Shrine . . . I usually gave just my initials not my full name if I wanted it to be printed in the Madonna Magazine. (I always sent a little donation to the shrine after a safe delivery etc in thanksgivings for favors received.)<sup>62</sup> To some extent women could enjoy the advantages and fellowship of a pilgrimage centre without actually leaving home. The participatory aspect was undoubtedly very important to many devotees in Newfoundland, as their spatial isolation did not hinder their involvement.

Although Madonna has ceased to be published, The League of St. Gerard continues as an important source of information and devotional objects concerning St. Gerard, as well as being a significant element in devotion to the saint. A Freshwater lady said of The League, "Someone . . . told me about it, so I, I sent to, you know, The League, and got the pictures and the medal, and em, the book that they gave you. So, eh, I mean, I had a grand time. I was only about fifteen minutes in the delivery room and the baby was born. . . . So usually when my daughters became pregnant I always sent away money to join The League for them. . . . So none of them had any trouble, anyway so far."<sup>63</sup> One

<sup>62</sup> Correspondence, July 10, 1978.

<sup>63</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3496.

Stephenville woman in her forties assured me that as soon as she and her contemporaries became pregnant they "all joined the St. Gerard club." Even now, when a woman wants a baby or discovers that she is pregnant, a friend or relative may either enrol her in The League or advise her to enrol.

The Redemptorists, then, were able to use their considerable influence to promote and manipulate devotion to St. Gerard Majella in a situation where the anxieties and responsibilities of pregnancy and motherhood were keenly felt. St. Gerard received widespread publicity through missions, which were important social and spiritual events. Hagiographic magazines helped to encourage and consolidate devotion, while The League of St. Gerard, a pragmatic combination of piety and propagandism, has been and continues to be an important focus for the devotion.

While the Redemptorists have been particularly active, they have by no means been the sole spreaders of devotion to St. Gerard Majella in Newfoundland. Some priests, such as the late Father Hayes of St. Alban's, have exhorted the ladies of their parishes to pray to St. Gerard. I have been told of various nuns, including Mother Gerard, formerly of the Convent of Our Lady of the Angels, Placentia, who fostered the devotion. Nursing nuns in St. Clave's Mercy Hospital, St. John's,

have a tradition of telling maternity patients about the saint and handing out medals and prayer cards, and Roman Catholic nurses and midwives elsewhere in Newfoundland have also been active in this respect.

A lot of women I spoke to had simply heard about St. Gerard from their mothers or from contemporaries, rather than "official" sources. A Placentia lady in her fifties said, "Well, you know, we heard a lot about him at different times. Mom and all them, they all believed in Gerard, all the old-timers. Oh yes. It came down through the years, you know."<sup>64</sup> A Lourdes woman said she couldn't remember a time when she didn't know about St. Gerard, because there were pictures of him at home, and her mother was always talking about him. One informant mentioned that she had recommended St. Gerard to her daughter, who had in turn told some of her friends about him; she commented, "You know, they spreads it from one to the other, see. I mean, that's the way devotion goes."<sup>65</sup>

Booklets containing details of St. Gerard's life and miracles (such as The Mothers' Saint by Daniel Ehman, C.Ss.R., and Saint Gerard by Ronald G. Delaney, C.Ss.R.)

<sup>64</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3497.

<sup>65</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3501.

could be used to promote the saint. A St. Mary's mother/ wrote and told me, "I helped spread devotion by giving booklets and medals to all young mothers in my community."<sup>66</sup> When I asked one Placentia woman how she had become interested in St. Gerard she replied, "I wasn't very well before the third was born, this friend of mine sent over a book, The Mothers' Saint, and so I prayed to him then."<sup>67</sup> However, although many of my informants with devotion to St. Gerard either possessed or had seen such booklets, in fact the majority could remember little or nothing about St. Gerard's life and miracles. I was frequently offered "a look at the little book," or assured that it was "all in there." This raises an interesting point concerning the role of the saint's legend in the encouragement and conduct of devotion.

In the pamphlets and devotional magazines the following incident was repeatedly mentioned:

At Oliveto he stayed with the Pirofalo family. When he was leaving their home for Caposele, a young girl ran after him with a handkerchief that he had left behind on the chair. "Keep it," Gerard said to her, "it may be useful to you one day."

In time this same girl married and was in danger of death in her first confinement. Fortunately, she remembered Gerard's remark and immediately asked for the handkerchief. At the mere touch

<sup>66</sup> Correspondence, undated, 1978.

<sup>67</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3499.

of the cloth she was restored to health and her child was happily born.<sup>68</sup>

In contrast, I was told this version of the story by a woman who claimed to have learned it from her mother: "Well, you know, my mother told me there was a lady going to have a baby, and she couldn't be delivered, so, eh, they called in St. Gerard. This man came in, she said, and put his scarf, or a handkerchief or something around her, and eh, her baby was born, you know, eh, soon after. So, eh, that's how he became the saint of the maternity."<sup>69</sup>

Another frequently mentioned incident occurred in 1754, when Gerard was accused of unchastity with Nicoletta Capucci by Neria Caggiano. For a few months Gerard was under suspicion, saying nothing in his defence, and relying on God to vindicate him. Caggiano, after becoming seriously ill, admitted that her accusations were false. A Branch woman told me, "he was involved in a scandal too, you know . . . There was a lot of problems about it, but he left it all, you know, to his maker, to the almighty, and the problems cleared up after that and he forgave her."<sup>70</sup> A Red Island lady,

<sup>68</sup> Delaney, p. 57.

<sup>69</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3502.

<sup>70</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C5851.



however, claimed that Gerard was the patron of mothers because he had been wrongly accused of siring an illegitimate child.

Although the pamphlets relate a number of incidents involving expectant mothers, both during Gerard's lifetime and after his death, if a person could remember a story he or she tended to pinpoint it as the reason for St. Gerard's special role. A lady in Placentia said, "Did you ever hear why he became the saint of mothers? Because he, he was a virgin, you know, and . . . became a monk very, very young and died very young. But eh, there was a woman in labour who was very, very sick, and someone applied a picture of St. Gerard to her body, and she . . . gave birth without any difficulty, and came better. So it was from that story that devotion spread."<sup>71</sup>

Somewhat predictably, saints' legends can get confused. One lady thought that St. Gerard had been a reprobate who became very ill; having been saved by his mother's prayers, however, he converted and became a saint. This is almost certainly based on the story of St. Augustine. A Branch informant with considerable devotion to St. Gerard told me that "this woman was haemorrhaging.

<sup>71</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/G3499.

He was passing along and he was only, only a lay brother then, and she sung out to him to touch her, to touch her arm or some part of her body with his cloak. And when he did, the haemorrhaging stopped, and it started from that."<sup>72</sup> I have never encountered a story of this type in connection with St. Gerard, and thus assume that it is based on the incident recorded in Luke 8:

42-44:

42 . . . . As Jesus went along, the people were crowding him from every side.

43 Among them was a woman who had suffered from severe bleeding for twelve years . . . .

44 She came up in the crowd behind Jesus and touched the edge of his cloak, and her bleeding stopped at once.

The pamphlets containing details of St. Gerard's life and miracles could be useful when a person was encountering St. Gerard for the first time. One woman said of Ehman's book, "In that booklet, I tell you, there's a lot of things, you know, that really give you devotion, see."<sup>73</sup> However, such knowledge was not necessary to devotion. A Point Verde mother of nine who learned of St. Gerard from her mother and has actively promoted devotion commented, "I've never really known his story, you know, in case, how he became, you know, the patron saint. . . . It has been more or less passed down, I suppose, you know, from mother to daughter, and you

<sup>72</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C5851.

<sup>73</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3501.

know that you can turn to him."<sup>74</sup> For the majority of my informants, St. Gerard's biographical details were considered largely irrelevant, and simply weren't retained. Personal experience narratives and the assurances of Redemptorists, friends and family concerning St. Gerard's efficacy tended to be more common and important than the saint's legend in persuading people to turn to him.

As devotion spread through folk reputation and personal recommendation, received traditions concerning St. Gerard might vary considerably. This is to some extent reflected in the titles given to him by informants. He was referred to as "Patron of the Maternity," "Patron Saint of Pregnant Women," "Patron Saint of Expectant Mothers," "Patron Saint of Mothers," and "Patron Saint of Motherhood." It is interesting to note that the title "Patron Saint" can only officially be conferred by the Vatican, and that this has not happened in Gerard's case, although it is something the Redemptorists have long desired. However, to devotees in Newfoundland what Gerard did was more important than who he was.

In the harsh physical conditions of Newfoundland this century, the frequent inadequacy of human resources

<sup>74</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3499.

tended to underline for Catholics the importance of supernatural assistance. Under these circumstances, the many women whose lives revolved around having and rearing children traditionally turned for aid to the Virgin, St. Anne, and St. Antony. Into this situation came the Redemptorists, who were able to use their influential position in Newfoundland to promote their man Gerard as the pregnancy specialist. Information about St. Gerard came from them through missions, devotional literature, and finally The League of St. Gerard. Meanwhile, women in Newfoundland appear to have found St. Gerard so efficacious that devotion was spread not just by the Redemptorists, but by those who felt that friends, relatives, and others in their community might benefit from his intercession. The devotion undoubtedly met a popularly perceived need, and St. Gerard's success was attested at official, folk and individual level.

Devotion to St. Gerard Majella, thus established, was to play a significant but varied part in the lives of many Newfoundlanders.

CHAPTER III  
PERSONALISED DEVOTION: DIVERSITY IN PERCEPTIONS  
OF THE ROLE OF ST. GERARD

For the majority of Roman Catholics religion has not existed in a spiritual vacuum, divorced from reality. The Church may ultimately be concerned with the state of men's souls, but it has also been important to many people as "a limitless source of supernatural aid, applicable to most of the problems likely to arise in daily life."<sup>1</sup>

People have most commonly sought this aid through the intercession of saints, whether pleading with St. Jude for the solution to some overwhelming difficulty, or praying to St. Anthony for the recovery of a lost knitting needle. As problems vary from person to person, so does what is asked of saints. Warner claims that "to scoff at the Catholic attitude to their saint's personal usefulness, as the Reformers and rationalists have done since the sixteenth century, is to miss its sympathetic side."<sup>2</sup> Such prayers, she points out, "give evidence of the intimacy of sinner and saint, and are equivalent, in their concern with daily problems, to

<sup>1</sup> Thomas, p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> Warner, p. 289.

conversations between family and friends."<sup>3</sup> Because people feel they can involve holy figures in every aspect of life, nonliturgical piety can be dovetailed to meet the precise needs of the individual.

As "The Mothers' Saint," St. Gerard had a well-defined clientele in Newfoundland of married women who desired or were expecting children. For many women, the need for devotion to a saint or saints was not really felt until after marriage, when they had to adapt to a new status and way of life away from the parental home. In particular, pregnancy is a life-crisis which quite naturally occasions stress and the desire for some sort of spiritual reinforcement. Christian claims: "That a special patron is not turned to until one is in a jam or under pressure does not imply that a person has not been devout or that patrons are looked to merely for protection. It is simply a trigger that releases the habit of turning to outside help at times when a personal, often private, need is felt."<sup>4</sup> One mother said of her devotion, "Well more or less, 'twas more of a habit, because where our children were so closely apart, I was forever, always praying to St. Gerard."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Warner, p. 289.

<sup>4</sup> Christian, p. 132.

<sup>5</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/Q3499.

St. Gerard was turned to, not only by expectant mothers, but also by women who wished to become pregnant; he was often recommended to young wives and to women who had experienced difficulties with pregnancy in the past.

One informant told me that, as a naive nineteen year old, she went to a neighbour shortly after she was married: "I said 'I'd like to, I'd like to know where I can get some babies.' She said, 'Well, go straight and pray to St. Gerard.'"<sup>6</sup>

A St. Lawrence mother of five wrote that "The first three years of my marriage I was very sick and could not have children. I was to a number of doctors but I didn't get any help.

Finally, the Mission Fathers came to our place and I told one of them my trouble. He said to me, I have the relic of the Mothers' Saint and I will cross you with it. He told me to pray to St. Gerard every day and I would get better and also have children, so I did

... I was cured by St. Gerard."<sup>7</sup> Even before conception, St. Gerard was the natural choice of anyone who was either eager to have a child or anxious about doing so.

Countless Newfoundland women prayed to St. Gerard when they were pregnant, but the significance of the devotion

<sup>6</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3501.

<sup>7</sup> Madonna, 34, No. 6 (June 1961), 31!

could vary according to the individual's circumstances. In addition to the normal physical and emotional difficulties of pregnancy, for example, many expectant mothers in Newfoundland had to contend with inadequate medical facilities and poor communications. A Groais Islands mother who wrote to Madonna in February 1953 thanking St. Gerard and Our Mother of Perpetual Help for a safe delivery had had to make a seven day steamer journey to get to St. Clare's Hospital in St. John's. In the past, rough seas, blocked roads, or iced-up harbours could imprison people in their communities and make it impossible for help to be brought in. One mother of thirteen with great devotion to St. Gerard told me:

There was no hospitals then and it was the roughest kind of life . . . we used to live into St. Veronica's, see, you know, and you take in the bad time of year there'd be ice and everything, there'd be no way you could hardly get out. . . . You'd see some of the women . . . with a baby on the way, it was frightening. . . . We had to keep our devotion strong, because we figured we'd never make it without it. . . . I don't care what anybody says, I don't think I'd have done what I done without the help of the saint.<sup>8</sup>

As Beattie points out, "religious belief and practice may give confidence in the face of dangers which would otherwise be overwhelming. They provide institutionalised means of coping with such dangers, and even if these means are generally scientifically ineffective, they are satisfying morally and emotionally."<sup>9</sup> Their

<sup>8</sup> MÜNFLA, Tapes, '78-196/C3501.

<sup>9</sup> John Beattie, Other Cultures (London: Routledge and



importance should not be underestimated. A St. Alban's midwife recalled that they used to have to depend on the coastal boat for transport, and that if a woman went into labour when the boat was down at Port-aux-Basques she would have to wait three or four days for its return before there would be any chance of getting her to hospital. Even after the road was made, conditions were often so bad that they would have to turn back, and this midwife has delivered numerous babies "on the road" while attempting to reach the hospital at Grand Falls. When I asked if she ever encouraged devotion to St. Gerard she replied, "Oh yes, I did, all the time. And I said that's the only help there is if there's no doctor or nothing, you know."<sup>10</sup>

A Deep Cove lady claimed that there was more devotion in the outports because "There was no doctors out around the bay, you know, and therefore they put their trust more in the saints than they would if you could just run to the hospital whenever you get a pain or an ache."<sup>11</sup> While there may be some truth in this, people's faith in divine aid did not automatically diminish when medical facilities became available. A woman thanking St. Gerard for her daughter's recovery from meningitis wrote, "As soon as she took ill I put the medal of

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<sup>9</sup> (cont) Kegan Paul Ltd., 1972), p. 238.

<sup>10</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3502.

<sup>11</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3497.

St. Gerard on her and rushed her to hospital. It was only prayer that saved her."<sup>12</sup> None of my informants dropped their devotion to St. Gerard when medical services improved, and a number of them had always had access to such facilities. In February 1957 a Madonna article told of the devotion to St. Gerard being fostered at St. Clare's Mercy Hospital, St. John's, and of the saint's usefulness in the maternity ward there.<sup>13</sup> I spoke with Sister R., who used to be very active in spreading devotion, giving out prayer cards, medals, and suchlike. She pointed out that even in hospital the women were often very nervous, and that devotion to St. Gerard helped to give them confidence. Mothers in labour often used to call to her to bring over her relic of St. Gerard, and many women were comforted by the St. Gerard statue which they passed on their way to the delivery room. (Plate 1) A nurse in the Placenta hospital also told me that she had experienced great devotion to St. Gerard among the maternity patients there.

Women in Newfoundland frequently continued to have children into their forties, when the risks of complications increased. One Freshwater mother said of her last

<sup>12</sup> Madonna, 34, No. 8 (Sept. 1961), 30.

<sup>13</sup> Ronald Delaney, C.Ss.R., "St. Clare's Mercy Hospital," Madonna, 30, No. 2 (Feb. 1957), 60-62.

Plate 1 Statue of St. Gerard Majella, St. Clare's Mercy  
Hospital, St. John's. (MUNPLA, Photo,  
78-196/P4415)



pregnancy: "I was older that time, I was 46 when, when Gerard was born, you know, and I was really nervous . . . I was sort of old then, because that was my, my eleventh baby, you know, and I was really scared that time, because, you know, the doctors tell you, you know, your twelfth, and around that time . . . so I was really scared."<sup>14</sup> However, after a neighbour recommended St. Gerard, she joined the League, received a medal and a booklet, and prayed to the saint. As a result, she claimed, "I think it was the best, em, you know, time I ever had. Only fifteen minutes in the delivery room and he was born--not a bit of trouble."<sup>15</sup> A St. John's mother wrote to Madonna, "In my three pregnancies like most mothers I found myself having a bundle of nerves. Learning of St. Gerard I found he sure did help me."<sup>16</sup> A lady with access to medical facilities who had, nevertheless, experienced considerable complications during a pregnancy, said of her devotion to St. Gerard: "Well, I kept my sanity. I think it's the only thing that kept me sane."<sup>17</sup>

A Madonna article urging expectant mothers to join The

<sup>14</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3496.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Madonna, 39, No. 6 (June 1966), 27.

<sup>17</sup> Fieldnotes, Sept. 1978.

League of St. Gerard and place themselves under St. Gerard's protection very astutely added, "When the soul is prepared for a crisis, the body tension is relaxed and reasonable."<sup>18</sup> A Placentia lady said of devotion to the saint, "It gave you confidence, you know. Well, at least you had someone in heaven who'd be interceding for you and you were consoled with that thought. . . . You know he helped others, so he'd help you too, you know. . . . If you trust, and if you have the right frame of mind, you probably come through quicker than if you're in despair; you know, so it's all in the state of mind. But at the same time, I think Gerard's there praying too."<sup>19</sup>

The occasions on which people have prayed to St. Gerard, and the duration of the devotion, have varied considerably. This variety was obvious even in connection with pregnancy, which was recognized as St. Gerard's particular sphere of influence by all the ladies who had devotion that I encountered. A couple of women regarded devotion to St. Gerard as a purely personal matter. A Deer Lake informant, for example, said she prayed to St. Gerard when she was pregnant, but would never think of praying to him at any other time. Another

<sup>18</sup> Madonna, 26, No. 3 (March 1953), 126.

<sup>19</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3499.

lady, from St. Alban's, said in connection with St. Gerard: "I think my prayers were answered--I never had no trouble and I had all my babies at home." However, when asked if she had ever prayed to him other than for her own pregnancies she replied, "No, no; my dear, no. I thanked him, but that was it."<sup>20</sup>

For many women, St. Gerard's association with pregnancy extended to expectant friends and relatives. A former Branch resident wrote and told me, "I used to always place myself in the care of St. Gerard when I was carrying my children and during childbirth . . . I would also pray to him for safe delivery etc for my sister and other expectant mothers."<sup>21</sup> A Point Verde woman mentioned that she did not pray to St. Gerard for years after her last pregnancy, but started again for her daughters when they were expecting. A Placentia lady said that "It was sort of an all round thing for every Catholic mother--they would be praying for themselves, and for others."<sup>22</sup> A lady from Campbell's Creek told me she prays to St. Gerard for young mothers whenever she is in church, while a St. Mary's mother wrote, "I still pray to St. Gerard every day for protection to expectant

<sup>20</sup> Fieldnotes, May 4, 1978.

<sup>21</sup> Correspondence, July 26, 1978.

<sup>22</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3499.

mothers and their unborn babies."<sup>23</sup> These examples indicate the concern for and solidarity with other mothers which were frequently expressed.

A few of my informants mentioned that they had been inconsistent in their devotion to St. Gerard, tending to turn to him only when they had difficulties. I asked one lady if she had prayed to St. Gerard and she said, "Now and then I did, when I thought I was in trouble."<sup>24</sup> When a Placentia lady told me of her great devotion to St. Gerard during her third pregnancy, I enquired whether she had known about the saint before that. She replied, "I did, yes, but didn't have, eh, not too much devotion until the third, and I eh, I wasn't very well, you know. That's, that's how religious I am--I only pray when I'm desperate!"<sup>25</sup> When I asked this woman if she thought that any of her daughters would have the devotion, she said, "I don't think so. . . . I think they would have to be in serious trouble to have devotion."<sup>26</sup>

Some of my informants had had miscarriages and other

<sup>23</sup> Correspondence, undated, 1978.

<sup>24</sup> Fieldnotes, Sept. 1978.

<sup>25</sup> MUNFLA, Tapes, 78-196/C3499.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



complications in their pregnancies, but their confidence in St. Gerard did not seem to have been shaken. I was told of two cases in which the mother had been critically ill, and the baby had died at or shortly after birth. In both instances it was said that the mother would also have died had it not been for St. Gerard's help. The loss of the child was thus counterbalanced by the survival, reportedly against the odds, of the mother. A Point Verde lady told me of her daughter's unfortunate experience: "My other one now, last spring she had, she was expecting and she had a miscarriage. And even now when she was going to hospital that time we thought, we knew it would be. But still, like ever, I turned to St. Gerard . . . because I knew he could still help her, you know, and she come out of it wonderfully and now she's expecting again. So she's eh, she has St. Gerard. . . . She's expecting now in June, and she's had a wonderful time, no trouble at all."<sup>27</sup> Even when a baby is lost it seems that mothers can benefit from devotion to St. Gerard.

One lady lost a baby at birth, while another child died as a result of damage during delivery. After this she had three sons, all named after the saint in some way. When I commented on the names she told me,

Well I, I promised it to him for safe delivery. Not altogether safe delivery, but you'd be hearing so much about children come with deformities, I

<sup>27</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3499.

always prayed so that they'd have all their limbs. That was one thing I always prayed for. I didn't care so long, if they died an hour after, so long as they were born with all their limbs, you know. Because I'd feel if they were born deformed without their limbs there was something I was doing that I shouldn't be doing, and I was being punished in some way. . . . And thanks be to God, they were all okay.<sup>28</sup>

It was interesting that the notion of God's punishment on a parent being wrought through a child was so strongly stated.<sup>29</sup> Death in this case was accepted as a natural event, but deformity would have been a different matter altogether. For this woman, who had already experienced loss, St. Gerard was called upon to deal with a very specific pregnancy-related anxiety.

Women devoted to St. Gerard during pregnancy might continue to pray to him for the child. The League of St. Gerard was naturally keen to have this happen: "St. Gerard can best be thanked by a continuation of your devotion to him. He is known not only for his assistance during birth but also during the growth and maturity of children."<sup>30</sup> I asked one informant who hadn't had devotion to St. Gerard until her third, very difficult pregnancy if she continued to pray to the saint.

<sup>28</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C5851.

<sup>29</sup> See Herbert Halpert, "Legends of the Cursed Child," New York Folklore Quarterly, 14, No. 2 (Fall 1958), 233-241.

<sup>30</sup> Madonna, 26, No. 5 (May 1953), 158.

after that: "Yes, I often prayed to St. Gerard for Edmund. He was extremely delicate, extremely delicate, yes. He developed pneumonia twice before he was a year old. Oh, we just saved him. . . . And when he started first, he wasn't too bright in school. I prayed for him and encouraged him to pray to St. Gerard too. . . . So, I kept it up for Edmund."<sup>31</sup> Another lady said that in addition to praying to St. Gerard during her nine pregnancies, she also used to pray to him if the children were sick: "so besides being pregnant . . . St. Gerard was always there. We knew we could turn to him, you know."<sup>32</sup>

A leitmotif of the Redemptorist literature concerning St. Gerard was protection. Typical of this was the claim that "By joining the League of St. Gerard. . . a mother places herself under the continued protection of the Mothers' Saint. . . . In return, St. Gerard, the saint of happy childbirth, will repay bountifully those who place themselves under his protection by joining the League."<sup>33</sup> In 1959 a Flowers Cove lady wrote to Madonna enclosing a list of names to be enrolled in The League, adding, "Living as we do in an extremely

<sup>31</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3499.

<sup>32</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3499.

<sup>33</sup> Madonna, 26, No. 3 (March 1953), 125.

isolated community, we feel so much safer to know that we are under St. Gerard's special protection during the long hard winter."<sup>4</sup> A Newfoundland mother thanking St. Gerard and Our Lady for her son's recovery from illness wrote: "I had great hope because my son had been enrolled in the League of St. Gerard for life and I believed that he and Our Lady would take care of my son."<sup>35</sup> Madonna urged mothers to keep renewing their League membership both as a thanksgiving for past favours, and as "an investment for his future protection."<sup>36</sup>

A number of informants commented on St. Gerard's role as "protector of the family" in Newfoundland, and on the inclusion of prayers to him in the family rosary. A Placentia man recalled that, in the 1930s, "when we knelt down to say the rosary there was prayers said to St. Gerard."<sup>37</sup> A Branch lady told me, "I kept up the Devotion after they were born too, you know, I still prays to St. Gerard . . . for protection, you know, for the boys, for the whole family. . . . Yes, and people would say at the family rosary, I was often in houses and at the end they'd say three 'Hail Marys' extra to St. Gerard Majella for the family's protection."<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Madonna, 32, No. 1 (Jan. 1959), 31.

<sup>35</sup> Madonna, 38, No. 6 (June 1965), 28.

<sup>36</sup> Madonna, 26, No. 5 (May 1953), 158.

<sup>37</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C8500.

<sup>38</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C5851.

A St. John's informant told me that whenever any of her children go out she says, "Gerard, look after him till he comes home."<sup>39</sup> A woman mentioned that her brother, a Redemptorist lay brother, had regarded St. Gerard as "patron saint for safety on the highways," and claimed "First thing he'd do when he got into a car was a deck of the rosary to St. Gerard for protection."<sup>40</sup> (This was the only instance I encountered of St. Gerard being prayed to in this particular capacity.) A further application of the protection motif appears in the following letter from Mrs. E.B.C., Nfld. which was printed in Madonna in December 1961: "Enclosed please find an offering in return of thanks to St. Gerard, who protected my son and grandson in heavy seas. They could not land and I turned to good St. Anne and St. Gerard and pleaded with tears for their protection. Thank God they landed safely."<sup>41</sup>

In April 1952 Madonna magazine talked of "a new apostolate opening up for St. Gerard," as "San Saint."<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Fieldnotes, Oct. 16, 1978.

<sup>40</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C5851. (The rosary consists of one hundred and fifty "Hail Marys," arranged in fifteen decades. A decade thus consists of ten "Hail Marys," and this is commonly known as a "dec"/"deck" of the rosary.)

<sup>41</sup> Madonna, 34, No. 11 (Dec. 1961), 32.

<sup>42</sup> Madonna, 25, No. 4 (April 1952), 124.

It was claimed that an "avalanche of mail" had been received from patients in T.B. sanatoria. Two Newfoundland examples of the "San" mail were quoted in that issue, one from a fifteen year old girl, the other from a young mother with a large family. Madonna continued to receive "San" letters from Newfoundland into the 1960s, including this one from a sixteen year old girl: "I wish to join the League of St. Gerard for life, for which I am enclosing ten dollars. Father, I was a patient in the Sanatorium for over fifteen months and during that time I had two operations. I prayed to St. Gerard and put all my trust in him that my operations would be successful. They were, and St. Gerard has answered my prayers many times."<sup>43</sup> A Spruce Brook mother writing to thank St. Gerard for a safe delivery added, "It was a great worry for me before he was born, because I was in a sanatorium at the time."<sup>44</sup>

In the T.B. sanatoria in Newfoundland there seems to have been a lot of devotion to St. Gerard, even among teenage girls. To oversimplify somewhat, apart from devotions inspired or enforced by parents or school, it would appear that people become interested in a patron when they encounter problems. For this reason, it

<sup>43</sup> Madonna, 34, No. 7 (July-Aug. 1961), 31.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

seems, people prone to illness tend to take on such devotion sooner than their contemporaries. One of my informants commented, "I had rheumatic fever before I was married, see, so that caused some devotion, I guess."<sup>45</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s St. Gerard was very popular among Newfoundland women, some of whom were in sanatoria. For girls facing a health crisis there, St. Gerard was a natural choice of patron, being talked about and prayed to by their fellow patients. A few informants who had been "in the san" commented that they did a lot of praying and made many novenas then, for in addition to spiritual considerations it all "helped put in the time." The League of St. Gerard retrospectively endorsed the appropriateness of the "San" devotion, pointing out that St. Gerard had died of consumption, and that one of his canonisation miracles had been the cure of a consumptive woman.

A number of women simply prayed to St. Gerard, as one put it, "for everything and anything." All of these ladies had become particularly interested in St. Gerard when they were pregnant, but had kept up the devotion. A Freshwater lady told me, "You can pray for anything else. I mean, it's not pregnancy alone, but you can pray for all favours. I've, I've got a lot of favours

<sup>45</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3501.

from him, you know . . . I always pray."<sup>46</sup> Another lady who has also continued her devotion to St. Gerard said, "I prays to him for everything. I pray to him now like if anyone, you know, drinks too much, if anybody at all is neglectful of their duty . . . I prays to him for everything, I don't make no difference."<sup>47</sup>

The Newfoundland letters printed in Madonna indicate the variety of situations for which St. Gerard's help was invoked. A St. John's lady wrote to thank St. Gerard for a "special favour," namely "an apartment in a good location" for her sister and family.<sup>48</sup> "A friend of St. Gerard," Witless Bay, wrote in thanking for passing his/her Grade 9 exams and asked to be remembered again in Grade 10.<sup>49</sup> A Great Codroy woman wrote that she had enrolled her husband and son in The League three months previously, asking for their reconciliation; she reported that her son and his father were now on friendly terms.<sup>50</sup> The following letter was received from a Mainland mother: "About two weeks ago, the children accidentally set fire to their father's barn. It had started up bad, when I prayed

<sup>46</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3496.

<sup>47</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C5851.

<sup>48</sup> Madonna, 34, No. 11 (Dec. 1961), 32.

<sup>49</sup> Madonna, 32, No. 10 (Nov. 1959), 30.

<sup>50</sup> Madonna, 38, No. 5 (May 1965), 28.



to St. Gerard and made the sign of the cross towards it. In five minutes, with the help of neighbours, we had the fire out. I feel it was St. Gerard who answered our prayer."<sup>51</sup> These letters demonstrate, in Berger's words, "the rootedness of religion in the practical concerns of everyday life."<sup>52</sup>

St. Gerard Majella's "clientele" in Newfoundland has consisted largely of Roman Catholic married women who desired, were expecting, or had children. Although most of my informants fell into this category, I also interviewed others on the periphery of this group and I shall now briefly deal with their perceptions of the saint.

I did not encounter any unmarried ladies with devotion to St. Gerard, although one woman had prayed to the saint before she was married when she was suffering from rheumatic fever. A Placentia nun whose mother was very devoted to St. Gerard told me that she tries to foster the devotion in mothers because "It's in my system," but she herself never prays to him. Nuns who spread devotion to St. Gerard in St. Clare's Mercy

<sup>51</sup> Madonna, 34, No. 2 (Feb. 1961), 31.

<sup>52</sup> Peter L. Berger, The Sacred Canopy (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1969), p. 41.

Hospital, St. John's, were likewise promoters rather than devotees. An unmarried nurse in the Placentia hospital said, when describing her patients' devotion to St. Gerard, "They often asked me if I'd, em, say a prayer to him for them as well, and I sometimes used to say one, you know, when someone was having a hard time or something."<sup>53</sup> She did this because "It's through the intercession of those saints that things are brought on," but she did not have any personal devotion to the saint. St. Gerard was regarded as a specialist for expectant mothers by all the single women I spoke to, and as such was considered irrelevant to them. As one Stephenville spinster said with a laugh, "I never had no reason to use him."

Madonna magazine made obvious attempts to impress men with St. Gerard. He was often captioned "The Working-man's Friend," his perseverance and industriousness were stressed, and it was suggested that fathers as well as mothers should pray to him. However, the bid to interest men in St. Gerard does not seem to have been very successful in Newfoundland. This may, to some extent, reflect the different social and religious concerns of the sexes. One young man simply claimed that "Religion for most of the men in the community

<sup>53</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3500.

was purely a Sunday event,"<sup>54</sup> but an older man, countering his wife's claims that he wouldn't even have thought of praying to St. Gerard, insisted, "Sometimes a father's prayers are different from yours."<sup>55</sup> Some men, whose wives had devotion to St. Gerard, either had not heard of the saint, or were unaware of his sphere of influence. The following exchange occurred, for example, while I was interviewing a woman who has a son named in St. Gerard's honour:

- Mr. M. : What's Gerard the patron saint of any-  
ways? What's he the patron saint of?  
Mrs. M.: Mothers, expectant mothers.  
Mr. M. : Oh geez, I don't know. No wonder I know  
nothing about the man, I had nothing  
to do with him.<sup>56</sup>

Any men I encountered who knew about St. Gerard connected him with women, and considered the devotion a purely female concern. One Placentia man recalled the devotion to St. Gerard in his parental home: "Oh, there was prayers and everything said in honour of St. Gerard. . . but it was her devotion, it was. . . . It all came from my mother."<sup>57</sup> Although aware of his mother's devotion to St. Gerard, it was interesting that this same man, after our conversation, said to his wife, "Say, why did you put Gerard on Edmund's name? He's called Gerard." To this she replied, "Oh sure, honey, I was

54 MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3495.

55 MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3500.

56 MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3497.

57 MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3500.

praying my heart out for Edmund."<sup>58</sup> This lady also mentioned that she had encouraged Edmund to pray to St. Gerard. When I spoke to Edmund, in his early twenties, he recalled having "a certain confidence" in St. Gerard when he was young, but he describes himself as "a good radical Catholic" now, and he no longer prays to saints. It was only as a result of my conversations with his mother that he discovered why his middle name was Gerard. (A number of Gerards thought their mothers had chosen their name because they "just liked it," or it was "traditional," when in fact it was in honour of the saint.)

A woman who had experienced considerable difficulties at the birth of her third child did not think her husband had prayed to St. Gerard, but added, "I know he believes as I do that St. Gerard had a hand in the last one--probably the other two too, but definitely the last one."<sup>59</sup> A Campbell's Creek lady, however, assured me that her husband had prayed to St. Gerard on her behalf; it was he who bought a large statue of St. Gerard in thanksgiving and donated it to the church at Port aux Port. A parish priest related this incident which he had witnessed at Fortune Harbour:

<sup>58</sup> MUNPLA, Tape, 78-196/C3500.

<sup>59</sup> Fieldnotes, Sept. 1978.

In this particular instance it was impossible to get any medical assistance whatsoever. The old lady who was helping the mother, oh, didn't have much experience in this regard at all, and . . . the mother had extreme difficulty and she put her trust and confidence in St. Gerard. In fact, she shamed me in her faith there that St. Gerard could bring her through.

And eh, I even saw her husband out in a little woodshed, down on his knees, just pleading, and almost crying to God through St. Gerard, for safe delivery for his wife. And eh, lo and behold, you could say, and they contend themselves, the husband and wife, that it was through a miracle of St. Gerard that the wife was able to survive.<sup>60</sup>

It is noteworthy that even in these cases when men had prayed to St. Gerard, it had been on their wives' behalf, and to him as "The Mothers' Saint." I met no man who had a personal devotion to St. Gerard.

A League of St. Gerard article in Madonna entitled "Saint Gerard Helps Everybody" claimed, "He helps Protestants too."<sup>61</sup> I was told on a few occasions that St. Gerard had helped a Protestant mother, critically ill in childbirth, who was so desperate that she allowed a St. Gerard medal to be "used" on her; mother and child came through the crisis and made perfect recoveries. However, only once was I able to get this narrative related to me with any personal detail, from a St. Alban's informant in her twenties who had heard it from her mother: "I remember hearing her eh, talking about

<sup>60</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3503.

<sup>61</sup> Madonna, 24, No. 6 (June 1951), 189.

her aunt who was a midwife using a St. Gerard medal or relic on a lady from Milltown who was having a real hard delivery, and the lady was Protestant.<sup>62</sup> General claims of St. Gerard's help in such a case may have been based on letters which appeared from time to time on this theme in Madonna, although none ever seem to have been from Newfoundland.

A couple of my informants were under the impression that St. Gerard was turned to by Protestants as well as Catholics as "The Mothers' Saint," although these were unsubstantiated views: In Stephenville, however, I spoke with an Anglican lady of somewhat unorthodox persuasion who does in fact have devotion to St. Gerard. This lady had lost her first baby in childbirth, and when she was expecting her second child her Roman Catholic neighbour's mother gave her a St. Gerard prayer card. She and her husband prayed to St. Gerard, she had a safe delivery, and she had six other children after that. The lady told me she wears her St. Gerard medal "constantly," and the couple have a picture of St. Gerard in their bedroom. Although they are practising members of the Church of England, the lady also mentioned a Sacred Heart plaque that they have had on their wall since they were married, which indicates

<sup>62</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3494.

a strong element of Roman Catholicism in their Anglicanism, and it would be wrong to regard this couple as typical.

St. Gerard Majella has appealed primarily to married Catholic women in Newfoundland, but what has been asked of the saint has varied according to people's particular needs and experiences. Expectant mothers have asked him for aid ranging from comfort in times of stress to physical intervention; for others he has been "Protector of the Family," "San Saint," or constant companion. The flexible nature of nonliturgical piety and the closeness of relations between individuals and holy figures allows people to dovetail devotion to their specific needs.

The considerable differences in the duration, intensity and emphasis of people's dealings with St. Gerard, and the wide range of occasions on which he has been turned to, exemplify the great scope for diversity in nonliturgical piety, and the way "each person's religion has to do with himself and his own autonomous needs."<sup>63</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Douglas, p. 26.

CHAPTER IV"I'M TALKING TO HIM ALL THE TIME:" COMMUNICATION AND  
TRANSACTION IN DEVOTION TO ST. GERARD

One of the major attractions of nonliturgical piety has been the ease with which the individual can communicate with a holy figure, whether to ask for assistance in some physical crisis, or simply to chat. Outside the strictures of ritual, and with no constraints of time and place, the individual has considerable freedom in how he deals with the saints. With this degree of autonomy, not only does what people ask for vary, but how it is asked for varies also. The individual can choose the degree of formality and form of communication he considers most appropriate--or efficacious--in a particular situation; he is able to conduct affairs with a saint very much on his own terms. The "transactional field in which humans deal with holy figures"<sup>1</sup> is therefore immensely wide and varied.

There has been a great degree of informality in relationships between St. Gerard and his followers in Newfoundland, for the devotion has been conducted almost entirely outside a formal ritual setting. Even celebration of the saint's feast day is not an integral

<sup>1</sup> Freeman, pp. 108-109.



part of Church ritual. The Redemptorists appear to be the only people who consistently celebrate the feast day in some way: mass is offered at The League of St. Gerard's shrine for League members on October 16, and at St. Theresa's (the St. John's church run by the Redemptorists) it seems to have been the practice to have a small picture of St. Gerard displayed and some mention made of him then. The only other celebration in a church which I have heard of took place in the old St. Stephen's Church, Stephenville. I was told that one year some of the ladies of the parish put artificial flowers and decorations around the statue of St. Gerard to celebrate his feast day, but unfortunately these caught fire from candles and the statue suffered somewhat as a result. Although Madonna urged readers to have a mass offered at their local churches on October 16, none of my informants had ever done so.

Only a couple of woman with whom I spoke had marked St. Gerard's feast day in any special way. One lady told me, "In earlier years now . . . when the feast of St. Gerard comes sixteenth of October . . . we'd shrine that little picture [of St. Gerard] like an altar, see, and light two candles and say the family rosary."<sup>2</sup> Another informant said, "I used to make a special novena

<sup>2</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3501.

for that, always."<sup>3</sup> For the most part, however, there was not even that degree of formality in relations with St. Gerard. I happened to be conversing with a lady on October 16, 1978, and asked her if she was doing anything special for St. Gerard's feast day. She replied, "I'm talking to him all the time. His feast day is every day as far as I'm concerned."<sup>4</sup>

Like many other forms of nonliturgical piety, devotion to St. Gerard was not in opposition to the Church, in the sense of the formal religious activity conducted in the actual church building. It supplemented it. It was a sphere in which the individual could take the initiative, and over which she had control. Communication with the saint could take the form of a set prayer or a brief exclamation, a novena or a conversation. It could be said or thought at any hour of day or night, free from ritual, spatial, or temporal constraints. As one informant said of St. Gerard, "He's always on call."<sup>5</sup>

Set prayers to St. Gerard Majella are easily obtainable. Ehman's widely distributed booklet The Mothers' Saint

<sup>3</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C5851.

<sup>4</sup> Fieldnotes, Oct. 16, 1978.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

contains a number of prayers, including "Prayer for Motherhood," "For an Expectant Mother," and "For a Sick Child." (See Appendix B) The League has also produced Prayers To The Mothers' Saint, an eight page pamphlet of prayers with a picture of St. Gerard on the front, while the "Prayer for Motherhood," "For an Expectant Mother," and others are available on small prayer cards bearing a picture of the saint.

The prayer "For an Expectant Mother" seems to have been said by most informants on their own behalf when they were pregnant, and was the one commonly used when praying for pregnant friends and relatives. A number of informants mentioned that they still say it with no-one particular in mind, as there's always someone, somewhere, expecting a baby: Flicking through Prayers To The Mothers' Saint, a Point Verde lady with nine children pointed to the prayer "For an Expectant Mother" and said, "Now there's the one that I said once I knew I was sick." She continued: "And, eh, when the children go down there are prayers there too for a sick child. . . . I've always prayed for sick children. Often in the night, too, you know, the children would have colds, or you'd be afraid it was pneumonia or something that you wouldn't really know, you know, with small babies. I always had my picture of St. Gerard to say my prayers

for the sick children."<sup>6</sup> A lady whose son made a "miraculous" recovery from appendicitis commented when showing me her copy of The Mothers' Saint, "You can see the print of me thumb now, round the side of the prayer for the sick child. I almost wore the book out."<sup>7</sup>

The novena is a special devotional exercise lasting nine days, usually undertaken to obtain a particular request through the intercession of a holy figure. It seems generally to have been regarded as a particularly efficacious form of prayer, and Christian describes its use as "the premature payment of a hoped-for favour."<sup>8</sup> In my fieldwork the earliest novena to St. Gerard which I encountered was contained in a pamphlet printed by the Redemptorists at Beaupré in 1922. Ehman's booklet, The Mothers' Saint, contains a similar novena, with instructions on how best to conduct the novena, a "Consideration" of some aspect of St. Gerard's life, an "Example" of his powers, and special prayers for each day. (See Appendix C) Novenas were often made by women to become pregnant, and at some point in a pregnancy for safe delivery. A lady writing in thanksgiving for the safe delivery of a baby after six years of

<sup>6</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3499.

<sup>7</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3501.

<sup>8</sup> Christian, p. 120.

marriage said, "It was after beginning a novena to St. Gerard that I became pregnant."<sup>9</sup> A Point Verde informant told me, "I said the novena in honour of St. Gerard all through the time, you know, through all the pregnancies."<sup>10</sup>

Madonna correspondence indicates that novenas were also frequently made for curative purposes. A Marystown woman wrote with regard to her husband's illness, "I made a novena to St. Gerard, and now my husband is on the way to recovery."<sup>11</sup> A Point la Haye letter read, "After my baby was born, I was seriously ill. I made a novena to St. Gerard and promised that, if I should get better, I would enrol as an Annual Member. Shortly after completing my novena I was feeling a lot better, thanks to St. Gerard."<sup>12</sup>

Although one Freshwater lady with particular devotion to St. Gerard claimed, "I've said this novena every day for some intention," a number of women mentioned that novenas are very time-consuming. A mother of thirteen children told me, "I always said a prayer to St. Gerard. But now, you know, I don't make the novenas

<sup>9</sup> Madonna, 36, No. 7 (July-Aug. 1963), 31.

<sup>10</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3496.

<sup>11</sup> Madonna, 34, No. 6 (June 1961), 30.

<sup>12</sup> Madonna, 34, No. 5 (May 1961), 31.

like I used to in the early days, because they are long. . . . The time really comes when you don't hardly have time to pray, I found . . . but I didn't worry, because I knew God understood, and I know St. Gerard understood. But like I said, there's days I've just said, 'St. Gerard, pray for me,' or 'St. Gerard, help me,' that's all."<sup>13</sup> These sentiments were echoed by a Placentia lady when I asked her if she took her prayers to St. Gerard from Ehman's book: "Yes, possibly, yes, yes. Or maybe just a brief aspiration, 'St. Gerard pray for me.' There'd be no special prayer. The special prayer doesn't make that much difference. It doesn't matter how you ask, I suppose, you know, it's if you have the right motive why you ask. . . . The short aspiration would be just as powerful and efficacious as a long one. A busy mother doesn't have too much time for long prayers."<sup>14</sup>

Although people can simply chat with the saint and express affection towards him, and although the form of communication with St. Gerard can vary according to the preference and circumstances of the individual, the category into which most communication with the saint falls tends to be that of instrumental or petitionary

<sup>13</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3501.

<sup>14</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3499.

prayer. Christian writes: "The most instrumental and most specific kind of communication with the divine seeks a response from the divine in the form of action in this world about a particular problem."<sup>15</sup> The League of St. Gerard's "Crusade of Prayer" is an extreme example of this. One of the degrees of League membership was that of the "Crusader," who promised "to recite daily the prayer to St. Gerard against the forces of anti-life."<sup>16</sup> (Appendix D) Other League members were encouraged to be active in this way also, and it was pointed out that the prayer could be said devoutly in about eighty seconds. This was to be The League's "spiritual warfare against anti-life,"<sup>17</sup> and the rather ambitious divine response sought by the prayer was "that all the diabolical forces may be destroyed from the face of the earth forever."<sup>18</sup>

At the individual level, instrumental or petitionary prayer can be divided into three broad categories--the "Thy will be done" variety, the specific request, and the promissory prayer. The first type of prayer is based on faith and trust and tends to be self-fulfilling,

<sup>15</sup> Christian, pp. 118-119.

<sup>16</sup> Ehman, p. 59.

<sup>17</sup> Madonna, 33, No. 9 (Oct. 1960), 31.

<sup>18</sup> Ehman, p. 51.

since God's will shall, presumably, be done; whether or not it accords with the wishes of the individual is quite another matter. A Branch lady with considerable devotion to St. Gerard told me that she prays to the saint for everything. She added, however, "But your prayers are not always answered the way you pray . . . they might be answered in a different way. You can't get everything you want, you know, not the way you want it."<sup>19</sup> In this respect Thomas writes that "Everyone who prayed could be sure that he would get what was good for him, though it might not be what he was hoping for . . . The belief in petitionary prayer was thus a self-confirming system. . . Once the petitioner had accepted the doctrine, his faith need never slacken, however unsuccessful his own requests for material aid."<sup>20</sup>

The second prayer type, the specific request, was common among devotees of St. Gerard and was frequently connected with pregnancy. A most touching example of this appeared in the June 1961 issue of Madonna:

First letter: February 9, 1961

Dear St. Gerard, I am enclosing an offering asking you to help me to save my child. I am in the family way and I am so frightened. Good St. Gerard, I have already lost four babies, so I am asking you and praying to you every night to help me save this one. Pray for me, and ask God to give my

<sup>19</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C5851.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas, p. 137.



dear baby the strength to move.

Good St. Gerard, there is something wrong with me. When I get to the eighth month, my babies die. Oh please, Good St. Gerard, pray for me that I may carry this baby nine months and that I may save the baby. How nice it would be to have a small baby! Oh Good St. Gerard, pray for me, help me. I would give anything to have a baby.

- Mrs. M.L., Nfld.

Second letter: April 2, 1961

Dear Good St. Gerard, thank you for sending me my baby smart [healthy]. Thank you and dear God!

- Mrs. M.L., Nfld.<sup>21</sup>

After praying to St. Gerard throughout the pregnancy, it is understandable that many women prayed to the saint during the delivery itself. One Stephenville lady told me, "You prayed until you delivered, and then you prayed in thanksgiving."<sup>22</sup> A St. Alban's woman who had her prayer card with the prayer "For an Expectant Mother" with her at the delivery said, "I held it in my hand and said the prayer over and over."<sup>23</sup> A Bird Cove woman, telling of her successful Cesarean Section operation, wrote, "While on the operating table, I spoke to St. Gerard and Our Blessed Mother in my own mind, as you would speak to any good friend. I left it all up to them."<sup>24</sup> The following account by a Newfoundland mother of the birth of her daughter appeared in Madonna in

<sup>21</sup> Madonna, 34, No. 6 (June 1961), 31.

<sup>22</sup> Fieldnotes, Sept. 1978.

<sup>23</sup> Fieldnotes, May 4, 1978.

<sup>24</sup> Madonna, 34, No. 2 (Feb. 1961), 30.

Plate 2 Statue of St. Gerard Majella, Port aux Port,  
donated in thanksgiving. (MUNFLA, Photo,  
78-196/P4386)



1961:

When she was born the doctors did not have much hope for her, as she was "post matured" and so distressed that she could not even breath. [sic] When I saw what was happening, I just forgot everything and prayed to St. Gerard. Then after the doctors had been working with her about fifteen minutes, they came and told me that she was beginning to react to the oxygen. I just kept on praying to St. Gerard. After five hours; the doctors told me there was a good chance for my little girl.<sup>25</sup>

Thomas's comments on "the petitionary prayer of individuals at moments of intense personal difficulty" are relevant here: "The ritual helped men to focus their attention and to take stock of their situation. It also allayed anxiety by mitigating their feelings of helplessness. The moral strength to be derived from this procedure is not to be underrated."<sup>26</sup>

If the specific request was granted, the devotee might do something in thanksgiving. Thanksgiving could take a number of forms--the naming of a child in the saint's honour, having a mass offered, and so on. In 1954, for example, a large statue of St. Gerard was presented in thanksgiving by a Campbell's Creek couple to the Roman Catholic church at Port aux Port. (Plate 2) A Point Verde mother assured me that she has told friends about St. Gerard and intends to recommend him

<sup>25</sup> Madonna, 34, No. 1 (Jan. 1961), 30.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas, pp. 174-175.

to her daughters when they marry: "Because St. Gerard, you know, has been good to me over the years, I never had any trouble, and I hope he'll do the same for them. By doing that too, you see, I'm helping to spread devotion to St. Gerard, you know . . . I mean more or less as a thanksgiving, too, you help spread devotion to him, you know."<sup>27</sup>

In terms of thanksgiving, The League of St. Gerard and Madonna magazine were not simply promotional, they actually became part of the devotional process. Publication of the favour in Madonna, sending money for The League's shrine to St. Gerard, and either joining or enrolling others in The League were common forms of thanksgiving. A letter published in Madonna read, "I have been praying to St. Gerard for quite some time for two special favours which have been granted . . . Please publish my humble gratitude to St. Gerard in the next issue of the Madonna. Thank God for St. Gerard and your Madonna."<sup>28</sup> Madonna's League section suggested that "The small offering for annual membership can be a yearly alms of thanksgiving to St. Gerard for his past favours."<sup>29</sup> In 1951 a Fleur de Lys mother wrote, "I have decided

<sup>27</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3499.

<sup>28</sup> Madonna, 34, No. 11 (Dec. 1961), 32.

<sup>29</sup> Madonna, 26, No. 5 (May 1953), 158.

I would like to become a promoter. Please find enclosed an offering for two new members and my own renewal. I don't have much spare time but I do all I possibly can to spread devotion to this great Wonder Worker. I have a little family, which came faster than expected-- so I was constantly asking St. Gerard for his help. He never did fail me.<sup>30</sup>

An interesting combination of thanksgivings is revealed in a letter from Mrs. D.L., Jersey Side:

I wish to thank St. Gerard publicly for all the favours he has granted me in the past.

The enclosed donation is in thanksgiving for a safe delivery and healthy baby during this past August. I was a bit nervous upon entering the maternity room due to the fact that certain complications arose after the birth of my previous baby which prolonged my stay in the maternity room for about four hours. However, when I entered the maternity room, I saw the picture of St. Gerard which I had given the hospital about a year ago in thanksgiving for a favour received. I knew that everything was going to be alright, and indeed, for within an hour I was back in the ward with a lovely baby boy.<sup>31</sup>

From the information gained in interviews and the evidence in Madonna, the promissory prayer appears to have been a major feature of devotion to St. Gerard Majella in Newfoundland. In the promissory prayer, the devotee makes in advance a conditional pledge, specifying what reciprocal action she will take if the prayer is granted.

<sup>30</sup> Madonna, 34, No. 6 (June 1961), 30.

<sup>31</sup> Madonna, 34, No. 11 (Dec. 1961), 32.

Explaining the rationale behind the promissory prayer, a Branch informant told me, "When you'd be praying like that to a saint, you'd have to give something in return. Like, if I done a favour for you, you know, or if you done one for me, you'd like to return it, wouldn't you? In some small way. Well, that's what I always done. I always promised that, perhaps, I'd enrol some friend or I'd spread devotion about the saint, or probably I'd have a mass offered."<sup>32</sup>

The League and Madonna were common components of pledges. The following Newfoundland letters are typical of the many printed in Madonna:

I am enrolling two new members as promised if my one year old was cured of an ear and throat infection and if my one month old baby came through an operation successfully. Both are fine.  
- Mrs. W., Placentia, Nfld.<sup>33</sup>

I am enclosing ten dollars for a Perpetual Membership for my son Gerard Joseph who was born December 19th. I promised St. Gerard to do this if everything was O.K.  
- Mrs. T.M., Placentia, Nfld.<sup>34</sup>

Thanksgiving for sick child's recovery from painful illness, after promising publication in Madonna if child recovered without medical assistance. Great anxiety relieved.  
- Mrs. D.L., Arnold's Cove, Nfld.<sup>35</sup>

Naming children after St. Gerard Majella has been one

<sup>32</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C5851.

<sup>33</sup> Madonna, 34, No. 6 (June 1961), 31.

<sup>34</sup> Madonna, 39, No. 5 (May 1966), 27.

<sup>35</sup> Madonna, 34, No. 2 (Feb. 1961), 31.

of the most public forms of thanksgiving or promissory pledge in Newfoundland. It is impossible to ascertain exactly when, where, and how the practice of naming children in St. Gerard's honour originated in the province, but there is evidence of it as early as 1900--four years before his canonisation. In the Placentia parish baptismal records for the nineteenth century there are no instances of the name Gerard, but in 1900 there appears one Gerard Majella, and two boys have Gerard as their middle name.<sup>36</sup>

An Argentinia woman assured me:

Most families, where there's big families, and there's boys or girls, 'cause they used to call them Geraldine, I think, if they didn't get a boy. They have a Gerard in the family, and this is after St. Gerard. And if they didn't call him, you know, Gerard by their first name, they certainly had Gerard stuck on the name somewhere. And as far back as, for instance, my aunt, she's what now, eighty, she's near ninety years old, you know. Probably that's where I first heard of it, you know, Gerard Majella. She had a son named Gerard, and eh, you know, she had a devotion to St. Gerard Majella.<sup>37</sup>

One Point Verde informant born in 1913 has Gerard as her middle name; she commented, "My mother must have been praying in honour of St. Gerard to have called me that."<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> I had hoped to study the baptismal records for other areas where I did fieldwork, but was unable to obtain access to them.

<sup>37</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3500.

<sup>38</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3496.



It is reasonable to assume that Redemptorist missionaries would have had some influence on naming patterns. Father S. told me, "Fair number of children named Gerard, actually, in Newfoundland, you know. . . . I think that came with the missions too, because I would talk about that and then some of them would name it . . . They might be pregnant, eh, and they'd come for a blessing, they wanted to be crossed as they say here, you know, and then after the child was born they'd call it Gerard often."<sup>39</sup>

Bestowing the saint's name on a child has been a common form of thanksgiving. An informant in Lourdes called her third child Gerard after a particularly complicated pregnancy during which she had derived great comfort from her devotion to the saint. I asked a Point-Verde mother who had been devoted to St. Gerard throughout her nine pregnancies why she had named her youngest child Alexander Gerard: "I suppose, girl, I figured well, he was the ninth and the last, and he had taken such good care of me. . . . I never had any trouble, see, although there was quite a crowd of them, nine, you know. . . . So more or less, I suppose, in thanksgiving, you know."<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3492.

<sup>40</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3499.

The naming of a child in St. Gerard's honour was also a common pledge in promissory prayer. In conversation with a Freshwater informant whose sons are called Eugene Gerard and Majella, I asked why she had chosen the names. She replied, "Because I prayed to him, asking him to be all right, I said I'd call them after him, you know, I'd honour him, you know, if they were boys."<sup>41</sup> Similarly, a Fortune Harbour mother thanking St. Gerard for a safe delivery wrote, "I prayed to St. Gerard and asked for his protection, and I promised that if the baby was born alive I would call the baby after him."<sup>42</sup>

In addition to using Gerard and Majella in names, there are a number of feminine forms--Gerarda, Gerardine, Geralyne, and Gerardella. I have frequently been told by informants that Geraldine is recognised as a female form of Gerard. The name Madonna can also be indicative of devotion to St. Gerard, because of the saint's close association with Madonna magazine: according to the Placentia records for 1959, one girl was christened Madonna Gerarda and another Madonna Gerard. A rather creative example of naming appeared in Madonna in a letter from Riverhead: "Thanks to St. Gerard, and Our Blessed Mother for the safe delivery of our fifteenth child. We called our baby Catrina Marie, after one

<sup>41</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3497.

<sup>42</sup> Madonna, 34, No. 8 (Sept. 1961), 32.

of the women cured by St. Gerard."<sup>43</sup>

Readers of Madonna were frequently encouraged to name their children after St. Gerard. The importance of choosing the "right" name was stressed in an article entitled "What's in a Name?" by Alphonsus Thomas, C.Ss.R., who stated, "If he is given the name of a saint then this saint . . . becomes a special protector of this child, a special patron for him before the throne of Almighty God, to help him in his difficulties and temptations of life."<sup>44</sup> In this respect I quote from an interesting letter received in response to my Catholic Monitor enquiry: "When I had my first child he was born three months prematurely, weighed only 2lb. 15oz. and wasn't expected to live 24 hours. When they asked me for a confirmation [sic] name for him I picked Gerard. Although I didn't pray to St. Gerard at the time I think the fact that I chose his name helped save him."<sup>45</sup> (It is, perhaps, significant that 25% of Gerard Majella-related entries in the Placentia baptismal register between 1900 and 1915 have in the margin "sub. con.," which stands for "sub conditione." I was told this

<sup>43</sup> Madonna, 34, No. 1 (Jan. 1961), 31.

<sup>44</sup> Madonna, 28, No. 8 (Sept. 1955), 250.

<sup>45</sup> Correspondence, undated, 1978.

generally indicated that a child had been baptised on the day of its birth because of fears for its survival. This had happened to Gerard Majella himself.)

The League's exhortations to name children in honour of St. Gerard seem to have had something of a publicity element: "May the list of boys and girls who have been given his name grow and grow until his fame stretches around the earth."<sup>46</sup> In the summer of 1958 Madonna magazine started to feature a "My Name is Gerard" section in its League pages. In the lists of children with Gerard Majella-related names Newfoundland was always well represented. In November 1959, for example, Gerard Ryan, Edmund Gerard Ryan, and Elizabeth Gerarda Ryan of Freshwater appeared as "St. Gerard family." A letter from Mainland was printed in 1960 under the caption "Gerardville;" in this the correspondent said that she would name the baby she was carrying after St. Gerard, but she would use Majella "because there are so many Gerards in this place now."<sup>47</sup> Similarly, when I asked one Point Verde informant if she had ever considered naming any of her children after the saint, she replied, "Then there were too many Gerard Greenes anyway, you

<sup>46</sup> Madonna, 39, No. 2 (Feb. 1966), 28.

<sup>47</sup> Madonna, 33, No. 5 (July-Aug. 1960), 31.

know.<sup>48</sup>

The presence or absence of a Gerard Majella-related name cannot be taken as conclusive evidence concerning devotion to the saint. One informant in Branch has all three sons named in honour of St. Gerard. A St. Mary's mother of twelve has reflected her devotion to the saint simply in calling one daughter Gerarda. Other ladies with devotion to the saint have not named their children after the saint at all. Furthermore, while conversing with a St. Alban's lady I ascertained that she had given birth in 1960 to a son named Gerard. Confidently expecting an affirmative answer, I asked if her son was named in honour of St. Gerard. She replied, "No, my dear, that was Father Hayes stuck that on him. I wanted to call him Calvin. Father Hayes called everyone Gerard that year."<sup>49</sup>

Although the practice of naming children after St. Gerard has not been uniform, the considerable number of people with Gerard Majella-related names is indicative of the devotional vogue which swept Newfoundland this century.

<sup>48</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3496.

<sup>49</sup> Fieldnotes, May 4, 1978.

While saints are officially only intercessors, and God is the source of divine power, they have traditionally been considered more accessible than the Almighty. As saints are basically holy people, it has seemed obvious to many worshippers that they would respond to "secular techniques of exchange and intimacy."<sup>50</sup> It is true that "There is no place in Catholic theology for the various kinds of bargaining with the divine that are common in present Catholicism,"<sup>51</sup> but relationships between St. Gerard and his followers have tended to be perceived and conducted in very human terms. In petitionary prayers people have struck bargains with St. Gerard, and he has been "paid" for services rendered in money for League subscriptions, publicity through Madonna, and so on. Many devotees have seen their dealings with the saint in friendlier terms, like asking and doing favours, and affection and gratitude have been expressed by, for example, spreading devotion or naming a child in the saint's honour. Folk and official practices have persisted side by side for centuries in relationships with saints, and the Church has not always made it clear where the two diverge. In devotion to St. Gerard, for instance, the type of bargaining

<sup>50</sup> Christian, p. 174.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

which is officially unacceptable was implicitly condoned by the Redemptorists in the publication of letters which fulfilled promissory pledges, or which told of successful "bargains" with the saint.

The intimacy and very human modes of interaction between devotee and Holy figure in nonliturgical piety have given rise to "unofficial" behaviour which seems entirely logical, natural, and proper to those involved. The received traditions and personal experiences of individuals have suggested that this is how relationships should be conducted; and there has frequently been no official guidance to the contrary. For devotees in this situation folk beliefs and practices are as much part of their religious lives as "the strictly theological and liturgical forms of the official religion."<sup>52</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Yoder, p. 14.

CHAPTER VTHE PARAPHERNALIA OF POPULAR RELIGION: ICONOGRAPHY  
AND DEVOTIONAL OBJECTS IN DEVOTION TO ST. GERARD

It has been common in popular devotion for believers to have some visual representation of the focus of their devotion, such as a picture, a medal or a statue. As authentic likenesses of a holy figure have often not existed, pictures have traditionally been compiled according to what has been known of the saint, and clues to his life and works have been given through the symbolism of Christian art.

Items bearing a picture of a holy figure are officially "memorials," aids to contemplation. However, devotional objects in Roman Catholicism have frequently been popularly regarded not simply as works of art, but as repositories of the saint's power. In such cases the emphasis shifts from the likeness on the object, to the item itself. People's feelings and behaviour towards representations of a saint, and the significance attached to them, have therefore varied considerably.

In the study of saints, as Delahaye points out, "pictorial tradition must not be neglected, for it plays an important part in hagiography."<sup>1</sup> It should be

<sup>1</sup> Hippolyte Delahaye, S.J., The Legends of the



remembered that representations of holy figures have from time to time been altered--for aesthetic reasons, to achieve greater accuracy, to popularise a saint, or even to change people's perceptions of him. The iconography of St. Joseph, for example, has undergone striking changes; he has been depicted as young and dynamic, or old and infirm, according to the theological climate.<sup>2</sup> In the cult of St. Gerard Majella, likenesses of the saint have been changed over the years by the Redemptorists, in attempts to increase his popular appeal and to highlight his role as "The Mothers' Saint."

The earliest representation of St. Gerard that I saw in my fieldwork belonged to a Placentia family, and dated from between 1893 and 1904, as it was captioned "Beatus Gerardus Majella." (Plate 3) The picture shows a youthful Gerard in Redemptorist habit, nimbused and standing with his hands clasped as if in prayer. A crucifix hangs on the wall, and on a table below there are rosary beads, lilies, a scourge, and a book. Gerard's appearance is somewhat delicate, in keeping with the poor health which almost prevented him from being accepted into the religious life.

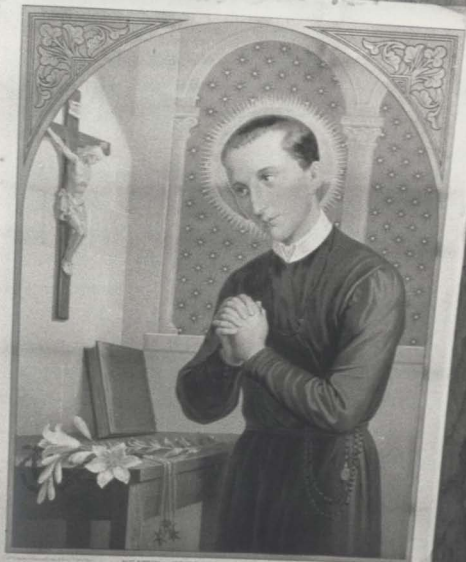
The picture of St. Gerard which I was most frequently

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<sup>1</sup> (cont) *Saints*, trans. V.M. Crawford (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907), p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> See Warner, p. 189.

Plate 3 Picture of Beatus Gerardus Majella. (MUNFLA,  
Photo, 78-196/P4434)



BEATUS GERARDUS MAJELLA

Ordinis Praedicatorum, Sacerdos

1723-1763

Sancti Spiritus, Sacerdos

1723-1763

Sancti Spiritus, Sacerdos

1723-1763

Sancti Spiritus, Sacerdos

1723-1763

Sancti Spiritus, Sacerdos

1723-1763

Sancti Spiritus, Sacerdos

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Sancti Spiritus, Sacerdos

1723-1763

Sancti Spiritus, Sacerdos

1723-1763

Sancti Spiritus, Sacerdos

1723-1763

shown during my fieldwork appeared on prayer cards and League of St. Gerard membership cards in the 1950s and 1960s. (Plate 4) In this the saint is simply depicted holding a large crucifix in his arms, without any other detail. On all the medals I was shown, St. Gerard holds a Latin cross, with lilies, scourge, and skull in the background. (See Frontispiece) Statues tend to have the skull, and sometimes the lily, at their base. (See Plate 2, p. 108)

In Christian symbolism the lily signifies purity and is associated with virgin saints. The lily, moreover,<sup>1</sup> is the flower of the Virgin Mary to whom Gerard was particularly devoted. The crucifix is indicative of Gerard's exemplary piety, and he is reported to have gone into ecstasy while contemplating the crucifix and other holy images. The skull is a reminder of the transitory nature of human existence and can also signify preparedness for death. A scourge symbolises Christ's passion, and in St. Gerard's case is suggestive of the penances which he inflicted on himself. The meaning of the book varies in Christian art; it could refer to Gerard's devotional writings, denote his role as an evangelist, and indicate his scriptural knowledge.

In October 1955 there appeared on the cover of Madonna a picture of St. Gerard taken from a statue in an English Redemptorist church. This illustration also

Plate 4 1950s League of St. Gerard picture of St. Gerard  
Majella. (MUNFLA, Photo, 78-196/P4376)



appeared on The League of St. Gerard membership application forms that year. The statue had been designed at the request of Cardinal Griffin, Archbishop of Westminster, who wrote of it, "I am afraid that St. Gerard suffers from his statues. . . . We designed a special statue for him. He was not emaciated, he always wore a smile, and that smile fell upon the crucifix he was holding in his hand. But the death's head had disappeared, and devotion to him through the statue increased. We ought to make the saints lovable."<sup>3</sup>

The League of St. Gerard introduced a novel picture of the saint on the cover of Ronald G. Delaney's new pamphlet Saint Gerard in 1956. He still holds a large crucifix in his arms, but the traditional halo which had appeared in previous pictures has disappeared, and there is no sign of the lily or the skull. This picture prompted enquiries about "St. Gerard's 'New Look'" which were dealt with in Madonna. Here, in answer to queries about authenticity, it was pointed out that "no real picture of St. Gerard has ever been found."<sup>4</sup> However, it seems that a conscious effort was being made to popularise St. Gerard through this medium: "Our new picture

<sup>3</sup> Madonna, 29, No. 5 (May 1956), 158.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

is a blending of the English and the Italian concept of St. Gerard. Of course it also has a slight trace of Canadian features which ought to make the Mothers' Saint still more acceptable to our people."<sup>5</sup>

The most recent picture of St. Gerard to appear on League prayer cards and on the cover of the latest edition of Ehman's pamphlet The Mothers' Saint shows St. Gerard with one hand resting on the shoulder of a woman who is kneeling at his feet and gazing lovingly at the child in her arms. (Plate 5) There have thus been quite striking changes in the iconography of St. Gerard Majella. The earlier pictures give clues to the saint's life through devices common in Christian symbolism, and his appearance is that of a rather "other-worldly" young man of delicate constitution. (Italian pictures still tend to be like this: See Frontispiece) In League pictures St. Gerard now looks a bit healthier, and the only aspect of his life which is depicted is his association with mothers. Emphasis has been shifted away from the saint himself to his role. Delahaye could to some extent have been speaking of St. Gerard when he comments, "For a vivid and clearly accentuated portrait as bequeathed to us by history, we substitute

<sup>5</sup> Madonna, 29, No. 5 (May 1956), 158.



Plate 5 The League of St. Gerard's most recent picture  
of St. Gerard Majella.



ST. GERARD MAJELLA, C.S.S.R.

Redemptorist Laybrother  
1726-1755

Feast — October 16th

an ideal figure who is the personification of an abstraction."<sup>6</sup>

When I asked informants about St. Gerard's appearance, some people could remember that he was "dressed like a Redemptorist" or "all in black," and that he held a big cross. After one woman described him as "dressed in black, holding a crucifix," her husband added, "and very sickly-faced."<sup>7</sup> It surprised me that the majority of those I spoke to had not noticed the skull at the base of the St. Gerard statues, or on medals, and asked me why it was there. One person conjectured that the skull was there, to show that St. Gerard had died young; someone else thought it showed he lived close to death and eternity. The latter lady pointed out that the lily is a sign of virginity. The vast majority of informants said that they had never really paid much attention to St. Gerard's appearance.

I encountered only one woman with strong views on the saint's appearance. This mother of thirteen, who has great devotion to St. Gerard, said of her picture (Plate 4, p. 127) acquired about 1952: "I've got some nice picture of St. Gerard here . . . nicer than the ones

<sup>6</sup> Delahaye, p. 23.

<sup>7</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3497.

you're going to get now, 'cause the new paintings are not so nice, you know. I find they don't strike my eyes so nice."<sup>8</sup> The picture habituated to in the formative years of the relationship with the saint would naturally be preferred, and as this woman regards St. Gerard as a "friend," she is probably more interested in the saint as an individual than those who see him purely as a pregnancy specialist.

The general lack of attention paid to the saint's appearance is striking in comparison with the considerable store set by most informants on the possession of pictures, statues, medals, and suchlike, bearing a supposed likeness of St. Gerard. A Madonna article claimed that "we need to use the tangible things of this world to help us center our interest on the things that are not of this world,"<sup>9</sup> but it seems that frequently these "tangible things" have been used not so much for centering interest on the other world, as providing contact with it. A League advertisement for a St. Gerard picture, for example, appeared under the rather suggestive caption, "Place the Mothers' Saint in the Home."<sup>10</sup> A letter from a Buchans lady to The League

<sup>8</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3501.

<sup>9</sup> Madonna, 23, No. 12 (Dec. 1950), 332.

<sup>10</sup> Madonna, 30, No. 9 (Oct. 1957), 287.

reads, "The enclosed offering is for a statue for our home so that we can always invoke his help and protection."<sup>11</sup> As Von Dobschütz remarks, "The power of a saint extended . . . to pictures and statues, which were regarded by no means as aids to contemplation, but as signs of the actual presence of the saint himself."<sup>12</sup>

A number of informants possessed statues of St. Gerard. These had been obtained largely through The League of St. Gerard, although one lady's statue had been bought in a Stephenville department store and another's had been won in a church raffle. Some ladies had the St. Gerard statue in their bedroom, while others had put it away until it would next be "needed." A Branch devotee had her statue on a "shrine" on the upstairs landing of her house, along with statues of St. Anne, the Virgin; and other favourites. (Plate 6) As with other religious objects, statues might be handed around among friends and relatives. A Lourdes lady told me that a neighbour had borrowed her St. Gerard statue because she was having trouble with her pregnancy.

Nurses in St. John's and Placentia commented that

<sup>11</sup> Madonna, 31, No. 3 (March 1958), 31.

<sup>12</sup> E. Von Dobschütz, "Charms and Amulets (Christian)," Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics.

Plate 6 Statue of St. Gerard Majella on family shrine.  
(MUNFLA, Photo, 78-196/P4405)



expectant mothers often used to bring a St. Gerard statue into hospital with them, and place it on their bedside locker. Amidst the modern equipment of the delivery room at St. Clare's Mercy Hospital, St. John's, there is a statue of St. Gerard which is said to have comforted many women there. (Plate 7)

Many ladies' high regard for their statues of St. Gerard tended to be based on trust in and affection for the saint. A St. John's woman wrote, "I have a statue of St. Gerard in my kitchen; it is real nice. I pray to him always, he is my best friend."<sup>13</sup> A midwife in St. Alban's told me: "When my daughter was having her children she used to pray to St. Gerard. And she got a statue, because she told me yesterday, she said, 'I got a statue, but I never could part from it,' she said, you know. And she used to have it in her bed too, when she'd be having, put in on her pillow, you know."<sup>14</sup>

This midwife commented that a lot of ladies who possessed statues would have them on the pillow or in bed with them during labour. I was not told of this particular practice in any other area; it could be seen as a means of making concrete the notion of the saint's presence during the delivery. I was told by another informant

<sup>13</sup> Madonna, 36, No. 2 (Feb. 1963), 31.

<sup>14</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3502.



Plate 7 Statue of St. Gerard Majella outside delivery  
- room, St. Clare's Mercy Hospital, St. John's.  
(MUNFLA, Photo, 78-196/P4415)



that one woman in St. Alban's "kind of give up" during her labour, but the midwife put a statue of St. Gerard in her arms and the baby was born.

There seem to be comparatively few statues of St. Gerard in Newfoundland churches. This is partly due to the overall changes which have taken place following Vatican II. There used to be a St. Gerard statue in the church at Placentia, for example, but this and many others were removed. I was told that the statue of St. Gerard in the old St. Stephen's church, Stephenville, had been there "since at least 1940," and it remained there until the whole church was destroyed by fire in the late 1960s. A replacement statue was not put in the new church, however; as one resident commented, "The church is more bare now." The church at Port aux Port contains a large statue of St. Gerard, presented in thanksgiving by Mr. Dan and Mrs. Sarah Campbell of Campbell's Creek. (Plate 2, p. 108) Mrs. Campbell later collected money among the mothers of Campbell's Creek and bought a small statue for the chapel there. In all the churches which I've been told have or had a statue, it appeared to have been given by a parishioner. A St. John's lady devoted to St. Gerard expressed the opinion that the Redemptorists at St. Theresa's should "be ashamed of themselves" for not having a St. Gerard statue there.

Most of the ladies who had pictures of the saint had

obtained them through The League of St. Gerard. Those who had continued the devotion to St. Gerard tended to have the pictures hanging in their bedrooms. Like other objects, pictures were often passed round to expectant mothers. A Branch lady told me that she had had a really nice picture of St. Gerard, but she had given it away "because when there'd be anyone expecting, you know, they'd come over and ask you. Well, you couldn't refuse them."<sup>15</sup>

In the case room at Placentia hospital there is a picture of St. Gerard which was placed there in thanksgiving by a Jersey Side woman in 1960. (Plate 8) Although the older informants in the area had not seen it, a number of women felt that they had derived great reassurance from its presence. A Placentia woman thanking St. Gerard for a safe delivery wrote, "I prayed to him all during my pregnancy and when my time came to go into hospital, the first thing I noticed in the case room was a beautiful picture of this wonderful Saint."<sup>16</sup> A Freshwater informant was actually introduced to St. Gerard through the picture in Placentia hospital: "There was a picture. Well, it wasn't always there, but around that time there was a picture in the

<sup>15</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C5851.

<sup>16</sup> Madonna, 34, No. 8 (Sept. 1961), 31.

Plate 8 Picture of St. Gerard Majella, Placentia Hospital  
delivery room. (MUNFLA, Photo, -78-196/P4421)



delivery [room], you know, of St. Gerard, over the door . . . So that's the first I heard, I suppose it must've been the nurses over there told me about him, so I started [devotion] to him at that time."<sup>17</sup> Talking of this picture, a nurse who works at the hospital told me, "The lady left that picture, and after she left it there, you know, lots of mothers used to ask me to pass it over to them and put it under them . . . under their pillow."<sup>18</sup>

A family in Placentia possesses the picture of "Beatus Gerardus Majella," which I have already described. This was acquired c. 1925, after the informant's mother attributed the cure of an abscess on her arm to St. Gerard. Being unable to buy a picture of the saint in St. John's, the lady went to see Mother Gerard at the Placentia convent, and offered to pay anything for the picture there. Mother Gerard gave her the picture as a gift. My informant continued, "My mother hung it in the kitchen living-room, and everything that got wrong with us was a matter of crossing it with her wedding ring, and the picture of St. Gerard."<sup>19</sup> She said her mother either lifted the picture down, or simply "crossed her thumb on the picture" and then

<sup>17</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3496.

<sup>18</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3500.

<sup>19</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C5851.

"crossed" the afflicted part. Perhaps here, as Warner claims, "The dynamic holiness of icons and relics did not just stir the soul to the contemplation of higher things, they also physically communicated the properties of their subject or owner."<sup>20</sup>

Madonna magazine printed two articles on medals, "Catholic Hallmarks"<sup>21</sup> and "Medals In Your Life."<sup>22</sup> In the latter, medals were described as "sacramentals, objects adopted by the Church as a means to obtain for the faithful spiritual and temporal favours from God." (A dictionary definition of sacramental is "an act or object which may transmit or receive grace.") Readers were told that medals could help Catholics "by obtaining for them actual grace, forgiveness of venial sin, remission of temporal punishment, health of body, material blessings, and protection from the wiles of the devil." They were reminded that "the effects don't depend upon the medal itself, but upon the mercy of God who regards the prayers of the Church and the dispositions of the wearers of the medal." Nevertheless, the contention that "Medals in your life, if worn with faith and devotion, can obtain God's protection for you and endless

<sup>20</sup> Warner, p. 293.

<sup>21</sup> Madonna, 23, No. 12 (Dec. 1950), 329-332.

<sup>22</sup> Madonna, 33, No. 2 (Feb. 1960), 25-27. All quotations in this paragraph from p. 27.



blessings," would appear to imply that medals could be potent sources of divine power.

Medals were held in high regard by many informants, and stories and customs concerning medals were numerous. The wearing of medals, frequently in quantity, used to be common practice in Newfoundland, and was seen as an expression of piety. To substantiate claims that a particular woman had been very religious, for example, I was told, "She had every saint you could mention on her neck."<sup>23</sup> Many Catholic homes possess a vast array of medals; one informant said of her mother and her medals, "If she wore them all at the same time she couldn't walk."<sup>24</sup> Almost all the ladies I interviewed who had devotion to St. Gerard had possessed a medal at some time. The majority seem to have worn it pinned to their underwear; one lady quipped, "You couldn't wear a bra without your medals."<sup>25</sup> Some had worn in this manner not just one medal, but a little cotton pouch containing a variety of medals.

The wearing of a medal was seen as an expression of devotion to St. Gerard, and usually signified that the individual had placed herself under the saint's

<sup>23</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3502.

<sup>24</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3494.

<sup>25</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3501.

protection. There was, however, some variation in the time a medal was worn. Most women wore a St. Gerard medal only during pregnancy. I asked one woman who wore her medal all the time she was expecting what happened to it when she was not pregnant; she replied, "You know, you put it away, and when the time comes round again, you take it out again."<sup>26</sup> Another lady told me that she always wore a medal during her five pregnancies, but she gave her medal away in hospital each time, as there were always other women there still to have their babies. Some ladies continued to wear their medals between children, but stopped after the birth of their last child. Of the informants who have continued their devotion to St. Gerard long after their pregnancies, only two still wear a medal: one pins her medal on, while the other has a medal attached to her watch because "I know he's always with me then."<sup>27</sup> The rest of the women who continue their devotion still have a St. Gerard medal to hand, however. As one lady put it, "Even though I don't wear it now, I keeps it, you know, where I'll know where it's to all the time."<sup>28</sup>

Quite a number of women mentioned that they had a St.

<sup>26</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3496.

<sup>27</sup> Fieldnotes, Oct. 16, 1978.

<sup>28</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3501.

Gerard medal with them up to and during the actual delivery. A midwife told me, "Oh yes, they'd have their medals on, on their nightdress, and if I changed them then they'd have to go back, pinned on again. And some would have them on their neck, have a chain or something, you know. There wasn't too many I went to didn't have a medal or something on them like that."<sup>29</sup> A Placentia lady recalled of her St. Gerard medal, "I asked for it in, when I went in the delivery room, and eh, so then I held it in my hand. I remember reaching for it, and having it in my hand as I went unconscious."<sup>30</sup> A woman who had all her children at home said she always had her St. Gerard medal "on me person, or on the bed, or somewhere around handy."<sup>31</sup>

Mothers who regarded St. Gerard as the patron of their children might also provide them with medals of the saint.<sup>32</sup> A St. Lawrence mother wrote to The League,

<sup>29</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3502.

<sup>30</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3499.

<sup>31</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C5851.

<sup>32</sup> Although none of my informants possessed one, it is possible to buy an Italian produced gift set for the new mother, containing small pictures of St. Gerard and Our Mother of Perpetual Help, a regular sized medal bearing them both, and a tiny medal "For Baby." An American friend sent me a set consisting of a card bearing a sketch of a baby and the words "Baby's First Medal," on which were two nappy/diaper pins with medals of the Virgin and St. Gerard attached.

"I called the baby Brendan Gerard and I keep the picture of St. Gerard over his bed continuously. Please send me a medal of St. Gerard for the baby to wear."<sup>33</sup> A Point Verde informant told me, "All of them, when the children were small, they always carried a St. Gerard medal. . . . From the time they were a baby I would, in fact I brought it to the hospital with me and attached it. In fact, I often asked the nurse, you know, would she attach it to their clothing."<sup>34</sup> One mother mentioned that she used to drop a St. Gerard medal into the Wellington boots of her children when they went out to play, for protection. A Placentia lady said that she put a St. Gerard medal on her son "To show that he was under, that I had him specially under the protection of St. Gerard."<sup>35</sup>

The wearing of the saint's medal, then, indicated trust in St. Gerard to use his power to help the wearer. There is, moreover, the satisfaction to be gained from having something quite literally to hold onto at times of stress, or having some physical assurance of the presence of the saint in whose hands one felt oneself to be. However, there were many indications that medals

<sup>33</sup> Madonna, 34, No. 5 (May 1961), 31.

<sup>34</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3499.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

had been frequently understood to act as channels of the saint's power. A Newfoundland woman wrote to Madonna in thanksgiving for an "unbelievable favour" concerning a pain over her left eye: "Then a friend gave me a St. Gerard medal and it's almost too much to believe that since then I haven't had the pain, so I thank St. Gerard."<sup>36</sup> I met a young pregnant woman in Stephenville, whose mother had sent away to The League for a St. Gerard medal for her. Although the young woman knew nothing about St. Gerard, she had promised to wear the medal, as she supposed it might do some good. A Southern Shore woman residing in St. John's told me that two months previously her cousin's son's hands had been "covered in warts." She asked the boy, "Do you believe Gerard can cure you?", to which he replied, "If you believe, I believe." The woman crossed him with her St. Gerard medal and he kissed it, and the warts went away. This lady claimed to have "used" a St. Gerard medal on many occasions with good results, but insisted that "if you cross a person, they've got to believe."<sup>34</sup>

A Colinet mother of thirteen children wrote to Madonna, "I always wear St. Gerard's medal and feel sure this

<sup>36</sup> Madonna, 38, No. 1 (Jan. 1965), 27.

<sup>37</sup> Fieldnotes, Oct. 16, 1978.

is why I have had such success."<sup>38</sup> The wearing of a medal could also have prophylactic overtones; when I asked one Stephenville woman why she wore a St. Gerard medal during pregnancy she replied, "To prevent a miscarriage, have a safe confinement."<sup>39</sup>

A R demptorist priest at St. Theresa's, St. John's, recounted the following incident which involved another R demptorist there:

There was one case that he ran into where a woman here, I guess here in town, or perhaps not far from town, and where a child of hers was born without a pancreas. And the doctor told the woman that the child might live eh, perhaps a couple of months at most, but eventually would die. And eh, the woman . . . said, "Well I, you know, I'm not going to take that," you know, to the doctor. And she brought the child eh, here to St. Theresa's, and eh, Father M. took a medal of St. Gerard, and I guess, pinned it on to the, the baby's dress or something, and, and said a prayer to St. Gerard, and, and the woman went away somewhat relieved, and apparently the child lived. Somehow the pancreas had, had, I don't know, had developed eh, subsequently, or something like that, em, but the child ended up living.<sup>40</sup>

People in Newfoundland could and did pray to St. Gerard without having to have a medal. However, on some occasions it has seemed very important for the expectant mother to have some tangible connection with the saint

<sup>38</sup> Madonna, 37, No. 11 (Dec. 1964), 29.

<sup>39</sup> Fieldnotes, Sept. 1978.

<sup>40</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3492.

by means of a medal. A St. Joseph's, Bay D'Espoir, woman told me that, as a girl, she was first aware of hearing about St. Gerard when a man came to borrow her mother's St. Gerard medal: "He come over after the medal, 'cause his daughter-in-law was, eh, having a baby, see? So, you know, she give un the medal, and he eh, he went over and put the medal on her, and she had her baby."<sup>41</sup> That people were prepared to go to considerable lengths to get a medal in some circumstances is demonstrated by the following incident which occurred in St. Alban's:

Well, her first baby, you know, she had a lot of trouble, and they come to my place to get the medal, I had a medal then at the time . . . her mother come to my place in the middle of the night, twelve o'clock in the night, to get the medal. Yeh, and you know 'twas a rough night, see, in the winter, and she come and asked for the medal. . . . And she said, "Don't think she [the midwife] is going to save her," so she come after the medal twelve o'clock in the night. And eh, she went in and put the medal on her, and the next morning they come out and she said she was all right, she had a baby boy.<sup>42</sup>

The fact that someone was prepared to venture out on a stormy night to obtain a medal indicates an assumption that the power of the saint could in some way be more effectively appropriated by the presence of his

<sup>41</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3502.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

medal.

Prayer cards and novena books, although not normally considered devotional objects like statues and medals, were treated in the same way as these by Newfoundland devotees of St. Gerard. A nurse at the Placentia hospital told me, "They might just have the prayer, you know, just have the novena they brought in with them, and they wanted to hold onto it during labour and during the delivery."<sup>43</sup> A thanksgiving letter published in Madonna under the caption "I thought he was dead" related that a Witless Bay mother, finding her son in an alarming condition, "crossed" him with "a Miraculous Medal" and a "St. Gerard booklet," and the child recovered.<sup>44</sup> The fact that League of St. Gerard prayer cards and the books The Mothers' Saint and Saint Gerard bore pictures of the saint may have contributed to them being used in the same way as other devotional objects bearing a likeness of him.

Relics are of a somewhat different order from the religious objects considered so far. In Christian usage the term "relic" is applied to "the material remains of a saint after his death, as well as to the sacred

<sup>43</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3500.

<sup>44</sup> Madonna, 32, No. 6 (June 1959), 30.



objects that have been in contact with his body."<sup>45</sup>

Relics fall into three broad categories: first class (remains of the saint's body); second class (objects with which the saint came into contact during his lifetime); and third class (objects which have been in contact with a first class relic). A Madonna article, "What Do You Know About RELICS?",<sup>46</sup> told readers that "Of themselves relics do NOT possess any miraculous powers," but asserted that "Miracle upon miracle attests to the power of the Saints, WHEN INVOKED THROUGH THEIR RELICS."

Relics have long been sought as aids in pregnancy and delivery--"Henry VII's queen paid 6s. 8d. to a monk for a girdle of Our Lady for use in childbirth"<sup>47</sup>--and many have been convinced of their efficacy in this respect. Father S. used to own a first class relic of St. Gerard Majella, and he related the following story in connection with it:

I'm quite sure it happened at Conne River . . . Now I was giving a mission there at the time; and I was called around midnight to this home. And this lady was, em, in labour, and eh, she was having a very, very hard time, you know. And eh, I don't know . . . they figured the child would be a couple of hours of something, you know. Anyway, they sent for me, and I went down and . . . I blessed the child with a relic, you know. And I said, "Don't you worry now, that child will be born very

<sup>45</sup> For a full exposition of relics, see J.A. MacCulloch, "Relics," Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics.

<sup>46</sup> Madonna, 29, No. 1 (Jan. 1956), 4-7. Quotations from p. 4 and p. 6 respectively.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas, p. 31.

shortly. That, that'll be born in an hour." It was born in twenty minutes!<sup>48</sup>

Father S. gave the relic to Sister F. in the 1950s to put in the maternity ward at St. Clare's Mercy Hospital, St. John's, where, Sister F. confirmed, "Relics have been used."<sup>49</sup> In 1963 a Newfoundland correspondent to Madonna wrote that, at the time of her delivery, "When the doctors had given me up, the Sisters at the hospital kept a relic of St. Gerard in my hand, and finally I took a turn for the better."<sup>50</sup>

The relic most commonly owned by my informants was a medal containing a tiny piece of cloth which had been touched to a first class relic of St. Gerard. There was a likeness of the saint on one side of the medal, and on the other side there was a clear panel to allow the minute scrap of material to be seen. The cloth was widely thought to be a fragment of the saint's clothes, and this third class relic was often a prized possession. Even one nun said of such a medal, "That's his relic . . . part of his clothing or something, preserved there."<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3492.

<sup>49</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3498.

<sup>50</sup> Madonna, 36, No. 4 (April 1963), 32.

<sup>51</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3498.

I have indicated that devotional objects have sometimes been regarded as symbols of the saint's presence and channels of the saint's power. Such notions were quite pronounced in connection with relics, regardless of their class. A Branch informant wrote, "I did receive a Relic Medal from the 'Shrine' in Toronto . . . I would often say prayers and cross myself and the children with it when I needed his help etc."<sup>52</sup> A nun told me that the relic medal already described contained "a piece of the saint," and was therefore "more powerful" than an ordinary medal. One woman's third class relic of St. Gerard consisted of flower petals which had been touched to a first class relic of the saint. Nevertheless, she said of it, "You clutch that relic, you really got something belonging to St. Gerard, you know, that's the way you felt, I'd say."<sup>53</sup> This woman related the considerable difficulties she experienced at the birth of her last child, and the importance of the relic to her at that time: "[The midwife] she said, 'I know you've got devotion to St. Gerard,' she said, 'so pray to him.' And I said to her I said, 'You pass over the relic,' I said, 'St. Gerard will do whatever he can.' So that's what she done, she passed the relic and crossed me stomach, and next pain me daughter was

<sup>52</sup> Correspondence, July 10, 1978.

<sup>53</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3501.

born."<sup>54</sup> For whatever reason, matters seemed to improve after the relic had been used; in this woman's experience, therefore, the relic seemed to act as a channel of her favourite saint's power.

Although the Redemptorists changed St. Gerard's appearance to increase his appeal and to focus on his role as "The Mothers' Saint," it seems that people paid little real attention to how the saint looked. The importance of having a picture, statue, medal, or whatever has tended to lie not in the appearance of the saint, but in the significance of the presence of the object. While notions that devotional objects are in some way "powerful" are officially unacceptable, Newfoundlanders with faith in the efficacy of relics and other religious items have not simply derived their own superstitious usages. They have been encouraged by popular tradition, by figures of authority, and by the religious literature they encountered to look upon such objects not simply as memorials, but as repositories of the saint's power. There has been such ambivalence, even unorthodoxy, in the views expressed by factions and officials of the Church on the subject of devotional objects, that an ordinary Catholic would find it extremely difficult to discern what actually

<sup>54</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3501.

constituted official or folk practice.

The diversity in outlook and behaviour, and the lack of clear distinctions between official, folk, and individual religion in the conduct of devotion to St. Gerard in Newfoundland are typical of nonliturgical piety.

## CHAPTER VI

"I THINK I KNOWS WHAT I OWES HIM:"A CASE STUDY OF A DEVOTEE

To study the saint system in operation it is necessary to take into account the perceptions, beliefs, and behaviour of those involved. The workings of nonliturgical piety are not easily observable, and to discover what part devotion plays in the lives of devotees it is necessary to consult them. The candid comments of informants directly or peripherally involved in devotion to St. Gerard, plus the information from popular devotional literature, are invaluable in building up a picture of the spread and conduct of this devotion. However, devotion to a saint is essentially a personal affair, and to appreciate its part in the life of the individual it will be helpful to consider one woman's account of her relationship with St. Gerard.<sup>1</sup>

Mrs. B. is in her late forties, and is the mother of thirteen children. She was brought up and resides in Bay D'Espoir. I approached Mrs. B. on the recommendation of the local midwife, who had been impressed by her intense devotion to St. Gerard, and she was most helpful and forthcoming. In recounting the development

<sup>1</sup> The quotations in this chapter are taken from MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3501.

of her relationship with St. Gerard, and her experience of the saint's aid, Mrs. B. reveals how the saint system has operated at various points in one person's life.

She recalls clearly when she first heard of St. Gerard Majella:

It was a long way back. First, the first time I heard of St. Gerard I was only eight year old. . . . The Redemptorist father come here, the mission father they used to call it in them days. Yeah, the Redemptorist father said St. Gerard was a Redemptorist brother, and that was the first thing I heard about him . . .

I was eight year old, that was the first mission I made, and that's, seemed like there was something about him then struck me, although I was only eight year old. Now I know. I mean, he's played a very important part in my life. That's what I think anyway, but then, I got the belief I suppose.

Mrs. B. was sure that there had been devotion to St. Gerard for a long time in Bay D'Espoir, and I enquired how she thought people found out about him. She replied:

I'd say some found out through good friends, I guess some found out through their parents, and the Redemptorist fathers used to come round here, they was always praising St. Gerard, see. Yeah, that's where a lot of the devotion come from, because at one time they used to be out here often, see . . .

I suppose some read about it in the papers. . . . We'd get the, what do you call it?, the Madonna magazine, we subscribed to that too, see . . . that was a lovely paper too . . . So I guess that's where some of them got the devotion about St. Gerard. And, you know, we used to pass them around, see.

Having heard of St. Gerard from the Redemptorists, Mrs. B. was encouraged in her devotion to St. Gerard by the local priest, Father Hayes: "And that's who

really did give me the devotion to St. Gerard, because he, you know, I had rheumatic fever before I was married see, so that caused some devotion, I guess. So then, this was where I got the real devotion. He, he used to tell me, he'd say, 'Pray to St. Gerard, my child, and everything will work out.'<sup>1</sup> As previously mentioned, illness can trigger devotion to a saint at an earlier stage than usual, and Mrs. B.'s rheumatic fever did precisely that. Father Hayes seems to have had a particular interest in St. Gerard, and was an important figure in the promotion of devotion to the saint in the St. Alban's area.<sup>2</sup>

It was after her marriage, however, that St. Gerard came into real prominence in Mrs. B.'s life:

I was only nineteen then, and there was a friend living next door where I was reared up in St. Joseph's, you know . . . She, she had a medal, so I told her, I said, eh, I wasn't married very long, I said, 'I'd like to, I'd like to know where I can get some babies.' She said, 'Well, go straight and pray to St. Gerard.' So that was, you know, that was when I really began to learn. She had a little bit more on him, see. So, she give me a prayer, she wrote up a prayer, a prayer for eh, parenthood, I think it was, and an expectant mother. That was two prayers I had then, and I said them, and I was married five months and I got pregnant.

It is interesting that although Mrs. B. had previously prayed to St. Gerard, it seems to have been the neighbour

<sup>2</sup> An informant claimed that one year he baptised all boys Gerard, regardless of the parents' wishes.



who made the connection between St. Gerard and motherhood for her. (Mrs. B.'s mother was dead.) In passing on the information about St. Gerard the neighbour was supplementing the activities of the Redemptorists and Father Hayes, and putting the devotion into a new context, appropriate to the circumstances. Mrs. B. is quite unusual in not having encountered St. Gerard originally as "The Mothers' Saint."

Unfortunately Mrs. B.'s first pregnancy was not successful: "Now, I didn't carry it to the full time, I lost the first baby. It didn't give me no doubts about St. Gerard. I wondered. I thought it shouldn't have happened, you know. Then I sized it up then afterwards. So, I guess 'twas after that I, really was devoted to St. Gerard. Starting from that. So it was, I was only a year then, from the time I lost that one, till I had another one." It may be that Mrs. B. simply had not appreciated the difficulties of pregnancy. There seems to be some implication that her devotion to St. Gerard had perhaps not been good enough the first time, rather than feeling that St. Gerard had let her down. Eventually Mrs. B. had sixteen pregnancies, and has thirteen children living. One son was actually born on the feast day of St. Gerard, and is called Gerard, while one daughter has Gerarda as her second name.

Mrs. B. was originally an Annual Member of The League

of St. Gerard, but became a Perpetual Member in 1952. She related the circumstances which led her to become one:

I had another relapse from rheumatic fever. That was when I became a life member, after I got well. So that would be early 1952. . . . I had the baby, and he was five months old, when I came down with this relapse . . . of rheumatic fever, they called it, then. So I mean I, I kept praying to St. Gerard, and kept praying, and then I got well. So I enrolled for life then. I figured he had, he did a lot. I mean, I didn't only pray to St. Gerard, I used to pray to other saints too, but, you know, I think I know what I owes him.

It is noteworthy that although Mrs. B. felt St. Gerard had been particularly efficacious, she had also prayed to other saints. Deep personal devotion need not be exclusive.

Mrs. B. had read "the life of St. Gerard" in Ehman's The Mothers' Saint, but did not recall much about it-- "I can't even remember where St. Gerard was born, but I suppose it's all in that book there." She did, however, recall how he became the patron of mothers:

When he was a young man, nineteen I believe he was, he eh, he was visiting this home, visiting home. I suppose he was going into the brotherhood then, see. And this young girl was in the house where he was to, and after he left, he left a powder handkerchief. I mean everybody used them one time. And, eh, she ran after him, and you know, she said, 'Brother Gerard,' she said, 'you've left your handkerchief.' And he turned around, and looked at her, and smiled and said, 'Keep it, child,' he said, 'it may do you some good some day.'

So now a few years after that she got married, and then she was dying, you know, the doctors give up, said there was nothing they could do with her,

she had to die. So, eh, when the doctor did his last rite, said there was nothing else he could do, she recalled about that powder handkerchief, see, and she told her mother, she said, 'Run to the, somewhere, I don't know . . . and she said, 'Get the handkerchief.' So she brought back the handkerchief, and she took it and placed it over her face, and all of a sudden her baby was born. Everything was perfect.

Although more elaborate than and slightly different from Ehman's version (recounted above, p. 64), Mrs. B. told this story with great gusto, and pinpointed it as the reason for the saint's special role. She said of Ehman's booklet, "In that book, I tell you, there's a lot of things, you know, that really give you devotion, see. That's what I used to read." However, once a person has devotion, it is not necessary to retain such things. Personal experience far outweighs hagiography.

Mrs. B. used to subscribe to Madonna magazine, which she describes as "a good read, thanksgivings, and other things to strengthen the devotion, I suppose." I asked Mrs. B. if she had kept any of the magazines and she told me: "I had, I mean piles. I kept them, you know. But now, one year we had letters from some, from some of the priests that was out in foreign lands, asking for books, and that's where all of mine went to, see<sup>3</sup>."

<sup>3</sup> An advertisement in Madonna, 29, No. 2 (Feb. 1956), 43 read:

HERE IS AN APOSTOLIC WAY TO RE-USE YOUR  
CATHOLIC LITERATURE

Only for that, I would've had them to pass them round to younger people, which would've spread the devotion and I suppose still done good." Mrs. B. does, however, have the cover of the June 1964 Madonna, which was the last magazine she received: "But the last one I got, I took the cover off and framed that, and put it up in my bedroom. Our Lady of Perpetual Help, that's who used to come out on the covers, see. . . . Now that's who St. Gerard was devoted to, see. This is how she come to be on the Madonna magazine cover, you know. He really was devoted. they goes together, see. . . . Now that one come, that last one, and I, I thought to myself, 'Well, I better take the cover and hang it.'"

Mrs. B. commented on the harsh conditions facing expectant mothers in the past. With the exception of her twins, all her children were born at home with midwives in attendance--"Some of them was trained, some wasn't."

That's why, you see, my dear, that's why we had to have devotion to something, you know. There

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3 (cont)

In the files of the Kenrick Remailing Service are 3,500 missionaries begging for Catholic magazines and papers.

These missionaries want the literature to help them in their convert work--literature to replace the pagan and Communistic reading being spread thru the mission fields . . .

If you wish to share your used Catholic literature with a missionary, write on a post card to Kenrick Remailing Service . . . and a name and address of a missionary wanting literature will be sent to you.

was no hospitals then and 'twas the roughest kind of life, you see. You take, I've been there, we used to live into St. Veronica's, see, you know, and you take in the bad time of year there'd be ice and everything, there'd be no way you could hardly get out. I mean you had to trust to something special. I know that God was always there. I mean, you know, you really needed somebody to give you strength to carry on. You'd see some of the women, my dear . . . with a baby on the way, it was frightening. So I guess that's, that's why the devotion was strong. Probably that's why it's kind of going out, you know. . . . We had to keep our devotion strong because we figured we'd never make it without it. I don't think I would. I don't care what anybody says, I don't think I'd have done what I done without the help of the saint.

Although Mrs. B. is convinced of Gerard's efficacy, she implies that with improved facilities devotion is perhaps not so necessary as it had been in her day. It was interesting that Mrs. B. did not automatically opt for hospitalisation once it was available: "I could've had me last one in hospital, she asked me that, the doctor did, but I said I'd rather have it at home here, so she had Mrs. C. [the midwife] in."

As one would expect from her experience of devotion to St. Gerard, Mrs. B. insists that "St. Gerard is the patron saint of more than childbirth; St. Gerard is the patron saint of many things:" "Like poor old Father Hayes said one time, he said, 'Don't take him out when there's new babies on hand,' he said, 'and put him back in the cupboard when they're, you know, when it's over.' That's the way he compared it."

On the subject of communicating with the saint, Mrs. B. told me:

I always said a prayer to St. Gerard. But now, you know, I don't make the novenas like I used to in the earlier days, because they are long. I mean, you've seen the novena books, haven't you? But that prayer now for a sick child, a sick person, I used to say that every day, and expectant mothers. Now, I mean, there's always somebody expecting somewhere, so I says that one. . . . But you know, I don't, like I told you, I don't make the novenas like I used to. When I was crippled [with rheumatic fever] over here now I used to make them. It takes a nice bit of time, see. It's long prayers. There's time I hardly got time to pray, some days. . . .

The time really comes when you don't hardly have time to pray, I found. . . . So many small ones, and you know, so many come from school, and so many others. I tell you, there was times. But I didn't worry because I know God understood, and I know St. Gerard understood. But like I said, there's days I've just said, "St. Gerard, pray for me," or "St. Gerard, help me," that's all.

Mrs. B.'s experience demonstrates that there can be great variety in the way in which one person communicates with the saint. When she had the time, Mrs. B. made novenas. When family life was hectic, a short exclamation sufficed. Her relationship with St. Gerard was not dependent upon formal verbal communication:

"Like I says, there is some days I didn't say, I didn't have time to say special prayers to him, but I always felt close to him." Like so many devotees of St. Gerard, Mrs. B. shows concern for expectant mothers in general, and prays for the unknown "somebody expecting somewhere."

Mrs. B. is convinced that her prayers to St. Gerard played a great part in the recovery of her son, Allan,

who was critically ill with appendicitis when he was eight years old.:

Well Allan, the one I was telling you about what was dying, and we had him in hospital, when I, when he came back, the doctor brought him back again and I had to bring him to the clinic. And when I walked in the clinic that morning he [the doctor] said, "Mrs. B., you've said all the prayers," He said, "that's a pure miracle." I said, "Is that right, doctor?" He said, "A pure miracle," he said, "you got your son back." And I saw some got petitions signed, see, so I got that thanksgiving signed, and sent it in [to The League]. You know, there's a lot of people thinks you got to be something special with prayer, getting something granted. That's not so. I felt some stupid, but I got it signed just the same.

But that's who I prayed to then, St. Gerard. You can see the print of me thumb now, round the side of the prayer for the sick child. I almost wore the book out.

In this particular crisis Mrs. B. seems to have found the set prayer "For a Sick Child" the most appropriate means of communication. It is noteworthy that the doctor was so sympathetic to the notion of a "miracle" resulting from prayer. Although Mrs. B. "felt some stupid," she considered herself duty bound to send the signed thanksgiving to The League, thus acknowledging the favour and providing The League with further evidence of St. Gerard's efficacy, which might in turn have been used to inspire others.

Mrs. B.'s eldest daughter is "real fond of St. Gerard" and feels that she too has benefitted from his help. Mrs. B. told me of one occasion when both she and her daughter were "praying hard to St. Gerard:" "Me daughter

over there now, she, she got Rh blood, see. She had two children, well she had three close together but she lost the third one. And she went eight years and last year she had another one. She was only two weeks pregnant when she started 'spotting.' Well, I mean, we figured there was trouble coming anyway, so I took her over here for a week, and then I enrolled her in St. Gerard, [and prayed, and thank God she got a lovely little baby."

As one might expect, Mrs. B. has a number of devotional objects connected with St. Gerard, including a picture and a statue. She is particularly fond of the picture, (Plate 4, p. 127) which she got in 1952 when she became a Perpetual Member of The League of St. Gerard: "I've got some nice picture of St. Gerard here . . . Nicer than the ones you're going to get now, because the new paintings are not so nice, see. You know, I find they don't strike my eyes so nice . . . I've got some ones I got in later years when I used to enrol. He's a different painter, I think. I mean, there's some statues of Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin now don't look so nice." Mrs. B.'s fondness for one version of St. Gerard's appearance may in part be due to familiarity, for in the formative years of her relationship with the saint she came to identify him with that particular representation. Mrs. B. keeps the picture in her bedroom, and as she had all but two of her children at home it was



visible when she was in labour with most of them. This was undoubtedly important to her: "I could tell everything was going to be all right when I could see that picture."

I mentioned to Mrs. B. that the same picture is in the delivery room at Placentia hospital, to which she responded: "I've often thought about that, you know. I'd, I'd like to be able to get a nice picture or statue and donate it to some hospital. If I'd have had all me children in hospital, I'd have had it done. . . . That one I got there now, I keeps it in me bedroom now, but you know if, if ever I was gone, I, that's where I'd like it to be, where it could help some mothers. . . . I figure that if he was in hospital, you know, he would help."

Father Hayes sent away to The League of St. Gerard for Mrs. B.'s statue: it "come from the shrine of St. Gerard, so you felt even stronglier attached to it."<sup>4</sup> I asked where the statue was kept: "First I used to keep it in me kitchen. Yeh, I had a little place in me kitchen for it. And then they used to smoke. I'd find the

<sup>4</sup> An advertisement in *Madonna*, 29, No. 6 (June 1956), 190 read: "It's the Best in Europe! Yes, this statue comes directly from the Shrine in Italy where ST. GERARD is buried. . . . It's the best statue available of ST. GERARD for the home, the school, the chapel, the small hospital."

smoke from the kitchen used to turn him, see, so now I've moved him upstairs." Mrs. B. had taken her statue into hospital, where it got knocked over and chipped. Her children said that she was "some fussy" about it getting chipped, but she told them they'd never know how much they owed St. Gerard. Mrs. B.'s affection for and gratitude to St. Gerard are very obvious in relation to her devotional objects.

I commented that the midwife had said that a lot of ladies in the area used to have their statues with them on the bed when they were in labour. She agreed that it was quite common, and said, "I know Mrs. C. was delivering one . . . when she kind of give up, you see, because she was wore out with her labour, and she told me she come out to her and put a statue in her arms . . . and her baby was born."

When I asked Mrs. B. if she had worn a St. Gerard medal, she replied, "Oh, I wore it all the time in the years when I was carrying the children." She was most emphatic about having a medal during delivery: "Oh, I used to wear me medal then, my dear, I couldn't leave me medal off then." On enquiring whether she still had a St. Gerard medal, Mrs. B. produced two and told me,

Now, me medal that I wore since I was enrolled I haven't got, because me niece was looking for a baby in the spring and she wanted a medal, so I gave it to her before I enrolled her, see. But

I still got those two, one of them poor old Father Hayes give me. . . . Now I wore them with other medals and they are turned too. But now this one here, now I wore, I wore that really a lot, with me other one that I had. Me other little one. . . I got that when I enrolled for life, see. But that one there you can see I really wore. Even though I don't wear it now I keeps it, you know, where I'll know where it's to all the time. But I don't wear it, just the same . . . I'm afraid I'll lose it.

Mrs. B. commented on how medal wearing practices had changed:

I mean, you see, in them days, we used to wear a lot of medals, and we used to wear them on different clothing. And when it come to your bra, I mean you couldn't wear a bra without your medals! . . . But I used to have them in a little . . . like a little pouch thing, and then you'd pin that on inside, see . . . I've heard Tom say, me husband, "If you fall overboard, you'll be anchored!" . . . So I thought it was time to leave some off, though I still keeps them around just the same . . . sometimes people needs them.

It was interesting that when Mrs. B.'s niece "was looking for a baby," "she wanted the medal right away." Mrs.

B.'s last comment on people needing medals gives the impression that possession of a medal can be of importance at times.

One of Mrs. B.'s most treasured possessions is her "relic:" "There is some people got them, but it's not everyone got the relic." She told me how she came to acquire it: "But you know, I never felt I had enough, so when I wrote to The League, oh, year after . . . Allan got well there, 'cause we thought he was going to die with the, when he had appendicitis trouble, see? And so, I prayed to him very much. So after that I

wrote to the priest [at The League] . . . and he sent me a relic." Mrs. B.'s relic consists of some flower petals encased in plastic on a St. Gerard prayer card. A Redemptorist father told me that these petals would have been touched to a first class relic of St. Gerard, thus becoming third class relics. Mrs. B., however, describes the relic as "flowers from his rose garden." When I asked where the flowers were from she said, "Well now, that I can't tell you, because that's too long since I read the life of St. Gerard." Mrs. B. is very attached to the relic, claiming, "You know that you clutch that relic, you really got something belonging to St. Gerard, you know."

Commenting on the condition of the relic, Mrs. B. said, "You see he's wearing through where I've used him that much, see." Expanding on the uses of the relic, she told me, "If somebody'd do something very serious you'd cross them with St. Gerard's relic, and I have got a little one here who'll ask for the relic of St. Gerard when he's first sick or anything." She also admitted, "But just the same, out of all me devotion to St. Gerard, I never did loan the relic out. Nobody ever asked me for the loan of it, but, you know. And if anyone would ask for a prayer I'd always use the relic for them. But I never loaned it out. I thought I might never get it back or something." Mrs. B.'s use of the relic in conjunction with a prayer, or for crossing a sick

person indicates that there is extra power to be gained from its employment.

Not surprisingly, Mrs. B. had the relic with her during labour. She assured me that she had it with her "all the time," even when she had her twins in hospital.

The relic was particularly important to Mrs. B. at the time of her last pregnancy:

When I had me last one, we was having trouble, and there was no doctor in the bay, so that's what I used, me relic of St. Gerard, and I always says that's who helped me. . . .

[The midwife] she said, "I know you've got devotion to St. Gerard," she said, "so pray to him." And I said to her, I said, "You pass over the relic," I said, "St. Gerard will do whatever he can." So that's what she done, she passed the relic and crossed me stomach, and next pain me daughter was born. Now, I never haemorrhaged one bit afterwards, but I was haemorrhaging before.

Having the relic of St. Gerard during labour may be seen as the desire for some tangible connection with the saint, but in the case of her last pregnancy Mrs. B. regards the relic as an instrument of St. Gerard's power. This last pregnancy was undoubtedly quite a traumatic experience for Mrs. B. She commented, "I felt so close to St. Gerard I almost thought I was seeing him sometimes, when I was in me labour with the last one."

Mrs. B. claimed that in the past it had been "the roughest kind of life," but that conditions were greatly improved now. However, she did not feel that all changes

had been for the better. She mentioned, for example, that there had been more time for reading in the past: "I hardly ever touches a book now, time you watches that there [television]. That, that's the ruination, I'd say that's the ruination of the home, that T.V. . . . Yes siree. Or 'tis our home, anyways. It's not, I don't find it the same." Mrs. B. thought that television also led to less discussion of religion in the home: "'Cause, eh, you know, that's on, you know, there isn't so much time for eh, talking things over. That's why the younger ones don't know. One time, see, you'd sit up, the family I mean, you'd talk. You'd have, you know, you'd have to do something. More than now, my dear. I'd say they used to learn more about those kind of things."

Mrs. B. commented that "Things is going out here, and we're letting it go out." One example of this was the celebration of St. Gerard's feast day: "In earlier years now, this picture here I was telling you about I got when I enrolled for life, when the feast of St. Gerard comes sixteenth of October . . . we'd shrine that little picture like an altar, see, and light two candles and say the family rosary. That's why the bigger ones remembers it, see."

Mrs. B. compared the different levels of awareness of St. Gerard among her children:

Me eldest daughter over there now I got married, well you know she's real fond of St. Gerard. I mean, he was almost like one of the family one time, see, you know. He was talked about . . .

I've got some younger daughters here, yeh, they might know there's a St. Gerard, but that's about all. They don't even want to know about him; you know. They never asked no questions about him. The first part of my children did, see . . .

When Allan, me eldest son was getting confirmed, he wanted Gerard on his confirmation name, so you know it must have passed along to him. So like I told you, some of my younger ones, my nineteen year old son asked me the other day, he said, "Who is this St. Gerard anyway?" He didn't know.

Mrs. B. continues to encourage devotion to St. Gerard Majella whenever she can, enrolling friends and relatives in The League when they are pregnant or wish to become so, and some members of her family seem set to perpetuate the devotion. Mrs. B. claimed that some contemporaries of her eldest daughter are now also devoted to St. Gerard: "You know, they spreads it from one to the other, see. I mean, that's the way devotion goes." Mrs. B. maintains that "there's a lot of devotion to St. Gerard in this bay," but admits that it is mainly among women of her generation. Mrs. B. recognizes the trend away from devotion to St. Gerard and naturally finds this very disturbing: "I think that's what's wrong with the world today, you know. The devotion has dropped off. . . . I mean, by praying to St. Gerard it might help to clear up some of the mess that's in the world now. This abortion, and all this kind of stuff. That's what I'd say, anyway. You know, if

he was brought back again. But I guess he's gone out in, in the young people's lives."

Despite her lengthy and enlightening account of her devotion to St. Gerard Majella, Mrs. B. claims that she cannot fully express her feelings towards the saint-- "That's what I feels about St. Gerard, much more than I ever could tell anybody."

This study of devotion to St. Gerard concentrates on the practice, as opposed to the theory, of religion. It demonstrates how people have lived their devotion and what it has meant to them. Showing how a relationship with a holy figure has been perceived and conducted by a devotee reveals the extent to which a saint can be considered to play an important part in the life of the individual--a major appeal of the saint system throughout the centuries.

St. Gerard has been to Mrs. B., as to many Newfoundland women, a source of friendship, inspiration, comfort, and practical aid. In the tradition of the patron saint in medieval Europe, St. Gerard has been for these women "an extra companion through life who healed hurts, soothed distress, and in extremity could make miracles."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Tuchman, p. 33.



CHAPTER VII .CONTINUITY AND CHANGE: THE SAINT SYSTEM IN TRANSITION  
IN NEWFOUNDLAND

The period known as the Middle Ages has often been described as "the age of religion" or "the age of saints." This does not mean that people then were particularly good or saintly. It indicates a specific attitude to religion and saints, one in which religion was perceived as an integral part of everyday life and saints were participants in the affairs of men. For Roman Catholics, unaffected by the Reformation, this attitude remained largely unchanged, and popular devotion continued in much the same vein as it always had done.

To give some indication of continuity in religious outlook and conduct in Catholicism, scholarly accounts of medieval behaviour can be compared with the socio-religious situation in Newfoundland this century. It has been claimed, for example, that in the Middle Ages "tales of miracles abounded, and they were solemnly recounted from the pulpit and by the fireside."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Morris Bishop, *The Penguin Book of the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971), pp. 169-170.

Miracle stories have long been told, and continue to be told, in connection with various saints in Newfoundland.<sup>2</sup> In the early stages of my fieldwork I was quite taken aback at the casual way a potential informant, said, in the course of my preliminary telephone call, "We had a miracle here a few years back." Another woman told me about the cure of her mother's brother after he had a vision in the woods, and concluded, "Now that's a miracle, eh?" People were not loathe to talk in terms of miracles, and stories of divine intervention were accepted and recounted as a matter of course.

It has been claimed that "In practice the distinctions between what is now called 'folk remedy,' faith-healing, and proper medical attention are inappropriate to the Middle Ages. The sick drew upon all at the same time or went from one to another."<sup>3</sup> Such behaviour is not unique to the Middle Ages. A Placentia lady told me that her mother used to treat sties by "crossing" them with her wedding ring, an established folk-religious cure; "crossing" them with her picture of St. Gerard,

<sup>2</sup> Examples of these are contained in my article "Twas only the statue on his dashboard saved him: Narratives affirming the Efficacy of Devotional Objects," Scandinavian Yearbook of Folklore, 37 (1981), 7-10.

<sup>3</sup> Ronald C. Finucane, Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1977), p. 68.

of whom she was particularly fond; and bathing them with boracic acid, a recognised folk remedy. A Point Verde informant said, "You don't ask the impossible of St. Gerard, you know, you go to your doctor too . . . but his help, his intercession along with your medical."<sup>4</sup> It is not peculiarly medieval to make use of what are seen as complimentary resources at times of need.

On the subject of health it has been said that "Belief in the possibility of a cure, and flexibility in society's attitude towards cure, were essential to posthumous medieval miracles."<sup>5</sup> That such conditions prevailed in Newfoundland is demonstrated in this mother's account of the "cure" of her daughter's rheumatoid arthritis: "See, Rose had a heavy cold, got from swimming, see, and it developed after that. Her heart wasn't affected, but you know she, her hands and everything. And so anyway, we had her in and out of St. Clare's Hospital, you know, so I turned to St. Gerard, and I think he helped her. In fact, she has grown out of it, you know."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3499.

<sup>5</sup> Fincucane, "The Use and Abuse of Medieval Miracles," 10.

<sup>6</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3499.

One historian contends that "An outstanding characteristic of the 'barbarian' Christianity of the early Middle Ages was the belief in relics that worked wonders."<sup>7</sup> Newfoundland letters to Madonna and personal experience narratives indicating that relics were perceived as "powerful" have already been quoted, and I often encountered this view during fieldwork. To cite just one example, a woman said of a complicated delivery, "When I had me last one we were having trouble and there was no doctor in the bay, so that's what I used, me relic of St. Gerard."<sup>8</sup> This lady was no "barbarian": she merely accepted the commonly held belief that a saint could operate through his relic. As Marina Warner points out, "When the Catholic reformers set their house in order, [after the Reformation] they did not reject the principles on which it had always been run; rather, they insisted on the efficacious intercession of the Virgin and saints more vehemently than before, and did not put an end to the use of images and relics as a channel of communication with heaven."<sup>9</sup>

These examples, along with the beliefs and practices

<sup>7</sup> Fincwane, Miracles and Pilgrims, p. 25.

<sup>8</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3501.

<sup>9</sup> Warner, p. 297.

outlined in preceding chapters, show a considerable degree of continuity in popular Catholicism. However, there have been changes in living conditions and reforms within the Roman Catholic Church which have significantly affected religion in Newfoundland since devotion to St. Gerard Majella was first introduced. It is the impact of such changes which is now considered.

For much of this century religion seems to have occupied a central position in the Roman Catholic outport. A Freshwater man claimed that, "out around the bay," "Everything, their days were built around religion."<sup>10</sup> A St. John's nurse who told me that it had always been the "bay" women who were keenest on St. Gerard added, "They are saintly people anyhow."<sup>11</sup> Although outport people still tend to be considered more pious than average, changes in physical and social conditions have had repercussions on the religious life of Catholics throughout the island.

The introduction of electricity and improved communications systems has lessened the social and spatial isolation of many communities, and caused readjustment

<sup>10</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3497.

<sup>11</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3498.

of entertainment and leisure activities. Having time for religion was an important factor in previous years, before so many other distractions were present. As one Branch lady said, "'Twas only religion then, and your day's work. There was no television, and there was no cars coming. You done your day's work and then there was your religion, and the rosary, and your religious books. You know, it would be only just religious books coming into the house. It was a different type of life then altogether. You don't sit now and talk about the saints."<sup>12</sup> This is not to say that people were religious purely for want of anything better to do, but in such circumstances more prominence could be given to religion. After listening to her husband's account of the central place of religion in the outport community, and the claim that everyone used to have the family rosary, a Freshwater lady added, "Television takes the place now."<sup>13</sup>

With increased outside contact and leisure activities, Redemptorist missions and visiting clergy no longer attract the same attention they once did. After discussing the elaborate preparations which used to precede

<sup>12</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C5851.

<sup>13</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3497.

such visits, a lady commented, "And everybody enjoyed, my dear, the bishop or the priests coming. But now the bishop, God love him, we don't know that he's here before he's gone. So that's the difference now."<sup>14</sup>

There was some feeling among my older informants that there had been a positive aspect to isolation, and that increasing contact with the outside world, particularly through television and radio, has been detrimental to traditional lifestyles. A St. Joseph's, Bay D'Espoir, woman reflected, "Now I mean, my mother used to sit down and tell stories and I used to listen to them. That was a wonderful thing, you know, someone sitting and telling you a story. But nowadays you can get all kinds, you don't bother about the old stories."<sup>15</sup> Stories of saints have suffered the general decline in storytelling, and this lady rather sweepingly claimed that "People aren't familiar, they don't hear nothing about no saints now, see." She admitted, "I wouldn't want it to be back again, not people have to work like they did then, you know, but I still, if there was no television and no radios I think people would be a lot happier somehow."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3502.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

A former teacher from Placentia commented on changes in the education system which have affected the younger generation's knowledge of and outlook on religion:

You know, when I see now of how things are lax in school, and I mean, we were in the old schools, and we think there should be more religious education in the schools than there are, because we got so much when we were young, and we gave so much when we were teaching, and every, every, every facet of our religion was taught.

Now it seems to be namby-pamby, you know, there's no, nothing definite to, I don't know, to teach them a way of life, and I don't know . . . we don't like it anyway.

But, and then our priests, they don't seem to be into the schools that much, you know, the whole system is changed . . . But dear, in my day, the parish priest ran the school, he ran the school. . . . And he supervised the religious teaching in that school, and saw that it was done, you know.<sup>17</sup>

Informants repeatedly cited improvement in medical facilities as a reason for declining interest in St. Gerard and other saints. Typical was the comment, "There was no doctors out around the bay, you know, and therefore they put their trust more in the saints than they would if you could just run to the hospital whenever you get a pain or an ache."<sup>18</sup> Undoubtedly people had regarded supernatural assistance as their only potential source of aid when human resources were lacking. As

<sup>17</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3499.

<sup>18</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3497.



one St. Alban's woman remarked, "We had no doctors around here, so we only had our faith to rely on."<sup>19</sup> The lessening of helplessness in the face of illness and accident may have reduced the anxiety which triggered some devotion in the past. Nevertheless, there was considerable devotion to saints in places which had medical facilities--Placentia had a hospital from the mid-1940s--and none of my informants had themselves abandoned devotions as a result of improved medical facilities. One priest commented, "Though I notice that there is a dropping off in the devotion [to St. Gerard] I couldn't say probably that it is specifically due to medical assistance. It may be due to the changes that have taken place in the Church where many good, pious devotions were dropped or neglected."<sup>20</sup>

A number of nurses noted changes in child-bearing habits in Newfoundland in recent years. Women tend to stop bearing children at an earlier age than they used to, and families of eight to twelve are becoming less common. The decline in both the number of babies born and the dangers faced in childbirth, especially by older women, have been suggested as significant factors in

<sup>19</sup> Fieldnotes, May 4, 1978.

<sup>20</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3503.

diminishing devotion to St. Gerard.

When I asked a St. Alban's midwife about the instances of devotion to St. Gerard in the past, she told me, "Well, my dear, I suppose everyone in this place nearly, you know. Yes, boy, there's a lot of people. If you could ask a lot of those people, my dear, that's around St. Alban's, there's . . . a lot of them prayed and had their medals and everything. And now I suppose, my dear, probably you wouldn't get five medals out of the place now, if you got any at all."<sup>21</sup> A nurse at the Placentia hospital recalled devotion to St. Gerard being very strong in the 1950s and 1960s--"Just about every Catholic mother who came in." She stressed that "In recent years, you know, I, I've heard very few . . . say that they have devotion."<sup>22</sup> A St. Clare's nurse commented, "Oh my, the patients here for a while were really devoted to St. Gerard." She too said that in recent years the devotion has been on the wane, adding, "Seems to be on the wane for everything as far as saints are concerned."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3502.

<sup>22</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3500.

<sup>23</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3498.

There was considerable awareness that devotion to St. Gerard and to saints in general had been seriously affected by the Second Vatican Council. Although a Placentia lady told me, "We have great faith in all our saints here," one of the most obvious effects of the Second Vatican Council in Newfoundland has been the attempted shift in emphasis away from the saints and nonliturgical piety, towards communal concentration upon the Mass. A Redemptorist father commented, "You don't hear all that much about St. Gerárd any more. Well, maybe that's because of Vatican II, eh, I don't know."<sup>24</sup>

The recommendations of Vatican II concerning nonliturgical piety were that "Popular devotions of the Christian people, provided they conform to the laws and norms of the Church, are to be highly recommended;" however, "the liturgy by its very nature is far superior to any of them."<sup>25</sup> In practice, the liturgy was to be emphasised while popular devotions were to be played down and purified. It has been admitted that "The criticisms which liturgists directed at popular Catholicism were

<sup>24</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3492.

<sup>25</sup> Austin Flannery, O.P., ed, Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing Company, 1975), p. 7.

various and at least to some degree valid. They charged that it obscured the importance of the Mass behind a plethora of noneucharistic devotions, that the latter were frequently dubious from a theological standpoint and even unintentionally heretical.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, no matter how theologically sound it is, the liturgy is limited, inasmuch as it only occurs in a set location at set times, and limiting, as it does not allow an individual the spontaneity which is so much a feature of nonliturgical piety. There are, moreover, those who still do not care for the new style of Mass. One woman said, "I go to Mass but I don't feel like I'm at Mass; I feel sad now when I go to Mass."<sup>27</sup>

Some differences of opinion concerning the status of popular devotion are discernible among Church personnel. One Redemptorist, for example, complained that many Newfoundlanders were far too preoccupied with saints. He was visibly perturbed when one woman who had been telling us about her great devotion to St. Gerard tried to "cross" us both with her medal of the saint. On the other hand, the parish priest who commented on "the changes that have taken place in the Church where many

<sup>26</sup> Hitchcock, pp. 100-101.

<sup>27</sup> Fieldnotes, Sept. 1978.

good, pious devotions were dropped or neglected" can be assumed to sympathise more with those who turn to saints for comfort and assistance. He had, after all, spent most of his professional life promoting such devotions, and has a fund of stories attributing safe deliveries and suchlike to the intercession of St. Gerard.

There has been some confusion and resentment among some Newfoundland Catholics over changes made in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. An Argentinian woman told me, "Since Vatican II, you know, things have changed a bit in the Church . . . there's even devotions to Our Lady that people don't seem to bother about any more. They've gone a bit too far, of course."<sup>28</sup> A young man from Placentia, who describes himself as "a good radical Catholic," commented on the difficulties facing the older generation of Catholics: "In those days the saints were everything, you know, and the Blessed Virgin was everything and all that, and nowadays the saints are almost gone to nothing, really, and the Blessed Virgin is occupying a lesser place. . . . I mean, you can realise that, like, my parents are sixty years old. I mean, gee, if you've gone through fifty . . . years of your life with this being so pronounced, you

<sup>28</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3500.

know, and all of a sudden, in the span of five years, it's turned right around, then . . . well, you can appreciate their confusion really."<sup>29</sup>

Not surprisingly, one occasionally encounters some rationalisation of the changes. A gentleman in Freshwater explained to me, "See, since the new liturgical calendar . . . there's been a lot of changes. St. Christopher was erased. Everybody prays to him. They seemed to take him off the calendar. Some people thinks they took him out of heaven. I don't think they did. . . . But actually, they were only taken off the liturgical calendar to make room for latter, later saints you know."<sup>30</sup>

One of the most obvious results of Vatican II has been the removal of many statues from churches throughout Newfoundland. On the subject of statues the Council recommended that "The practice of placing sacred images in churches so that they be venerated by the faithful is to be maintained. Nevertheless their number should be moderate and their relative positions should reflect right order. For otherwise the Christian people may

<sup>29</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C9850.

<sup>30</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3497.

find them incongruous, and they may foster devotion of doubtful orthodoxy."<sup>31</sup>

I was told on a number of occasions that one of the main reasons for such changes was that people in other countries like Africa and "up around South America" had been making too much of the saints. A Placentia lady said:

Well, you know, with the, eh, after Vatican II, a lot of statues came out of that [Placentia] church. It was more a concentration, or, you see . . . In a lot of countries, maybe not so much here, but in some countries they branched out from God to the saints, and eh, you know, everyone had a special devotion to the saint and they valued the saint probably more than God. . . . so a lot of statues were removed from the church. Because we could see people go in the church, and they'd, you know, go straight to the saint, kneel and pray. Now then we wondered too . . . whether, you know, they did identify with that statue too much. . . . You see, the saint was up in heaven, but they knelt (before the statue and they talked to it. I've seen elderly people do this) . . .

The statue's just a bit of plaster, only, only revered because it was eh, well, like a photograph. . . . Say some large civic building you'd have a, a picture of certain prominent officials, well in our church we'd have statues of our saints, only just to reverence them, that's all.<sup>32</sup>

Many people, however, were upset by the treatment of statues. In the Placentia area I was told on a number of occasions that the statues which were taken from

<sup>31</sup> Flannery, p. 35.

<sup>32</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3499.

the church had been thrown over the cliffs; one person said that this was to prevent anybody making fun of them, but it had outraged most people who mentioned it. In some parishes priests simply removed statues from churches, despite local opposition. A Branch woman told me, "We had grand statues here in the church, Marion, but they took them out when they went very modern in the Church. . . . I'll never forgive them for it."<sup>33</sup> People point out hotly that they were not "idol worshippers" in the old days, and that the statues had often been given in thanksgiving at great cost to an individual or community. One woman said of the church in Placentia, after the removal of the statues, "It's not a church any more, it's like an auditorium."<sup>34</sup>

While some Newfoundlanders have objected to changes in the Church, others have welcomed and embraced them. The Charismatic movement has been gaining adherents in Newfoundland as devotion to saints has been declining. A nurse, commenting on the decrease in expectant mothers she encounters with devotion to St. Gerard, said, "And you get the younger people in today and they say that we got the, what's it. Come Alive Christians,

33 MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C5651.

34 Fieldnotes, April 8, 1978.



or what is it, the latest thing they're talking about? . . . The Born Again-Christians, that's the crowd there . . . Well, we've got the Charismatic movement, Haven't we, here? That's, that's the Born Again Christians."<sup>35</sup>

The Charismatic movement is a suitable substitute for popular devotion to saints in emotional terms, inasmuch as it presents the notion of a personal saviour, and encourages a close relationship between the individual and Jesus/the Holy Spirit. Younger people who have never been particularly involved with a saint will more easily adapt to this idea, and may regard devotion to the saints as, among other things, hopelessly "old-fashioned." However, older people who have grown up with devotion to saints are unlikely to suddenly turn their backs on them completely. When I asked a couple in Freshwater whether they thought that devotion to saints was declining, the gentleman said, "See, people have been encouraged by the Church now not to depend so much on the saints." To this his wife added, "We have more devotion to the Holy Spirit nowadays."<sup>36</sup> However, although this couple belonged to the Charismatic

<sup>35</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3498.

<sup>36</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3497.

movement, the lady was convinced that St. Gerard had helped her greatly in her pregnancies, and the man mentioned that he still prayed to St. Christopher.

For the future there may be three broad options facing Newfoundland Catholics in terms of personal religion. Many will continue as they have in the past, maintaining devotion to and close personal relationships with the saints they have come to know, love, and trust. This was certainly the situation among some of my older informants; they knew of changes in the Church's outlook, but chose either to ignore them, or were hostile towards them. The devotion of such people might continue to influence friends and relatives, but there will no longer be the same encouragement from the Church to turn to saints as personal patrons, and saints will no longer enjoy the exposure so important to devotion in the past.

A second option in devotional practice will come with adaptation to changes in the Church, and the Charismatic movement will give the kind of "intimacy" with the divine which people previously found with saints. In the interim there will be those with, as it were, a foot in each camp. The new ways will be embraced, but old devotions and favours received will not be entirely forgotten. (I tend to agree that "patrons decline

through attrition, not abandonment.")<sup>37</sup>

A third possibility is that individuals may simply drift away from the Church, for a variety of reasons. The loss by the Church of its central position and authority in the community makes it easier now for the individual to opt out of religion. As one Redemptorist commented, "People are not as devotional, not as pious these days as they used to be."<sup>38</sup> Social change has lessened the compulsion towards conformity and cohesion which existed in the past. Increased entertainment and leisure activity, along with outside influences, have helped reduce religion to one "option" among many. There is undoubtedly some truth in Hitchcock's claim that "As a deeply ingrained and traditional piety is rooted out, the void will be filled not by a more authentic Christianity but by the available resources provided by popular culture."<sup>39</sup>

In outlining significant changes in the physical, social and religious life of many Newfoundlanders and the implications thereof, we have to a considerable extent been

<sup>37</sup> Christian, p. 135.

<sup>38</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3493.

<sup>39</sup> Hitchcock, p. 110.

dealing with secularisation. Secularisation is defined by Berger as "the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols."<sup>40</sup> Alterations in lifestyles have removed religion from the prominent position it once enjoyed in school, at home, and in society at large. One lady lamented, "The Church is changed, and everything is changed, and people are, you know, God's right out of everything."<sup>41</sup>

As I have indicated, while many Newfoundlanders are still fiercely devoted to saints, there does seem to be a general awareness that, for a variety of reasons, saints are gradually playing a less important part in people's lives than they once did. This was certainly true of devotion to St. Gerard Majella. It is obviously very difficult to gauge the popularity of a private devotion, but it would appear that St. Gerard was particularly popular in Newfoundland in the 1950s and 1960s. I have already mentioned the unreliability of naming patterns as a guide to devotion, but the percentages of Gerard Majella-related names in the Placentia baptismal records may give a rough guide to the saint's

<sup>40</sup> Peter L. Berger, The Social Reality of Religion (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin University Books, 1973), p. 113.

<sup>41</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3502.

popularity in that area. (Fig. 3). After the initial impact in the first quarter of this century, it seems that from the mid-1950s until the end of the 1960s such names were consistently popular, peaking in 1957 and 1959. The number of identifiably Newfoundland letters printed in Madonna was highest between 1959 and 1961, (Table 1) but again this can only be taken as a very vague indication because of the obvious limitations. A St. John's nurse estimated that St. Gerard became very popular around 1957 or 1958, and remained so for about ten years. The recollections of midwives, Redemptorists, and devotees suggest that devotion to St. Gerard was at its height in the 1950s and 1960s. There was certainly devotion to St. Gerard Majella in Newfoundland long before the 1950s and it continued after the 1960s, but it seems that St. Gerard's popularity peaked around those two decades.

Table 1. Number of identifiably Newfoundland contributions to Madonna, 1950-1967.

Year	No.	Year	No.	Year	No.
1950	1	1956	16	1962	11
1951	0	1957	29	1963	14
1952	1	1958	44	1964	6
1953	1	1959	117	1965	9
1954	0	1960	120	1966	7
1955	9	1961	93	1967	1

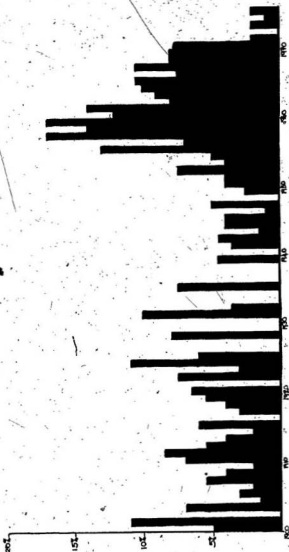


Fig. 3. Graph showing percentage of Gerard Majella-related names in Placentia baptismal registers, 1900-1975.

When I asked one Branch lady if she thought devotion to St. Gerard was declining she replied, "I wouldn't say, no. Any good Christian woman that's expecting, if she's concerned about her child, no, I wouldn't say it was going down. No. I'd say that it might be going down in the sense that, like, young people that are taking the Pill and all that, they wouldn't be concerned about St. Gerard. But where you get your Christian homes, where they're concerned about the child and all that, no, I wouldn't say it was going down."<sup>42</sup> A Point-Verde mother thought that there was still as much devotion to the saint as ever, and said, "I intend with all my family, whenever they get married, I mean the first thing I'm always going to do is have a picture of St. Gerard, or refer them to the prayer."<sup>43</sup> A nun active in spreading devotion to St. Gerard said it was "still going strong," and a Branch informant in her late teens whose mother is devoted to the saint said it would be "instinct" to pray to him if she were pregnant. These, however, were minority views. The devotion will continue, but it will rely more than ever on the personal recommendation of friends and family, and it is almost inconceivable that it will ever reach the same heights of popularity that it once enjoyed.

<sup>42</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C5851.

<sup>43</sup> MUNFLA, Tape, 78-196/C3499.

In this chapter I have commented on aspects of continuity and change in the religious lives of Newfoundland Catholics. While certain ideas and practices have survived in the devotional tradition for centuries, folk and official religion are not static entities existing in a cultural vacuum. Seemingly non-religious factors such as improvements in medical facilities, communications, and suchlike, have had to be taken into consideration, for "Social change has unquestionably affected the condition of popular religion."<sup>44</sup>

In addition to external pressures, religion is subject to change from within, at both official and folk level. It has been pointed out that "Devotions come into and go out of style. In the church as in all cultural matters there are fads."<sup>45</sup> It does seem that at certain times in certain places in Newfoundland, for example, devotion to St. Gérard was very much "the done thing," almost as accepted a part of pregnancy as cravings. While the decline in St. Gerard's popularity is obviously part of a general trend and the result of a variety of factors, the fact that the devotion is no longer "fashionable" should not be overlooked.

<sup>44</sup> Hitchcock, p. 123.

<sup>45</sup> Christian, p. 82.



Susan Tax Freeman claims that "If objects of devotion vary with time, place, and person, so do styles of worship. General vogues may be governed by the way in which the Church presses for communication with the divine and the importance given to immediacy in this interaction."<sup>46</sup> At the official level, intermediacy is at present being downgraded in preference to direct communication between man and God/Christ/the Holy Spirit. Innumerable people turn to saints as mediators and will continue to do so, but the official emphasis away from mediation should have the long term effect of reducing interest in the saints.

Devotion to saints has been of immense importance to Catholic Newfoundlanders in their practical and spiritual lives, and within this tradition countless women feel that they have benefitted from devotion to St. Gerard. The changes and developments touched upon in this chapter, however, indicate that Newfoundland's "age of saints" may gradually draw to a close.

<sup>46</sup> Freeman, p. 115.

CONCLUSION

This account of devotion to St. Gerard Majella traces a significant episode in the socio-religious history of Newfoundland, and provides a record of the saint system in operation and transition in the twentieth century. It shows how Roman Catholics have conducted relationships with a holy figure, and the part devotion has played in their lives. It explores the complex interrelationship of official, folk, and individual religion, and demonstrates the considerable degree of variety and variation in nonliturgical piety.

Devotion to saints has long been recognised as a feature of Catholicism given to diversity and "unofficial" behaviour, but comparatively little attention has been paid to why this is so, and what actually happens in nonliturgical piety. Because I felt there was a need for an accurate account of the workings of the saint system, this study is largely descriptive. It concentrates on the practice rather than the theory of devotion, giving equal weight to folk and official ideas and behaviour, examining the perceptions, beliefs, and practices of those involved in devotion, and showing that a large element of autonomy and diversity are inherent in nonliturgical piety.

Devotion to St. Gerard Majella was studied both for its intrinsic interest and as part of a centuries old devotional tradition. St. Gerard's popularity resulted to a considerable extent from specific social, environmental, and religious conditions in Newfoundland this century, so the timing of the study was important, as many aspects of life in Newfoundland are changing, and traditional devotion to saints is coming under pressure.

The speed with which devotion to St. Gerard spread in Newfoundland shows that it was vigorously promoted, and suggests that it met a perceived need. The important part played by Redemptorist missions in the Roman Catholic outposts of Newfoundland ensured that St. Gerard received publicity throughout the island, as the Redemptorists keenly recommended "their" saint. The enthusiasm with which the devotion was received indicates that it was welcomed by Newfoundland women, many of whom were producing and raising large families in a harsh environment with inadequate medical resources. Devotion to St. Gerard was concerned with the life-crisis of pregnancy, a socially and theologically ambiguous area, which occasioned anxiety and health risks. Spiritual comfort and the hope of supernatural aid must have been most attractive, and for women who had always been taught that it was right and proper to turn to saints in time of need, St. Gerard was a welcome addition

to their pantheon.

Devotion to St. Gerard was spread through a variety of channels in addition to Redemptorist missions. Other Church personnel could be active, while some Catholic nurses and midwives encouraged devotion, considering supernatural aid a useful adjunct to their professional skills. Oral transmission from mother to daughter, neighbour to neighbour, and so on, formed a valuable network in the promotion of the saint. This naturally meant that many people who heard about St. Gerard did not receive their information from "official" sources, but the basic message was that St. Gerard had a special interest in and power to help expectant mothers. Some of the women who had devotion were not familiar with the saint's life and miracles, but personal experience narratives and assurances of the saint's efficacy tended to be more persuasive forces in attracting devotion. In a situation where stories of saints could be swapped as easily as local gossip, news of a saint's success could be spread quite informally.

Devotional magazines were of considerable importance in the spread and consolidation of devotion to St. Gerard in Newfoundland. While the brief biographies of the saint seemed to make little impression in the long term, the magazines published by the Redemptorists,

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particularly Madonna, were greeted with enthusiasm by many Newfoundland women. For many households, religious literature of this type was the only publication subscribed to. The magazines were considered "a good read," with thought-provoking but light articles, letters, and "human interest"--in many respects similar to secular women's magazines. What appeared in these magazines was taken very seriously, and through the letters pages Newfoundland women could empathise with the problems of others, and rejoice over accounts of St. Gerard's successes,

The League of St. Gerard provided information, prayer cards, medals, and suchlike, and fulfilled many of the functions of a pilgrimage centre for devotees. Instead of going on a pilgrimage to seek a cure, or in return for a favour granted, Newfoundlanders could relate to The League in a similar manner without actually leaving home. The propagandist League made devotion to St. Gerard seem more purposeful, and encouraged a sense of vocation and solidarity among mothers: Through The League and Madonna, Newfoundland women could participate in a wide devotional and therapeutic community, despite spatial isolation or lack of mobility.

In the conduct of devotion to St. Gerard Majella, personal, folk, and official ideas and practices intermingled

and the degree of diversity was immense. As "The Mothers' Saint" Gerard had a well-defined clientele of Newfoundland women desiring or experiencing pregnancy, but he also attracted a following as "San Saint" and "Protector of the Family." Although regarded purely as a pregnancy specialist by some, he was treated by many Newfoundlanders as a general practitioner and was called upon to deal with a huge variety of personal and domestic problems. As needs varied from person to person, so did what was asked of the saint. There was also considerable autonomy in how people communicated with St. Gerard, and what strategies they adopted in dealings with him. While some conducted their business with "The Mothers' Saint" on a purely utilitarian basis, others developed with him close relationships perceived in very human terms. One woman wrote of St. Gerard, for example, "He is my best friend," while another said, "He was like one of the family." In both types of relationship human modes of interaction, lacking a theological basis were employed: St. Gerard was coaxed, bargains were struck, favours were asked and returned.

The lack of interest in the iconography of St. Gerard among devotees in Newfoundland contrasted strongly with the significance given to devotional objects bearing a likeness of the saint. Items such as medals, for

example, were used by women to show that they were under the saint's protection, to "cross" themselves or others for curative purposes, or whatever seemed appropriate to the situation; it was widely accepted that the power of the saint might in some way be directed through them. The woman who ventured out on a stormy night to obtain a St. Gerard medal for her daughter is unlikely to have thought, "Expecting this to do any good is just folk religious and not officially sanctioned, but I'll give it a try anyway." In all aspects of devotion, there was simply no distinction between official and folk usage.

Although its heyday was in the Middle Ages, the saint system has continued to flourish into the twentieth century, retaining aspects which have remained, virtually unchanged since pre-Reformation days. Devotion to St. Gerard Majella in Newfoundland is not a "survival," but it is part of an ancient tradition of nonliturgical piety. Because of the considerable degree of autonomy, and the informality of the spread and conduct of devotion to saints, there has been great scope for "folk interpretation and expression."<sup>1</sup> Folk and official beliefs and practices have continued side by side in

<sup>1</sup> Yoder, p. 13.

the saint system for centuries, and while the Church has promoted saints as intercessors it has not been able to control people's relationships with them. Indeed, until quite recently this form of popular piety benefitted from rather a laissez-faire attitude on the part of the Church. Now, in the wake of Vatican II, devotion to saints is facing something of a miniature Reformation, this time from within the Church. As Tax Freeman comments, "We are in some respects back in the sixteenth century watching popular religion suffer the beginnings of a fresh attack."<sup>2</sup>

This attack on the saint system does not mean that popular religion per se will disappear: "An understanding of change as a constant feature of popular as well as official religion is essential if we are to assess the scale of the changes occurring today."<sup>3</sup> (Thomas claims, for instance, that in post-Reformation England "The decline of old Catholic beliefs was not the result of persecution; it reflected a change in the popular conception of religion.")<sup>4</sup> However, the saint system as it has remained for so long seems set to come under

<sup>2</sup> Freeman, p. 111.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas, p. 87.



increasing pressure. One of the aims of this study has been to demonstrate the extent to which the saint system has maintained traditional outlook and behaviour, for this is necessary if the changes in popular devotion which are now taking place are to be appreciated.

I have shown in this study that categories like "official" and "folk" religion are not fixed, straightforward, or easily discernible. I suggest that religion can be viewed in terms of three basic components. There is official religion (in the context of this study, the official position of the Roman Catholic Church), folk religion (that which is generally accepted belief and practice, regardless of the official view), and individual religion (the product of the received tradition, plus personal beliefs and interpretations). The study of devotion to St. Gerard Majella in Newfoundland has shown something of the interplay between these categories, and the difficulty of distinguishing between them.

At the official level, where one might expect constancy and fairly clear-cut positions, there is some ambiguity and inconsistency. In The League of St. Gerard, for example, devotion to a saint was manipulated by a Church faction for propagandist purposes in the face of socio-religious pressures. The League and Madonna both

implicitly condoned bargaining with the divine by becoming part of the system of promissory prayer, and while Madonna purported to give the official line on medals and relics, it also implied that tremendous benefits might result from wearing or using them and printed letters suggesting that power was intrinsic in such objects.

There is also a problem with differences of opinion, outlook, and intellect among Church personnel. Compare, for example, the young priest unhappy about being "crossed" with a St. Gerard medal, and the older priest who has blessed many in this way and has worked wonders with a St. Gerard relic. Compare, furthermore, a Vatican II theologian and the Newfoundland nun who claimed that her third class relic of St. Gerard was "more powerful" than a medal because it was "a piece of the saint." It should be remembered that whatever a cleric or a religious tells a lay person, albeit a folk or purely idiosyncratic belief and practice, is liable to be believed and taken as official because of that person's position in the Church.

Some within the Church are presently complaining that the laity are overawed by priests, behave superstitiously, lack real understanding of theological matters, and place too much faith in saints. People are, however,

only doing what they have been told by figures of authority such as priests, nuns, teachers, and parents. They have in the past been led to believe that the clergy are "special," as in the belief, apparently even perpetuated by some priests, that helping a cleric earns an indulgence. They have been told that it is correct, indeed praiseworthy, to place their trust in saints, and that it is beneficial to get "crossed" or "to cross" with a medal or relic, as frequently done by Church personnel. The only theology most people know has come from the pulpit, for popular devotional literature, and from fellow Catholics--none of them necessarily reliable sources. The Church is internally inconsistent, and at present subject to change at many levels; it is not and has not been constant in what it has expected of and taught the people.

The implications of all this for the individual are immense. The difficulties in keeping abreast of what actually comprises official religion are considerable, and innumerable people's religious ideas and behaviour contain a proportion of folk religion of which they are unlikely to be aware. Yoder describes folk religion as "the totality of all those views and practices of religion that exist among the people apart from and alongside the strictly theological and liturgical forms

of the official religion."<sup>5</sup> I contend that the Church, believers, and scholars have tended to seriously overestimate the "strictly theological" content of most people's religious beliefs and practices, and have consequently seriously underestimated the extent and importance of folk religion.

Scholars of religion have tended to concentrate on what should happen, paying little or no attention to what does happen. This study of devotion to St. Gerard Majella in Newfoundland demonstrates the importance of taking into account both official and folk religious beliefs and practices if an accurate picture of religion as it is lived is to be presented. In a situation where nonliturgical piety has been widely practised, and in which folk religious beliefs and behaviour have been accepted as integral parts of religion, devotion to St. Gerard Majella has played a great part in the spiritual, psychological, and practical lives of countless Newfoundlanders. To regard folk religion as a deviation from the norm in such a situation is to misunderstand what is normative at popular level.

Folk religion is a potentially vast field. Its size

<sup>5</sup> Yoder, p. 14.

and importance are still widely underrated. After rather a chequered history, it deserves to be recognised for what it is--an important and inevitable element of religion per se.

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APPENDIX A

Places of origin of Newfoundland contributions published in Madonna.

The first identifiable Newfoundland letter in Madonna concerning St. Gerard appeared in January 1950, from "Mrs. B.B., Newfoundland," and from then until the magazine's demise in 1967 numerous Newfoundland contributions were published in the League section. On some occasions only the writer's initials and province were shown, but on others a more precise provenance was given. The Newfoundland place-names which appeared with Madonna contributions are listed below:

Admiral's Beach	Bear Cove Point
Admiral's Cove	Bell Island
Allan Island	Bellevue
Angel's Cove	Benton
Arnold's Cove	Bird Cove
Arnold's Cove Station	Black Duck Brook
Avondale	Black Island
Baie Verte	Bonavista Bay
Bartlett's Harbour	Botwood
Bauline	Branch
Bay de Verde	Brent's Cove
Bay D'Espoir	Brig Bay

Brigus  
Brigus South  
Buchans  
Burin  
Burnt Island  
Burnt Woods  
Canada Harbour  
Campbell's Creek  
Cape Broyle  
Cape Race  
Chapel Arm  
Clattice  
Coachman's Cove  
Colinet  
Colliers  
Conception Bay  
Conche  
Corner Brook  
Crawley's Island  
Croque  
Cull's Harbour  
Curling  
Daniel's Cove  
Daniel's Point  
Dunville  
Duntara  
Eastview

English Harbour  
Fermeuse  
Ferndale  
Ferryland  
Fishot Islands  
Fleur de Lys  
Flower's Cove  
Fortune Bay  
Fortune Harbour  
Fox Harbour  
Freshwater  
Gander  
Gaskiers  
Goose Cove  
Goulds  
Grand Falls  
Great Codroy  
Great Paradise  
Groais Island  
Harbour Main  
Herring Neck  
High Beach  
Holyrood  
Island's Harbour  
Jaques Fontaine  
Jerseyside  
Kilbride

King's Cove	Pine Falls
Kippens	Placentia
La Scie	Placentia Bay
Lamaline	Point au Mal
Lance Cove	Point La Haye
Little Bay	Point Lance
Little Harbour	Point May
Little Island	Point Verde
Little Paradise	Port au Mal
Long Harbour	Port au Port
Long run	Port aux Choix
Lord's Cove	Port Royal
Mainland	Portugal Cove South
Makinson's Crossing	Red Island
Marystown	Reginaville
Merasheen	Renews
Miller's Passage	Riverhead
Mount Arlington Heights	River Head
Mount Carmel	Riverside
New Ferolle	Rushoon
North Arm	St. Alban's
North Harbour	St. Ann's
North River	St. Bernard's
Northern Bay	St. Bride's
Oderin	St. Georges
Parker's Cove	St. John's
Patrick's Cove	St. Joseph's

St. Kyran's	Three Rock Cove
St. Lawrence	Tilting
St. Mary's	Townside
St. Mary's Bay	Torbay
St. Shotts	Tors Cove
St. Veronica's	Trepassey
St. Vincent's	Trinity Bay
Shalloway Cove	Tuff's Cove
Ship Harbour	Tuft's Cove
Spruce Brook	White Bay
Stephenville	Windsor
Stephenville Crossing	Witless Bay
Sweet Bay	Woods Island
Terrenceville	



APPENDIX B

Prayers commonly used in devotion to St. Gerard Majella in Newfoundland.

## PRAYER FOR MOTHERHOOD

O good St. Gerard, powerful intercessor before God and Wonderworker of our day, I call upon thee and seek thy aid. Thou who on earth didst always fulfill God's designs help me to do the Holy Will of God. Beseech the Master of Life from Whom all paternity proceedeth, to render me fruitful in offspring, that I may raise up children to God in this life and heirs to the Kingdom of His glory in the world to come. Amen.

## FOR AN EXPECTANT MOTHER

O everlasting and Almighty God, Who through the operation of the Holy Ghost, didst prepare the body and soul of the glorious Virgin Mary, Mother of God, to be a worthy habitation of Thy Son, and Who, through the same Holy Ghost, didst sanctify St. John the Baptist before his birth; hearken to the prayer of Thy humble servant who implores Thee, through the intercession of St. Gerard, Thy faithful servant, to protect her (me) in the dangers of motherhood and to safeguard against the evil spirit the tender fruit which Thou hast vouchsafed to grant her (me) in order that, by Thy Saving Hand,

it may receive Holy Baptism; grant also that, after living like Christians on earth, both mother and child attain to everlasting bliss in Heaven. Amen.

FOR A SICK CHILD

O St. Gerard, who like Our Divine saviour, didst show children such loving tenderness, and didst deliver so many from sundry diseases, nay, even from death; graciously look down upon distressed parents, who implore Thee to restore their child's health (if such be the Will of God), promising to bring it up a good Christian, and safeguard it, by constant vigilance, from the fatal leprosy of sin. We implore this favor, O compassionate Brother, through that early love with which Jesus and Mary encompassed thy childhood. Amen.

APPENDIX C

Making a novena in honour of St. Gerard Majella.

The novena, a devotional exercise lasting nine days, has played a part in devotion to St. Gerard Majella in Newfoundland. The earliest novena I was shown during fieldwork, the Novena to Saint Gerard Majella With extraordinary favors, translated by Lawrence Drummond, LL.L., was published in 1922. This novena was included in The Mothers' Saint, by Daniel Ehman, C.Ss.R., which is where most of my informants had encountered it.

Ehman prefaces the novena with the following instructions:

TO MAKE A NOVENA IN HONOUR OF  
ST. GERARD

- (1) Devoutly read and follow the Consideration for each day listed in the following pages.
- (2) Practice some devotion each day for nine days, such as reciting the Rosary, assisting at Mass, etc., each time requesting the aid of St. Gerard, as in one of the prayers in this booklet. Go to confession and receive Holy Communion.
- (3) Promise St. Gerard that you will make him known to others, and that you will do all in your power to spread devotion to him.
- (4) Spend a few moments each day in reading something more about the life of St. Gerard.
- (5) Wear a medal of St. Gerard that has been blessed, and that has (if possible) touched his holy relic.

Do these things with the utmost sincerity and confidence, and St. Gerard will not fail you.

Each day's devotional exercise consists of four stages:

I Consideration

A passage which reflects upon one particular aspect of St. Gerard's life. Consideration topics include: "St. Gerard's devotion to the Blessed Virgin;" "St. Gerard's charity towards his neighbor;" "St. Gerard's perfect obedience;" "St. Gerard's devotedness to the poor and sick."

II Practice

A recommendation to improve the devotee's spiritual life. The Practice for the ninth day, for example, reads: "Get a picture of St. Gerard and put it in a conspicuous place. It will recall Gerard's holiness and, the better to secure his protection, often repeat this short invocation: St. Gerard Majella, pray for us."

III Example

Incidents demonstrating St. Gerard's miraculous powers, such as his insight into the state of people's souls, his cures of the sick, and his aid to mothers in childbirth.

IV Prayer

A prayer based on the Consideration and Example for the day, asking that the devotee might become more like

St. Gerard in that respect.

In addition to the four stages which differ each day, the daily devotional exercise is rounded off with a prayer which remains the same throughout the nine days. This prayer praises St. Gerard for his many virtues and spiritual gifts, and asks for his help "in our diseases, our infirmities and reverses; in all our woes of mind and heart; in all the ills which embitter this wretched life." Although the Drummond translation published in 1922 makes no mention of it, the novena in The Mothers' Saint specifies that nine "Hail Marys" should be said each day prior to this final prayer.

APPENDIX D

The League of St. Gerard's prayer "Against the Forces of Anti-Life."

## AGAINST THE FORCES OF ANTI-LIFE

Great Wonder-Worker of our day, St. Gerard, powerful protector of the mother and her unborn child, beg God, we beseech thee, to crush the mounting forces of anti-life, and to enlighten those who walk in this deadly way that they may see the enormity of their sin and return to the generous observance of the divine law. Pray, too, for mothers that they may prize the great privilege of motherhood and that they may bring up their children in the holy love and fear of God; so saving their own immortal souls and furthering the honour and glory of their Maker; through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.

Almighty and Eternal Father, Who, in Thy all-wise Providence, hast deigned to raise up St. Gerard to be the glorious protector of the mother and her unborn child: grant, we beseech Thee, through the powerful intercession of this, Thy servant, that all the diabolical forces of anti-life may be destroyed from the face of the earth forever; that so the Christian family may once more flourish to the praise and eternal glory of Thy Holy Name. This we ask through the merits of Our Lord and

Saviour, Jesus Christ, Thy Son, Who liveth and reigneth  
with Thee and the Holy Ghost, God for ever and ever.  
Amen.

3 Hail Mary's and 3 Glory be to the Father's.

(100 days indulgence).









