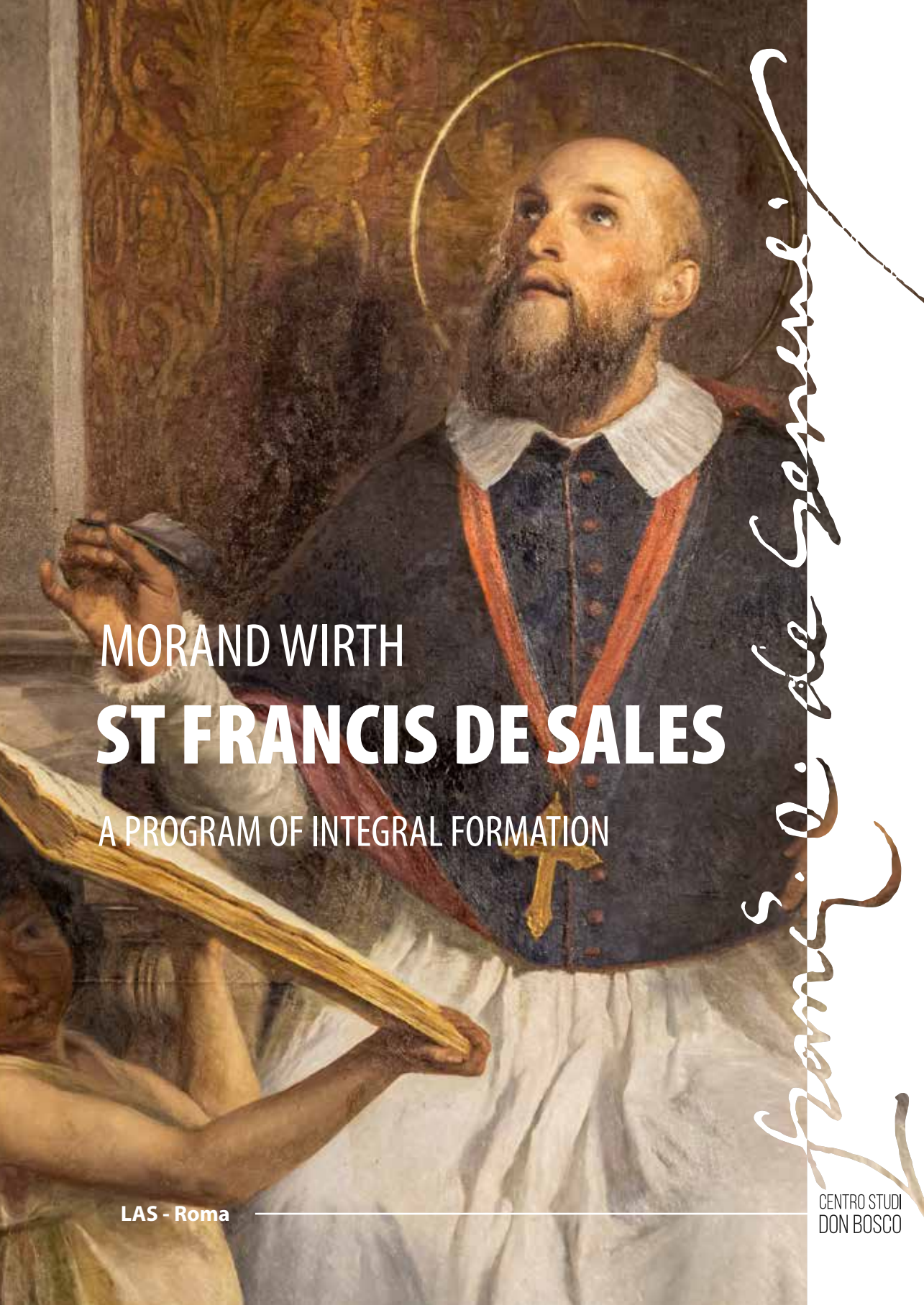

MORAND WIRTH

ST FRANCIS DE SALES

A PROGRAM OF INTEGRAL FORMATION

LAS - Roma

CENTRO STUDI
DON BOSCO

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A Program of Integral Formation

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PRESENTATION

On 8 December 1844, Piedmontese educator John Bosco (better known as Don Bosco or St John Bosco) opened an oratory dedicated to St Francis de Sales on the outskirts of Turin.

For three years already he had been gathering the boys he met on the streets, in workshops or on construction sites, every Sunday and on feast days. The work that was then only at its beginnings, and that he called an oratory, recalling the Oratory founded in the 16th century in Rome by St Philip Neri, was aimed at the education of young people who were often uneducated and ignorant. In addition to religious formation, which he considered to be fundamental, Don Bosco did not neglect human formation and instruction, and infused all his activities, among which games, music and amusements played an important part, with a festive air.

When telling the story of that historic day in his *Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*, Don Bosco did not fail to explain the reasons why he had chosen the protection of this Savoyard bishop. The first was apparently by chance: the portrait of St Francis de Sales was already adorning the entrance to the building he would be using for the work. The second, a more personal reason, did not need much explanation: "Because we had put our own ministry, which called for great calm and meekness, under the protection of this saint in the hope that he might obtain for us from God the grace of being able to imitate him in his extraordinary meekness and in winning souls."[1]

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1 See J. Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855*, Salesiana Publishers, New Rochelle, New York., 2010, p. 113

And this is how it came to be that this ancient bishop from Savoy became the protector of a nineteenth century educational work later destined to show remarkable development.

Formator

Born in 1567 at the Castle de Sales in Savoy, Francis received a thorough humanistic education crowned by university studies in Paris and Padua.

Ordained priest in 1593 and Bishop of Geneva in 1602, but residing in Annecy, he devoted himself to intense pastoral and formative activity at the service of all his people: he corrected the errors of the "rebellious children" of the Church at the time of the Protestant Reformation, formed his collaborators through conferences and meetings, instructed children in the catechism, was concerned with the education of young people in schools, promoted the culture of the elite and ordinary people as well, spiritually accompanied many people, and with Jane-Frances de Chantal founded the Sisters of the Visitation. He died in Lyon, in 1622, at the age of fifty-five.

There is no doubt that St Francis de Sales has always been considered to be a great man of the Church, a holy pastor of souls, the founder, together with St Jane-Frances de Chantal, of the Visitation Order, author of hugely successful spiritual works like the *Introduction to the Devout Life* and the *Treatise on the Love of God* that earned him the title "doctor of love". That he also became the inspiration and model for educators and formators will have to be sought in his life and thought.

Francis de Sales lived at a time when the question of the human being was at the centre of a culture strongly marked by Rennaissance humanism. A study dedicated to education and formation according to Francis de Sales will have to take into consideration the humanistic dimension of his thinking.

A formation program

Undoubtedly, the problem of education and formation for Francis de Sales concerns every dimension of the human being. Everything is connected, interdependent and ordered to precise, transcendent ends in the human individual. From this point of view, a line from his *Treatise on the Love of God* establishes the premises of his program: "Man is the perfection of the universe; the spirit is the perfection of man; love, that of the spirit; and charity, that of love."

As we can clearly see, love is the apex of humanity and the entire created universe, and when love is directed towards God it is called charity.

Thus we can deduce that Francis de Sales' humanism is an integral humanism, that is, as Jacques Maritain would say, a "theocentric humanism, rooted where man has his roots, integral humanism, humanism of the incarnation."[2]

His humanism is integral because it takes account of both the openness to transcendence and natural and temporal realities: corporeality, passions, affectivity, relationship with others and with this world's realities.

It is true that humanism is not the object of specific teaching by Francis de Sales, who is totally preoccupied with pastoral and spiritual concerns. Nevertheless, in his writings we find a vision of the human being that is rich in so many pedagogical and formative implications. By placing ourselves in his school, we will be listening to his lessons on the integral formation of the human being in three dimensions: as an individual (first part), as someone living in society (second part), and finally as a person open to transcendence (third part).

It will not be difficult to discover in each of the parts that St Francis de Sales' entire program revolves around the central theme of love: love of self, love of neighbour, love of God. We could say that his humanism is the integral humanism of love.

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2 J. Maritain, *Humanisme intégral. Problèmes temporels et spirituels d'une nouvelle chrétienté*, in Œuvres *complètes,* vol. VI, Éditions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse - Éditions Saint-Paul Paris, 1984, 376.

Important highlights

The book before the reader is an abridged and adapted version of the large volume published in 2006 on Francis de Sales' relationship with education.[3] The two parts that deal with the life and activities of the Bishop of Geneva have been left aside. Overly erudite points have been simplified, and many quotations have been deleted.

Most of the quotes are taken from the "Annecy Edition" of the complete works of St Francis de Sales (OEA) in 27 volumes with Index.[4]

In this volume we have almost always left out the initials OEA, indicating only the volume and page (II 125 = OEA, vol. II, p. 125).

Here are the acronyms used:

C	*The Controversies* (= OEA I), indicating page
E	*Entretiens (Spiritual Conferences)* (= OEA VI), indicating page
D1-5	*Introduction to the Devout Life* (= OEA III), indicating part (1-5) and chapter
OEA	*Œuvres*, Annecy Edition, indicating volume (I-XXVII) and page
L1-11	*Letters* (= OEA XI-XXI), indicating volume (1-11) and page
O1-5	*Opuscules (Pamphlets)* (= OEA XXII-XXVI), indicating volume (1-5) and page
S1-4	*Sermons* (= OEA VII-X), indicating volume (1-4) and pag
T1-12	*Theotimus (Treatise on the Love of God)* (= OEA IV-V), indicating book (1-12) and chapter

3 M. Wirth, *Francesco di Sales e l'educazione. Formazione umana e umanesimo integrale*, Roma, LAS, 2006.

4 *Œuvres de Saint François de Sales, évêque de Genève et docteur de l'Église*. Édition complète, 27 vols, Annecy, Monastère de la Visitation, 1892–1964.

Translator's note:

The *Introduction to the Devout Life* and the *Treatise on the Love of God* are readily available online (especially in the older, long-standing traditional translations going back a century or more) so despite the quaintness of the language, it is the traditional translations of these that have been used here. And while some of the remaining items (*The Controversies* and *Spiritual Conferences* in particular) are also available online and have been employed here when quoted, most readers will not have easy access or even any access at all to other items such as the full range of *Letters, Pamphlets* and *Sermons.* Therefore the translator has translated quotations either directly from the OEA or on the fly, so to speak. It seemed the most sensible way to deal with them.

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

A "divine" intervention and the end of a world

At the dawn of modern times, when the Middle ages were coming to an end and the new period called the Renaissance was beginning, the invention of the press and typographical art halfway through the 15th century had to be seen to be quite extraordinary. In Gargantua's famous letter to his son Pantagruel, Rabelais wrote in rapturous terms: "Printing likewise is now in use, so elegant and so correct that better cannot be imagined, although it was found out but in my time by divine inspiration."[1]

Francis de Sales was certainly not far from sharing this enthusiasm when he compared the work of creation to Gutenberg's art: "God, like the printer, has given being to all the diversity of creatures which have been, are, or shall be, by one only stroke of his omnipotent will" (T2 2).

In fact it would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of this invention if we bear in mind that the dissemination of the book opened a new era in the field of communication of ideas and culture. By now the press had become established in the city and street vendors were spreading it to the most remote parts of the countryside. The need and taste for reading and education was developing everywhere.

But at a time when the West was inventing printing, an event of an entirely different kind marked the end of an era in the East. Constantinople, the largest, most beautiful and richest city of the Middle Ages, was taken by the Turks in 1453, a date that marks the beginning of the new era

1 Quoted in L.-H. Parias (Ed.), *Histoire générale de l'enseignement et de l'éducation en France,* t. II: De Gutenberg aux Lumières, Paris, Labat éditeur, 1981, 173.

known as the modern era. The drama that played out in Eastern Europe had positive consequences for the development of culture. Great men of letters who fled to the West, where they brought with them precious ancient manuscripts, were at the origins of a profound renewal of Greek and Byzantine studies.

Renaissance humanism

The tragic events that followed in the East did not hinder the flourishing in the West of the Renaissance, a term introduced in the 19th century to designate the cultural movement born in Italy in the middle of the 15th century.

From a negative point of view the Renaissance could be characterised as a series of rejections: rejection of the "barbaric" Latin of medieval teaching, rejection of the "dictatorship" of Aristotle, the philosopher par excellence of the Middle Ages, rejection of sterile scholastic logic. From a positive point of view, it professed a true enthusiasm for human nature and nurtured a universal curiosity for all its manifestations. It is in this sense that the Renaissance paved the way for what would come to be called humanism, from which it is inseparable.

An extraordinary desire for knowledge took possession of the Renaissance humanists. Not only did they rediscover the real Aristotle by going back to the original texts, but they almost completely rediscovered Plato, inspiring a new natural philosophy. The teacher of Platonic philosophy in Florence, Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), a theorist of love and beauty, saw the universe as a living organism formed by the union of heaven and earth, which underwent heavenly influences.

These wonderful representations are found in other fashionable followers of Platonism, sometimes mixed with tendencies close to Gnosticism, exotericism and even magic. Carried over to the area of the human individual, they made a kind of microscosm of the soul where

heaven and earth join. Among Ficino's disciples, Agnolo Poliziano, poet and philologist, educator of Lorenzo de' Medici's children, was no stranger to Francis de Sales who quotes him.[2]

Mathematics saw new development when Pierre de la Ramée (better known by the Latin name Ramus) dared oppose Aristotle, becoming the first professor of this discipline at the Royal College. Francis de Sales recalls one of his successors, "the famous Bressius" (S1 415), who held the Chair from 1576. Astronomers, for their part, including Copernicus (1473–1543) a Pole who had studied in Bologna, Padua and Ferrara, were increasingly interested in the mathematical laws governing the universe. Copernicus overturned Ptolemy's geocentric system. His most famous disciple was Galileo (1564–1642), whose ideas would even penetrate the walls of the college at Annecy.

Medicine, too, freed itself from its abstract prejudices to dedicate itself to experimentation, as was especially the case at the University of Padua which the young Francis de Sales attended. In 1543, Flemish doctor Andrea Vesalio made his *De humani corporis fabrica* made public. This was a treatise based entirely on the anatomical study of the human body.

The Middle Ages, when everything was considered in relation to God, were followed by a period of discovery of the human being in all his or her dimensions, both aesthetic and literary as well as scientific and moral. Politics, too, was liberated from traditional norms with Machiavelli (1469–1527), whose main work, *The Prince*, was in Francis de Sales' library.[3]

---

2 Agnolo Ambrogini, called the Poliziano (1454–1494), is the author of the *Miscellanea*, a work of notes and comments on Latin texts that makes him a forerunner of classical philology. Francis de Sales quotes him in a *Recueil de similitudes* (O5 157).

3 This book belonged to a list of prohibited books that the Roman Congregation of the Inquisition, at his request, had allowed him to read and keep in his possession. See the list in OEA II 425–427

The New World

The discovery of unknown lands in America (the West "Indies"), Asia and Africa, fed a thirst for knowledge that was now able to range "over all places on earth, in the ancient and in the new world" (S1 206ff). Francis de Sales was interested in all these great currents of information and exchange. He read the *History of the East Indies* by Jesuit G.P. Maffei (II 92); the *Letters from Japan and China* by another Jesuit, Fr P. Almeida (S1 404); the *General History of the East Indies*, by F. López de Gómara (S2 359); and the *Dies caniculares* by S. Majoli, a collection of natural phenomena and curious events "in Europe, in Asia and in Africa" (S1 404). He knew of the great Portuguese navigators: Bartholomew Dias, who gave his name to the Cape of Good Hope (S1 379); the "valiant Captain Albuqerque" (C 102), who "fortified Goa, the main city of the East Indies" (II 113); the discoverer of Brazil, Pedro Álvares Cabral, who "erected a very high cross there from which that huge country took the name of the Holy Cross for many years, until the people, after abandoning this holy name, called it Brazil" (II 130ff).

In the *Defence of the Standard of the Holy Cross,* Francis de Sales tells of the marvellous events that accompanied the arrival of Christianity from overseas: the apparition of a cross in Albuquerque's time "in one of the districts in India" (S1 235), the story of the miraculous cross of Meliapor (II 108), the devotion to the cross by the inhabitants of Socotra, "an island in the sea of Eritrea" (II 109), the apparitions of the cross "on the coast of the kingdom of Abyssinia" and "towards Japan" (II 123), the apparition in the ancient kingdom of Congo of men marked with the sign of the cross, who were in the service of King Alphonse, and the construction of a church to the Holy Cross in the city of Ambasse (II 123).[4]

He mentions Guinea (O5 124), which in his time designated the entire coastal zone of West Africa, washed by the Gulf of Guinea.

4 Ambasse corresponds to today's Mbanza-Congo, a city in Angola that in Portuguese times bore the name São Salvador.

He found curious things in letters from Jesuit missionaries, such as a certain animal from the Indies that, while being terrestrial in nature, "turned into a fish" (S1 404). In the *Introduction* he tells us that "merchant-ships coming from Peru with gold and silver often bring apes and parrots" (D3 4). He compared himself to geographers (called cosmographers at the time), when attempting to outline a great character in broad strokes: "I will therefore imitate the cosmographers, whose maps of the world indicate cities only with points, mountains with lines, leaving the task of imagining the rest to the imagination." (S1 408). Under his pen appears the name of the new continent that was being explored when he writes that "we know a little of the configuration of America and what pertains to this country from the description made of it by those who have visited it." (S2 277).

A New Education

The dawning of modern times is also marked by the discovery of another kind that Philippe Ariès has described as the "discovery" of childhood (and youthfulness), by now thought of as a stage of life different from adulthood.[5]

While the child did not appear at all in medieval society or was dealt with briefly as a small adult, now this stage of life is increasingly seen as a separate one. People are interested in children, they dress them up in special clothes, and children enjoy games that are different from those of adults. The family, too, begins to become aware of its own identity, cultivates its intimacy, its emotional ties, and its educational concerns.[6]

5 See chapter "La découverte de l'enfance", in P. Ariès, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime*, Paris, Librairie Plon, 1960, 23-41.

6 On the development of the meaning of family and private life during the Renaissance, cf. P. Ariés - G. Duby (Ed.), *Histoire de la vie privée*, t. III : *De la Renaissance aux Lumières*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1986.

The awareness of the character of this early age is manifested concretely in the establishment of day and boarding schools, which are no longer the Middle Ages mixture of schoolchildren, young and old.

In order to renew society and form a new type of civil, courteous, kindly, pious and cultured individual, the humanists spread an innovative pedagogy.[7]

Francis de Sales recognised in Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536) a "great literateur", one who stated that "the best way to understand and become wise is to teach" (L II 301). One of Erasmus' last books was his 1530 work entitled *De civilitate morum puerilium*. This disseminated the notion of "civilisation" in the educational field in European society. A friend of Erasmus, the British Chancellor Thomas More (1478–1535) is mentioned by Francis de Sales in reference to the Church's authority (C 207). We do not have explicit proof to say with certainty that the Bishop of Geneva had read the works of Juan Luis Vives (1492–1540).

Nevertheless, a careful study of his concept of the human being allows us to identify one source of it in the great Spanish humanist's *De anima et vita*. Francis de Sales must have felt very close to the views of Cardinal Sadoleto (1477–1547), a great humanist whose name appears in his writings (C 315). Sadoleto based education on the necessity of religion combined with an expressly humanistic culture, a synthesis of ancient wisdom and Christian faith.

Contrariwise, Francis de Sales was not fond of Rabelais (1494–1553), this former monk, author of books that he judged unworthy of being read by a young person. The author of *Pantagruel* (1532) and *Gargantua* (1534) spread the enthusiasm humanists had for philosophy, morality and the knowledge of antiquity in his writings. The giants whose incredible

7 Cf. the work of E. Garin, *L'éducation de l'homme moderne. La pédagogie de la Renaissance 1400–1600*, Paris, Fayard, 1968. On the transformation of boarding schools, cf. D. Julia, *Église, société, éducation à l'époque moderne. La transformation des collèges au XVI^e^ et au XVII^e^ siècles*, in G. Avanzini (Ed.), *Pédagogie chrétienne - Pédagogues chrétiens*, Paris, Éditions Don Bosco, 1996, 61-84.

adventures he recounts become the symbols of humanity without limits, the true king of the universe, transformed into a "well of science". Religion is well present in his work, but it tends towards a naturalistic rather than dogmatic theism.

Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592) was certainly not unknown to Francis de Sales,[8] who quotes this "profane doctor" on various occasions (C 180). The author of the *Essais* dedicated one of his chapters to the education of children. Francis de Sales could have felt in agreement with statements in this essay, with its preference for "a well-made head" rather than "a well-filled head". He wanted lessons not only to be useful but pleasurable as well, and rejected any recourse to violence in education.

The impact of the Protestant Reformation

Initially, the Reformation was clearly distinct from the Renaissance, which he considered was marked by traces of paganism. On the contrary, it was far from so by virtue of its austere concern to return to the purity of the primitive faith, to form the Christian according to the evangelical model and to fight against the pagan tendencies found in the Church. However, its effects often combined with those of the humanists: both parties rejected the Scholasticism of the Middle Ages and demanded a direct knowledge of religious texts, thus the learning not only of Latin but also Greek and Hebrew, the translation of the Bible into contemporary languages, education open to all and a more personalised religion.

Concern for education and instruction was paramount for the reformers, just as it was for the humanists. We can even speak of a true revolution if we consult the programs of Luther (1483–1543), Zwingli (1484–1531), and Calvin (1509–1564). According to the leaders of the Reformation,

8 Cf. the study by L. Terreaux, *Montaigne et saint François de Sales,* in "Bulletin de l'Académie Saint-Anselme" I (1985) 22-51.

ignorance is the great evil of religion: fighting it is the first duty of the state. In his letter to German magistrates and senators, Luther had written that "the prosperity of a city does not depend merely on its natural wealth, the solidity of its walls, the elegance of its houses, the abundance of its armaments and arsenals; the health and strength of a city lie above all in a good education that guarantees it educated, reasonable, upright and well-behaved citizens."[9]

This is why Luther demands school teachers who are capable of educating and instructing youth in such a way that a man is enabled to exercise his profession in a suitable manner and a woman to manage the domestic chores and educate her children in a Christian manner. He criticised Scholastic education and required each child to attend school at least for an hour or two a day. "Educating youth" he wrote, thinking of Homer, "is worth more than conquering Troy."[10]

Calvin was a disciple of Luther before going his own way. His basic work, translated from Latin and entitled *Institution de la religion chrétienne*, a work that made the author one of the first great writers in French, was well-known to Francis de Sales (II 425). He too was moved by the concern to form Christians and citizens. Every believer had to know exactly what the true faith according to the Gospel was and be able to read the Holy Scriptures in their mother tongue. Calvin renewed the existing college [from here on, understand 'college' as a boarding institution] in Geneva and in 1559 succeeded in founding an Academy, entrusting the running of it to Theodore Beza who was its first Rector before succeeding him as head of the Reformed Church after Calvin's death in 1564. "Calvin's great spiritual work," Lucien Febvre said "was not in composing books, giving addresses, formulating and defending dogmas. It was educating people."[11] Likewise, it is no exaggeration

9 Quoted by R. Gal, *Histoire de l'éducation, Paris*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1979, 62.

10 Quoted by E. Garin, *L'educazione in Europa 1400/1600. Problemi e programmi*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1976, 185.

11 L. Febvre, *Au cœur religieux du XVI^e^ siècle*, Paris, SEVPEN, 1957, 263.

to say that the role of Francis de Sales, who can be considered from various points of view as the anti-Calvin, was to form men and women according to the concepts of Catholic humanism, interpreted, however, according to his particular temperament and original vision.

Francis de Sales' concern for education and formation is not properly understood if one were to overlook the enormous challenge posed by the proximity of Geneva, a city that the bishops had had to abandon. They took refuge in Annecy.

Catholic education after the Council of Trent

Faced with the Protestant challenge, the Council of Trent (1545–1563) was unable to tackle the problem of education. Born four years before it ended, Francis de Sales would be a "Tridentine" bishop, a promoter of the Catholic Counter-reformation inspired by that Council, following the example of Cardinal Charles Borromeo, the Archbishop of Milan, "the great mirror of pastoral order" (T8 3), the exemplary architect of Church renewal of the time.

At the heart of the Council's pastoral and disciplinary concerns was the reform of religious instruction and behaviour. These were the lines pursued by Charles Borromeo's many initiatives: he established the "Society and schools of Christian doctrine" for the Christian education of children, encouraged the development of schools and colleges as well as the founding of the Barnabite Congregation. He called the Ursulines to Milan for the education of young people, promoted literary and theological debates, and founded a print shop to disseminate Christian literature. At Charles Borromeo's suggestion, the humanist prelate Silvio Antoniano published his treatise on *The Christian education of children* in 1584,[12]

12 See the presentation of this most important work in P. Braido, *Prevenire, non reprimere. Il sistema educativo di don Bosco,* Roma, LAS, 2000, 47-56.

considered to be the Counter-reformation's most important work,[13] a summary of Christian humanist pedagogy, a kind of manifesto reflecting the seriousness with which Catholic reform intended to educate the young.

One of the most important effects of Catholic reform was the establishment and development of Jesuit colleges. Founded in Montmartre by Ignatius Loyola and his first companions in 1534, and approved in 1540, the Society of Jesus was not initially an Order aimed at teaching: it was the need to combat religious innovations that prompted it to become deeply involved in the education of the younger generations. For Ignatius and his companions, "the entire good of Christianity and of society as a whole depends on the good education of young people".[14] Their first college was founded at Messina in 1548; 1551 saw the opening of the famous Roman college that Montaigne, visiting Rome, described as "a breeding ground for all kinds of great men".[15] In 1563 the Jesuits opened the college at Clermont, in Paris, that the young Francis attended for ten years.

The Jesuits profoundly renewed the teaching and pedagogy of their time compared to the old Medieval universities. They dared to borrow everything from the humanism in vogue that could benefit their apostolate, especially the study of classical culture, without breaking totally with the past. They proceeded with care in the formation and choice of rectors, prefects of studies and teachers, and in the implementation of teaching according to a well-drawn-up plan of studies called the *Ratio studiorum*, which would be drawn up in 1586 and published in 1599.[16]

But it wasn't just the Jesuits. The Barnabites played an important role in the life of the Bishop of Geneva. They had been founded in 1534 at the

13 Cf. G.M. Bertin, *La pedagogia umanistica europea nei secoli XV e XVI*, Milano, Marzorati, 1961, 297.

14 See F. De Dainville, *La naissance de l'humanisme moderne, t. I: Les jésuites et l'humanisme,* Genève, Slatkine Reprints, 1969, 37.

15 Quoted in G. Mialaret - J. Vial (Ed.), *Histoire mondiale de l'éducation*, t. II: De 1515 à 1815, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1981, 218.

16 Cf. F. De Dainville, *L'éducation des jésuites*: XVIe -XVIIIe siècles, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1978.

Church of St Barnaba in Milan, their real name being the Clerics Regular of St Paul. Initially intended to fight against the decadence of behaviour and "tepidity" in faith, from the beginning of the 17th century they also dedicated themselves to teaching and education.

During a trip to Rome in 1599, at the request of Bishop de Granier, whose successor he was about to become, Francis de Sales also came into contact with the Congregation of the Oratory, founded in 1575 by Philip Neri, a man consumed by "divine love" (T6 15), who knew the "secrets of hearts" (S3 81) and who won the Eternal City over to the cause of Catholic reform by his fervour, sense of humour and love for the humble and for youth.

As for the education of girls, things were still in the initial stages. Those rare families who had the possibility entrusted them to nuns in monasteries. But the era also saw some female Congregations come into being who dedicated themselves to this new mission. Among them one could mention the Society of St Ursula, founded in Brescia in 1535 by St Angela Merici, who succeeded in establishing a kind of female society with educational aims and then a community that was not enclosed. Working in the reform movement of the Council of Trent and following in the footsteps of the Jesuits, the Ursulines would increase the number of places where young girls were educated at the beginning of the 17th century.

Francis de Sales, a man active on many fronts

Born in the ancient Duchy of Savoy, Francis de Sales found himself at the crossroads of the Europe of his time. His little part of the world, that did not even have its own university, was extremely open to outside influences. The first college for classical studies was opened by the Jesuits in Chambéry, the capital of Savoy, only in 1565.

Humanism, however, which originated in Italy and spread to Savoy through a whole body of literature imported from France, had been

circulating in cultured circles for about a century.[17] On the other hand, Savoy was not without men who became illustrious beyond its borders. The Savoyard Guillaume Fichet (1433–1480) was Rector of the Sorbonne, where he taught rhetoric and introduced the first print shop.[18] Claude de Seyssel was a humanist politician who experienced the Renaissance in Milan, where he forged links with great Byzantine scholars. The poet Marc-Claude de Buttet (1530–1586) Ronsard, Du Bellay and Baïf among his students in Paris. Francis de Sales, without being French liked French, to the point of having his texts revised by a Parisian friend before having them printed, because, as he said, "I fear that I may miss some of the accents of our local chatter" (L 3 325).

At a political and religious level (two areas that were inseparable at the time), the gaze of this Savoyard of the late 16th and early 17th centuries naturally turned not only and primarily to Paris, where he was to complete ten years of studies, but to Turin, where the Duke resided after 1563, and to Rome, to which he sent his correspondence addressed to the Pope and the Curia. Having spent more than three years in Padua, in the Venetian Republic, he was to some extent bilingual, and there is a considerable number of his letters written in Italian.[19]

As can be seen, it is not possible to grasp the personality of Francis de Sales, his activity and thinking regarding education and human formation, other than in this historical context, marked by humanism, the Protestant challenge and the Catholic Counter-reformation and not overlooking the geographical placement of Savoy in his time.

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17 Cf. L. Terreaux, *Aspects de la littérature savoyarde*, "L'histoire en Savoie" 117 (mars 1995) 8-12.

18 On Guillaume Fichet, cf. L.A. Colliard *Un ami savoyard du cardinal Bessarion:- Guillaume Fichet, ancien recteur de l'Université de Paris*, Fasano di Brindisi, Schena Editore - Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2004.

19 Regarding his "multyilingualism" and "ultramontane culture", see V. Mellin-Ghoff-Bourgerie, *François de Sales (1567–1622), un homme de lettres spirituelles. Culture, tradition, épistolarité*, Genève, Librairie Droz, 1999, 29-58.

Part One

FORMATION OF THE PERSON

In order to form the man, the human being, we need to know what kind of one we need to form. Who or what is man? In the early years of the 17th century, moral and spiritual literature focused on the fundamental question of self-knowledge.[1]

Man, says Francis de Sales, is "the perfection of the universe" (T10 1). Quoting the line dear to Socrates and the philosophers, "Know thyself", he asserts not only the smallness and misery of our being, but also the "excellence and dignity" of the human person (E 76).

Man is a microcosm, a compendium of the world, being part of the vegetable and animal world. But with his spirit he is also part of the angelic world, the angels being purely spiritual creatures.

1 See R. Bady, *L'homme et son "institution" de Montaigne à Bérulle (1580–1625)*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1964, 447.

When he speaks of man, Francis de Sales means the complete human being "with all his actions and dependencies", in other words: the body with all its senses, the (sensitive) soul with all its passions and emotions, and the higher soul or spirit (mind) with all its faculties, the intellect, memory and will.

We need to begin with the body, showing Francis de Sales' attitude to this basic reality and outlining how he describes the education of the five bodily senses. When speaking of the powers of the soul, he refers to the sensitive soul and the passions that the human being has in common with the animals. In many cases, the imagination, which does not depend on the higher faculties, also comes into play. The higher faculties of the spirit or mind include the intellect, memory and will. The body occupies the highest place in the human pyramid because it is the seat of the will, which is inseparable from love and freedom.[2]

Before examining each of these dimensions which make up human beings in terms of their education, we will begin by exploring the author's ideas concerning education and formation in general, then conclude by indicating his views on women's education.

2 For a study of the anthropology of the time, see M. Bergamo, *L'anatomia dell'anima, da Francesco di Sales a Fénelon*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1991.

1. EDUCATING AND FORMING

While the "learned profane writer" Montaigne dedicated a lengthy chapter of his *Essais* to the education of children,[1] we find nothing of the kind in the writings of Francis de Sales. However, there are many reflections on education. And although they do not always concern the education of children and young people, we can find many indications on the formation of the human person.

A duty to be done with love

Education is a universal duty based on the laws of reason and nature. It is the best gift that parents can give their children and that will give rise to gratitude and filial piety in them. Being in charge of others, both in the family and in society, and watching over their consciences are binding duties for those in charge. Therefore, Francis de Sales makes this recommendation to them: "Let them therefore perform their duties with love" (D3 28).

Youth needs to be guided. If it is true, as St Bernard says, that the one who governs himself is governed by a great fool, this applies all the more to those who as yet have no experience.

The doctor who falls ill calls another doctor and lawyers do not defend their own case. And so it was that the eldest child of Mme de Chantal, a cause of concern for her mother, needed a guide so she could "often taste the good of true wisdom through corrections and recommendations" (L4 72).

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1 *Essais*, livre I, chapitre 26. "Learned profane (writer)" is an expression of Francis de Sales to describe moral philosopher Montaigne (C 180).

He suggested to a young man who was about to "set out into the wide world of the court" that in Paris he find "some noble spirit who will be happy if you sometimes go to see him for refreshment and to regain your spiritual energy" (L4 379). There is a need to act like the young Tobias in the Bible: when his father sent him to a distant town and he did not know the way to go there, he received this advice: "Go then, and find someone who will lead you there" (D1 4).

Knowing the mountains well, the Savoyard bishop was pleased to point out that when on steep and slippery paths, mountain people hold on to each other in order to proceed more safely. He too, when he could, brought help and advice to young people in danger. He wrote a letter filled with good, kindly and friendly warnings to a young student engulfed in gambling and general wantonness, to get him back on track and to get him to make better use of his time.

A good guide must know how to adapt to each one's needs and possibilities. Francis de Sales admired the enterprise of a mother surrounded by five or six children, knowing how to give each what is appropriate to them and deal with them according to their physical and spiritual capabilities. This is how God accompanies human beings. His pedagogy resembles that of a father attentive to the capacities of each individual: "Like a good father who holds his child by the hand," he wrote to Jane-Frances de Chantal, "he will adapt his steps to your steps and will be happy not to go faster than you" (L4 111).

Elements of child psychology

To have some possibility of success in this enterprise, the educator must have some understanding of youth in general and know each young person in particular. What does it mean to be young? Commenting on the famous vision of Jacob's Ladder, the author of the *Introduction to the Devout Life* notes that the angels going up and down the ladder represent all the charm

of youth. In reality "they are not youthful, but they seem to be so by reason of their vigour and spiritual activity. They have wings wherewith to fly, and attain to God in holy prayer, but they have likewise feet wherewith to tread in human paths by a holy gracious intercourse with men; their faces are bright and beautiful, inasmuch as they accept all things gently and sweetly; their heads and limbs are uncovered, because their thoughts, affections and actions have no motive or object save that of pleasing God; the rest of their bodies is covered with a light shining garment" (D1 2).

But let us not idealise this age. For Francis de Sales, youth is by nature bold and daring; young people overcome all difficulties from afar, but flee them at close quarters. 'Young' and 'bold' are two adjectives that are often paired, especially when they are used to describe a spirit full of ideas and prone to extremism. The risks of this age include the ardour of a blood that is beginning to boil and a courage that does not yet have the prudence to regulate itself.

Young people are versatile, they move and change easily. Like puppies who love movement, inconstant and fickle youth, agitated by various desires for novelty and change, are exposed to the risk of committing serious and unpleasant scandals. Youth is a difficult age in which passions are virulent and difficult to master.

But how wonderful it is when youth and virtue meet! "It is an extraordinary gift," he wrote to a young woman "that amid the pleasures of the world, in the springtime of youth and amid the praise of many, you love and esteem the holy virtues" (L6 17).

Young people in particular are sensitive to the affection with which they are surrounded. "It is not possible to express how close we are," wrote the Bishop of Geneva to the father of a family, speaking of his relationship with the latter's son who was very restless, not to say unbearable at school (L7 28). He wrote likewise to the mother of a child whose godfather he was: "Your dear little daughter, it seems to me, has a secret feeling that I love her, so strong is the affection she shows me" (L6 33).

Also, this age is ready to "receive impressions", and this is excellent because it also means that young people allow themselves to be educated and are capable of great things. The future belongs to the young, as we saw

at Montmartre Abbey in Paris: it is the young people, together with their abbess, also young, who carried out the reform.

Sense of purpose in education

If, on the one hand, realism requires educators to have good knowledge from the outset of those they are dealing with, on the other hand they must never lose sight of the sense of purpose of their actions. When we want to do something, Francis de Sales wrote, "We always look at the goal before the work" (S3 49). And as Aristotle said, "what is first is the measure of everything homogeneous with it".[2]

So what is education and what is the aim of formation? Education is "the many cares, aids, succours, and other offices necessary to a child, exercised and continued towards him till he grow to years in which he no longer needs them" (T3 4). There are two striking features of this definition: on the one hand, the insistence on the accumulation of care required by education, and on the other, its end, which coincides with the moment when the individual concerned reaches the age when they no longer need it, or in other words, when they achieve their autonomy. The child is brought up so that he or she can act with freedom and full mastery of their own existence.

Looking closely at Francis de Sales' ideal in education, what can put us on the right track is the concept of harmony or harmonious integration of all dimensions of the human being: actions, movements, feelings, inclinations, habits, passions, faculties and powers.

Harmony presupposes unity but also distinction. Unity requires a single command which, however, must not only respect differences, but also promote distinctions in the pursuit of harmony. In the human person, the task of governing lies with the will, to which all other components refer, each in its place and interacting with one another.

2 *Physics*, IV, 14

To describe his ideal, in the introductory chapter to the *Treatise on the Love of God*, Francis de Sales uses two comparisons, one drawn from the military world, the other from the artistic world; they are not without analogies with the two fundamental drives of the human being highlighted by psychoanalysis: aggression and pleasure.

An army is beautiful when it is well ordered in all its divisions, and when their distinction is reduced to the relationship that the individual divisions must establish among themselves in order to form a single army. A piece of music is beautiful when the voices are tuned in such a way that they form a single consonance and harmony through the union of distinct voices blended together.

The first image taken from military life suggests that the beauty of human nature and harmony cannot be achieved without conflict and struggle. The second, taken from artistic experience, reminds us that education must be based on the desire for beauty and, at the same time, on the search for the ideal.

Beginning from the heart

"Whosoever gains the heart has won the whole man", wrote the author of the *Introduction to the Devout Life* (D3 23). The expression "gains the heart" could be interpreted in two ways, or so it would seem: it could mean that the educator should look to the heart, to the innermost part of the person, before worrying about the individual's outward behaviour; but it could also mean winning the person's adherence through reason and affection.

The human being is built from within: this seems to be one of the great lessons of Francis de Sales, the educator and reformer of the individual and of communities.[3]

He knew very well that not everybody shared his approach. In fact, he admitted that he had never been able to approve of the method of those

3 In this regard see reflections by E. Valentini, *La salesianità di Don Bosco*, "Rivista di pedagogia e scienze religiose" 5 (1967/1) 36.

who start from the outside, from attitudes, clothes and hair when they wanted to reform the human being, On the contrary, it is necessary to start from within, that is, from the heart, the seat of the will and the source of all our actions.

The second point is to try to win the affection of the other person, so as to establish a good educational relationship with them. In a letter to an abbess advising her of the reform of her monastery, where the members were "almost all young women" (L2 339), we find valuable indications of the way in which the Savoyard bishop's work was to be done (L2 339). We find valuable indications of how the Savoy bishop conceived of the method of formation and, in this particular case, of how to bring about reform.

First of all, we must beware of creating even the slightest alarm that we are out to reform people: they must reform themselves. After these preliminaries, it is necessary to resort to three or four expedients. There is nothing extraordinary about this, because education is an art, indeed the art of arts.

The first step is to give them commands often, but only about small things, and without giving the impression of telling them what to do. Then comes the need to talk about what should change, as if it were about other people. The third step is to strive to command so gently and lovingly that obedience becomes lovable, without forgetting once again to demonstrate the positive results and advantages. According to Francis de Sales, gentleness in commanding is to be preferred because it is generally more effective. Finally, those in charge should show through personal witness that they are not acting on a whim but by virtue of their duty and responsibility for each and everyone's welfare.

Commanding, advising, inspiring

Commands are given especially when a child is small and cannot be reasoned with; this is the only way to see to the child's true welfare. In

his responsibility as a bishop, Francis de Sales did not hesitate to issue commands when there was need, but always for his neighbour's good. However, he abhorred authoritarian types who want to be obeyed at all costs and demand that everything be subject to their rule. "Those who love to be feared" he used say, "fear being loved."[4]

There could be cases where we have to force people to obey. With regard to the undisciplined son of a friend, he wrote: "If he perseveres, we will be able to satisfy ourselves; if he does not, it will be necessary to resort to one of these two remedies: either to send him to a boarding school a little stricter than this one, or to give him a particular teacher, a man with a firm hand whom he must obey" (L7 28). In certain cases firmness, which is different from harshness but not contrary to gentleness, is not to be excluded.

Usually, however, Francis de Sales employed advice, warnings, recommendations. In the *Introduction to the Devout Life* he presents himself as a counsellor, an assistant, someone who gives warnings. Although he often has recourse to the imperative, what he is actually doing is offering advice, so much so that he often accompanies this with the conditional: if you are able to do this, then do it. Sometimes the recommendation is formulated as a statement of value: it is good to… or, it is better to…

But any time that he can and when his authority is not called into question, he prefers to intervene with inspirations, suggestions. This is the Salesian method par excellence, respecting the freedom of individuals. He feels that it is very well adapted to spiritual matters, and especially in the choice of a state of life. This is the method he advises Mme de Chantal to adopt for her children: "gently inspiring them with compliant thoughts" (L2 360).

Inspiration, however, is communicated not only through words. Good example is silent preaching, like that of St Francis of Assisi: without uttering

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4 A statement attributed to Francis de Sales by J.-P. Camus, *L'Esprit du bienheureux François de Sales*, Ed. Migne, Paris, 1861, partie VII, section 11. Bishop Camus, Bishop of Belley, disciple and friend of Francis de Sales, published this monumental work in 1641 in honour of his model and teacher. His great admiration for the Bishop of Geneva and his verboseness mean that we cannot always be sure of the authenticity of the words attributed to 'Blessed' Francis.

a single word, he attracted large numbers of young people by his example. The example then gives rise to imitation: little nightingales learn to sing by hearing the bigger ones, and the example of those we love exercises an invisible authority over us.

Correcting

Resisting evil and correcting the failings of those entrusted to our care continually, firmly, but at the same time gently and pleasantly, seems to be the Salesian method. However, it is necessary to intervene without delay, while these failings are small, because if we allow them to grow we will not be able to cure them easily.

Severity is sometimes necessary. Two scandalous young religious had to be put back on the right track if many regrettable consequences were to be avoided. If their young age had excused them up till now, their unwillingness to make amends was now inexcusable. There are also cases in which it is necessary to instil a little fear in the wicked, pointing out to them the opposition they would face. The Bishop of Geneva cites a letter from St Bernard to his brethren in Rome who needed to be corrected, in which he gave them "a rather vigorous dressing down" (S4 290). Let us be like the surgeon who does not hesitate to cut out his friend's abscess to save him.

At any rate, correction should be done without animosity. A father's gentle and loving reprimands to his son in order to correct him are far more effective than his irritated and indignant actions. That is why it is important to guard against anger: at the first resentment we feel, we should know how to promptly control our reactions, not abruptly and impetuously, but serenely and seriously. In a letter to a teacher who had complained about a grumpy and careless child, the bishop gave her this advice: "Do not correct her, if you can, when you are angry; do it in such a way that she is happy to obey you" (L8 184).

There are many ways of correcting. One of the best is to recognise all that is positive in a person, rather than condemning what is negative. This is called "correcting by way of inspiration" (D3 26); In fact, it is wonderful to see how the kindly way of proposing something good becomes a powerful lure that attracts hearts.

Inspiration, however, is communicated not only through words. The heavens do not speak, says the Bible, but glorify God by their silence. Similarly, "good example is silent preaching", like that of St Francis.[5] "without saying a word, he succeeded in having a large number of young people who, attracted solely by his example, followed him to be taught by him" (E 133).

Bishop Jean-Pierre Camus, friend and disciple of Francis de Sales, tells the story of a mother who had cursed the son who had offended her. She thought the bishop would have done the same, but he replied: "What do you want me to do; I'm afraid to waste in a quarter of an hour this little liquor of meekness which I've been trying to collect for twenty-two years, drop by drop, like dew in the bowl of my weak heart."[6] And it was Camus again who referred to his model's words: "more flies are caught with a spoonful of honey than with a hundred barrels of vinegar."[7]

Gradual education

Great plans are only achieved through patience and lots of time, wrote Francis de Sales, who had a sense of reality and what was possible and at the same time an essential sense of balance and tact. Things are never perfect to start with and perfection will probably never be achieved, but it is possible to make progress. Growth has its own laws that need to be

5 St Francis of Assisi (1182–1226) was Francis de Sales' patron saint.

6 J.-P. Camus, *L'Esprit du bienheureux François de Sales*, partie I, section 26.

7 J.-P. Camus, *L'Esprit du bienheureux François de Sales*, partie I, section 3.

respected: when bees are born they are just larvae and little worms, but over time they change and start to look like bees, and ultimately completely formed and perfect bees.

Doing ordinary things, one after the other, without anxiety, indeed with a degree of slowness, but without ever stopping, this seems to be the ideal of Francis de Sales who said: "We are always walking, and however slow we go we will still cover some distance" (L3 202). He recommended to an abbess who wanted to reform her monastery, "You need to have a big heart and one that lasts a long time" (L2 336). The law of progress is universal and applies to every field.

There are countless images and comparisons that can be used to inculcate a sense of time and the need for perseverance. Some are inclined to fly before they have wings, or to want to be angels straight away, when they are not even good men and good women as yet. Babies are fed with nothing but milk and are given bread and butter when they grow up and begin to have teeth.

An important point is not to be afraid of repeating things. We need to imitate artists and sculptors who achieve their works through repeated strokes of the brush or scalpel. Education is a long journey; during the journey, we need to get rid of lots of negative feelings and this is a slow process. However, we should not lose courage. Going slow does not mean giving up or waiting about lazily. On the contrary, we need to get some benefit from everything, without wasting time, knowing how to "use our years, our months, our weeks, our days and indeed every moment" (L9 98).

Patience, something the Bishop of Geneva often taught, is an active patience that moves forward, even if in small steps. "We need to acquire this control little by little, step by step," he wrote to an impatient Philothea (L3 19). Growth into adulthood begins slowly but it gradually accelerates, and the same is true for formation and education.

Patience, finally, is fed by hope: "There is no land so thankless that the farmer's dedication cannot make it productive" (L5 28).

2. THE BODY WITH ALL ITS SENSES

The soul, being more noble than the body, deserves to be given greater care, says Francis de Sales. Should we then ignore the body?

A good number of ancient Christian ascetics often considered the body to be an enemy whose corruption had to be fought against, and in fact they saw it as an object of contempt not to be taken into consideration. Many spiritual men of the Middle Ages had no concern for the body except to inflict penance on it. Some boarding schools of the time perpetuated the old methods where discipline took on the appearance of unbearable harassment.[1] In most schools of the time, nothing was provided for "brother ass" to rest.

At the other end of the spectrum, many Renaissance writers and artists exalted the body to the point of worshipping it, sensuality playing a major role. Rabelais, for his part, glorified the bodies of his giants and even delighted in displaying their less noble functions.[2]

Salesian realism

Between the deification of the body and its contempt, Francis de Sales offers a realistic view of human nature. In his meditation on the topic of creation

1 At the Montaigu school in Paris, under the leadership of Jean Standonck, the harshness of the corrections instilled fear. Montaigne also denounced the treatment he had suffered at the school at Guyenne in Bordeaux.

2 In his satirical novels *Pantagruel* (1532) and *Gargantua* (1534) Rabelais describes all manifestations of the body eating, drinking, reproducing, with all its physiological needs.

of man, the first being in the visible world, the author of the *Introduction to the Devout Life* invites Philothea to thank the Creator, saying: "realise that I am honoured by His calling me to the being He has given" (D1 9). It is clear that the source of this realistic and, at the same time, fundamentally optimistic view is the biblical doctrine of the book of Genesis.

As an animate body, the human being possesses the threefold faculty of nourishment, growth and reproduction. In this we resemble plants and animals that feed, grow and reproduce. Eating and drinking maintain the life of the body and promote its growth. What is the first thing babies do when they are born? They suck greedily and do not look to see if the milk is better at any particular moment; as long as there is milk, they suck it anyway, regardless of anything else. Then, in order to grow, the child eats what is offered to it day after day. Young people are often compared to tender plants which are destined to produce fruits, those of nature and those of the spirit, and in turn these reproduce. In fact, plants and fruits do not have proper growth and ripening except when they bear their grains and seeds that serve for reproduction.

Certainly, the body is doomed to death. Francis describes the soul's farewell to the body, which it will leave "pale and cold, to become repulsive in decay" (D1 13) with stark realism, but this is no reason to neglect it and denigrate it unjustly while it is alive. St Bernard was wrong when he announced to those who wanted to follow him that they should abandon their bodies and come to him in spirit only. Physical ills must not lead to hatred of the body: moral evil is far worse.

We do not find any obliviousness or obscuring of bodily phenomena in Francis de Sales, such as when he speaks of different forms of illness or when he evokes the manifestations of human love. His attitude towards the body provoked scandalous reactions even in his time.[3]

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3 A. Ravier writes that they wanted to eliminate from all his works, "any expression that is too emotional, too tender or too familiar", and that seemed to "somehow tarnish the almost angelical ideal" that had been formed regarding the holiness of Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal. Cf. A. Ravier - A. Mirot, *Saint François de Sales et ses faussaires*, "Mémoires et Documents", t. LXXXIII, Annecy-Paris, Ed. A. et J. Picard, 1971, 208.

When the *Introduction* appeared, an Avignon cleric publicly criticised this book, ripped it to shreds and accused its author of being a corrupt and corrupting "doctor".[4] An "enemy of exaggerated decency",[5] Francis de Sales did not yet know the restraints and fears that would emerge in later times. Did medieval customs survive in him or was it simply a manifestation of his biblical taste? In any case, there was nothing in him comparable to the trivialities of the "infamous Rabelais" (L4 377).

The most esteemed natural gifts are beauty, strength and health. In reference to beauty, Francis de Sales recalls, when speaking of St Bridget who was born in Scotland, that she was a very beautiful girl, that the Scots are beautiful by nature, and that one encounters the most beautiful creatures in existence in that country.

Let us also consider the repertoire of images of the physical perfection of the bride and bridegroom Francis took from the *Song of Songs*. Although the representations are sublimated and transferred to a spiritual register, they nevertheless remain significant in an atmosphere where the natural beauty of man and woman is exalted. Attempts were made to have him suppress the chapter on kissing in *The Treatise on the Love of God* in which he shows that love tends towards union, but he always refused to do so. In any case, external beauty is not the most important thing: "The beauty of the Daughter of Sion is an inner beauty" (S4 49).

Close link between body and soul

First of all, Francis de Sales says that the body is part of who we are as a person. The personified soul may also say with a hint of tenderness: "This

4 According to Henri de Maupas du Tour, who published a biography of the saint in 1657 (cf. O5 242, note 1).

5 F. Hermans, *Histoire doctrinale de l'humanisme chrétien,* t. III, Tournai–Paris, Casterman, 1948, 182.

flesh is my dear half, it is my sister, it is my companion, born with me, nurtured with me" (S1 160).

On the other hand, the holy bishop was very attentive to the bond that existed between body and soul, between the health of the body and the health of the soul. He was very much aware that the health of the body depends very much on the health of the soul, and that the health of the soul depends on spiritual consolations. Sometimes one has the impression that the heart is sick, whereas it is only the body that is sick because of the very close ties that unite them. Often it can be observed that bodily infirmities end up causing discomfort to the spirit as well, because of these bonds between them. On the contrary, the spirit acts upon the body to the extent that the body perceives the affections that are stirring in the heart.

In any case, let us do the right thing by the body. In case of sickness or mistakes it happens that the soul accuses the body and mistreats it, as Balaam did with his donkey: "But, dear friend, you are smiting the ass! you afflict your body, which can do nothing when God stands before you with His sword" (D3 23).

The distinction between body and soul in Francis de Sales is often replaced by the distinction between "inner" and "outer". Inward change manifests itself outwardly. When someone reforms their inner self, this conversion will also manifest itself externally: in all their attitudes, the mouth, hands and even hair. The practice of virtue makes a person beautiful inwardly and also outwardly. Conversely, an outward change, a behaviour of the body, can promote an inward change. An act of outward devotion during meditation can awaken inward devotion. What is said here about the spiritual life can easily be applied to education in general.

Love and control over the body

Speaking of the attitude to take towards the body and bodily realities, it is not surprising to see Francis de Sales recommending to Philothea, in the

first instance, gratitude for the "material gifts" that God has given her (D1 11). There are various reasons for loving our body: because it is part of who we are as a person, because we need it to accomplish good works, and because it is destined to share in eternal happiness. Christians should love their body as a living image of the body of the incarnate Saviour, as coming from him through kinship and consanguinity. In the sacrament of the Eucharist especially, we renew the close alliance between the Redeemer's body and our own.

Love of our body is a part of the love we owe to ourselves.[6] But to be honest, the most convincing reason for honouring and making wise use of the body lies in the vision of faith that the Bishop of Geneva explained to Mother de Chantal recovering from illness: "Take care of this body again, for it belongs to God" (L10 151). At this point the Virgin Mary is presented as a model: "with what devotion must she have loved her virginal body! Not only because it was a sweet, humble, pure body, obedient to divine love, and wholly embalmed with a thousand sweetnesses, but also because it was the living source of Our Saviour's, and belonged so strictly to him, by an incomparable appurtenance" (T3 8).

However, since the body and spirit often go in opposite directions, and as the one weakens, the other strengthens, and since the spirit must reign, we must support and strengthen it so that it always remains the strongest. If I take care of the body, then, it is so that it is at the service of the spirit. In order to control the appetite I must command my hands not to provide the mouth with food and drink, except in the right measure.

In order to govern sexuality we need to take from or give to the reproductive faculty the things, objects and nourishment it needs according to circumstances and the dictates of reason.

So that the body is submissive to the law of the spirit, it helps to avoid excess, neither mistreating it nor pampering it. Balance in everything. Charity is the motive that must take precedence in all things. If the work

6 See reflections by A. Ravier regarding self-love, in A. Ravier, *Ce que croyait François de Sales*, Paris, Ateliers Henry Labat, 1976, 122-128.

we do is necessary for us, or if it is very useful for the glory of God, it is preferable to endure the pains of work rather than those of fasting. Hence the conclusion: in general it is better to have more strength in your body than you need rather than to ruin it beyond what is necessary; because you can always ruin it as soon as you want to, but it is not always enough to simply want to for the body to recover.

What we need to avoid is excessive self-tenderness. With fine irony, yet ruthlessly, Francis de Sales takes issue with an imperfection that is not only inherent in children but also in women and men with little courage who do nothing but complain, console and pamper themselves and look to themselves.

At any rate, the Bishop of Geneva looked after his body as it was his duty to do so. He obeyed his doctor and "nurses". He also looked after the health of others, advising them to take appropriate measures. He wrote to the mother of a young pupil to have him examined by doctors, "so that the swelling in his stomach does not get worse" (L7 224).

Hygiene is at the service of health. Francis de Sales wanted both the heart and the body to be clean. He recommended decorum, which was very different from statements like one by St Hilary, according to whom we should not seek cleanliness in our bodies, which are nothing but pestilential carrion laden only with infection. He was rather of St Augustine's and the ancients' opinion. They bathed to keep their bodies clean from the filth produced by heat and sweat, and to look after their health, which is certainly helped most by cleanliness.

In order to be able to work and fulfil our duties of office, we should take care of our body with regard to nutrition and rest. Eating little, overwork and anxiety, and denying the body the necessary rest is like demanding much of a tired horse without giving it time to chew some fodder. The body needs rest, that much is obvious. Long stints in the evening are harmful to the head and stomach, whereas getting up early in the morning is good for both health and holiness.

Educating our senses

The five bodily senses are wonderful gifts from the Creator. They put us into contact with the world and open us up to all sensible realities, to nature, the cosmos. The senses are the gateway of the spirit, providing it, shall we say, with raw material; for as the old adage goes, nothing is in the intellect that was not first in the senses.

When Francis de Sales speaks of the senses, his interest led him especially to the educational and moral level, and his teaching in this regard is linked to what he said about the body in general: admiration and vigilance. On the one hand he said that God gives us "eyes to see the wonders of his works, a tongue to praise him, and so on for all the other faculties" (D1 10), but never forgetting the recommendation to set up sentinels for the eyes, mouth, ears, hands and the sense of smell.

The eyes and ears

We need to begin with sight because the eye, for its quality as well as for its activity, is the noblest of all the external parts of the human body.

The eye is made for light: the more beautiful, pleasing to the eye and duly illuminated things are, the more eagerly and vividly the eye looks at them. We know what the soul and spirit of the human being is by the eyes and words, for the eyes serve the soul as the dial serves the clock. It is well known that the eyes speak more than the tongue between lovers.

We need to keep a watch over our eyes because temptation and sin can enter through them, as happened to Eve, who was charmed when she saw the beauty of the forbidden fruit, or to David who fastened his gaze on Uriah's wife. In certain cases we have to proceed as one does with the bird of prey: to make it come back it is necessary to show it the lanyard (jesses); to keep it calm it is necessary to cover it with a hood. Similarly, to avoid

looking at bad things we need to avert the eyes, cover them with their natural hood and close them.

I admit that it is visual images which broadly dominate Francis de Sales' works, but it should be acknowledged that auditory images are also very much worthy of note.[7] This shows the importance he attached to hearing for both aesthetic and moral reasons. A sublime melody listened to with great concentration produces such a magical effect that it enchants the ears. But be careful not to exceed your hearing capacity! Music, however beautiful it may be, annoys us and offends the ear if it is loud and too close.

On the other hand, we need to know that the heart and the ears talk to each other, because it is through the ear that the heart listens to the thoughts of others. It is also through the ear that suspicious, insulting, lying or malicious words enter into the depths of the soul, something we need to be wary of. Souls are poisoned through the ear, just as the body is poisoned through the mouth. Remaining in this sphere of symbols, Francis de Sales states that the right ear is the organ through which we listen to spiritual messages, good inspirations and motions, while the left ear is used to hear worldly and vain discourses.

The other senses

There is also an abundance of olfactory imagery in the writings and words of the Bishop of Geneva. Fragrances are as diverse as fragrant substances are diverse, such as balsam, myrrh, frankincense, spikenard (nard), rose, violet and cinnamon. It is amazing to see the fragrances produced in the manufacture of scented water distilled from a mixture of scents: basil, rosemary, marjoram, hyssop, cloves, cinnamon, nutmeg, lemons and musk.

There are many olfactory images in the *Treatise* drawn from the *Song of Songs*, an Oriental poem where fragrances have an important place and in

7 On this, see reflections by H. Lemaire, *Étude des images littéraires de François de Sales. Avec un florilège*, Paris, Ed. A.-G. Nizet, 1969, 98.

which one of the biblical verses most commented on by Francis de Sales is the bride's heartfelt cry: "Draw me: we will run after thee to the odour of thy ointments." [tr: Douay-Rheims Version; unfortunately this imagery is somewhat lost in more modern English versions]. And how refined is this note: "the sweet smell of roses is intensified by the neighbourhood of garlic planted near the trees!" (T5 5).

However, let us not confuse sacred balsam with the fragrances of this world. There is indeed a spiritual sense of smell which it should be in our interest to cultivate. It allows us to perceive the spiritual presence of the beloved, and also ensures that we are not overcome by our neighbour's bad odours. The model is the father in the parable who takes his prodigal son in his open arms, his son who returns to him "half-naked, unclean and bemired, and smelling most offensively of the filth which he had contracted in the company of those vile beasts" (T10 4). Another realistic image appears in reference to certain criticisms from worldly people: let us not be surprised, he says, since it is necessary that the little perfume we have should seem smelly to the nostrils of the world.

Where taste is concerned, certain observations by the Bishop of Geneva could make us think he was a born glutton, whereas in fact he was an educator of taste: "for who knows not that the sweetness of honey is united more and more to our sense by a continual increase of savour, when, keeping it a good while in our mouth, or swallowing it slowly, the relish thereof more deeply penetrates our sense of taste?" (T7 1). Admittedly, honey is sweet, but salt should be appreciated more because it is more commonly used. In the name of sobriety and temperance, Francis de Sales recommended knowing how to renounce personal taste, eating with simplicity what is put in front of us.

When dealing with touch, Francis de Sales considered this to be a less noble sense. This is why he recommends to the young man who is leaving to make a career in the world that he govern himself vigorously, despising softness, bodily delights and idleness, letting the body experience some harshness and hardness, sometimes refusing delicacies and things pleasing to the senses; because reason needs to exercise its superiority over the

sensual appetites. He speaks of touch above all in a spiritual and mystical sense. He recommends often "touching" the crucified Christ: the head, the holy hands, the precious body, the heart.

The body and spiritual life

The body, too, is called to participate in spiritual life expressed firstly through prayer, which is helped by the voice, gestures and other outward signs, revealing the innermost part of hearts. The soul is not happy with praying if the whole person is not praying; it prays together with the eyes, hands, knees. The soul prostrate before God easily makes the whole body bend: where the heart is lifted up it raises the eyes. It awaits help from the hands, raised up.

Francis de Sales also explains that to pray in spirit and in truth is to pray willingly and affectionately, without pretence or hypocrisy, committing the whole person, body and soul, so that what God has united may not be separated.

The whole being must pray. He asks Philothea to consecrate not only her spirit, soul and heart to God, but also her body with all its senses; in this way she will truly love and serve God with her whole being.

3. THE SOUL WITH ALL ITS PASSIONS

Moving on from the body and the external senses to the soul and its passions, we go up a level, to use the language of Francis de Sales, but pointing out that we are not yet dealing with the rational soul but with the sensory soul and the "sensual appetite", which human beings have in common with animals.

On the other hand, the body is very upset by the passions because they disturb the soul and agitate the body. We enter a world that is moved by impulses and emotional reactions.

Modern psychology has demonstrated the importance and influence of the emotions in the human psyche and everyone knows that the emotions are particularly strong during the time of youth. But there is hardly any mention of the passions of the soul, which classical anthropology has analysed in detail, as the work of Francis de Sales testifies, particularly when he writes that the soul, as such, is the source of the passions. Taking the image of the lute or harp, he compares them to the strings of that instrument: when the musician touches a string, his gesture causes vibrations.

The passions are the vibrations of the soul

In the field of education, the question that arises is what attitude to adopt in the face of these involuntary manifestations of our sensitivity which always have a physiological component. Does Francis de Sales' humanism prove itself to be open to these upheavals or movements of the soul?[1]

1 We will not enter into the theological controversy that was very much alive at the

I am as human as anyone could possibly be

Everyone who knew Francis de Sales noted his great sensitivity and his emotional nature. The blood rushed to his head and his face turned red. We know of some of his outbursts of anger against the "heretics" of his time and against the courtesan of Padua. Like any good Savoyard he was usually calm and quiet, but sometimes capable of exploding, "a volcano beneath the snow".[2]

His sensibility was very much alive. On the occasion of the death of his younger sister Jeanne, he wrote to Jane-Frances de Chantal who was also upset: "Alas, my daughter, I am as human as anyone could possibly be. My heart was softened more than I ever imagined" (L3 330).

At his mother's death he certainly had the courage to close her eyes and mouth and give her a final kiss, but after that, he confided to Jane-Frances de Chantal, "my heart swelled and I wept over this good mother more than I have done since I was ordained" (L4 262).

Likewise, at the death of little Charlotte, only nine, the last of Mme de Chantal's children, he exclaimed: "Alas, was it perhaps not necessary to mourn her for some time, since we cannot but have a human heart and a sensitive nature?" (L4 264). When he received news of the death of his brother Bernard, "he collapsed and shed bitter tears uncontrollably", according to his nephew.[3]

In fact, he did not systematically restrain the outward manifestations of his feelings, but accepted them calmly. A precious testimony by Jane-Frances de Chantal informs us that "our saint was not exempt from feelings

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time of the Protestant reformation, regarding the consequences of original sin. Luther made passions, concupiscence and sin practically coincide. For Francis de Sales, the natural passions "are not of themselves sinful" (S4 154), not even in the current condition of sinful man.

2 É.-J. Lajeunie, *Saint François de Sales. L'homme, la pensée, l'action*, t. II, Paris, Guy Victor, 1966, 118.

3 C.-A. De Sales, *Histoire du Bien-heureux François de Sales* [...], t. II, Paris, Louis Vivès, 1879, 159.

and the stirrings of the passions, and did not want to be freed from them".[4]

We know well that the soul's passions influence the body, provoking outward reactions to their inner movements. When we feel fear, we turn pale, and when we are called out for something we don't like, the blood rushes to our face and we go red, or the opposition may even bring tears to our eyes. When they see a dog barking, children immediately start screaming and do not stop until they are close to their mother. Similarly, when faced with the unrestrained forces of nature, lightning, thunder, storms, floods, earthquakes and the like, even the least pious begin to fear God.

When Mme de Chantal would meet her husband's murderer, how would she react? "I know that your heart will undoubtedly pound and feel upset, and your blood will boil" (L3 67), her spiritual director foresees, adding this lesson on wisdom: In these emotions, God shows us how true it is that we are made of flesh, bones and spirit. The passions, in fact, possess a great power, capable of shifting the moods and changing the qualities of the body. It is not in our power to prevent our colour, our eyes and our demeanour from demonstrating the battle we are fighting within ourselves. In fact, they are messengers who show up unsolicited and who, despite being told to go back where they came from, usually do not move.

Pleasure and aggression

How numerous and diverse are the successive states that the human soul passes through! At one or other moment it is sad, cheerful, overwhelmed by sweetness or bitterness, at peace or upset, filled with light or darkness, tempted or quiet, full of pleasure or disgust, immersed in dryness or tenderness.

4 Cf. Mother de Chantal's letter to Dom Jean de Saint-François, 26 December 1623, in Jeanne -Françoise Frémyot De Chantal, *Correspondance*, t. II (1622–1625). Critical edition, Éditions du Cerf - Centre d'études franco-italien des Universités de Turin et de Savoie, 1987, 307.

The two main tones that condition it derive from two "appetites": one is the sensual appetite, which makes us desire all kinds of good and satisfaction, while the other is an irascible appetite by which we try with all our might to repel the evils that threaten us. The one is oriented towards pleasure and the satisfaction of desire, the other towards aggression.

These two basic appetites of our being are useful, essential resources for human life. As a good teacher, Francis de Sales would base his teachings on these two motivations: the desire to unite with good (virtue, devotion, truth, beauty, God) and to triumph over evil (sin, seduction of the passions, restlessness, sadness, Satan).

These two constants of our psyche are like two legs we walk with, but if we are not careful, it can happen that they cause us to limp.

The sensual part desires goods, honour, dignity, supremacy, voluptuous pleasures and idleness; This causes someone to become lascivious, thus limping on this side. Some people are so quick-tempered that, if they do not submit it to reason, they get angry and constantly seek out ways of getting revenge for any tiny word or small wrong.

It is between these two appetites that the different passions and motions of the soul are divided, the number of which varies from author to author.[5] In the *Introduction*, Francis de Sales indicates seven of them, by comparing them to the strings that the lute player has to tune in each case: love, hatred, desire, fear, hope, sadness and joy. Instead in the *Treatise*, he lists up to twelve of them, and it is worth our while dealing with these.

This multitude of passions is astonishing. The first six have as their object the good, i.e. everything that our sensitivity makes us spontaneously seek and appreciate as good for us (think of the fundamental goods of life, health, happiness): they are love, desire, hope, courage, joy and triumph.

5 St Thomas offers the following list of eleven passions of the soul: *amor, odium, desiderium, fuga, gaudium, tristitia, spes, desperatio, timor, audacia, ira.* The first three pairs depend on the sensual appetite and the rest on the irascible appetite. The eleventh passion (*ira*) does not have a corresponding one; Francis de Sales associates *triumph* with it, relating it also with courage. Cf. *Summa theologiae*, prima secundae, quaestio XXIII, art. 4.

The other six passions are those that make us spontaneously react negatively to everything that appears to us as evil to be avoided and fought (think of illness, suffering and death): they are hate, flight, fear, sadness, despair and anger.

The twelve passions of the soul

Francis de Sales did not carry out a detailed analysis of each passion in particular,[6] but it is possible to pick up more than a few traits of each in his work. We note at once that the passions normally go two by two, one being the opposite of the other.

As could be easily foreseen, love is presented as the first and principal passion. *Love* is the "king of all movements of the heart" (D3 17). It manifests itself in a thousand ways and its language is very diverse. In fact, love is expressed not only in words, but also with the eyes, with tears, with gestures, with sighs, with actions, in particular with a kiss. And *hatred*? We spontaneously hate what seems like an evil to us. We are talking here about instinctive, irrational, unconscious forms of hatred and aversion, such as those existing between the mule and the horse, between the vine and the cabbage. We are not responsible for them at all because they do not depend on our will.

If the good that we want is absent, then *desire* is born in us. Daily life provokes many desires, because desire makes us aspire to some future good. The most common natural desires are the ones that regard goods, pleasures and honours. On the contrary, we spontaneously flee from the evils of life. Christ's human will urged him to flee the pains and sufferings of his passion; hence the trembling, the anguish and even the sweating of blood.

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6 In contrast to Juan Luis Vives who, in book III of his *De anima et vita*, describes a large number of passions and affections of the soul: love, desire, reverence, sympathy, joy, pleasure, laughter, offence, contempt, anger, hatred, envy, jealousy, indignation, revenge, sadness, tears, fear, hope, modesty and pride.

Hope concerns a good that we think we can gain. Philothea is invited to examine whether she has behaved in reference to hope which has perhaps too often been placed in transient goods and creatures, and too little in God and eternal things. As for *despair*, look, for example, at the despair of young aspirants to perfection: as soon as they encounter a difficulty on their path, there is immediately a feeling of disappointment which drives them to complain a lot, so much so that they give the impression of being tormented to the point of despair.

Joy is satisfaction at the good that has been gained. So, when we encounter what we love, it is impossible not to feel moved by joy and contentment. Joy sometimes leads to laughter. Laughter is a passion that erupts without our wanting it and it is not in our power to hold it back, all the more so when we laugh and are moved to laugh by unforeseen circumstances. The young sisters of the Visitation were sometimes overcome with laughter when a companion beat her chest or a reader made a mistake while reading at the table. *Sadness* is sorrow at a present evil. At times it can burst into tears. When parents send their son off to court or for studies, they cannot stop weeping when saying goodbye to him. A daughter, although married according to the wishes of her father and mother, moves them to tears at the moment of separation. A child starts crying bitterly over an apple that is denied him.

Fear refers to a future evil that we believe we cannot avoid. Some people, as soon as they hear a stone fall in the night or the rustle of a rat running away, start shouting: "My God!" It is necessary to be cautious because fear is a greater evil than the evil itself. As for *courage*, before being a virtue, it is a feeling that sustains us in the face of difficulties that should normally knock us down. Francis de Sales felt it as he embarked on a long and risky visit to his mountain diocese: "I am leaving full of courage," he wrote, "and since this morning I have felt a great joy at being able to begin, even though for several days before I had felt vain fears and sadness" (L3 192).

As for *anger*, it is something we cannot avoid being overwhelmed by in certain circumstances: if they come and tell me that someone has spoken ill of me, or caused me some other annoyance, I immediately feel angry and

every vein in me twists because the blood rebels. Even in the monasteries of the Visitation there was no lack of opportunity to become irritated and angry, and the attacks of the irascible appetite were overbearing. The satisfaction of anger, in overcoming evil, provokes the exhilarating emotion of triumph. The one who *triumphs* cannot contain their joy.

The role of images and the imagination

The passions, the direction they take and their intensity are very much linked to the images that are formed in us from the experience of the external senses.

It is therefore appropriate to speak of this faculty, even though it is not detached from the higher faculties of the spirit or mind, which can govern it, but only to some extent.[7] The imagination was a great ally of Francis de Sales and also a cause of the success of his writings, which are overflowing with images.

Images stimulate the passions and these, in turn, arouse and increase mental images. The five external senses correspond to the internal ones. We have inner eyes, we have ears of the heart, we can smell virtues, have a taste for spiritual things, and we can even touch a thing with the spirit, which means applying our mind to it.

Imagination is a beautiful gift from the Creator: it serves to incite and nourish the human spirit, it aids the work of the intellect and provides motivation for the will. It serves as a needle for us to thread affections and resolutions into our spirit. It is very useful in mental prayer because it enables us to depict the mystery we wish to meditate upon. Thanks to it we fix our mind on the subject we want to study or meditate on so that it does not wander here and there at random, just like a bird is locked in a cage.

7 "Fantasy" is sometimes mentioned alongside memory and the intellect and distinct from the sensual appetite. See for example in T1 3.

In his marvellous account of a pilgrim in the Holy Land, the author of the *Treatise* shows how the imagination allows us to mentally reconstruct all the details of the life of Christ. In the different places where the Saviour lived, the pilgrim sees him through the eyes of the spirit or mind, contemplates him, pictures him, sees him in the imagination, looks at him, turns the eyes towards him. In the same way, a simple picture can come alive at the touch of the imagination and recall a previously understood scene or words. Francis de Sales, who had given a portrait of himself to an acquaintance, was delighted that the latter drew inspiration from it: that portrait is not silent, he wrote, because "it speaks, without saying a word, calling to your imagination what I was saying" (L8 251).

But the imagination can play more than one trick on an intelligence that tries to defend its sense of reality. Imagination can lead us astray, making us conceive of non-existent dangers, exaggerating the risks that threaten us, scaring us about future damage. It is especially dangerous when we are suffering. He explains to a woman distressed by slander that most of our ills are more imaginary than real.

With its dreams and their mystery, the night is most conducive to the imagination. In fact, we are used to seeing in our dreams, with our imagination, what we think during the day. There are bad dreams, voluntarily provoked by depraved thoughts during the day, and dreams from holy affections experienced while awake. And here the author of the *Treatise* imagines the dreams that occupied the Virgin's sleep when she saw her son still gathered in her womb, or sleeping on her bosom like a lamb resting on the softness of its mother's side.

A difficult ideal to achieve: a constant mood

The movements of the soul and the passions make human beings extremely subject to variations in psychological "temperature", using the image of climatic variations. Jane-Frances de Chantal's spiritual director had well

identified the different seasons she went through: the winter of sterility and boredom, the spring of beautiful hopes, the summer of the warmth of a heart that loves, the autumn in which one hopes for many fruits.

The health of the soul as well as that of the body cannot consist in eliminating the passions, which is almost impossible, but in seeking a constant mood as far as possible. When one passion predominates in us over the others we run the risk of a disease of the soul, we become bizarre and variable, subject to various fantasies, inconstancy and stupidity.

The good thing about the passions is that they enable us to exercise our will in acquiring virtue and spiritual prowess. In spite of certain manifestations, in which the passions must be stifled and repressed, for Francis de Sales it is not a question of eliminating them but of controlling them as much as possible, that is, moderating them and directing them towards a good end. Here, the philosophical tradition concerned with constancy, and the spiritual tradition oriented towards the search for peace of soul and the fight against restlessness, the fruit of self-love, come together. Passions are to the heart like strings on a harp: they must be tuned.

How do we achieve this ideal? When the passions make us lose our inward and outward balance, there are two possible ways: by opposing them with opposing passions, or by opposing them with greater passions of the same kind. If I am excited at the hope of a very uncertain promotion I will tackle that passion with the opposite passion of despair, or I will cultivate more solid and higher hopes still. If I am troubled by the desire for riches or voluptuous pleasure, I will fight that passion with contempt and flight, or I will aspire to higher riches and pleasures still. I can fight fear with the opposite, which is courage, or by developing a healthy fear at a spiritual level.

Movements of the soul, passions and imagination are deeply rooted in the sensible soul, meaning they can become a resource to the extent to which I get them to serve the good. It will be the task of the higher faculties, reason and above all the will, to moderate and govern them. A difficult task, which St Francis de Sales successfully accomplished, because, according to Mother de Chantal, "he possessed absolute control, over his passions,

making them obedient as slaves; and in the end they hardly appeared anymore."[8]

8 See Mother de Chantal's letter in Jeanne-Françoise Frémyot *Correspondance*, t. II, 307.

4. THE MIND WITH ITS FACULTIES

Francis de Sales considered the mind (spirit) to be the higher part of the soul, which he called the rational soul. Its faculties are the intellect, memory and will. Imagination could be part of it to the extent that reason and will intervene in its operation.

The will, for its part, is the master faculty to which it is appropriate to reserve special treatment.

The mind makes the human being, according to the classical definition, a rational animal. We are human only through reason, writes Francis de Sales. After the bodily graces, there are the gifts of the mind, and these should be the subject of Philothea's reflections and gratitude for not "having grown up in utter ignorance", but "with a decent and suitable education" (D1 11).

Reason, divine torch

When he was a student in Padua – he was twenty-three at the time – Francis set out to meditate on a rather surprising topic: "I will pause to admire the beauty of reason that God has given to man, so that, enlightened and instructed by its marvellous splendour, he might hate vice and love virtue. Oh! let us follow the shining light of this divine torch!" (O1 35).

In the human being's inner kingdom, reason should be the queen to whom all the faculties of our spirit, all our sense and the body itself should submit absolutely. It is reason that distinguishes the human being from the animal and allows us to moderate and govern our passions. That is why it is necessary to let the authority of reason reign, Francis de Sales insists.

But between the higher part of the mind or spirit, which must reign, and the lower part of our being, sometimes designated by Francis de Sales with the biblical term "flesh", the struggle sometimes becomes bitter. Each side has its allies. The flesh is associated with two powerful princes who are the world and the devil, while the mind, the tower of the soul, can count on three valiant soldiers: intellect, memory and will. In this struggle, even when all the passions of the soul seem to be upset, nothing is lost as long as the spirit resists.

In the field of education it is important to get the child to sense the superiority of the mind. As soon as the child's reason awakens, the educator, by showing the child what is truly beautiful and good, will help him or her control their instinctive reflexes and passions, instead of slavishly following them.

The eye of the rational soul

The intellect, a typical human and rational faculty which allows us to know and understand, is often compared to sight. For example, we say: "I see", in order to say "I understand". For Francis de Sales, the intellect is the "eye of the soul" (S3 4) whose incredible activity makes it similar to Argus, the mythical hero with a hundred eyes, fifty of which are always open.

How does the human intellect work? Francis de Sales precisely analysed the four operations of which it is capable. The first is simple thought, which is exercised over a great diversity of things, without any purpose, as bees do when they settle on flowers without wanting to extract anything from them. When the intellect passes from one thought to another this way, the thoughts that cram it are usually useless and may even be harmful.

Study, on the contrary, aims at considering things in order to know them, understand them and speak well of them, with the aim of filling the memory with them, like the beetle that alights on roses for no other purpose than to satiate itself and fill its belly. At this point Francis de Sales recalls an old axiom of the philosophers, according to which every person desires to

know, and what the person desires to know is the truth. Truth is the object of our intellect, which, consequently, in discovering and knowing things, feels fully satisfied and content. And when the spirit finds something new it feels an intense joy, and is impelled to continue the search, like those who have found a gold mine and go on to find more of this precious metal.

Francis de Sales could have stopped here, but he knew and recommended two other higher activities of the human mind, starting with meditation. While study aims at increasing knowledge, the aim of meditation is to move the affections and especially love. It consists in fixing our intellect on a subject from which it hopes to draw good affections. This is the way of the dove who coos by holding her breath and produces her typical song by the rumbling in her throat without letting out her breath.

But the activity most pleasing to the intellect is contemplation, which consists in rejoicing in the good known through meditation and loved through that knowledge. The contemplative is like the bee which, after flying here and there in search of nectar, sucks it up, loads it up, takes it into the hive and transforms it into honey. With contemplation, the human mind reaches its summit..

Cultivating our intelligence

It is the great desire to know that characterises the human being. It was this desire that led the great Plato to leave Athens to learn about the world, that brought people from the ends of France and Spain to Rome to the great historian Titus Livius, that led the ancient philosophers to renounce their bodily comforts. Some even go so far as to fast in order to study better.

In fact study is able to produce intellectual pleasure which is superior to sensual pleasures. St Francis de Sales calls this "intellectual love". He writes regarding this: "Intellectual love, finding in union with its object an unhoped-for contentment, perfects its knowledge of it, thus continuing to unite with it, and uniting itself more and more, it does not cease to do so." (T1 10).

One of the principal tasks of education and formation is to "enlighten well the intellect" (L2 313), to "purge it" of the darkness of ignorance (D2 1). The Bishop of Geneva denounces the dullness and indolence of spirit which does not want to know what is necessary, and he insists on the value of study and learning. "Study more and more, with diligence and humility," he writes to a student (L11 11).

But it is not enough to purge the intellect of ignorance. We also need to embellish and adorn it, "carpet it with considerations" (O5 213). To consider means to apply the mind to a specific object, to examine its various aspects carefully, to see things in general and then to descend to particular cases, to examine the principles, causes and consequences of a given truth, to weigh certain words or sentences, to consider them one by one and compare them with each other.

Finally, one must know that there are sins of the intellect. Beware of the vanity of false wise men and pedants who want to be honoured and respected by all for the little knowledge they have![1] In the opposite sense, there is a kind of intellectual avarice that borders on pride, when we close ourselves off and deny others access to knowledge. Finally, there are the mistakes that everyone makes in their search for the truth, as when Francis de Sales reproached Jane-Frances de Chantal for the false esteem in which she held him.

The memory and its storerooms

Like the intellect, the memory too is a faculty of the mind that gives rise to admiration. Francis de Sales compares it to a storehouse "worth more than those of Anversa or Venice" (S1 132). Don't we say "store something" in

1 On the "deformation of humanism" and the danger of a "new scholasticism", see E. Garin, *L'educazione in Europa 1400/1600, Problema e programmi*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1976, 209-216.

our memory? Memory is a soldier of the spirit whose loyalty is very useful to us. It is a gift from God, Francis tells Philothea, inviting her to flee from detestable and frivolous memories and to make the following resolution: "All the days of my life I will dwell upon the greatness of Thy Goodness" (D1 10) [tr: where the original uses the term "memory", translated here as "dwell upon"].

This faculty needs to be trained. When he was a student at Padua, young Francis exercised his memory not only in his studies but also in remembering all the good motives, desires, affections, intentions, plans, feelings and sweetness that God had inspired him to experience.

However, in some cases the memory of the past is not always good and can bring sadness, as happened to a disciple of St Bernard who was attacked by an awful temptation when he began recalling his worldly friends, relatives and the goods he had left behind. In some exceptional circumstances in the spiritual life we need to purify the memory of passing things and worldly affairs and forget worldly and material things for a while, good and useful though they may be.

In order to practise virtue in the moral area, someone who has felt offended will take a radical position, saying, "I remember too much of the barbs and insults, from now on I will forget them" (O5 172). This is a voluntary forgetting, a negative tactic that prepares to embellish the memory with all the benefits one has been rewarded with.

We need to have a well-balanced and reasonable mind

The human mind's capacities, especially the intellect and memory, are not solely aimed at glorious intellectual undertakings, but also and especially at leading a good life. Seeking to know our humanity, understanding life and defining the norms of behaviour in conformity with reason – these should be the fundamental tasks of human formation. The central part of the *Introduction*, which deals with the practice of virtues, contains, towards

the end, a chapter that sums up Francis de Sales' teaching on the virtues: "We need to have a well-balanced and reasonable mind" (D3 36).

With finesse and a touch of humour, Francis denounces numerous bizarre, crazy or simply wrong behaviours. We accuse our neighbour of some little thing, and excuse ourselves for much more; we want to sell at a high price and buy cheaply; what we do for others always seems a lot to us, and what others do for us is nothing; we have a gentle heart towards ourselves, and a strict and rigorous heart towards our neighbour; we have two weights, one to weigh our own comforts with the greatest possible advantage for us, the other to weigh those of our neighbour with the greatest possible disadvantage. In order to judge well, Francis advises Philothea, it is always necessary to put oneself in the shoes of one's neighbour, to be a seller in buying and a buyer in selling.

Reason lies at the heart of the educational edifice. Some parents do not have the right mental attitude. In fact, there are virtuous children whom parents can hardly stand because they have this or that defect in their bodies; while on the other hand there are vicious ones who are continually pampered because they have this or that fine physical endowment. There are educators who easily indulge in preferences; they have to keep the balance right among all their pupils so that natural gifts do not make them distribute affections and favours unjustly.

It is the young who run the greatest risk overall, because self-love often puts them at a distance from reason. Francis de Sales explains to one young man about to set out into the big wide world of the precise nature of the two major stumbling blocks he will come across: vanity and ambition. Vanity is the lack of courage of one who, not having the strength to win true and solid praise, is content to have false and empty praise. Ambition is an excess of courage, which leads us to pursue glories and praise outside or against the rule of reason, or to receive honours before we have deserved them. A young person's reason is in danger of being lost, especially when they allow themselves to fall in love. Therefore, the bishop writes to the young man, advising him "not to allow your affections to pre-empt judgement and reason in the choice of who you love!" (L4 378).

Reason resembles the river of paradise, which God makes flow in order to irrigate all mankind in all its faculties and activities; it is divided into four branches corresponding to the four virtues that the philosophical tradition calls the cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. Consequently, there is a close link between reason and virtue in the human being, to the point that there could be no virtue without the intervention of reason.[2]

All virtues are so because of the conformity they have with reason; and an action cannot be called virtuous if it does not proceed from affection for the beauty of reason.

2 See the *Fragments on the cardinal and moral virtues* (O5 40-89), a preparatory work intended to become part of the *Treatise on the Love of God*

5. THE HEART: WILL, LOVE AND FREEDOM

At the centre and summit of the human person, Francis de Sales places the heart, to the extent that he would say: "whosoever gains the heart has won the whole man" (D3 23). In Salesian anthropology one cannot fail to notice the superabundant use of the term and concept of the heart. This is all the more surprising because in the humanists of the time, steeped in the language and thoughts of antiquity, it does not seem possible to discover any particular insistence on this symbol.

On the one hand, this phenomenon can be explained through the common, indeed universal use of the word "heart" to designate the inner being of the person, especially in reference to the person's affections. On the other hand, Francis de Sales owed much to the biblical tradition that sees the heart as the seat of the human being's higher faculties such as the will, thinking, love. Contemporary anatomical research into the functioning of the heart in the human organism could perhaps be added to these considerations.

The will, the master faculty

With the faculties of the spirit, such as the intellect and memory, we remained in the realm of knowledge. It is now a question of entering the realm of action.

As St Augustine and certain philosophers like Duns Scotus had already done,[1] Francis de Sales assigns prime of place to the will, probably under

1 Franciscan John Duns Scoto (1270–1308), who would teach at Oxford, Paris and

the influence of his Jesuit teachers. It is the will, the soul's "monarch", that is the faculty that should govern all the "powers" of the soul. It is significant that the *Treatise* begins with a chapter entitled: "That for the Beauty of Human Nature God has Given the Government of All the Faculties of the Soul to the Will."

This time quoting St Thomas, Francis de Sales says that the human being has full power of all kinds of events and happenings and that the wise individual, meaning the one who follows reason, will become "absolute master of the stars".[2] The will is our mind's third soldier and the strongest of all, and "nothing can override man's free will; God himself who created him does not want to force or violate him in any way" (S3 300).

The author of the *Treatise* likes to show that the will is the human being's true resource because, thanks to it and around it, all the physical and mental elements that make up the human being come together in a harmonious whole. But it exercises its authority in very different ways, and the obedience due to it varies considerably. Thus some parts of us, unimpeded by movement, obey the will normally: we open and close our mouths, move our tongues, hands, feet or eyes at will, and as much as we like, "without resistance" (T1 2).

The will also exercises power over the workings of the five senses, but this is an indirect power: in order not to see with the eyes I have to avert them or close them; to practise abstinence I have to order my hands not to provide my mouth with food. The will also has power over the higher faculties of the mind, because it is the will that decides to apply the mind to an object and direct it away from this or some other thought. There remains the question of governing the sensual appetite with its twelve passions. Although it tends to behave like a rebellious, seditious, restless

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Cologne, criticised Thomism and Aristotelianism, claiming the superiority of the will over reason.

2 See E 34. Francis de Sales was probably of St Thomas's opinion. He thought that the stars had influence over the human passions, but that to the extent that man was in control of his passions, he also commanded the stars. See the *Summa theologiae*, prima pars, quaestio CXV, art. 4, ad tertium.

subject, the will can and must dominate these sensual passions, even at the cost of a long struggle.

But how does the will work? To answer this question we refer to the Salesian model of meditation and its three stages: considerations, affections, resolutions. Considerations consist in reflecting and meditating on a good, a truth, a value. This reflection normally produces affections, i.e. great desires to acquire and possess this good or value, and these affections are able to "move the will" (L3 162). And the will, once moved, produces resolutions.

The affections that move the will

Since Francis de Sales considers the will to be an "appetite", it is an "affective faculty" (T1 8). But it is a rational appetite and not a sensible or sensual one. The appetite produces movements, and while the movements of the sensible appetite are ordinarily called "passions", those of the will are called "affections" because they press and move the will. The author of the *Treatise* also calls the former "passions of the body" and the latter "affections of the heart". The affections correspond to the twelve passions, but placed on a higher level of reason and will.

In the meditations he proposes in the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Francis invites Philothea, through a series of meaningful and lively expressions, to cultivate all kinds of voluntary affections: the love of good (to turn one's heart, to feel affection, to embrace, to attach, to join, to unite); the hatred of evil (to detest it, to break every bond with it, to trample it underfoot); desire (to aspire, to implore, to invoke, to supplicate); flight (to despise, to separate, to distance oneself, to remove, to abjure); hope (Oh my heart!); despair (oh! my unworthiness is great!); joy (to rejoice, to be pleased); sadness (to grieve, to be confused, to lower oneself, to humble oneself); wrath (to rebuke, to chase away! eradicate); fear (tremble, frighten the soul); courage (encourage, strengthen); and finally triumph (exalt, glorify).

Francis seems to suggest that these affections develop in us in two ways: they come about spontaneously following on from considerations, or we bring them about through an act of reason or will, that is we "kindle" them (D1 11).

Recognising the role of the affections in the decision-making process seems indispensable. It is significant that the meditation intended to lead to resolutions reserves a central role for them. In certain cases, Francis explains to Philothea, one can almost omit the considerations or shorten them, but the affections must never be missing because they are what motivate the resolutions.

Love, the first and foremost affection

For Francis de Sales, love comes first both in the list of the twelve passions and the twelve affections. What is love? Jean-Pierre Camus asked his friend the Bishop of Geneva, who replied: "Love is the primary passion of our emotional desires, and a primary element in that emotional faculty which is the will. So that to will is nothing more than to love what is good."[3]

Love governs the other affections and enters the heart first of all. Sadness, fear, hope, hatred and the other affections do not enter the heart unless love drags them behind it. Following St Augustine, for whom to live is to love, the author of the *Treatise* explains that the other eleven affections populating the human heart depend on love, because "love is the life of our heart". In fact, "All our affections follow our love, and according to it we desire, we rejoice, we hope, we despair, we fear, we take heart, we hate, we avoid things, we grieve, we get angry, we triumph" (T11 20).

Curiously, the will has first and foremost a passive dimension, while love is the active power that moves us emotionally. The will does not come to

3 J.-P. Camus, *L'Esprit du bienheureux François de Sales,* partie I, section 31.

a decision if it is not moved by this love stimulus; he also uses the image of the tree. Love is like a beautiful tree, the one that stands out. Taking the example of iron attracted by the magnet, the author says that the will is iron and love the magnet.[4] To illustrate the dynamics of which, the root is the appropriateness of the will to the good, the stump is satisfaction, the trunk is tension, the branches are our attempts and other efforts, and the fruit is union and enjoyment.[5]

Love imposes itself on the will. Such is the strength of love that, for the one who loves, nothing is difficult, nothing is impossible. Love is as strong as death, says Francis de Sales with the *Song of Songs*; indeed, love is stronger than death. If we look closely, the human being's only worth is love, and all human powers and faculties, especially the will, tend towards it: "God desires to have us only for the sake of our soul, or the soul through our will, and our will for love's sake" (D3 18).

Inner struggle and the choices of freedom

To will is to choose. As long as one is a child, one is still entirely dependent and unable to choose, but as one grows up, things soon change and choices

4 Francis de Sales seems to have been fascinated by the "secret and most wonderful virtue" of the lodestone or magnet (*aimant* in French), and the French name is a reminder of love (T7 14). In 1600 Englishman William Gilbert had published the first treatise on magnetic phenomena (*De magnete*). The invention of the adjective *electric* is his. Struck by the earth's attraction, he likened the earth to a gigantic magnet.

5 The division into five elements of the movement of love comes from the *De anima et vita* by Juan Luis Vives, according to Königbauer. Francis de Sales would have also borrowed from the Spanish humanist the idea of convenience and union as fruit, as well as that of the relationship between will and love. He deviated from him on the matter of complacency. His conception of love is more dynamic than that of his predecessors. See L Königbauer, *Das Menschenbild bei* Franz von Sales, Würzburg, Universität, 1953, 164-174.

are imposed. Those who come out of a town go straight for a while; but they soon discover that the road has two directions; it is up to them to choose the one to the right or the one to the left.

Ordinarily the choices are difficult because they require one to give up one good for another. In fact, there are different forms of love among which priorities must be established: there is maternal, paternal, fraternal, nuptial, communal love and many others. In certain circumstances, choices have to be made that can prove painful. Most of the time the heart is divided between the affections of the lower part of the soul and the resolutions of the upper part.

Usually the choice has to be made between what one feels and what one wants, because there is a big difference between feeling and allowing something. The young man tempted by an unruly woman, of whom St Jerome speaks, had his imagination exceedingly occupied by such a voluptuous presence, but he passed the test by a pure act of the higher will. Francis de Sales asked a person who felt aversion to another to stamp on his distrust and fear with his feet and to take the side of generosity and reason.

Choice, however, is not only in the objective to be achieved, but also in the intention behind the action. This is an aspect to which Francis is particularly sensitive, because it touches on the quality of action. Indeed, the aim pursued gives meaning to the action. One can decide to perform an act on the basis of many reasons. Unlike animals, we are so much in control of our human and reasonable actions that we do them all for a purpose.

We can also change the natural purpose of an action by adding a secondary purpose to it, as when, in addition to our intention to help our neighbour, we add the intention of forcing our neighbour to do the same. Among pagans, intentions were seldom disinterested: they went out of their way almost only for honour or some other ephemeral purpose, as St Augustine points out. Intentions can be polluted by pride, vanity, interest or some other evil motive. There are conversations that are bad for the simple reason that they take place with bad intentions. Sometimes we

pretend that we want to be last and sit at the end of the table, but so we can move more honourably to the head of the table.

So, as far as we can, let us purify all our intentions, Francis asks of Theotimus. Good intentions must animate the smallest actions and simple everyday gestures. In fact, we achieve perfection not by doing many things, but by doing them with pure intention.

The fruits of the will are our good resolutions

After having highlighted the passive character of the will, whose first property consists in allowing itself to be attracted by the good that reason presents to it, we must now show its active aspect. Francis de Sales attaches great importance to the distinction between the affective will and the effective will, as well as between affective love and effective love. Affective love resembles the love of a father for his youngest son, a graceful, very gentle child, while the love he shows his eldest son, a well-formed, good and courageous man, is of another kind. The latter is loved with a real love, while the little one is loved with an affective love.

Now, the effective will must produce resolutions; if not, it risks being empty and ineffective. The moment come where we must no longer speculate with reasoning, but "stiffen the will" (L3 161). Our soul may be sad or cheerful, at peace or disturbed, tempted or tranquil, immersed in dryness or tenderness, it doesn't matter: a strong will is not easily turned aside from its resolutions. Let us remain firm in our resolve, unyielding in our resolutions, asks the amiable author of the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, adding, "The whole world is not worth one soul, and the soul is worth but little without its good resolutions" (D5 14).

The word "resolution" points to a decision that comes at the end of a process which has brought into play reason with its capacity for discernment and the heart, understood in the sense of an affectivity that lets itself be moved by an attractive good. At the end of the meditations proposed to

Philothea, we find frequent expressions such as these: I want, I no longer want, I will follow the inspirations and advice, I will do all I can, I will make this or that effort, I choose, I want to take a position... And at the end of her purification process, and after having decided on the fundamental choice of her life, Philothea concludes with this very demanding formula: "This is my will, my intention and my decision, inviolable and irrevocable, a will which I confess and confirm without reservation or exception" (D1 20).

The will in Francis de Sales often takes on a passive aspect, but here it reveals all its extremely active dynamic. It is therefore not without reason that one could speak of Salesian voluntarism.

Fortifying and motivating the heart

Francis de Sales has been considered as an "admirable educator of the will".[6] To say that he was an educator of the human heart means, more or less, the same thing, but with the addition of an affective nuance, characteristic of the Salesian concept of the heart.

Now, the human heart is restless, according to St Augustine's dictum, because it is filled with unsatisfied desires.[7] It seems that it is never tranquil or at rest. Francis de Sales, then, also proposes education of desires. He indicates the the will's main enemy is the sheer number of desires, demands,

6 See the study *Saint François de Sales étudié dans ses lettres*, in L11 xci. The authors highlight the Salesian method of making the will more and more malleable and disinterested in itself in order to make it coincide with the will of God. Another aspect consists in showing this education through radical choices. See also F. Vincent, *Saint François de Sales, directeur d'âmes. L'éducation de la volonté*, Paris, Beauchesne, 1923.

7 A. Ravier also spoke of "discernment or a policy of desire". See François De Sales, *Correspondance. Les lettres d'amitié spirituelle*, édition établie et annotée par André Ravier, Bibliothèque européenne, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1980, 797.

plans that very often simply mean wasting time considering them all, and causing restlessness and agitation.

So we need to regulate our desires and let the useless ones go. Realism dictates that we should not entertain vain, useless or, worse still, harmful plans. Everyone should cultivate their own garden without dreaming of impossible things: "What use is it building castles in Spain if we then have to live in France?" (L3 291). When the mind allows itself to be carried away by an inordinate curiosity, the will is liable to be inflamed by a multitude of ineffectual desires. It is more worthwhile to follow a good desire and make it bear fruit than to run after a crowd of desires to be satisfied. In the Gospel scene at Bethany, Mary is the model of a single desire that bears fruit, while Martha represents the useless agitation caused by many desires that pull her in different directions.

It is therefore necessary to fortify the heart against dissipation and agitation. But at the same time it needs to be motivated. From this point of view, Francis de Sales can also be considered an educator of the human heart in the sense that he nourished the will by proposing attractive motivations and ideals capable of setting human freedom in motion. In fact to be effective, education, as indeed any kind of formative intervention regarding others, must make use of this great resource of the person.

The will must be moved, attracted to goodness, truth and beauty, offered values and made to desire them.

Good teachers know that in order to lead their pupils towards the objective proposed to them, be it knowledge or virtue, it is essential to present them with a program that mobilises their energies. Francis de Sales was a master in the art of motivation when he taught Jane-Frances de Chantal one of his favourite maxims: "You need to do all through love and nothing through constraint" (L2 359). The joy that flows from love opens the heart just as sadness closes it. Love, in fact, is the life of the heart.

6. EDUCATING YOUNG WOMEN

The problem of women's education has tempted many humanists to write about it. In 1523, Juan Luis Vives published his *De institutione feminae christianae*, in which he claims the need for a more advanced education for young women,[1] while maintaining the traditional role of women in the family. A more worldly spirit can be found in Baldassarre Castiglione's *Cortigiano*, which presented the ideal of the courtly woman, attractive, graceful, cultured, spiritual and at the same time discreet, honest and good-natured. Later, in his treatise *Dell'educatione christiana dei figliuoli*, written in 1584 in the severe spirit of the Council of Trent, Silvio Antoniano maintains that a father and mother should "guard their daughters, making them fear each other more than anything else".[2]

During his trip to Paris in 1619, Francis de Sales met a clergy reformer priest who reproached him for caring too much about women. The bishop calmly informed him that women make up half of humanity and that forming good Christian women means you will have good young men, and with good young men, good priests. And didn't St Jerome devote a lot of time and writings to them? Francis de Sales recommended that Mme de Chantal read his letters in which, among other things, she would find plenty of pointers for educating her daughters. He drew the conclusion that the role of women in education justified, in his eyes, the time and attention devoted to them.

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1 A friend of Thomas More and his family, Vives declared himself of women's access to culture under the influence of the English Chancellor. See G. Marc'hadour, *Thomas More entre Érasme et Vivès*, in G. Avanzini (Ed.), Pédagogie chrétienne - P*édagogues chrétiens,* Paris, Éditions Don Bosco, 1996, 91-97.

2 Mentioned by J.M. Prellezo - R. Lanfranchi, *Educazione e pedagogia nei solchi della storia*, II, Torino, SEI, 1995, 108.

Francis de Sales and the women of his time

"The female sex must be helped, because it is despised," said the Bishop of Geneva.[3] To understand his concerns and his thinking we need to situate it in his times.

It has to be said that a number of his statements still seem very much in line with the current mentality. He deplored the artificiality of speech and writing in the women of his time, the ease with which they pitied themselves and wished to be pitied, a greater propensity than men to believe in dreams, to be afraid of spirits and to be credulous and superstitious, and also the entanglements of their vain thoughts. Among the advice given to Mme de Chantal concerning the education of her daughters he wrote without hesitation: "Remove vanity from their souls: it is born almost together with sex" (L2 361).

Nevertheless, women are gifted with great qualities. He wrote about one who had just lost her husband: "If I had only this perfect little sheep in my fold, I would not have been distressed to be shepherd of this afflicted diocese. After Mme de Chantal, I do not know if I have ever encountered a stronger soul in a female body, a more reasonable spirit and a more sincere humility" (L7 143).

Women are by no means the least in many circumstances of life. The great theologians have said wonderful things about virtues, but not so much about practising them, whereas there are many holy women who do not know how to speak of virtues but who nevertheless know very well how to practise them. Speaking of married women, he exclaimed with a sense of admiration: "Oh my God! How pleasing to God are the virtues of a married woman! Indeed, they must be strong and excellent in order to endure in that vocation" (L4 134). He claimed that women have often fought more courageously than men in the struggle to preserve chastity.

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3 According to a witness at the canonisation process, quoted in R. Devos, *Saint François de Sales par les témoins de sa vie*. Textes extraits des Procès de béatification, Annecy, Gardet Éditeur, 1967, 201.

Founder of a Congregation of women, together with Jane-Frances de Chantal, he received strong criticism as well as praise. Pushed into these trenches, he had to defend himself and defend them, not only as religious women, but also as women. In a text that was to serve as a preface to their Constitutions, we find the polemical vein he knew how to demonstrate, no longer directed against the "heresiarchs" but against malicious and ignorant censors:

> The presumption and importune arrogance of several children of this century, who ostentatiously blame everything that is not according to their spirit, gives me the opportunity, or rather compels me to write this Preface, my dear Sisters, to arm and defend your holy vocation against the points of their pestiferous tongues; so that the good and pious souls who are undoubtedly attached to your lovely and honoured Institute may find here how to repel the arrows shot by the temerity of these bizarre and insolent censors (O4 291ff).

Perhaps foreseeing that a preface of this kind risked damaging his cause, the founder of the Visitation drew up a second, softer version, aimed at highlighting the fundamental equality of the sexes. After quoting Genesis, this time he made the following comment: "Woman, therefore, no less than man, has the grace of having been made in the image of God; equal honour in both sexes; their virtues are equal" (ibid.).

Educating young women

The defect that Francis de Sales, like the moralists and pedagogues of his time, feared most in the education of young girls was called "vanity". He highlighted a number of manifestations of this. For example, when some important person enters a house, the young ladies go and hide in one or other place because they are not dressed as they wish. The Bishop of

Geneva amuses himself a little by making fun of these society girls who wear scattered and powdered hats, with their heads shod like horses' hooves, all plumed up and full of frills. There are some who wear garments that are very tight and uncomfortable and this is to show that they are slim; here is a real madness that mostly makes them unable to do anything.

What, then, is to be thought of certain artificial beauties transformed into boutiques of vanity? Francis de Sales prefers a clear and clean face, wants nothing affected, recommends simplicity and what is natural. Should we then condemn all kinds of artificial touches? As in all indifferent matters, balance, simplicity and a sense of propriety are necessary. One always laughs at old people who want to flirt; and levity like this is barely tolerable in youth. However, should there be some natural defect, then there is a need to correct it in such a way as to see the correction, but without any artifice.

Perfume? the preacher asked when talking about Mary Magdalene. He replies that it is an excellent thing, and a man who is perfumed also perceives something excellent about it, adding, as a good connoisseur, that musk from Spain enjoys great esteem in the world. As for clothes, he allows young women to have dresses with various ornaments because they may freely wish to be pleasing to many, but with the sole aim of gaining a young man for holy marriage. He closed with this indulgent remark: "What do you want? It is convenient for young ladies to be a little bit pretty" (L4 35).

It should be added that his reading of the Bible had prepared him not to put on a long face before female beauty. In the *Song of Songs*, he admired the remarkable beauty of the bride's face, like a bouquet of flowers. He describes Jacob who, when he met Rachel by the well, shed tears of joy on seeing a virgin who pleased him and enchanted him with the beauty of her face. He also loved to tell the story of St Bridget, born in Scotland, a country where one can admire the most beautiful creatures one can see; she was a very attractive young woman, but her beauty was "natural", the preacher said (S4 25).

The ideal of Salesian beauty is called "good grace", describing not just the harmony of the parts of the body but also graceful movements, gestures,

actions, reflecting the goodness of the heart. Grace demands simplicity and modesty, because flowers that are firmly rooted in the ground wither if handled. Then there is more honour in being beautiful when one does not pay attention to it: to be appreciated, beauty should not be flaunted. Grace, in fact, is a perfection that comes from within the person. It is beauty combined with grace that makes Rebecca the female ideal of the Bible: she was so beautiful and graceful at the well where she drew water to water her flock, and her familiar goodness inspired her, moreover, to give a drink not only to Abraham's servants, but also to his camels.

Instruction and preparation for life

In Francis de Sales' times, women had few opportunities to gain access to higher studies. Girls learned what they heard from their brothers, and when the family had the opportunity, attended a monastery for women. Reading was certainly more common than writing. Boarding schools were reserved for boys; consequently, learning Latin, the language of culture, was practically forbidden for girls..

Certainly, the Bishop of Geneva was not against the fact that women could become cultured individuals, but on condition they didn't fall into pedantry and vanity. He admired St Catherine who was very learned but humble in her knowledge. Among the Bishop of Geneva's conversation partners was a lady who had studied Latin, Italian, Spanish and the fine arts, but she was an exception.

To find a place in life in either the social or religious setting there comes a time when young women need special assistance. The bishop's treasurer said that he had been involved with some difficult cases. A woman from Geneva with three daughters was given generous help by the bishop, both money and credit; he found one of the girls an apprenticeship with a lady in the city, paying her board for six years in grain and cash; he also gave 500 florins for the wedding of a printer's daughter from Geneva.

The religious intolerance of the time sometimes caused dramas which Francis de Sales sought to remedy. A young girl brought up by her parents in the "errors of Calvin", discovered the *Introduction to the Devout Life* when she was nineteen. She only dared read it in secret. She took a liking to the author, about whom she had heard. Though closely supervised by her father and mother, she still managed to be picked up in a carriage, was educated in the Catholic religion and entered the Visitation Sisters.

The social role of women was still rather limited. Francis de Sales, for his part, was not completely against women intervening in public life. For example, he wrote in these terms to a woman led to intervene in the public sphere, intentionally and inopportunely: "Your sex and your vocation allow you to repress evil outside of you, but only if it is inspired by goodness and carried out with simple, humble and charitable remonstrances towards transgressors and alerting your superiors as far as possible" (L4 136).

On the other hand, it is significant that a contemporary of Francis de Sales, writer Marie de Gournay, a feminist before the term was invented, an intellectual and author of polemical texts like her treatise *The Equality between Men and women and Women's Complaints*, had great admiration for him. Throughout her life she strove to prove this equality, collecting as much evidence as she could about it, not forgetting the testimony of "the good and holy Bishop of Geneva".[4]

Education to love

Francis de Sales had much to say about the love of God but he was also very attentive to manifestations of human love. Indeed, in order to explain love of God he could do no better than to start from human love.

4 See T. Schueller, *La Femme et le Saint. La femme et ses problèmes d'après saint François de Sales*, Paris, Les Éditions Ouvrières, 1970, 249.

Every love has its story; as with divine love, so with human love one can describe its history of birth, progress, decay, operations, properties, advantages and excellence.

Love comes from the contemplation of beauty, and beauty is perceived by the senses, especially the eyes. An interactive phenomenon is established between gaze and beauty: contemplating beauty makes us love it, and love makes us contemplate it. The sense of smell reacts in the same way, because scents exert a powerful attraction with their fragrance.

After the external senses play their part then come the internal senses, fantasy, imagination exalting and transfiguring reality. Love makes the beauty one loves seem more beautiful and, likewise, sight refines love so that it finds beauty even more lovable. One understands then why those who painted Cupid blindfolded his eyes, claiming that love is blind.

At this point comes love as passion, which makes people seek encounter and conversation. Love desires secrecy, and when lovers have no secret to tell each other they sometimes take pleasure in talking to each other secretly. Love induces us to utter words that would certainly be ridiculous if they did not flow from a passionate heart.

Now, this love, which is perhaps only reduced to words like "darling" or acts of gallantry, has its ups and downs, to such an extent that in the *Introduction*, Francis de Sales offers a series of considerations and warnings about frivolous friendships that are formed between persons of different sexes and without any intention of marriage. Often they are nothing more than semblances of friendship.

Francis de Sales also commented on the subject of kisses, asking himself and the ancient commentators, for example, why Rachel had allowed Jacob to embrace her. He explains that there are two kinds of kiss: one bad, the other good. The kisses that young people readily exchange with each other and which are not bad at first, may become bad later on because of human frailty. Kissing, however, can also be good. In certain places it is what custom demands. It is also good when it expresses a sign of friendship and respect.

As for the question of balls and dancing, very much in vogue at the time, the Bishop of Geneva avoided giving absolute statements like the rigourists

of the time did, be they Catholic or Protestant, but he was very prudent. He was even strongly criticised for having written that dances and balls are morally indifferent in themselves. As with certain games, they also become dangerous when we become so attached to them that we can no longer detach ourselves from them. Dancing should be done for recreation and not for passion; for a short time and not until you get tired and dizzy. What is more dangerous is that these pastimes often become occasions that provoke disputes, envy, mockery and amorousness.

Making a choice in life

When a little girl grows up, the time comes for speaking to her about getting married. A man of his time, Francis de Sales broadly shared the view that gave parents an important task in determining their children's vocation, be it marriage or religious life. One did not usually choose one's prince or bishop, one's father or mother, or even often one's husband. However, the Bishop of Geneva clearly says that daughters cannot be given in marriage while they say no. In order for a marriage to take place, three things were necessary with regard to the girl whom one wanted to give in marriage: first of all the proposal was made to her; secondly, she liked it or not; thirdly, she consented or refused.

Since girls very often married when very young we should not wonder at their affective immaturity, very well described by Francis in the *Treatise*: "For even as young girls love their husbands properly if they have one, yet do not cease to greatly love rings and trifles, or their companions, with whom they amuse themselves extravagantly in playing, dancing and silliness, busying themselves with little birds, little dogs, squirrels and other such playthings;—so these young and novice-souls have truly an affection for the sacred lover" (T10 4).

The problem of freedom of choice also arose for the girls who were to be destined for religious life. The youngest daughter of the Baroness de

Chantal was to be placed in a monastery by her mother who wanted her to become a nun, but the bishop intervened: "If little Frances really wants to be a religious, good; if not, I do not approve of anticipating her will with decisions that are not hers" (L2 361). He therefore advises restraint and to proceed only gently.

Some young girls hesitate before the choice of religious life or marriage, never arriving at a decision. Francis de Sales encouraged one unsure young girl to take the step of marrying, and he wanted to perform the ceremony himself. He did this good deed, the husband would later say, at the request of his wife who wished to be married by the bishop, and without that presence she could never have taken this step, "due to the great aversion she had for marriage".[5]

Women and devotion

Quite distinct from any feminism before its time, Francis de Sales was aware of the exceptional contribution of femininity on a spiritual level.

They were often the first to embark on the path of devotion. It has been pointed out that by fostering devotion in women, the author of the *Introduction* also fostered the possibility of greater autonomy, a private life for women.[6]

The main quality of the woman lies in her great capacity to love. Living proof of this was Jane-Frances de Chantal, to whom he wrote: "I see you, my dear daughter, with your vigorous heart that loves and wills powerfully" (L3 331). No wonder then that women have special propensities for devotion. After listing a number of learned teachers and experts, he could write in the preface to the *Treatise*: "Who has ever

5 R. Devos, *Saint François de Sales par les témoins de sa vie,* 292.

6 See N. Castan, "Le public et le particulier", in P. Ariès - G. Duby (Ed.), *Histoire de la vie privée,* t. III: De la Renaissance aux Lumières, 417-426.

better expressed the heavenly passions of sacred love, than St Catherine of Genoa, St Angela of Foligno, St Catharine of Siena, St Mechtilde?" (IV 5). Another woman had deeply impressed him, Mme Acarie, whom he met during his stay in Paris in 1602, and with whom the first foundation of a reformed Carmel in France was decided on and realised. He declared himself extraordinarily indebted to the great reformer of Carmel, Teresa of Avila. During his pastoral visits, he met very different women who aroused his admiration, such as the haberdasher of La Roche, the "saint of the valley" (L3 200).

Were women allowed to meddle in problems concerning religion? "So here is this woman who is a theologian." (S1 155), notes Francis de Sales speaking about the Samaritan woman in the Gospel. Does this necessarily imply disapproval of female theologians? This is not certain.

All the more so as he often repeats with conviction that a simple, poor woman can love God as much as a doctor of theology. Superiority does not always dwell where one thinks. There are women who are superior to men, starting with the Blessed Virgin compared to Saint Joseph.

Francis de Sales, as we can clearly see, always respected the principle of order established by the religious and civil laws of his time, to which he preached obedience, but his practice testified to a great freedom of spirit. Thus, for government of the women's monasteries he considered that it was better for them to be under the jurisdiction of the bishop than to depend on their religious brothers, who risked weighing on them excessively. The Sisters of the Visitation, for their part, would not depend on any male order and would not have any central government, each monastery being under the jurisdiction of the local bishop.

The founder dared give the wonderful title of "apostles" to Visitation Sisters leaving for a new foundation (E 90). Their preaching would be their silent witness. Interpreting his thought in this light we can say that the ecclesial mission of women consists in announcing not the word of God, but the glory of God through the beauty of their witness. The heavens, says the psalmist,

tell of the glory of God in silence, only through their splendour. "Is it not a greater marvel," exclaimed Saint Francis de Sales, "to see a soul adorned with many virtues, than a sky dotted with stars?" (S3 322).

Part Two

THE PERSON IN SOCIETY

7. THE DIGNITY OF EVERY PERSON

Social life depends, before anything else, on respect for the dignity of the human person. Now, humanists exalted human nature, its greatness, beauty, capacities, as the Italian philosopher Pico de la Mirandola had done in 1486 in his address *De hominis dignitate*, sometimes thought to be the manifesto of the Renaissance. According to him, man's privilege is that he is the only free subject in the universe. Unlike all other beings, he does not have a nature that conditions him, but it is his own actions that make him what he is. This is how the humanists of the time expressed themselves, creating a climate more favourable to the affirmation of the dignity of each person and their place in society. Unlike the collective and almost impersonal education of the Middle Ages, humanism had discovered the individual and private life.[1]

These statements of principle become rules of conduct for a good social life for Francis de Sales. The most important points for formation in this respect are: the values of freedom, conscience and responsibility, respect and love self and others, union with one's neighbour with respect for differences.

Know the dignity of the human being

From ancient times, philosophers have spoken of the excellence of the human being. According to Francis de Sales, the famous dictum of Socrates

1 Concerning the human being as an individual, cf. F. De Dainville, *La naissance de l'humanisme moderne,* t. I: *Les jésuites et l'humanisme,* 277. See the second part in particular (*Développement de l'individu*) in the book by J. Burckhardt, *La civilisation de la Renaissance en Italie. Un essai*, Paris, Plon, 1958, 63-78.

"Know thyself" is to be understood not only in terms of our smallness and misery, but also the "excellence and dignity" of the human individual (E 76).

However, the true foundation of the dignity of the human person can be read in the book of Genesis where it teaches that we are created in the image and likeness of God. Not only is man the perfection of the universe, but everything was made in view of man. God created the world before he created man, because he wanted to prepare a dwelling place for him to dwell in; then he declared him to be master of everything in it. If we admit that man is the perfection of the universe, we can say that man is "the paradise of paradise" (O5 44), because the earthly paradise was made solely to be the human being's dwelling place.

For the Christian, the reality of the Incarnation is an even more valid reason for affirming the dignity of the human being. Using St Francis de Sales' words, it can be said that not only has God made us in his image and likeness by creation, but he himself "made himself to our image and likeness" (T8 4). In the person of Christ, humanity has received this incomparable honour of personal union with his divinity. The origin and destiny of the human person, created by God, intimately united to the Son and destined for grace and glory, could not be better expressed.

Freedom is the most valuable part of the person

If such is humankind's greatness when contemplated from the point of view of the Giver, the value of the individual as we experience it lies first and foremost in our freedom as individuals. Although it is a gift received, it manifests our moral autonomy, making us individuals who govern ourselves and exercises our responsibility before God, others and our conscience.

One day in a sermon, recalling the conversion of St Augustine and the liberation that followed, the Bishop of Geneva took the opportunity to offer

a passionate eulogy on his behalf. For him, freedom is the most important part of the human being since it is the life of our heart. It is so important that the devil cannot touch it; he roams around it, he besieges it on every side, but he cannot force it. God himself, who has granted it to us, does not demand it by force, and when he does demand it of us, he wants it sincerely and willingly. "He has never forced anyone to serve him and he never will" (S3 335).

Therefore, fighting for freedom is a good cause. The bishop states this in a letter to Jane-Frances de Chantal: "I think that if you understand me well, you will see that it is true and that I am fighting for a good cause when I defend a holy and charitable spirit of freedom, which, as you well know, I honour in a singular way, provided it is true and far from debauchery and libertinism, which are only a mask of freedom" (L3 185). The testimony of his friend Camus is also valuable on this point: "He often said to me that those who try to force the human will are exercising a tyranny which is hateful to God and man."[2]

The risks to freedom do not only come from outside. Very attentive to the inner freedom of the heart, Francis de Sales denounces the traps of the triple lust for money, pleasure and pride, describing them as alienation or a disease of freedom.

In any case, if Francis de Sales has become the apologist for freedom, it is because he links it with love, the supreme value. Love is the only slavery that counts. Even when our life bends outwardly to many laws and constraints, if we want to we can make sure that we have no other law and no other constraint than that of love.

In fact, love is the supreme freedom: love has neither forced nor slaves, it brings everything to obey it by a most sweet strength, for, "as nothing is so strong as love nothing also is so sweet as its strength" (T1 6).

2 J.-P. Camus, *L'Esprit du bienheureux François de Sales*, partie VII, section 11.

Conscience and responsibility

Closely linked to the subject of freedom is conscience and its corollary, responsibility. We know that the question of conscience and freedom of conscience had taken on great importance at the time of the Reformation. In a letter from 1597 to Clement VIII, the Provost of Sales deplored the "tyranny" that Geneva was bringing to bear on Catholic consciences. He asked the Holy See to intervene with the King of France so that Genevans would grant "what we call freedom of conscience" (L1 271). Opposed to military solutions to the Protestant crisis, he saw *libertas conscientiae* as a possible way out of violent confrontation, provided reciprocity was respected.[3]

Claimed by Geneva for the benefit of the Reformation, and by Francis de Sales for the benefit of Catholicism, freedom of conscience was about to become one of the pillars of modern thinking.

The concept of conscience is primarily synonymous with sincerity, honesty, frankness, conviction. When the Provost of Sales presented his reasons in favour of Catholic doctrine and practice to Protestants, he took care to specify that he did so "in conscience". He also asked those who opposed him: "Tell me in conscience" (C 265).

However, the individual subjective conscience cannot always be taken as the guarantor of objective truth. One is not always obliged to believe what one tells oneself in conscience. "Show me clearly", says the Provost to his adversaries, "that you are not lying at all, that you are not deceiving me when you tell me that in conscience you have had this or that inspiration" (C 169). The conscience can be a victim of illusion, either voluntarily or involuntarily: not only do inveterate misers not confess to being miserly, they do not in conscience think they are.

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3 This expression, which sounded like a neologism in the Latin letter to the pope in 1597, was to have widespread success. See on this point L. Terreaux, *À propos de la correspondance latine de S. François de Sales*, in H. Bordes - J. Hennequin (Ed.), *L'Unidivers salésien. Saint François de Sales hier et aujourd'hui*, Paris, Diffusion ChampionSlatkin, 1994, 123.

The formation of conscience is an essential task, because freedom of conscience entails the risk of doing good and evil, yet to choose evil is not to use but to abuse our freedom. It is a hard task, because conscience sometimes appears to us as an adversary that often fights against us: it constantly resists our bad inclinations, but always for our true good. When one sins, inner remorse moves against one's conscience "with sword in hand", but it does so in order to "pierce it with holy fear" (D3 23). Francis de Sales quotes a saying of Minucius Felix, comparing pagans to Christians: "You fear the witnesses, we fear the conscience" (O5 139).

One means of exercising responsible freedom is the practice of the examination of conscience, which the pagans also used. The wise Epictetus suggested doing this every evening and gave this warning: "If thou hast ill done, chide thyself bitterly, If thou hast well done, rest thee contentedly" (T2 18).

Respect and self love

From the affirmation of the dignity and responsibility of each person must come self-respect. Some of our actions are not only an offence against God but also an offence against the dignity of our person. Their consequences are deplorable: the image of God, which we carry within us, is defaced and disfigured, the dignity of our spirit dishonoured. We become like animals without reason when we make ourselves slaves to our passions and overturn the order of reason.

Self-respect will avoid two opposing dangers: pride and contempt for one's gifts. In a century in which the sense of honour was exalted to the utmost, Francis de Sales had to intervene to denounce misdeeds, particularly in the problem of duelling which made his "hair stand on end", and even more so the senseless pride that was its cause. To the wife of a duelling husband he confided: "I am scandalised, I cannot think how one can have such unbridled courage for trifling matters and things of

no value" (L6 186). Others, on the contrary, do not dare to acknowledge the gifts they have received and thus sin against the duty of gratitude. A certain false and foolish humility that prevents us from discovering the good in us must be denounced. The good that God has placed in us must be recognised, valued and sincerely honoured.

The first neighbour I need to respect, the Bishop of Geneva seems to say, is myself, my own ego. True respect for myself demands that I strive for perfection and correct myself, if necessary, but gently, reasonably and following the path not of harshness but of compassion. For there is a love of self that is not only legitimate but also beneficial and commanded. Well-ordered charity begins with oneself, says the proverb that reflects Francis de Sales' thinking well, but on condition that self-love is not confused with self-regard.

Self-love is good in itself. Philothea is invited to ask herself how she loves herself: "Is your love of yourself well regulated? for nothing is more ruinous than an inordinate love of self" (D5 5). On the contrary, *amour propre* or self-regard, is a selfish, narcissistic, self-inflated love that is jealous of its own beauty and solely concerned with its own interests.

The respect due to others

If everyone respects and loves themselves, they will be better prepared and willing to respect and love others. The fact of being the image and likeness of God has as a corollary – the assertion that all human beings enjoy the same dignity. In spite of the conditioning of the context in which he was placed, Francis de Sales promoted a thought and practice characterised by "the respect due to others", as the title of a chapter in the *Introduction to the Devout Life* (D3 27) puts it.

We need to begin with babies. St Bernard's mother, Francis de Sales says in the *Introduction*, loved her newborn children "with a reverential love, as a sacred deposit from God" (D3 38). A very serious reproach addressed by the bishop of Geneva to the pagans concerned their contempt for the lives

of defenceless beings. Respect for the child about to be born emerges in a letter from Francis de Sales to a pregnant woman: he encourages her by explaining that the child forming in her womb is not only a living image of God, but also the image of its mother, who will be "contemplated eternally and with pleasure by God, angels and men" (L9 341).

A bad consequence of the discovery of new lands was the re-emergence of slavery, which recalled the practices of the ancient Romans at the time of paganism in which the sale of human beings degraded them to the rank of beasts. Francis de Sales pointed out that this is still the case today, when children are sold and there are people who procure them and then traffic them like horses.

Respect for others is constantly threatened in a more subtle form by backbiting and slander. In the *Introduction*, Francis de Sales insists a great deal on sins of the tongue. One chapter deals explicitly with "unseemly words and the respect due to others" (D3 27). To tarnish someone's reputation is to commit spiritual murder; it is to deprive the one spoken ill of of civil life. If we blame the vice, and rightly so, we will strive to spare the person involved in it as much as possible. Certain categories of people are easily denigrated or despised.

Francis de Sales defends the dignity of ordinary people; he recalls that Saint Peter, a rough, coarse man, an old fisherman, a lowly tradesman, was called to lead others and to be the "universal superior" (E 45). The Bishop of Geneva proclaims the dignity of the sick, saying that crucified souls are royalty. He denounces cruelty towards the poor, exalts their dignity, justifies them, specifies the attitude we should have towards them, explaining how we should honour and visit them.

The Salesian "unidiverse"

The problem that has always plagued human societies is reconciling the dignity and freedom of each individual with others' freedom and dignity.

Francis de Sales tackled it in an original way by inventing a new word: "unidiverse". By calling the universe this, he emphasised the need for unity in diversity and diversity in unity.

Every being is unique. People are like the pearls of which Pliny speaks: they are so unique, each with its own quality, that no two are ever perfectly alike. But diversity does not hinder unity. On the contrary, it makes it even richer and more beautiful. Certainly, Francis de Sales cannot stand confusion and disorder, but he is equally an enemy of uniformity. The diversity of beings can lead to dispersion and the rupture of communion, but if there is love, the bond of perfection, nothing is lost; on the contrary, diversity is exalted by union.

In St Francis de Sales there is certainly a real culture of the individual, but this is never a closure to the group, the community or society. He spontaneously sees the individual inserted into a context or state of life which clearly marks the identity and belonging of each one.

Hence it will not be possible to establish a program or project that is the same for everyone, for the simple reason that it will be applied and implemented differently for "the noble, the artisan, the servant, the prince, the maiden and the wife" (D1 3). It must also be adapted to the strengths and duties of each individual. The Bishop of Geneva sees society as divided into living spaces characterised by social belonging and group solidarity, such as when he speaks of "the soldier's guardroom, the mechanic's workshop, the prince's court, or the domestic hearth" (ibid.).

Love personalises and, therefore, individualises. The affection that binds one person to another is unique, as Francis de Sales demonstrates in his relationship with Jane-Frances de Chantal: "Every affection has its own particularity that differentiates it from others; the one I feel for you possesses a certain particularity that consoles me infinitely, and, to say the least, is most fruitful for me" (L2 354). To illustrate his thought he presents this comparison: "the sun shines on each spot of earth as brightly as though it shone nowhere else, but reserved all its brightness for that alone" (D5 13).

8. MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

From the 15th century onwards, together with feelings about the child, we see the development of feelings about the family, which was not very visible in the Middle Ages, a period which favoured collective relationships among the people leaving little room for the intimacy of private life.[1] On the other hand, we see a revaluation of the family at the expense of clerical and monastic celibacy. For the humanists and the reformers, these realities greatly favoured the life of society and the Church. Luther and Calvin, not content with denouncing the celibacy of monks and priests as a cause of immorality and hypocrisy, encouraged marriage for all and extolled its greatness.

For his part, Francis de Sales, while maintaining the tradition of religious celibacy and its evangelical superiority, did not stop at the social conventions of the time but went further in doctrine and practice.

We find two chapters in the *Introduction* that are unquestionably original in relation to all the spiritual literature of the past: one contains *Counsels to Married People* (D3 38), the other deals with *The Sanctity of the marriage Bed* (D3 39).

Marriage is a vocation

Marriage is a human bond through which we share our hearts, bodies and goods. After strongly affirming that marriage is honourable for all,

1 Cf. P. Ariès, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime,* "Civilisations d'hier et d'aujourd'hui", Paris, Librairie Plon, 1960.

in everyone and in all things, the author of the *Introduction* explains: for all, because even virgins must hold it in honour; in everyone, because it is holy in the same way among the poor as among the rich; in all, because its origin, its purpose, its usefulness, its form and its substance are holy.

Not only does he consider marriage to be a great sacrament of the Church and the nursery of Christianity, but he also declares that the preservation of marriage is extremely important for public affairs. Also destined to marry according to his father's wishes, Francis de Sales had refused it not out of contempt for marriage but to follow a certain inner and spiritual ardour that urged him to give himself totally to the service of the Church, and to be all for God with an undivided heart.

At the time of Francis de Sales, old traditions continued to exist in noble circles, where young ladies were often betrothed when they were still very young, and husbands much later in life exercised absolute authority over the couple. This is not to say that everything was going badly, as can be seen in the case of Francis de Sales' parents. On the other hand, there was a certain evolution in customs, with the result that young men married at a younger age and acted more freely as a consequence.[2]

One of Francis de Sales' most significant contributions was to help spouses become aware that their state of life is a vocation. Here is what he recommended to Philothea about marriage: "If everyone must honour it, you especially should greatly honour it, living in marriage by virtue of your vocation" (III 263). He wrote in similar terms to a young girl about to be married: "Walk in this vocation, because you will draw great consolation from it, and in the end will become holy" (L5 357ff).

Marriage is a vocation because first of all it is a gift, and then because it implies a call and a responsibility. This is what the author intends to inculcate in married people when he tells them: "my friends, it is God's Invisible Hand Which binds you in the sacred bonds of marriage; it is He Who gives you one to the other, therefore cherish one another with

2 Cf. R. Pillorget, *Le mariage chrétien selon saint François de Sales*, in H. Bordes - J. Hennequin (Ed.), L'*Unidivers salésien,* 243.

a holy, sacred, heavenly love" (D III 38). He was on the same wavelength when writing to a young woman about to be married: "Love your husband tenderly as if it were Our Lord that was giving you his hand" (L5 358).

Love in marriage

According to Henry Bordeaux, Francis de Sales was a convinced supporter of love in marriage.[3] Rabelais and Montaigne, two authors who extolled paternal sentiments, paid no attention to love in marriage. It was very often held that marriage was incompatible with love since it was confused with passion, and the logical conclusion was that it was nothing more than a necessary institution for society. For the author of the *Introduction*, on the other hand, mutual love was to be its principal characteristic with its two corollaries: the indissoluble union of hearts and the inviolable fidelity of one to the other.

Francis de Sales did not cease to exhort spouses to deepen their love for each other. He willingly describes the love between spouses as a mutual friendship in which there is a communication of life, affairs, goods, substance, affections and indissoluble fidelity. The friendship of marriage is a true and holy friendship. Gestures of affection should not be lacking: the model is the great king, St Louis, who was almost criticised for having exaggerated such caresses.

This does not detract from the fact that the qualities of love are different in men and women. Husbands are to have a tender, constant and warm love for their wives, while wives are urged to love their husbands tenderly and heartily, but with respectful love filled with reverence. Francis de Sales admires all married people who live so lovingly together in mutual respect, which, however, cannot be without great charity.

3 Cf. H. Bordeaux, *François de Sales et notre cœur de chair*, Paris, Plon-Nourrit, 1924, 103.

As for the sacrament of marriage, it is a powerful aid against inconstancy of purpose. How many marriages would be broken, he notes, if they were not made stable by the sacrament that prevents changes in this kind of life! He also adds with surprising realism: "Someone who spent his whole life peacefully with his wife would, had he had the chance to change her, have done so a dozen times" (E 160).

The Bishop of Geneva defends the authority of men in the family, but knows that they can abuse it. With subtle irony on the subject of men's demands, he recommended understanding and indulgence to a lady: "My God, what a good father we have and what a good husband you have! Alas! they are a little jealous of their empire and dominion, so much so that they seem rather annoyed when something is done without their permission or command. If you want to do something, you have to turn a blind eye to this little human weakness" (L3 226).

One has to believe that this small weakness was frequent in couples, as is evident from this bit of disillusionment, but useful in consoling a widow: "It is undoubtedly true that a good husband's support is great, but it is little, and however good it may be, it consists more in subservience than assistance" (L4 151).

Marriage is a school

"Amid thorns or amid flowers," Francis de Sales wrote to Jane-Frances de Chantal, who was happily married to her husband Christophe before being involved in the drama of loneliness, "God helps us draw benefit from its school" (L3 99).

Everything begins with a change of circumstances and a new departure which can arouse both gratitude and confidence. Marriage is a gift to be cultivated. This is what he wrote to a young bride: "It is therefore necessary to cultivate this beloved heart with great care and to spare nothing that may be useful for its happiness" (L6 166). In order to protect and promote the

progress of their marriage and sanctify it more and more through mutual friendship and fidelity, Francis de Sales did his utmost to give couples advice suited to their situation.

First of all, he teaches that married people must love their state of life. We must love what God loves; now, he loves this vocation; let us love it too and not digress thinking about other ones.

It is often said, in fact, that individuals would prefer to change their circumstances to ones like others have: those who are married would prefer not to be, and those who are not would like to be. At this point, the Bishop of Geneva wonders where this general restlessness of spirits comes from. According to him, the reason is to be found in a certain displeasure we feel, coming from an evil spirit, to think that everyone else is better off than we are. As always, a comparison comes to mind: those who have a fever can never find the right position; they have been lying on the bed for a quarter of an hour, and would like to change their position; it is not the bed, it is the fever that keeps tormenting them. The conclusion goes without saying: "someone whose will is not suffering from fever is the happiest of all" (L2 349).

Like few writers before him, Francis de Sales dared to talk about the marriage bed, marital relations and carnal pleasures. He uses a traditional comparison which is delicate but transparent. We sit at the table, he explains, not only to nourish and preserve our life, but also out of the duty of mutual and proper conversation and good will.

Two excesses to be avoided are overabundance and a lack of etiquette in eating.

When a couple was in crisis, he appealed not only to the will of God but also to duty and reason. He advised wisdom and prudence for a woman annoyed at the conduct of a flippant and erratic husband: she could speak forcefully and resolutely if the occasion required it, to remind him of his duty, but remembering that force is most effective when it is calm, dictated by reason and not mixed with passion.

He advised married couples to set out on a journey into the spiritual life. When this dimension is missing the man is an ugly beast, greedy and rude,

and the woman's love likely to fade and tarnish. On the contrary, what a blessing it is when man and woman sanctify each other in their marriage!

Parents, cooperators with God

The conception and birth of a child are two wonderful gifts that make parents co-operators in a worthy task through the generation of bodies. Francis de Sales also composed a special prayer, which he seems to have repeated often, for those who were prevented from "consummating" their marriage. This was actually an exorcism, because impotence was thought to be caused by the devil and evil spirits.

The love of a father and mother governs the family. A father's heart is firm, steady and constant; a mother's heart is tender and makes her children desire pleasant things. This parental love should serve as a model for educators, formators and all those who exercise a duty towards others. All should feel invited to imitate God who governs all things with gentle strength and strong gentleness.

Love is facilitated between parents and children when parents discover that their children resemble them or their grandparents. They are happy to contemplate themselves in them as if in a mirror and take pleasure in seeing them portray their mannerisms, gestures and behaviour.

The love of parents for their children is wonderful, especially in moments of danger when the children's safety is at stake. Instinct certainly plays its part, as it does for the hen: when she is not brooding she lacks courage; but when she is, she has the heart of a lion, walks with her head held high and her eyes watchful, scanning around for even the slightest danger to her chicks.

Parents have a serious responsibility, to the extent that their failure to do so risks harming themselves. It was clear to Francis de Sales that the foundation of education was religion, understood in biblical terms as the fear of God. In a sermon, he issues a stern warning: parents sin if they laugh at seeing their children follow bad example or succumb to vanity. There are

parents who are moved by an ill-understood love for their children, and are ready to go to all sorts of expense to please them. Moreover, the love of parents can turn into disordered love when they prevent their children from following a religious vocation.

Francis de Sales also felt a fatherly love himself. In order to demonstrate his constant concern to one of his spiritual sons he wrote to him on one occasion: "Well-brought-up children often think of their father; and their fathers have their sons in mind not just often but every day" (L7 129).

The child, the living image of its parents

Children are the precious guarantee of the marriage, the living image of their father and mother. They are also their parents' heirs, but not only in a material sense. Addressing the widow of a deceased man, Francis de Sales tells her that her daughter is the heir of her father's virtues, and that it is now up to her to cultivate them through a good education.

The first virtue of the child is obedience. The obedience of children is the joy of parents, because everyone knows the joy that parents feel when they see their children obey them; and the more they show themselves to be submissive and obedient to the will of their parents, the more pleasure they take in loving them. The authority of parents, especially of the father, at the time of Francis de Sales, was considerable. However, a son does not obey his father because of the power he has to punish disobedience, nor because he can disinherit him, but simply because he is his father.

The counterbalance of obedience, in fact, is the filial confidence that children have towards their parents. The allegory of the surgeon's daughter describes this very well. Falling ill, she does not think about the painful treatment her father makes her undergo, but relies totally on his care, saying simply: "My father loves me very much, I am all his." (T9 15).

When the children grow up and become teenagers, the recommendations of the Bishop of Geneva become more insistent and demanding: "To the

young," he said in a sermon on the theme of the cross that each one of them carries, "I give them the cross of obedience, chastity and reserved behaviour; a salutary cross that crucifies the eagerness of a blood that is beginning to boil and of a courage that does not yet possess the prudence to guide it" (S2 418). To all these virtues must be added filial piety, of which storks are a marvellous model: when they migrate they carry their elderly parents with them, as their fathers and mothers had done when they were still young.

Family union

It is unimaginable that a Francis de Sales did not come from a united and numerous family and did not experience the legitimate tenderness of the heart. He would be another saint, not the intelligent consoler, "the restorer of the family spirit, the doctor of hidden wounds".[4]

During a stay in Sales, the Bishop of Geneva was so struck by the harmony that reigned there that he felt the desire to speak to his spiritual daughter about it. In a letter to Jane-Frances de Chantal, he wrote:

> It would please you to see such perfect agreement between people who are generally at odds with each other: mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, brothers and sisters-in-law. I assure you, my true daughter, that among all of them, to the glory of God, there is but one heart and one soul in the union of a holy love; and I hope that God's blessing and grace will be abundant among them, because it is already a good, beautiful and sweet thing to see how these brothers live together (L3 347ff).

Family disagreements often arise when it comes to inheritance. When the division of property was made in the Sales family, the danger was real,

4 H. Bordeaux, *Saint François de Sales et notre cœur de chair,* 78.

because his father had left the first choice to the youngest son Bernard and the older sons might have felt aggrieved. Francis de Sales was greatly relieved to see that everything was done by consensus and in harmony.

In the event of a conflict between husband and wife, the mutual help of one towards the other should be so great that both should never be angry at the same time, so as to avoid quarrels and dissensions between them.

Francis de Sales tenaciously teaches how to overcome repugnance and to stay in the boat in which one finds oneself, willingly and lovingly. His most insistent recommendations concern mutual support, faithful friendship uninterrupted by extramarital affairs, care in bringing up children, and setting a good example for the whole family.

9. SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

After the first few years in the family it is time for the child to make contact with people outside. The new stage in the child's physical and mental development is matched by an appropriate upbringing. At the age of one, two or three, the mother gives the child milk and teaches them to say their first simple words; when they are four, she begins to accustom them to speaking better and eating more solid food; and as they get older she helps them to be polite and modest.

The learning of social life thus begun will have to continue for years. The results will vary greatly according to case and possibility. Not all of them will have the good fortune of Philothea, who was brought up civilly and honourably while many others were brought up roughly and in extreme ignorance.

The ideal of an education for life in society, as understood by Francis de Sales, seems to be summed up in this recommendation to a young man about to set out into the wide world: he suggests that he should not only be brave, courageous, generous, but also good-natured, courteous, polite, frank and kind. These are qualities that the world can appreciate, and "as long as you are in the world, you must follow its laws" (L10 172).

Civility

Civility, with its closely related concepts of courtesy, kindness, good manners, modesty and honesty, was part of a set of social virtues common to all

humanists of the time.[1] Baldassare Castiglione in his *The Book of the Courtier*, which appeared in 1528, had described the image of the accomplished man, which became the ideal for many generations not only in Italy but also for humanists throughout Europe. At around the same time, the Dutch humanist Erasmus revived the concept of civility in the educational field with his book *De civilitate morum puerilium* published in 1530. It was a resounding success in northern Europe, to the point where it was adapted and plagiarised up until the 19th century.[2] In 1558, a posthumous edition of Giovanni Della Casa's *Galateo* appeared, a handbook of etiquette explaining what "uprightness" consists of in behaviour, customs, society and conversation. It is also worth mentioning the Piedmontese Stefano Guazzo, who, in his *La civil conversatione* of 1574, showed that the cult of "good manners" was no longer to be reserved to the elite of the court, but was to become a characteristic of the whole of "civil" life.

Religious life, too, had to be imbued with this civility which had been made fashionable by the humanists. Referring clearly to this code of good manners, the Jesuits would draw up the rules for ecclesiastical "uprightness" and knowing how to live in society. The formation Francis received consolidated his natural dispositions. He willingly acknowledged that he was inclined to courtesy, a social virtue which consists in wanting to honour everyone, even simple people: "It is true that I love everyone, especially simple souls. As for the honour that I seem to show for everyone, my education teaches me this, and I am naturally inclined towards it; I have never been able to do as many do, who, if they are of high rank, seem to have to be honoured by everyone" (E 422ff).

It is not surprising that among the recommendations made to a young man embarking on a career in the world, Francis de Sales remembers the

1 On this point see "Traditions de civilité dans les Entretiens spirituels, de Guazzo à saint Ambroise", in V. Mellinghoff -Bourgerie, *François de Sales (1567–1622). Un homme de lettres spirituelles,* 59-83.

2 On the success of this book, cf. J. Revel, *Les usages de la civilité*, in P. Ariès – G. Duby (Ed.), *Histoire de la vie privée*, t. III: De la Renaissance aux Lumières, 171-184.

gentle and sincere courtesy that offends no one and seeks to be useful to all, that seeks love more than honour, that does not enjoy itself at anyone's expense.

A principle of good manners is to greet people. The pagans already had this good habit of greeting each other. Paul does it in his letters. The letters of the Bishop of Geneva are also full of greetings: he greets and salutes, very humbly, a thousand times, cordially, affectionately, wholeheartedly, endlessly, in the most affectionate way in the world. He also passes on the greetings of others and asks someone to greet another either on his own behalf, in his own name, or through an intermediary. He adds good wishes, prayers and blessings.

Greeting and putting on a good face is what the bishop recommended to his domestic helpers, mostly young people, who were tempted to discriminate when welcoming visitors. He wanted them to be there every day to receive and introduce visitors, and to be courteous and well-mannered, careful not to upset anyone whoever they may be.

Manifestations of incivility differ according to one's upbringing and temperament. There is the incivility of the common people who have not had the privilege of a refined education and who easily yield to rough and coarse manners. But Francis de Sales takes issue more particularly with the incivility of the great when they display pride and unreasonableness. The eldest son of the Baroness de Chantal needed a lesson in this regard: he needed to be taught that gentleness and courtesy are incomparably more honourable than violence and pride, and that only in this way would he set out on the road that would lead to him doing wonders.

Ways of dressing

In the society of the *ancien régime*, split into orders, degrees and dignities, the way one dressed took on great importance, first of all because it helped identify one's social status. Among the books Francis

de Sales had there was, curiously, a *Treatise on modest clothing*. It was probably the work of a Protestant "heretic", but the fact that it was in the bishop's library shows that he was interested in this topic.[3] No surprise, then, that we find a chapter in the *Introduction* entitled: "On modesty in dress" (D3 25). At stake was self-respect and respect for those we come into contact with.

His thoughts on the subject revolve around two concepts: cleanliness and simplicity.

The first recommendation concerns the cleanliness of our clothes, which should be constant and general; as far as possible we should not leave traces of dirt and signs of neglect on them. St Bernard said that cleanliness is a sure indication of the purity of the soul. On this point Francis de Sales distances himself from certain desert fathers who seemed to want to cultivate filth when they declared that our bodies are nothing but stinking carrion, full of putridity.

Simplicity is also necessary. The opposite faults are affectation, vanity, refinement, folly. Towards the end of his life he was led to see that these were on the increase. He remembers that when he was young, one did not see so much luxury, children were dressed much more simply; now, however, one has to spend a lot of money on vanity. He noted that simplicity is the most beautiful adornment of beauty, and the best excuse when there is no beauty.

In addition to cleanliness and simplicity, there is always the need to take into account the different circumstances of time, age, rank, environment and situation. One should dress according to one's state and age. Quoting the saying of St Louis, king, he teaches that one should dress in such a way that wise and decent people cannot say you exaggerate too much;

3 Not only Castiglione, Della Casa, Guazzo, Luigi di Granada, Savonarola and Erasmus demand clarity and simplicity, but also a Protestant like Lambert Daneau, who translated the treatises written by Tertullian and St Cyprian on this subject. The Protestant author, however, is more inclined to austerity than the Bishop of Geneva. Cf. R. Murphy, *Saint François de Sales et la civilité chrétienne*, Paris, A. G. Nizet, 1964, 117.

and young people cannot say you exaggerate too little. Let us leave it to young people to discern what is appropriate. When writing to the young man leaving for court, the Bishop of Geneva did not intend to speak about outward dress but about inner dress; it was up to him to know and practise the rules of good behaviour.

Good behaviour

Attention to outward behaviour is justified by two considerations that are not alien to educational concern. On the one hand, external appearance is a reflection of the individual's inner dispositions and, conversely, the body's posture can influence the spirit.

Francis de Sales emphasises this twofold aspect with regard to prayer. Everyone knows that devout behaviour helps a great deal, such as kneeling with hands joined or arms crossed; such behaviour encourages recollection and remaining in the presence of God.

Inner devotion, on the other hand, encourages and almost determines a suitable outward demeanour.

Educators know how important it is to inculcate certain rules of behaviour and body posture to facilitate attention and study. At the table, good manners require eating what is presented. Discarding one dish for another, touching and manhandling everything, never finding anything well prepared and clean, making a fuss over every morsel, all this implies "too much thought of meats and platters" (D3 23).

Good behaviour is a quality often presented under the name of modesty. It consists in moderating our deportment, our movements, our gestures and our external actions, and bringing them into line with good manners, taking into account the variety of people, places and tasks.

However, we must avoid falling into affectation and unnatural behaviour. Modesty is opposed to two vices, namely, unruliness in gestures and behaviour, i.e. frivolity, and an affected demeanour.

There is no other virtue that Francis paid such special attention to. The reason lies in the fact that it requires self-mastery which extends to all gestures, all places and all moments of life.

On the other hand, there is a time for everything, a time for laughing and a time for crying, and it would be a failing against modesty, i.e. against common sense and moderation, to mistake one for the other, like wanting to be serious when it is time to laugh and vice versa. Similarly, we do not behave in the same we when we are old as we did when we were young; or in religious life as we did when we were in the world. "A young lady living in society who wants to keep her eyes down like nuns do would not be esteemed" (E 134).

Conversations

For Francis de Sales the term "conversations" still had its broad meaning of dating or companionship, nouns indicating the totality of interpersonal relationships, whether mediated or not by language.

When Francis was a student at Padua, he established a set of rules for himself for conversations and encounters. The *Introduction* contains a chapter on "Society and solitude" (D3 24) in which we can see the influence of Stefano Guazzo's *La civil conversatione*.[4]

He distinguishes between conversations that take place for serious business reasons and entertainment, mutual visits and various meetings or assemblies. According to him, a fair balance must be observed between life in society and times of solitude.

The search for a private life, a characteristic feature of early modern

4 V. Mellinghoff-Bourgerie is of this opinion. He recalls that Guazzo has an entire chapter on the matter, entitled: "Qual sia più utile la solitudine, o la conversatione". Cf. V. Mellinghoff -Bourgerie, *François de Sales (1567-1622). Un homme de lettres spirituelles*, 66.

times,[5] is also true for those who practise devotion amid ordinary people.[6] Aware of the hustle and bustle of everyday life, he recommends carving out moments of tranquillity and silence. However, Francis approves of conversations that are made with the aim of honouring one's neighbour; we do not need to be so uncivil as to despise them, but rather we must fulfil our duty with moderation, equally avoiding being crude and flippant.

"Be friendly and then amiable; try to be graceful and affable, cordial and expansive" (O5 296), he recommended, adding that it is not correct to be nice just to know the affairs of others when we don't want to say a word about our own.

But be careful about associating with vicious, indiscreet and dissolute individuals, since those in formation can easily be victims of these kinds of people. The two excesses that ruin the practice of conversation are coarseness, which prevents us from fostering a positive conversation in any way, and endless chattering or jabbering away without ever giving others a chance to say a single word.

However, circumstances, especially age, must always be taken into account. Backbiting and slander are the scourges of conversation and can bring about the "civil death" of the victim. How to defend oneself? In most cases it is better to conceal the offence, i.e. ignore it, act as if it did not happen, following the warning of an ancient sage: "Whoever disregards an offence forgets it; if one picks up on it, one gives it importance" (L10 230). Nevertheless, we must not give ill-intentioned people the opportunity to create a scandal.

5 See the chapter in Montaigne's *Essays*, *De la solitude*, Book I, Chapter 38.

6 Cf. F. Lebrun, *Les Réformes : dévotions communautaires et piété personnelle*, in P. Ariès - G. Duby (Ed.), *Histoire de la vie privée,* t. III: De la Renaissance aux Lumières, 71-111.

Salesian gentleness

Before being an evangelical virtue, gentleness can be regarded as a quality particularly valued by humanists.[7] Gentleness is often recognised as Francis de Sales' distinctive virtue, the virtue that gained him most sympathy and great success in his interpersonal relationships. The famous maxim attributed to Francis de Sales by Camus is well known: "You attract more flies with a spoonful of honey than with a hundred barrels of vinegar."[8] On the other hand, if we recall that his was a time of violence, wars, furious hatreds and duels, we will understand that the method of gentleness was a counter-cultural choice on his part.[9]

The evil of the time came from the idea that forgiveness was an act contrary to honour. On the contrary, says Francis, not to forgive is a weakness, to say that forgiveness is weakness is to be a heretic.

The individuals in need of such a lesson were the nobility above all. He recommended they be modest and flee from this phantom of imaginary honour that haunted them because when it took possession of them, it plunged them into vanity, self-esteem and, from there, drove them to duels.

One aspect of Salesian gentleness is to make ourselves pleasing to our neighbour, practising what Francis de Sales calls "condescension".

The meaning of the word for him is very close to what we call solidarity today, and therefore has a positive nuance that has pretty much disappeared in the way the word is used today. Condescension leads to anticipating our neighbour's wishes, indulging their tastes, even adapting to their will insofar as it does not oppose the will of God. In the name of condescension some indifferent, even risky things are not only permitted, but recommended,

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7 The 'sweetness of the Muses', their 'sweet pleasures', the sweetness of poetry, inspiration and emotion the poem provokes in the reader, were all praised in competition. Cf. D. Ménager, *Introduction à la vie littéraire du XVI^e siècle*, Paris, Nathan, 2001, 27.

8 J.-P. Camus, *L'Esprit du bienheureux François de Sales*, partie I, section 3.

9 See subtitle of the book by E. Bianco, *Francesco di Sales. Contro-storia di un mansueto,* Leumann (Torino), Elledici, 2001.

subject to prudence and discretion. This is the case with gambling and dancing. Even games of chance are no longer blameworthy if, at times, appropriate condescension encourages them.

In fact, gentleness is beneficial. The proverbial gentleness of Francis de Sales produced surprising results, attracting the most distant hearts to him. Speaking of himself, he said that it took no more than a fortnight for his enemies to become his friends.[10] Where there is disagreement, great gentleness and dexterity must be used, avoiding attacking anyone; in fact, we never gain anything by dealing with things harshly. The spirit of gentleness "enraptures the heart and conquers souls" (L2 272).

Finally, it is worth noting his very much Franciscan gentleness towards animals. One of his earliest biographers wrote: "He extended his gentleness to animals, even to flies, dogs or similar animals, to which he would not for the world do harm or endure others doing so."[11]

Friendships

Gentleness spontaneously expands into friendship. Francis de Sales is unthinkable without his friends, his "habitual living space".[12] Some of his friendships have remained famous, notably those with Senator Antoine Favre and Jane-Frances de Chantal. Not only did he personally cultivate friendship with everyone, but he also advised everyone to acquire and nurture true friendships. Addressing Philothea he recommends: "There are some who will tell you that you should avoid all special affection or

10 Quoted by É.-J. Lajeunie, *Saint François de Sales. L'homme, la pensée, l'action*, t. II, 120.

11 Cf. Jean De Saint -François (Dom), *La vie du bienheureux Messire François de Sales, in Œuvres complètes de Saint François de Sales*, Lyon, Librairie ecclésiastique et classique de Briday, 1868, 145.

12 M. Henry -Coüannier, *Saint François de Sales et ses amitiés,* Paris, Monastère de la Visitation, 1979, vii.

friendship, as likely to engross the heart, distract the mind, excite jealousy, and what not. But they are confusing things" (D3 19). For those who live among the people of the world and embrace true virtue, it is essential to forge good friendships; by leaning on them we gain courage, help one another and support each other on the path to goodness.

Good friendships are very important for young people. He advises the young man about to set forth in the world to make some friends in whom he can confide, and to find understanding and encouragement in them. It is a great truth that familiarity with those whose souls are upright serves immensely to rectify and preserve our own uprightness.

It is obviously necessary to be cautious in the choice of friends and to distinguish carefully between frivolous and bad friendships, vain friendships and true friendships. Friendship is founded on mutual communication in which we must also distinguish different forms of friendship and association. For if the mutual communication takes place in the field of science, the friendship will certainly be praiseworthy; more so if it is the field of virtue such as prudence, discretion, fortitude and justice. But if this mutual communication takes place in the field of charity and Christian perfection, then friendship will be truly precious.

From friendship comes a taste for coming together in groups. Francis de Sales encouraged the associations that existed in his time, because it is a good thing to cooperate with others in carrying out good projects. Of course, one can do good things alone, but the good is more abundant when we do them through union and collaboration with our brothers and sisters and neighbours.

10. WORK AND SOLIDARITY

Older children are destined to integrate more or less quickly into the social and economic fabric by studying or learning a trade. At the time of Francis de Sales, for the vast majority of young people work began at a very early age, so that they passed from childhood to adulthood almost without any intermediate steps.

Rare were those who, like the future bishop of Geneva, followed a long course of studies in view of the career to which they were destined.

Preparation for an active life

Study and work served those who devoted themselves to them first and foremost, but their usefulness normally spilled over into family and society. As a student in Paris, the young Francis expressed his ideal of life in terms of service. Writing to a friend of his father's who had come to visit him, he said he wanted to continue with the studies he had undertaken with the aim of being able, with God's help, "to serve Him well in the first place, and then to render good services to you, to whom I have so many duties of gratitude" (L1 1).

In those times, the possibilities of choosing a profession were limited, given that society was divided into categories. Young men of the nobility served a prince at court, in administration or in the art of war. The bulk of the population of Savoy was made up of peasants engaged in agriculture and sheep farming. Members of the bourgeoisie were involved in trade and various craft activities. In Annecy, in the 17th century, they became cobblers, weavers, gunsmiths, grinders, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, gilders,

bricklayers, millers, stonecutters, carpenters, tile makers, potters, printers, stationers, notaries, pharmacists, surgeons, doctors, butchers or merchants.[1]

Very much a part of the society of his time, the Bishop of Geneva did his best to help the youth in their education. His treasurer informs us that the bishop kept a young convert in his house for about a year, had him study at the Jesuit college in Chambéry, gave him food and clothing, had another young man learn the trade of knife-grinder and another the trade of stonemason at his own expense. He also employed young men for domestic work.

In a social context in which the majority of people embraced a state of life and a profession without really being able to choose, Francis de Sales taught them to make of every kind of "*vacation*" [= term of engagement] a vocation and a service. The two similar sounding words, *vacation* and *vocation*, served him to value each person's profession, duty or assignment, to the point of even making it a criterion for devotion.

He said that each must learn to move from prayer to all the various types of activity that their commitments and profession rightly and legitimately require of them: a lawyer must know how to move from prayer to defence; a merchant to his business; a married woman to her family duties and domestic hustle bustle.

The dignity of work

As *homo sapiens*, we want to know more and we want better knowledge; as *homo faber*, we want to work and manufacture more, and better. In the age of humanism there was not only a revival of studies but also a real rehabilitation of work and active life. The humanist opened up to the

1 Cf. M. Velay, *La vie quotidienne à Annecy au 17e siècle*, Thônes, Imprimerie Jacquet, 2004, 74-105.

new possibilities of *homo faber*. We see people in workshops, celebrating inventions, and praising manual work.[2]

By abolishing the Church's hierarchy and priesthood, Luther and Calvin sought to give value to secular activity as a place where everyone carries out their normal Christian vocation. This is the context for understanding certain positions of Francis de Sales concerning work and solidarity.

Learning the "nobility" of work begins in the family. In a letter to the children of his friend Antoine Favre, Francis de Sales invited them to model themselves on their father by playing on the meaning of the Latin word *faber*: "Keep your eyes fixed day and night on his excellent example, dear friends. Thus, while you are now excellent apprentices, you will come out of his workplace as the noblest of craftsmen" (L1 79ff).

The Bishop of Geneva's industrious life could also serve as an incentive to work. In his letters he often says that he is surrounded, distracted and hindered by the piling up of work, squeezed here and there by chores, occupied and overwhelmed by business matters, with his spirit stormed by so many commitments, immersed in a world of tasks, in a sea of ordinary occupations or in a great tangle of affairs. At the end of his prolonged pastoral visit he confided to Mme de Chantal: "The affairs of this diocese are not rivers but torrents. I can tell you truthfully that since I began my visit, I have had endless work, and, on my return, I found a job waiting for me which I had to be involved with and which kept me enormously busy" (L3 139). He knew from experience that the diversity and multiplicity of tasks weighed much more than each task on its own.

Similarly, when he wrote the *Introduction* he was rightly addressing those who are burdened with temporal affairs, those entrusted with many worldly tasks, engaged in common affairs and occupations, caught up in many human tasks after the example of David, a king overwhelmed by difficult tasks. But there is nothing extraordinary in all this. Man is born to work and the bird to fly, he wrote in a sermon outline on the theme of creation (S2 392). The activity that a person performs plays a positive role.

2 Cf. D. Ménager, *Introduction à la vie littéraire du XVI^e siècle*, 69.

According to one possible interpretation he liked to relate, it is not man who guards the garden in Genesis, but the garden that guards man through work. David fell into the temptation he had sought through idleness and doing nothing. Work puts temptation to flight. Since idleness is the mother of all vices, a necessary and appropriate occupation frees the soul from a thousand fancies. In one of his lively oratorical addresses, the bishop emphasised this truth when addressing the idler: "Get up from your bed, O lazy one, for it is time, and do not be frightened by the day's work, for it is normal that, since the night is made for resting, the day that follows is destined for work" (S4 202).

Tranquillity, which he so highly valued, is not indolence, for tranquillity that does not occur amid the storm is a sluggish and deceitful tranquillity, and peace is not of the right kind if it avoids the work required. We must not stop at what is good when we can achieve what is best. Let us continue to work well, Francis de Sales concludes optimistically, because "There is no soil so thankless that the farmer's dedication cannot make it productive" (L4 28). On the other hand, according to St Augustine, fatigue has no place where there is love, or, if it is present, it becomes a loving fatigue.

Work carefully and diligently, but without fatigue or anxiety

A frequent recommendation of Francis de Sales was: we must attend to our chores carefully but without worry, apprehension or anxiety. Work can be a source of happiness provided it is done with a calm and peaceful mind.

Agitation disturbs reason and judgement and even prevents us from properly doing the things we are striving for. We should imitate the rivers that flow placidly over the plains, carrying great ships and rich merchandise, and the rains that fall calmly over the countryside, making it fertile with grass and seeds. On the contrary, streams and rivers rushing downstream ruin the environment and are useless for traffic, just as violent and stormy rains devastate fields and pastures. Wisdom is well expressed in the ancient

proverb that says we should "*festina lente*", make haste slowly, doing things in order, one after the other. Let us imitate the farmer who is thoughtful but not at all agitated.

But where does this agitation that sometimes overwhelms us come from? Much of the malaise and discontent we feel at work stems from desires and dreams which distract us from the current occupations belonging to our state of life and our duties: they plunge us into an unreal world, beyond our reach and assignment. The author is clear in this regard in the *Introduction*: he does not approve of someone getting lost by wanting a kind of life other than what present duties demand, or activities incompatible with current circumstances, for this dissipates the heart's focus and distracts it from tasks that must be done.

How do we give quality to all our actions? This depends not only on how we do them but also on the intention that guides them. We can, in fact, carry out our commitments for selfish reasons, or in a spirit of service instead, and give quality not only to important and major undertakings but to small and humble things as well. Francis de Sales also highly recommended the small and humble virtues such as service to the poor, visits to the sick, care of the family, with its related activities, and fruitful diligence that does not leave us idle. Amid visions and ecstasies, St Catherine of Siena did not forget to humbly turn the spit in the kitchen, stoke the fire, prepare the food, knead the bread and do all the humblest housework.

Here is a very useful tip to avoid agitation: let us take a little break from time to time, following the example of the pilgrim who drinks a little wine to gladden his heart and refresh his mouth. Even if he lingers for a moment, he does not interrupt his journey; on the contrary, he gains strength to complete it sooner and more easily. In short, it is necessary to balance ardour and calm, passion and peace.

Encouraging the country's economy

At the time of the humanists, wealth was not seen solely as something tainted: Christ did not forbid clever activity, Erasmus taught, but "the spasmodic desire for gain".[3] Commerce was given a new impetus along with merchant and banking capitalism.

One issue on the agenda at the time was the question of interest-bearing loans. Theologians had long discussed this practice, which they had generally severely condemned. A predecessor in Geneva, Bishop Fabri, had authorised interest-bearing loans but under certain conditions, paving the way for Calvin and the city's entire economic and banking development on this point.[4] There remained the ever-present danger, however, of exploitation of the poor.

In one of his first sermons, Francis de Sales denounced the false justifications of the usurer who deceives himself by making a thousand excuses for his avarice. He did not yet distinguish between interest-bearing loans, assimilated to usury, and productive loans intended to stimulate the spirit of enterprise in producing wealth.

But this did not stop Francis de Sales from approving and encouraging all useful work in the service of God and neighbour. According to him, the people of the world are not forbidden to acquire wealth and to engage in commerce. Idleness must be avoided, whatever our condition.

Rebecca was a shepherdess and later became a princess, but in those days "princesses and princes all did something" (E 177).

Everyone has a role to play in society to ensure their contribution to the common good. Everyone has to make themselves useful, not only those who are active and vigorous by nature, but also the weakest and the idlers. An architect needs the work of the carpenter, the bricklayer, the ironmonger, the tile maker.

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3 Quoted by D. Ménager, *Introduction à la vie littéraire du XVI^e siècle*, 68.

4 There has been much discussion about the thesis of the German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) who, in his book on 'the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism', established a significant relationship between the Puritan morality of Calvinism and the economic rationalisation characteristic of the capitalist system.

As is well known, the majority of the people at that time lived from agriculture and sheep farming. The main products, taxed when the prince was strapped for cash, consisted of grain, wine, cheese and cattle. Francis de Sales knew how to appreciate these humble products of the earth and human labour. He wished one of his interlocutors "a beautiful and abundant harvest" (L4 78). An important and very useful foodstuff for humans and livestock was salt. True, sugar is more excellent than salt, but salt is in more frequent and in general use. In 1609, the Bishop of Geneva was involved, together with the Bishop of Basel, in the affair of the salt pans in Franche-Comté, whose ownership was a point of debate between the clergy and the Count of Burgundy.[5]

How could the country's resources be increased? The silk industry, imported into Geneva by Italian merchants, could contribute to this. A rich merchant from Geneva, who had taken refuge in Annecy after his conversion, introduced this new industry there. The bishop encouraged this new industry, which seemed very profitable to him. He wrote to the Duke of Savoy inviting him to encourage "progress" which was very useful in relieving the people and increasing earnings (L7 66).

The mining industry at the time underwent considerable improvements. The search for precious materials such as gold and silver, and useful materials such as copper, gave rise to numerous initiatives in Europe at that time; in some areas, quarries or mines were reopened, some of which had been abandoned since the end of the Roman era. The bishop supported with all his might an initiative of his brother Louis, who had decided to establish some in his own estates.

As for clockmaking, Francis de Sales was also familiar with the considerable improvements introduced in his time. The timepiece was regarded as the symbol of pre-industrial technology in that era, before the advent of the machine, the future symbol of the industrial age. By the beginning of the 16th century, replacing weights with springs had enabled miniaturisation and the invention of portable clocks no bigger

5 Cf. C.-A. De Sales, *Histoire du Bien-heureux François de Sales,* t. II, 27-29.

than an orange. The Bishop of Geneva said that we are amazed at how art has been able to "join together such a number of pieces, with so just a correspondence" (T4 8).

Solidarity with the poor

Inculcating the value of work and encouraging industry opened up prospects for the future, but did not solve all the problems of the present. Social and economic life cannot forget the poor. Between 1580 and 1630, Savoy experienced a disastrous economic situation, due in particular to three scourges well known at the time: plague, famine and war.[6] Francis de Sales sought to hear the cry of the poor and needy, knowing well that there was not only an obligation to help them but that he needed to do so. He developed a "Salesian theology of poverty".[7]

The bishop's personal situation did not allow him to do as much as he would have liked on behalf of the needy. Like his predecessors, following the turmoil of the Reformation he had been deprived of his cathedral, his palace and his main resources and income. When he became bishop of the diocese of Geneva, "this wretched boat, all smashed and open inside" (L III 108), he did not inherit a fortune. The means at his disposal were not sufficient to materially support his clergy and found a seminary.

For a bishop, such as the bishop of Geneva, the problem of the poor was a fundamental and constant concern at a time when the needy had no right to any protection or security. Therefore, the most ordinary means of helping them was almsgiving. In his episcopal rule of life he had prescribed for himself the duty to give alms, and more consistently in winter than in summer.

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6 For this period see R. Devos – B. Grosperri, *La Savoie de la Réforme à la Révolution française*, Rennes, Ouest-France, 1985.

7 Cf. G. Pochat, *François de Sales et la pauvreté*, Paris, S.O.S., 1988, 69.

In certain circumstances, Bishop Francis was ready to go beyond convenience. In 1622, during a stay in Turin, he learned of the distress of the inhabitants of Annecy, laid low by the occupation of French troops and the wheat famine that year. On leaving the court, he had firmly decided that as soon as he arrived in his diocese he would sell his mitre, cross, vestments, crockery and everything else he owned to relieve the population.[8]

Solidarity with the poor manifests itself in many ways. Francis de Sales became the spokesman for those who had nothing. Following the misery caused by a natural catastrophe, he wrote to the Duke to ask him to abolish the tax, because "this misfortune has deprived them of a very large part of their goods, so that from being miserable they have become misery personified" (L5 103). In the *Introduction* he also recommends all useful work in the service of one's neighbour: serving the sick, helping the poor, gathering up lost and misguided souls and promoting peace and harmony among people.

There are various ways and degrees in the practice of charity. Lending to the poor, outside of dire need, is the first degree of the counsel to give alms; a higher degree is to give simply; higher still to give everything; and finally, even higher still, to give of one's self, dedicating oneself to the service of the poor. He also taught that when we make ourselves servants of the poor, they become our masters. St Vincent de Paul, a great admirer of the charity and kindness of Bishop Francis, would remember this recommendation.

The ideal to be fixed in the mind is equality and the sharing of goods. Thomas More had dreamed of a country where people would live without "yours" and "mine". For Francis de Sales, such an ideal had to be put into practice in the Visitation monasteries: "If someone wants to have yours and mine," he told them frankly, "you should go and give it to them outside the house, because inside there is no question of it" (E 121f).

The great Salesian principle that love makes lovers equal should be applied in a special way to the case of poverty and the poor.

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8 According to C.-A. De Sales, *Histoire du Bien-heureux François de Sales*, t. II, 234.

11. REST AND LEISURE TIME

Life is not just about work and serious occupations. It is also punctuated by moments of rest, relaxation and recreation. For a person interested in formation and education like Francis de Sales, this dimension of human life could only but draw his attention. Of course, his approach to this issue is primarily ethical: he is not interested in relaxation and play *per se*; one does not find him reflecting on the educational value of this or that game or amusement. He is concerned rather with defining the conditions that make amusements necessary, useful, good, indifferent or harmful as the case may be. However, he also shows his humanism on this subject, thanks to his openness of spirit and heart to everything human and, in particular, to what interests youth.

The chapter of the *Introduction* dedicated to pastimes and recreation offers a certain number of activities common at the time that were thought to be both allowed and praiseworthy:

> Walking, harmless games, music, instrumental or vocal, field sports, etc., are such entirely lawful recreations that they need no rules beyond those of ordinary discretion, which keep every thing within due limits of time, place, and degree (D3 31).

Fresh air, walking, hunting

The list begins with walking, a kind of relaxation that involves two activities that go hand in hand: fresh air and walking, two aspects of the same relaxing activity.

Getting fresh air is being like the bird that rises and flies away with outstretched wings, while the traveller uses their feet. At first glance, what the author says about the necessity of well-done recreation can be referred to walking, because it has the double advantage of relaxing the spirit and the body at the same time.

To give walking its proper place, time and measure means that such activity comes after the serious occupations that are part of everyone's duties. The time to be devoted to it obviously depends on what is necessary and advisable for each person. As for the place, it is pleasant to go for a walk and reach a delightful garden, where, once we have arrived, we do not stop walking or moving about. We no longer need to reach it but walk in it and spend time there. At the end of the walk, no one likes to leave without first picking some flowers, smelling them and keeping them for the whole day. The walk is a moment of freedom for the spirit, so it would be wrong for anyone to spend it doing something inappropriate.

When Francis de Sales received his guest, Bishop Jean-Pierre Camus, he liked to entertain him after the work of preaching was over: he would take him for a boat ride on the beautiful lake that laps against the walls of Annecy, or in the gardens that stretch along its enchanting shores. And when Francis went to visit him at Belley, he did not refuse similar amusements that the bishop there invited him to enjoy.[1]

Walking can be a good remedy in cases of business overload. When overwork caused him discomfort, his doctor advised him to take a breath of fresh air, to spend some time walking in order to get rid of the bad moods he had accumulated and which made him feel heavy. Very obedient to the doctor, the bishop went for a walk "in a large garden".[2]

As for hunting, Francis de Sales' interest in this activity, practised mainly by the nobility, is clear. Restrictions in this respect only concerned clergymen, who were not allowed to hunt with dogs or blunderbusses. In 1610, he wrote to his publisher in Lyon inviting him to send him two

1 J.-P. Camus, *L'Esprit du bienheureux François de Sales,* partie IV, section 26.

2 J.-P. Camus, *L'Esprit du bienheureux François de Sales,* partie IV, section 27

books, one on the art of hunting and the other on hunting with a falcon.[3] Although he was not a hunting bishop, despite the slanderous comments of the Genevans, he probably wanted to use this knowledge to enrich his collections of examples and similes.

He admired the hunter's skill to the point of proposing it as a model to those who seek genuine and ardent zeal. Indeed, the hunter is diligent, accurate, active, dynamic and very attached to the quest, but without anger, without rage, without being upset.The hunter's sense of smell is also a guarantee of success: when hunting for deer the hunter lurks near a spring from which they usually drink in order to capture them as soon as the icy water has made them cold.

Hunting with a falcon allows him to make curious observations. When the falconer removes the hood from this predatory bird, having sighted its prey it immediately launches itself into the air and, if it is held back by the string (called a jess), it struggles vigorously while being held. It is also astonishing to see how the birds return to the fist, allow themselves to be blindfolded and tied to the perch. Careless and boastful pigeons often fall victim to these birds of prey.

Sometimes it was necessary to defend farmers against damage caused by hunting. A hunter's first duty is not to harm others. It is unreasonable to amuse oneself at the expense of others, especially by oppressing the poor peasant who has already suffered enough, and whose work and circumstances should not be despised.

Games of skill

In Francis de Sales' time, common games of skill were court tennis, football, pall mall, ring race.

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3 The first book was *La vénerie,* by Jacques Du Fouilloux, and the second by Charles d'Esparron on *La fauconnerie.* Cf. L4 384 (note 2 and 3).

Court tennis is the forerunner of today' tennis: a ball was hit from one side to the other over a rope with the palm of the hand or with a racket. In France, by the end of the 16th century, it had become a true national game, and in Paris alone there were two hundred and fifty courts.[4] The first game of court tennis in Annecy was set up on a terrace beneath the castle walls.[5] As in modern-day tennis, spectators cheered for one or other of the players. The passion for the game must have been strong if it prompted this warning: playing the game for a long time does not mean resting the body, but exhausting it.

The game of football helped him one day to describe contempt for honours: "Who is the one who is best honoured at football? The one who throws it the furthest" (III 159).

Pall mall, which later evolved into games like cricket, croquet, was played with a kind of wooden mallet and a small wooden ball.

For the ring race, a person ran with a series of rings on a stick they were holding.[6] This game demanded great concentration, leading him to say: "Ring racers are not thinking about the public watching at all, but about running a good race to win" (O5 242). Here, too, a shrewd moral lesson is not lacking. He was also familiar with target shooting, which would provide him with the opportunity to offer a nice insight into shooting accuracy. If we cannot always reach the white dot in the centre of the target, we will strive to at least reach the circle around it.

All these games, which involve using a lot of energy, are particularly suitable for young people. Francis de Sales recommends them to a young person by adding horse riding to them: "Train in pastimes requiring strength, such as riding, jumping and other similar games." (L11 7).

Those who play do so for their own pleasure and also to please others. But care must be taken to ensure that gambling does not turn into an

4 See G. Mialaret – J. Vial (Ed.), *Histoire mondiale de l'éducation*, t. II: De 1515 à 1815, 190.

5 Cf. M. Velay, *La vie quotidienne à Annecy au 17e siècle*, 285.

6 Cf. R. Alleau (Ed.), *Dictionnaire des jeux*, Paris, C. Tchou, 1964.

addiction from which one can no longer free oneself. Our affections are so precious, he said, that we must not allow them to become entangled in useless things, such as games and certain recreations to which we risk attaching too much importance.

Dancing and balls

Dealing with dancing and balls in two chapters of the *Introduction*, Francis de Sales does not speak of their physical or aesthetic value, except to say that these exercises cause those who do them to sweat. It is the social and moral dimension that urges him on. It has to be said that his approach to the question aroused astonishment. For a Protestant like Lambert Daneau, author of a *Treatise on Dances*, everything about dancing is bad: its origins are vicious, its form inconvenient, its purpose evil. He logically advocates its complete abolition and asks Christians to move away from groups where people dance, without worrying about the effect it has on their environment.[7]

Unlike many preachers and moralists of his time, the Bishop of Geneva did not condemn dancing and balls as such. His fundamental thesis consists in stating that, in itself, dancing and balls are indifferent. This assertion provoked the indignant reactions of certain censors who had forgotten that he was writing for people living in the world or at court.

In fact, dances and balls are indifferent things from a moral point of view, but according to the ordinary way in which they are practised they can be dangerous. First of all, they take place at night, and it is known that nocturnal gatherings generally lead to vices: quarrels, envy, mockery, amorous follies. Added to this is that people who are up all night are not up early the following day!

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7 See Lambert Daneau's position in R. Murphy, *Saint François de Sales et la civilité chrétienne*, 182.

This said, we can dance for recreation but not for passion, for a short time and not so long that we become dizzy. What is more, positive reasons for dancing can be presented when we do it out of "condescension", in other words, out of good manners, because condescension, an offshoot of charity, makes indifferent things good and risky things lawful. Francis de Sales said he was consoled after reading in a life of St Elizabeth of Hungary that she sometimes played and danced, being in company to pass the time. The general conclusion remains cautious, but open: "So dance but little, and that rarely, my daughter, lest you run the risk of growing over fond of the amusement" (D3 33).

Society games

Chess and board games are part of the group of amusements that are good and honest of themselves. However, the game of chess could turn into a passion that is difficult to moderate over time: after playing for five or six hours, one comes out dead-tired and empty-headed.

Games of chance with dice or cards, where someone plays for money and sometimes commits large sums, are frankly not recommended. These games, in which the winnings depend mainly on chance, are not only dangerous amusements, like dancing, but also directly and by their nature evil and reprehensible. According to a witness, Francis de Sales never wanted to allow any games in his lodgings except draughts and chess, but he never wanted to hear about cards and dice.

In the chapter in the *Introduction* on forbidden games, Francis has taken the trouble to set out three reasons against games of chance. Firstly, in these games one does not win by reason, but by dint of fate, which very often rewards those who deserve nothing at all. Secondly, they are not really games but rather violent occupations which keep the spirit all concentrated and constantly so to the point of being tense and agitated by restlessness, fears and perpetual anxieties. Lastly, the joy of the victor is the joy of one

alone, since it is gained at the expense and to the displeasure of the other players.

Passion for games can lead the player to total ruin. For all these reasons Francis de Sales warns a young man about to set out into the big wide world of the risk of games: "I fear that you will return to gambling; and I fear it, because it would be a great evil. In a few days, gambling would bring dissipation into your heart and wither all the flowers of your good desires. Gaming is the occupation of idlers" (L4 379).

But as always for Francis de Sales there is an exception: one can play a game of chance to please someone else. Gambling, which would otherwise be reprehensible, is no longer reprehensible if we sometimes do it out of righteous indulgence.

Cultural amusements

After games and dancing, the author of the *Introduction* lists a number of activities as recreation and amusement, such as comedies, a term that applied to any theatrical event at the time, playing the lute or some other instrument, and singing. Music and singing are meant to delight the ear.

Music is a source of pleasure but the pleasure is greater or lesser depending on how delicate the ears are. Francis de Sales certainly observed the lute player plucking all the strings: finding those that are out of tune, he tunes them, tightening or loosening them. The harmonious sound of the lute is astonishing because it results from the combination of very distant sounds, such as high and low, but with the tuning of these two strings, the harmony of the lute is truly pleasing.

Singing demands some effort, but singing is uplifting. The pilgrim who goes on happily singing while travelling is actually adding the effort of singing to the effort of walking, but despite the increase in fatigue, it encourages and alleviates the effort of the journey. However, it is not advisable to exaggerate as singers do who sing themselves hoarse rehearsing

a motet. Among music masters it is not the one who sings well who is considered the best, but the one who conducts better. The music maestro who sings well but beats the time badly is making a mistake. One cannot imagine a festival without the pleasure of singing.

There are still other means of relaxation, such as reading and even writing. One reads or writes not only to instruct oneself or others, but also for recreation. To a nun, tempted by sadness and despondency, Francis de Sales recommended reading some good book she liked best, or singing some pious melody.

There is also pleasure in writing, and in the *Treatise*, Francis willingly confessed this to his reader. Given the many occupations his situation entailed, he always had some writing project which he thought about when he could, and this gave relief and rest to his spirit.

Feasts, banquets, dressing up

While Protestants had suppressed many of the feast days, Catholics continued to celebrate many of them, especially of Our Lady and the Saints. For a Christian, Sundays and feast days are different days to the other ones, therefore in general people dressed better for them. Other than religious celebrations ordered by the Church or recommended by it, there were also civil celebrations such as the arrival of a prince. The Bishop of Geneva was also feted during his pastoral visits; entering a city late one night the inhabitants had prepared so many lights and festivities that everything was illuminated.

On feast days, people hold banquets and dress up with great pomp. Now, banquets and pomp are among the things that Francis de Sales placed among those that are in essence not bad but indifferent. Everything depends on the use made of them. Judith put on her festive clothes, the Bible says, because God wanted her to put on all her finery. Preparing a good meal is a demonstration of friendship. As carnival approached, the

young Provost of Sales reminded his great friend Antoine Favre of "the habit of providing oneself with some honest amusement, inviting oneself to gracious banquets and even taking some chores away from ordinary work" (L1 43).

Just the same we must not go to extremes. Those who taste every course and eat a little of everything at feasts seriously ruin their stomachs, causing such severe indigestion that they can't sleep all night, being unable to do anything but vomit. Weddings are great occasions for feasting and rejoicing, but it is not uncommon, said the bishop, for people to indulge in a thousand pastimes, banquets and gossip.

Happy and friendly conversations

Finally, among the most common and pleasant pastimes in human society are family and friendly conversations, happy and friendly chats. The subjects they deal with can be diverse. According to Camus, the Bishop of Geneva did not disdain to talk to his friends about building, painting, music, hunting, birds, plants, gardens and flowers. Between the two extremes of babbling and silence there is a space for conversation, the main qualities of which must be warmth and good humour. Three faults destroy them: swearing, backbiting and mocking someone.

Following Aristotle and St Thomas, Francis de Sales praises *eutrapelia*, a Greek word referring to pleasant conversation. A good conversation is one that takes place with face and words shining with joy, gaiety and courtesy. Therefore Philothea should avoid laughter and stupid and insolent merriment such as sounding off on someone, slandering another, prodding a third party, hurting someone who is a bit simple.

Joy should not be reduced to mere private sentiment. In some way it is also a social duty. Francis de Sales' letters to his correspondents are filled with advice of this kind: keep the holy and hearty joy that nourishes the strength of your spirit and edifies your neighbour; keep a holy joy of spirit,

which, spread modestly across your actions and words, will gladden those who love you. We should keep our neighbour happy, wrote the bishop to one of his correspondents, and serve God with joy, because "God is the God of joy" (L3 16). It is therefore possible to joke and jest, much to the annoyance of the Avignon monk who had publicly mocked him for writing in the *Introduction* that jokes can be told during recreation.

If the words are clean, civilised and honest, what is wrong with that? Francis de Sales often recommended joy, even to the Visitation Sisters who might be tempted to neglect recreation. "Let them not participate in recreation with sad and sour attitudes," he recommended, "but with gracious and cheerful faces" (O4 150).

Salesian humour

Following the editors of Francis de Sales' letters, we can pick up some traits of Salesian humour.[8] Finding himself short of news, he replied to a curious friend who asked him about it: "All our news boils down to this, we have none at all" (L5 201). A thousand questions were raised about the mysterious departure of an important personage: "As for me," he said, "since I have neither the benefit of prophecy nor the evil of curiosity, I let him go and wished him a good journey and happiness" (L11 114).

Observing the little quirks we all have lends itself well to some witty banter. He tossed this gently teasing dig at one of his spiritual daughters who was a little presumptuous and self-sufficient: "I am very happy that my books have found their way into your mind, which is so good that it thinks it is self-sufficient" (L7 389). Could certain women from Chambéry be allowed to enter the monastery to see the new congregation? "I have told them yes, as long as they do not wear their long train. They are very

8 See observations and citations in *Saint François de Sales étudié dans ses lettres,* L11 cxxxvi-cxxxxvii.

good women, except for their vanity" (L6 249). The irony is very subtle in the following passage from a sermon in which he makes fun of the false politeness shown in listening to the preacher: "When you are invited to lunch, you take things for yourself, but here you are extremely polite, because you never stop giving to others" (S1 136). The countless images and comparisons drawn in particular from animals often make one smile, because the bishop refers not only to noble animals like the lion or graceful ones like doves, but also to monkeys, chickens, frogs, chameleons and crocodiles.

Humour is the salt of conversation and one of the surest ways to communicate with others. The Bishop of Geneva had a taste for puns and word play. He told a friend who had invited him to stay with him that he could not: "As for accommodation, I will have to stay in the *fureria* (the orderly room in a military barracks) that the king's *furiere* (yeoman or paymaster) *mi fornirà* (will provide)" (L8 304). Even in the most serious teachings he uses repetition, assonance, and combinations of words that invite a smile. Speaking of gentleness with oneself, he gently mocks those who "fall into the error of being angry because they have been angry, vexed because they have given way to vexation, thus keeping up a chronic state of irritation" (D3 9). Regarding certain illusions that some people have about the well kept secrets in women's monasteries, we find this pleasant remark: "There is no secret that does not pass secretly from one to another"(E 230).

When he learned that his brother Jean-François would be his coadjutor and would soon relieve him of the burden of the diocese, he exclaimed, "This is worth more than a cardinal's hat" (L9 194). This brother, with his impetuous and impatient character, would test his patience several times, to the point that one day he would say: "I think, my brother, that there is a very lucky woman. Guess who she is... This very lucky woman is the one you didn't marry."[9] Another time he compared the three Sales brothers to three

9 Cf. A. Ravier, *Un sage et un saint, François de Sales*, Paris, Nouvelle Cité, 4 1985, 224.

ingredients for making a good salad: "Each of us three will prepare what is necessary for a good salad: Jean-François will prepare some good vinegar because he is very strong; Louis will prepare the salt, because he is wise; and poor François is a good worker who will make the oil, so much does he appreciate gentleness."[10] Blessed is the one who can laugh at himself!

10 According to a testimony quoted in M. (A.J.M.) Hamon, *Vie de Saint François de Sales, évêque et prince de Genève*, Paris, Gabalda, 1920, 30.

12. THE IDEAL OF THE GOOD CITIZEN

Valiant, obedient, good citizen and magnanimous – for Francis de Sales these were some of the qualities of someone who cares for the public good.

To be a good citizen, one must love the common good and the country. Even if, under the *ancien régime*, the word "citizen" referred only to the inhabitant of a city, we can see that the expression "good citizen" already designated someone concerned about the good of society and their country.

Loving and serving your country

The good citizen loves their country and prefers it wholeheartedly to all the others.

This does not necessarily mean regarding it to be superior to others. In marriage a wife should prefer her husband to any other, not in terms of honour but in terms of affection. Every sailor prefers the boat he is sailing on, even if others are richer and better equipped.

Francis de Sales loved Annecy, "my poor little shell," he said, "which is dearer to me than all the palaces of the great princes" (L6 2), while still admiring Chambéry, "a model for the whole of Savoy" (S2 95). His attachment to his family, his country, his friends and his flock turned into nostalgia when he was far away from them. Thus in 1618, at the beginning of his final stay in Paris, he wrote to an acquaintance of his: "I will be here until Easter, and believe me, my dearest daughter, I will gladly stay because it is my duty, but I would much rather be among my own small matters and in my own country" (L8 319).

The love of one's country was confused at the time with obedience to the prince and service to him.[1] A subject of the Duke of Savoy,[2] Francis de Sales did not question the system of the *ancien régime*, which was that of his time. Like the majority of his countrymen, he believed that the best way to administer public affairs was monarchical, whereas Calvin in Geneva preferred an aristocratic or even democratic system.

Learning loyalty to the sovereign and service to the state was part of his education. Having obtained the admission of one of his nephews as a page at the court in Turin, he believed that this favour would enable the boy, from an early age, to learn the first elements of the service to which he was obliged by birth for the rest of his life.

Therefore, Francis de Sales extolled obedience as the first of the civic virtues, undoubtedly because he considered it to be a moral virtue dependent on justice. He recommended it to Philothea: "You are likewise bound to obey your civil superiors, king and magistrates" (D3 11).

The Bishop of Geneva showed his service to his country until the end of his life. In obedience to the Duke of Savoy, despite his poor health he undertook his last journey to Avignon and then to Lyon, where he died.

Overcoming certain social barriers

The society in which Francis de Sales lived was made up of diverse, unequal strata separated from each other by barriers. There were the clergy, the nobility, the magistrates, the military and the common people or third state. When something went wrong, each cast the blame on the others: the people accused the nobility, the nobility blamed the ministers of justice,

1 For a history of Savoy, see P. Guichonnet (Ed.), *Nouvelle histoire de la Savoie*, Toulouse, Éditions Privat, 1996.

2 For a history of the Dukes of Savoy, see J. Lovie, *Les ducs de Savoie (1416–1713)*, "L'histoire en Savoie" 67 (réédition 1998).

the latter denounced the soldiers, the soldiers blamed the captains, and the captains spoke ill of the princes. Some cried out that all evil comes from the people not being sufficiently reformed. The preacher's conclusion was obvious: everyone should examine their own conscience and take responsibility (cf. S1 23s).

Speaking of the nobility, whom he knew well, Francis de Sales noted that its great evil was the exaggerated attachment to a sense of honour, which he vigorously denounced in his sermons. In our times, he said, if you ask a gentleman: who are you? O God! one must be careful not to offend honour; there is the risk of having to fight a duel. It was necessary to point out where you came from, what lineage, and to pull out your licence of nobility. Nonsense and folly! If you go and tell a gentleman that he is a man, he will be offended and will answer: "How can I, a lord, elevated to such dignity and greatness, who am a prince, a count, be called a man!" (S3 108).

Women, too, also needed to be invited to come down a little from their haughty state: "Every day you will make an act of humility," he wrote to one of them, "by wishing good morning or good evening to one of your servants or maidservants with an inward act by which you will recognise his or her person as your companion" (L10 133).

As for the judges with their long robes, they needed knowledge of law, fairness and sincere truth. They had to defeat three enemies: human respect, fear of others and attachment to self-interest.

While the division of citizens is an evil that can lead to the worst, there is strength in unity, as the saying goes. When there were disagreements and differences of opinion, the bishop firmly reminded people of the urgent need to overcome them, reminding them that unity and minds in agreement are necessary for any good endeavour. In some cases, the common good demands that certain people renounce their personal opinions and decide to "secure once more the general consent, in order to oppose it to the judgement of private individuals" (L3 129).

The privileged by virtue of birth and function needed, in certain cases, to be able to renounce their rights. This is what the Prince-Bishop of Geneva did in one of his estates, where his subjects were obliged to silence the frogs

in the neighbouring ponds while the bishop slept. He said humorously: "Let the frogs croak as much as they like: if I am sleepy, I will not fail to sleep for that reason, as long as the toads do not bite me" (L3 301).

When justice is wronged

What especially characterises the good citizen is a sense of justice. Unfortunately, there was no shortage of opportunities to denounce injustice. Driven by his eagerness as a young preacher, one day he took up each of the categories of swindlers in turn: The artisan who sells his products at a higher price; the brawler who initiates a lawsuit that ruins both parties, just for a mere trifle; the judge who drags his feet; the usurer who justifies himself badly; the priests who secure dispensations to serve two masters; and the women who are pleased to be courted, saying that they are not doing anything contrary to their honour. Besides, buyers and sellers ordinarily become thieves if they do not watch their consciences carefully.

In specific and particular cases of injustice, the bishop made it his duty to intervene directly with the competent authorities to defend the rights of people under threat. In fact, it is not enough to be willing not to disregard the innocent, he wrote. It is necessary to get on their side and defend their cause.

The Duke of Nemours, a suspicious, turbulent and restless man, had listened to slanderers and persecuted the accused without giving them a hearing. The bishop raised his voice to give him a lesson on justice in how to conduct affairs. With his frank way of speaking he reminded him that no word that causes harm to one's neighbour is to be believed before it has been proved, and it cannot be proved except by examination after both sides have been heard. His final words were strong ones, for he added: "Whoever speaks to you otherwise, Monseigneur, betrays your soul" (L6 319).

In times of hunger, he resented the women who killed rams to feed a small, cowardly, lazy dog. During armed conflicts he called for exemption from the burden of war for his poor good people.

The law of the gospel excludes all kinds of war, the bishop recalled, but war was allowed according to him because of human malice: one can repel force with force. But what is worse is the people who take advantage of it and get rich and fat because of it.

Naturally, there is no ideal city on earth, but that is no reason not to work towards making it a little less unworthy of such a model. Justice and peace are the goods that civil society and the "Christian republic" demand. There are many cases in which "one must yield to the needs of one's neighbour" (L3 264).

Francis de Sales "the European"

The education of the good citizen from a humanist perspective cannot be limited to one's own small area. One of its tasks is to cultivate a more universal sense. Although his trips abroad were very limited, Francis de Sales' readings and aspirations took him beyond the frontiers of Savoy.

First of all, the Bishop of Geneva felt connected to events in Europe. Nearby France, where he had studied as a young man and made two important journeys, attracted and preoccupied him, especially for religious reasons. His contacts with Italy had been continuous since his studies in Padua: travel and correspondence in Turin with the Duke and the Apostolic Nuncio, travel to Milan to venerate the tomb of St Charles Borromeo and to solicit the help of the Barnabites for his college, travel to Rome when Clement VIII appointed him coadjutor bishop, and correspondence with Paul V who consulted him. As a prince of the Holy Empire, theoretically a vassal of the emperor, he wrote to Rudolph II to apologise for not being able to attend the diet that was to be held in Regensburg. Spain was very much in his mind, not only through its great theologians and spiritual authors, but also through the presence of Spanish troops at Annecy. A contemporary of Shakespeare, he showed a great and aching love for England, whose conversion he hoped for.

His greatest suffering was to see Europe torn apart by religious wars.[3] At a time when the King of France, Henry IV, was still a Protestant, he had written these lines filled with pain in his legal notebooks:

> The Italian and German princes are enlisting troops for war; the English, Spanish, and French, having already drawn their swords, are disturbing sky and earth with groans and blood; the kingdoms of Scotland, England and Denmark are plunged into the horrible abyss of heresy, as are those of Poland, Hungary, and Bohemia; and what surpasses all sorrow is to have to contemplate, with tears in one's eyes, the crown of France, formerly very Christian, now ready to rest on the head of a heretic, or rather on the crest of a deplorable disaster (O1 73ff).

Returning from a trip to Sion in the Valais, he was struck by the almost hopeless state of division into which Christianity had sunk. He prepared a "Memorandum for the conversion of heretics", in which he ruled out the use of external weapons in favour of internal ones. In order to facilitate unity, the Church had to overcome one of its greatest obstacles, leaving ecclesiastical goods, all or a large part of them, to those who had taken them over.

Loving one's country does not entitle one to despise other countries. In the *Introduction* he warns against a habit whereby everyone feels free to judge and criticise princes and speak ill of whole nations, independent on where one's sympathies lie.[4]

A practical way of opening up to a more universal perspective is learning languages. Francis de Sales admired Mithridates, king of Pontus, who, according to Pliny, knew twenty-two languages. In his funeral address for the Duke of Mercœur, he praised this great man for being an expert in

3 Cf. L. Terreaux, *Saint François de Sales et l'Europe, in La Savoie dans l'Europe,* "Mémoires et documents de l'Académie de la Val d'Isère" 37 (2002) 211-224.

4 According to a testimony cited by É. -J. Lajeunie, *Saint François de Sales. L'homme, la pensée, l'action*, t. II, 203.

eloquence and having the grace to express himself perfectly, not only in French, but also in German, Italian and Spanish.

Citizen of the world

The discovery of unknown lands in America (the West Indies), in Asia (the East Indies) and in Africa fed a thirst for knowledge that could now span all places on earth, in the ancient and new worlds. Francis de Sales was interested in these great currents of information and exchange. He read *The History of the East Indies* by Jesuit Fr Maffei; the *Letters from Japan and China* by another Jesuit, Fr Almeida; the *General History of the West Indies*, by López de Gómara; and the *Dies caniculares* by Majoli, a collection of natural phenomena and curious events in Europe, Asia and Africa.

He knew of the great Portuguese navigators: Bartholomew Dias, who gave his name to the Cape of Good Hope; the valiant Captain Albuquerque who fortified Goa, the main city of the East Indies; the discoverer of Brazil, Pedro Álvares Cabral, who erected a very tall cross there from which the huge country for many years took its name, the land of the *vera Cruz*, until the people called it Brazil from the name of a Brazilian wood used for dyeing.

In his *Defence of the Standard of the Holy Cross* he recounts the wonderful events that accompanied the arrival of Christianity abroad: the appearance of a cross in Albuquerque's time in one of the districts in India, the story of the miraculous cross of Meliapor in India, the devotion to the cross by inhabitants of Socotra (an island in the Etrirean Sea), appearances of the cross near Abyssinia and Japan, the appearance in the ancient kingdom of Congo of men marked with the sign of the cross, who were in the service of King Alphonse, and the construction of a temple to the Holy Cross in the town of Ambasse. He mentions Guinea, which in his time designated the whole coastal area of West Africa, washed by the present Gulf of Guinea.

Francis de Sales drew curious events from the letters of Jesuit missionaries, such as a certain animal in the Indies, which, despite being terrestrial in

nature, little by little and piece by piece loses its natural being and turns into a fish. In the *Introduction* he says that those who return from Peru bring with them not only gold and silver but also monkeys and parrots. He compares himself to geographers (then called cosmographers), "who only indicate cities in their world maps with dots and mountains with lines, leaving the rest to the imagination" (S1 408).

At least once the name of the new continent being explored appears under his pen, when he writes that "we know a little of the configuration of America and what concerns this country on the basis of the description given of it by those who have visited it" (S2 277).

How he would like to get to know the new Christians now converted to the faith, living in the Indies, Japan, and Maragnon in Brazil! For him, the hero of evangelisation is the great missionary Francis Xavier: at the hour of his death he found neither a home nor the food he needed to sustain himself, because he died near China, in a poor place, abandoned by all human help.

St Francis de Sales' universalist outlook became more and more apparent as he advanced in age and experience. Towards the end of his life, to show his perfect indifference to the journeys and missions that might await him outside Savoy, he made this unexpected declaration: "I no longer belong to this country, but to the world" (L9 311).

Part Three

OPENING TO TRANSCENDENCE

The alcyon (kingfisher), these fabulous birds mentioned by Pliny and Aristotle, make their nests like the palm of their hand, leaving only a small opening at the top. It is also said that mother-of-pearl opens in this way in order to receive the dew from above. So Philothea will have to keep her heart open up there at the top to receive the heavenly dew.

The concept of the human being involves a twofold openness to a reality that is superior to it: on the one hand, a certain natural capacity to discuss God and transcendent realities, and on the other, a readiness to receive a revelation that exceeds natural forces.

For Francis de Sales, Christian revelation is absolutely a free gift of the transcendent God, but this God who reveals himself is not foreign to the human being to the extent of appearing as someone who wants to impose himself from outside.

In fact, God has gifted the human being with the wondrous capacity for encountering him in the inner sanctuary, which Francis de Sales calls the "summit of our soul", the "highest point of our spirit" (T1 12), and "heart of my heart" and "soul of my soul" (O5 175).

There, in this mystical, hidden place, the relationship with God is established in the chiaroscuro of faith, through a simple glance of the intellect and a simple consent of the will.

The appreciation of the human being in the approach to the divine is outlined by Saint Francis de Sales in various forms: by stating a link between the human and the divine, in the positive image of God he proposes, in the proposal of civil devotion and everyday spirituality, and finally in the importance given to the practice of love of neighbour.

13. THE HUMAN AND THE DIVINE

The pagan philosophers were right when they said that man was an upside down tree: man's true roots, although born of the earth, are in heaven. Just as the tree that does not have enough earth to cover its roots cannot live, so too the human being who does not have a special concern for heavenly things. Francis de Sales' entire program consists in persuading human beings that it is up to them to implement this opening towards heaven.

But before showing us how we should proceed, he undertakes to convince us that openness to transcendence is not only possible, but also desirable and rewarding.

A question of happiness

"Man is created for happiness and happiness is made for man", says St Francis de Sales (S4 20). Following Aristotle, he sees in every person an aspiration to happiness, a movement tending towards this end.

This is a natural desire common to everyone. Francis himself experienced this when he confided to his spiritual daughters: "All men aspire to good and desire to be shown it; I am not of those who do not desire it, for I have discovered in myself a certain natural instinct which leads me and makes me strive for happiness" (S4 19). Unfortunately, humans are often mistaken about the means of achieving it: some seek it in riches, others in pleasures, still others in human glory. A first approach to happiness in this world is to be content with what one has since whoever is not happy will never be happy with anything. For their part the best pagans had discovered that happiness lies in love of wisdom and seeking the truth.

In reality, only the highest good can fully satisfy the human heart. Francis de Sales found no difficulty in identifying this supreme good with God to whom the human heart naturally tends.

He had learned from his philosophy teachers that "practical happiness" consists of possessing wisdom, honesty, goodness and pleasure, but that the "essential happiness" of the human being can only be "God and him alone" (O1 6).

As a disciple of St Thomas he therefore had faith in the ability of the intelligence and will, universal faculties that encompass all that is true and good. Since God is the most universal object there can be, since he is the fullness of goodness and truth, God is the object of these faculties, and he alone is able to satisfy them completely. At this point the famous phrase of St Augustine comes to mind: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."[1] True happiness is the union with God to which we tend.

We naturally tend towards this union, but we are incapable of achieving it by ourselves, because it is the object of a pure gift from God, who takes the initiative. Since it is destined for man without any merit on his part, this union can only be true happiness insofar as he possesses it, and since God has promised it to him, he is obliged to give it to him. Between the innate aspiration of the human person and God's plan to unite with us, a relationship is established that is destined to bear much fruit.

Reason and faith

Accepting a supreme good, which is God and his revelation, finds support in reason, that is, in human nature itself. Francis de Sales emphasised this

1 In the manuscript of his philosophy course in March 1586 he had copied this Latin phrase from St Augustine in large print: "FECISTI NOS – INQUIT – DOMINE, AD TE, ET INQUIETUM EST COR NOSTRUM DONEC REVERTATUR AD TE" (O1 7). It is also found in a sermon from 1594 (S1 189).

point all the more because it was disputed by the reformers and because his reasoning, based on philosophy, no longer reflected the tastes of some of his contemporaries. In his discussions with the Protestants he was pushed to exalt reason, whereas his opponents wanted to stick to the Bible alone.

For example, reason and faith, springing from the same source and being the work of the same author, cannot be contrary to each other; theology does not destroy the use of reason but presupposes it; it does not ruin it, though it does surpass it; the Gospel soars far above all the highest reasons of nature but never contradicts them, never spoils them, never disposes of them.

On the other hand, reason should not take pride in its clear and evident knowledge to the detriment of faith, which proceeds in darkness here on earth. The light of reason and the light of faith involve two different approaches to the truth which is unique and always the same. Reason and faith respect each other.

Consequently, far from rejecting the services of reason Francis de Sales wishes to use them in reference to divine realities. Human experience shows, moreover, that without the light of faith, human beings have been able to access great truths. How else can we explain that Cicero, like many others, freely recognised that there was a divinity and that a divinity different from this one could not create man nor rule and preserve this great universe? Reason is therefore capable of knowing God, as the pagans' own research shows.

Along with St Augustine and the great theologians, Francis de Sales exclaimed: "My soul, you are made for God, woe be to you if you stop short in anything short of Him!" (D5 10). In this capacity lies the nobility and excellence of the rational soul, endowed with intelligence and will, and a heart that is generous by nature. Thanks to his intelligence, he explained to Philothea, man not only knows the whole visible world, but also knows that there is a very high, excellent and ineffable God; thanks to his will, he can love God and cannot in himself hate him. As for the heart, it can only find peace in God, while "God will not suffer our hearts to find any rest... until it returns to God, whence it came" (D5 10). It is undoubtedly true that

faith enlightens human reason, making it know truths that it cannot reach by itself. Nevertheless, the great principle of Catholic theology, of which Francis de Sales is a convinced proponent, remains firm, namely that grace does not destroy nature, but embraces it, purifies it and elevates it.

Virtues of the pagans

What is said about reasoning also applies in the field of ethics.

The appreciation of natural reason also led Francis de Sales to appreciate the human virtues, to the point of writing that the moral virtues, even if they come from a sinful heart, belong to God.

According to him, one can find something good even in pagans, while the ministers of Geneva protested, saying that we have nothing to learn from pagans but must only instruct them.

By virtue of this principle, every virtuous work must be considered the work of the Lord, even if it is practised by an unbeliever. Comparing the combination of the natural and supernatural virtues to the mixing of water with wine, he pointed out that there is a difference: wine is better when it is not mixed, while in the case of the virtues, mixing them is better. Charity, which is the gift par excellence of the Holy Spirit, is a virtue that does not destroy and impoverish, but gives goodness, gives life and enriches all that is good in a person. Charity takes nothing away, but perfects everything: it is "a sun in the whole soul to enlighten it with its rays, in all the spiritual faculties to perfect them, in all the powers to moderate them, but in the will as on its throne, there to reside and to make it cherish and love its God above all things" (T2 22).

In accordance with the strictest principles of Tridentine education, good things can be found in pagan books as long as we use them with the necessary prudence. Since natural reason is a good tree planted by God in us, its fruits cannot but be good, even if they are very small and imperfectly placed next to the fruits of grace. Proof of this is the fact that God attaches

temporal rewards to the practice of these natural virtues. In the *Treatise* he cites St Augustine, who declared that God rewarded the virtue of the Romans by granting a magnificent reputation to their empire.

Affinity between God and man

The relationship between the human and the divine is explained by the fact that between man and God there is what Francis de Sales calls an "affinity" (T1 15), a kind of complicity, one might say. There is nothing strange about this, because we have been created in the image and likeness of God.

Francis distinguishes several kinds of affinity, beginning with resemblance. The human soul resembles God because it is spiritual, indivisible and immortal; it intends, wills freely, is capable of judging, discoursing, understanding and acquiring virtues. Moreover, the soul resides wholly in all of its body and in each of its parts, just as the divinity is wholly in everyone and in every part of the world.

The most wonderful resemblance is that man is made in the image and likeness of the divine Unity and Trinity. For just as God has made his thought known through his Son, who proceeds from him, and expresses his love, which proceeds from him and his Son, by the work of the Holy Spirit, so man knows with his intelligence, expresses himself with his speech and loves with his loving will. The three divine persons are distinct but inseparable; likewise the words and acts of the human person which proceed from the intelligence and will are truly distinct, although they remain inseparably united in the soul and faculties from which they proceed. In this way, everything is perfectly one, so that with his intellect and will man forms an image of the Trinity. In addition to this affinity through similarity, the author is especially interested in the unparalleled correspondence between God who gives and man who receives.

Indeed, God is powerfully inclined to exercise his goodness towards humanity, and humanity has an extreme need and a radical capacity to

receive the good that God wants to give it. Thus a sweet and desirable meeting takes place "between abundance and indigence" (T1 15). Such reciprocity occurs in the loving relationship of the bridegroom and the bride, as described in the *Song of Songs*, or in the person of the mother who rejoices in offering her milk to the infant, who rejoices in receiving it.

This affinity between God and man is continuously fed by what Francis de Sales calls our "natural inclination", which impels man towards God. Certainly, as a good theologian, he conveniently articulates the desire for the supernatural and its gratuitousness: on the one hand, the human heart tends towards God moved by natural inclination, while on the other the happiness it aspires to goes far beyond a simple natural joy.[2] However, he spends a lot of time showing the path from natural desire to its supernatural fulfilment. He insists on man's natural capacities that lead him towards the All, explaining that his intellect has "an infinite inclination ever to know more, and [its] will an insatiable appetite to love and find the good" (T1 15).

There is a mutual attraction between God and man, so much so that the voluntary rejection of God seemed unthinkable and unbelievable to Francis de Sales. Once one has tasted God's love, how is it possible to renounce its sweetness? The encounter of God and man open to transcendence is not a burden that God has imposed on human beings, but a pleasure to be shared.

Francis de Sales, a disciple of the Spanish theologian Francisco Toledo, who was never an advocate of the pure nature system, does not believe in a pure natural happiness independent of its supernatural end.

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2 Cf. J.-P. Wagner, *Saint François de Sales, analyste et narrateur de la convenance entre Dieu et l'homme*, in "Revue des Sciences Religieuses" 75 (2001) 238-240. Francis de Sales, a disciple of Spanish theologian Francisco Toledo, who was never an advocate of the system of pure nature, does not believe in a pure natural happiness independent of its supernatural end.

A pedagogy of faith

Starting from Francis de Sales' ideas on the relationship between the human and the divine, it is possible to imagine a pedagogy of faith. A number of ways present themselves.

The first starts from the spectacle of creation and goes back to the Creator. God, in fact, has left a trace of himself, his sign, his mark on all created things. The Bishop of Geneva was particularly attracted to this, as can be seen on almost every page of his works where images and examples taken from nature abound.

In order to reach God, he gladly followed the *via pulchritudinis*, the way of beauty. The beginning of the *Treatise* is a hymn to the beauty of human nature. In daily life, Francis de Sales' thoughts easily rose from the contemplation of beauty to the contemplation of uncreated Beauty.

He advises Philothea to often aspire to God, admiring "his beauty" (D2 13). "There is nothing as beautiful," he said, "as the soul made in the likeness of God".[3] No surprise, then, that there is talk of "Salesian hedonism".[4]

Another, more interior path, consists in showing that human beings harbour desires and aspirations that almost spontaneously lead them above himself. It is therefore necessary to plumb the depths of the human heart in order to discover the divine germs that God has deposited there. It is to this path that the author of the *Treatise* especially commits his reader. He follows a pedagogy that starts from man, his nature and his aspirations in order to reach the heights of union with God.

It is therefore the ascending and inductive path that Francis de Sales prefers. He wants to show human beings that in order to be true to themselves they must recognise the inner dynamism that inhabits them and directs them towards God. He makes them discover and interpret the natural inclination they have to love God above all things.

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3 J.-P. Camus, *L'Esprit du bienheureux François de Sales*, partie IV, section 26.

4 L. Cognet, *La spiritualité moderne*, t. I: *L'essor*: 1500–1650, Paris, Aubier, 1966, 294.

In this sense, it can be said that the first of the twelve books that make up the *Treatise on the Love of God* is nothing more than a philosophical preparation for accepting the transcendent gift of charity. It does not set out on the path of pure transcendence, which consists in showing a God who intervenes almost from without in the lives of human beings, revealing himself and establishing a unilateral covenant with full authority as creator and master of the universe. "God is the God of the human heart" (T1 15), writes Francis. Only God is able to fill the human heart, because it is made for the absolute.

As we can see, Francis de Sales seems unable to speak about the human being without speaking about God, nor of speaking about God without speaking about the human being.

Youth and God

Being open to transcendence and to knowing God as my supreme good, all this drives me to give myself to him and to serve him. This does not depend on age. The nephew and biographer of Francis de Sales, Charles-Auguste, recounts that, when he was very young, his uncle often said to his playmates: "Let us learn early on to serve God and pray to him, while he gives us the opportunity."[5]

Should we wait until we are older to give ourselves to God? Such a prospect is undoubtedly outside the bishop's view; he never ceases to tell those who have chosen his direction:

"Do not wish not to be what you are not, but wish to be very well what you are" (L3 291). So, if you are young, learn to serve God with a true heart and without waiting. This is what the Duke of Mercœur did, who, in spite of the allurements of youth, beauty and comfort kept his soul "pure and unscathed amidst so many attractions" (S1 417).

5 C.-A. De Sales, *Histoire du Bien-heureux François de Sales*, t. I, 8.

Devotion is valid for every age and especially for the young: It makes youth wiser and more lovable and old age less unbearable and boring. It is the best commitment one can make during the springtime of life. In this respect, the Bishop of Geneva imagines this little dialogue between a father and a son: "My son, why are you not devout?" "I will be in my old age." "Good God! Who knows if you will grow old?" (S2 40).

Youth possesses resources that are sometimes unsuspected. To see Isaac, in the springtime of his years, still an apprentice in the art of loving his God, offering himself to the sword and fire to be a holocaust of obedience to the divine goodness, is "a thing that passes all admiration" (T12 10). So did the young women who faced martyrdom in the prime of their lives, when they were "whiter than lilies in their purity, ruddier than the rose in their love, at every age, from childhood upward" (D5 12). According to him, he met a girl who from the age of nine to ten wanted to die "for the faith and for the holy Church" (L9 363).

Giving oneself to God when one is young is a particularly frequent theme in the conferences given by the founder of the Visitation to his spiritual daughters, some of whom were only fifteen or sixteen years old. He told them that youth who give themselves to God bring mutual happiness. In fact, God desires the time of youth, the most suitable time to put oneself at his service. The years of youth are the first fruits of age and God desires that they be consecrated to him. Youth is the morning of life and, if one had to choose between two types of flowers, roses and lilies, his preference would fall on the former, "because roses are more fragrant in the morning" (S3 385).

Speaking of those who have dedicated themselves to God from their youth and who have been persevering since then, Francis de Sales says that everything in them has been good: "the leaves, the flowers and the fruit, that is, their childhood, their youth and the rest of their lives" (S4 101).

14. AN IMAGE OF A POSITIVE GOD

The King of France, Henry IV, a great admirer of Francis de Sales' abilities and virtues, one day regretted the distorted image that his contemporaries had of God. Some said that God, in his goodness and greatness, did not care closely about the actions of human beings, while others believed that he was always ready to surprise them, waiting only for the hour when they had fallen into some slight fault to condemn them for eternity.[1] Was there no other choice between God the policeman and a distant and indifferent God?

Francis de Sales, for his part, was aware that he was offering a different image of God from the one that was widespread in his time. In one of his sermons, he compared himself to the Apostle Paul as he announced the unknown God to the Athenians. The God he wanted to talk about was not an unknown God, but a misunderstood God. "I will make known to you," he said, "I will have you discover the God who is so lovable that he died for us" (S3 267).

God is good

As a young student in Paris, Francis had experienced a terrible spiritual trial: he thought that God was inevitably sending him to hell. After overcoming this existential crisis, the conviction, both philosophical and theological, that God is good became ever stronger in his soul. As a student at Padua

1 According to the testimony of Antoine des Hayes in the first canonisation process for Francis de Sales (no. 51).

he resolved to meditate on the nature of this unique goodness of God, as a spiritual exercise:

> I will taste, if I can, this immense goodness, not in its effects, but in itself; I will drink this water of life, not in the vessels or ampoules of creatures, but at its source; I will taste how good this adorable majesty is in itself, good to itself, good for itself; indeed, how it is goodness itself and how it is all goodness, and goodness that is eternal, inexhaustible and incomprehensible (O1 36).

Among his contemporaries, there was no lack of those who maintained that God not only permits, but unleashes, wills and guides people's evil will; that Satan, the minister of his wrath, is the instrument God uses to drive human beings to sin; that if all of Adam's children have fallen into sin, it is due solely to the free choice of the divine will.

Impious statements, replied Francis de Sales, because they deprive God, who is infinitely good and great, of his immense goodness.

In reality, God wants all human beings to be saved, as Scripture says; the perdition of human beings depends only on their free choice.

It is true that everything that happens depends on the divine will, but when it comes to moral evil or sin, it must be said that God allows it, not wills it. Indeed, evil tainted with moral malice cannot come from God, who is good, indeed goodness personified.

Let not the justice of God be opposed to it, for the divine goodness makes use of mercy and justice: of the former to do good, and of the latter to punish and eradicate whatever prevents us from feeling the effects of the goodness of our God. Mercy makes us embrace good, justice makes us flee from evil. Our Lord's goodness is communicated by means of these two powers, inasmuch as he remains equally good, whether he uses one or the other.

No one is a stranger for this God: he knows each and every one of us "by name". He is the God of the human heart. The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob who revealed himself in the Old Testament, and manifested himself in the New Testament as an inner presence within

man. Philothea will therefore seal her solemn decision to serve God with this invocation of Trinitarian intonation: "O God, Thou art my God, the God of my heart, my soul, and spirit" (D1 20).

This is the source of what has come to be known as Salesian "optimism", a synonym for joyful trust in human beings and in God. Joy, besides being a fruit of the Holy Spirit, also becomes a way of life. Francis de Sales could rightly be credited with the saying: a sorry saint is a sad saint.[2]

Providence

Rather than speaking of predestination, a difficult subject that can become distressing, Francis de Sales prefers to speak of God's providence, to which he devotes five chapters of his *Treatise on the Love of God*. Providence is shown to all creatures and especially towards human beings, be they pagan, heretic or other. Therefore we must pray for all, "for the Turks, the Moors, the foreigners, the pagans and other similar peoples" (O5 383).

In the natural order, the most accessible to all, Providence has ordered all things for our benefit; it has produced all animals and plants for us. Moreover, God created the elements, the heavens and the stars, ordering all creatures to serve one another.

Apart from this, Providence is admirable because it knows how to draw good from evil. In fact, it allows evil in view of a hidden plan, as is shown by the story of Joseph, sold by his brothers to get rid of him: when he became viceroy of Egypt, he would be able to save his own family. What appeared in the eyes of the brothers to be a chance event was in reality a

2 On the topic of optimism and joy, see M. Müller, *La joie dans l'amour de Dieu*, Paris, Aubier, 1935, 67-77; W. Marceau, *L'optimisme dans l'œuvre de saint François de Sales*, Paris, Lethielleux, 1973; E. McDonnell, *God desires you. St Francis de Sales on living the Gospel*, Dublin, The Columba Press, 2001, 109-116. On the foundations of optimism see especially É.-J. Lajeunie, *Saint François de Sales. L'homme, la pensée, l'action*, t. I, 147-156.

plan of Providence. Chance only exists for us, not for God. There are certain apparently fortuitous cases and unsuspected accidents, but God foresees them and orders them for the benefit of the common good of the universe.

If natural Providence is admirable, supernatural Providence is even more so. Providence foresaw the Incarnation from eternity and brought it about in the desired time. Not only was sin unable to hinder God's plan, but rather, by way of a counterstroke, it brought about abundant, overflowing and overwhelming redemption. One can hardly be more optimistic.

Trust in Providence has a positive effect on our engagement in the events of this world. It eases the anxieties caused by ambition when we leave the initiative to God. Francis de Sales, already considered for the archdiocese of Paris, would not take any step in this direction saying: "I am, I will be and I intend always to be at the disposal of God's providence, and I do not intend to reserve any rank for my will other than that of following it" (L9 76).

However, the Bishop of Geneva does not fall into an inactive and blissful hope in Providence. Faith in Providence not only does not dispense someone from action, it rather requires it, because it counts on us to implement its plans. We must "work in quiet co-operation" with it (D3 10).

A God who draws us to himself, respecting our freedom

Grace, the name by which theologians designate the sovereign action of the God of goodness, never works without our consent. It acts with force, not to compel but to draw the heart, not to violate but to make our freedom loving. Francis de Sales frequently returns to this theme, declaring in other words that no one can overcome the freedom of the human will; God himself, who created it, "does not want in any way to force or violate it" (S3 300).

God's benevolent initiative with regard to human beings manifests itself in many ways and there are many terms to describe it with. Francis de Sales often describes it as an attraction, because God draws us to himself; sometimes as a vocation or an appeal; as a "prevenient" action, because he

always anticipates us; as the voice of a friend; as an illumination, similar to that of the sun in the morning; as an inspiration or an invitation. God does not impose himself: he knocks on our door and waits for us to open it.

When this God draws us to himself, he does so in a way that is most in keeping with our nature, i.e. not with chains of iron, as is done with bulls and buffaloes, but "with the cords of Adam", or human bonds that are proportionate and "adapted to the human heart" (T2 12). God attracts like the perfumes of which the *Song of Songs* speaks. He is this desirable, attractive friend to whom the woman in love can say: "though I follow thee, it is not that thou trailest me but that thou enticest me; thy drawing is mighty, but not violent, since its whole force lies in its sweetness" (T2 13).

What is most astonishing is that God, while supremely hating sin, so respects the freedom of the human being that he very wisely allows it to act. He lets the reasonable creature act according to his or her own nature, and makes the good more commendable in that, although they may violate the commandments, they do not do so.

Now this love of God, by which he draws us to himself, is by no means the rival of human love for creatures; the all-embracing aspect that characterises it excludes totalitarianism. We can be all of God while being all of our father, our mother, our children, our friends, our country. No love ever turns our heart away from God except that which is contrary to him. If mysticism can be defined as exclusive love for God, for the Salesian mystic this love, far from excluding love for others, rather demands it.[3]

Human beings are God's cooperators

This God respects the human beings capacity for initiative. He draws them to himself, and this is why they become his cooperators. Making his own a

3 Cf. F. Vincent, *Saint François de Sales, directeur d'âmes. L'éducation de la volonté*, 264 (nota 1).

sentence of St Augustine on the subject of salvation, Francis de Sales says that God could very well create us immediately in paradise, but our nature requires that he make us his co-operators; "he who made us without us, does not save us without us" (S1 14).

With its insistence on divine attraction, it is easy to see that Salesian teaching respects both the transcendence of God, who alone takes the initiative, and the freedom of the human person. The will, attracted by the supreme good, seeks to be united with God, but this union cannot be achieved by human efforts alone: it is God who establishes this union by attracting us. Here we are far from not only pure naturalism and Pelagianism, which claim to take possession of God by their own hands, but also from an absolutist concept of God's power that would do everything apart from us and without us.

Consequently exercise, work and endless other occupations deserve to be valued at all levels, starting with the spiritual life where illusions are perhaps easier than elsewhere. Hence the bishop's forceful calls for spiritual combat and practice of virtue. What a pity to see a soul that deludes itself by fantasising about being holy and remains calm as if it had charity! But in the end it turns out that this soul's holiness is of a false kind, "her rest a lethargy, and her joy a madness" (T4 10).

Work and devotion are not at all contradictory, no less so than work and Eucharistic communion are, as the wife of the president of the Burgundian parliament thought. On the day she went to communion, there was no danger in doing all sorts of good deeds and working, but there would be danger if she just kept her hands together in prayer. St Paul earned his living by working with his hands. According to the bishop's early plans, the Visitation Order was not intended to be purely contemplative and cloistered: the religious had to know how to combine contemplation with service to the sick.

A God who is passionate about communication

The God whom Francis de Sales speaks of is led to communicate and, better still, to communicate himself. It is proper for goodness to communicate, because goodness is communicative by nature. God's pleasure lies in spreading and communicating his perfections.

The Trinity is the place of communication par excellence. In contrast to Calvin, who had suppressed the substantial communication between the three divine persons, Francis de Sales says that there is a communication of essence in God, through which the Father communicates his infinite and indivisible divinity to the Son by generating him, and the Father and the Son together produce the Holy Spirit, at the same time communicating his own unique divinity to him. Thus, thanks to this communication, "God Who is sole is not solitary" (T3 12).

It is through communication that the mystery of the Incarnation, the fundamental mystery of Christianity, is explained. In order to communicate Himself, Francis explains, God chose to unite Himself to a created nature, in such a way that the creature was assumed and inserted into the Divinity in order to constitute a single person with it.

In the Incarnate Word, who is Jesus Christ, divinity and human nature each preserve their properties; they are joined and united together, an admirable example of communication, where the identity of each is respected in the most perfect communion.

The mystery of communication continues. Faith makes us realise that God can communicate himself to us, and that he not only can but also wants to. This God goes in search of us to have our hearts and fill them with his blessings.

The God of Francis de Sales continues to be passionate about human beings; in a sense he exists only for them. Love for humanity has enraptured God and brought him out of himself, as if in an ecstasy. By virtue of the principle that there is no love without pleasure, one can say of Jesus in the words of Scripture that "his delights were to be with the children of men" (T10 17).

Prayer becomes a "heart to heart" with a God with a loving face like the one proposed by Francis de Sales, and the aim of this prayer is union with God. It is friendship, because friendship is the communication of goods, exchange and reciprocity. In this way, nothing can prevent us from being in perpetual communication with him.

Fear and love

Between rigorism on the one hand, as manifested particularly in Jansenism, and laxity on the other, the Bishop of Geneva maintains the need for fear, but as a preparation for love. Fear, in fact, disposes the soul to charity; it is, as Saint Augustine says, "the servant of charity for which it prepares the room" (S2 63). But why does Jesus Christ speak so often of the judgement and the end of the world? To fill us with fear. And why does he want us to fear? So that we may love. Fear is the beginning of wisdom as well as of love.

In order to be holy, the fear of God must not turn into scruple, sickness or a servile spirit. It is not a bad thing to tremble sometimes before him in whose presence even the angels tremble, but always on condition that love, which predominates in all his works, also predominates in us and is the beginning and end of all our considerations. In the midst of the tribulations of life, is it better to discern the effects of God's justice or those of his mercy? It is a good thing to direct our thoughts to God's justice that punishes sin, but "it is better to praise the mercy that purifies us" (L8 114).

The fact is that love is far preferable; it even makes us love the commandments, while fear only makes us observe them like one swallows a bitter medicine. One day Jane-Frances de Chantal received this admonition: "I beseech you for the honour of God, my daughter, do not fear God at all, for he does not want to do you any harm; love him strongly instead, for he wants to do you so much good."

We cannot say that Francis de Sales practised a pedagogy or ministry of fear.[4] His sermons undoubtedly contain vigorous calls to penance and the *Introduction* offers a meditation on each of the four final ends (death, judgement, hell, heaven). However, throughout all his work we find no underlying theme centred on fear. For him, the believer who fears God does not succumb to depression. One must fear death and divine judgements, but the fear must not be of the terrible and frightening kind that breaks the spirit down and takes away its vigour: it must be a fear so closely united with trust in God's goodness that it only serves to make that trust sweeter. It is good to meditate on death and hell, but such meditation must always end with an act of trust in God. Fear is like the sharp needle that allows the golden thread of charity to be threaded into the silk fabric.

And the devil?

The devil clearly exists, but he does not possess the terrifying and fantastic power that some authors of the Middle Ages attribute to him and that he would have for the Romantics. Francis de Sales, in fact, does not have a romantic, satanic image of the Evil One. When Mme de Chantal manifested her temptations against the faith to him, he reassured her by saying: "Our enemy is a great shouter; do not feel sorry for him, for I am sure he will not harm you. Mock him and let him do his work; in no way answer him, and despise him, for all his noise is nothing" (L3 392).

What is to be feared in the devil is not so much his strength as his cunning, deception, false appearance, disguises, particularly when he exaggerates God's severity, attributing to him the face of an authoritarian father, jealous of man, an enemy of his legitimate autonomy and joy. Our

4 Francis de Sales is practically absent from research by J. Delumeau, La peur en Occident (XIV^{e} -XVIII^{e} siècles). Une cité assiégée, Paris, Fayard, 1978.

enemy is devious, says the Bishop of Geneva, but he can do nothing against our will: he goes around, he makes confusion, he besieges it from all sides but he cannot force it.

However, we need to be on our guard, since his nefarious influence could threaten the balance of human nature. With his sad, melancholic and unpleasant suggestions he clouds the intellect, weakens the will and disturbs the whole soul; like a thick fog, he "fills the chest and head with phlegm and thus makes breathing difficult" (T9 21).

By filling the human spirit with sad thoughts, the evil one takes away from it the facility of aspiring to God, and provokes in it a strong perplexity and a most severe discouragement, so as to make it despair and feel lost.

We must not allow ourselves to be disturbed: the enemy gnaws away at our door in anger, he pushes, knocks, shouts, screams, but he cannot enter our souls except through the door of our consent. Let us keep this door carefully closed; let us often look to see that it is secured, and let us not worry about the rest, for we have nothing to fear.

The evil one is a poor devil, incapable of rejoicing; he wallows in sadness and melancholy, because he himself is sad and melancholic and will be so for ever, and for this reason he would like everyone to be like him. The devil is a loveless wretch. Everyone can and should pray, but the devil cannot, because "he is incapable of love" (S3 53).

An educator God who "anticipates" the human being

Henry IV's contemporaries oscillated between a policeman God who represses breaches of the law, provoking rigorism and the search for loopholes, and a distant and indifferent God who leads to laxity and transgression. Francis de Sales, for his part, constantly highlights the face of a God concerned about human beings and their happiness, respectful of their freedom, and committed to guiding them firmly and gently.

It can be said that this God is an educating God. At times he is forced to correct, indeed to chastise, but this is not what he seeks. Sometimes human beings feel he is indifferent, but this is due to fact that they care little about listening to the voice that calls them.

God's most usual way is to "anticipate" the human being, not with threats of blows, but with blessings: "he prevents us with the blessings of his fatherly sweetness", writes Francis de Sales in the *Treatise on the Love of God* (T2 9). He wants to convince us that God's eternal love for us anticipates our hearts, simply so that we love him.

The verb "prevent" retains its etymological meaning here: God precedes us in every sense, particularly through his inspirations.

Those who allow themselves to be guided by the inspirations of the Spirit are on the right track. In educational terms, it could be said that the educational method inspired by the divine model will be neither repressive nor permissive, but preventive.[5]

5 On the "preventive system" in the education of a disciple of Francis de Sales, see P. Braido, *Prevenire, non reprimere. Il sistema educativo di don Bosco*, 300ff.

15. DEVOUT LIFE IN THE WORLD

Speaking to Philothea about the life of relationships in the world, Francis de Sales gives her the following advice: "Either to seek or to shun society is a fault in one striving to lead a devout life in the world, such as I am now speaking of" (D3 24).

This insistence on devotion in the world has been one that seems to have struck ancient and modern readers of the *Introduction to the Devout Life* the most, because it reveals the author's profound intention to form not only fervent Christians but also good citizens of the earthly city.

True and false devotion

At the beginning of the 17th century, the term devotion still did not have the weak and derogatory sense it would often take on later. A devotee was not yet a bigot or a hypocrite. This does not detract from the fact that Francis de Sales felt obliged to discard several false interpretations that were already common in his time.

Some think they are devout because they fast, even though their hearts may be full of rancour. There are those who dare not touch a little wine with their tongues, for reasons of sobriety, but who do not hesitate to dip their tongues into their neighbour's blood through gossip and slander. Others think they are devout because they say so many prayers every day, even though their tongues then abound in unbecoming, arrogant and insulting words. Yet others willingly take alms for the poor out of their pocket, but cannot bring themselves to pour out kindness from their heart to forgive their enemies.

All of these individuals, the author of the *Introduction* continues, are commonly thought to be devout, but are no way so; they are merely "phantasms of devotion" (D1 1). It should be added that it is not Lenten faces that make saints. Francis de Sales is credited, and not without reason, with the answer he is said to have given one day to a holy man who always looked sad: "If the saint is a sorry person, he is a sad saint".[1]

Some only think that those who are thin are saints: this is great nonsense, he replied, as if holiness consisted in being thin.

In what, then, does true devotion consist? True and living devotion presupposes the love of God; indeed, it is nothing but true love of God. But not just any love. Devotion is a love that not only makes us do good, but makes us do it with great care, frequency and readiness. Devotion is an inner fire, not outward attitudes and postures. Devotion is the perfection of the Christian life.

Religion within everyone's reach

Francis de Sales' success consisted in placing the spiritual life within everyone's reach, with a clear language adapted to the sensibilities of the time and with the strength of his personal testimony. Indeed, if devotion is love, love of God firstly but also, and in the same movement, love of neighbour, it becomes accessible to all, in all situations. Devotion in the world, moreover, takes into account all aspects of human reality on which it will exercise a beneficial influence.

There is no need to withdraw from the world, go into the desert or enter a monastery in order to lead a genuinely Christian life. In addressing Philothea, that is to say, everyone who wants to love God, the author set out to chart a course of fervent Christian life in the midst of the world, teaching her how to use her wings to fly to the heights of

1 See M. Müller, *La joie dans l'amour de Dieu*, Paris, Aubier, 1935, 67-77.

prayer, and, at the same time, her feet to walk with people in holy and friendly conversation.

We find a wealth of advice and teaching on subjects in this book that spiritual literature before him did not deal with much: marriage, social relationships, dress, recreation, play, dancing, friendships. More generally, it has been acknowledged that the Bishop of Geneva had the merit of bringing religion into life and life into religion. But this was only possible thanks to a new understanding of devotion compatible with all conditions of life.

The author is keen to show that devotion can be practised by "the noble, the artisan, the servant, the prince, the maiden and the wife"(D1 3). It offers teachings that apply to everyone, but which we should try to apply to each situation and to each individual according to their vocation. Religious, widows and married couples must all seek perfection, but not all in the same way and by the same means.

Besides, devotion is as good for men as it is for women, we read in the preface to the *Treatise*. Philothea is a female name the author chose to represent any soul aspiring to devotion, adding, however, with a touch of humour, that men have a soul too, just like women do.

On the other hand, devotion does not depend on natural temperament. There are people whose hearts are inclined to love, for whom it is easy to want to love God, but with the risk of loving badly. Others have sour, bitter, melancholic and sullen souls: their love will be more valuable and praiseworthy, just as the other kind of love will be more graceful and delicious. All these people with different temperaments will undoubtedly love God in the same measure, but not in the same way.

Intelligent and discreet devotion

Protestants laughed, sometimes rightly so, at a torrent of Our Fathers, or unintelligible or meaningless words that took the place of prayers, often

in a Latin that no one understood. One has to understand the prayers one says. That is why Francis de Sales asked Jane-Frances de Chantal to have a French translation of all the prayers she said so she could understand their meaning. He would give the same advice to Philothea in his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, adding this warning against the excesses of verbal devotion: one Our Father said devoutly is worth more than many prayers "hurried over" (D2 1).

To understand their religion Christians living in the world must form themselves. As spiritual director, Francis de Sales recommended listening to the word of God during preaching, and reading works useful for spiritual formation, such as the life and works of Saint Teresa of Avila, as well as works by the great spiritual authors of his time. If personal reading of the Bible was not yet the order of the day for Catholics, nevertheless abundant nourishment was available to people desirous of Christian perfection. The Bishop of Geneva made a major contribution to this, particularly with the publication of the *Introduction to the Devout Life* and the *Treatise on the Love of God*.

The Christian must know especially that what counts above all in the spiritual life is interiority. The devout person who becomes infatuated with external practices and exercises, who boasts of them as if they were clothes they wear, must be induced to get rid of them because true love strips a person of overly sensitive affections and consolations.

Above all, devotion needs discretion. Beware of excesses that irritate family members and acquaintances! The bishop recommends moderation in religious practices, which must be adapted to each individual's occupations; he asks that they be regulated in such a way that their length does not tire the soul or irritate the people with whom one lives.

He suggested a kind of code of devotion in the world to one young woman whose desire for perfection threatened to make her unbearable. After advising her to visit hospitals sometimes and console and help the sick, he asked her to take care of her husband and family, not to spend too much time in churches, and above all not to be too severe in criticising the conduct of others or too openly disdain conversations where the rules of devotion were not scrupulously observed. In all that we do we

must be dominated and enlightened by charity, which leads us to comply with the will of our neighbour in everything that is not contrary to the commandments of God.

Francis de Sales insists: it is not enough to be devout and love devotion; it must be made amenable for everyone, and be useful and pleasing. The sick will love your devotion, he says, if they are charitably consoled; your family will love it if they see you more solicitous of their good and more agreeable in your reproofs; your husband will love it if, as your devotion grows, he sees that you are warmer and more affectionate towards him; your relatives and your friends will love it if they find greater openness in you, a capacity for forbearance, and acquiescence to their legitimate desires. In a word, you must make devotion attractive.

A final recommendation of the saint is this: everyone must be balanced in everything, not dream of being something they are not, not try to be special or at least not see the extraordinary as visible proof of devotion. Civic devotion requires adapting oneself to the other and not making them feel you are spiritually superior to them. He wrote to Mother de Chantal, who wanted to devote herself too much among the first Sisters to fasting, paraphrasing St Paul: "You must be Jewish with the Jews and gentle with the Gentiles, eating with those who eat, laughing with those who laugh" (L4 324).

Choosing proper models

All the kinds of asceticism that are practised in solitude and in the desert are not advisable for everyone indiscriminately. One cannot, therefore, propose models to people of the world that are of purely contemplative, monastic or religious devotion: they should be chosen from among models practised in the secular state.

Francis de Sales did not hesitate to look for his models among the characters of the Old Testament, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Job, Tobias, Sarah, Rebecca and Judith. What more lovable couple than the

ideal biblical couple, Isaac and Rebecca? Among the figures of the New Testament he chooses the Blessed Virgin first, with St Joseph, and then praises Mary Magdalene, "the queen and mistress of all perfumers", as well as St Martha, "our dear Master's cook" (S4 81).

In the *Introduction* he happily catalogues Christian models by placing them in their professions: St Joseph, Lydia and Crispin in their workshops; Anne, Martha, Monica, Aquila and Priscilla in their marriages; Cornelius, Sebastian, Maurice bearing arms; Constantine, Helena, King St Louis, Blessed Amadeus and Edward on their thrones.

As for the great Saint Maurice, he shows that this heroic soldier suffered martyrdom of the heart before bodily martyrdom: he saw his whole dear legion killed before his eyes and suffered martyrdom every time he saw ones of his soldiers fall. St Monica, mother of St Augustine, is often cited as a model of wife, widow, mother and educator.

St Louis, King of France, was a model of piety, conjugal love, love for the poor, and also a model of well-ordered civil devotion, given that he knew how to combine care of the spiritual life with seeing to the public good. Closer to Francis de Sales, was not his friend, Senator Antoine Favre, someone who knew how to combine exquisite devotion with vigilance in public affairs? In 1612, the Bishop of Geneva wrote to Paul V, who had canonised the Archbishop of Milan, Charles Borromeo two years earlier, inviting him to also canonise a layman, Blessed Amadeus, Duke of Savoy.[2]

The need to follow the laws of the world

A general principle of Salesian teaching says: "Since we live in this world we need to follow its laws", but without forgetting something added to this: "in everything that is not contrary to God's law" (L10 173).

2 This is Amadeus IX, who died in 1465 at thirty-seven years of age and was beatified in 1677.

The laws of the world are above all the laws of civility, courtesy, good manners. The Christian must be courteous. Respect for social rules and conventions may sometimes be subject to exceptions, as in the case of King David who danced and whirled around a little more before the Ark of the Covenant than decorum required, but it was because of the extraordinary and immense contentment in his heart.

The world, recalls Francis de Sales when he used this term with the ambivalent meaning it has in Scripture, is governed by the law of threefold concupiscence, that is, the desire for pleasure, goods and honours. Now, these three temporal realities do not necessarily have a negative value.

Pleasure is linked to certain acts and experiences both at the level of the senses and at the level of our higher faculties. If pleasure is not misdirected and is maintained in a just measure, and especially if desire is legitimate and does not turn into dependence and slavery, what harm is there in it? The Visitation Sisters should also accept not only all kinds of pains and mortification, but also those things that they find pleasurable, in peace and gentleness of spirit and in accordance with their will and needs; pleasures such as drinking, eating, resting, recreation and the like.

As far as temporal goods are concerned, Christians must take care of them even more than people of the world, because the possessions we have are not ours; it is God who has given them to us to cultivate and he wants us to make them bear fruit and be useful. Nor is it forbidden to increase them when just opportunity presents itself and to the extent that our state requires it.

As for the pursuit of a good reputation, this does not in itself contradict well-understood Christian humility. Everyone should strive to preserve their good name, which is one of the foundations of human society; without it we are not only useless, but are even harmful to our neighbour because of the scandal involved. Consequently, charity demands, and humility appreciates the fact that we highly desire it and preserve it. This will neither offend the good nor give satisfaction to the wicked.

Witnesses to Christian joy

The most frequent reproach levelled at devotion is well known: the world paints pious people with a dark, sad and afflicted face and goes around saying that devotion makes one melancholic and unbearable.

In proposing the example of St Louis to a young man, Francis de Sales shows him that this saint was good-humoured and that this king knew how to laugh pleasantly when the occasion arose.

We find numerous invitations to joy scattered through Francis de Sales' letters and writings. It will not be long before we find expressions like the following: Live joyfully as long as you can; always be joyful; do not resign yourself to sadness at all; live in peace and joy, or at least be content; awaken the spirit of joyfulness and gentleness often in yourselves; in this our short pilgrimage, let us live joyfully, indulging our guests in everything that is not sinful; preserve a holy and hearty joyfulness which nourishes the powers of the spirit and edifies your neighbour; preserve a holy joyfulness of spirit. When it is spread modestly across your actions and words it will be a consolation to those who see you; be constant, courageous, and cheerful; live fully content before God; "live generously and nobly joyful in Him who is our only joy" (L7 24).

Why constantly look for what is wrong? It is a fact that when the spirit of contradiction becomes systematic, nothing goes right. Does reality afflict us? We need to let afflictions pass through our heart, but not let them remain there. Is the world going wrong? Do we need to imitate the Israelites who could never sing in Babylon because they were thinking of their own land? Francis de Sales says: I would like us to sing everywhere.

Christians do not even complain about the imperfections they discover in themselves. We would all like to be without imperfections, but we must be patient: our nature is human and not angelic.

St Francis de Sales is not unaware of our mortal condition, but he does not want to frighten our spirit. His behaviour in the daily journey of life moved in the same direction. According to his secretary and confidant, the bishop had a jovial and gracious nature at all times, was the enemy of

sadness and melancholy, had a gentle and serene face, acted with moderate restraint, and was not too expansive in moments of joy. He never looked sad or even sullen, no matter how bothered he was, but received everyone with a very serene and happy face. It was his conviction that "God is the God of joy" (L3 16).

16. LOVE OF GOD IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Francis de Sales wanted to bring religion closer to life and life closer to religion. His aim, in fact, was not to teach the "sovereign" way of perfection that some books of his time dealt with. In the *Introduction*, he does not speak of ecstasies, raptures, impassiveness and deifying union, but proposes a lower but safer way, one that is less excellent but more congruent with everyday life. Even in the *Treatise*, which contains many things that are less known to simple people and is a little more difficult to understand, his aim was not to foster a totally disembodied kind of mysticism.

According to Francis, everyday life is the providential place where I can encounter God. The human being is continually tempted to look for him elsewhere, in another age or in a different situation of life. Perhaps he spontaneously thinks that spirituality is reserved for an elite, and encompassed in books that are obviously incomprehensible to ordinary mortals.

Choosing one's spirituality

The more common traditional spirituality in St Francis de Sales' times was monastic. Despite the laxity and sometimes scandals of some monasteries and abbeys, this spirituality continued to nourish a deep piety, including the piety of Christians living in the world.

Their favourite reading was the *Imitation of Christ*, a golden book, said his friend Camus, but less suitable for active life and daily practice. The works of the great Spanish mystic Teresa of Avila had very successfully

spread a genuine mysticism, but of a very elevated and austere kind. Her works are admirable, said the holy bishop, but one must not hasten to put into practice all that is good in them; those who say they admire them do not say they put them into practice, for the doctrine contained in these books is not directly applicable to the daily life of someone living in the hustle and bustle of worldly affairs. The Bishop of Geneva never ceased to recommend his own writings, as well as those of St Catherine of Siena, but he was aware that Christians in the world needed nourishment more appropriate to their form of life.

After the end of the Middle Ages another kind of mysticism, called "abstract" mysticism, had also developed, particularly in Flanders and along the banks of the Rhine. This mysticism was much appreciated in Paris where Francis encountered it during his journey to the French capital in 1602. It emphasised the contemplation of God's essence in this life and neglected the human aspects of Christian experience.

Francis de Sales' spirituality is undeniably of a different vein. It is inspired by spiritual masters who were preachers, pastors and spiritual directors, such as St Philip Neri, founder of the Oratory in Rome. His main sources are works of spirituality that bring Christian perfection closer to the common condition of Christians in the world.

Francis proposes a spirituality for ordinary life. In the preface to the *Introduction* he explicitly states that his intention was to instruct those who are obliged by their circumstances to live an ordinary life. Outwardly nothing seems to distinguish them from others; inwardly the fire of love transforms them. If Francis de Sales chose Our Lady of the Visitation as the patroness of his congregation, it is because the Virgin carried out a great act of charity towards her cousin Elizabeth, and at the same time composed the canticle of the Magnificat, "the sweetest, most elevated, most spiritual and most contemplative that has ever been written" (O4 114).

The need to flourish where God has planted us

The above line attributed to Francis de Sales undoubtedly describes one of the fundamental features of this spirituality. It consists first of all in sincerely loving one's state of life. "We must love what God loves," he explained to a married woman who envied her religious sister's situation. "He loves your vocation, so let us love it too and not waste time thinking about others" (L2 351).

Sometimes we dream: if I were in another situation, with other people, in another state of life, I could be more useful and serve God and neighbour much better than the situation I am in. This may be true in certain cases but it is usually an illusion which must be denounced as a real temptation. It is therefore necessary to keep an eye on one's desires because they risk leading us down a blind alley, that is, into serious errors.

Here we touch on the spiritual realism of Francis de Sales, who fears nothing so much as multiplying fruitless desires. Of course, it is a good thing to desire a lot, but it is also necessary to put our desires in order and transform them into works as the right moment and opportunity arise. The work done, even if it is very limited, is always more useful than great desires for things that are beyond our possibilities. We often waste a lot of time trying to be good angels while neglecting to be truly good men or good women.

Thus we need to learn to take pleasure in being where we are and where we are called to bear flowers and fruit. Reluctant to become a bishop, Francis de Sales learned every day to love what God had wanted of him. Jane-Frances de Chantal had to learn to love her situation as a widow because God had allowed it to happen.

Such a spirituality fears special features, especially in devotion where they risk becoming too conspicuous. If we want to be a saint of true holiness, it must be common, like Our Lord's and Our Lady's, and accept the law of growth. "One should not wish to achieve perfection in one fell swoop," he insisted, "one should follow the common and ordinary path, which is the surest."[1]

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1 See Appendix B of the Spiritual Conferences in Saint François De Sales,

The daily practice of virtue

So far, this spirituality seems rather passive: we must accept life as it presents itself, because it is our reality, and strive to love it as a manifestation of God's will and his love for us. But this is only the starting point. It is now a matter of practising the virtues in the present moment and in the providential place in which God has planted us, and of producing not only flowers but also fruit according to each person's vocation. The classic text that defines the kind of holiness to which all are called deserves to be quoted:

> When God created the world He commanded each tree to bear fruit after its kind: and even so He bids Christians,—the living trees of His Church,—to bring forth fruits of devotion, each one according to his kind and vocation (D1 3).

If a bishop spends all his time praying and fasting and does not visit the flock entrusted to him, does not instruct them and does not console them, he is lost. A married person can perform miracles, but if they do not fulfil their obligations to their spouse and do not take care of their children, they are worse than an unfaithful person, as St Paul says. And so say all the others. There are many virtues that must be practised and among them we should prefer those that are more in line with our duty and not with our taste. On the other hand, it is worth remembering that there is a hierarchy of virtues.

For Francis de Sales, and this is beyond question, the first is charity. Charity resembles the queen bee who never goes out into the fields unless accompanied by all her little people. In the same way, charity pulls behind it the whole retinue of other virtues that depend on it. Now, the little virtues that we need every day are called patience, humility, gentleness, diligence in daily duties, kindness, mortification of heart, tenderness towards our neighbour, forbearance of their faults, and holy fervour. In order to acquire charity we also have at our disposal three great means which religious take as vows: obedience, poverty and chastity.

Œuvres, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Paris, Gallimard, 1969, 1325.

We find other lists of virtues in the bishop's writings, which include, for example, prudence, temperance, honesty, courage, simplicity, modesty, cordiality and friendliness. In addition, there are some spiritual attitudes that Francis de Sales greatly appreciated but which should be considered rather as fruits of the virtues, or rather of the Holy Spirit, such as joy, peace, confidence and abandonment in God.

Encountering God in everyday events

Every day things happen, some of which we foresee, and others of which we do not foresee. We like the former, but Francis de Sales wants us to love the latter as well, not only the happy ones but also the painful ones. For God also makes himself known through the things that happen in my life and in the world. In this spirituality, the element that is in some sense the high peak to be reached is called "holy indifference", summed up in the words: "ask for nothing, refuse nothing".[2]

Francis starts from the principle that everything that happens in life (except sin) is willed by God or at least permitted by him. Consequently, those who truly love God prepare themselves to accept whatever happens, whatever it may be, as coming from "divine goodness".

This frame of mind is based on a great trust in Providence, without which nothing happens in this world. Even from a purely human point of view, this confidence contributes greatly to maintaining a constant mood, especially in difficult moments. Holy indifference, of course, is a virtue that cannot be acquired in five years. As St Francis taught, it takes ten.

Practising this spirituality does not mean remaining completely passive and inactive in the face of events. If someone falls ill, they should obey the doctor, take the prescribed medicine. If they want to get well, then the

2 This was the final recommendation he made to the Sisters of the Visitation at Lyons before he died. See Saint François De Sales, *Œuvres*, 1319.

reason for doing so should be to be able to continue doing good; should they have to suffer and even die they should not oppose the benevolence of a God whom they love above all else. This way, wisdom and holiness will guide me to accept the inevitable, and not only to accept it, but to want what God wants, making my will coincide with His.

Accepting the event will be all the easier the more we are convinced, with St Paul, that "everything contributes to the good of those who love God". He says "everything", that is, not only the joys and consolations, but also the trials, tribulations and evils of this life, and even sins, because God knows how to extract good even from evil.

Combining prayer and life

There is no Christian spirituality without prayer. Following the classic distinction, Francis de Sales considers three types of prayer: vocal, mental and active prayer.

He recommends vocal prayer, whether liturgical, communal or personal. The quality of such prayer comes from within, from the heart of the praying person.

In fact, God scrutinises the heart of the one praying and not the words one says.

The Bishop of Geneva highly valued mental prayer, which he recommended to everyone. It is an excellent prayer because it effectively gives priority to the inner over the outer. Its quality depends on love, because prayer is only as good as the love with which it is carried out. Although he did not fail to propose a method for meditation in the *Introduction*, he said that the secret of secrets in meditation is to follow the attractions of grace with simplicity of heart, because "true love knows no method" (L8 239).

There is a third form of prayer, much closer to life and compatible with all sorts of occupations. It is active prayer, which seems to have a certain primacy in St Francis de Sales's consideration. It consists in doing all our

actions in love and for the love of God, so that all of our life becomes a continuous prayer. Whoever practises charity, visits the sick or does similar good works is praying, and those good deeds demand a reward from God. Occupations should in no way impede union with God, and those who practise this form of prayer are in no danger of forgetting God. When two people are in love with each other, their thoughts always turn towards each other.

Certain approaches are needed to attain union with God. Those who live under the pressure of temporal things are strongly advised to find even brief moments of recollection in order to unite their hearts to God with brief aspirations, a few prayerful words and good thoughts, or to bring God to mind somehow. While our body is caught up in conversations and affairs, our mind and spirit can always remain in the presence of God.

This way, true prayer means we do not neglect the obligations of everyday life. The bishop advised us to imitate the strong woman of the Bible, of whom it is said that she used her hands to undertake great things, and her fingers to handle the spindle. Great things are spiritual things; handling the spindle means spinning the thread of small everyday virtues.

According to his secretary and confidant, Francis de Sales lived what he taught others. What he did he did for God and in God. He felt that this "active prayer" was better than the other kinds. When he was overloaded with commitments he devoted almost no time to formal prayer: "his life was one continuous prayer".[3]

Daily life transfigured

Daily life is punctuated by fleeting moments, but "in these moments of our life," he said, "the seed of eternity is contained, as if in a kernel" (L7 130).

3 See Mother de Chantal's letter to dom Jean de Saint-François, in Jeanne -Françoise Frémyot De Chantal, *Correspondance*, t. II, 305.

The clock offers us a quantitative measure of time, but its quality depends on us. If we want to, we can "spend all our years, our months, our days and our hours, making them holy through good and faithful use" (L3 348).

Francis de Sales tries to persuade us that it is important to take the small occasions of each day into consideration in addition to our great works, in particular annoying little affronts, unimportant losses, small daily acts of charity, small inconveniences, small humiliations, small problems. Now, if we know how to use them well all these occasions that can arise at every turn are a great way to amass much spiritual wealth. The smallest of these moments can acquire extraordinary value if it is lived with love. It often happens that someone who is weak in body and spirit, and who only does small things small things, does them with so much charity that they far surpass the merit of great and elevated actions. It all depends on the intention that inspires and guides our actions, that is, on the purity of the love with which we do them.

In his final conversation with the Visitation Sisters in Lyon, two days before he died, St Francis de Sales repeated his favourite lesson: "It is not the quantity or greatness of the works we do that makes us pleasing to God, but the love with which we do them. A Sister who does a little work in her cell will be more deserving than another who is busy with important things but does them with less love. It is love that gives perfection to our works."[4]

The contemplative life is better in itself than the active life, but if a more intimate union with God is achieved in the active life, then it is better. Therefore, if a Sister who works in the kitchen and handles the saucepan by the fire does this with greater love and charity than another, then this real fire will help her to be more pleasing to God. Solitude with God is good, but it often happens that someone is united with God as much by action as by solitude.

Love is the secret of the Salesian alchemy, to the point that what ails us can take on extraordinary value through the union of our will with God's

4 See the final Conference to his Sisters in Lyons before he died, in Saint François De Sales, *Œuvres*, 1308.

benevolence. "In this way," he told an acquaintance who was suffering from the burdens of pregnancy, "you will transform the lead of your burden into fine gold" (L9 341).

17. LOVE OF NEIGHBOUR

"Philotheas are philanthropic!", St Francis de Sales wrote, wishing to demonstrate that there was no contradiction between the two terms (O5 50). The love of God is inseparable from the love of humankind, and there is a close correspondence between the two loves. Wherever the love of God flourishes, the love of neighbour also flourishes. What is more, the growth of one cannot take place without the growth of the other: they are two loves that cannot continue without the other. The more we love God, the more we will also love our neighbour.

However, their effects go in the opposite direction, as the biblical image of Jacob's ladder, on which angels ascend and descend, suggests. On the steps representing the various steps of charity, the love of God makes us climb higher and higher, but the love of neighbour makes us descend lower and lower.

Why love our neighbour?

We are called to love our neighbour, not because they are nice and we like them, but because God loves them as their creator, redeemer and sanctifier. The three reasons for our love are rooted in the mystery of Trinitarian love.

Since the human being is created in the image and likeness of God, we must recognise this image in every person. The conclusion is self-evident: "when we see a neighbour who is created to the image and likeness of God, ought we not to say one to another: Observe and see this creature, how he resembles the Creator? Might we not cast ourselves upon his neck, to caress him and weep over him with love?" (T10 11).

The second reason is derived from the mystery of Christ's incarnation and redemption. The love for humanity that Jesus experienced becomes our love. Let us therefore love one another very much, recommends St Francis, recalling that Our Lord shed his blood from the cross to the last drop for all humanity and for every human being. The blood of Jesus became the "sacred mortar" with which to "cement, unite, conjoin and bring together all the stones of his Church".[1]

Finally, we must love our neighbour because God wants everyone to share in the grace of the sanctifying Spirit. Everyone is destined for holiness and salvation: no one is predestined for hell and damnation. Everyone, for their part, is called to purify and sanctify themselves, thus cooperating in the work of salvation.

These purely theological considerations in no way exclude the human motivations of our love, such as natural affections, friendships, solidarity, simple philanthropy. Nothing is discarded of what is good, beautiful and true on the human level: everything is taken up, purified and elevated in Trinitarian love.

Is love of neighbour a priority?

For Francis de Sales, there is no doubt that the love due to God must be above everything else, and therefore also above charity towards our neighbour. However, one may wonder whether he did not attach a kind of primacy of fact or method to the second commandment.

In fact, observes the Bishop of Geneva, Jesus Christ so emphasised the commandment of love of neighbour that he called it "my commandment". For most people of his time, love of God seemed to go without saying, it seemed more natural and in a sense easier than the other. Therefore, the preacher had to insist especially on the commandment of charity, not because the commandment of love of God does not come first, but simply because nature is less helpful in the practice of love of neighbour.

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1 See variants of the Conference on cordiality, in Saint François De Sales, *Œuvres*, 1605.

Then, there are circumstances of life in which the service of our neighbour requires us to neglect certain acts of love for God such as prayer, fasting, and even participation in Holy Mass, in order to devote ourselves to works of charity. In such cases it is better to "leave God for God" in a spirit of freedom. If my neighbour suffers a sudden attack while Mass is being celebrated, I can and must miss Mass to be with them. If I am in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament and am called to do something else, I must promptly get up and go and do that. Charity is a great lady: one must obey her commands.

On the other hand, love of neighbour is a very sure criterion for verifying our love for God. There are so many deceptive forms of religion and piety! Therefore, the very first lines in the *Introduction* are intended to dispel the harmful misunderstandings already pointed out about devotion. Even mystical ecstasy, to which some attach great importance, must be verified by the testimony of life and charity.

For all these reasons there is a certain practical primacy of the commandment of charity towards one's neighbour over the first commandment, inasmuch as the latter is intended to judge the value of the former.

St Francis de Sales dared write that "the supreme love of the divine goodness of the heavenly Father, consists in the perfection of the love of our brothers and companions" (T10 11).

How do we practise love of neighbour?

Love of neighbour can be practised in different ways, starting with charity in thought and word.

Loving our neighbour in thought means not judging them. It means trying to see the positive aspect in all our neighbour's actions: if an action could have a hundred faces we must look at the most beautiful one. Charity in thought guards against making rash judgements, an important theme

to which Francis devotes a chapter in the *Introduction* (D3 28). With surprising subtlety, Francis de Sales lays bare a good dozen reasons why we make judgements about others: sometimes it will be because of a rigid and harsh character, or because of pride, or because we relish the mistakes our neighbour makes, or to excuse our own vices, or for the sake of philosophising about people's habits, customs and moods, or out of hatred towards others, or out of ambition, jealousy, fear, or other weaknesses of spirit.

Charity in words is so difficult to observe that Francis de Sales devoted five chapters of the *Introduction to the Devout Life* to it. The fundamental recommendation is that our speech should be gentle, open, sincere, frank, cordial and truthful. He dwells in particular on three major defects of conversation: backbiting, slander and mockery. The first two are serious because backbiting and slander stick their tongues into their neighbour's blood. Slander is the true plague of conversation. As for mockery, it is the most evil kind of offence that can be done to one's neighbour with words because, while other offences show some respect for the offended, this one shows contempt.

Moreover, charity is practised in two ways, actively and passively. The first consists in acting effectively on our neighbour's behalf and is effective love.

It consists in helping our neighbour by word, deed and example; providing for their needs; rejoicing in their temporal fortune and happiness and in their spiritual progress; providing them with temporal and spiritual goods.

There is also another form of charity, and that is the patient charity of compassion and mutual forbearance. According to Francis de Sales, knowing how to bear with one another in our imperfections is probably the most frequent way we practise charity. This is certainly a significant part of our perfection. Christians who love their neighbour do not make extraordinary gestures every day, but remember that charity is patient and accepting.

Gentleness, the flower of charity

What tone was Francis de Sales, a Renaissance man naturally sensitive to the values of humanism but committed to a century of iron, setting for his being and actions? His gentleness, which has become proverbial, is not just a matter of good manners among decent people; it reveals evangelical roots. One could say that charity lived in the Salesian way is called gentleness or that gentleness is the concrete Salesian way of living charity.

Besides being one virtue among others, gentleness is the "flower of Love" (D3 8). Just as humility should mark our relationship with God, so gentleness is called to sum up our attitude towards our neighbour.

In this light, charity and gentleness are no longer seen as a combination of two separate virtues but rather as the synthesis of Salesian teaching on love of neighbour.

Francis de Sales does not like ceremonial kindness or kinds that are artificial or showy rather than genuine and sincere. Therefore, he is happy to associate gentleness with other virtues, especially simplicity, an evangelical virtue that he highly valued since it is opposed and contrary to the vice of cunning, a vice that is the source of fussiness, artifice and duplicity. True virtue requires us to have our inner attitude exactly in line with our outer attitude.

Gentleness does not altogether exclude anger: it manipulates and moderates it to keep it within the bounds of reason. Even when anger is well guided, it should be used only rarely and only when one needs to "stiffen our courage on those occasions when we need to win, overcome and punish" (O5 84).

Although gentleness should not be confused with exaggerated sensitivity and idleness, it does not exclude the world of feelings and affectivity. Francis de Sales makes it the subject of frequent and insistent recommendations. With angry people there is no other way to calm them down: "Nothing so stills the elephant when enraged as the sight of a lamb" (D3 8).

Showing love

We need to love our neighbour, but that is not enough: we have to show that we love them, and the other person has to know that they are loved. And to show that we love our neighbour, we must not avoid being with them. Running away from conversations prevents us from showing that we love them. It often happens that communicating with our neighbour, whether in words or in writing, has no other purpose than to show that we love them. Francis de Sales wrote in simple terms at the beginning of one of his letters: "I am writing these four words just to let you know that my heart loves yours" (L4 86).

In his conversations with the first Visitation Sisters he insists on this point: "we must show that we love our Sisters and are pleased with them."[2] We need to imitate the great Apostle Paul who teaches us to act in such a way that our affections are manifested in a holy way, particularly through our greetings. In this way, reciprocity can be born. This is not only the foundation of friendship but also the condition for an authentic educational or other relationship.

One of the most common ways of showing our love is by yielding to others [condescension, in Francis de Sales' terms]. It not only designates a social behaviour that is *a priori* very suspect, but, as its etymology shows, is the attitude of someone who comes down to the same level as the other person.

The term recalls God's "condescension" in this in making himself one of us. The Abbot Saint Anselm was famous for his kindness and the way he yielded to the wishes of his monks: one came and told him to take some hot broth, and he immediately took it; then another came and told him not to take it, and he immediately left it. He kept both of them happy.[3]

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2 See the Conference on cordiality in Saint François De Sales, *Œuvres*, 1114.

3 See the Conference on the will of God in Saint François De Sales, *Œuvres*, 1125.

St Paul's greatest skill, then, was to make himself all things to all people: laughing with those who laugh, weeping with those who weep, drinking with those who drink, being one with each one. The real reason for this is that God manifests his will to me through my brothers and sisters, and so I obey God whenever I comply with my neighbour's wish or request.

Love up to what point?

Quoting a well-known line from St Bernard, according to whom the measure of loving God is to love him without measure, St Francis de Sales asks whether this should also be understood of the love of neighbour. The answer is as follows: we must love our neighbour with all our heart, and not be content to love them as ourselves but love them more than ourselves. Jesus said this: "Love one another as I have loved you": this means "more than ourselves".[4]

On the other hand, love of neighbour would not be complete if it did not include love of our enemies. After quoting Tertullian's statement that Christians are enemies of no one, he made his own a reflection by St John Chrysostom. According to this Church Father, God commands us to love our enemies so that love does not remain idle; for friends are so few in number that if we limit ourselves to loving only friends, we would be loving a small number of people. Love goes so far as to forgive, because forgiving does not entail any dishonour, as many contemporaries of Francis de Sales thought.

The end to which love tends can be nothing other than union with the person loved. Just as love of God tends towards union with God, so love of neighbour is naturally oriented towards union with our neighbour, to the point of becoming one heart and one soul with that person. Francis de Sales is referring here to the spiritual union that consists in the union of wills or hearts.

To want the same thing together, to want what the other wants, this is the perfection of love of neighbour.

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4 Saint François De Sales, *Œuvres,* 1110.

CONCLUSION

At the end of our journey, in which we have collected the suggestions and lessons of St Francis de Sales for a program of integral formation of the person, it is appropriate to conclude with some considerations and suggestions.

Many things have changed today, compared to the era of Renaissance humanism. The style has changed: we no longer speak or write like the Bishop of Geneva did. The world has changed. There is a considerable distance between the society of the *ancien régime* and our modern societies marked by secularism, pluralism, ecumenism and democracy. The concept of the human being, as presented in philosophy, education, psychology and sociology, has undergone profound changes.

However, we remain convinced that on some points that we consider fundamental, the contribution of Francis de Sales continues to be a source of inspiration for educators and formators in general. We highlight three main ones: the essential role of education, the choice of a preventive type of education, and an optimistic attitude on the part of the educator and the formator.

The essential role of education

The study of Francis de Sales' thinking draws our attention to the importance of education and formation in all areas of human activity. It has rightly been said that there are two ways to improve and change society: one that consists in intervening in structures and laws by means of a policy concerned with the common good, and one that aims at forming and changing individuals.

It is clear that, in spite of his legal training, Francis de Sales focused much more on the latter than on the former.

Now, the formation that he proposes is an integral formation. In this sense, Saint Francis de Sales' thinking and practice can help us not to limit our gaze to a single dimension.

That is why our journey began with the formation of the individual in all his or her dimensions: the body with all its five senses, the soul with its twelve passions and imagination, and finally the faculties of the mind which are the intellect, memory and will, this latter the supreme faculty of the individual human being. While education is often identified with instruction, this broader perspective will be useful to remember at all times.

With regard to education for social life, the Bishop of Geneva teaches respect for the dignity of every human being, the value of the family and work, courtesy, the need for rest and how to be a good citizen. All these themes recall the importance of social relationships and at the same time the importance of civility and good manners. It is a highly topical subject at a time when exaggerated individualism risks tearing our social fabric apart.

Education would not be complete if one forgot, as is often the case, the religious dimension of the person and society, which links the human and the divine. Francis de Sales conveys a positive image of God, and for everyone he proposes civil devotion, love of God in everyday life and love of neighbour.

Choosing preventive education

Education, according to Francis de Sales, can be called preventive, that is, founded not on the fear of punishment, but on the use of reason, gentleness and all the resources of the Christian faith centred on love. After him St John Bosco would say that his educational system was based on three pillars: reason, religion and loving-kindness. The Salesian system, therefore, is

not repressive, but neither is it permissive. Permissiveness, often the case today, is actually an absence of education.

On the subject of gentleness or loving-kindness it seems that the problem of education and formation for the Bishop of Geneva found its place around the concept of the "heart". We recall this line from the *Introduction*: "Whosoever gains the heart has won the whole man."

Following in the footsteps of this Saint from Savoy, Don Bosco had the same conviction: one of this Piedmontese educator's early disciples attributed the following to him as conforming with his thinking: "Education is a matter of the heart." The symbol of the heart designates the seat and intimate source of feelings, of love, but also of thoughts and will.

The heart represents the interiority of the human being. Education and formation as envisaged by Francis de Sales appear to be an endeavour that aims at acting in depth. It does not aim at mere formation with a view to pure external correctness. Only by starting from the centre of the human being can one hope to conquer the whole human being, with reference to all of our relationships: with self, with others, on a social and interpersonal level, and on a spiritual level with God.

In an attitude of trust and joy

Setting out on a program always implies an inner attitude of trust in the future. The educator's vocation is to look to the future. Setting out on a formation program always requires trust in others and in their capacity for the future.

Salesian educators do not allow themselves to be discouraged by difficulties, because they believe in the natural resources of the human being and the young, while not ignoring their weakness. "Let nothing disturb you," said Don Bosco, inspired by the humanism of St Francis de Sales. The Salesian educator considers everything good, especially if it is pleasing to the young.

Above all they have full confidence in the human being's supernatural resources. Confident in the providence of the Father, they announce the Good News. That is why they are always happy: "God is the God of joy", proclaimed St Francis de Sales. His disciples spread this joy and know how to educate to the joy of Christian life and to the sense of celebration. Don Bosco taught his boys this biblical motto: "Let us serve the Lord in holy joy."

In Francis de Sales and his disciples it is possible to recognise men and women open to the future, and this openness of spirit and heart still enables every educator and formator today to overcome the difficulties linked to their mission, not to lose hope and not to complain too much about their times.

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5. Relationship between St Francis de Sales and Don Bosco

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In the wake of Renaissance humanism, St Francis de Sales developed a pastoral rather than theoretical program of education and integral formation of the person. Every human being is called to perfect themself in all their dimensions as an individual: the bodily senses, the passions and affections of the soul, the spiritual faculties of memory and intellect, and especially the heart, the seat of the will and freedom.

As someone immersed in society, St Francis de Sales shows himself to be attentive to the promotion of the dignity of each individual be it in the family, in social relationships, at work, in leisure time or in the service of country. Finally, St Francis de Sales cannot think of the person without an openness to transcendence. His program is original in this area too: he has a positive image of a God who attracts the human being while respecting our freedom; the devotion he promotes is a "civil devotion"; moreover, the love of God is to be lived in daily life, while love of one's neighbour is characterised by "gentleness", the flower of charity. St Francis de Sales program is an antidote against a one-dimensional formation that neglects the multiple resources of human nature.

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