

GRICIGLIANO

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Dear Friends,

In his encyclical dedicated to Saint Francis de Sales, *Rerum Omnium Perturbationem*, Pope Pius XI declared that “It appears that Francis de Sales was given to the Church by God to refute a certain prejudice, which is that the ideal of genuine sanctity held up for our imitation by the Church is so difficult that it surpasses the capabilities of the great majority of the faithful... and that holiness was so hedged around by annoyances and hardships that it is inadaptable to a life lived outside of cloister walls.”

Of all the bishops who were animated by the spirit of the Council of Trent during those difficult times when the Church was being torn asunder, Saint Francis de Sales is one of the most remarkable, both by the conversions that he made, and by his immense pastoral charity.

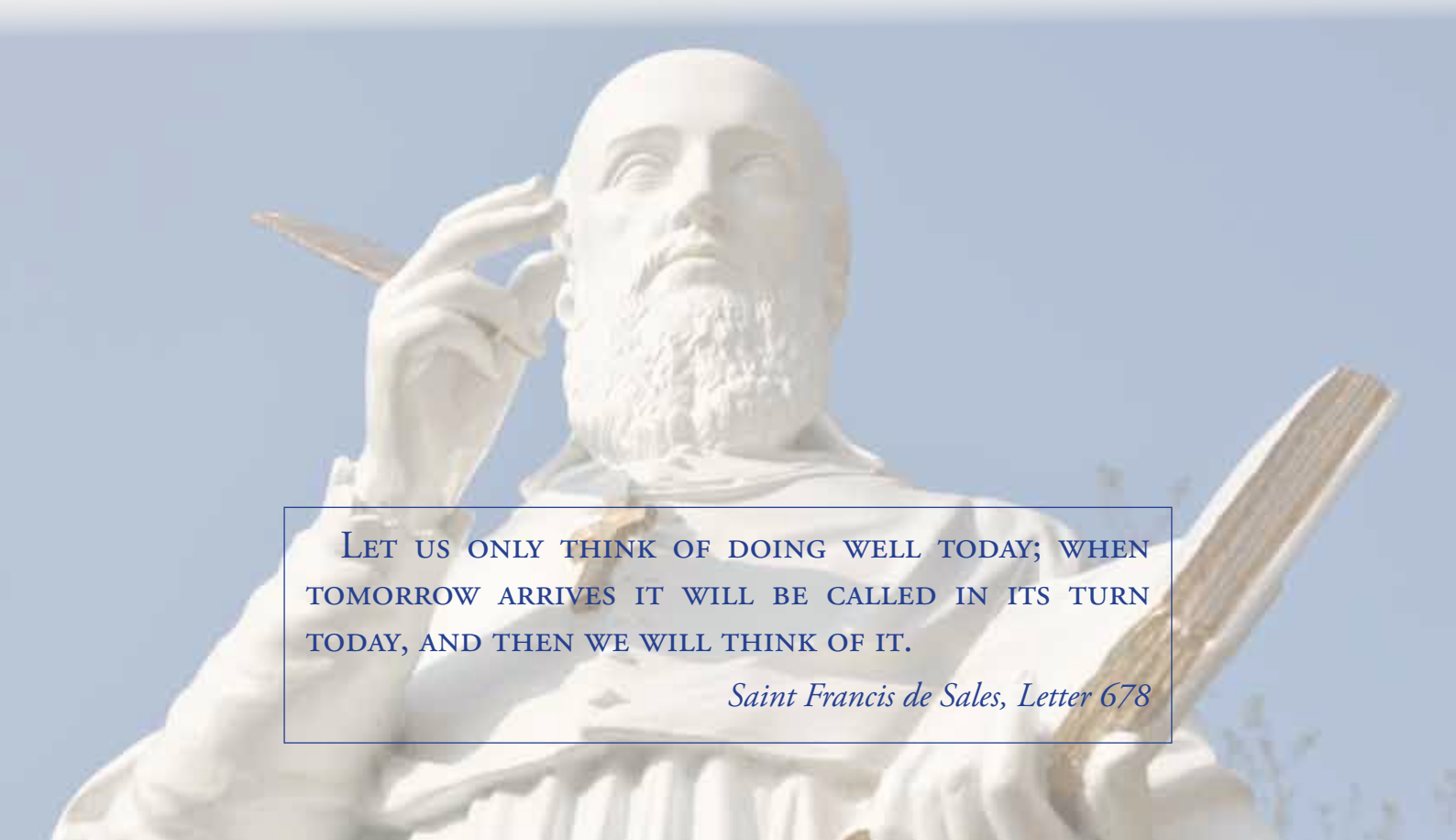
Moreover, the spirituality that Saint Francis de Sales has left us has not aged a bit in four centuries, it is in fact more pertinent than ever in our own times. Thanks to his detailed knowledge of human nature and to his sensitive pedagogy, he is still a very reliable and very useful guide for the formation of seminarians. The future priests formed at Gricigliano today, tomorrow will have to teach souls how to love God in a world that has lost the true sense of what love is, and which no longer even has a clear idea of God. The gentleness and firmness of the Doctor of Divine Love will be precious points of reference for them, both in their personal lives and in their apostolates.

May these few pages help you discover and appreciate the richness and depth of our patron saint’s teaching.

Enjoy!

Canon Philippe Mora,

Superior of the Seminary of Saint Philip Neri.



LET US ONLY THINK OF DOING WELL TODAY; WHEN
TOMORROW ARRIVES IT WILL BE CALLED IN ITS TURN
TODAY, AND THEN WE WILL THINK OF IT.

Saint Francis de Sales, Letter 678

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BIOGRAPHY

EARLY LIFE

Saint Francis de Sales was born in Thorens, in the Duchy of Savoy, on 21st August 1567, the eldest of a family of six children. His parents, François de Sales de Boisy and Françoise de Sionnaz were scions of the old Savoyard nobility. Intended from an early age for the law, Francis was sent to school at Roche, then at Annecy, where he was tonsured at eleven years of age. He afterwards attended the College of Clermont in Paris from 1581 to 1588 where he took courses in philosophy and rhetoric from the Jesuits. It was at Paris that he underwent a terrible temptation to despair. In the church of Notre-Dame-des-Grès, at the feet of Our Lady of Good Deliverance, he was freed from this trial after making a vow of chastity before Our Lady's statue. In 1588 he went to Padua where he continued his studies in law and theology, and where, in 1592, he received the title of doctor *in utroque jure*. It was in Padua that he wrote the first version of his *Rule of Life*, destined one day to develop into the *Introduction to the Devout Life*.

HOLY ORDERS

Saint Francis de Sales had already been recognized as a barrister by the senate of Chambéry, and was on the point of being named a senator himself when he renounced the brilliant career offered him to embrace the ecclesiastical state. His father consented to this choice only once the bishop of Geneva, Monseigneur de Granier, arranged to award Francis the highest ecclesiastical honour in the diocese, Provost of the Cathedral Chapter. And so, in 1593, in the space of six months, Saint Francis de Sales

received all of the minor orders, and was ordained subdeacon, deacon and finally priest.

MISSION TO THE CHABLAIS

In 1594 he undertook a mission to the Calvinists of the Chablais, and he and his cousin, Louis de Sales, soon began to influence the region from their base at the Fortress of Allinges. On several occasions, Saint Francis de Sales escaped death in miraculous circumstances. After several notable conversions, including that of the mayor of Thonon, the region's whole population re-entered the Church between 1597 and 1598.

EARLY WRITINGS

It was during this time, as Pope Pius IX declared in his brief naming him a Doctor of the Church, that "to overcome the obstination of the heretics of his time and to encourage Catholics," he wrote *The Catholic Controversy*, "which contains a perfect demonstration of the Catholic Faith."

He began by distributing loose-leaf tracts among the people to entice them to attend his sermons. In these tracts Saint Francis explained the authority of the Church and the rule of Faith. He also refuted protestant beliefs and affirmed the Church's constant need for "an infallible authority to whom one can turn, and for a foundation that the gates of hell can never overthrow." This text, which was redistributed by the first Vatican Council, had an historic influence on the dogmatic definition of papal infallibility.

In response to a pamphlet by a Protestant minister named de la Faye against devotion

to the Cross, Saint Francis wrote *The Defense of the Standard of the Holy Cross* in which he explained the difference between adoration, or the cult of latria, which is reserved to God alone, and veneration, or the cult of relative latria, which can be addressed even to those objects that are associated with Jesus Christ, particularly the Holy Cross. His *Treatise on Demonology* also probably dates from this period.

PRINCE BISHOP OF GENEVA

In 1599, Francis de Sales, despite his protests, was chosen as coadjutor by Bishop de Granier. Pope Clement VIII confirmed the choice and personally oversaw the candidate's examination in the presence of numerous cardinals. At the end of the examination, Pope Clement declared: "Not one of the candidates whom we have examined to date has satisfied us more fully." On the return trip, Francis went to Paris to settle questions about the region of Gex, a part of the diocese of Geneva that belonged to France. There he met the future Cardinal de Bérulle and encouraged him to found a society for the education of the clergy. Henry IV would have liked to keep Saint Francis for Paris, and he invited him to preach the Lenten exercises for the royal court. When Bishop de Granier died in 1602, Saint Francis de Sales succeeded him.

Until his death in 1622, he criss-crossed his diocese, organising catechesis for adults as well as for children, regulating the life of his clergy, and reforming several religious communities. He also preached numerous retreats, notably at Dijon (in 1604), where he met the Baroness de Chantal; at Chambéry (in 1606); and at Grenoble (in 1616, 1617 and 1618). He was in Paris for the last time from Novem-



Saint Francis de Sales before Clement VIII
Troyes, Saint John-in-the-Market.

ber of 1618 to September of 1619. During that time he preached every single day, besides encountering Saint Vincent de Paul, Father de Condren, and Angelica Arnaud, whose later fall into Jansenism he predicted. He refused successive offers to become abbot of the wealthy Abbey of Sainte-Genviève, and to be made the coadjutor bishop of Paris; he chose to return instead to Annecy.

HIS LITERARY WORK

In Lyon in 1609 appeared *The Introduction to the Devout Life*, a guide to asceticism for people living in the world. The work is based in part on letters originally written to a certain Madame de Charmois. It was the first clear guide to a life of piety published in France, and it met with great success. In 1656, less than forty years after the death of its author, it had already been translated into 17 different languages.



Saint Francis de Sales preaching in the Chablais,
by Prosper Dunant (1790-1878, painted c. 1822)

THE VISITATION

In 1610, with Baroness de Chantal, Saint Francis founded the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary, an order meant for young women and widows called to the religious life but who were too frail to enter the great established orders with their rigorous rules.

From then on, many of his writings were addressed to the Visitation sisters, though he continued his massive correspondence and his many pastoral visits.

It was thanks to the urging of the first Visitation sisters that, in 1616, he published *The Treatise on the Love of God*, the fruit of many years of labour. Saint Francis de Sales himself described it as follows:

“Truly my intention is only to represent

simply and naïvely, without art, still more without false colors, the history of the birth, progress, decay, operations, properties, advantages and excellences of divine love.”

True Spiritual Conferences is a collection of talks that Saint Francis addressed to the sisters of the Visitation. They give an overall picture of the spirit of their order.

The *Rule of Saint Augustine* and the *Constitutions* for the religious sisters of the Visitation were meant to guide the sisters to union with God by encouraging them ceaselessly to conform their will to God’s. *Quæ placita sunt ei facio semper*.

THE PREACHER

Throughout his life, Saint Francis never ceased to preach. His sermons converted many, including the Duke of Lesdiguières, future Constable of France, who heard him preach at the Collegiate Church of Saint-André at Grenoble. Blessed Pius IX said Saint Francis deserved “to be recognized as the restorer and master of sacred eloquence”.

In the Fall of 1622, Saint Francis de Sales was following the ducal court of Savoy as it travelled in France, first to Avignon and then to Lyon where, on 28th December at the age of 54, he passed away in a spirit of piety. After some opposition from his admirers in Lyon, his body was returned to Annecy. His heart was, however, confided to the Visitation of Lyon; during the French Revolution it was taken to Treviso. Francis de Sales was beatified in 1661 and canonized in 1665 by Pope Alexander VII. In 1887 Blessed Pius IX declared him “Doctor of the Universal Church”. On 26th January 1923 Pius XI declared him the “heavenly patron of writers and journalists”.



BEAUTIFUL SAVOY

Annecy, by Prosper Dunant (1790-1878)

Saint Francis de Sales was undeniably influenced by the sophisticated and profoundly Christian teaching imparted by his mother; by the manly, common sense education offered by his father; and by the instruction that he received in various academic institutions; but he was also formed by the beautiful surroundings of his magnificent native Savoy.

Henry Bordeaux describes this enchanting landscape for us: “The traveler who crosses the Lake of Geneva lengthwise and who surveys the coast of Savoy has before his eyes an incomparable landscape, a real miracle of loveliness, of harmony and of grace. The verdant plain of the Chablais borders the lake’s blue waters and contains the smoothly curved mountains, wooded up to their summits. Further on, the jagged, icy peaks rearing white against the pristine sky seem to be so many flagstaves flying the standard of the setting sun. This blessed country, with its clear and limpid air, is a propitious climate for the cultivation of a contemplative soul. The autumn, more than any other time, gives

this enchanting nature its power to move us. With the harmony of its fading hues, it moderates the excessive joy with which summer had lavished. The resounding laughter of waters and meadows, of plains and of mountains, is changed into the poignant smile of a pleasure that senses its own fragility, yet wishes to continue rejoicing, unafraid to meld in some rare and pungent brew its zest for life with the knowledge of its imminent death.”

Saint Francis de Sales: Theologian of Love

Here indeed are the reflections of the qualities of his nature: harmony, grandeur and measure were imprinted in the spirit of the youthful Francis. On countless occasions Saint Francis de Sales was to use nature to illustrate his sayings and his writings.

“I have even encountered God, full of sweetness and suavity, on our highest and rudest mountains, where many simple souls love and adore him, and where the deer and mountain goats run hither and thither among the awful glaciers, announcing his praises.”

Letter to Madame de Chantal, 2nd October 1606

THE DOCTOR OF DIVINE LOVE

Man is the perfection of the universe; the spirit is the perfection of man; love, that of the spirit; and charity, that of love.

Treatise X, 1

In 1877, Blessed Pope Pius IX declared Saint Francis de Sales a Doctor of the Church. On the 400th anniversary of Saint Francis' Episcopal consecration, Saint Jean Paul II wrote that, as the "Doctor of Divine Love, Francis de Sales did not rest until the faithful accepted God's love, to live fully in it, turning their hearts to God and uniting themselves with him."

Letter to the bishop of Annecy, 23rd November 2002.

Charity was at the heart of his teaching:

"Never do anything without love," wrote Saint Francis to Madame de Chantal when he began giving her spiritual direction. "Gather this holy love at every chance... Everything that is done for love is love; labour, yea, and even death are naught but love, when for love they are accepted."

Letter to Madame de Chantal, 14th September 1611

TO LOVE DESPITE OUR FRAILTY

Though he was realistic about human nature, Saint Francis de Sales always preached confidence. Confidence despite sin and despite the disorders of wounded human nature, "for what could a child fear between the arms of such a father?"

A gift from God, insofar as it is an action of God, is always perfect. Consequently, if charity within man is imperfect, it is due to man's receiving it imperfectly.

He understood the weakness of human



Gricigliano, *Relic of the Heart of Saint Francis de Sales offered by the Visitation Monastery of Treviso.*

nature and, as a director of souls, worked towards strengthening his spiritual children against sin.

In the end, sin actually reveals a Divine love higher than the love that inspired creation: mercy. And thus, man's misadventure serves to manifest the glory of God. In his chapters on Divine Providence, Saint Francis de Sales exposes his thoughts on the "superabundance" of the Redemption; the infinite mercy of God has elevated the created order in a wonderful way.

Nowhere in his works is any trace to be found of the depressing, Jansenist concep-

tion of original sin (a conception which was so common in the 18th century) as a “denaturation”, or as an almost irreversible destruction.

“You do not know the force of humility, which can change the lead of our infirmities to purest gold.” *Spiritual Counsel to a Religious, 1612*

“Be your heart made of earth, of mud or of mire, fear not to put it into the hands of God; when he created Adam, he took a bit of earth, and out of it he made a living soul.”

Sermon for the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lady, 1620

PRIOR DILEXIT NOS

Saint John tells us that “It is God who first loved us.” Saint Francis de Sales had a profound conviction of this truth.

With our unaided capacities, it is impossible to love God as we ought to. We thus need to pray that Love Himself will come down to us, that He will take the place of our souls and teach us how to love Him: “The love of men towards God takes its being, progress and perfection from the eternal love of God towards men.” *Treatise, IV, 6*

“When the soul sees her God wounded by love for her sake, she immediately receives from it a reciprocal wound. Thou hast wounded my heart, said the heavenly lover to the Sulamitess, and the Sulamitess cries out: *Tell my beloved that I languish with love.* Bees never wound without being themselves wounded to death. And we, seeing the Savior of our souls wounded to death by love of us, *even to the death of the cross*, how can we but be wounded for him, but wounded with a wound as much more dolorously amorous as his was amorously dolorous.” *Treatise, VI, 14*

LOVING UNION

“God, who is One, loves unity and union, and all that is not unified is displeasing to Him. But if He sovereignly loves what is united and conjoined, He is the enemy of disunion, for what is disunited is imperfect, disunion being caused only by imperfection.”

Sermon for the Feast of the Visitation, 1621

PEACE IN UNION

Once this loving union with God is attained, a peaceful tranquillity results. Our Holy Doctor highlights this aspect of union: “Peace and tranquillity of heart have their

Saint Francis de Sales, Cathedral of Le Puy





origin in perfect confidence in the goodness of God, and they are the dwelling place of the Holy Ghost.”

*Letter to Madame Rousselet,
4th October 1620*

“You know that when the lake is very calm, and the winds do not agitate its waters, the sky with the stars on a clear night is so well represented in it, that looking down one sees the beauty of the heavens as well as by looking up. So, when our soul is very tranquil, and the winds of superfluous cares, of inequality of mind and of inconstancy do not trouble and disturb it, it is well capable of bearing in itself the image of our Lord; but not when it is troubled, disturbed, and agitated by divers storms of passions.” *Conference III, on Resolution*

“The indifferent heart is as a ball of wax in the hands of its God, receiving with equal readiness all the impressions of the Divine pleasure; it is a heart for molding, without any resistance in the hands of God.” *Treatise IX, 4*

AFFECTIVE AND EFFECTIVE LOVE

There was nothing of a quietist in Saint Francis de Sales, and it would be missing the point of his teaching to interpret holy in-

*Saint Francis de Sales at the feet of the
Virgin Mary, the Visitation Monastery
in Bourg-en-Bresse.*

difference in such a light:

“You know the difference between effective love and affective love. Our Lord is not satisfied with the affective if we do not also give Him effective love. Notice that He does not consider those blest who simply hear His word, but only those who also keep it.”

Sermon for the Feast of Our Lady of the Snows, 1617

“Effective love works and is never idle. It suffers labours and pains, it endures injuries and calumnies... Do you see Saint Mary Magdalene? She was moved by affective love when, seeing her Master and wishing to kiss his feet, she cried: ‘Rabboni.’ But Our Lord turned her away, saying, ‘Do not touch me; go unto to my brethren’ (*Jn. XX, 16-18*). And so behold effective love, for at once she set out and went.”

Sermon for the Feast of St. Augustine, 1620.

Love dwells in our will, and in its essence it is purely interior, and so it cannot be evaluated by outward deeds. Outward deeds can give love its colour but never its essence. Although love can be qualified as affective or effective according to its outward manifestations, it always remains essentially unchanged. For Saint Francis de Sales, there is no such thing as active or contemplative love: it is life that may be active or contemplative according to the nature of love’s different exercises.

“Charity, then, is a love of friendship, a friendship of spiritual love, a spiritual love of preference, but a preference incomparable, sovereign, and supernatural, which is as 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 re-

side and to make it cherish and love its God above all things.”

Treatise II, 22

DEVOTION IS ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYONE

Henri Bremond remarks with good reason that it is important to understand that for Saint Francis, “devotion” is synonymous with “perfection” or with “pure love,” in that elevated and crucifying sense that the great mystics give these expressions.

“Devotion is simply a spiritual activity and liveliness by means of which Divine Love works in us, and causes us to work briskly and lovingly in all that concerns the service and honour of God... Devotion is the perfection of charity.”

Introduction I, 2

“It is not merely an error but a heresy to suppose that a devout life is necessarily banished from the soldier’s camp, the merchant’s shop, the prince’s court, or the domestic hearth.”

Introduction I, 3

Saint Francis de Sales’ great merit is to have managed to elucidate this demanding spirituality while at the same time showing its compatibility with any state in life.

No other spiritual master has better exposed the whole meaning of the great maxim of Saint Augustine: “*Ama et fac quod vis*”; “love and do what you will.” The same is true of Saint Francis of Assisi’s saying: “My God and my All”.

SAINT FRANCIS' SPIRITUAL PEDAGOGY

Our Holy Doctor strives to instil love in the heart and soul of his spiritual children, and he finds many different means of increasing charity in them. What he desires above all is to reform man's interior, and his method is rooted in love.

A METHOD FOUNDED ON LOVE

Saint Francis never wishes to give secondary exercises more importance than the first and greatest of commandments: to love God above all things.

He bases his method upon a keen psychological analysis: to love God is for him both the end and the means of spiritual progress. We desire because we love, and we love because we desire to do so. Thus, the more we love God, the more perfect our actions and desires will be.

“Philothea, I cannot approve of those who in reforming a man would begin with external things – his face, his hair, or his dress. On the contrary, we must begin from within. For the heart is the mainspring of our actions. Wherefore I should have you above all things inscribe and engrave on your heart that blessed Name, being persuaded that if you do so, all the actions of you future life (which spring from your heart as the tree from its kernel) will be stamped with that saving name of Jesus. And inasmuch as He will be in your heart, He will also be in all your gestures, in your eyes, your mouth, your hands, and all of the members your body.”

Introduction III, 23

“What the reformers had built on the dogma of original sin and the radical misery of mankind, he founded upon love; love was

for him the starting point, just as it was destined to be the point of arrival.” *Trowski, Introduction à l'histoire du sentiment religieux en France au XVII^e siècle.*

LET VIRTUE BLOSSOM

The logic behind Salesian spiritual pedagogy can be summed up in a few words: instil love in man's heart, for love is the surest means of banishing vice and of making virtue flourish.

“Love is the most pressing teacher and solicitor, to urge the heart which it possesses to obey the will and the intention of the beloved. Love is a magistrate who exercises his authority without noise, without marshals or sergeants, by that mutual complacency,



by which, as we find pleasure in God, so also we desire to please him.”

Treatise VIII, 1

In Saint Francis’ mind, every virtue is an extension of love, and, without love, every virtue is fragile.

“The queen bee never takes wing without being surrounded by all her Subjects; even so Love never enters the heart but it is sure to bring all other virtues in its train.”

Introduction III, 1

All of our faculties should subsequently be directed towards God.

“God has given you an understanding to know Him, a memory to remember Him, a will to love Him, an imagination to recall His mercies, eyes to see the wonder of His works, a tongue to praise Him, and so with all your other faculties.”

Introduction I, 10

A METHOD ROOTED IN FREEDOM

Soft passivity is not at all what our Holy Doctor recommends; especially as a Bishop and as a spiritual director, he seeks rather an intelligent and active obedience. He would like that whoever receives an order first understand and assimilate it, then apply it while taking stock of concrete circumstances.

He praises collaboration, responsibility and liberty, though without abandoning souls to the whims of their own fancy. He seems to wish to leave them their liberty so that their decisions be strong and conscientious, but his goal is always one and the same: to lead these souls to God.

He is an attentive guide who uses his skill, dexterity, flexibility, and personal influence all to govern souls without having to impose his authority by constraint or by direct orders.



Saint Francis de Sales, Enrico Reffo, 1896

A SENSITIVE SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

His letters and his *True Spiritual Conferences* contain a splendid pedagogical lesson that perfectly reflects his own way of doing things; he helps one to arrive at the truth by roundabout means, without lecturing or irritation.

When he offers a correction by saying it as if it were meant for a third person, the Bishop of Geneva is borrowing from the Bible, and he gives credit to Nathan, who used this technique with David: “Nathan spoke to him of his fault in the third person.

Perhaps it would not have been so easy if he had spoken to him directly.”

Sermon for Sexagesima, 1594

A spiritual director’s principal task is to open a soul up to divine action, thus allowing grace to fashion it.

EXPERT IN HUMAN NATURE

Saint Francis de Sales has a wonderful insight into human nature; he understands perfectly that progress is slow.

“You need patience: a rose bush first grows thorns, and only later roses.”

Letter to Dom Juste Guérin, April 1618

Right from the beginning of the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, he asks the reader not to expect that sudden sanctity which was sometimes achieved in history, but which must in general be considered a miraculous exception:

“St. Paul was purged with a perfect purification in a moment, as were St. Mary Magdalene, St. Catherine of Genoa, St. Pelagia, and some others, but such purifications are miracles of grace, even as the resurrection of the dead was a miracle in nature, and we dare not aspire to such. Ordinary purification and healing, whether of body or soul, are accomplished little by little, progressing slowly and often hardly at all. It is an old saying that a slow cure is a certain cure.”

Introduction I, 5

TO MERIT BY TEMPTATION

Saint Francis recognises the merits to be gained by souls in temptation, particularly by the practice of good works.

“Even supposing that temptation to some particular sin were to last our whole life, it would not render us odious in the sight

of God so long as we neither took pleasure therein, nor yielded our consent; and that because in temptation we are not active, but passive; and whereas we take no delight therein, neither can we partake of any guilt. St. Paul was grievously tormented by the messenger of Satan with a thorn in his flesh; but far from being displeasing to God; He was the rather glorified therein.”

Introduction, IV, 3

IMPERFECTIONS

We can resume his teaching on the different imperfections that torment us in his own words:

On distraction in prayer, Saint Francis advises following the example of a baby, who, “to see where his feet are, has taken his head from his mother’s breast, but then immediately returns to it, because he dearly loves it.”

Treatise VI, 10

Accepting our own weakness and the goodness of God should allow us to remain, “in the sweet and peaceable attention of God’s presence from whence we strayed.”

Treatise VI, 10

And so, when distraction takes us, “one should humble himself without being astonished.” “God does not order us to hinder sin from coming into us and being in us, but he commands that it should not reign in us. It is in us when we feel the rebellion of the sensual appetite, but it does not reign in us unless we give consent unto it.”

Treatise IX, 7

OVERCOMING TRIALS

For Saint Francis, the essence of love resides in that consent, by which the will tends effectively towards its good. The soul, “how-

ever troubled, cannot be injured whilst it refuses its consent.”

Introduction IV, 7

“Lately I was near some bee-hives, and some of the bees flew on to my face: I wanted to raise my hand, and brush them off. But a peasant said to me, ‘No, do not be afraid, and do not touch them: they will not sting you at all; if you touch them they will bite you.’ I trusted him, and not one bit me. Trust me; do not fear these temptations, do not touch them, they will not hurt you; pass on, and do not occupy yourself with them.” *Letter to Madame de Chantal, 28th August 1605*

Aware of his own weakness, but confident in the strength of God, a soul guided by our saint will wait humbly and simply for the divine grace necessary to overcome his trial: “Like someone who, taking one road but finding it very muddy, simply takes another road, we ought to do the same without thinking more about it.”

Spiritual Notice to a Religious, 1612

SIN

Saint Francis incorporates into his thought the teaching of the Council of Trent that distinguishes clearly between sin, temptation and concupiscence. Our faults serve both as reminders of our fragility and as occasions to practice humility.

“Let us not be upset if we are burdened by the weight of our bad inclinations; let us instead love the abjection that they cause us. You do not know the strength of humility, which can change the lead of our infirmities into purest gold.”

Spiritual Notice to a Religious, 1612

And so he encourages sinners to have confidence in God: “Be your heart made of earth, of mud or of mire, fear not to put it into the hands of God; when he created Adam, he took a bit of earth, and out of it he made a living soul.”

Sermon for the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lady, 1620

Through these passages we have a clear view of the genius of Saint Francis. He possesses remarkable clairvoyance concerning human psychology and unlimited faith and confidence in the infinite love of God. To instil love in men’s hearts is the *Alpha* and *Omega* of his spiritual doctrine.

Saint Francis de Sales, stained glass window from Saint Mary Oratory in Rockford, served by the Institute.



THE VIGOUR OF SALESIAN SPIRITUALITY

Some might accuse Saint Francis de Sales of being too optimistic, or of trying to show Christian asceticism in a pleasant light just to make it more attractive. One might think that his seemingly easy version of perfection, appeals only to weak souls who fear the arduous way of Christian perfection. The reality is rather different.

A DEMANDING SPIRITUALITY

Saint Francis' is one of the most demanding and crucifying forms of spirituality insofar as it is more interior than exterior. It requires renouncing one's own will in all things and in all ways so that the will of the Beloved alone remains. It requires fighting selfishness down to the destruction of one's deepest affections. Saint Francis is, according to Jean-Jacques Olier, "in the principle of his direction, the most mortifying of all the saints."

Life of Monsieur Olier, E. M Faillon

FORCEFUL RESISTANCE TO TEMPTATION

"The enemy occupies all the other faculties and is making a great racket and clamour in them." Yet we have our liberty, a gift from God, and Saint Francis understands that: "It is so excellent an element (our liberty) that the devil cannot touch it; he turns about it, muddles and encircles it, but he cannot force it."

Sermon for the Feast of Saint Augustine, 1620

He mocks the devil, and urges us to pay no heed to his scheming. "Let the enemy rage at the gate, let him knock, let him push, let him cry, let him howl, let him do his worst; we know for certain that he cannot

enter save by the door of our consent. Let us keep it closed tight, often looking to see that it is well shut; and about all the rest let us not trouble ourselves, for there is nothing to fear." Ever the sage pedagogue, he counsels staying firm until the devil loses patience. "Let him rage; keep all the entrances closely shut. He will tire at last, or, if he does not tire, God will make him raise the siege."

Letter to Madame de Chantal, 18th February 1605

SELF-PITY

Saint Francis de Sales asks his spiritual children to eliminate incessant introspection: "And to do so, keep your soul firmly to its path, without allowing it to distract itself in introspection, wondering about what it is doing or whether it is happy. Our satisfactions and consolations, alas, are not gratifying in the eyes of God; they only placate that miserable love and preoccupation that we bear for ourselves, without reference to God."

It is really a question of selfishness, of too great an affective love for oneself: "There are certain people who love themselves with too much affective love. They are very tender with themselves, and they never do anything other than pamper, cosset and spare themselves. It is really a pity how they fear anything that might harm them. If they are sick, even if they have nothing graver than a sore thumb, they think that no one could be worse off than they! They are so miserable! No evil, no matter how great, is anything compared with what they suffer, and you could never find a sufficient number of doctors to care for them. They will not stop

taking medicine, and, hoping to save their health, they lose and ruin it altogether. But if someone else is sick, they think it of no importance.”

Recommendation to Madame de Chantal, 31st March 1616

“Then there are those who think that nobody is to be pitied but them. They shed tears of tender sympathy over their own sufferings, trying by that means to move those around them to compassion; they care not about being considered patient, if only they are believed to be sick and afflicted. This is an imperfection, certainly, peculiar to children, or (if I may venture to say so) to women, or to effeminate men deficient in courage; for among noble minds this fault is not met with. Well-balanced and generous souls are not impeded by these follies and this silly softness, which can only hinder our progress along the road of perfection. And then, again, not to be able to endure being considered tender is surely to be so in the highest degree!”

Conference XV, on the Will of God

GREAT FORTITUDE

“This devotion must also be strong in bearing temptations, which never fail those who desire in earnest to serve God. Strong in bearing with the variety of dispositions which are to be met with in the Congregation, this being as severe a trial for weak minds as can be found. Strong in bearing each one of you with her imper-

fections, so as not to be disturbed at seeing herself subject to them. Strong in fighting against our imperfections. For as we need a very strong humility not to lose courage, but rather to increase our confidence in God in the midst of our weaknesses, so also do we need a courage strong enough to undertake the correction and perfect amendment of them. Strong in despising the opinion and judgment of the world, which never fail

*Saint Francis de Sales,
Church of Ss John and Reparata, Lucca.*



to run counter to all pious institutions, especially in their beginnings. Strong in keeping ourselves independent of all private affections, friendships, or inclinations, so as not to live according to them, but rather according to the light of true piety, in keeping ourselves independent of the sweetness and consolations which may come to us from God or from creatures, so as never to allow ourselves to be attached to them.”

Conference I, on the Obligation of the Rules

“We belong entirely to God, without reserve, without division, without any exception whatsoever, and with no ambition besides the honour of being his. If we had a single fibre of affection in our hearts that was not for him and of him, O God, how we would wrench it out at once.”

Letter to Madame de Chantal, August 1600

STEADFAST AGAINST THE WORLD

“Whatever we do, the world will find fault; if we spend a long time at Confession, it will ask what we can have to say; if we take but a short time, it will say that we do not tell everything; it will spy out all we do, and from one little hasty word it will pronounce our temper unbearable; it will denounce our prudence as avarice, our gentleness as folly; but as to the children of the world their passions will pass as the fruit of a generous spirit, their avarice as forethought,



Saint Francis de Sales Converting the Protestants Sent to Assassinate Him, stained glass window in the Church of Saint Francis de Sales, Paris.

their lusts as honourable. Spiders invariably spoil the bees' labour.

Never heed this blind world then; let it cry out as it will, like a bat that would disturb the birds of day. Let us be firm in our plans, unchanging in our resolutions; perseverance will show whether we are in earnest in offering ourselves to God and leading a devout life. Comets and planets are very alike in their brightness, but the comets, which are but wandering lights, soon disappear, whilst the planets shine

with perpetual brilliancy. So hypocrisy and true virtue have a considerable external resemblance, but they are easily distinguished, since hypocrisy does not endure, but soon vanishes like the rising smoke, whilst true virtue abides firm and constant.

There is no small advantage to the confirmation of our rising devotion, in encountering opprobrium and calumny; for by their means we are saved from the dangers of pride and vanity, which are like the midwives of Egypt whom Pharaoh commanded to kill all the male Israelites as soon as they were born.

We are crucified to the world, and the world should be crucified to us. It counts us as fools; let us count its votaries as madmen.”

Introduction IV, 1

THE VIRTUES DEAR TO SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES

As a spiritual director, Saint Francis de Sales does not scorn “the virtues of pagan philosophers,” but he does fear lest pride should attack them and reduce them to a mere appearance of virtue, “like a wormy apple, spoiled by the worm of vanity.”

“The martyrs make me ever wonder at the admirers of pagan virtues; not so much because they unreasonably admire the imperfect virtues of the pagans, as because they do not admire the most perfect virtues of Christians, virtues a hundred times more worthy of admiration, and alone worthy of imitation.”

Treatise XI, 10

Our holy doctor recommends the practice of “the little virtues” as an effective means of defeating selfishness and of allowing grace to work in us, so that we can live in divine charity.



HUMILITY

“This glorious King does not reward His servants according to the dignity of their office, but according to the humility and love with which they fulfill that which He has appointed them.”

Introduction III, 2

“Humility repulses Satan and preserves in us the gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost. For this reason all the saints, and especially the King of saints and His mother, ever honoured and cherished this virtue above all others.”

Introduction III, 4

“Charity is an ascending humility, and humility is a descending charity.”

Conference VIII, on Detachment

OBEDIENCE

“The truly obedient person will live sweetly and peaceably, like an infant in the arms of its dear mother, who is not disturbed by the thought of what may happen to him; whether she carries him on the right arm or the left, he does not care. So the truly obedient person, whatever may be commanded him, is never troubled; provided that he is commanded, and is always in the arms of obedience, he is satisfied.”

Conference XI, on Obedience

“If I were a religious, I should not ask to communicate oftener than the community, or to wear sackcloth, a hair-shirt, a chain, to make extraordinary fasts, to take disciplines, nor anything else. I should content myself with following the community in everything.”

Conference XXI, Ask for Nothing

Saint Francis de Sales,
the Visitation Monastery of Brooklyn

DISCRETION

The same spirit of discretion which in Saint Benedict seems to be the result of long reflexion, in Saint Francis de Sales appears with all the charm of almost impulsive spontaneity.

“The Bishop of Geneva is essentially a reasonable genius and a genius of conciliation... Reasonableness, measure, and good sense determine all of his teaching. Exaggeration, rarity, subtlety, affectation and fancy are all resolutely banished from his doctrine. If he does possess a certain affectation, it is, as in the case of Montaigne or Racine, a chance ornamentation of literary style; it does not affect the substance of things or of the soul.”

F. Vincent, Saint François de Sales directeur d'âmes

In all of Saint Francis' works, but above all in his letters, we enjoy that charming discretion of his, which is at once so insightful, so easygoing and so wonderfully effective at sanctifying. To a lady who is more zealous than thoughtful, but who is nonetheless keen to seek virtue, he writes “Love nothing, I beg you, to excess, not even virtues, for we sometimes lose them by their abuse.”

Letter to Madame Brûlart, 10th June 1605

“The drone bee makes more noise and is much more eager than the honey bee, but it produces only wax and no honey.”

Introduction III, 10

POVERTY

According to the testimony given by Saint Jane de Chantal during the process for beatification, there was nobody “so disinterested or so completely pure of any earthly affection as our blessed father.”

“Blessed are the poor! True happiness in this life is to be content with what suffices; nothing ever suffices those whom what is sufficient does not suffice.”

Letter to a Lady, 21st August 1621

SIMPLICITY

Simplicity, for Saint Francis, is nothing other than that candour of heart which goes straight to the truth, straight to duty, straight to God alone.

“You know that we commonly call a thing simple when it is not embroidered, lined or diversified. For example, we say, “There is a person very simply dressed,” because she has no trimming or lining on her gown; I mean no fancy lining that can be seen; but her gown and her dress is of only one material, and such is a simple dress. Simplicity, then, is nothing else than a pure and simple act of charity, which has one only motive, that of acquiring the love of God. And our soul is simple when we have no other aim in all that we do.”

Conference XII, on Simplicity

MODESTY

This little virtue regulates every aspect of man's bearing according to the dictates of good order and decency. It does this always and everywhere, alone and in company; within his soul and upon his exterior countenance; and it does all this by respect for the Most Holy Trinity and for the Heavenly Court which sees us everywhere, and by respect for our neighbour whom we should seek to edify, and finally by respect for ourselves, sealed as we are by the sacred character of Baptism, of Confirmation and, as the case may be, of Holy Orders. Modesty is the right balance between affectation and heedlessness.

SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES AND THE LITURGY

MASS, THE SUN OF SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

“I have as yet said nothing concerning the Sun of all spiritual exercises, which is the most holy, sacred and royal sacrifice and Sacrament of the Eucharist, the center of the Christian religion, the heart of devotion, the soul of piety; an ineffable mystery which embraces the untold depths of divine charity, and in which God, giving Himself to us, bestows upon us freely all His favors and graces.

“Prayer, united to this Divine Sacrifice, has unutterable power, so that in it the soul overflows with celestial grace, as leaning upon her Beloved, He fills her with fragrance and spiritual sweetness, until, in the words of Solomon, she is ‘like a pillar of smoke of aromatic spices, of myrrh and frankincense, and of all powders of the perfumer.’

“Endeavor, if possible, to be present daily at the Holy Mass, that, together with the priest, you may offer the Sacrifice of your Redeemer to God His Father in your own behalf and that of the whole Church. The holy angels are always present in great numbers to honour this holy mystery, St. Chrysostom says, and we may hope to be made partakers of their holiness, when we are gathered together with them to the same intent; and the choirs of the Church Triumphant as well as the Church Militant join themselves to Our Lord in this divine action, that with Him, in Him, and by Him, we may as it were take God by storm, and obtain His mercy and love. What a privilege to be united in so blessed and mighty an action!”

Introduction II, 14

REVERENCE TOWARDS THE SACRED

“Reverence, which is one of the acts of

the virtue of religion, is nothing other than a certain lively apprehension and righteous fear of not conducting oneself correctly, and of lacking in honour and respect towards God and towards sacred things; and from this apprehension proceeds a particular care in giving as perfectly as possible every kind of mark of the esteem that we have for the majesty and eminence of God and of our vileness and lowliness, and of the disproportion that exists between us and God. And this holy affection is generalised in all the

*Saint Francis de Sales, Prince Bishop of Geneva
Gricigliano, Patron Saints Room*



different works of religion and it is contrary to any negligence or small esteem towards divine things, and to the lack of attention and veneration that we ought to bear towards the greatness of the excellence that we serve and honour.”

Opuscles

CARE FOR THE LITURGY

Because he believed that “God, as the Sovereign Beauty, is the Author of the beautiful balance, of the wondrous lights and of the gracefulness that is in all things” (*Treatise X, 1*), Saint Francis de Sales sought to ensure that the liturgy always be beautiful and fitting.

“He was very generous towards his cathedral, bestowing upon it ‘a large lamp and six large silver candlesticks, a chasuble and two tunics of precious cloth-of-gold’; he furnished his private oratory equally well with the most beautiful of objects. (...)”

“He celebrated with a voice that was measured, deep and calm, and he pronounced his words distinctly and never hastily, no matter what business was pressing. One could see clearly that he was extremely recollected in God when engaged in this holy action, for he was able to keep his thoughts exclusively on what he was doing and on the people he wished to recommend to God during the holy sacrifice.

“During the process of canonisation, Canon Jay who had assisted him as a deacon, declared that “The majesty of the Lord filled the temple; struck by the pomp and by the pro-

found meaning of spiritual realities, his eyes flashed like lightning, his face was enflamed; sometimes, when filled with deep respect, his inner piety was betrayed by exterior signs to such an extent that he would hold himself bowed down in an admirable fashion.”

Monsignor Trochu, Saint Francis de Sales, vol. II, pp 527-528

FORTY HOURS’ DEVOTION AT ANNEMASSE

“Never could this first Forty Hours’ Devotion be too beautiful. The missionaries set to work preparing them, Francis in the lead. They had to capture the interest of a considerable crowd for several days, while also helping them to pray, and instructing and edifying them. Francis took the initiative of including what our pious forbearers referred to as ‘a mystery play’ in the program for the Forty Hours’ Devotion.

“These religious plays were very popular during the 16th century. The Provost was of the opinion that the sacrifice of Abraham would be a very appropriate subject. The play would be in verse. It was one of Francis’ brothers who, along with a cousin, wrote the poetry.

“The play was written quickly and the roles assigned; Francis chose the role of God the Father. Father Chérubin meanwhile was preparing ‘all that was necessary for the organization and beauty of the event.’ He did his best to restore the church, and nearby he had a vast tent dressed, complete with canvas and woodwork, so that the concourse



would have shelter. As for the stage, it was put up in the main square of the town. The extent of the preparations gave the region's inhabitants a high idea of the coming feast. In truth, in living memory nothing like it had been seen in all of Savoy; all around people were thinking of going. Geneva was concerned. De Bèze and de la Faye had 'several companies of soldiers occupy the roads.'

"Francis offered mass at the break of day, and all of the devout pilgrims attended. Afterwards, he put on surplice and stole and, kneeling before the altar, began the litany of the saints with great devotion; all of the people present sang the responses. He then rose and left the Church, followed by about five-hundred parishioners.

"The weather was inclement, and the roads were broken and muddy, but it mattered little. The people of Thonon kept to their ranks and did not speak. They prayed silently or alternated the Aves of the Rosary. Francis intoned songs of devotion, including hymns and canticles. The Provost took advantage of breaks along the way to prepare their hearts for the communions and adoration that the following day held in store. At every village along the way, new converts swelled the ranks of the procession.

"It was thus an imposing crowd that entered into Annemasse. Shortly after their arrival, Francis received 'the news that his children, the Penitents of the Holy Cross, were not far off. They were proceeding solemnly, covered in sackcloth, mostly in bare feet, rosaries in hand, singing with accompaniment the litany of the Most Holy Crucifix, and taking up the rear was Canon Louis de Sales.' They followed their path and went to the Church of Annemasse where musicians sang a motet in honour of the Most Holy Virgin.

"After that everyone retired, for night had already fallen. Under the immense pavilion erected by Father Cherubin, the people of Annecy and of Thonon settled in as best they could.

"On Sunday, 7th September, the ceremonies were incomparably splendid, at least for the many poor people who had never in their whole lives been able to attend the great manifestations of Catholic life. And besides, there was something unexpected to complete their joy: 'Seven hundred new converts from the bailiwick of Ternier arrived.'

"True to his word, the most Reverend Bishop celebrated a pontifical mass. After the gospel, 'his dear Provost ascended the pulpit and, as usual, delivered an admirable sermon to the vast assembly, explaining how to assist piously at the Forty Hours' Devotion.' At this mass, many of the converts received communion; those among them who were receiving communions for the first time were greatly moved.

"Once mass was over there was a procession of the Blessed Sacrament. Despite his weariness, Bishop de Granier carried the monstrance. At the monumental altar of repose that he had built, Father Chérubin, a gifted public orator, glorified the Eucharist with words of fire.

"Once they had returned to the Church, the other pilgrims went to take well-deserved refreshment, while the Provost 'took his place with admirable modesty at the head of the confraternity of the Holy Cross of Annecy, and kept the first hour of Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament exposed on the altar.' The different regional groups then took turns before the altar. There had to be constant sermons and a great number of priests, both religious and secular..."

Monsignor Trochu, Saint Francis de Sales, pp 505-509

OUR LADY OF GOOD DELIVERANCE



Saint Francis Praying to Our Lady,
stained glass in the Church of Saint
Francis de Sales, Paris.

Around December 1586, during his twentieth year, Saint Francis de Sales underwent a great temptation to despair in connexion with the difficult question of predestination. In his beautiful biography of Saint Francis, Monsignor Trochu describes this trial in detail:

“He was in a daily state of collapse, and by his sobbing one would have thought him in agony... He prayed in this way: ‘O miserable me! Alas, shall I then be deprived of the grace of the one who has given me so sweet a taste of his delights, and who has shown himself so lovable in my regard?’

“This agony lasted for six weeks, and during all that time he barely ate or slept. One evening, in January 1587, ‘more dead than alive,’ he entered the church of Saint-Étienne-des-Grès. Like a desperate child, he ran ‘straight to his divine mother’.

“He prayed as follows: ‘O Lord Jesus, you will always be my hope and my salvation in the land of the living. If, because I must necessarily merit it, I am to be cursed along with those whose curse is never to see your most sweet countenance, grant

me at least not to be among those who curse your holy Name.’

“From near the chapel’s balustrade he took a card that had a little prayer to the Holy Virgin: the *Memorare* of Saint Bernard... Upon this cry gushing forth from the most filial and the most sorrowful of hearts, the temptation vanished.”

During his whole life Saint Francis de Sales was very devoted to Our Lady and grateful to her for obtaining by her intercession deliverance from his dreadful temptation.

THE ROSARY

“The entire primitive Church, everywhere in the world, and with universal accord, had always hailed the Mother of God in this angelic way: *Ave Maria, gratia plena*. And our more immediate predecessors, hearkening to the sacred tone of their ancestors, sang in devout harmony on every occasion and in every place *Ave Maria*. They sought by honouring his mother to find favour with the Celestial King, and they could find no better way of honouring her than by imitating those very

same honours and marks of esteem that God Himself had been pleased to bestow upon her, in view of glorifying her, on the day that His Divine Majesty was pleased, by becoming man, to give a mark of immense esteem to the Virgin and to all mankind. O holy Salutation! O what well-merited praise! O what rich yet tactful honours! Great was the God who ordained them, great the Angel who pronounced them, great the Evangelist who recorded them. All of antiquity repeated them, and our forefathers have taught them to us.”

Sermon on the Angelic Salutation, 1595

Memorare, O piissima Virgo Maria, non esse auditum a sæculo, quemquam ad tua currentem præsidia, tua implorantem auxilia, tua petentem suffragia, esse derelictum. Ego tali animatus confidentia, ad te, Virgo Virginum, Mater, curro, ad te venio, coram te gemens peccator assisto. Noli, Mater Verbi, verba mea despiciere; sed audi propitia et exaudi. Amen.

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thine intercession was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother; to thee do I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of The Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy, hear and answer me. Amen.

Statue of Our Lady of Good Deliverance, Gricigliano, Blessed Sacrament Chapel.



DOCILITY TOWARDS THE HOLY GHOST

“With an unparalleled heart Our Lady came to give herself to God without reserve; and had she dared to speak, no doubt she would have said to the good women who brought up those maidens who were dedicated to Our Lord in the Temple: *I am here in your hands like a ball of wax. Do with me what you will, I shall make no resistance.*

Moreover, she was so pliable and submissive that she allowed herself to be turned by every hand without ever testifying any desire for this or that, so condescending that all

were overcome with admiration. (...)

Let us add also that she was obedient to the Divine Majesty, not only to His commandments but also to His desires and good pleasure and to His inspirations. In that, my dear Sisters, we must take care to imitate her as closely as possible. I say this because very few are found who do it faithfully, though many protest that they are resolved to do so. To obey the will of God is to obey His word.”

Sermon for the Presentation of Our Lady, 1619



Saint Jane de Chantal and Saint Francis de Sales Offering Their Hearts to the Holy Virgin, Caprentras Cathedral.

THE FRUITFUL VIRGINITY OF OUR LADY

“The purity and virginity of Our Lady had this excellence, this privilege and supereminence above that of the angels, that it was a fruitful virginity. That of the angels is sterile and can produce no fruit. On the contrary, that of our glorious mistress was not only fruitful because she produced for us this sweet Fruit of Life, Our Lord and Master, but in the second place she has begotten many virgins. It is in imitation of here, as we have said, that virgins have vowed their chastity. But the virginity of this divine Mother has also the property of restoring and repairing those

who had been stained and defiled at some period of their life. Holy Scripture testifies that during her lifetime, she called a great number of virgins, so that many accompanied her wherever she went: St. Martha, St. Marcella, the Marys, and many others. But in particular, was it not by means of her and by her example that St. Mary Magdalene, who was a caldron blackened by a thousand impurities and the receptacle of impurity itself, was afterwards enrolled under the standard of the purity of our lady and converted into a crystal vial, resplendent and transparent, capable of receiving and retaining the most precious liquors and most salutary waters? (...)

“The most holy Virgin alone was the first to be drawn by the Heavenly Spouse to consecrate and dedicate herself totally to His service, for she was the first to consecrate her body and soul to God by the vow of virginity. But as soon as she was drawn she drew a host of souls who offered themselves to God, to advance under her sacred protection in the observance of a perfect and inviolable virginity and chastity. Ever since she led the way it has always been filled with souls who come to consecrate themselves by vows to the service of the Divine Majesty. Most dear souls, whom the glorious Virgin regards when she says ‘We will run!’ Thereby she assures her Beloved that many will follow her standard, striving under her authority against all kinds of enemies for the glory of His Name.”

Sermon for the Annunciation, 1621

THE POWER OF MARY’S PRAYER

“It is quite the same with this first miracle that Our Lord worked today at the wedding

feast of Cana. 'My hour is not yet come,' He said to His holy Mother, 'but since I can refuse you nothing, I will advance this hour to do what you ask.' From all eternity, He had foreseen that He would anticipate it in favour of Our Lady's Prayers."

Sermon for the 2nd Sunday after Epiphany, 1621

MARY'S SILENCE

"The holy Gospel makes special mention of the silence of Our Lady (*Lk. II, 51*). Mary was silent and seated herself at the feet of her Master. She had no care but to enjoy His presence. It seems that our worthy Mistress had only this one care. Picture her in the city of Bethlehem where, after every effort is made to find her a lodging and none is found, she says not a word. She enters the stable, brings forth her Beloved Son, and lays Him in a manger (*Lk. II, 7*). The Kings come to adore Him, and we may imagine what praises they offer to the Child and the Mother, but she speaks not a word. She carries Him into Egypt. She brings Him back, without speaking either to express her sorrow in taking Him there or the joy she must have felt in bringing Him back. But what is still more admirable, see her on Mount Calvary (*Jn. XIX, 25-27*): She does not yield to outbursts of grief, or does she utter a single word. She is at the feet of her Son and that is all she desires. It is as if she is perfectly indifferent. She seems to say, whatever may happen, provided I am always near Him and possess Him, I am satisfied, since I desire and seek only Him."

Sermon for the Feast of the Assumption, 1618

THE HEAVENLY *MAGNIFICAT*

"We mount then in this holy exercise from step to step, by the creatures which we invite to praise God, passing from the insensible to the reasonable and intellectual, and from the Church militant to the triumphant, in which we rise through the angels and the saints, till above them all we have found the most Sacred Virgin, who in a matchless air praises and magnifies the divinity more highly, holily and delightfully than all other creatures together can ever do. Being two years ago in Milan, whither the veneration of the recent memory of the great Archbishop St Charles had drawn me, with some of our clergy, we heard in different churches many sorts of music: but in a monastery of women we heard a religious whose voice was so admirably delightful that she alone created an impression more agreeable, beyond comparison, than all the rest together, which though otherwise excellent, yet seemed to serve only to bring out and raise the perfection and grace of this unique voice. So, Theotimus, amongst all the choirs of men and all the choirs of angels, the most Sacred Virgin's clear voice is heard above all the rest, giving more praise to God, than do all the other creatures. And indeed the heavenly King in a particular manner invites her to sing: Show me thy face, says He, my well-beloved, let thy voice sound in my ears: for thy voice is sweet and thy face comely" (*Cant. II, 14*). *Treatise V, 11*

SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES AS SEEN BY CARDINAL PIE

“When I consider the characteristics of the Bishop of Geneva, I would willingly write beneath his portrait the words of the apostle: *Benignitas et humanitas apparuit Salvatoris nostri Dei* (*Tit. III, 4*). For, in reality, it is truly ‘the appearance of the benignity and humanity of our God and Saviour.’ The description that our Master left of Himself would have been rightly reproduced and appropriated by his disciple had his modesty not forbidden it: ‘Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart’ (*Mt. XI, 29*). These words express, in effect, the distinguishing characteristic of Saint Francis de Sales: he will forever be offered to successive generations as the personification of Christian meekness. (...)

“The world, which has little esteem for meekness, likes to confuse it with weakness of character, but in his person, Saint Francis de Sales had a manifest alliance between meekness and energy of will. More often still the world has wished to identify meekness with a lack of intelligence; Saint Francis de Sales allied his meekness with the height and breadth and with the grace and charm of his mind. Let us go over or rather touch upon some of his thoughts.

“First of all this man, who like Moses could be called the ‘the meekest of men’ (*Nb. XII, 3*), employed an admirable force in the practical government of his own life. He had in himself and found all around him every kind of temptation. (...)

“Look closely: his entire life is a combat against himself; his very meekness requires a continual effort, because he was not meek by nature. He would have tended naturally to

vivacity and anger. (...) Like an able helmsman, he governed his heart so well in the midst of every obstacle that he never separated himself from the Lord: *et gubernavit ad Dominum cor ipsius* (*Eccli. XLIX, 4*).

“This man, ‘the meekest of men’, was forceful in governing souls. The fruit of Saint Francis de Sales’ direction is Saint Jane de Chantal, ‘the valiant woman’ among all others: ‘far and from the uttermost coasts is the price of her’ (*Prov. XXXI, 10*). The fruit of his direction and spiritual guidance is the Order of the Visitation, an order which, under the appearance of a common and easy life, enjoins the practice of the most constant and absolute renouncement. (...)

“Finally, this man, the meekest of men, was forceful in governing practical affairs. According to the prejudice of the worldlings, meekness is incompatible with great undertakings: meekness is never heroic. But here is Saint Francis in whom we see meekness’ aptitude for the most difficult kinds of affairs. Follow in detail, for example, the works undertaken by the Chapter Prevost as the Apostle of the Chablais. Could there be a bolder determination than that which led him to establish himself at Thonon, then the very centre of heresy and opposition? (...) Seventy-two thousand heretics brought back to the faith and unity of the Church: is that not enough to justify an apostle accused of losing everything by his meekness?

“The bishop showed no less forcefulness in the government of his diocese. Our Lord said, ‘Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the earth’ (*Mt. V, 4*). Everyone gives way before the words of such a meek master! There

was no diocese more ordered or better disciplined than his. He accomplished the difficult task of reforming religious orders, and he founded a new institute, and the durable way in which he did so proves the power and wisdom of his conceptions.

“But what is generally unknown is that Francis de Sales who refrained from any participation in political life was in fact a politician with very elevated and bold views. What staunchness he brought to bear in the counsels of the courts of Savoy and France in order to challenge and undo those dangerous advantages which diplomacy dared not deny the heretics! (...)

“To Christianise power just when it was becoming Machiavellian, to restore harmony between politics and the Gospel: this was the thought of Saint Francis de Sales, and it is this that he preached from the pulpit of Notre Dame in Paris when he pronounced the funereal elogy of one of the last crusaders of France (27th April 1602, *Philippe-Emmanuel of Lorraine, Duke of Mercœur and of Penthièvre*). With all the fire of Christian patriotism, he encouraged the ardent souls of his warlike audience; he sought to renew in the hearts and to place in the hands of these men the Cross and sword that lay upon the catafalque of that catholic soldier of Lorraine. (...)

“And now shall I express Saint Francis de Sales’ way of uniting meekness with breadth of spirit and of knowledge, and with height and power of intelligence? There is the familiar saying of Cardinal du Perron: ‘If you want heretics to be convinced of their errors, you may send them to me; but if you want them to be converted, send them to the Bishop of Geneva.’ But the Bishop of Geneva was sure

to convert them only because he was sure to enlighten them at the same time: no one better than he was able to throw the light of day on difficult questions.

“Bossuet, who openly admired Saint Francis de Sale, drew freely on the saint’s *Controversies* in more than one passage of his *Advertisements to Protestants*.

“Lastly if we consider the author of ascetical theology, we can affirm that our saint holds pride of place among spiritual writers; he speaks the language of the simple of the perfect with the same superiority; never was piety presented in more attractive a form. (...) I do not mean to speak of the natural qualities of his style, though he was in that respect superior to the majority of his contemporaries. Erudition, understanding and talent are not enough if knowledge of things is not complemented by knowledge of men. The Bishop of Geneva, so meek a man, was both very penetrating and very perspicacious, and he had that rare quality that in Christian parlance is called the discernment of spirits. (...) His meekness was more discriminating than the prudence of even the most prudent men. He had the seeing into thoughts, of unravelling intentions, of reading hearts; that is why he esteemed each person in a different degree, according to his merits.”



Portrait of Cardinal Pie by E. Lejeune

SAINT JANE DE CHANTAL AND THE VISITATION

“A new religious family was to come into being from his profound spiritual communion with an exceptional figure, St Jane Frances de Chantal: The Foundation of the Visitation, as the Saint wished, was characterized by total consecration to God lived in simplicity and humility, in doing ordinary things extraordinarily well: ‘I want my Daughters’, he wrote, ‘not to have any other ideal than that of glorifying [Our Lord]

Saint Francis de Sales Giving the Rule of the Order of the Visitation to Saint Jane de Chantal, by Noël Hallé,
Church of Saint-Louis-en-l’Île, Paris



with their humility.”

Benedict XVI, General Audience, 2nd March 2011

“Here is the general rule of our obedience written in large letters: We must do all by love, and nothing by force. We must love obedience rather than fear disobedience. I leave you the spirit of liberty; not that which excludes obedience, for this is the liberty of the flesh; but that which excludes constraint, and scruple, and worry.”

Letter to Madame de Chantal, 14th October 1604

Last night God inspired me with the thought that thanks to His grace our house of the Visitation is sufficiently noble and considerable to have its own coat of arms, escutcheon, motto and battle cry. I have thought, my dear Mother, if you agree, that we should take as our coat of arms a single heart pierced by two arrows, the whole enclosed in a crown of thorns, and with the poor heart serving to hold and support a cross which is to surmount it, and the heart is to be engraved with the sacred names of Jesus and Mary. My daughter, I have a thousand little thoughts to tell you on this subject at our next meeting, for indeed, our little congregation is the work of the hearts of Jesus and Mary. Our dying Savior gave birth to us by the wound in his sacred heart.”

Letter to Madame de Chantal, 10th June 1611

During Lent of 1604, Jane Frances Frémyot, widow of the

Baron de Chantal, came to Dijon to hear a preacher of great renown. She was then only twenty-eight years old and was the mother of four children. She was going to discover the man who would guide her to the heights of sanctity: Saint Francis de Sales.

Under his direction, she became the head of a foundation with a missionary vocation; just as Our Lady came to help her cousin Elizabeth, these religious would have as their principal task visiting and comforting the sick and the poor. They therefore took “The Visitation” as their name.

On 6th June 1610, the first community was established at Annecy. After a year of novitiate under the guidance of Saint Francis de Sales, four women made their profession. Starting on 1st January 1612, the sisters began visiting hospitals and the homes of the poor in the city. But their presence “in the world”, met with disapproval, and gradually the cloister was imposed.

From 1615 to 1616 Saint Francis wrote *The Constitutions of the Order* which made of the Visitation a cloistered order. These *Constitutions* would be approved by a bull of Urban VII on 27th June 1625.

In 1615 the order’s second monastery was established in Lyon. Jane de Chantal was then named founder and superior of the order. She travelled all around France and kept up a written correspondence with a great number of monasteries. At the time of Saint Francis de Sales’ death (28th December 1622), the order counted 13 monasteries, and at Saint Jane de Chantal’s death (13th December 1640), there were 87 monasteries.

Jane Frances Frémyot de Chantal was beatified in 1751 by Benedict XIV et canonised by Clement XIII on 16th July 1767.

Among other well-known sisters of the Visitation was Saint Margaret Mary, who entered the convent of Paray-le-Monial on 25th May 1671 at 24 years of age. Shortly afterwards, Our Lord appeared to her and made her the apostle of devotion to the Sacred Heart.

The 129 French convents were dispersed in 1793. In 1805, the order was re-established in France; today it counts nearly 150 active convents around the world.

Our Lord Appearing to Saint Margaret Mary, Saint Peter’s Basilica, Vatican



LOVE OF THE CHURCH

“After the love of our Lord, I recommend to you that of his spouse, the Church, this dear and sweet dove, which can alone produce and bring forth little doves for the Spouse. Praise God a hundred times a day for being a daughter of the Church, like Mother (St) Teresa, who often repeated this sentiment at the hour of her death with extreme consolation. Cast your eyes on the bridegroom and the bride, and say to the beloved: O, to how lovely a bride art thou espoused! And to the Spouse: O, to how divine a lover art thou wedded! Have great feeling for all the pastors and preachers of the Church, and behold them spread over all the face of the earth; for there is no province in the world without them.

“Pray to God for them, that while saving themselves they may procure the salvation of many souls; and here I beg you never to forget me, since God has given me such strong will never to forget you.”

Letter to Madame de Chantal, 3rd May 1604

PERPETUITY OF THE CHURCH

“One must never say that the Church can ever die; her Spouse has died for her in order that she never die...

“Is more desired to verify her perpetuity? The prophecies and the Gospels are full of references to it. A single passage shall suffice for all; in Saint Matthew, XVI, 18: *Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church.*

He says, *I will build*; O what an architect!
He says *on this rock*; O what a foundation!

And, *The gates of hell shall not prevail against her*; O what a promise!”

Sermon on the Perpetuity of the Church, October 1594

THE PERFECT BEAUTY OF THE CHURCH AND HER MEMBERS

“The Church as a whole is entirely fair, holy, glorious, both as to morals and as to doctrine. Morals depend on the will, doctrine on the understanding. There never entered falsehood into the understanding of the Church, nor wickedness into Her will. By the grace of Her Spouse, She can say with Him, ‘Which of you, sworn enemies, shall convince me of sin?’ (*Jn. VIII, 46*) And yet it does not follow that in the Church there are no sinners. Remember what I have said to you elsewhere: the Spouse has hair, and nails, which are not living though She is living; the senate is sovereign, but not each senator; the army is victorious, but not each soldier—it wins the battle while many of its soldiers are killed. In this way is the militant Church always glorious, ever victorious over the gates and powers of hell, although many of Her members, either straying and thrown into disorder like yourselves, are cut to pieces and destroyed, or by other mishaps are wounded and die within Her. Take then one after another the grand praises of the Church which are scattered throughout the Scriptures and make Her a crown out of them, for they are richly due to Her; just as maledictions are due to those who though in so excellent a road are lost. She is an army set in array (*Cant. VI, 9*), though some fall out of her ranks.”

Controversies I, 2

Saint Francis de Sales Installing Saint Vincent de Paul as Superior of the Visitation of Paris, by Jean Restout (1692-1768), Church of Saint Margaret, Paris

THE SPIRIT OF AN INSTITUTE

“Now, the Capuchins have a severe and rigorous spirit, and to define it exactly, we may say that it is a perfect contempt as regards the exterior of the world and all its vanities and sensualities. I say, as regards the exterior, for all Religious Orders have it, or ought to have it, as regards the interior. They wish by their example to induce men to hold the things of earth in contempt, and the poverty of their garments serves for this end. By this means they convert souls to God, uniting themselves thus to His divine Majesty, and also with their neighbour for the love of God. This spirit of severity as regards the exterior is so inseparable from them, that if one of their Order is seen to have any kind of affectation, or shows it in his dress, or wishes to be treated more delicately than the others, in however slight a degree, it is said at once that he no longer possesses the spirit of St. Francis.

“Again, if a Carthusian is observed to take the smallest pleasure in conversing with his neighbour, however perfect may be his intention, were it even to convert him, he loses

instantly the spirit of his Order, as would also a Jesuit if he wished to retire into solitude and to devote himself to contemplation like the Carthusians. (...)

“There is, as we have said, the general end and aim of all Religious Orders, but there is also the special end of which I am speaking, and for which we must entertain so great a love, that there can be nothing likely to help towards that end that we would not embrace with all our heart.

“Now, do you know what it is to have a true love for the aim and end of our Order? It is to be exact in observing the means for arriving at this end—namely, our Rules and Constitutions. It is to be most diligent in doing whatever depends on this, and will help us to keep the Rule more perfectly. This is what is meant by having the spirit of our Religious Order.

“But, then, this exact and punctual observance must be undertaken in simplicity of heart—I mean that we must not wish to exceed, by aspiring to do more than our Rule prescribes for us. It is not by the multiplic-

ity of things we do that we acquire perfection, but by the perfection and purity of intention with which we do them. You must, then, consider what is the special aim of your Order, and the intention of your Founder, and stop short at the means marked out to bring you to it.”

Conference IX, on Modesty



POSTFACE *by Monsignor Wach*

“It is the heart of God that made the heart of man.” This is what Saint Francis de Sales tells us to help us understand that God is Love.

For our holy Doctor of the Church, creation is the first book in which we can read about the love of God. Creation already in and of itself seemed beautiful to him; he appreciated the colours, the shapes and the variety, but above all he admired its order: “Thy providence, O great and eternal Father, governs all things.” *Treatise II, 3*

And so, in his immense admiration for the entirety of creation, and for God’s extraordinary gift to mankind that is the Incarnation, Saint Francis de Sales seeks to share with his disciples his wonder before such a superabundance of love.

His optimism is founded above all on the elevation of the entire creation to the supernatural order by the Redemption of the Incarnate Word: “This copious, abundant, superabundant, magnificent and excessive redemption, which has gained for us, and as it were re-conquered for us, all the means necessary to attain glory, so that no man can ever complain as though the divine mercy were wanting to anyone. (...) Human nature has received more graces by its Savior’s redeeming than ever it would have received by Adam’s innocence, if he had persevered therein. The state of redemption is a hundred times better than that of innocence.”

Treatise II, 4 and 5

He knows perfectly well that man cannot live without God, without love: “Oh, if we were able to comprehend it, my dear Theotimus, what obligation should we have to this sovereign good, who not only permits but even commands us to love him! Ah, my God, I know not whether I ought more to love thine infinite beauty which so great a goodness orders me to love, or thy divine goodness which orders me to love so infinite a beauty! O beauty, how amiable thou art, being bestowed upon me by a goodness so immense! O goodness, how amiable thou art, in communicating unto me so eminent a beauty!”

Treatise X, 1

Contemporary man thirsts for love, but he perishes, because no one offers him to drink from

that fountain of Life which is our God.

Saint Francis understands that the heart of man, no matter how mysterious it may be, bears the distinguishing mark of its divine origin. That is to say, the God of Love has made us into love, for he made us “in his image and likeness”.

“God, having created man to his image and likeness, wills that as in himself so in man all things should be ordered by love and for love.”

Treatise I, 6

And how to love? By loving, he says. “You must love God with your whole heart... I do not know of any better way of learning to love than loving, like one learns to study by studying, to speak by speaking, and to work by working. Let the apprentices begin, and, by dint of loving, they will become masters. Let the adepts become ever more adept, without ever believing that they have reached their goal; in this life charity can always be increased.” (*J. P. Camus, Spirit of Saint Francis de Sales.*) “The measure of love is to love without measure.” (*Saint Augustine*)

Love’s response to a God of Love is to unite our soul to Him, to meld it into Him by the development of our life of grace and by the full conformity of our will to his, and our Holy Doctor understands that holiness depends in large part on “the humble and daily fulfillment of the duties of our state in life”.

God knows each one of us in the context of our state in life, in our concrete situation, in our own vocation, and he invites us to be what we are and to be it well. *Nec plus, nec minus*, as the motto of the Prince Bishop of Geneva put it. He tells us that “Providence is no other thing than the act hereby God furnishes men or angels with the means necessary or useful for the obtaining of their end.”

Treatise II, 3

How ideal a teacher Saint Francis de Sales seems to be for our own times! How perfectly his teaching responds to the needs of our generation! What an admirable connoisseur of the heart of man, this man who during his life was so close to the heart of God! This is the reason why I chose him as a patron saint for our beloved Institute and why I invite you all to become his disciples.



S. FRANCISCUS
SALESIIUS

What I love,
Said St. Francis de Sales in his graceful way,
More than all the riches of this Earth,
More than all the treasures of the heavens,

What I love more than the reflection of a flower
Upon the surface of clear water,
More than a sweet and gentle breeze,
More than the singing of the birds,

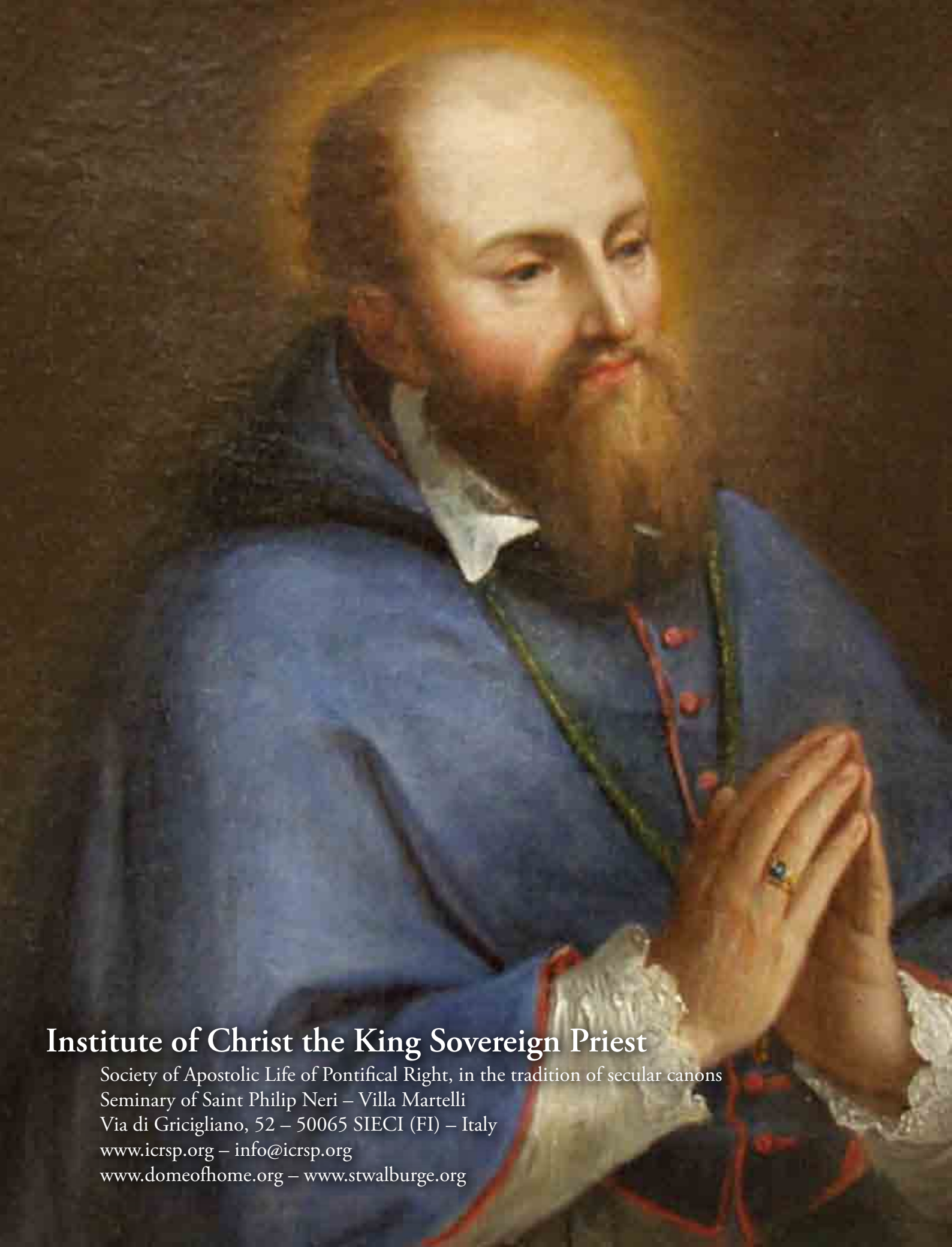
More than the soothing succession of the tides,
More than the golden starlight
Shining across the vast expanse
Of the evening sky,

More than the thunder that fills the hearts
Of the wicked with righteous fear,
More than the blue eyes of a child
Smiling at me beneath his tears,

More than the consoling little light
Of the sanctuary lamp,
More than prayer and the moments of ecstasy
Spent in the Real Presence of the Lord,

More than the holy bliss of Heaven
More than Paradise where my God awaits me,
More than the secrets of His Holy Word
To which my heart listens in silence,

More than His smile, more even than His grace
Which fills the whole world,
Yes, more than all these things,
I love the holy Will of God.



Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest

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