It is quite unusual to give an introduction to an introduction. However, I have been asked to deliver the introductory remarks to the annual Salesian seminar and I will do so.

Let me start my remarks by speaking about a book I have read just recently. It is a novel of Michael Chrichton called “State of Fear”. I will not take away from the suspense of that book, should you be reading it, I want to mention the main theme of it. The book deals with facts around global warming. Global warming, you will say, I know what that is. Due to the emission of carbon dioxide and many other reasons we are made to believe that the Earth is warming rapidly and we are a cause for it, and that we should change our way of life. A state of fear is created while scientific reports clearly elaborate that the earth is not getting warmer, icebergs are actually growing in the Antarctica, and that most news about the Global warming are rather fund raiser for institutionalized environmental groups who want to continue their work, independently of the facts they are promulgating. Global warming is used to scare people off, so that they open up their pockets and give some money to someone.

Why do I mention this little story in the beginning of my introductory remarks? First of all, I must say that I had a similar feeling when I read the leaflet to this annual meeting. Spiritual empowerment—A Salesian Life experience in an era of globalization. I wondered how neutral this era of globalization was. If it is merely a description of the time we are living in, I can comfortably live with this heading. If it were meant to insinuate within us a certain negative nuance I would rather disagree with it. Globalization is not something to be afraid of; I would rather see it as a fact. You may be surprised at my introductory remarks, but I intend of course something with it. I want to raise an awareness to be careful the use terminologies that may
insinuate apprehension and a reserved attitude. It would totally contradict what I have learned
from St. Francis de Sales. The era of globalization is a chance for us, a new opportunity, and
another approach to disseminate what we have become so fond of: Salesian spirituality. If at all
we are given new opportunities in an era of globalization, we have to face them with a Salesian
attitude. I would go even further.

St. Francis de Sales was in a special way in his “Introduction to the devout life” a
globalizer. So I may ask, whether Saint Francis de Sales lived in an era of globalization himself?
Or how else would you understand his famous passage:

“It is an error, nay more, a very heresy, to seek to banish the
devout life from the soldier’s guardroom, the mechanic’s
workshop, the prince’s court, or the domestic hearth. Of course a
purely contemplative devotion, such as is specially proper to the
religious and monastic life, cannot be practiced in these outer
vocations, but there are various other kinds of devotion well-suited
to lead those whose calling is secular, along the paths of
perfection.”  

Saint Francis de Sales is a globalizer. I like this notion. His desire and dedication to
describe a way to perfection for everyone was a globalizing effort. There is nothing particular
about it, no privileges for a special group, and an opportunity for everyone. Introduction to the
Devout Life is indeed literature of globalization at the beginning of the seventeenth century,
some four hundred years back. Saint Francis’ Introduction is a spiritual empowerment indeed, is
and always has been, indifferently of the state of life one is living in, indifferent to the culture
one is coming from, indifferent to caste, race, country, nation, work, gender.

Late John Paul II say in Veritas Splendor No. 53 something similar. “It must certainly be
admitted that man always exists in particular culture, but it must also be admitted that man is not
exhaustively defined by that same culture. Moreover, the very progress of cultures demonstrates
that there is something in man, which transcends those cultures. That ‘something’ is precisely
human nature: this nature is in itself the measure of culture and the condition ensuring that man
does not become the prisoner of any of his cultures, but asserts his personal dignity by living in
accordance with the profound truth of his being.”

The spiritual empowerment of Introduction lies exactly in this: that man has to be living
in accordance with the profound truth of his being. He is not solely determined by his culture,
his caste, his state of life, and/or his work. And that is a global truth.

Unfortunately, I cannot proceed with my introductory remarks without addressing
another keyword that has a rather negative connotation.

In last Thursday’s newspaper it was reported that the Chicago Police had landed a major
coup against the local mafia because some arrested members of the mafia had “sung”, had
broken the famous “omerta- silence” and reported several names and crimes to the police. The
article went on making the present “me-generation” responsible for it. What had not been
possible for the last 100 years in Chicago was suddenly possible, because people are now part of a “me-generation”. Are we also part of a “me-generation”? Have we become more individualists? Isn’t the era of globalization also an era of individualization? If yes, is it something bad or something good? Careful, I may be misleading you, because I want to lead you back to the black virgin in Paris, at the origin, the introduction of Francis life into his devout life.

When we speak about Introduction to the Devout Life, we have to talk about the black virgin. There, at her feet, Saint Francis de Sales made willingly a very individual decision. He resolved the question of predestination with strong faith and will. He decided not to bother about what God wanted for him in the next world, he some how defiantly decided to love God anyway in this world. “Whatever may happen, O God, you who hold all things in your hand, whose ways are justice and truth, whatsoever you may have decreed concerning me in the eternal secret of your predestination and reprobation, you whose judgments are unfathomable, you who ever Just Judge and Merciful Father, I will love you always, O Lord, at least in this life! At least in this life will I love you, if it is not given for me to love you in eternity?”

This decision was a lonely, individual, but essential decision of his. Only this decision freed him to become who he became. It needs a personal and individual decision to love God in the first place, before we can even start talking about an Introduction to the Devout Life.

The “Introduction” is not something abstract, something that doesn’t concern our heart. On the contrary if my hart is not in it, go home. Forget about this seminar. Only your individual decision to love God can set your heart free. No one can take this decision from you. The earlier reflection John Paul II about culture flashes back and takes us into responsibility. Be part of the “me generation” and make only once this very individual and personal decision. And this decision will lead you to become part of a ‘God-generation’. Pope Benedict XVI, then still archbishop of Munich, said in one of his homilies about St. Francis de Sales regarding this decision.

“With this decision Saint Francis de Sales freed himself. He had stopped to look back at himself. He entrusted his destiny to God. And so he could walk forward, calmly, trusting; the true faith is indeed to overcome ones fear and to obtain freedom. Who looks back will experience, what the wife of Lot experienced: he will become a monument of stone, he becomes bitter and disapproves with everything, he becomes a monument of his own, he grows stiff.

And this is our danger: that we look back at ourselves, that we make ourselves, that we want to succeed before God, that we calculate, how our destiny before God and before ourselves, that we cannot trust anymore. To have faith means to have freedom, to surrender us to God and to look forward only. To walk towards him, freely, irrespective of becoming something before God, to
remain in his hands, and so, freed, full of trust, to live him—and so to be able to love at all.”

This very fundamental decision of Saint Francis de Sales is the foundation of his spirituality and the foundation of his work in the *Introduction to the Devout Life*. With that faith and trust, nothing could stop Saint Francis de Sales, nothing at all. Through one single personal and individual decision he had brought together heaven and earth, God and world, contemplation and action, the basics of his spirituality. And he was determined to enable as many people as possible to realize and to put into practice, what he had experienced himself.

Michel Tournade, the present Provincial of the French Province of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales has re-adapted the *Introduction to the Devout Life* in today’s French and called his book—*Un monde à aimer*—A world to love. By choosing this title he touches the essentials of Saint Francis de Sales’ intention and mission. The world is something to be loved, not something to run away from. It may be global, individual, challenging; still it is something to be loved. It may be busy, distracting, challenging; still it is something to love.

In the Easter season we keep hearing in the gospel of John about the Abba experience of Jesus. Jesus as the model of bringing together heaven and earth, Jesus as the ladder between heaven and earth, rediscovered and imitated by St. Francis de Sales. *Introduction to the Devout Life* is an effort of Saint Francis de Sales to bring together, what belongs together. The spiritual empowerment in an era of globalization is the renewal of this undertaking to close the gap, to enable people to interiorize God’s love and to finally live it—a Salesian life experience. *Introduction to the Devout Life* can be seen as means to ‘Live Jesus’ by interiorizing his relationship to the Father and exteriorizing his love for people.

“Thus, Theotimus, charity”, I add as found in *Introduction to the Devout Life*, “will be for us another Jacob’s ladder, made up of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit as of so many sacred steps. Upon them angelic men will ascend from earth to heaven, to be united to the breast of God almighty and upon them they will descend from heaven to earth to take their neighbor by the hand to lead him to heaven” says Saint Francis de Sales in his second major work, *Treatise of? the Love of God*.

A Salesian life experience will focus on these gifts of the Holy Spirit, since they will enable every human being to live the Salesian experience. He says:

“These gifts are not only inseparable from charity, but all things being well considered and speaking precisely, they are also the principal virtues, properties and qualities of charity;

- *Wisdom is actually nothing else than the love that relishes, tastes, and experiences how sweet and gentle God is.*
- *Understanding is nothing else than love attentive to consider and penetrate the beauty of the truths of faith, therein to know God in himself and then, descending from this, to consider him in creatures.*
• Science, on the other hand, is simply the same love keeping us attentive to know ourselves and creatures, so as to make us mount up again to a more perfect knowledge of the service we owe to God.

• Counsel is also love, inasmuch as it renders us careful, attentive, and skilled in choosing the means proper to serving God in a holy manner.

• Fortitude is love that encourages and animates the heart as to carry out what counsel has determined to be done.

• Piety is the love that sweetens labour and makes us with good heart, gratitude, and filial affection do works that please God our Father.

• To conclude, fear is simply love inasmuch as it causes us to fly and shun what is displeasing to God’s majesty.”

Wisdom, Understanding, Science, Counsel, Fortitude, Piety and Fear are all different expressions of love or charity, nothing else. Saint Francis has become famous for it. His words may sound abstract, but he has applied them quite concretely and this is why the Introduction will also mention quite concretely steps to grow in this charity and in this love.

Two things are important: Salesian spirituality cannot remain theoretical, and it cannot remain shallow. Theory and shallowness will allow us to pretend to be experienced in Salesian spirituality; practice and depth will allow us to live it.

We have to be willing to love, we are to embrace our Salesian heritage, and we are to hug it in order to fulfill our mission today. Let me bring it to the point like this. In a world were nothing seems to be sacred, Saint Francis de Sales offers us something sacred by which to transform our lives and work so that everything might become sacred. It is up to us to concretize in the light of the Introduction. How to concretize it? Allow me to give you a few suggestions on how I understand to what Introduction to the Devout Life will lead us to.

Put into practice it will surely lead us to:

1. **Attentiveness**—We will become attentive to people, things, and events. We will live in the present moment, which is the most essential part of it. Attentiveness presupposes interiority because if we live only superficially and on the surface, we can walk by people and things without really seeing them and live through events without really discovering their meaning.

2. **Confidence**—By trusting in his decision to love God and knowing to be loved by God, Saint Francis de Sales gains his essential freedom to walk courageously forward. To be able to live in the present moment implies the confidence one gains by knowing that God is there at last after all.

3. **Cooperation**—It is important so that we are providers as well as consumers in our interdependent world. We need to avoid being in competition with others. Rather, we will reach out to others to share ideas, tasks, sufferings and joys.
4. **Courage**—While Saint Francis always rebuked what was bad and evil in his eyes, he always made a difference between the evil thing and the people who represented it. “One has to be upset about the evil and be very firm about it, not to get involved with it; however, one must always remain very gentle towards his neighbour.”

5. **Creativity**—While we of course need courage to point out abuse, evil and wrong beliefs and actions, in order to allow improvements to take place, we need much more creativity to make visible the way that we will be able to encourage people to have faith in themselves, to have hope to live, to have love to give.

6. **Gentleness and peace**—Saint Francis has shown us only one way to bring truth to victory. It is the gentle and peaceful method. “How wonderful is it to win hearts and to draw people to it, if you make your case gently and charmingly,” Francis observes.

7. **Humility**—It is foundational to the entire Christian life. Let us always remember that humility is truth, and that during the Last Supper, Jesus chose to be a servant. In the letter to the Philippians, Paul says: “In humility count others better than yourselves.” Francis says, “To be true, humility must always be lowly, little and at everyone’s service. Humility then is the foundation and base of the spiritual life.”

8. **Listening skills**—They are necessary for us to understand, know, receive, appreciate, discern, and expand our horizons. Such listening presupposes both exterior and inner silence. We need to adapt and adjust this silence to fit our own individual life situation, but it is indispensable for everybody.

9. **Open-mindedness**—It enables us to perceive the giftedness of others and to know how to encourage and empower people to develop their gifts. We rejoice in the talents and success of others rather than indulging in envy or criticism of them.

10. **Study**—It is a strong recommendation of Saint Francis de Sales to study seriously also what we want to rebuke. One of his accomplishments was that he studied well what Calvinism was about and so found a ways to counter their arguments. No shouting or defamation necessary. Saint Francis tried to invest every day two hours in on-going formation and studies.

11. **Truthfulness**—the reality of our life, not our desire of how it is, becomes the real challenge. Saint Francis says: “Live according to the truth that faith teaches us, and cultivate truth within you, a gift which has been given to your for your advantage.”

May I close my remarks with a recommendation that I have taken from Ezekiel.

“He said to me, Son of man, eat that which you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat the scroll. He said to me, Son of man, cause your belly to eat, and fill your bowels with this scroll that I
give you. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness.”

By fulfilling the command to eat, not to hear it, not to see it, not to feel it, but by eating it, Ezekiel becomes a prophet. May I raise the same expectations? By eating the Introduction to the Devout Life you will be transformed and become a Salesian prophet and then give others the ‘Introduction’ to eat.

To end my remarks with this little insight of mine, I wish all of you all the best digesting the Introduction. It will not always be sweet, it will sometimes be bitter, but it will always lead to love, love of God, and love of others, it will be a ladder between God and the people of God you are minister to, it will be a spiritual empowerment, it will be a Salesian life experience in an era of globalization.
May God be praised!

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1 Introduction to the Devout Life, Part I, Chapter 3.
3 Josef Cardinal Ratzinger, Homily on the feast of St. Francis de Sales in Angerkloster in Munich, on January 24th, 1982.
5 Ibid.
7 In Spirituality of the heart, article published by the Monastery of the Visitation St. Louis, referring to Salesian spirituality identified and described in Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantel: Letters of Spiritual Direction, translated by Peronne Marie Thibert, VHM, selected and introduced by Wendy M. Wright and Joseph F. Power, OSFS.
8 Ibid.
9 Winklehner OSFS Herbert; Salesianischer Ehrenkodex fuer Journalisten.
10 Ibid.
11 In Spirituality of the heart, article published by the Monastery of the Visitation St. Louis, referring to Salesian spirituality identified and described in Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantel: Letters of Spiritual Direction, translated by Peronne Marie Thibert, VHM, selected and introduced by Wendy M. Wright and Joseph F. Power, OSFS.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Winklehner OSFS Herbert; Salesianischer Ehrenkodex fuer Journalisten.
15 Ezekiel 3, 1-3