St. Francis de Sales as Preacher:
A Study by
Dom B. Mackey

translated from the French by
THOMAS F. DAILEY, O.S.F.S.

original source:

Oeuvres de St. François de Sales
Édition complète
Annecy: J. Niérat, 1898
tome X, pages v-xcvii

originally published by the
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF SPIRITUALITY
Bangalore (India), 1992-93

ISBN 81-85812-00-4
St. Francis de Sales as Preacher: A Study by Dom Mackey

CONTENTS

Preface (3)

Introduction (4-7)

Oratory Formation and Apostolic Life of St. Francis de Sales (8-22)

St. Francis de Sales: Master of Sacred Eloquence (23-42)

St. Francis de Sales: Model of Sacred Eloquence (43-103)

St. Francis de Sales: Restorer of Sacred Eloquence (104-129)
Translator's Preface

Compared with his ascetical masterpieces, the *Introduction to the Devout Life* and the *Treatise on the Love of God*, and with his numerous Letters of spiritual direction (most recently published in the "Classics of Western Spirituality" series by Paulist Press), the Sermons of St. Francis de Sales have received much less attention and recognition. Nevertheless, interest in the preaching dimension of Salesian spirituality seems to be on the rise, both in scholarly and popular circles: in the study presented by Vincent Kerns (*Pulpit and Pew*, S.F.S. Publications), in the extensive research undertaken in France by Hélène Bordes, and in the series of collected Sermons currently being published by TAN Books. As a result, the oratory art of St. Francis de Sales is becoming increasingly known and appreciated. Hopefully the present publication will also contribute to this newfound interest.

To make such a contribution, however, this little work must be read in its own context. Originally written by Dom B. Mackey in 1898 as an introduction to the fourth and final volume of the Sermons of St. Francis de Sales (*OEA*, tomes VII-X), this "study" is without doubt a *product of its time*. In its promotion of "our Saint," it breathes often, and sometimes heavily, the spirit of the counter-reformation, a spirit which may not be amenable to our present "ecumenical" mindset. Likewise, the inclusion of lengthy panegyrics in testimony of the Bishop of Geneva's worthiness for canonization may appear to the critical eye as being historically slanted. Finally, the many citations included here pertain to the linguistic style of "old French" and, for that reason, are rendered in English only with difficulty.

Nevertheless, these temporal limitations need not detract from the potential value of this little work, which for its breadth of study can also be considered a *product for our time*. The explication of the saint's oratory formation gives the historical background in which to hear his words today. The demonstration of his oratory exemplariness, in terms of being both Master and Model, will surely be confirmed by any who take the time well-spent to read his sermons anew. Lastly, that St. Francis de Sales be again today the Restorer of Christian preaching may be a goal at once too grand for this little study, yet it looms there on the spiritual horizon. As he did in his time, may this holy preacher continue to inspire others with his sacred eloquence.

THOMAS F. DAILY, O.S.F.S.
Divine Providence, in giving to St. Francis de Sales so brilliant a destiny in the Church, has, in order to correspond with its designs, filled him with "every wisdom and spiritual insight" (Colossians 1:9). And in order that the talents with which he was enriched would be useful to a greater number of people, God crowned them by the gift of eloquence.

This eloquence, which in the testimony of the great Bishop of Hippo [St. Augustine] is "the following of inspired wisdom,"¹ is attributed to the word of our lovable Doctor and becomes one of the best merited of his glorious titles; nevertheless, whether by ignorance or bad faith, it remains the most contested of all. Therefore, our concern here is to justify his being able to be classed in the highest rank of preachers who, since the beginning of the 17th century, have scaled the French pulpit. It will not be less easy to demonstrate how, by his teachings and his example, the Bishop of Geneva has prepared the complete blossoming of sacred eloquence in France. This will be the goal of this Study.

This study could, in part, be superfluous for the intelligent and reflective reader who has studied the four volumes of Sermons with the attention which they merit. It will have sufficed to

¹De Doctrina Christiana, book IV, chapter vi.
meditate on these pages, a great number of which are unpublished and others of which have been
too neglected up to this point, to notice in the Author all the qualities which constitute the
distinguished orator and signal him to the admiration of posterity: immense erudition, exquisite tact,
communicative vigor, and a habit of speaking with precision and clarity. From these observations
one can infer by what solicitude the oratory formation of the man of God has been encompassed
and by what assiduous effort he has progressed in the development of his precious faculties. One
can fathom his methods and account for the influence which he must have exercised on his
contemporaries. But these observations themselves engender among many the desire to be clari-
fied by other lights, and they will be grateful to us for coming to their aid in order to perfect the
notions that they have acquired and to affirm the opinions that they themselves have formed. So
that our estimations may not be suspect, we support ourselves on the most authorized witnesses,
and we often cede to the word of both the hearers of the holy Prelate and to the critics who have
most soundly judged his Œuvres.

Francis de Sales appeared in an epoch of transition where, in France, the rules of taste
remained still to be formulated and the secret truth of art to be found again. His glory is to have
sensed and applied these rules and to have recommended them, at a time when the greater number
of preachers strayed into entirely opposite routes; this alone is an incontestable proof of his moral
and intellectual superiority. The savoyard Bishop stems from the race of the grand orators, and
even without intending to establish parallels, one can say that he shares their same principles and
marches in the same direction. Massilon "is all spirit," an eminent critic has said, 2 "Bourdoloue all
reason, Bossuet all genius"; and, taking up in turn the judgment of the Bishop of Angers, 3 Saint
Francis de Sales "is an ineffable mixture of grace and tenderness."

Msgr. Freppel continues:

I am not surprised to encounter, on the brink of this great epoch (the 17th
century), a man who by charming naivete, by vivacious and gracious turns,
and by the picturesque forms of his style, recalls all the verve and origi-
nality which had been in the French literature of the 16th century. On the
other hand, by less clashing sounds and more regular lines, a more certain
taste, as well as a more polished and refined diction herald, under his pen
or in his word, the simple yet grand manner of the 17th century, of which
he is one of its first and most glorious representatives. He is a man who

---

2 L'abbé LEBARQ, Histoire critique de la prédication de Bossuet, p. 372.

3 Mgr. FREPPEL, Cours d'éloquence sacrée [published in 1893], 4th Lesson.
resumes in himself alone all that one can welcome, in the history of
Christian letters, of what is more fine, delicate and spiritual; a writer who,
promenading across all drynesses and all aridities of doctrine by way of his
brilliant and flowering imagination, has known to bear charm even in
controversy; ... an orator whose beautiful soul is poured out in words of
exquisite tenderness and infinite sweetness; a man, finally, in whom the
most perfect holiness has come to crown all the gifts of the spirit, all the
qualities of the heart, and of whom it suffices to pronounce his name in
order to embalm one's soul with the delicious aroma which arises from his
writings: this man, is St. Francis de Sales."

This same author, who we continue to cite in abridgment, proceeds thus:

It is assuredly something very strange to see appear on the same scene, at
little distance the one from the other, two men in whom are personified
two doctrines so diverse, in whom are incarnated, so to say, two spirits so
contrary: Calvin, whose merciless prod marshals us under the sovereignty
of God ... as slaves under the whip of a tyrant; and Francis de Sales, who
does not find in human language such bitter sounds in order to awaken filial
confidence. It is as if Catholicism, mustering in one point alone all that
there had been of tenderness and suavity in the heart of its Ambrose and
Augustine and Bernard, had wanted by this mixture of force and unction to
disarm heresy, by assailing against it its most divine seductions, by letting
fall on it, from the figure of Francis de Sales, a reflection of the goodness
and gentleness of Christ.

It was by a manner more direct still that the Bishop of Geneva went to combat
Protestantism. To struggle advantageously against this heresy, he took up the same arms to which
it owed its victories, namely the ministry of the word. It had taken a long while to comprehend this,
for, seeing that "the enemy" sowed "untruth" in large hands "in the field" of the Father of the family,
"the servants slept" (cf. Matthew 13:25) without being worried of the danger. The fiery preachers
audaciously spread their errors, and by neglecting to oppose there the evangelical doctrine, the
sacred ministers allowed the advantage to their adversaries, who stigmatized them by the name of
"mute dogs" (Isaiah 56:10). Calvin, Zwingli, and de Beza were endowed with incontestable oratory
talents; their preaching had "the vigor of a nervous argumentation along with the sobriety of an
austere teaching." And so, proud of their success, they cast in the face of the Church the most

---

4Le seizième Siècle en France, Tableau de la Littérature et de la Langue, by Darmesteter and Hatzfeld, section I,
chapter 1.
insolent provocations, and they flattered themselves that no one took up their challenge. But however debased it may have appeared, the Church always has in its ranks some David to enter into battle with the Goliath of heresy and impiety. The 16th century, in its own way, proceeds to give proof of this.

To the intrusions of Protestantism, Providence opposed a whole legion of apostles, in the highest rank of which were Saint Phillip and his Oratorians, and above all Saint Ignatius and the Society of Jesus. These two Societies had as an aim not only to preach everywhere "the Gospel of peace" (Ephesians 6:15), but further to form a school of preachers who would find in the simplicity of language put in the service of a profound erudition and an ardent zeal, the secrets of true eloquence. What these great men did for Italy, Switzerland and Germany, the Bishop of Geneva had to do for the benefit of France and Savoy, if it is possible, in the question which concerns us, to distinguish between the two countries.

To appreciate better the services which he renders in the pulpit, we proceed, in the first part of this Study, to examine the oratory formation of the Servant of God and the apostolic works occupied his life. In the three successive parts, we will consider him as Master, as Model, and as Reformer of sacred eloquence.

5 Among the first companions of the illustrious Founder, we salute in passing two compatriots of St. Francis de Sales, namely, Pierre Lefèvre and Claude Le Jay who, both the one and the other, combatted with success Lutheranism in Germany. The first, who preached with equal facility in seven languages, came to be chosen, at the moment when death surprised him, as the first theologian of Paul II at the Council of Trent. The second assisted there as the representative of the Cardinal of Augsbourg, Othon Truchsess.
St. Francis de Sales seemed predestined, by the circumstances of the time and place of his birth, to exercise a universal influence on Christianity. As we have said above, he appeared in a troubled epoch, where the ardor of the struggle increases courage and draws to the battleground wrestlers most worthy of squaring off against the encroachments of heresy and the outpouring of vices.

"Providence, always admirable and wonderful in its conduct, gave him birth in a place which is like the center of the Christian kingdoms," in order that it, in the same way, would make "heard more easily in all the Church the sweetness of his word." 6

In effect it is in this land of Savoy, where the most picturesque beauties of nature are reunited as if to provoke the most noble elans of the soul, that St. Francis de Sales was born. The lordly dwelling where God placed his cradle (infancy) was the sanctuary of chivalrous traditions and of Christian virtues. M. de Boisy, his father, sometimes took it upon himself, by his own words and examples, to render his own (children) worthy of receiving this double heritage. One day, in order to assure himself that his lessons were being understood, he wanted to take his first-born son, then four to five years old, to the destitute. "Francis," he said to him, "what do you think?" "My father,"

6M. Olier, Sermon sur saint François de Sales.
responded the infant, without hesitation nor embarrassment, "I think of God and of being a good man." Thus, ever since his early years, he worked to establish in his soul the foundations of true eloquence as well as those of holiness, for Cicero defines the orator as a "good man, expert in the art of the word."

Along with the virile teachings of his father, the child received the pious instructions of his mother, who wished to cede to no one the joy of initiating him to the elements of our faith. She was listened to not only with attention but with a sort of enthusiasm. Delighted by the marvels which were offered to his young intelligence, Francis felt already enkindling in his heart the flame of zeal which makes one an apostle. As soon as Mme. de Boisy had finished speaking, he gathered together the companions of his youth and communicated to them with such grace and warmth whatever he had come to learn. His naive eloquence animated him especially when, grouping the small audience around the sacred sources, he tried his hand at preaching to them the glories of divine adoption and the duties which it imposes on every baptized soul. Then, returning near to his mother, as if he had wanted to make himself receive the fruits of the seedlings that she had cast on his heart, he spoke to her about God and recalled to her, in the midst of her domestic cares and concerns, how everything is led by divine Providence.

At the schools of La Roche and Annecy, which he attended in turn, Francis prepared himself better still for the mission which God reserved to him in his Church by the simultaneous development of piety and knowledge. "Because he had a plain, noble and majestic motion," says his nephew, Charles-Auguste de Sales, "well-formed body, an attractive expression and a solid voice, his teacher and his regent often made him give speeches. All his life he had been an enemy of pedantics" (this is to be noted, for it is one of the characteristics of his eloquence as much as of his sanctity), "and he made no motion at all which was not naive and well suited."

As we see this in the modest institutions of Savoy, so we will find it again at the college of Clermont, in Paris, where his father sent him in 1580. "Nothing is more touching than the manner of living of this young gentleman who divided his heart and his time between study and prayer … There was perhaps no one who put more ardor into appropriating all the sciences, human and divine. Still, it is there, in the studies of his early years, that it is necessary to search for the origins of the writer and of the orator; there is the germ of his future, there the secret of his development."

Deposition of Mme. Lhuillier de Villeneuve, the widow Marcel (Process. remiss. Parisiensis, ad art. 33).

Histoire du B. François de Sales (Lyon: La Bottière et Julliard, 1634), book I.
"It is in the Bible," continues Msgr. Freppel, to whose word we continue to give way,\textsuperscript{9} that he seeks, with the flame of inspiration, the living forms of his style; it is from this unique book that he extracts the sweetest juices, that he gathers up the most suave perfumes, in order to pour them forth in his writings. The ecclesiastical literature, in its turn, opens to him its treasures; he plunges himself there with all the ardor of his soul. All this is what nourishes, what inflames, what fashions his own genius. It is in this way that Francis de Sales, making fruitful those notions acquired from the breath of the creator and by his own originality, will merit being called by the doctors of the Sorbonne, who themselves would know for sure, the most learned theologian of his time, and being ranked by the French Academy among the number of the fathers of our national literature."

While undertaking at the same time the study of philo-sophy and that of theology, the young gentleman, in the dual goal of nourishing his piety and of forming his taste, went assiduously to listen to the most renowned preachers. It is true that if he had had a less correct judgment and a less certain literary sense, this assiduity would have been for his oratory formation a danger more than an advantage. In this epoch of laborious transition, "the sacred and the profane did not at all disperse," says La Bruyère\textsuperscript{10}, "they had slipped together even into the pulpit: Saint Cyril, Horace, Saint Cyprian, Lucrecian spoke alternately ... one used to speak Latin, and for a long while, before women and churchwardens; another has spoken Greek. It was necessary to know prodigiously in order to preach so badly." But if it was not among the orators in vogue that one could seek a model, one found them nevertheless in the pulpits of several priories, and even in those of some parish churches. However, it is necessary to acknowledge that these preachers owed their success less to the transcendence of talent than to the holiness of their life. We cite as examples Jean de la Barrière, Founder of the Feuillants, and above all the Jesuit Edmond Auger, no less appreciated by the court than by the University. His ardent word enraptured at the same time men of the greatest worldly stature and students, carrying them along together in those processions of penitents which Francis de Sales later established in Annecy. Nonetheless, Francis separated "the vile from the precious" (Jeremiah 15:19), and knew to appropriate the good qualities of the orators that he heard without imitating their eccentricities. His own genius gave him, in this respect, a more useful

\textsuperscript{9}see note 3 above.

\textsuperscript{10}Caractères, chapter 15: "On the Pulpit."
safeguard than could the influence of M. Déage, his tutor, or even the lessons of the famous Fr. Sirmond, his regent.\(^{11}\)

According to André de Sauzéa, the bishop of Bethlehem, who have a deposition at the process of beatification,\(^{12}\)

The same Déage had told me that amid his studies of philosophy, (Francis) used to go to hear the public disputations of theology, and to do so that he often skipped his meal, and that he reported his disputations to his teacher, together with the arguments and distinctions, as would a great theologian. So also for the sermons, he used to draw up by script the most remarkable things, which the Blessed has since communicated to me.

Another who have a deposition, Noël Roget, adds: "I remember having heard the same Déage his tutor say that during the time that he did his studies at the Universities, (Francis) used to attend the preachings so often that was where he believed he learned how to preach."\(^{13}\)

In Padua, the young student got to listen to some men whose celebrity was more justly acquired than that of the Parisian preachers. It was not in vain that St. Philip Neri and his Oratorians worked to bring good taste, along with evangelical simplicity, back into the Christian pulpit, for their method spread gradually nearer and nearer. St. Charles Borromeo, once he had become the Archbishop of Milan, had introduced it into his diocese; from there it spread to all of northern Italy, and it flourished principally in Padua, the city of letters par excellence.

There was hardly a religious Order which did not possess a priory in this city and which did not promote the honor of producing there its own most renowned orators. Among these numerous monasteries, St. Francis de Sales assiduously attended that of the Conventuals, called The Holy, where "Fr. Gesualdo . . ., with whom he had established a holy friendship, occupied the high pulpit."\(^{14}\) Nor did he miss the chance to assist at the preachings which Fr. Scupoli, then in residence in Venice, came frequently to offer among the Theatins. More often still he found himself in the

---

\(^{11}\)One knows that this celebrated Jesuit, having been in Paris the teacher of St. Francis de Sales, had been at the University of Pont-à-Mousson the professor of St. Peter Fourier.

\(^{12}\)Process. remiss. Parisiensis, ad art. 2.

\(^{13}\)Process. remiss. Gebenn. (I), ad art. 33.

\(^{14}\)Charles-August, Histoire, book I.
church of the Jesuits to listen to Fr. Possévin, for whom he maintained a fond memory. This eminent man, who had been attracted to the Society of Jesus in 1558 by Fr. Palmio, composed in Padua at that time his Bibliotheca Selecta, but his works did not absorb him to the point that he could not find time to dedicate to the direction of souls. When Providence had addressed Francis de Sales to him, with supernatural lights adding themselves to the remarkable insight which distinguished him, he understood what a future was in store for this young gentleman and one day spoke to him these memorable words:

Continue to ponder divine things and to study theology; for divine Providence reserves to you the care of the bishopric of Geneva. Believe me, your spirit is not to be caught up in the bustle of the bar (of law) and your eyes are not blinded by its dust… Is it not a more glorious thing to preach the word of our good God to several thousand persons from the high pulpits of churches than to chafe and fume … amid the controversies of lawyers?

Docile to this advice, the pious student directed all his efforts toward the sacred ministry, and, as he later acknowledged in private, "he did not pay as much attention to what he was studying as he did to wondering if one day he would serve God well and aide his neighbor by the study that he was undertaking." Dominated by this preoccupation, he carries out his pilgrimage to Rome in the Spring of 1592. The sojourn that he made to the eternal city at that time marks in a special way the development of his rare aptitudes for the pulpit. It is no more at a distance that he sees the application of the principles of St. Philip Neri; here he could listen to them explained from the saint’s own mouth! Tradition wished, in effect, that the gentle Servants of God encounter each other and that the Founder of the Oratory ascertain the designs of the Lord for Francis de Sales.

---

15“For half a year now,” our Saint wrote to him (Possévin) a little while after his promotion to Holy Orders, “I have preached the word of God here and there amid the diocese … quite often carrying you with me in imagination in the pulpit. May it please God only that I should carry there some moderate fortune of your perfections for the service (of) his divine Majesty.”

16Charles-Auguste, Histoire, book I.

17Deposition of Claude-Louis-Nicolas de Quoex (Process. remiss. Gebenn. [I], ad art. 1).

18“In Rome, (Francis) visits several persons who were flourishing in the letters and in piety; according to common opinion, he also knew there St. Philip Neri, who lived at that time with a great reputation for holiness. Moreover, it is said that this holy old man, complimenting Francis de Sales in prevision of the holiness that he was to acquire, predicted that he would be a great servant of God and most useful to the Church.” (Vie de saint François de Sales, written in Italian by Canon Pierre-Hyacinthe Gallitia, 1720; book I, chapter 7).
Less than a year later, Francis renounced the brilliant future that his background and talents promised him and consecrated himself to the service of the altar. The abandon that he made then was without reserve, as it was also without turning back; for, after his promotion to Holy Orders, he refused the dignity of senator, which was believe not to be incompatible with the exercise of the sacerdotal ministry. On those occasions when his friends referred to this subject, the Provost responded invariably that henceforth the unique occupation of his life was to be preaching the word of God to all peoples.  

On June 24, 1593 this apostolic voice which, for nearly thirty years, would preach the eternal truths without abatement was heard for the first time. The elder Bishop of Geneva, Msgr. Claude de Granier, was so delighted that at the close of the sermon he himself wrote: "How does he seem to you, as my son? Has he spoken marvelously about marvelous things? For sure, we have a new apostle; he is 'powerful in words and in works' (Luke 24:19), and he has been given to us by God in order to display 'the knowledge of salvation to his people, by the remission of their sins' (Luke 1:77)." Of the sermons that he preached during the six months which remained prior to his ordination, six have been preserved for us; they are replete with unction, grace, and freshness and convey a thorough knowledge of the Sacred Scriptures as well as a great spirit of observation.

The day itself when the Provost had stepped up to the altar for the first time (21 December 1593), he also wanted to mount the pulpit and "offer a most fervent preaching on the subject of his sacrifice." Beginning from this epoch, the apostolic career of St. Francis de Sales, properly speaking, commences; since then he would no more have tired of preaching than would others have tired of listening to him. In whatever church where he preached the holy word, he saw assembled at the foot of the pulpit a numerous and attentive congregation, quite appropriate for exciting his zeal and inspiring his eloquence. There before him, in the old Franciscan church which served as the cathedral of the exiled Chapter of Geneva, was the venerable Bishop, surrounded by his twenty-nine canons, all distinguished by lineage or learning; there also was the Chapter of the Maccabees, equally exiled, and that of Our Lady of Liesse; and there was the small court and the officers of the Duke of Nemours, all in the midst of an erudite nobility and an intelligent and sympathetic gathering of citizens.

---

19 Charles-Auguste, Histoire, book II.

20 Charles-Auguste, Histoire, book I.

21 Charles-Auguste, Histoire, book I.
Without allowing himself to be intimidated by this imposing assembly, the new Priest expressed himself with a vigor and an energy which prove how much he justly esteemed the independence of the apostolic ministry. In intimate conversation with God, he drew in such illumination as to speak afterward to persons of all states and all conditions with the level of maturity of an elder statesman accomplished in experience and in wisdom. To all he declared, without disguise, the truth; to all he demonstrated, without hesitation, the austere footpath of duty. Without effort he drew himself up to the exposition of the most sublime mysteries, and without embarrassment he descended again to the explication of the elements of the Christian life. The young Preacher took advantage of all occasions, accommodating himself indiscriminately to all the auditors, in the same way as later he acknowledged to one of his friends, who has given this deposition under the faith of an oath:

I know that as soon as the Servant of God was advanced to Orders … he went into the villages continually to preach, in order to instruct the poor people and to improve his preaching. I have heard him say this several times and counsel it to any of his friends who had taken up this vocation. I know further that this great man had so much zeal for the honor of God and so much charity for his neighbor, that during an entire year he did not allow one day to pass without preaching publicly or giving some particular exhortations; this is what has rendered him a great preacher.

"When I was Provost," the Saint said one day to the Bishop of Belley, who has preserved this story for us, "all the preachings, both of the cathedral and of the parishes, even to the least confraternities, were laid on me. I knew of no way to refuse: omni petenti te tribue (Luke 6:30)." Everyone commended this indefatigable zeal, except him who ought to have rejoiced in it more than any other. The prevailing bad taste infiltrated as far as the mountains of Savoy. In Annecy as in Paris, he found himself amid beautiful spirits who pretended to know "how to mix Greek and Latin in with French." M. de Boisy had supported these influences. Disturbed by seeing his son adopt a different manner, he thought it necessary to offer him some paternal remonstrances. Therefore, as the Saint says to his friend,

One day he took me aside and said to me: Provost, you preach too often. I even hear on working days the bell sounding for the preaching, and always someone says to me: It is the Provost, the Provost. In my time, it was not

---

22 Des Hayes (Process. remiss. Parisiensis, ad art. 10).

this way; the preachings were much more rare, but, oh, what feats of preaching! … They were erudite and highly educated; they spoke of marvels, they cited more Latin and Greek in one (sermon) than you do in ten. All the world was delighted and edified; we ran there in great herds (you would have said that we went to gather manna). Now you render this exercise so common that no one thinks much of it, and no one has any more esteem for you.…

"You see," continued the amiable Saint,

this good father spoke according to the maxims of the world in which he had been brought up … the evangelical maxims are of quite another temperament. Jesus Christ, who is the exemplar of the mountain of perfection and the model of all preachers, has not adopted all these circumspections.… Believe me, one can never preach enough, et nunquam satis dicetur quod nunquam satis discetur. Especially now, with the opposite of this neighboring heresy, a heresy which maintains itself only by its preachers and which will never be destroyed except by holy preaching.

"The sword of the word of God" (Ephesians 6:16; Hebrews 4:12), such is the only armament which glitters in the hands of the fervent Apostle when, at the age of only twenty-seven years, he went to the conquest of the Chablais, which was enslaved in the odious yoke of Calvinism. We have no need of repeating here the history of this admirable campaign, which has been treated in the Preface to the Controversies.24 It would be better to yield to the word of an ocular witness, Georges Rolland,25 this faithful servant who constantly followed the Saint in his evangelical excursions:

During the first three years that the Blessed dwelled alone in the Chablais, he preached there with an entirely apostolic method. In his preachings and his conferences, he taught this people of the Chablais so easily, with words that were neither affectatious nor curious. But instead, with beautiful and intelligible similitudes entirely his own, he enabled the people, even the more uncouth, to hear and understand the holy Christian doctrine. And he explicated the points of controversy so clearly, and inflamed the people with such beautiful moralities to the love of God and of neighbor and to

---

24 OEA I:cvii-cxi, cxxv-cxxix.

embrace and to follow our holy Catholic faith, that I have heard some
countrymen who recounted the whole of his preaching, and even some
women, admiring the facility with which he preached. And, in general, they
all said of his preachings that they were so agreeable and fluent that they
lost nothing and that they were borne grandly to the belief of the truth that
he preached and of living better in the fear of God.

It would be beyond the scope of this Study to return to the redaction of the Controversies
and recount all the zeal, the constancy, and the indomitable energy which the Apostle had to put
forth in order to conquer the obstinacy of the heretics. No work would disconcert his courage, no
persecution would dissuade his patience. He happened to preach the divine word up to two or
three times on Sundays or feast days, as he writes on March 12, 1597 in an as-yet unpublished letter
addressed to the Archbishop of Bari, Nonce in Turin.

Last Sunday, having preached in the early morning, as was customary, in
the parish of Allinges, I passed on to another parish three miles away, called
Cervens, where I had never before been. And having informed the people
that I wished to preach, I had a numerous and benevolent congregation
which, at the end of the sermon, witnessed to me an ardent desire for this
"bread of infants" (Matthew 15:26). But I had great trouble presenting
myself in time for the sermon at Thonon, which was five or six miles from
Cervens.

During the week his preachings were hardly less frequent, although they were addressed to his
more modest auditors, often to any group of villagers. So much charity and perseverance were
crowned with success. Nothing could resist the persuasive eloquence of the Missionary: at the end
of four years of a marvelous apostolate, the entire Chablais was reconquered to the Church.

The end of this laborious mission was not, for our Saint, the signal to rest. Applying to him
his own words,\textsuperscript{26} we can say that he "changed his place but he did not change his heart, nor his
heart's love, nor his love's object." Now, the only objective that he had in view was the glory of God
and the salvation of souls; it meant putting the creature in communication again with the Creator,
and he knew that this divine rapprochement, the goal of the Redemption, is accomplished above
all by means of the apostolic ministry. That is why this fervent Apostle was always ready to mount
the pulpit; even in the course of his mission, when he had been obliged to make some journey to

\textsuperscript{26}\emph{Treatise on the Love of God}, book 12, chapter 4.
Msgr. de Granier, he did not resume the route of the Chablais without having evangelized his "dear people of Annecy."

He seemed to extend to preaching the resolution, relative to the celebration of the Mass, which he made at the time of his entrance into the priesthood. At any hour of the day, when someone asked him what he was occupied with, the Provost would have been able to respond: I am preparing to preach. The habitual collectedness, an intimate commerce with God, study and meditation on the sacred Writings, the continual vigilance of his own heart, the spirit of observation — all these established him in a state of incessant preparation for the ministry of the divine word.

What is more, he remained avid for the discourses of other preachers, and he would never neglect an opportunity to hear them. It is in this manner that, at the time of his second pilgrimage to Rome in the first months of the year 1599, he attended most assiduously the exercises of the Oratory. At this time, he revives the friendship which unites him to some of the more celebrated disciples of St. Philip, such as Bozio, Baronius, and above all the blessed Juvénal Ancina. We find proof of this in a still unpublished letter written in Italian and addressed by the Saint himself on November 23, 1606 to Fr. Jean Matthieu Ancina, brother of the Bishop of Saulces, who had died only two years prior:

I come to recall to you that I am your most affectionate servant, and thus to beg you to accord to my brother the favor of seeing the exercises of your most devout Congregation which, with a particular respect, I revere very much, and among its members the Rev. Fr. Thomas Bozio, whom I still remember perhaps more for the endearing care which he took of me during the time that I was in Rome, when our Monsignor, of blessed memory, led me often to the Oratory.

Assuredly our Saint did not have to seek information there on what method to choose in order to preach fruitfully the eternal truths. The success which he came to obtain in the Chablais demonstrates to him that the manner he adopted was the most profitable. Nevertheless, it had to be a pleasure and a comfort for this Preacher so humble to verify that this method was in harmony with that of an Institute which was considered in Rome as the best school of preaching.

The Apostle of the Chablais, nominated Coadjutor to Msgr. de Granier, dedicated three years to evangelizing the diocese which had been confided to him, and in particular the town of Annecy. But the Lord exhibited him on a more vast scene. Sent to Paris to deal with interests of religion in the land of Gex, he saw during nine months the different churches of the capital dispute
the goodness of listening to him. He even preached the Lenten exercises before the queen, Marie de Médicis, to the applause of the court and persons distinguished by their learning. The most serious persons will comprehend when the art of sacred eloquence was recovered and will engage their disciples to be formed on this model.

It is during his sojourn in the capital that the Coadjutor of Geneva celebrated the funeral service for the Duke of Mercoeur and pronounced the sermon for the feast of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin. Although demonstrating himself superior to his contemporaries, he does not give us in these two discourse the exact measure of his talent; they are tarnished by some slight defects, traces of which will not be found in his later works. But, then again, what imperfections these were, compared to those by which one could reproach the orators more in vogue! Coeffeteau, Bertaud, Cospéan, Du Perron himself — all labored painfully to rejoin the ways of true evangelical preaching, and despite their good will, they paid the dept of the reigning prejudices. The Saint had to listen to these celebrities, and the oratory apparatus which they unfurled, shocking at the same time his good sense and his piety, had perhaps contributed to confirming him in the resolution taken to preach always and everywhere "in the apostolic (mode)."

This he does in Lyons, at the time of his voyage from Annecy to Paris. On his return he probably preached the divine word again in this town which was so dear to him. Yet he will not sojourn there for long, for having learned of the death of the Bishop of Geneva, he had to hasten his return to Savoy.

Let us not forget to recall the wondrous vision with which he was favored on the day of his episcopal consecration and how, at the imposition of the book of the Gospels on his head and his shoulders, he understood "most distinctly and clearly" that he was specially invested with the mission of teaching his people. 27 It was Sunday, December 15, 1602 when he did this for the first time as a Bishop and thereby opened to his flock those abundant pasture in which he would lead them for the next 20 years. In addition to the isolated preachings that the indefatigable Prelate addressed to the faithful, he gave the entirety of the quadragesimal stations not only in Annecy but also in modest locales, such as La Roche (1605) and Rumilly (1608). In conformity with the prescriptions of the Council of Trent, St. Francis de Sales held essentially to the obligation of residence; he left his flock only due to the most special manifestations of the will of God, which was the sovereign rule of his life.

27 Charles-Auguste, Histoire, book V.
A divine impetus obliged him to accept the invitation which the aldermen of Dijon gave him for the Lenten season of 1604, and one knows how admirable were the fruits of that station: a general renewal of the inhabitants in piety and that providential encounter with Madame de Chantal, from whom, six years later, the Order of the Visitation was born. What is more, the Bishop of Geneva contracted in this city relationships of a great interest from the point of view which concerns us. He was admitted into the friendship of president Fremyot and his son, the Archbishop of Bourges; the latter established himself as the disciple of our Saint and obtained from his experience the counsels summed up in the Letter on Preaching, which will be analyzed in the second part of this study.

The eloquence and the virtue of the Servant of God were no less admired in Chambéry during the Lenten seasons of 1606 and 1612 than they had been in Bourgogne. The numerous and lettered congregation was capable of appreciating his true merit; seated there in the first rank were the sovereign Senate of Savoy, the Court of the esteemed and most ancient aristocracy of the country. He spoke a language which responded to the dispositions of spirit and to the culture of this audience. Thus, the Orator applied himself with great care to preparing the sermons for these two stations, as can be judged above all by what remains for us of the Lenten sermons of 1612.

From these grand pulpits, where he was so strongly applauded, the Bishop of Geneva passed with the same dignity and the same gentleness to those of the more humble parishes of his diocese, which he evangelized during the course of his pastoral visits. During these laborious rounds, he preached the eternal truths every day and often several times a day. Were he obliged to make some journey outside of Savoy, this was not an interruption of his apostolate; for everywhere he was asked to break the bread of the divine word, and, as in the time of his youth, he could not refuse anyone. It is thus that in 1603, 1613, and 1622 he preached at Carmagnole, Mondovi, Pignerol, Chieri, Turin, and other towns of the Piedmont region; in 1608 and in 1609 in the Franche-Comté, in 1614 at Sion in Valais, and often at Lyons, notably in 1615 and in 1621.

But no other town enjoyed so favored a relation as Grenoble, which had the honor of hearing our Saint during the Advent season of 1616 and the Lenten seasons of the following two years. This capital of the Dauphine, governed then by Lesdiguières, was considered as one of the strong places of Protestantism. The marshal enjoyed an almost unlimited authority, and although

---


he did not openly oppress the Catholics, the tolerance with which he covered up the aggressions of his co-religionists exposed the faithful to incessant vexations and put their faith in peril. It was a question, therefore, of calming the suspicions, appeasing the hatred, and exciting the courage and fervor of the ones, and of clarifying and converting the others. But the sympathies of all were gained early on by the Orator, and they opened "a great door" (1 Corinthians 16:9) for him to preach the Gospel. He knew to take advantage of this, and before this audience, which reminded him of that which was the object of his first evangelical works, he put into action all the ardor of his zeal, all the industriousness of his charity. We have proof of it in what has come down to us of the original sermons prepared for these diverse stations.

"It was a marvel," says Charles-Auguste de Sales.30

how this apostolic man could be enough, and be satisfactory, to preach every day, to hear confessions, and to attend to the disputes of the points of controversy … His reputation was so great that several persons wrote down, with an unparalleled curiosity, the whole of his preachings … and certainly they were not bored with their work, because each day the blessed Francis worked new miracles of doctrine.

"What a man this is!" cried out a learned ecclesiastic at the end of one sermon: "he deals so well with theology that he enables women and men of a more lowly condition to hear and understand the more difficult and lofty matters, Several heretics renowned for their learning and their influence abjured Calvinism following these stations. The marshall of Lesdiguières who, despite the protestations of his ministers, had attentively followed them when his affairs kept him not far from Grenoble, felt his prejudices begin to dissipate, and from this time onward, he drew closer and closer to the Roman Church, which he would soon re-enter.

Other successes awaited the man of God, who was to find himself a second time in the city of Paris in 1618, following the Cardinal of Savoy. The great reputation which he had acquired by publishing the Introduction to the Devout Life and the Treatise on the Love of God made him famous for his virtues in the same way as his eloquence had attracted around him the great and the small, the learned and the illiterate. Far from allowing himself to be fascinated by this affluence, our Saint felt obliged to speak more simply than he had done in any other town in France, so as to protest by his example against any pretensions to the beautiful spirit, from which a great number of ministers of the Gospel at that time were not exempt. And when one remonstrated with him

---

30*Histoire*, book IX.
about this, he responded "that he was not the preacher for the King, but for the poor." Nevertheless, this entirely apostolic method was appreciated for what it merited to be: the most illustrious persons constituted the assiduous auditors of the humble Prelate who, in spite of his modesty, acquired the title of "Apostle of the court." The hastened to his sermons in such a way that more than once the crowd which besieged the church had to go in through the windows, or even to hoist themselves onto the rooftop of the neighboring houses.

On his return he preached in all the great towns which he came upon along the way. Without speaking of Orleans, which enjoyed his presence for several weeks, Tours, Bourges, Moulins, Lyons, Grenoble — all heard him successively. Afterwards, by multiple preachings, the Good Shepherd made amends to his own flock for the privations which he had imposed on it by his long absence. He evangelized it without interruption during these last three years, except for a brief sojourn to Lyons during the Lenten season of 1621 and another of three months to Pignerol and Turin in the Spring of 1622.

The indefatigable Apostle drew near to the end of his career. He had "fought the good fight," he had "guarded this faith" and re-animated the charity in the souls of a great number; there remained nothing more than to "receive the crown of justice" (2 Timothy 4:7,8). To this land of France, which he had so much loved, was reserved the privilege of gathering the last accents of his word, of receiving his last breath. Obliged to follow the Duke of Savoy, who went to congratulate Louis XIII on his subjugation of the Protestants of Languedoc, our Saint was the object of a pious enthusiasm along the way; each town wanted to see and hear him, and without reckoning the weakening of his strength, he satisfied them all. He preached not only in the important cities, such as Lyons and Avignon, but even in modest locales such as Calence, Bourg-Saint-Andéol, le Pont-Saint-Esprit. Upon returning to Lyons, without allowing himself the least repose, he resumed his apostolic labors: the court and the town heard him once more, and his Daughters of the Visitation were favored with long conferences, the echoes of which they have transmitted to us. Such efforts exhausted the man of God, and, on December 28, those eloquent lips which had taught wisdom to kings and to the people were forever silenced and sealed by death.

But not content to render "eternal the memory of the just man" (Psalm 11:7), the Lord often wishes that he be survived in his works and that "although dead he still speaks" (Hebrews 11:4). It

---

31 La Vie de tres-illustre Messire François de Sales, Evesque et Prince de Geneve … by Mr, de Longue-Terre (Lyon: Vincent de Coeursilly, 1624), part 8.

is this which happens to our glorious Doctor, relative to his oratory *Oeuvres*. He had written the sermons of his youth in their entirety and left some notes which had been of use to him for a great number of others.\(^{33}\) For their part, the Religious of the Visitation collected and preserved with care the exhortations that the holy Founder had addressed to them. It is a bundle of inappreciable value which merits being preciously compacted in the loft of the Father of the family in order to be placed at the disposition of all Christian people.\(^{34}\) The editors have fulfilled this duty by furnishing all the care desirable to the publication of the four volumes of the Sermons of St. Francis de Sales.

---

\(^{33}\) See *OEA*, VIII:x, note (1).

\(^{34}\) We have said that the Religious of the Visitation had not been alone in gathering the sermons of their blessed Father. In Dijon, in Grenoble, and elsewhere, some distinguished men wrote them in the measure that they were spoken. Unfortunately these manuscripts have not been preserved for us.
One can be a great preacher without founding a school, and by consequence without acquiring the title of "master of sacred eloquence." But the one who teaches this art excellently, even when its practice would not be equal to its theory, that one is really a master, even if, as Cardinal de Bérulle, he had never mounted the pulpit of truth. Francis de Sales not only has the merit of having posed solid principles, but further that of having demonstrated their application in his discourse. He therefore has a dual claim to being cited as an accomplished Master of evangelical preaching.

We are not setting forth here a personal judgment inspired by an enthusiastic admiration; the estimation of the best critics has preceded ours. Listen to Msgr. Frappel:

I readily admit that neither Francis de Sales, nor Vincent de Paul, nor M. Ilier, nor the Cardinal de Bérulle have left behind them any models of eloquence, as did the grand orators of the second half of the century. No, but I do not fear to say that these four men have marked out the route and enlarged the pathways. It is in their writings, or at least in their school, that the first masters of sacred eloquence were formed. The initiative pertains to them. It is Francis de Sales who, in his Treatise on Preaching, first
proclaims, in the heart of decadence, the true principles of the eloquence of the pulpit.\footnote{Cours d'éloquence sacrée, 11th lesson.}

After having said a word about the three saintly personnages that he has named after our Doctor, the eminent writer resumes as follows:

Here, Gentlemen, is an entire current of healthy ideas that, little by little, were bound to lead sacred eloquence along another way. For, either I am quite mis-taken or you comprehend with less diffi-culty, that this word — simple, strong, Christian, (and) falling from the mouth of men whom the clergy of France honored as its masters and its oracles — that this word had the privilege of driving away before it the pedantism of the school, the ostentatious erudition, the flowery elocution which for many years had prevailed in the pulpit. What had to be done, in effect, in order to render its true tone? It had to oppose to these faults the contrary qualities: let the heart speak, there where only the school used to speak; substitute for a style in-flated by profane citations, one nour-ished by Scripture and the Fathers; let a false taste of eloquence fall away under Christian simplicity. Nothing else. Now these maxims, so simple in appearance yet so profitable, I find in the writing or on the lips of the great men of whom I speak.

It would be more proper to say that St. Vincent de Paul and the Cardinal de Bérulle, as well as M. Olier, owed to the example and precepts of the Bishop of Geneva, with whom the first two were close friends and all three his admirers, their glory of having contributed greatly to the reform of sacred eloquence. But, without contesting or wishing to diminish the share of merit which redounds to them in this great work, let us content ourselves with demonstrating how incontestable is that which we attribute to St. Francis de Sales. His principles and his teachings on evangelical preaching must be studied first in the highly instructive "Letter" mentioned above, where he treats this subject exclusively, afterward in some other writings where he speaks of it incidentally, then finally in the testimony of a good number of those who gave depositions at the Process of his Beatification.

The Letter to which we have just referred contains an exposé of the principles of the eloquence of the pulpit and the applications of it which must be made; so complete in its brevity and
so luminous in its simplicity, it is designated commonly under the title of Treatise on Preaching. It had been written at the chateau de Sales, the 4th and 5th of October 1604, at the request of André Frémyot, Archbishop of Bourges, to whom it is addressed. This Prelate, although previously the commendatory Abbot of St-Etienne de Dijon, had only been promoted to the priesthood during the preceding Lent. St. Francis de Sales, who had assisted at the altar when he mounted there for the first time, on Holy Thursday 1604, wanted further to accompany him by his counsels in the preaching of truth. Believing himself lacking in the qualities required for this ministry, Msgr. Frémyot hesitated to take it upon himself. To persuade him that for the Bishop preaching is a duty not only possible but easy to fulfill, to indicate to him the manner with which he must apply himself and the sources which would be important to make use of — such is the goal which his holy Friend proposes in the admirable Letter which he addresses to him. With the exception of some points which concern his addressee personally and others which have to do only with preachers invested with the episcopal dignity, this Letter contains teachings proper to all sacred orators. It has been drawn up in French; and of the various Latin translations of it which were made later, none can be attributed to the Author. The first editor of the Spiritual Letters of the holy Bishop published it in his collection which appeared in 1626.

"In order to speak in a followable sequence," our Saint condenses all his teachings to four key points: "who must preach, for what end one must preach, what it is that one must preach, and the manner with which one must preach." After having established that no one can proclaim the divine oracles without having received a mission from the Church, he indicates the two factors indispensable for doing it profitably, namely, knowledge and virtue. He then treats of the end which each dispenser of the holy word must have in view:

His end and his intention must be to do that which Our Lord came to do in this world … ‘I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly’ (John 10:10). Therefore, the end of the preacher is that sinners dead in iniquity may live in justice, and that the just who have a spiritual life may have it even more abundantly.

In order to obtain this end, the sacred orator must work to instruct his hearers and apply himself to moving them. St. Augustine, along with the generality of rhetoricians, had indicated a third means to employ: "So as to condescend to the weaknesses of those who, disgusted of the truth, love it only when it is seasoned and dressed up with attractive words, a rather considerable part of eloquence

---

had been dedicated to the art of pleasing.\textsuperscript{37} It is from experience, in effect, that one commonly clarifies the spirit and touches the heart in the measure that one has known how to charm the one and the other. Our Saint does not in any way contradict this assertion, as some have wanted to suggest; rather, with the clarity and precision which are habitually his, he explains how one must listen to it.

Several persons say that the preacher must delight. But, as for me, I make a distinction and say that there is one delectation which accompanies doctrine and (one which accompanies) emotion. For who is this soul so insensible that he receives an extreme pleasure of understanding well and holily the way of Heaven, who does not also feel an extreme consolation of the love of God? And this delectation must be procured, but it is not distinct from teaching and moving — it is dependent upon it.

There is a sort of delectation which … makes its case separately and often impedes the teaching and moving. It is a certain titillation of the ears which proceeds from a certain secular, worldly and profane elegance, from certain curiosities, arrangements of ideas, of utterances, of words; in brief, it depends entirely on artifice. With regard to that, I deny strongly and firmly that a preacher must pay much attention to it. It is necessary to leave it to the orators of the world … They do not preach 'Jesus Christ crucified' (1 Cor 1:23), but they preach themselves.

The third part of this little Treatise, which is all the more remarkable for its importance and its scope, is dedicated to the study of what the material of the evangelical discourse must be. It is subdivided into three main considerations: the sources, the way of employing them, and the arrangement of ideas. Ambassador and emissary of God, the preacher must transmit to the Christian people the divine, unchangeable word of the One who sends him. Therefore the first of his obligations is to imbibe the Sacred Scriptures, that Book where, according to Bossuet, we hear our God speak "his natural language."\textsuperscript{38} This is both the essential duty and the guarantee of the sacred orator, for just as Augustine argues, "a man speaks with more or less wisdom in proportion to the progress that he has made in the intelligence of the Scriptures."\textsuperscript{39} Other than the Bible, the works of the Fathers of the Church and the Lives of the Saints must be carefully studied. In the first,

\textsuperscript{37}De Doctrina Christiana, I.IV.chap.13.

\textsuperscript{38}Sermon for the Third Sunday after Easter (1656).

\textsuperscript{39}De Doctrina Christiana, book IV, chap. 5.
one finds the analysis and the explication of the Gospel; in the second, one sees it put into action. If the Gospel is bread, the Fathers break it for us; if it is music, the Saints chant it to us.

There is another "book" in which the most fecund inspirations can be found; it is open under the eyes of all, though very few apply themselves to reading it. It is the great book of nature, which "recounts" so eloquently "the glory of God" (Ps 18:1). Created by the word of the Lord, the universe repeats to all this divine word; but, distracted by other thoughts, people care little about understanding it. It therefore pertains to the preacher to listen to its accents in meditation, in order to explain them to his hearers with the patient solicitude of a mother who articulates slowly in the ear of her little infant sounds which the child perceives without comprehending.

The works of secular history can sometimes be called upon in the pulpit, "but very little (and) only in order to re-awaken the appetite"; further, it is necessary to see that they are "put entirely at the service of the Gospel." Concerning "poetic fables," they must be carefully set apart or appear only "so rarely and so opportunely that each person can see that (the preacher) does not wish to make a profession of them." This last recommendation, which seems superfluous to us today, merits further remark. On the part of the Author it shows a trait of boldness, for it was common knowledge how much, in that epoch, mythology used to invade the Christian pulpit. But if the extravagant narratives of the ancients must be excluded unrepentingly, their verses merit more indulgence. St. Francis de Sales tolerates their being cited sometimes, with discernment, authorized in this by the example of St. Paul and of St. Bernard, who had not disdained availing themselves of their use.

Having posed these general principles, our Saint returns to the "foundation of the edifice," to the inspired Scripture and the different manners of explaining it. First of all, he distinguishes the four senses that one can discover in the different passages of the Bible: the literal sense, the allegorical, the anagogical and the moral or tropological sense.

"As for the literal sense, it must be drawn from the Commentaries of the Doctors, this is all one can say. But it pertains to the preacher to make it meritorious, to weigh the words, their propriety, their emphasis." Concerning the interpretation of the allegorical or mystical sense, the Author extends himself much more and formulates five observations, of which the first two are especially important. He requires, first of all, that the connection "not be too forced." That being admitted, he insists on the following remark, which could not be known better than by citing his text:
Where it is not strongly apparent that one of the things has been the figure of the other, it is not necessary to treat the passages as figures of one another, but simply by way of comparison. For example, the juniper-tree under which Elijah lulled himself to sleep with distress is interpreted allegorically by several persons as meaning the Cross. But I would like better to say it this way: As Elijah lulled himself to sleep under the juniper-tree, so we must repose under the Cross of Our Lord by the sleep of holy meditation. I would rather not say that Elijah signifies the Christian, the juniper signifies the Cross. I would not like to assert that the one signifies the other, but I would prefer to compare the one to the other, for in this way the discourse is more sound and less reprehensible.

The five rules given on the use of the allegorical sense must be applied equally to the anagogical sense, which "relates the stories of Scripture to that which will take place in the next life," as well as to the tropological sense, which "relates them to that which takes place in the soul and conscience."

"After the statements of Scripture," continues the holy Bishop, "the statements of the Fathers and Councils hold the second place of importance. With regard to these, I say only that … it is necessary to choose the concise, crisp and clever ones." Then, remembering that he is speaking to a man from Dijon, he adds with the appropriateness that distinguishes him: "In your St. Bernard there is an infinity of these; but it is necessary, having cited them in Latin, to say them with efficacy in French, and to make them meritorious, by paraphrasing and inferring from them keenly."

There are not only short statements that one can adopt from the writings of the Doctors, but also some arguments and proofs in favor of the verities to be established or virtues to be recommended. These are found "in St. Thomas more easily than in others." Nevertheless, it is permitted to make use of them only on the condition of knowing "clearly how to make them understood, at least to ordinary hearers."

To render preaching intelligible to all is the great and continual preoccupation of our Saint and probably one of the reasons for which he insists on the usefulness of examples and comparisons. "Examples," he writes, "have a marvelous power and give a great flavor to the sermon; all that is required is that they be proper, well proposed and best applied." (In this respect, he teaches that) "The examples of the Saints are admirable," and with a new tint of local color, our amiable Doctor adds, "above all those of the province where one would preach, like St. Bernard in Dijon." Afterwards he passes on to comparisons:
They have an unbelievable efficacy to en-lighten the understanding and to move the will. They are to be drawn from human actions … from natural histories … from philosophy and finally from everything. Comparisons of trivial things, when subtly applied, are excellent, as Our Lord shows in the parable of the sower.

The sacred orator must always remain within the bounds of simplicity and put his word on everyone’s level of understanding; but both the one and the other he can accomplish without ever becoming coarse. In support of this principle, which he presupposes without actually expressing, the Bishop of Geneva indicates a procedure that he calls "an extremely profitable secret for the preacher." From his own experience he knew the usefulness of it, and he owes to this means, in part, the benefit of always remaining novel, even when he deals with subjects that others before him thought to have exhausted. The secret — "It is to offer comparisons drawn from Scripture, from certain places where few people would know to distinguish them; and this is done by meditation on the words." There follow very interesting practical applications, but these are too extensive to be cited. Concluding his precepts on the manner of applying the divine Scriptures, the Author indicates in passing the usage which can be made of the accommodated sense, but not without warning immediately that "in this use, it is necessary to be discreet and moderate."

To inquire of the Bible and the Fathers the foundations of the teaching that is proper for dispensing to the faithful, and to embellish it with examples and comparisons more suitable for highlighting it and rendering it accessible to all those listening to it — this is only the first part of the preparation that the herald of the divine word must impose upon himself. Once the elements of the discourse once have been put together in study and meditation, it remains to arrange them with order, in such a way that each argument, each proof, would produce the total effect that can be expected from it. It is about this important subject, "the arrangement of the material," that St. Francis de Sales now instructs his disciple, and he begins by posing as a principle that it "is necessary to maintain method over all things: there is nothing which aids the preacher more, which renders his preaching more useful, and which pleases the hearer as much."

Then, with a magisterial authority, he takes but a few words to settle a strongly debated question. It used to be considered a merit not only to neglect absolutely any method and order in the arrangement of the discourse, but to conceal them in some way, so that the audience would have to make a laborious effort in order to discover them. Our Doctor protests as follows against this pretention: "I maintain that the method must be clear and manifest and in no way hidden, as several do who think that it be a masterly stroke to make their method unknown. To what end, I ask you, does method serve, if one would not see it or the hearer would not know it?" But it is
not necessary that this method be inflexible, that it be uniform for all genres; it must with pliancy be formed to the exigencies of each, to direct the work of the orator so as to sustain the attention of the hearer, and not to compromise the action of the one or the other. There are distinctions to observe; borrowing from his personal experience and his perfect tact the sensibility of all the nuances, the saintly Author outlines with his masterly hand the traits which should characterize four specialities in the vast field of general method. He distinguishes the manner with which it is necessary to treat: 1) a mystery of the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ; 2) a statement of Scripture having to do with the acquisition of a virtue or the repression of a vice; 3) the homily; 4) the history, or panegyric, of a Saint.

To analyze the counsels given for each of these genres would take too long. But those which are applied to the second are particularly remarkable. In order to discourse profitably about a virtue, it is necessary to consider its nature, "its true marks, its effects and the means of acquiring or exercising it," and our Saint concludes by declaring that this has always been his method.

However wise these rules may be, the skillful Master does not pretend to oblige his disciple to conform himself to them invariably. He knows that the habit of the pulpit develops each preacher, be he even somewhat moderately endowed, with special aptitudes that design his personality. It is necessary therefore that in studying all the models the sacred orator remain always himself. Such is the reason for which this series of counsels is concluded as follows: "Here, indeed, are some methods useful for beginning; for after a little practice, you will create some others which for yourself will be proper and better."

It is according to the same principle that one should "fill in the points" of the sermon, meaning to arrange the materials with which each of those points will be composed. Before borrowing from others, it is necessary to look within and there inquire about all that is capable of being furnished, and only afterward to have recourse to those well known procedures of the levites and of young priests who make their first efforts in the pulpit. One may be astonished perhaps that such expediencies be indicated to an Archbishop; but it is necessary not to lose from view the fact that since Msgr. Frémyot had been elevated to the height of ecclesiastical dignities quite suddenly and without previous preparation, it was not impertinent to teach him as a beginner. It is certainly not by inadvertence that recourse to the written sermons of others is not counseled; for the servile imitation of discourse definitively drawn up serves properly to paralyze talent rather than to develop it.

On the contrary, the assiduous reading of the Fathers and of theologians, meditated upon and then analyzed and applied discreetly, is a sure means of forming the taste and of making
hundredfold the personal resources of the preacher. Lengthy is the nomenclature of authors whose study is recommended in the Letter. First of all, among the Fathers there is St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory and St. Bernard. St. Augustine is not named, probably because it is understood that since he holds the first rank among the masters, no one could be dispensed from consulting his teachings and examples. Perhaps also he is judged less elementary than the preceding Doctors, and for this reason he is not pointed out to a debutant; or indeed it may be by inadvertance that St. Francis de Sales would have forgotten to mention him. Whatever the reason, this omission weakens nothing of the confidence that he has always had in the doctrine of the Bishop of Hippo and the admiration that he had devoted to his genius and his holiness.

The theologians especially recommended are St. Thomas, St. Antonin and William, “Bishop of Lyon.” To these it is necessary to add three renowned Commentators: the Jesuits, Salmeron and Barradas and the Franciscan, Stella. Louis de Grenade, whom our Saint cites so often in his writings, is indicated next. Further, he advises the reading of the Sermons of the Jesuit, Jean Osorius, of the Franciscan, Maurice Hylaret, and those especially of Phillipe Diez, whom he esteems highly and praises in the following terms:

Among all those who have written sermons, Diez pleases me infinitely. He proceeds in good faith and exhibits the spirit of preaching. He inculcates and explains well the passages. He makes noble allegories and comparisons, as well as vivid descriptions. He takes the occasion to speak admirably and is extremely devout and intelligible.

By enumerating the qualities of this author, the Bishop of Geneva describes, without his knowing it, those which shine forth in his own sermons. Nevertheless, let us note that his admiration for Diez does not impede him from pointing out a rather important defect:

He lacks what is in Osorius, namely order and method, for he does not hold to it. But it seems to me that it is necessary to become familiar with him at the beginning. What I am saying is not based on my having made use of it, for I have mastered it only after much time, but because I know it as such, and it seems to me that I do not deceive myself.

---

40Guillaume Perrault was, in the 13th century, suffragant and Vicar general of Philip of Savoy, Archbishop of Lyon. Philip never having received Orders, his Vicar general found himself to be the de facto spiritual head of the diocese, and as he had the habit of signing “Gulielmus Episcopus,” he came to be considered Bishop of Lyon.
After having further indicated the *Sylva allegoriarum* of the Benedictine, Laurétus, and the Concordances or the *Summa Peccatorum* of the Franciscan, Benedicti, he concludes this long enumeration with these words: "Here seems to me the principal point of what now comes to mind for the material." Let us note this word "principal," for the preacher cannot set a terminating point to his studious activity. Channel of the truth that he has the mission of bearing to souls, he should acquire it incessantly as incessantly he must dispense it. Thus our Saint, far from being limited to the extensive studies of his youth, had made himself a rule to consecrate several hours to this work each day of his life. This is how he familiarized himself not only with the authors whom he has just recommended, but still further with a number of others, such as Tolet, Maldonat, Corneille de la Pierre, whom each time he cites in his sermons, he does so with as much ease as is appropriate.

We have been able to detect the tone of authority which holds sway in the counsels that we have just analyzed. The Master reveals himself in the complete independence of his genius. One senses that, because he is sure of his method, he does not ask himself if it is in harmony with the practice of his contemporaries. But he will do even more still. In explaining "how it is necessary to preach," he declares hardly that he is about to break with universally followed presumptions. "It is here," he says in beginning, "where I desire more credence than elsewhere, because I do not share the common opinion, and yet what I say is the truth itself." The material of the discourse, however carefully prepared that one supposes it to be, nonetheless remains in his eyes as an inert body that the orator must vivify by incarnating it, so to speak, in his own soul. This is what the Author proceeds to explain to us: "Form, says the Philosopher, gives being and soul to the thing. Speak marvels, but do not speak them well, and that is nothing; say little but say it well, that is a great deal."

But in order to speak well, it does not suffice to enunciate oneself with elegance and clarity. Vigor and precision of style constitute only one of the merits of the form: "In order to become an orator, in order to give oneself an eloquence, a style, a movement, the chief thing is to give oneself a soul; there is the ultimate word of sound rhetoric, the master condition that nothing supplants and which supplants the need of all the rest."41 So our Saint also understood it. After having proscribed everything that smacks of pedantry, which he calls "the plague of preaching," he recommends "speaking affectionately and devoutly, simply and candidly and with confidence, and of being quite learned in the doctrine that one teaches and about which one persuades." These last words merit being given special attention; they express the principal condition essential to true eloquence. Here, according to the Bishop of Geneva, is another version:

---

The sovereign artifice is to not have any artifice. It is necessary that our words be enflamed not by cries and excessive actions, but by interior affection; it is necessary that they flow from the heart more than from the mouth. One has much to say, but the heart speaks to the heart and the tongue speaks only to the ears.

There follows the enumeration of the qualities which the action of preaching must have: it is necessary that it be "free, noble, generous, unaffected, strong, holy, serious, and a little slow … The language must be clear, plain and simple, without ostentation of Greek, Hebrew, newfangled, or courtier-like words. The texture of the speech must be natural, without preface, without ornamentation."

A series of other observations of veritable interest, though secondary in importance, concludes the counsels given by the Saint to his friend. They concern the appelations which can be employed in speaking to the Christian people, the usage of exclamations, (and) the vigor which he admits to give to the peroration. Then (he speaks of) the proximate preparation to preaching: "I approve," he says, "that it be made in the evening, and that in the morning one meditates for oneself upon that which is to be said to others." Herald of the sovereign King, the apostolic man must learn from him what he has the mission of teaching to the faithful. Provided only that he put his heart in contact with the Heart of Jesus, he will be able to realize the recommendation of the Prince of the Apostles: "If someone speaks, may it appear that God speaks by way of his mouth" (1 Peter 4:11). This is why, not only "must one never preach without having celebrated the Mass or intending to celebrate it," but also it is good to make the immediate preparation in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Identifying with the thoughts of his adorable Master, sensing again in himself "the sentiments of the Lord Jesus" (Phil 2:5), the preacher will have to do no more than allow his soul to project itself into that of his hearers. He will be persuasive, eloquent, sometimes sublime, all because he will be filled up with God. But then, he should know to watch over and moderate this very abundance, and for that a last counsel is given — brevity. "It is always better that the preaching be short than long, which," adds the Author with an amiable frankness, "I have failed to do up to the present … Provided that it lasts half an hour, it cannot be too short."

Nothing is both as gracious and as touching as the manner with which our Saint excuses himself for having "written off-handed, without any attention to either words or style, borne," he says to his correspondant, "by the desire alone of witnessing to you how much I am obeying you … I am advancing my own views, it is true; but it is only because you want my opinion and not that of others, and when I practice this myself, why should I not say it?" Avowedly precious to take in, this recapitulates all that remains for us to show regarding the method which the holy Bishop of Geneva
employed. What he counseled to another, he used to practice himself. To read his "Letter on Preaching" is to see him, to understand him in the pulpit of truth, treating with equal success the most diverse subjects.

And because he came to be depicted in this Letter au naturel, because he revealed himself there completely, he adds this prayer: "I implore you, sir, not to allow anyone to see this whose eyes would be less favorable to me than yours." Then a word which, according to Msgr. Freppel, "all rhetoric owes to him alone," falls from the pen of the Saint, or better springs from his heart: "There is nothing impossible for love … It suffices to love well in order to speak well." Such is the epilogue that he gives to this masterpiece, drawn up in two days, without having at hand any book relative to these matters. Experience and wisdom themselves, clarified by an exquisite taste, speak in these admirable pages, across which a perfume of holiness exudes from one end to the other.

Perhaps no single work on sacred rhetoric exists (and those who treat of it are innumerable) in which such practical teachings are condensed in such a restricted space. Obviously we do not claim that this Letter exhausts the subject, but at least it recapitulates, with as much verve as clarity, all that matters for the preacher to know and to observe in order to announce the divine word profitably. There one finds holistic views, those extensive and unerring surveys without which the rules of detail are of only a most mediocre usefulness. Our appreciation is shared by whoever has meditated upon the work about which we speak.

Already in 1637, Fr. Caussin considered "this piece to be one of the more instructive which could be seen or desired on such an important matter and in which the pinnacle and the solidity of the judgment of the Blessed man appear resolutely, along with the equity of his beautiful and solid advice, with the force, the elegance, and the good sense of his style, and with the great experience that he himself had in this holy exercise." "Although our writer had not wanted to present a treatise on the material," says, in his turn, a most admirable contemporary author, "we know of no such rhetoric for the use of preachers to be more complete, comprising more good counsels, elevated outlines, and useful rules, than this Letter written to a friend in all the simplicity and abandon of an intimate chat."

---

42 *Cours d'éloquence sacrée*, 5th lesson.
This truly magisterial Letter is not the only work of the same genre that the Bishop of Geneva has left us on preaching. On June 3, 1603 he had addressed a quite remarkable letter to Antoine de Revol, Bishop of Dol, whose acquaintance he had made in Paris the preceding year. The teachings that he gives to him being like a summary of those which we have just analyzed, they merit being reproduced:

You must in every way resolve to preach to your people. The most holy Council of Trent, in line with all the ancient councils, has determined that the first and principal office of the Bishop is to preach. Do not allow yourself to be carried away by a consideration which could deter you from this resolution. Do not do so in order to become a great preacher, but simply because you must do it and because God wills it. The paternal sermon of a Bishop means more than all the artifice of the elaborate sermons of preachers of another sort. Little is necessary for a bishop in order to preach well, for his sermons must be about necessary and useful things, not curious or researched, his words simple, not affectatious, his gesture paternal and natural, without artifice or attention, and however short it may be or whatever little he may say, it is always enough. All this should be said only for the beginning; for the beginning will teach you about what comes later. Seeing that you write your letters so well and fluidly, you will do fine in the sermons. Nonetheless I remind you, sir, that it is necessary not to have little resolution, but much, and a good and invincible one.

Beyond these counsels written to Bishops, let us listen to the oral lessons which St. Francis de Sales used to give to simple priests; they denote no less charity, wisdom, and spirit of observation. Father Philibert de Bonneville, who was his first historian, testified as follows when he was called to give his deposition for the Process of Beatification of the Servant of God:

I admired his charity the first Lent that I had the pleasure of preaching in his presence. For he came precisely to St. Dominic in this present city, telling me that he was delighted by its dwellings, giving me several remarkable directions in order to preach fruitfully, and doing so with a more than paternal charity. Leading me into a separate chamber, he put me near the table, speaking for some time in order to teach me the manner of governing the voice and making the movements and gestures, admonishing me not to load my preachings so much with statements, but to weigh
them beforehand. And with an unparalleled gentleness, he gave me courage to occupy myself seriously with preaching.\footnote{Process. remiss. Gebenn. (I), ad art. 27.}

But this application must be freed from all personal preoccupation: "It is not necessary to worry so much about doing well," the Saint says further to the Religious whom we have just named, "but merely to seek the salvation of souls, and then, as preaching is a work of God, he will help you with a special favor to exercise it holily."

Father Jean-François Rendu, a Franciscan, received the same teachings another way:

In 1612 the Servant of God gave me a pious method in order to preach profitably for the salvation and conversion of souls, saying that all vanity of words must be banished from sermons, and that Christ crucified should not be announced to the people by the "persuasive discourses of human wisdom, but by the sensible effects of the spirit and of virtue" (1 Cor 2:4). And he added these most precious words that I have conserved in my heart so as to recall them to myself always: "Pere Jean-François, it is in vain that a preacher preaches if he is not embraced by the flames of charity.\footnote{Process. remiss. Gebenn. (II), ad art. 7.}

Charity — such is, indeed, the supreme energy of true eloquence and the reason for the prodigious success that the Saints have obtained in this evangelical ministry.

From these lofty principles, our amiable Doctor descends again to the entirely practical observations whose usefulness his experience had led him to know. This is assured for us by the celebrated Vaugelas, who had the fortune to maintain with him some most friendly relations. The Blessed could not wholly approve of the manner of preaching of those who always speak in a same (high) tone of voice, without ever flexing it or varying it in any way. For, he would say, besides the fact that they have tried very hard and have exerted their sides and lungs, they have not tended to make such a strong impression on the spirits of those who listen to them. For if they would vary their voice, raising and lowering it according to what they would judge appropos, by this means it seems to each hearer that he is the
one being addressed by the word of the one who preaches. For when one speaks to an entire audience in the same tone of voice with which one would speak to an individual, (the listener) takes to himself the instruction of the preacher, which would not happen if he heard it ex-claimed in an exalted voice which, not varying, seems to be pronounced only in order to slap the air and not the con-science of each one of the hearers in particular. This blessed Prelate called this fashion of managing his voice alloqui hominem, meaning to speak to his man, and to do so in a way that each would take for himself what would be dis-tributed to the entire audience in general. 47

The Bishop of Geneva occupied himself in a special manner with the formation of several priests, to whom he gave, according to the expression of Jean-François de Blonay and of Father Rendu, "a Directory for preaching with profit." Above all, the young preachers were the object of attentive sollicitudes on his part: often he used to go to listen to them in order to be better prepared to indicate to them the defects into which they were falling; other times he used to beckon them to himself and recommend to them, primarily, a sustained application to study and the flight of all pretention, of all vain display of erudition in the sacred pulpit.

St. Francis de Sales has expressed himself in his procedures and methods; it is our task now to demonstrate its practice in his apostolic life. We have heard him trace his principles; it is time to convince ourselves that he complies with all these things, a contestation which is as agreeable as it is easy, since a part of his oratory Oeuvres have come down to us.

It would be fastidious to repeat all that has been said in the Preface of the three preceeding volumes (OEA, tomes VII-IX) concerning the dual series of Sermons: the "Autographs" and those that it has become expedient to designate under the name of "collected Sermons." The reader should call to mind the distinction made in the first Series, between the discourses of the ecclesiasti-cal youth of Francis de Sales, and those of his episcopacy. Each of these two classes of Sermons has its genre of merit: in the first, (which are) writings nearly entirely from his own hand, one hears the Saint speak; in the second, one sees him work; it does not take much for us to say that one senses him think. It is true, these are no more than sketches, but sketches traced by an artist's brush and in accord with the principles formulated in the diverse teachings that we have analyzed. One can ascertain there the progressive development of the talents of the Author and can see at the price of what patient labors he had obtained it. Assuredly we do not pretend to offer these sketches as irreproachable types. They are outlined in broad strokes, such as befits a man of genius who has

47Process. remiss. Parisiensis, ad art. 35.
the right to count heavily on the resources that a long habit of the word and above all the fire of inspiration furnish at the moment of the delivery.

It is likewise useless to repeat here the indications contained in the Preface of tome IX on the character, the mode of transmission, and the authenticity of the "collected Sermons." It suffices to recall that the imperfections that can be pointed out there are imputable more to the Religious who have written them than to the holy Bishop who has pronounced them.

These observations having been made, it remains for us to examine more closely how in practice St. Francis de Sales complies with the diverse counsels that he himself proposed to preachers. And first of all, let us look at his engagement with the use of the sacred Text. Who has been able to read the four volumes of his Sermons without being struck by the richness of the biblical citations with which they are adorned! The autograph pieces alone number not less than four thousand of them. What is even more remarkable are the interpretations that the Saint gives to them, the deductions that he draws from them, the applications that he makes of them. One cannot meditate upon them without avowing, after those who had the goodness of hearing him, that he explicates "marvelously well the passages of the Sacred Scripture," or further, that he is "so consummed in the intelligence of the Scriptures, that his spirit seems to be transformed in them." He knows and understands the Scripture in a marvelous fashion," writes Cardinal Pie;

he is inspired by them always, he ana-lyzes them, elucidates them and applies them with no less surety than grace. On this point, the Bishop of Geneva does not seem inferior to those first Fathers and great Doctors of antiquity, whose dis-course was only as a fair embroidery on the fabric of the divine word. He is, in a particular way, from the school and the family of St. Ambrose and St. Bernard.

What meanings, as new as ingenious, does he not find in texts whose fecundity seems to have been exhausted! Let one read, for example, the Sermon preached at Chambéry on Ash Wednesday of 1612; the spirit goes from surprise to surprise, the heart, from ravishment to ravishment. It is with no less charm that, when speaking in the next Sermon about the first encounter of Isaac and Rebecca, our Saint deduces from it the sentiments in which the Church must

\[48\] Deposition of M. Michel Favre (Process. remiss. Gebenn. [I], ad art. 35).

\[49\] Deposition of M. André de Sauzéa (Process. remiss. Parisiensis, ad art. 44).

\[50\] Concessio tituli Doctoris S. Franc. Salesii, postulatio xxvii.
anticipate the wish of Christ, its spouse. And, as a summary for us, let us cite this claim of an author who, having made allusion to the quarrels in part too often borne in the Christian pulpit, adds: "The exegesis of St. Francis is no more subjected to vulgarity than to hate; purity and unction are always its principal characteristics."\(^5\)

But far from depending on his own interpretations, always so just and so luminous, our Doctor often inquires of the more authorized Commentators the explication of the literal sense. Among the Fathers, he is pleased above all to consult St. Augustine and St. John Chrysostom, of which the one, according to the word of Bossuet, "elevated the spirit to grand and subtle considerations, and the other leads it and measures it to the capacity of the people."\(^5\) After them come St. Jerome, St. Gregory the Great, St. Ambrose, St. Bernard. What is more, one senses in reading his Sermons that the Orator has continually at hand the Great Bible with the ordinary Gloss and the annotations of Lyra, as well as the Chain of Gold of St. Thomas. He refers to him often to borrow his citations from this last work; however, not less frequently he goes back to the sources. Besides the authors that we have indicated above, it is necessary further to point out Rupert, Hugues de Saint-Cher, Génébrard, Bellarmin and the great Greek exegetes. Among the Commentators who have concentrated their works on some part of Scripture, our Saint prefers to quote Péreira on Genesis, Pinéda on the Wisdom literature, Ribéra, Sa, on the Canticle of Canticles, Viegas on Revelation.

If he is pleased to appeal to the witness of the Fathers for the interpretation of the Bible, the Bishop of Geneva brings it forth more rarely when he speaks on other subjects, as one can judge by the Sermons written entirely by hand. Thus, in the first three, which comprise 65 pages, one encounters only nine patristic citations: three in the long Sermon for the Assumption in 1602, not even one in the funeral Oration for the Duke de Mercoeur. He loves to cite the Sacred Scriptures directly, as much as he has the habit of appropriating the doctrine of the Fathers without constraining himself to render it with their own expressions.

Perhaps, in considering the outlines of his discourses, one will accuse the Orator of himself practicing what is contradictory to his theories relative to the use of profane histories. But it is necessary to recall that these sketches are only a repertorie prepared in advance; at a given moment, he would have taken them up with as much sobriety as circumspection. It is evident, for example, that the indications gathered together on pages 111 and 294 of tome VIII have not been put to use in any preaching. What is more, if sometimes our Saint evokes the opinion of the ancients,

\(^5\) Abbot Savage, Saint François de Sales Prédicateur, chap 3, § 2.

\(^5\) Lettre au Cardinal de Bouillon, 1670.
such as Epictetus and Plutarch, Aristotle and Seneca, it is principally when one of their axioms can put in relief the authority and beauty of the evangelical truths. And further in this case he takes care to use a sort of corrective: "Know yourself," he will say, "is a maxim of the philosophers, but it has been approved by the Christian doctors." Another time: "I cite this here from Seneca; I wish it were St. Augustine." Or indeed he will love to recommend "the good Epictetus, who probably died a Christian."

The mythological allusions against which Francis de Sales has so energetically protested in his Letter are generally absent from his sermons. Msgr. Freppel notes that, "in this, the Master preceded somewhat his epoch. A sense more solid, a taste more alive and more delicate made him find almost by instinct the first word of the reform, which Bossuet will take up again in order to perfect it with the authority of his genius." Only sometimes, at the beginning of his ministry, will he evoke certain reminiscences of the fable; but these deviations are quite excusable if one takes into account the youth of the Orator (and) the examples with which he was surrounded; these are exceptions which confirm the rule. By contrast, he profits rather easily from the liberty which he accords to others to cite some verses of the great classics in the pulpit. Bossuet himself will recognize later that the reading of the poets is of "great help" for the formation of the sacred orator. Despite the austerity of their principles, the Oratorians of Naples, authorized by the celebrated Tarugi, would not disdain to use similar means in order to get the attention of the audience.

The comparisons by which the brilliant imagination of the Bishop of Geneva was able to find material in all of creation appear with a marvelous renown in his Sermons. One would be able to gather more than a thousand of them in those sermons which have been recently discovered. If some of them are not of an irreproachable taste and a perfect justice, how many more numerous are those which make him admired for an originality, a ravishing charm! To give some examples: what greater novelty than the rapprochment established between the tears that love and compassion cause to gush from the eyes of Jesus onto the tomb of Lazarus, and the water of the rose which escapes from the alembic under the action of fire (OEA, VIII:99)! And that other comparison between the rose stripped of its petals and the heart of the prelate deprived of the love of his subordinates (OEA, VIII:146), is it not strikingly appropriate and gracious? One should point out this double image which is found in Sermon 78: "The best balm goes to the bottom of the vase, the olive

---

53 *Cours d'éloquence sacrée*, 7th lesson.

54 *Lettre au Cardinal de Bouillon*. 
oil floats above; charity produces the good works, humility conserves them. The bees make honey, and in order to conserve it, they produce beeswax" (OEA, VIII:56).

It is easy to determine that our Saint was faithful to complying with the principles that he formulates on the arrangement of materials. However vague they may seem, the divisions which are designed in the Autographs are the incontestable proof of it. Despite the extent of his knowing (and) the facility of his word, he traces beforehand a sure framework in which his ideas are ranked afterward according to the order which must put them in best relief. Nonetheless, this plan will not always be definitive; it will happen that some new considerations will come to modify it, in such a way that the sermon preached will offer some divergences, more or less considerable, from the written discourse. It is easy to judge this by comparing Pieces 95 and 105 of the first Series with Sermons 1 and 7 of the second, which are their development.

One recalls that our Doctor distinguishes four principal genres to treat in the pulpit: the exposition of a mystery of our faith, the explication of a statement of Scripture characteristic of the acquisition of a virtue or the correction of a vice, the homily properly speaking, and the panegyric. To these it will be necessary to add three other genres more strongly determined: the sermon of controversy, the conference to Religious, and the funeral oration. It would be very interesting to distribute among these different categories the 232 Sermons that have come down to us. A fair number would enter into the first category; more numerous still are the homilies on the Gospels of Advent and of Lent; three panegyrics have remained in the state of summaries or of sketches. As to the sermons on the acquisition and the practice of the virtues, there are few in which the method traced by the Saint could be clearly distinguished; nevertheless, if he did not comply with it entirely, one senses that he does not lose it from view. We shall say nothing of the sermons of controversy, which among all have been the object of a special preparation (OEA, tome I), nor of the numerous conferences addressed to the Daughters of the Visitation and collected by them (OEA, tome VI).

The biographers of St. Francis de Sales mention only two funeral orations pronounced by him: that for the Duke of Mercoeur, which he condescended to entrust to impression, and that for the Duchess of Nemours, Anne d'Este, of which nothing has been conserved for us. The holy Bishop was strongly repugnated by this type of discourse, because, as he used to say, "if one is not careful in these, the mundane spirit mounts in the sacred pulpit, expands itself in deceitful praises, unworthy of the holy place, and the flattery of the court takes the place of the word of truth."

55 Ancient manuscript of the Année Saint de la Visitation, 27 June.
Simplicity (and) naturalness — these are the master qualities in the eyes of the amiable Orator. They shine in the depths of his preaching; they are one of the pleasures of its form. Always he shows himself such that he is, and he can do it with advantage, for nothing is more noble, more pure, more endearing than his personality. The man of genius never makes us forget the Saint; and it is to so attractive a holiness that he owes in part the prodigious success of his ministry. His word is always animated by that ardent and communicative fervor for which Christian piety had devised a special name — "unction." His heart is possessed by the love of God and of souls, and this double love inspires him, excites him, transports him, to the point that his hearers have testified to having seen him often in the pulpit "resplendent as a seraphim." It is not necessary therefore to be astonished that one senses warmth and life circulating in his sermons and that some fruits of conversion respond everywhere to the ardor of his zeal. For, as he used to write, "it is not by so sterile an earth that the love of the laborer makes fertile." Thus one could apply to him the beautiful word fallen one day from his lips: "Nothing is lacking to Pastors who love ... Two words inspired by love are sufficient" (OEA, VIII:289).

But he has not cared to content himsself with "two words." His Sermons are the object of a careful preparation. In his youth he wrote them entirely, as we have said. When the multitude of his affairs did not allow him more free time, at least he still traced some sketches and notes, and studied himself to transmit among his hearers the sentiments by which he is animated. And if in his preliminary work he seems not to have been sufficiently successful, he takes it up again by way of parenthetical notes thus conceived: "This must be strongly inculcated ... This history must be recounted as clearly as possible." It is as if, for him, the audience is not a sort of abstraction, a collective being. His spirit is dissolved and places itself before each individuality; his soul enters into communication with each soul. He previews its objections, responds to its secret thoughts, identifies himself with it, in such a way that he always applies himself to alloqui hominem. And this man, this soul whom he thus takes aside, is the more humble, the less well-endowed of his hearers. In each of his sermons the holy Bishop would have been able to say that which we read in the one of the last sermons which he would have written: "Most of you already see what I wish to say, but it is expedient that I explain it for the simple" (OEA, VIII:400). And there is a characteristic trait of true oratory talent as much as of holiness: To know how to make oneself "all to all in order to gain all" for Jesus Christ (1 Cor 9:19,22).

Letter to Msgr. Camus
ST. FRANCIS DE SALES:
MODEL of Sacred Eloquence

St. Francis de Sales, as we have come to see, has traced with surety and applied with constancy and success the authentic laws of evangelical preaching. Therefore he has the right to be considered as a MASTER and, under this title, to be followed with complete confidence. But from that one could not conclude strictly and without other proof that he was a MODEL. An orator can offer a teaching drawn from the best sources, can be irreproachable under the dual rapport of style and elocution, without meriting that title. Work, good will, (or) personal effort, as persevering one may suppose it to be, would not always be able to supply for that which nature has refused. The one who does not have the gift of penetrating, of moving, can be a pleasing speaker, but he will never be a great preacher. Eloquence is found only where one "encounters a heart which palpitates, a soul which trembles, a soul lively smitten by the true, the beautiful, the good, (a soul) which expresses with goodness that which it senses with strength."57

That St. Francis de Sales can be numbered among those personalities so richly endowed, and that his brilliant faculties had been directed and perfected by the rules of the oratory art, will make of him incontestably a MODEL; that is what we hope to show. For this demonstration it will suffice to produce the testimony of his contemporaries and to prove that he possessed all the intellectual

57Msgr. FRAPPEL, Cours d’éloquence sacrée, 2nd lesson.
and moral aptitudes which constitute the great orator. Afterward it will be easy to cause to vanish the reservations that certain authors have raised concerning the praises given to this part of the oeuvres of the Bishop of Geneva.

In order to make the qualities and virtues of its Servant radiate with a more lively renown, Providence had put him in contact with a multitude of superior spirits, capable of recognizing and appreciating in him all kinds of merit: in Savoy there was St. Jane-Frances de Chantal and president Favre; in Paris there were some men of the church and courtesans (de Bérulle, du Val, Vincent de Paul, Vaugelas, Des Hayes); there was Henry IV himself, who boasts of being the friend of (the) "Monsieur de Genève," as one used to say at that time. Let there be no objection to us that this esteem, this admiration, compromises the impartiality of the witnesses. They are of such unanimity and multiplicity that it is not possible to suspect their sincerity.

First of all, no one would have a mind to contradict the celebrated Antoine Favre who, by his own merit, obtained the highest dignity of his country: the role of (being the) first President in the sovereign Senate of Savoy. This great jurist, whose reputation spread through Europe, speaks thus of our Saint in the Preface to his *Codex Fabrianus*:

> As a preacher, not only does he express himself extremely well (*disertissimus*), which many are capable of doing, but he is most eloquent (*eloguentissimus*), which is the merit of a small number. One does not know in what he excels, whether in the profundity of doctrine, the beauty of diction, the majesty of expression, or in the choice of subjects most appropriate to the circumstances.

Often in his private correspondence, the illustrious magistrate, a good judge in such matters, repeats the same praises in other terms. They are the expression not of enthusiasm but of a profound conviction, for he speaks as an auricular witness. Much more, he used to appreciate the sermons of his saintly Friend to such a point that he wanted to transcribe several of them by his own hand. These copies, which were recovered later in the archives of the Favre family, would aid the President in the composition of a work mentioned by the Bishop of Geneva in a letter addressed to St. Jane-Frances de Chantal, dated 11 February 1607: "I send to you," he writes "the enclosed book, in which you will see many beautiful ideas which were in part offered on my first sermons by the President of this city, a man of rare and strongly Christian virtue."
Another contemporary and friend of our Saint, Fr. John of St. Francis, the Superior General of the Feuillants, has rendered this testimony about him:\footnote{58}{R.P. Dom Jean de S. François, La Vie du Bien-heureux Mre François de Sales, Evesque et Prince de Geneve (Paris: Michael Soly, 1624), book II.}

He had a strong, intelligible and poised voice (and) a most elegant style. His terminology was good, proper, unaffected (and) accommodated to his thoughts, which were clear, distinct, and in no way confused or muddled. His notions were uncommon, haughty and divine, but they were treated by him in a common way and were so easy (to understand) that each person was capable of doing so, even the simplest folk who could easily remember his sermons due to the fluency engendered by his method and the great order and arrangement which he brought to bear and observe therein. After having heard him, several persons \ldots, who would not know how difficult this fluency is, used to imagine that they were quite as capable of it as he; and in this last point consists the excellence of the one who speaks in public, namely that of deluding the presumption of his hearer.

The conversion of the Chablais would alone prove, and by a brilliant manner, that given his youth Francis de Sales was "powerful in word" (Luke 24:19). Other missionaries before him had attempted this difficult work; for all, defeat was complete. The Provost appears; the heretics, already captivated by the charm of his virtue, feel that they would not be able to escape the divine seduction of his eloquence; a rigorous abstention is imposed by the ministers under the most severe pains. Not being able to make himself heard, Francis succeeds in making himself read. The defiances diminish, the prejudices fall; one is reproached by him, one is emboldened to listen to him, and soon this blossoming province is rendered to the Church.

One of the leaders of the error, Colonel de Brotty, used to avow that the promises and threats of the Duke of Savoy, his sovereign, would have left him hard-hearted; the virulent invectives of certain preachers, less prudent than zealous, would have affirmed him in his obstinacy. But before the "pleasing discourses" of the Provost, he and his initiates had felt their "total aversion" for his religion diminish,\footnote{Process. remiss. Gebenn. (I), ad art. 11 and 40.} and all finish by rendering their arms, which no other until then had been able to wrest from their hands. Thus the Apostle used to verify the word which he would insert in the Controversies when dealing with the fruitfulness of the Church.\footnote{Part I, chapter 3, article 19 (OEA I).} This fecundity "is made principally
by preaching, as says St. Paul (per evangelium ego vos genui — 1 Cor 4:15)." And, revealing as unknown to him the cause of the prodigious success which he would obtain, he adds: "Therefore the preaching of the church must be inflamed: ignitum eloquium tuum, domine (Ps 118:140); and what is there more energetic, penetrating and prompt to convert and give form to other materials than fire?"

The preaching of the holy Missionary was truly inflamed because, according to the noble expression of an author, he himself being "as one enclosed in the Word, his life would preach before his word. He underwent the divine things, as writes St. Denis,  before saying them, and the triumph of his eloquence was the conversion of his hearers." This magnificent triumph, the only one to which a minister of the Gospel could legitimately aspire, the Coadjutor of Geneva obtained in Paris, where he made the sojourn of 1602 about which we spoke above. President Favre, who found himself then in that city, wrote to Msgr. de Granier on 28 March 1602: "Monsignor my brother does not allow himself to be admired for the erudite and noble sermons which he gives in diverse places." And on April 10: "You would not believe … how (much) all the princes and princesses of the court favor my brother for the merits which they recognize in him and for the reputation that he has acquired by such noble and erudite sermons. … He is held to be the premier preacher that France had seen for a long time in this great theater."

"In Paris, he proclaimed the word of God with great fervor, to the public praises of all the Parisians, but especially of the court of Henry IV," says the celebrated du Val, doctor of the Sorbonne.  

Several changed their ways and all were strongly disposed to piety. Some men who until then had been living in heresy abjured it immediately, among others a marquis of illustrious birth, whose conversion brought a great blow to the part of the heretics and augmented considerably the influence of the Catholic part. The eloquence of our Francis was gentle, his language serious, his action moderate, his appearance venerable. He was quite persuasive (and) earnest, compelling nearly all his hearers to the amendment of their life or to the abjuration of heresy by the strength of his

---

61 De divin. Nom., chapter 3.

62 P. Caussin, Traicté de la conduite spirituelle, section 7.

63 This was the title which our Saint and the celebrated jurist would give themselves reciprocally.

64 Process. remiss. Parisiensis, ad art. 35.
arguments (as) supported in the Sacred Scriptures or the treasure of theology. Henry IV was so moved by the Blessed that he used to speak often of him to his courtesans and used to wish to provide him with some bishopric in his kingdom.

In his turn the marquis de Lullin gave this deposition:65

I have learned from Antoine Favre, (the) first President of Savoy, and from Des Hays, (the) steward of His Majesty, that he was received by the King and by all the court and revered as an Angel; that this great Prince, who was the most well-informed in all the land, used to name him nothing else than the phoenix of Prelates, a unique one in the person of whom he used to admire as brought together all the qualities of a perfect Bishop. . . . He preached the Lenten sermons in the hall of the Louvre with the admiration of all the court. The most knowledgeable doctors listened to him as to an oracle, and they proclaimed that he was the most eloquent and the most knowing man of his century; the King himself declared that he had never heard such a powerful preacher.

As a result, the Monarch conceived the desire to retain the Coadjutor of Geneva in Paris in order to send him from there to attempt the conversion of the King of England, James I.66 This project ought to have delighted the soul of the Apostle, who all his life had a special predilection for the isle of the Saints. But if it was not given to him to water this land by his sweat, he made it fertile by his prayers; certainly they contributed from afar, and in a large way, in preparing for the noble movement of return which gladdens the Church at the end of our 19th century.

The attempts to attract Francis de Sales to Paris made at that time would be renewed several times, to no avail, in the years which will follow. For his part, he did not forget the congeniality with which the Parisians had overwhelmed him, and he will very willingly come back to evangelize them. One can infer this from a letter which he wrote to Des Hayes, dated 5 October 1612:


66Henry IV confided the negotiation of this affair to his confidant, Zamet, in the presence of the Duke de Bellegarde, who in turn recounted the fact to Fr. Rendu, a religious of St. Francis, who had given testimony at the process of canonization of our Saint (Process. remiss. Gebenn. [II], ad art. 7).
God knows well that I would prepare a heart all new, more grand this seems to me than my ordinary (one), in order to go to pronounce those holy and divine words … and I resolve, if by a certain excess of love in this design, that preaching now a little more sternly, solidly, and so to say it all in a word between us, (with) a little more "apostolicity" than I had done ten years ago, you would have loved my sermons, not only out of consideration for me, but in themselves …. It is necessary to confess the truth, I have an extreme passion in this regard.

The regrets which the Bishop of Geneva went through were shared by the numerous friends and admirers which he made for himself in the capital. Marie de Médicis herself was disappointed by this mischance and promised herself to take good advantage of the first favorable circumstance in order to meet him. The question of knowing if he would be part of the delegation which would have to go to Paris to handle the marriage of Christine of France with the Duke of Savoy was for a rather longtime discussed in Turin. Richilieu intervened by signifying that his Sovereign would be strongly discontented if one refused him the satisfaction of being acquainted with the man of God.

The divine will was such that the humble Prelate appeared yet again in the grand city where so many souls used to go to be captivated both by the charm of his eloquence and by the prestige of his holiness. In Paris he would see again Cardinal de Bérulle, who in former times had eagerly desired his co-operation for the foundation of the Oratory. (He also would) make the acquaintance of St. Vincent de Paul and contract with him a friendship such that upon leaving the capital he bequeathed to him that which he held closest to his heart: his Daughters of the Visitation. (It is known that this holy Priest was their Superior for forty years.) Finally, he went to establish relations with Georges Froger, the curé of St. Nicholas du Chardonnet, and above all with the celebrated M. Bourdoise his vicar, the "restorer of the common life." The latter had recently transferred to the territory of St. Nicholas the small community which he had founded originally at Reims. It is there that St. Vincent de Paul used to come to be consoled from the constraints which his humility used to undergo at the mansion of Gondi. This parish was found to be a hearth of fervor whose radiance made itself felt far away.

An irresistible current of the spiritual life penetrated into the regions of the great world. Some women of high eminence, some ladies of the court itself, were given to the more admirable practices of piety and penitence. Thus they prepared themselves to lend an efficacious co-

67 In a letter dated 18 January 1617.
operation, when the moment would come, to the remarkable men of whom the Lord would avail
himself in order to regenerate France. For the most part they wanted to take advantage of the
insights of the Bishop of Geneva and to have recourse to his counsels. We name only the Ladies de
Maignelay, Séguier, de Vialart de Herse, d’Harcourt, de Villeneuve, de Villesavin. There will be
much to say on the subject of that which these eminent Christians would owe to St. Francis de
Sales; but it is necessary that we pass rapidly over these remembrances, for we are studying here
the model Preacher and not the Director of souls. At Port-Royal, he was appreciated under both
aspects, and everywhere the most serious persons concurred to decree to him the title "apostolic
Preacher."

As St. Vincent de Paul says,\textsuperscript{68}

His fervor used to shine above all in his public sermons, which I regard as
the speaking Gospel. It is there that he used to enkindle in his audience
living flames of devotion. … His words inspired me with such admiration
that, upon considering them, it seemed to me that no one better than he
represented the Son of God conversing among men.

Following upon this declaration of a great Saint, let us listen to that of a man of the world,
a compatriot of the Bishop of Geneva, Vaugelas, one of the founders of the French Academy.\textsuperscript{69}

It is certain that in the exercise of preaching 'the Blessed' sought to see
himself as humiliated rather than praised. Considering he was extremely
erudite and eloquent — as I have learned from some of the most erudite
doctors and the most eloquent men of our century, namely Cardinal du
Perron, Cardinal de Bérulle, Monsignor Coeffetau (Bishop of Marseille) and
Monsignor Fenouillet (Bishop of Montpellier) — he managed nonetheless
to appear neither the one nor the other. On the contrary, he rendered
himself so familiar and so intelligible that those who esteemed in matters
of discourse only that which they did not understand, they complained of
too great a fluency on his part, which they dared to call baseness. I have
heard him say sometimes that the slowness which appeared in his
preaching and that difficulty of explaining himself which he seemed to have,
these proceeded not from sterility of spirit but, on the contrary, from (its)
abundance, in as much as so many things and words presented themselves

\textsuperscript{68}Process. remiss. Parisiensis, ad art. 27.

\textsuperscript{69}Process. remiss. Parisiensis, ad art. 30.
to him at the same time that doubt over which to choose made him hesitate.

It is to be noted that this slowness of elocution is mentioned only by those who were accustomed to the volubility by which the authors of the large cities fancied themselves.

Vaugelas continues.\(^70\)

I have never heard of a preacher who delighted me or moved me so gently or so sensibly as he. First he had in view the true goal of a preacher, which is the conversion of souls, to which he used to work more by way of the love of God than by that of the fear of hell. He demonstrated an admirable judgment in observing exactly all the requisite circumstances, be it of place, time, or persons before whom he was preaching. He did not utter a word which did not serve him, and all his discourse was so judicious and so well-ordered that even though I have quite a bad memory, it had been easy to retain the entirety of his sermon by heart, for what little attention I had wanted to pay there. His language was clear, vigorous and powerful in persuasion, but above all he excelled in the propriety of words, the choice of which was so exquisite that it was what rendered him so slow and sluggish in explaining himself. He could not endure that fashion of glossed-over speaking which so many people have an affection for today and that even more people take falsely as (a) sign of true eloquence.

For the rest, he abounded in lofty thoughts and was so prolific in notions that several great and most well-read personages have sworn to never having heard him say some things entirely new and which they had never previously read or heard anyone say. But they were entirely judicious thoughts, and never extravagant or too studious; they moved the soul and the understanding and not simply the imagination of the hearer. What delighted me were the practical applications, frequent and admirable, which he used to make on all sorts of things, for which he drew from the rich comparisons that led him to his subject. … He thus used to make it quite apparent that he possessed per-fectly this art in that he knew how to turn a subject on all sides and to look at it from all sorts of viewpoints, so well that he never encountered (a subject) so sterile nor so arid that he did

\(^{70}\) ad art. 35.
not give birth there to some flowers and from which he did not gather fruits capable of nourishing souls.

Philippe Cospéan, Bishop of Nantes, also knew and appreciated Francis de Sales. This Prelate, one of the first who had discerned the genius of Bossuet, was unquestionably a competent judge in matters of oratory merit. Now, his admiration for our Saint is conveyed by this word which for him is alone as good as some long praises: "This was an excellent preacher, animated with the most ardent zeal for the faith." He was especially inflamed by the ardors of divine charity and, as Georges Froger testified, was able to lift souls up into the heavenly realms which his inhabited. As he says,

The Servant of God preached frequently in our church. One time among others, vested in miter and cope, he did so with such remarkable talent and strength, or rather under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, that during the entire duration of his sermon, he seemed to us to be transported in heaven. It was on the feast of the Translation of St. Nicholas, Patron of our parish.

And finally, to choose some witnesses from each of the ranks of the clergy, let us receive that of a celebrated Jesuit, Fr. Caussin; if one believes Jacquinet, he would have been the first religious of the Society of Jesus who in France came back to the authentic rules of evangelical preaching. He could, therefore, speak knowingly when he affirms that "the sermons" of the Servant of God "were knowledgeable, pious, instructive, vigorous, and fully apostolic." We could readily produce still numerous citations; it would be of more merit for us to summarize by saying that all the contemporaries of St. Francis de Sales concurred in proclaiming him the Model of preachers.

However conclusive these extrinsic proofs may be, let us not allow ourselves to be contented with them, since it is easy to advance others (that are) much more convincing, meaning

---

71 In an undated letter, but one which according to its context should be from November of 1621, St. Jane Frances de Chantal wrote to St. Francis de Sales on the subject of Msgr. Cospéan: "The most kind Monsignor of Nantes loves this Institute perfectly. But of you, I would dare to write that which he says; it is with gentleness and delight that he speaks of you and considers you, but he does so with admiration." (Sainte Jeanne-Françoise Frémyot de Chantal, sa Vie et ses Oeuvres [Paris: Plon, 1877] tome IV, letter 354.)

72 Process. remiss. Parisiensis, ad art. 35.

73 Process. remiss. Parisiensis, ad art. 35.

74 Traicté de la conduite spirituelle, section 7.
to ascertain in our Saint all the natural or acquired qualities which constitute the perfect orator. In order to merit this title, it is necessary to possess the dual power of clarifying and moving; it is necessary to cause (another) to see and to will. Solidity of doctrine, profundity of thought, justness of demonstration, a clear and methodical exposition — these satisfy the intelligence. But in order for the will to yield, (it is) required first of all (that) it cede to the one alone who will know how to dominate it or to move it. Now, in order to attain that, it is necessary to use "strength," in the general sense of the word, or that special strength intended by the term "the pathetic" [understood as "moving" or "affecting"].

The first of these qualities is easily within the range of the man of character who, endowed with a sure judgment and habituated to a close argumentation, knows how to extricate from the truth all the practical consequences which it comports. A spirit of this temper is especially apt to find in the preaching of the most terrifying mysteries of our faith the secret for converting sinners. "The pathetic" proceeds otherwise, if in fact one can speak of proceeding, when it is a question of a power proper to the one who, by a divine influence, knows how to instill in the souls of his hearers all the noble and holy emotions with which his is filled. In order to reach the reason and engage the will, he works first of all on the sensibility and the imagination; with the co-operation of these intermediary faculties, he penetrates, moves (and) stirs the conscience to its ultimate depths and (thereby) brings about a conversion. So as to obtain this result, which is certainly the most beautiful triumph of his grace, the Lord ordinarily avails himself only of Saints or men of a consummate eloquence — Francis de Sales was both.

His Sermons, studied with care and attention, will give proof of this in a certain measure. But still they can never permit to judge exactly the merit of their Author. If the man who draws up some eloquent discourses can not be capable of pronouncing them eloquently, in like proportion the talented orator will be imperfectly represented by that which one calls "his remnants." To this general caution several others often come to be added, (these) deriving from circumstances of time and place in which the preacher is found, of the composition of the audience, (and) of the occasions which cause him to speak and which can either compromise his talent or give place to its being exhibited with renown. This last observation is one of those which furnish the most solid base for an equitable appreciation. *Sermo opportunus*, says the sage, *est optimus* (Prov 15:23). Would he not be deprived of sense who would judge the genius of Bossuet according to the familiar exhortations that this great man addressed to villagers in the course of his pastoral visits?

Conclusions drawn from written discourses are therefore rather often badly founded. If one can declare that the preacher has left his masterpieces, as did the celebrated orators who rendered France illustrious (during) the second half of the 17th century, the discussion is closed; if not, an
inquiry becomes necessary. In order to recognize and admit the superiority that one attributes to these men, critics have the right of demanding that all their works be affixed with the seal of an uncommon talent. If, however, it is possible to invoke in their favor some extrinsic proofs, it suffices that proofs drawn from written discourse not be contradictory; this is what takes place for our Saint. Of all the Sermons which he has preached during the twenty years of his episcopacy, when he benefitted from the full maturity of (his) talent, we do not have even one extant draft. The witness of his contemporaries supplies for this defect by attesting that during this period the Bishop of Geneva produced marvels of eloquence; therefore, he had to an eminent degree the gift of clarifying and moving.

We know that he was richly endowed with all the reliable and brilliant faculties that permit of exercising an irresistible action on the intelligence and the will of another. First of all, as we have said in the second Part of this Study, nothing equals the strength and the justness of his argumentation, except the blessed usage which he makes of it (in) his holy Letters. According to Cardinal Pie,\textsuperscript{75} "the Bible is more than the pattern of his thoughts; one can say that it has become the substance of it." Now, as our Holy Father, Pope Leo XIII declares,\textsuperscript{76} "the Scriptures have for their own, singular virtue (the ability) to give to the orator sacred authority, apostolic liberty of language, (and) rigorous and triumphant eloquence."

But in order to make the most of the riches contained in this inexhaustible mine, study does not suffice; it must be made fruitful by meditation, which, putting the human intelligence in immediate contact with God, renders it capable of being supernaturally illumined. Thus our Saint understood it and practiced it excellently; meditation is itself the great energy of his personal action and of the corresponding effort which he demands from the audience. Already he had hinted at this in his Letter "to the Gentlemen of Thonon":\textsuperscript{77} "Read my rationales attentively … then take time and leisure to put in place your (own) judgment." According to him, the Doctors merit their crown "by meditation," as "the Martyrs (merit it) by constancy."\textsuperscript{78} From that comes the insistence with which, in his two ascetical masterpieces, he counsels, recommends and declares indispensable mental prayer (or) "consideration"; it is what he repeats often in his Sermons under diverse forms.

\textsuperscript{75}Concessio tituli Doctoris S. Franc. Salesii, note 3.
\textsuperscript{76}Encyclical letter Providentissimus Deus, 18 November 1893.
\textsuperscript{77}See the Controversies, OEA I:6.
\textsuperscript{78}Letter to a Religious of St. Bernard for the feast of All Saints.
These Sermons, prepared in this way by study and prayer, contain a profound doctrine and are always presented with the most perfect clarity. The Autographs, those especially which remain unpublished at the present time, complete the teaching given in the Controversies on Tradition (and) on the infallibility of the Church and of the Sovereign Pontiff. One can ascertain this principally from what remains for us of the Lenten sermons preached in Grenoble in 1617. The discourses prepared for this station also offer some remarkable lessons of moral theology (for example, the teaching on avarice in Sermon 131 and that on fraternal charity in Sermon 135). Francis de Sales was perfectly capable, therefore, of clarifying intelligences. He was no less able to captivate the will, by the two irresistible arms that we have indicated above: "strength" properly speaking and "the pathetic."

First of all, oratory strength is only the reflection and consequence of strength of character. Few historians have known to recognize this quality in our holy Preacher. If they are to be believed, gentleness would be natural for him and would have required no effort from his good and loving soul. But such is not the case; for this gentleness, acquired at the price of twenty-two years of struggle against himself, is in reality the triumph of his strength.

This was understood also by Fr. de Neuville, one of the panegyrist of our Saint. He himself does not hesitate to declare that the advantages which nature had lavished upon him were in him so many obstacles to gentleness:

In order to be convinced of this, it is necessary to cast one's eyes on his writings, where a certain impetuosity reigns which, by demonstrating to us what St. Francis de Sales was by nature and temperament, makes us admire above all what he became by study, by reflection, and especially by divine operation. Thus, he was gentle and pacifistic because he willed to be so. Nature, if you will, had sketched the work, but nature had left much for grace to do; it had endowed itself entirely to him in making that his gentleness be worthy of God.

Another Jesuit, Fr. Caussin, whom we have cited above, had said well before Fr. de Neuville: "Several good souls" which have known the Blessed "only by rapport and reputation were greatly misunderstood in the judgment that they have made of his spirit, whom they have believed (was) naturally easy-going and a little too complying. What he made of it was by … some unbelievable strength over himself."

79 Panegyric of St. Francis de Sales, 1st part.
80 Traicté de la conduite spirituelle.
But let us proceed even further, and after having established that strength is the foundation of the gentleness of the holy Bishop, let us add that this gentleness ceded to another, entirely militant, virtue in him. This is affirmed by the soul who on earth knew him most intimately. In the testimony of St. Jane Frances de Chantal, the dominant virtue of her blessed Father was "zeal" — that inflamed ardor, whose function is to "loathe, shun, impede, detest, reject, combat and overthrow, if one can, all that is contrary to God, meaning to his will, to his glory, and to the sanctification of his name." This energy, this zeal, bursts forth in the Sermons with an impetuosity which is at first surprising.

We have remarked elsewhere (about) the authority (and) noble independence with which the Saint began in the evangelical pulpit. Still relatively a minor, he denounces without reticence the irregularities of the magistrates as well as those of the people, and renders the one and the others equally responsible for the calamities which desolate the country. Less apparent in other discourses, this strength remains no less most visible to the thoroughly observant spirit. It is revealed principally in that which remains to us of the stations of Chambéry and above all of those of Grenoble. This Preacher, whom one figures to be so lenient and easy-going, announces the formidable truths of our faith with a vigor that is terrifying. And if the simple reading of his outlines is capable of penetrating the heart with the fear of divine judgments, how must this be (so) when such teachings were animated by the tone, the gesture, the glance of a man singularly capable of rendering his convictions transparent in his words! Up to the end of his career, one feels his soul trembling at the thought of the mysterious cessation which must fix the eternal destinies of each (person). This impression seemed itself to become more vibrant in the measure that he approached his (own) end, as is proved, for example, by the Sermons of the second Series for the feast of St. Matthias and for Good Friday 1622.

The Bishop of Geneva, who had the gift, so to speak, of taking the will by storm, of captivating it by force, excelled in that much more appreciable ability of seizing it by "the pathetic." This power in him was the consequence of a blessed assemblage of energy, sensibility, (and) impressiveness carried to the highest degree. It is above all in the subjects which deal most directly with the Person or the mysteries of Our Lord Jesus Christ and of his holy Mother that one feels oneself overtaken by the emotion which filled up the soul of the Preacher. From this point of view, Sermons 88, 95, and 102 of the first Series are especially recommended to the attention of the

---

81 Letter to Rev. Fr. Dom Jean de Saint-François, on the virtues of St. Francis de Sales (Oeuvres, tome III).


83 See the first section of this study and the "Forward" to tome VII, page xi of the OEA.
reader. More remarkable still is Sermon 98, preached in 1614 on the feast of the Nativity of the most Holy Virgin. It was in the evening of this same day when, during the pontifical Mass, a dove of brilliant whiteness came to rest on the head of the holy Bishop, in the sight of a congregation entirely astonished by such a prodigy. Without difficulty, then, one can account for the singularly moving tone of a discourse pronounced under such an impression.

Yet again, the fragments which remain to us are only a pale reflection of what on the lips of the Orator would have been a word completely inflamed by divine love. This is suggested eloquently by Bourdaloue in his Panegyric of St. Francis de Sales. "Ah! if the morality of this holy Preacher (which is) only traced on paper still remains so powerful, what could it (have been) when it was living and animated? And when it appears immediately from the heart embraced by the most pure and most ardent zeal, what fire should it not pour forth everywhere?"

A good number of those who gave depositions at the Process of Beatification speak of the irresistible dominion that Francis de Sales exercised on his hearers, and St. Vincent de Paul does so in terms that could dispense us from invoking any other proof. As he attests,

The Blessed said to me that he when he preached he sensed whenever some hearer was interiorly touched with grace by his word; because, as he assured it, I perceive that without premeditation, without intention, something that I did not know goes forth from me, which proves to me that I have spoken by divine compulsion. This is what the event always justifies, for after preaching, those whose heart had been touched by the compunction went to avow it to him, citing the words that had penetrated them. And I affirm that the witness of this man is authentic, he who not only inflamed others by his words, as by so many ardent torches, but who, more so, made as many sermons as he did actions."

"When the Blessed passed along the streets of Paris," says Doctor du Val in his turn, "one stopped in order to look attentively at the one who was understood to fulminate in the pulpit and whose life was known to be without blame, in order to be inflamed in piety by his glance alone."

---

84According to a recent discovery owed to Fr. Chérot, SJ, this Panegyric had been pronounced at the first monastery of the Visitation of Rennes, on 16 June 1668, at the opening of the feasts celebrated on the occasion of the Canonization of St. Francis de Sales. (Études publiées par des Pères de la Compagnie de Jésus, 20 January 1898.)


86Process. remiss. Parisiensis, ad art. 32.
In his Letter on preaching, St. Alphonse de Ligouri inserts the following extract attributed to Gallitia:\(^\text{87}\)

A woman of the great world, the duchess de Montpensier, used to say that (the) "Monseigneur de Genève" had caused her an irreparable damage, because she could no longer appreciate any other preacher. "The others fancy themselves by the airs of their lofty discourses," she adds, "but he focuses on his prey and, as an authentic orator of holy love, immediately reaches the heart and renders himself master of it."

This was assuredly the triumph of his eloquence, but it was still and above all the effect of his sanctity. Sanctity is nothing else than the invasion of the human soul by the divine life; and the perfection of sanctity, according to the word of the Apostle to the Ephesians, consists "in being filled entirely with the plenitude of God" (Eph 3:19). This plenitude will not content itself; it overflows (and) works outward with impetuosity. The Saint cannot be "powerful" in words; he will be it always "in works" (Luke 24:19). Has not our scoffing and skeptical century seen a poor Curé of the countryside shake France and the surrounding environs and work some more shocking and more numerous conversions than will be obtained by the celebrated orators who in the same epoch render illustrious the pulpit of Notre Dame de Paris?

In order to augment the confidence that the Bishop of Geneva inspires in all, it pleased God to manifest his holiness by prodigies (taking place) at the same time that he teaches the divine word. More than once "he became in the view of all the listeners (as) radiant as a sun and surrounded by such a splendor that scarcely could one discern him (any) more, for he seemed to be completely transformed in splendor."\(^\text{88}\) We could cite a multitude of similar marvels by which the Lord authorized the mission of his Son and, so to speak, repeated on his person the Ipsum audite of Tabor (Matt 17:5).

If the holiness of our Doctor is uncontested, it is not the same for his oratory merit. Some critics have wanted to diminish it by levelling three principal grievances against the Sermons: in their opinion, they offer some forced applications of the sacred Text, some comparisons destitute of appropriateness and rightness, and too great a familiarity. Let us rapidly examine these three charges.

---

\(^{87}\) Vie de Saint François de Sales, book IV, chapter 1.

Concerning the first, Jacquinet does not fear to rank our Orator among the men who had the custom "of seeking everywhere in the holy Books the contrary of the apparent sense." Counter to so adventurous an assertion are raised not only the precepts formulated in the *Letter on Preaching* but the practice itself of the holy Bishop. It is with reserve, almost with hesitation, that he tends to the accommodated sense. Thus, in the Sermon for the Assumption 1601, he takes good care to note that only *per similitudinem* will he apply the Gospel of the day to the mystery which was being commemorated. And twenty years later he begins in this way the summary of another discourse prepared for the same feast: "In my sermons I have the custom of following the literal sense; but here the authority of the Church persuades me to treat it otherwise. … To relate the Gospel and to add following: the Church employs this comparison" (*OEA* VIII:403).

Dr. Froger, whom we have already cited, has conserved for us something of the teachings that, during his sojourn in Paris, the Servant of God gave to "diverse and most numerous ecclesiastics, abbots, religious, curés, (and) doctors, behind closed doors." Now, among the instructions made to this serious assembly, the following is noteworthy: "He taught us," says the one giving this deposition, "the best manner of reading, understanding, (and) employing the texts of Sacred Scripture, namely, to look to the literal sense in which speaks the Holy Spirit, (as) explicated by the Church and the Fathers." Nonetheless we do not deny that in practice our Orator sometimes seems to digress from the rules which he poses. But it is necessary to observe that he avails himself of this license only in the case where the text itself would not be taken literally or better still when he addresses himself to an elite audience which has the right of applying the mystical sense of the sacred Text. It is universally admitted that among our holy Books there are several in which a rather considerable part cannot be understood in the literal sense: other than the Canticle of Canticles, these include Job, Wisdom, the Prophets, the Apocalypse. Moreover, the didactic teachings of the Bible, the most simple and the most elementary, (and) the evangelical precepts themselves are often presented in a figurative style, and then the preacher has not only the right but the duty to explain the signification of them to the Christian people. Accordingly St. Jerome remarks, "it is the mysterious sense that the Holy Spirit attributes there that is necessary to study in these symbolic passages; the expressions of it are themselves of a secondary importance." But in making some free applications,

---


90 *Process. remiss. Parisiensis*, ad art. 35 and 46.

91 *Contra Lucif.*, § 28.
the orator will proceed always with a prudent reserve and will assure himself that his personal adaptations are not in opposition with the thought of the Fathers and the sentiment of the Church.

It is in this way that the Bishop of Geneva ensures his judgments, and one can understand of other Books of Scripture what he says on the manner of interpreting the Canticle of Canticles. After having declared that the terms are "most rarely literal" and that it is "quite difficult to know them," he adds: "We have undertaken nothing without imitation of the better authors and without apparent correspondence between the signifying term and the signification." In commenting on this divine epithalamium, our Saint adheres by preference to the sense that Ghisler, Soto, Sa, and St. Bernard discover there (and) to that which is found there by Hugues and Richard de Saint-Victor, Rupert and Raban Maur, who follow St. Gregory the Great, St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Ambrose. For the rest, it is rare that in his public sermons he borrows from the allegories of the Canticle, except in order to celebrate the praises of the Holy Virgin and of her chaste Spouse. These images could not be more justly applied, for in the solemnities consecrated to Mary and to Joseph "one hears resonating in all the Church only the celestial melody of the sacred Canticle."

One wishes further to protest against the facility with which Francis de Sales attributes a mysterious signification to certain evangelical names, such as Nazarean, Capharnaum, etc. But one forgets that St. Bernard and several other Fathers avail themselves of similar liberties, about which no one dreams of blaming them. For the rest, these ingenious attributions are not in our Doctor a simple game of the imagination. He begins always from a principle. It is this, that if he makes a somewhat unexpected comparison on the subject of the word "Boanerges," he takes care to add that this "name having been imposed by Our Lord, it cannot be without mystery." 

Even when he seems subtle, the Bishop of Geneva does not cease to be profound. One is astonished, for example, to see that in the materials prepared for the Advent sermons of 1616, after having consecrated numerous pages to (a) discourse on the interpretations to which the word "horn" is subject, he pauses for a rather long time to examine whether the trumpet used by the Levites to announce to the Jewish people the jubilee year was made of a ram's horn. But it is precisely there that the key to the symbolism is found, since according to St. Thomas, in accord 

---


93 Bossuet, Exordium of the Sermon for the Assumption, 1663.

94 Summa I² I², question 102, article 3.
with the Hebraic tradition, the ram substituted for Isaac on the pyre of Moriah was the figure of Christ immolated on Calvary.

Moreover, it is principally in the discourses of the second Series that one encounters the supposedly too audacious attributions of the sacred Text. But these wholly intimate conferences made by the Founder to his Religious were more like meditations than sermons. He could freely announce "the mysteries of the Kingdom of God" (Matt 13:11) to those souls already delivered by the sovereign Truth from the slavery of the flesh and the passions. "Let all their life and exercises be in order to unite themselves with God" — such is the basis that the holy Founder of this institute gives to their perfection, the law which regulates their destiny. They should, in the midst of the vicissitudes of the times, begin the contemplations of eternity; living on earth, it is permitted to them, enjoined even, not to have any "conversation" except "in heaven" (Phil 3:20). Borrowing the chaste allegories of the Canticle of Canticles in order to depict to these virgins the delights of union with the Word, their Spouse, was to enter into the intention of the church and to give to their heart the alimentation which suits it best.

The second reproach that the author named herein brings against our Saint is "that beside(s) simple, just, and charming images," there are others which present "an enumeration of trifling and far-fetched comparisons." It is true that, in order to pardon himself for so hazardous a judgment, M. Jacquinet takes care to add a little further on: In the Bishop of Geneva "the subtle thoughts, the refined images have nothing of the pedantic … it is an involuntary tribute paid in fashion by a living and brilliant imagination. It is, if one wishes it, the innocent play of an artful, ingenious and fecund spirit, to whom the lessons of a strong literary discipline have been lacking and who has been trained in the school of St. Bonaventure at least as much as in that of the Fathers and the ancient classics." One knows, according to that which has been said above [in the first section of this study] concerning the formation of Francis de Sales, what it is necessary to think of this last assertion, and the criticism which sought to be a corrective falls by the wayside when one reads the Sermons. Even when they rest on the somewhat fantastic notions generally admitted in that epoch, the images with which they are embellished remain always natural (and) gracious and prepare for conclusions of an admirable justness. Let us understand it of those which one wishes to find too naive or "quintessential" such as that of the oriole (who) attracts to itself the malady of man, or the orange-man along the shore of Genoa, carrying at the same time foliage, flowers, and fruits.

---

95 Custom Book and Directory, first Article: "General Intentions for the Sisters."

96 JACQUINET, Des Prédicateurs du XVIIe siècle avant Bossuet.
One has advanced, moreover, (the objection) that our Orator has the custom of making lavish comparisons. Such an affirmation loses all its strength since the classification of the Sermons according to their chronological order permits (us) to ascertain that the incriminated discourses revert to the beginnings of his oratory career and can not, consequently, furnish the basis for a general evaluation.

It remains for us to say a last word about what one calls too great a familiarity in Francis de Sales. In a preacher such as he, writes the abbot Sauvage, the exquisite urbanity of the gentleman and the unalterable gentleness of the Saint would oppose an insurmountable bulwark to the encroaching torrent of license and bad tone. … However, if these advantages mirror a great distance between him and the coarse declaimers of his time, do they suffice to preserve him from all negligence? By wholly interdicting bantering or malice, is he rather defended against an excessive simplicity?

We dare to respond affirmatively.

The rules which determine the distinction of language are essentially relative and are modified according to time, place, (and) persons. What will be improper in one epoch and before a certain audience can be perfectly suitable to another age or in different circumstances. At a distance of five centuries, one is surprised, almost scandalized, by the licenses which St. Vincent Ferrier accorded himself in the pulpit; yet none of his audiences judged (as) vulgar the expressions which, in our days, would offend less delicate ears. The erudite editor of the works of Bossuet speaks "of comparisons familiar in the excess" with which his sermons in a certain epoch are strewn; however, no one ever accused this great man of disregarding the proprieties and dignity of the evangelical word. The most sure principle for equitably judging material (that is) so debatable appears to us to be this: as long as a preacher does not clash in the least with an intelligent and cultured audience, one could not be able to accuse him of vulgarity.

After having justified the timid reticence given to our Saint, as we have indicated just now, Abbot Sauvage gives place to the sentiment of the best critics, in avowing that "the distinction of his spirit maintains him at a level quite superior to that of his contemporaries. If he attempts to descend at some rare intervals, it is because he believes it (to be) good for his subject. He wishes to instruct,

---

97 Saint François de Sales, Prédicateur, chapter 3, § 1.

98 The abbot Lebarq, Histoire critique de la prédication de Bossuet, conclusion.
to teach useful (and) necessary things. As he loved to say himself, he speaks quite simply and catechetically; see how we, who do not often enough put ourselves in the place of his audiences, (how) we are exposed to encounter some expressions which shock us. For him, who did not fear these susceptibilities of taste, the expressions matter little for him. These words that we regret do not displease him, if they are introduced naturally, and above all do not displease the faithful who have been habituated to hear many others like it."

In sum, since the absolute good is not found in this world, and since no great man is exempt from imperfections, we repeat that those attributed to St. Francis de Sales are not only counterbalanced, but thoroughly surpassed by his eminent qualities. Several of the Fathers of the Church, among whom he merits to be figured, have more considerable faults than his and do not for that (reason) give up being proposed as models. Let us, in complete justice, lay claim to this same glory for our eloquent Doctor.
After having heard about the Master and contemplated the Model, it remains for us to consider the Restorer of sacred eloquence. In order to demonstrate how much our Saint justly merits this title, it is necessary first of all to expose the state of decadence into which preaching had fallen. We will then verify in what large measure the Bishop of Geneva contributed to restoring its splendor.

A prominent lawyer, du Vair, had written several years before La Bruyère, whose estimation we have cited earlier: "Concerning the other (eloquence) which dwells in the public pulpits, which should be the more perfect, as much by the dignity of its subject as by the great leisure and liberty of those who treat of it, it has remained so base that I have nothing to say about it."  

In conveying so severe a judgment, this magistrate probably had in mind the spirited harangues, the insolent provocations, which the troubles of the Confederacy passed on from the political tribune to the sacred pulpit. Among the orators forgetful of the holiness of their state and of the dignity of their ministry, we limit ourselves to naming Boucher, Rose, Aubry, Commelet, Porthaise; they have acquired "an odious celebrity which history preserves for them and inflicts upon

---

99De l'eloquence françoise et des raisons pourquoi elle est demeuree si basse, 1594.
them today as a chastisement.” Fortunately these men did not found a school; the bellicose genre which they had put in vogue disappeared with the popular agitations that had given birth to it. It was the same for the buffoonery and triviality which in their turn attempted to debase evangelical preaching, for the good public sense did not delay in doing justice to them. But if these accidental deviations left no traces, there are others against which the struggle was longer and the victory more difficult. Much time and effort was needed in order to obtain mastery over three defects which infested the pulpit at that time: the abuse of scholasticism, the mixing of the sacred and profane, and a false rhetoric.

The scholastic method which, by disciplining in the Middle Ages the spirit of our fathers, had protected the blossoming of thought and guaranteed the surety of judgment, evidently used to preserve the right to exercise a control over eloquence. But, while some just limits were to be posed, one did not know how to establish them at the right distance. In place of asking logic (to act as) a useful restraint, it makes of its rules a troublesome hindrance; this was to pass from use to abuse. The sermon became a tightened web of abstract deductions (and) subtle argumentations, an inextricable chain of divisions and subdivisions which wearied the attention without clarifying the intelligence.

Besides this fault, which is explained and even excused in a certain measure, there was a second fault to which criticism would not know to inflict too severe a blame. We have indicated it as the use of mythological allusions in preaching. In place of borrowing from the Bible the majestic allure of style, the burst of colors, the force of thought and the grace of images, the preacher went to gather flowers on the Parnasse or transported from Olympus some stories which degraded his ministry and dishonored his word. Vainly the Council of Trent mounted itself against this scandal. The evil was so universal that, for a time, its protestations appeared not to be heard. And yet, many of those who fell in this path were endowed with an incontestable merit; some even, as Jean-Pierre Camus, the friend of St. Francis de Sales, received advice which would have enabled them to withdraw from the influence of the bad example. He did nothing however, and it is not without


\[101\] It will not be extraneous to relate here an assertion of Sainte-Beuve, reproduced without thought by some authors on the subject of the rapport of the Saint with the Bishop of Belley. To believe them, the latter would have formed himself in the school of Francis de Sales, and for that, one would wish thus to render him responsible for all the extravagances of his friend. JACQUINET (Des Prédicateurs du XVIIe siècle avant Bossuet, chapter 1) advanced with the greatest composure (the theory) that for the two Prelates “the method is found (to be) nearly parallel (and) the genre is the same.” As if Camus had ever followed some “method!” As if he had known any other “genre” than the fantasies of a bizarre and intemperate imagination! He recounts himself how much his efforts to imitate the gesture and delivery of our Saint had been unfruitful. For the rest, when in 1609 he made the acquaintance of the holy Bishop, the literary
a profound stupefaction that one receives from the lips of the Bishop of Belley accents such as these, which he speaks when inveighing against the vice of simony in the Etats-Généraux of 1614:

True chimeras (are) streaked by three compositions: the horse which grazes on the high crags … the lion and the dragon, vigilant guardian of the golden apples … And we will never have (that) of Bellerophon, meaning a prince who carries to Pegasus with a holy zeal of the house of God the documents fulminated against that contagion by our holy Fathers! We will never have (that) of the courageous Horace, who fells with Roman liberty the three (times) presumptuous Curiae, (or that) of Hercule, who strangles that Cerbere at three throats, which suffocates this triple Geryon!

The Prelate who expresses himself in a manner so shocking for Christian ears, far from suspecting the extravagance of such a language would, to the contrary pique himself to remain in the terms of simplicity! He knows, he says, "that glossed and flossed words are unworthy of entering into the ingredient of the chaste word of Heaven."

And yet, how many indecent and ridiculous mixtures would he and his contemporaries yet cause to enter into the preaching of that divine word! With the fabulous divinities, there were all the heroes of antiquity who would appear turn by turn under the eyes of the audience, which the Renaissance had familiarized with such a language. We do not claim that the sacred orator was not right sometimes to borrow from classic writings the graces of form (or) the pattern of thought; but it must be limited to that, seeing that in the 16th century there was a bizarre display of pagan erudition that would be carried on in the evangelical pulpit. From there "an affectation of tone and oratory formation of Camus was completely achieved. The first four volumes of his Diversitez, which have been published around this time, give proof of it. Just as he used to speak and write then, he will speak and write forty years later. St. Francis de Sales had the merit to support and the regret not to be able to reform this spirit, which in truth was not capable of reform, since he considered himself totally deprived of judgment. It is therefore as unjust to render our Saint responsible for the tasteless errors of his friend, as it would be to impute to St. Vincent de Paul the doctrinal errors of Saint-Cyran.

Moreover one claims to connect Francis de Sales with a certain school of French preachers in the refined and emphatic style, contemporary to and emulated by Camus. If it is true that these men had taken as a model the Bishop of Geneva, it is therefore necessary either that they had often heard his sermons or at least that they had been able to read and study them. Now, they were not able to be present at the sermons of the young Saint, which we ourselves admit are not absolutely irreproachable. And when, in 1619, the Orator returned to Paris in the full maturity of his genius and the plenitude of his holiness, everyone admired the completely apostolic simplicity with which he preached the word of God. Thus it must be that these preachers were formed by the printed Sermons, among which they would have chosen as typical those of the early years of the oratory career of Francis de Sales. But how could they have been able to do so, since those Sermons were published for the first time only in 1641? Up to that time they remained entirely ignored by the public; consequently, not being able to be read, they could not have been taken as models.
which eludes simplicity, and a grandiosity of style which aspired, in effect, to attain to the ridiculous. ¹⁰² This is the third abuse that we have pointed out.

As Msgr. Freppel says,

Thus, from the point of view of art and healthy criticism, preaching, in the first years of the 17th century, was tainted with the most grave defects. One used to abuse everything there: forms of reasoning, richness of erudition, figures of rhetoric — all was squandered without order and without measure … Not, certainly, that there was not in this chaos some strong (and) vigorous elements, but there reigned such a confusion that it was nearly impossible to foresee what would be able to arise of the grand and beautiful …  One makes efforts, one marches gropingly, one searches adventurously for the true tone of the pulpit, but the ones seek it too low and crawl in triviality, (while) the others perch themselves too high and are lost in turgidity. No one encounters the right way because all are distanced from the natural.¹⁰³

The author whom we cite evidently speaks only of France, for, as we have said above, the Oratorians and the Jesuits in Italy had begun the reform of sacred eloquence several years earlier. Possevin did not used to give the example of a serious and entirely apostolic preaching only to his students; he indicated its laws in his Bibliotheca Selecta, the manuscript of which Francis de Sales would read during his sojourn in Padua.¹⁰⁴ This work, whose printing expenses were borne by Pope Clement VIII, appeared in 1593.

The illustrious Jesuit, in the rules which he outlines, intends to follow only the traditions of the Society to which he belonged. St. Ignatius had, before him, recommended in his Concionator to

¹⁰² Msgr. Freppel, Cours d'éloquence sacrée, 8th lesson.
¹⁰³ ibid.
¹⁰⁴ Here is a résumé of its precepts which are reflected in the Letter on Preaching. They are extracted from chapter 17 of the 4th book of the work so named: Read with care the Gospel on which one will preach (and) reduce the whole to two or three points. Then close door and window and devote (your)self to the meditation on the persons, the times, the places, the intention, the application. By this means the Sacred Scripture will be interpreted according to the sense of the Spirit who has inspired it. Then write the result of (the) meditations so as to review it in (your) memory. It is necessary then to take up the Harmonies sur la concordance des Evangiles, by Cornélius Jansens, in order to learn the literal sense; (then) add briefly the moral sense and the mystical sense. In dividing the subject, indicate the spots where the different movements will be introduced. It is good first of all to preach (the) sermon to (your)self; concerning the form and style, let them be simple, catechetical, (and) on the level of the people."
meditate much and to write assiduously. And St. Francis Xavier wrote to P. Barzée: "Enough of this rubbish of the schools: study man in himself (for) he is the true subject of preaching."

These ideas were, in all respects, conformed to the principles which St. Philip Neri posed in order to build up "a dam before the torrent of jealousy and vanity which, swollen by imaginative exaggerations and stylistic oddities, used to invade preaching."\(^{105}\) One knows with what entirely evangelical simplicity and what prodigious success he used to preach the divine truths in the metropolis of the Christian world. His disciples followed his methods and obtained similar results. "Their word," says Gallonio, "was simple and without ornamentation, but eloquent with a wholly interior eloquence."\(^{106}\) It is that which Tarugi had explained in a word: The goal of "our Institute is to speak to the heart."\(^{107}\)

Two influences would occur in France in reaction to the disposition of spirits. Some eminent men by their doctrine and their holiness were in general the first to accept them, not however without some defiance. The sojourn to Paris of two years (1596, 1597) made by Cardinal Alexander de Médicis, who had been at the time the disciple and the protector of St. Philip, greatly favored this reaction. More active still was the movement in the south which the Oratorian Archbishops of Avignon, Tarugi and Bordini impressed upon it. The celebrated Génébrard, Archbishop of Aix, came to learn from them the means to employ in order to restore to the Christian pulpit its veritable grandeur. Nevertheless, the resolutions which he took afterward gave honor more to his piety than to his good taste, for by resolving to preach in the apostolic manner, this Prelate believed to be sacrificing his reputation as an orator.

The Venerable César de Bus was patterned by these Archbishops, all three of whom applauded the introduction of what he called the "petite doctrine." Perhaps he was also aided by their encouragements in the publication of his Instructions familiaires sur les quatre parties du Catechisme romain, a work which contributed to bringing back, at least among the preachers of the

\(^{105}\) CAPECELATRO, Vie de saint Philippe de Néri, book II, chapter 1.

\(^{106}\) Cited by CAPECELATRO, Vie de saint Philippe de Néri, book II, chapter 1.

\(^{107}\) Letter to St. Philip Neri (CAPECELATRO, Vie de saint Philippe de Néri, book III, chapter 7). One can take into account the proceedings of the Congregation by perusing a book published in 1613 by one of its members, Père F. GIUSTINIANI, under the title De S. Scriptura et sacra concionatore. The affinities which this little Treatise presents with the Letter on Preaching are striking, and one can not be impeded from believing that the author was not inspired by the ideas of Francis de Sales, as formerly the Saint had himself drawn many of his methods from the Oratory. Thus Giustiniani recommends the same Commentators as the Bishop of Geneva: Louis de Grenade, Hylaret, Osorius, Stella, Diez. He poses some rules in all respects conformed to those which we have analyzed above relative to the manner of invoking the testimony of the Fathers, that of the philosophers, etc. His counsels on the subject of style, elocution, (and) action are identical.
region, the savor and the esteem of simplicity. César de Bus definitively instituted the work of the Catechisms in 1593, the same year when our Saint made his debut in the oratory career at Annecy.

Thus, some efforts had been attempted in the reform of sacred eloquence, but how much more remained to be done! One hesitated to adopt the rules so wisely formulated on this subject by the Council of Trent, for it was questioned whether they could have a general application. Much indolence on one part (and) fear of diminishing its proper renown on the other kept the majority of preachers in the rut hollowed out by routine and bad taste. We have seen how the Provost, thanks to the firmness of his judgment as much as to his rare piety, knew to rid himself of the reigning prejudices and enter into the reformatory ways which the Fathers of the Council indicated. He was aided in this by the reading of his favorite authors, especially those whom he names in his Letter on Preaching. It should be noted that for the most part they were little known in France, so much so that by conforming to their methods and their examples, our Saint appeared to make innovations. All these authors and those whose Sermons he is pleased to cite are of foreign nationality, with only one exception: Panigarola and St. Charles are Italian; Nausea and Canisius, German; Louis de Grenade and Diez and Galvana, Spanish or Portugese; Hylaret alone is French. He is thus the only (one) of all those which we come to name whose works are encumbered with sacred and profane erudition; at least he is exempt from pretentious rhetoric, from mythological allusions and from scholastic stiffness, and in this regard he could be depended upon profitably.

Thus Francis de Sales was prepared from afar to contribute in large part to the reform of the oratory art in France. Some orators of merit worked there simultaneously, struggling with abnegation and perseverance against the torrent of opinion and the pernicious examples of their contemporaries. One has not sufficiently rendered justice to these distant precursors of Bossuet. Several persons imagine that, without any transition, eloquence passed suddenly from the most deplorable state to the zenith of its glory, and among the celebrated men of the 17th century some were not exempt from this illusion. One could say, to listen to them, that with their appearance a complete metamorphosis is worked as if by magic. Fénelon naively asserts that eloquence dwelled corrupt until his epoch. And Massillon exclaims in his turn: "The Academy appeared, chaos is cleared up; nature displays all its beauties, and all things take a new form … The pulpit substitutes for instruction in a vacant and displaced state, reason for false glimmers, and the Gospel for the imagination. Everywhere the true takes the place of the false."
In effect this transformation does take place, but it was not by a great deal as unexpected as these orators took it. As Msgr. Freppel writes,

> When an inveterate vice has invaded the domain of art or of literature, it ordinarily befalls a man who speaks the word of reform. This word some others repeat after him, but until it has made the rounds of society, (until) it should come back understood by all, accepted by all, surely some men succeed each other and often even several generations.¹¹⁰

This is what happens in France with regard to eloquence. Several persons converge upon it to render it glorious, and the illustrious Prelate whom we come to cite does not hesitate to place the Bishop of Geneva "in the first rank of those who have contributed by their example and their precepts to restoring to the pulpit a language more conformed to its sacred character." According to Abbot Sauvage, "he left much to do to his successors, but he did much for them."¹¹¹ We seek to prove this by demonstrating how St. Francis de Sales prepared the way for Bossuet.

The distance which separates these two great men is less considerable than it seems at first. Twenty years after the death of the first, the second astounded the town hall of Rembouillet by the precocity of his genius. In giving to his young protege the counsels which should teach him to discipline his brilliant faculties, perhaps Cospéan, then Bishop of Lisieux, recalled the examples received from our Saint, whose memory lived on in France and Savoy at that epoch and many years later. Numerous still in Paris, Lyon, Grenoble, Orléans, Chambéry were those who had known, loved, and admired him, those who themselves tried to imitate him.

For the rest, it was early on, nearly unknown, that the lovable Orator began to lead a school (of thought). During his sojourn to Paris in 1602, says an ocular witness,

> his sermons garnered the admiration of all, even the doctors of the Sorbonne, and particularly M. du Val, doctor and professor of theology, who exhorted the first-level students in theology to hear and imitate the Blessed, saying that he was truly an apostolic doctor and preacher, that he desired that all preachers would conform themselves to his fashion of preaching, and that this be the true and excellent manner.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ *Cours d’éloquence sacrée*, 6th lesson.

¹¹¹ *St. Francis de Sales Prédicateur*, conclusion.

One was so persuaded of it that, at the time of his last voyage to the capital, seventeen years later, some ecclesiastics distinguished by their knowledge gathered in great number at Saint-Nicolas du Chardonnet, as we have said above, in order to learn from his mouth the rules of evangelical preaching. In the supplication by which the assembly of the clergy of France solicited the Holy See in 1625 for the Canonization of the Servant of God, one reads these remarkable words:

One needed only to hear him in order to be embraced by divine love.
Each time that he appeared in the pulpit in order to preach the word of God (something he did very often ... above all in Paris), one used to see a gathering of hearers so numerous that the largest churches could not contain them, and they were for the most part so moved that they melted in tears, detesting the disorders or the tepidity of their past life (which) they renounced there without delay.

The admiration of the French clergy for our Saint constantly increased. In the testimony of the Foundress of the Visitation, the priests of the parish of St. Paul, who lived in the vicinity of the first Monastery of the Visitation, especially exerted themselves to reproduce his methods and to be inspired by his doctrine. Several societies of ecclesiastics were established with this same aim; St. Jane Frances de Chantal mentions in particular the Congregations of Dinan, of Avignon and of Toulouse. Thus, from one end of the kingdom to the other, "the Blessed Francis de Sales" continued to lead a school (of thought).

The Society of Jesus whom he had so much loved contributed powerfully ever since to diffuse his spirit and his maxims everywhere. Among the Fathers who had known him the most intimately were Fr. Binet, Provincial of France, his old friend (and) Frs. Arnauld and Suffren, confessors, the one of the King, the other of the Queen Mother. Frs. Dagonel and Caussin also propagated his teachings, the former in the *Advis chrestiens*, the latter in the *Conduite spirituelle*. Fr. Talon collaborated with the Commander of Sillery in the preparation of the great edition of the complete Works of our Saint, in which his Sermons appeared for the first time (1641).

The Benedictines reformed under the name of Feuillants also sought to work for the extension of his glory. Dom Jean de Saint-Francis, (Superior) General of this Congregation, was one of his first historians; he consecrated to the apostolic works of the Bishop of Geneva some admirable pages of which we have given here some extracts. The methods which he recommended thus certainly grew in honor among his Religious, among whom some men of great merit can be

---

113 Declaration made before the Apostolic Delegates for the Beatification of St. Francis de Sales (*Process. remiss. Gebenn.* [I], Acta facta, etc). This remarkable document is still unpublished.
noted: Dom Vialart, later Bishop of Avranches, Dom Asselin, (and) Dom Sens de Saint-Catherine, author of *Livre d’or*, so strongly appreciated by the two saintly Founders of the Visitation.

The close friendship which united Francis de Sales and the Cardinal de Bérulle is known, but it is difficult to state precisely in what epoch the relationship between these two celebrated persons originates. All that can be affirmed is that it is anterior to the voyage that our Saint made to Paris in 1602, as we have said elsewhere.\textsuperscript{114} It is not improbable that they knew each other at the Clermont College, where both had spent several years. But, even if he had not met him, Pierre de Bérulle must have heard others speak about the Savoyard student, whose piety lived on in the memory of his old schoolmates. What is remarkable is the identity of their method of preaching; one can hardly doubt that the Cardinal had borrowed much from his holy Friend. The Founder of the Oratory, says one of his historians, wanted that preachers “should cite little the pagan authors, little the philosophers … Sacred Scripture, such was the source to which they should without end come back and draw upon, banishing unmercifully those flowers for a long time withered, under which an affected and ridiculous rhetoric was obstinately resolved to hide the simple and virile beauty of the Gospel.”\textsuperscript{115} Here is abridged the complete teaching of our holy Doctor, and this was the traditional practice of the Oratory in as much as it remained faithful to its destinies. In this serious and completely evangelical school were formed Bourgoing, Senault, Lejeune and several other preachers of merit who were the immediate precursors of Bossuet.

But the most saintly person who may be proud of adopting and propagating the oratory principles of Francis de Sales, the one who was, so to speak, the connecting link between those two Bishops, so great for different reasons, is beyond any doubt Vincent de Paul. To that illustrious disciple, as we shall demonstrate, the Founder of the Mission communicated much of what he had received from the one whom he considered as his Master.

As different as they were in terms of intellectual spirit and culture, the two Saints, guided by an admirable practical sense and an eminent piety, coincided in the intuition of the means to take in order to reform the French pulpit. They both broke with all profane erudition in order to restore the honor of apostolic simplicity, and the results they obtained prove the justness of their views. The remarkable depositions of St. Vincent de Paul, which we have several times cited, demonstrate how much he had appreciated the merit of the Bishop of Geneva, and, by a completely natural deduction, they should lead us to conclude that he had taken him for his model. Nevertheless, this

\begin{footnotes}
\item[114]See the General Introduction, *OEA* I: xxxvii.
\end{footnotes}
conclusion does not rest solely on conjecture, but further still on positive proofs which we collect by recalling summarily the principal steps of the apostolic life of the Founder of the Mission.

It is in March of 1625 that "Monsieur Vincent" (all of Paris designated him by this name) made his debut with only two companions in the great work of the evangelization of the abandoned inhabitants of the countrysides. Six years later, he inaugurated at the College of the Good-Children the retreats for ordinands; then he instituted, in 1633, the celebrated meetings of ecclesiastics, known by the name of "Tuesday Conferences," which he would preside over himself for twenty-seven years, meaning until his death. The principal goal proposed in these assemblies was to learn "to preach in the missionary (way)." Quite opportunely, the holy Institutor quoted to his disciples "the Blessed Francis de Sales," especially when he recommended simplicity, the frequent use of Scripture, (and) the purity of intention in the exercise of the evangelical ministry. He (even) had the portrait of our Saint hung in the hall where the conferences were held. It is there that a crowd of distinguished persons would come to learn and unlearn under the conduct of the humble Priest; it is there that by adopting what he called "the petite method," they became in reality great preachers.

We could cite a multitude of illustrious names, but all are eclipsed by the incomparable Bossuet. This one, directed first of all by Nicolas Cornet, to whom he paid a public tribute of recognition, received from Vincent de Paul at that time all that such a genius was still susceptible of receiving. It is in his service that he discharges that "passion of simplicity" so necessary in order to discipline the extension of his erudition and to direct the sublime impetus of his thought. It is there that he draws the courage to comprehend and to say:

> If our simplicity is displeasing to the superb, let them know that we wish to displease them, as Jesus Christ disdained their insolent fasts and as he wished to be known only by the humble. Let us lower ourselves therefore to these humble ones; let us give them sermons whose baseness holds something of the humiliation of the cross and which will be worthy of that God who wishes to conquer only by weakness.\(^{117}\)

When, in 1658, the Founder of the Lazarists asked Bossuet for his collaboration in the mission of Metz, he obtained this response: "I feel quite incapable, but I hope that the lessons


\(^{117}\)Panegyrique of St. Paul, 1657, 1st point.
otherwise learned in the Company will give me strength." The exercises having concluded, the
Archdeacon of Metz writes further: "There has never appeared anything better ordered, anything
more apostolic, more exemplary, than that mission." And, many years later, evoking the
memories of his youth, Bossuet renders to Vincent de Paul a testimony which, word for word,
could be applied to Francis de Sales.

This Servant of God recommended strongly to the ecclesiastics of his
Congregation and (those) at the Tuesday Conferences to teach the people
our holy mysteries in a great simplicity. In this he has given them an
example, preaching simply, sometimes most strongly, and his proofs were,
ordinarily, drawn from the Sacred Scriptures with which he was most
conversant.

As we noted above, the Tuesday Conferences often dealt with preaching. Now those of
1652 and 1653, recorded by Alméras, contain the complete exposition of the "petite method"," which would be interesting to put in parallel with the Letter on Preaching. Maynard, who has himself
done this rapprochement, concludes thus:

With more flare and grace, the method of the holy Bishop of Geneva is the
method of the holy Founder of the Mission, both so united in heart and in
thought. Let one read the admirable Letter to the Archbishop of Bourges,
and one will believe his is hearing a conference of Vincent de Paul on
preaching.

Nevertheless, let us not stop at this conclusion, however advantageous it could be for our
holy Doctor. To prove that the two methods are similar will already be much; but it is no less easy
to demonstrate that the one derives from the other, that St. Francis de Sales was the Master and
the Model whom St. Vincent de Paul has in view. Consider the three characteristics of the system
of the latter: the careful imitation of Our Lord and of the Apostles; the frequent use of the parables;
finally, the order and the method determined in the disposition of the materials. One can easily
argue that, on these three chief points, the humble Priest is the continuator of Francis de Sales.

---

118Letter of January 12th.
119Letter to St. Vincent de Paul, 23 May 1658.
121Saint Vincent de Paul, tome II, book VI, chapter 1, § 3.
Concerning the first, the imitation of the Savior, it suffices to send the reader back to what we have said earlier (part II). It will be seen that it is principally in the pulpit of truth that the Bishop of Geneva would appear to his holy Friend as a living image of the "Son of God conversing among men." His public sermons are what he considered above all as "the speaking Gospel."

The Founder of the Lazarists insists much on the second point and poses this principle:

> It is necessary that the Company be given to God, in order to explicate by familiar comparisons the truths of the Gospel, even if one works in the missions. Let us therefore study in order to fashion our spirit to this method, imitating in that Our Lord, who, as the Evangelist says, *sine parabolis non loquebatur ad eos* (Matt 13:34).\(^{122}\)

And the following extract will prove to us how in this relation he is amenable to our Doctor: To the reasonings one will add "as much as one can, some good comparison, as does Our Lord in the Gospel and, after him, St. (John) Chrysostom and St. Francis de Sales."\(^{123}\)

Concerning the method and the plan of the discourse, St. Vincent de Paul has more evidently still taken the Bishop of Geneva for a model. We find proof of this in a work entitled *Le Missionnaire paroissial*, which is nothing other than a collection of Sermons for all the Sundays and feasts of the year.\(^ {124}\) This book has for its author Adrien Gambart, one of the first sons of St. Vincent, the one who with Portail accompanied him constantly at the beginning of his Missions. In order to compose this work, he had only to evoke the memories which remained of the sermons given at that time to the inhabitants of the countryside and to reproduce them as faithfully as was possible. Now, in a sort of Dedication or Preface ("to the reader"), which appears at the beginning of the volume, it is said that "the method" employed "is (that) of the holy Bishop of Geneva who had given it (sic) to a great Prelate." And in fact, by examining attentively these discourses, one is convinced that they are drawn up according to the teachings developed in the *Letter on Preaching*. It is therefore evident that Vincent de Paul has adopted for himself and for his disciples the oratory rules outlined by Francis de Sales. Let us indicate further some points of a secondary interest where the two methods are related: brevity of the exordium, clarity of the divisions, reserve and discretion in the

\(^{122}\) Louys Abelly (Bishop of Rodez), *La Vie du Venerable Serviteur de Dieu Vincent de Paul*, book II, chapter 1.

\(^{123}\) *Abregé de la petite Methode de prescher*.

stories borrowed from profane authors, care of giving only short citations, quite appropriate to the subject, (and) of rendering diction clear, (with) a natural and moderated tone of voice.\textsuperscript{125}

Far from us, however, (be) the pretention of affirming that Vincent de Paul is formed exclusively according to the principles of his holy Friend. It is enough for the glory of the latter to demonstrate that he borrowed from him his great lines and that their views on preaching approximated each other very closely. For the rest, if grace had been equally prodigious to them, nature had differently endowed them. Both schooled themselves in preaching "Jesus and Jesus crucified" (1 Cor 1:23; 2:2); and yet, even though he was the (one) more free of all personal refinement, Francis de Sales, elevated by his genius, attained those heights which Pius IX called so well \textit{splendidum orationis genus}.\textsuperscript{126}

Let us point out another bond which attaches the Bishop of Geneva to the Founder of the Mission. Several persons who had been admirers of the first considered themselves disciples of the second. We see around "Monsieur Vincent" several remarkable men who are amenable to him in different ways and who all share his veneration for our Saint. There is, first of all, M. Olier who began under his direction to realize the prophecies that, near to the vigil of his death, St. Francis de Sales had made about his future. And when he took the last measures regarding the establishment of the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice, it is to Annecy that he comes to draw light, strength and courage in order to lead to a good end this great enterprise. Among the men who will give him a most active collaboration, Félix Vialart de Herse must not be forgotten. He was a son of that president de Herse, benefactor of Vincent de Paul and great admirer of Francis de Sales. In 1619, the president de Herse held one of his sons over the sacred fonts and heaped upon Félix, then seven years old, proofs of an affectionate interest. Named to the bishopric of Châlons-sur-Marne, Msgr. Vialart gave a place of honor in his diocese to the method of preaching which he had learned in the Tuesday Conferences.

\textsuperscript{125}It will not be without interest to bring in from the deposition of Vaugelas cited above (note 47), this extract of a letter of St. Vincent de Paul to one of his Missionaries: "I have been told that you make too great an effort when speaking to the people, and that this afflicts you much. In the name of God, take care of your health and moderate your work and your sentiments. I have said to you other times that Our Lord blesses the discourse which one makes by speaking with a common and familiar tone, because he himself has taught and preached in this way, and that this manner of speaking, being natural, is easier than the other which is forced, and the people savor it better and profit from it more. Do you believe that comedians, having recognized that, have changed their manner of speaking and no more recite their verses with an elevated tone as they used to do before but do it with a mediocre voice, like one speaking familiarly to those who are listening to them? It was a person who had been in this situation who has recently told me this" \textit{(Lettres de saint Vincent de Paul, Fondateur des Prêtres de la Mission et des Filles de la Charité} [Paris: Pillet, 1880] tome I, letter 221).

\textsuperscript{126}Encyclical letter \textit{Qui pluribus}, 9 November 1846.
In order to judge the intimacy which existed between our Doctor and Pavillon, Bishop of Aleth, it suffices to read the fragment of a letter which the Prelate who inherited his episcopal see, Taffouereau de Fontaines, wrote in order to solicit the Canonization of the Founder of the Mission:  

If we accept the testimony of men, there is nothing more grand than this praise pronounced by St. Francis de Sales, namely, that he knew no one who was superior to Vincent de Paul in wisdom and virtue. Doctor Coqueret was accustomed to say that he had heard these words from the mouth of the holy Prelate … . This is what is affirmed by my predecessor, Nicolas de Pavillon, the imitator, emulator, and so to speak, the familiar of Francis.  

This extract gives us, in addition, a precious indication by demonstrating that some relationship had existed between the Bishop of Geneva and Doctor Coqueret. St. Vincent de Paul held this person in great esteem. In 1640 he sent word to St. Jane Frances de Chantal that, if the Institute of the Visitation were to have a Visitor General, M. Coqueret would muster all the qualities necessary in order to fulfill those delicate functions. 

Thus the influence of St. Francis de Sales on preaching is felt gradually nearer and nearer in all of France during the 17th century. In the following century, the love of novelty, like a devastating breath, passed through all the spheres of letters, and sacred eloquence could not escape totally its pernicious action. At least several regions preserved with a jealous care the directions received from the holy Bishop. At the Major Seminary of Annecy, one of the first which had been regularly established, the Lazarists first of all, and then the diocesan priests who succeeded them, have

---


128 In naming Vialart and Pavillon let us not forget that the end of their life denies cruelly the confidence, the admiration even, that they inspired to all good people. Disciples the one and the other of St. Vincent de Paul, intimate friends of M. Olier, they withdrew themselves little by little from his sound doctrines, and after the death of these great Servants of God, they gave in to Jansenism. As one has often remarked about it, it is among persons endowed with the best qualities that this insidious sect is principally recruited. The misfortune of these men, fallen almost unconsciously into the abyss, is (that) of being left so strongly blind by their arrogance, that, being warned afterward by the infallible voice of the Church, they were not able to recover from their deplorable downfall. For a long time the abettors of error had been preserved from without so irreproachable that the most serious men would not suspect their defection. It is thus that M. de Bérulle solicited and obtained the approbation of Saint-Cyran and even that of Jansénius for his celebrated work Des Grandeurs de Jesus. And one knows that Singlin, one of the most famous preachers of Port-Royal, was the disciple of St. Vincent de Paul and that he was formed according to the oratory principles inculcated in the Tuesday Conferences.

129 Letter of July 30th.
instilled and continue to instill the spirit of our holy Doctor in numerous priestly generations, by forming them completely according to his oratory method. Thus, this method so clear and so luminous, put into use by a zealous and studious clergy in the constant explication of the Catechism of the Council of Trent, has not contributed little to preserving in the countries of St. Francis de Sales the vigorous faith which has distinguished him up until our days.

As (if) it had wanted to ransom the memory of our holy Orator from the semi-obscurity in which its predecessor had left it, our 19th century has doubled (its) admiration for his writings (and its) activity in order to diffuse them and to popularize his principles of direction and preaching. Several Congregations of ecclesiastics have been established to this effect: the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales at Annecy, the Salesians (of Don Bosco) at Turin, the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales at Troyes, the Priests of St. Francis de Sales at Paris. All these Societies, several of which extend their apostolate into far-off missions, are inspired by the doctrine and the spirit of their holy Patron; and, by following his examples and his oratory manner, they strive to preach truly "in the evangelical (manner)."

The influence of St. Francis de Sales on the Christian pulpit likewise continues to be felt by the foreigner. St. Alphonsus Liquori has rendered him preponderant in Italy at the end of this last century, and at the present the professors of sacred eloquence still do not cease to appeal to the precepts contained in the Treatise on Preaching.

Catholic Germany rivals Italy (in its) admiration for our Saint and confidence in his oratory methods. It places "his sermons full of fire" on the same line as "his excellent writings." Already in 1667, a German author proclaimed Francis de Sales "the best Pastor and Preacher of souls." Mrgr. Sailer, by inserting the Letter (on Preaching) in his Lettres de tous les siècles, affirms that this "Letter, full of unction, gentleness and experience, is a model of pastoral theology for the use of preachers." And from our days, a celebrated professor, M. Jocham, attests that Germany knows and venerates the holy Bishop particularly as Preacher.

His sermons, which have procured him the reputation of Doctor of the Church in his diocese and in a considerable part of France, have acquired for him the same title and the same honor in Germany, and certainly the same rights by which we venerate the great model that he takes after, St. John Chrysostom. His long Letter addressed to a Prelate on the true manner of preaching, translated into German by Mrgr. Sailer, has since

---

130 Dr. Gaspard Stadler in the Dedication of his translation of the Vraies Entretiens spirituels, 1667.
been reprinted, at least in abridged form, in nearly all the treatises on pastoral theology which have been published. Consequently, the holy Bishop of Geneva has become in Germany (a) Master and Doctor of preachers.\textsuperscript{131}

But why limit ourselves to citing private authorities when we can listen to the infallible voice of the Sovereign Pontiff proclaim in his turn the oratory merits of St. Francis de Sales! All that has been said in this Study and all that remains to be said pales before the following praise, extracted from the Brief by which Pius IX confers upon this great Saint the title of Doctor of the Universal Church:

The great love which the holy Prelate portrays in the church, the burning zeal by which he was animated in its defense, inspired in him the method of preaching which he adopted, both in order to announce to the Christian people the elements of the faith, to form the morals of the most instructed, and to lead the souls of the elite to the summits of perfection. Seeing himself "indebted to the wise and to the ignorant" (Rom 1:14), and "made all (things) to all (people)" (1 Cor 9:22), he knew to place himself at the door of the simple, at the same time that he spoke "wisdom among the perfect" (1 Cor 2:6).

He thus gave the wisest teachings on preaching, and, by restoring to honor the examples of the Fathers, he contributed in large measure to recalling to its ancient splendor that sacred eloquence which had been obscured by the arrogance of the times. From this school proceeds eminent orators who have produced some wonderfully healthy fruits in the universal Church. This is why St. Francis de Sales merits being recognized by all as Restorer and Master of sacred eloquence.

\textsuperscript{131} Concessio tituli Doctoris S. Franc. Salesii, responsio ad animadv., 33.