To understand and to define the spirituality of Saint Francis of Sales we must first ask what the Saint thought of God and man. For, it would seem, religious life takes very different forms if with Monsieur de Saint-Cyran we think of God as a terrible Master, or with Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus we invoke Him as a merciful Father. Or again, if we believe that man, to use the language of Pascal, is an angel not a beast. In a word, if our attraction is toward what is called theological optimism or pessimism. Now on these two points, there is no doubt that the thought of our saint is far from pessimistic, as Sainte-Beuve correctly observed in his Port Royal:

"Saint Francis of Sales is decidedly optimistic in theology. He is most impressed with the abundance of the means of salvation.... Nothing could be more contrary to the trembling that Monsieur de Saint-Cyran felt and inspired."[1]

This was especially true of the Saint's concept of God. In his eighteenth year he definitely adopted optimism after the famous crisis which he called his "temptation" and which, carrying him to the brink of despair, forced him to choose between opposing theodicies. At the time he was but a student at the University of Paris. He was in the midst of the great debate on predestination that was about to enter one of its most acute stages.

From one chair of theology came the statement:

"God has predestined for salvation those to whom He has decreed to give salvation and the means to attain it. In other words: God predestines to salvation those whom He predestines to salvation, and not those whom He sees, in His foreknowledge, will correspond with grace. Predestination is not based on foreknowledge, on the contrary, foreknowledge is based on predestination, God knows those who will be saved because He has decreed their salvation. Now He has not decreed the salvation of all. So we must conclude that those who are deprived of salvation, are deprived not as the consequence of their own refusal, but through the refusal of God Himself.[2]"
Those who spoke like this claimed, with or without justification, the support of Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas. The young student discovered that his teachers, the Jesuits, did not agree. They quoted to him Saint Ambrose, Saint John Chrysostom, and the Greek Fathers. The substance of their teaching may be expressed this way:

"In God, the decree of predestination to glory is based first, if one may so speak, not on the mere divine good pleasure but on the prevision of the merits and holiness of the elect. God foresees their merits and as the result of this prevision, He predestines them to glory."

The heart and mind of Francis spontaneously went out to this human doctrine through which he could discern a God of love whose true will is to save all men. But for a time the double authority of Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas weighed heavily on him and during five or six long weeks of uncertainty, mental anguish undermined his physical strength and he anxiously asked himself if he were included in the mysterious "a priori" decree that predestines to salvation.

At last, after reciting a fervent "Memorare" at the feet of our Lady of Gres, he felt himself suddenly freed. He made his choice. Then he heard the words: "I am not He who damns. My name is Jesus". Francis begged pardon of Saint Augustine and of Saint Thomas, in writing, for separating himself from them on this point that had so tormented him and he adopted the doctrine that was soon to be called Molinism. From this doctrine he was never to deviate until his dying day.

Let us be clear about this: he was a Molinist--or as Canon Jacques Leclercq says: he was one who "molinised"--only on the question of predestination. We agree with Father Chenu that he continued to be a Thomist on all other questions; just as we agree with M. Bremond that he was in principle a theocentrist and, wishing as he did to procure God's glory by perfecting man, he habitually speaks the language of an anthropocentrist. We may add that he would have been amazed at all the labels which are showered on him today and they probably would have made him smile, for he had a subtle mind.

For him God was always the "One who does not want to damn", and who consequently gives all men most truly sufficient grace, so different from the grace Augustinians refer to when they use the word and which they claim suffices for nothing. No wonder Pascal's friends used to say jokingly:

"From sufficient grace, deliver us, O Lord!" Everything that Saint Francis wrote is based on an optimistic conception of grace, of salvation and to sum it all up in one phrase: an optimistic conception of the divinity. As it is fitting this doctrine finds its technical expression in his "Treatise on the Love of God."

In rigorously exact terms he describes the mechanism of the human and divine acts which when coordinated can lead us straight to heaven if we so will. He says that God
"first of all willed with a true will even after the sin of Adam, that all men be saved... that is to say, He willed the salvation of all those who wished to contribute their consent to the graces and favors He was to prepare, offer, and distribute to them with this intent. Now among these favors, He wished vocation to have the first place... And to those whom He foresaw would answer the call, He wished to supply the sacred movements of penance; and to those who would correspond, He planned to give holy charity; and to those who possessed charity He intended to give help needed to persevere; and to those who were to make good use of these gifts, He resolved to give them the gift of final perseverance and the glorious happiness of His eternal love.[4]

So God's decision about us is only made after He has seen how we will decide because "we are His", as the Saint says a little later.

We need not fear that he allows Christians to slumber, as it were, on the pillow of a lazy confidence. He deprives God of none of His attributes. He takes care to speak of them all because he knows that to be silent about them is the first step toward forgetting them. He calls the attention of the faithful to them but he presents them from a somewhat new angle. The preceding century had thought of God in terms of justice and power; he accents God's mercy, goodness and love.

Nor need we have any anxiety that he has been infected by semi-Pelagian germs, as some have suspected who have read him hastily or in part, because as we have seen he teaches that human liberty is always immersed in grace and this grace is abundant and unfailing. Men lose their souls not because grace fails them but because they fail grace. Saint Francis had so vast an idea of a munificent and good God that he was convinced that God would never turn away from a sinner, no matter how depraved he might be. He thought Judas had damned himself only through his stubbornness and coldness. After his crime, God still waited for him, still offered him grace: "O, unhappy man, did he not know well that our Lord... was the Savior and that He held redemption in His hands?"[5]

That is why our saint never anathematized even the most obstinate sinner. Toward the end of his life he said in a sermon on December 20, 1620:

"When sinners become so hardened in their sins that they live as if there were no God, no heaven, no hell, then it is that the Lord makes known to them His pity and the sweetness of His mercy."

The Saint had written much the same thing in his "Treatise:"

"When He sees the soul sunk deep in iniquity it is His custom to hasten to its aid and with unparalleled mercy He opens wide the door of His Heart."[6]

This is the exact opposite of Port-Royal and of many who taught in the seventeenth century. Pessimism of varying degrees has darkened men's thoughts for the last hundred years. Even today it occasionally dictates a doctrine that is sharply opposed to the teaching of Saint Francis. If a time comes, as Arnauld and Saint-Cyran believed, when God withdraws from a sinner and
takes away grace, what can be done but abandon him in his wretchedness and perdition? In this way we will see that Port-Royal treated Pascal and Racine, at the time of their errors, like Lucifers struck by lightning. Because they abandoned God, God rightly in His turn abandoned them. To the Jansenist Cenacle the disdainful wrath of Mother Agnes of Saint Thecla toward the former "little Racine" seemed but a faint echo of wrath from above. But this was not the God of Saint Francis of Sales, who does not quench the smoking flax.

This is the innermost thought of the Saint which was expressed one day in this cry which escaped from his heart: "O my dear sinners".

The confidence of the Bishop of Geneva in God is paralleled (for the two optimisms are one in nature) by a confidence in the natural goodness of man. It cannot be denied that this confidence is far from the free and absolute optimism of J. J. Rousseau, and that it is equally distant from the position defended by the Jansenists who believed man to be radically corrupt. In the eternal, inner struggle of "the angel" and "the beast", it is the possibilities of "the angel" of which he is primarily conscious, for he says: "our human heart quite naturally produces certain beginnings of love for God".[7] And here we touch one of the deep roots of Salesian spirituality. Sainte-Beuve tells us in a luminous little note in his Port-Royal that when he explained the Bishop of Geneva's doctrine about "the beginnings of the love of God" which still remain in us after Adam's sin, the rigid Protestants of Lausanne were surprised and scandalized.

A great gulf separates Salesian thought from Calvinistic thought on this subject. Nor do the Jansenists lessen the distance. For Salesians the point of departure is God's love, for Calvinists it is God's hatred. True, the Bishop of Geneva does not fail to say that this natural tendency to love God which is in us, cannot go far unless it is fructified by grace. But he does believe that grace finds in us an ally, while his opponents claim that it finds an enemy.

"Although our human nature no longer enjoys the health and original rectitude that was the first man's at the time of his creation and furthermore it is now gravely wounded by sin, nevertheless the holy tendency is still ours to love God above all things, as well as the natural light which shows us that His sovereign goodness is more lovable than anything else. Nor is it possible that a man thinking attentively about God, even on a merely natural plane, will not fail to feel a certain "elan" of love that a hidden inclination of our nature arouses in the depth of our heart and by which the will, at the first apprehension of this first and sovereign object, will find itself stirred up and urged to delight in it."[8]

From these beautiful words (and he has given us many others) we can conclude that our nature is not fundamentally vitiated and that it retains certain aptitudes for the good. That is why Philothea's master did not think himself obliged to base his whole asceticism on constraint and fear.

Furthermore, is not the assiduity and fervor with which he devoted himself to the care of souls, an experimental proof of his confidence in man and in the power of man's efforts?

Knowing his idea of God and man, we cannot be surprised when we discover that love is the pivot of his spirituality. To love God who loves us is, for Saint Francis, the goal of perfection and the way that leads to this goal. "All is for love, in love, to love and of love in the holy
Church”, he declares in the first pages of his "Treatise on Divine Love." With what pleasure he repeats this magic keyword! For him, love is not merely an ideal towards which we strive, it is the principle and source of this ideal, and as he is to say in another connection, "in it are contained all virtues”.

M. Strowsky has not gone too far in his book "Histoire du sentiment religieux au XVIIe siecle" when he says that Saint Francis of Sales effected "a true revolution" in asceticism because he is the great master and technician of a spirituality of love. There were men before him who practiced this asceticism, men who lived it, we would say today. But who formulated it into a theory or reduced it to a system?

Saint Paul in sovereign fashion established the principle. More than one saint has spoken to us in glowing terms of love: Saint Augustine, Saint Bonaventure, Saint Teresa, Saint John of the Cross... Saint Francis of Sales summed up their experiences and added his own. He orchestrated a thousand good but scattered thoughts into a coherent whole. He established a coordinated doctrine, an architecture of spiritual life founded on love.

No one before him had shown so clearly how Saint Augustine's great word "ama et fac quod vis" can be verified in practice, that is to say how one who loves God with his will, with the high point of his soul, infallibly does at every moment of the day what is best and just what God wants. "True and living devotion, O Philothea, presupposes the love of God, and thus it is nothing but a true love of God".[9]

Since the publication of the two books which have quite rightly won for Saint Francis of Sales the title "doctor of perfection", we know that the measure of all holiness depends on the degree of the soul's love, on the "elan" and the strength with which the soul wills what God wills. We know that everything else must be considered merely as a means in relation to this last end.

Penance was to many older authors what love was to Francis, and penance to Francis had value only insofar as it enables us to grow in charity. To the anchorite, fastings, watching and macerations were the usual proof and measure of holiness. With these it seemed, man must begin, continue and end. The Bishop of Geneva, on the contrary, claimed that the beginning is an "elan" of the heart and of the will, a desire to love, the indispensable seed that must be cultivated; works of penance are to be performed as need arises, but these works are valuable only because they are means.

In making these changes in the structure of the spiritual life, he reestablished the hierarchy of its parts. What was last, he placed first and in doing this he knowingly and deliberately separated himself from a school of sanctity which for centuries has been venerated by souls thirsting for sanctity. He expressed himself vigorously:

"For my part, Philothea, I can never approve the method of those who try to reform man by beginning with the exterior, with his face, his clothes, his hair. It seems to me, on the contrary, that we should begin with the interior... because it is the heart that is the source of our acts and makes them what they are... I desire, therefore, dear Philothea, above all things else, to engrave upon your heart this sacred motto, 'Live Jesus;' being assured that your life, which proceeds from the heart, as an almond tree from its kernel, will afterward produce the same words of
salvation written upon all your actions; for as this sweet Jesus lives within your heart, so will He also live in all your exterior, in your mouth, your hands, and even the hair of your head."[10]

To establish love in hearts and to make it grow, will be the "alpha" and "omega" of all his spiritual teaching.

It may be said categorically: before this no form of spirituality was so solidly based on the concept of love as was his. Once again, this was not an absolute discovery. Many saints since saint Paul had had, as it were, an intuition of the eminent role of love. They seemed to have some insight into the importance of this truth, this much they implied, but they never made it the object of a methodical demonstration. It is present like the sun hidden behind a mountain: a secondary virtue veils it from our eyes.

Saint Jerome, for example, seems to make chastity the basis of his asceticism; Francis of Assisi chooses poverty; Saint Bernard, mortification; Saint Benedict, zeal for the liturgy. No doubt had they been told that charity is the source of all holiness, they would have answered as did a certain diplomat: "O, that goes without saying". To which Saint Francis of Sales would seem to reply: "And by saying it, it goes even better". So he says it and continues to say it with an insistence that has never been equaled. Even Saint Ignatius, to whom our saint owes so much, has never given love so important a place in his strategy of the means of perfection. One of his sons, Father Brou, has correctly observed:

"Every author has his favorite formulæ which recur constantly and betray the preoccupations of his soul.... For Saint Ignatius these formulæ attest God's dominion over the creature."[11]

For Saint Francis of Sales they attest God's love for His creature and are meant to secure from the soul an answering love. Father Brou also says that, according to an actual count, Saint Ignatius speaks of the greater glory of God 259 times in the "Constitutions" alone. A similar calculation would show us that for Saint Francis of Sales love has taken the place of the glory of God.

It was the role of our saint to replace the idea before souls that love is the true guide to be followed in the spiritual order. A frontal attack is not the best means of combating a vice. It is far better to form a soul which spontaneously reacts against this vice. In other words his spirituality is positive. Against it can never be leveled the charge made by Nietzsche and his followers that Christian morality consists of nothing but prohibitions, restrictions, and negations. Philothea's director says only when he is forced to, and then with reluctance: those shalt not, or beware! He is guided by Saint Paul: "Overcome evil with good!" And his rule is to fight evil with good. Protective barriers, imposed from without seem to him to bring about only a momentary halt but they do not eradicate the wrong idea.

His constant objective is to substitute the power of good for the power of evil, that is to say he tries to provide the soul with a strong love which will make it want what God wants it to love. He believes that the only true and lasting moral prophylaxis is that which comes from within. He said:
"The lion is a courageous beast and has complete confidence in his own might. He goes wherever he wishes and falls asleep on a highway as if it were a private den."[12]

Although our saint does not fail to take certain suitable precautionary measures, especially those needed by a beginner, he still claims that love is the organic power that, of itself, is able to make us immune and to give us the strength to walk or rest, if necessary, on the highway.

As a matter of fact, all risks cannot be avoided and many of these risks, he believes, should be faced. When Celse-Benigne of Chantal was about to set off for court, Francis made no objections even though he knew the dangers the young man would have to meet. Instead he sent him a letter with some good advice, at the same time, strengthening his confidence. "I am not", he wrote on December 8, 1610, "as fearful as are so many others".

Let us see what he has to say about Saint Elizabeth of Hungary:

"As to Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, she played and danced sometimes, when she was present at recreational gatherings, without any prejudice to her devotion; for devotion was so deeply rooted in her soul, that as the rocks around the lake of Rieti grow beneath the dashing of the waves, her holiness increased amid the pomps and vanities to which her rank exposed her."[13]

So we see that an education that coddles us and places the conditions of our security outside ourselves is not true to his usual spiritual pedagogy.

A love that protects us from evil is also the strength that leads to perfection and to heroism. Where will a lover stop if it is a question of pleasing the one loved? "A cottage and a single heart" is not a vain formula. It is only when love has cooled that the cottage no longer suffices. If I love, the Saint used to say, what does it matter to me "whether I am sent to new worlds or old?" He added:

"Love is an insistent doctor and lawyer, well able to persuade the heart that is his to obey wishes and desires of the beloved. Love is a judge who acts noiselessly, without officers or magistrates, through that mutual complacency by which we wish to give God pleasure because we find our pleasure in Him."[14]

A method of growing and persevering in love (a method which we will define in a moment)--this is the essence of Salesian spirituality. To remind us that there is an education, a training in love, just as there is a training in humility, meekness, temperance and that this training in love yields rich results-- this is the Saint's contribution to the history of spiritual doctrines. Instead of beginning, as do so many masters, with the advice: "Be humble, poor, temperate, mortified!", he says: "Love; cultivate love; let it take root, let it become strong; let it grow!" Souls had been told to practice virtue in order to attain to love, he taught that love leads to virtue. To prescribe virtues to a soul without love seemed to him like prescribing athletics to one too weak to exercise.

This teaching of the primacy of love was truly his "leif-motiv." "But with what should we feed these little lambs?", he wrote to Mother Jane Chantal, "with love, because if they have life, their
life is love.[15] He was convinced that love naturally begets virtue and without love all virtue is weak.

This does not mean that the soul renounces the deliberate pursuit of special virtues, nor that it postpones this pursuit. The cultivation of virtues parallels the cultivation of love. If an opportunity of performing an act of virtue presents itself to a soul possessing love, the soul responds spontaneously. "Charity does not come to a soul and there take residence", said the Saint, "unless it is accompanied by the other virtues".[16] In this way all the virtues are linked with love, they develop together and they act together. To practice a virtue through love is virtually to practice all the virtues. "He who observes a commandment out of true love of God is ready to observe all the other commandments when the opportunity presents itself".[17]

Those who claim that Saint Francis of Sales is too easily satisfied with a sigh of love have hardly considered his teaching on the solidarity of love and the virtues. Mystical moon-gazers have no place in his school.

To this doctrine of love-as-a-source there is a corollary, namely that an act of virtue is, so to speak, of no worth of itself but it draws all its merit from the motive of love which inspired it. In the scale of spiritual values, the material act does not count for Saint Francis of Sales.

He wrote to a woman of the world on June 10, 1608:

"Do not consider the substance of what you do, but the honor that is theirs, poor and miserable as they are, of being willed by His divine will because love determines the value of our acts."

A common act like that of eating, drinking or sleeping can rank higher in supernatural values than an act of heroism.

On October 13, 1604 he wrote:

"Often consider that the true value of all that we do comes from our conformity with God's will. If I eat and drink because it is God's will for me to eat and drink I am more pleasing to Him than if I were to suffer death without this intention."

We are far from the ways of the temporal city where it is "impossible to sound the reins and the hearts" and so citizens are rewarded according to the size, the greatness and the results of their works. In the Salesian perspective, the Christian soul has but one question to ask: "At this moment what act is not the greatest, the most beautiful or the most useful, but the most conformed to God's will, that is to say, to the duty of my state?" This act, were it the act of sleeping, and were we to perform it with a maximum of love would be the greatest, the most beautiful and the most perfect.

Nevertheless it must be understood that our saint does not deny that if two unequal acts are both performed with an equal love, the greater exceeds the lesser. "If", he said, "a great work is done with as much charity as a little act, no doubt he who does the great work has the greater merit."[18] As for establishing a strict hierarchy of our acts and attributing to them a coefficient
of unchanging value—this is one of the vain acts of curiosity against which the bishop of Geneva
will never cease to warn his Visitation religious and all those whom he directs.

Our task, therefore, is not so much to do many and great things, but to do things well. "Non
multa sed multum." Our concern must be with quality not number. "Our advancement is not
made by the quantity of our exercises of piety but by the perfection with which we perform
them."[19] This is an obvious truth of which devout souls of every age must be reminded.

Collectors of little practices, lovers of devout recipes or "devotionnettes" are legion in every
level of Christian society, as they were in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The spirited
difference will be remembered that arose one day between Madame Acarie (whom the Church
was one day to declare blessed) and Monsieur de Berulle on the eternal question of the relation
of devotions to perfection. Madame Acarie, theheiress of the spirit of Saint Francis of Sales who
had visited her home and had been her director, dared to resist her master on this point and
obstinately defended the doctrine that unifies life in love. Perhaps she had heard the Saint
gently joke about the two hundred genuflections made by the Stylite on his column. Perhaps
she had been forbidden by him in confession to bind herself to some fantastic practice of
reciting "every day, or for a year, or for a certain time" this or that prayer. "This must not be", he
used to say"[20]. Most probably she had received from him a motto so often traced by his pen:
"non multa sed multum." One day when Monsieur de Berulle seemed to forget this principle,
Madame Acarie respectfully resisted him, in the name of the Salesian doctrine, and forcefully
defended the primacy of devotion over devotions.

Like Montaigne, whom he loved, Francis of Sales wanted good heads, not full heads. To
accumulate practices and prayers, to be concerned exclusively about piling up treasures in
heaven just as one might store away funds for one’s old age, seemed to him to be the petty
calculations of spiritual capitalism.

One day in the pulpit he laughed about those who decide that a person is holy because "she
recites many rosaries and hears many masses."[21] To add good work to good work, merit to
merit matters less than to increase one’s capacity for merit and to acquire an organic piety of
which every manifestation is centered, ruled, inspired by love.

"We ought not to try to increase the number of our desires, or our exercises but the perfection
with which we perform these exercises, seeking thus to win more by a single act (as we
undoubtedly will) than by a hundred acts performed under our own initiative and
affection."[22]

In this sentence the whole Salesian doctrine on this point is crystallized.

One of the consequences of this doctrine was to make devotion, and to tell the whole truth, to
make holiness possible for people living in the world. If perfection consists in doing what God
wants us to do, wherever we may be, then no change of life is needed and holiness no longer is
the exclusive privilege of cloister or desert. When Saint Francis first appeared, it was generally
held that devotion, in the strict meaning of the work, belonged to specialists and that it was to
be sought only in the cloister because communal life in the desert is no longer possible.
A hundred years before, Saint Antoninus tried to make holiness easy for those who lived in the world. But his method made demands that very few could meet. Only exceptional souls enjoying unlimited leisure could perform all the practices he prescribed. Each day he exacted attendance at Mass, recitation of the little office of Our Lady, the seven penitential psalms with the sixteen Our Father's and Hail Mary's which accompanied meditation on the Passion, spiritual reading, good works, etc. Such a program served only to make men believe that holiness could not be won in the world. At most it could be reconciled with a life freed from all social bonds, according to the pattern Port-Royal was soon to give in Paris.

It seems that the Bishop of Geneva at first was of this opinion but when he had formed his doctrine of a transforming love that is capable of changing common lead into gold, he boldly drew all the conclusions. He wrote:

"It is an error, therefore a heresy, to want to banish a life of holiness from the company of military men, from the workman's shop... from the home of married people."[23]

It is one of his principal contributions to the history of spirituality to have restored forever this important idea that holiness is connected with the lowly and loving daily practice of the duties of our state, which naturally is different for each one, and determines a different hierarchy of virtues for each one. As he expressed it:

"Every vocation requires the practice of some special virtue. The virtues of a prelate differ from those of a prince or a soldier. The virtues of a married woman from those of a widow."[24]

What does this mean, if not that each of us must excel in his profession: the worker must be a good worker, the soldier must be a good soldier, the professor a good professor. In the eyes of our saint no one can be a good Christian if he "does not work hard at the duty of his charge."[25] So much a part must one be of one's profession that, when needful, one sacrifices for it spiritual exercises which are of themselves higher and holier. Not only must "the lawyer know how to pass from prayer to pleading, the merchant to bargain, the married woman to the duties of her marriage and the duties of her home";[26] but they must, when necessary, subordinate pious practices to the obligations of their state; without, however, allowing themselves to be deceived. As the Saint said to Philothea: "If you are very prudent, neither mother, nor wife, nor husband, nor father can prevent you from receiving communion often."[27]

If the value of an act is determined by our conformity with God's will, and the degree of our adhesion to this divine will gives our act, while we perform it, what Saint Francis calls "the whiteness of perfection", does this not mean that we must abandon to God the choice of our acts? Does this not mean that we must allow life to act on us, that we must submit to circumstances of time, of place, of people through which God's will is usually made known to us? We touch here upon this high doctrine which is so misunderstood, so unjustly travestied, which lifts indifference and acceptance to the heights of asceticism; a doctrine which many have allowed themselves to confuse with fatalism, passivity, quietism.

That an act performed under obedience is usually more perfect than an act performed through inclination and choice is emphatically affirmed by the Bishop of Geneva. He wrote in a letter of August 1, 1612:
"Young apprentices in divine love gird themselves, they elect mortifications that seem to them good, they choose their own penances... and do their own will along with the will of God, but old masters in this trade allow themselves to be bound and girded by another."[28]

The holy Bishop was certainly not unaware that illustrious teachers of the spiritual life had ideas on this important point which are quite different from his own. He had read Cassian and he could not have failed to note that the great cenobite used to direct his monks along quite contrary lines. In fact when speaking of prayer Cassian had said: "The voluntary offering which we make in this matter is more meritorious than those exercises which are imposed on us." But he had also meditated on the life of Saint Ignatius and what he found there inspired him to write to Madame de Chantal on October 14, 1604:

"Father Ignatius Loyola who is going to be canonized, on Wednesday in Holy Week ate meat at the mere request of a physician who judged it expedient because of a slight illness.

A constrained spirit would have had to pray about this for three days."

Saint Francis also taught something that narrow minds find very difficult to accept, namely that an act, even one that is very pleasing to us, when done through obedience is of greater value than an act, even one that is very displeasing to us, when the latter is done through sheer caprice. To take part gaily in a prescribed recreation can be more meritorious than to perform difficult penance we have imposed upon ourselves. He has exploited this delightful and reasonable maxim: Ask for nothing and refuse nothing. "Therefore I say that we must not ask for anything nor refuse anything... in this practice is to be found our whole perfection.[29]

It is not always an act of virtue, he believed, to flee from dignities, honors and human joys -- although history is full of such refusals. In these matters everything depends on God's will. He declared in a sermon of June 6, 1617 that it would be far better to be raised to positions of great honor against our will than to refuse them through our own choice and decision. "To refuse positions like this when they are offered by those who are over us would be temerarious". This reasoning applies all the more to what are called crosses. He wrote to Madame de Chantal on November 21, 1604.

"You very much long to have a cross and you want to choose your cross... What does that mean, my much loved daughter? O no, I want your cross and mine to be wholly the cross of Jesus Christ both as to its imposition and choice. God knows what He is doing and why."

This doctrine has far-reaching results and decides a delicate point. The influence of Saint Teresa's powerful word: "To suffer or to die", in Carmels and fervent religious communities of the period, is well known. Noble souls thirsted for suffering. A little later Pascal was to repeat the sublime prayer and ask the Lord to visit him and make him feel the sting of suffering. Francis of Sales remains closer to man as man. He taught souls to welcome pain but not to ask for it. "Do not desire crosses", he said to Philothea, "except insofar as you have generously carried those that have been sent you."[30] From this position he never moved.
If he considered self-imposed penances salutary—as a measure of discipline and training—he thought it was even better "to receive them patiently, sweetly and pleasantly out of respect for the divine will which sends them."[31] All else being equal, it is better to accept rather than to choose, for in any act of choice there is always "I" and "me", that is to say there is self-love. "There is no comparison between what is done to us and what we do and choose for ourselves... therein is to be found the highest degree of abnegation."[32]

This naked acceptance of the divine will, this acceptance that is given without any of the stimulants or pain-killers that self-love, fashion, a craving for liberty and emulation (who can tell how much emulation meant to the old anchorites?) this is the masterpiece and highest expression of free will.

So we may wonder how well-disposed men like M. Crousle could have discovered in this doctrine of "holy indifference" the germ of a dangerous fatalism. The charge might have some weight if Saint Francis of Sales exacted a submission that tended to weaken the will, including the will to obey. But Salesian acceptance is the opposite of passive. To do God's good pleasure is not to cease to will but it is to will as God wills, that is to say, this usually means to will twice because so often we must will what is contrary to our instincts, we must will against those blind tendencies which prevent us from acting the way we would like to and which destroy our true liberty. Far from leading us to fatalism, Salesian acceptance, on the contrary, destroys fatalism because of its constant insistence on willed effort. "If you are careful", said our Saint, "the attention of the soul becomes truly deliberate... and as soon as the events occur and are accepted, the waiting changes into consent or acquiescence."[33] In this kind of consent there seemed to him to be so much that was voluntary that he hesitated to call it 'acquiescence', a word he considered to be ambiguous, "because accepting or securing is a kind of action which might be called a passive action"[34] But whatever be the name given to the mental attitude that he so commended, in his opinion it necessarily involves active cooperation, an "elan," a movement towards union. It has nothing in common with the apathy of the stoics which is really chimerical. The Salesian does not say: "I surrender myself as a victim to the laws of the universe". To the sustine of the ancients, he adds the positive element of transforming love. He repeats with the Master: "To carry the cross means much more than merely to bear it."[35] He goes on to say that resignation is practiced by effort. To acquiesce is to take one's self in hand, so to speak, and in an "elan" of virile adhesion to lift one's self and adjust one's self to the will of God. Holy indifference is the highest act of the will.

He was so anxious that indifference never be confused with stoic apathy and oriental impassivity, which are often nothing more than a lazy yielding up of life, that he one day declared impetuously: "I have no love for certain souls who lack all affection for things and never change no matter what happens... they are like this because they have neither strength nor heart."[35] Have desires and affections (we know how keenly he himself felt all things) but let us learn to discipline them. It is foolish to try to stifle all our feelings. All that is necessary is to keep them under the control of a will totally submissive to God. It is not sensibility that must be made indifferent but the will, that is to say "the fine point of the soul", the central redoubt, "the impregnable keep"[37] The soul established on this plane of high serenity has touched, as we have seen, what he calls "the whiteness of perfection."[38]
In laying down the principle that perfection means love, and that love means the accomplishment of the divine will as made known to us through the duties of our state, Saint Francis of Sales advanced directly toward that ideal of Christian humanism, whereby man gives to intellect, heart and body all culture compatible with evangelical morality.

When Renan believed that he could denounce a certain antinomy between Catholicism and intellectual culture, he was probably thinking of Port-Royal and its harsh invectives against the appetite for knowledge, "libido sciendi," but he did not take into account the teaching of the Bishop of Geneva who, as a Doctor of the Church, is a more authentic representative than Jansenistic heretics. "Knowledge", said our Saint, "is not of itself contrary to devotion. In fact it may conduce thereto. And if knowledge is united with devotion, they can mutually help one another in an admirable way."[39]

It is our "misery" that accidentally makes knowledge harmful. The dangerous germs it contains are our own. But he believes that there is a remedy for our "misery" and this remedy is not ignorance. Let us purify ourselves and strengthen ourselves from within by love, then knowledge instead of being for us a poison will become a means of perfection.

"The eminent learning of Cyprian, Augustine, Hilary, Chrysostom, Basil, Gregory, Bonaventure, Thomas did not only add light to their devotion but refined it; just as, in turn, devotion not only enhanced but highly perfected their knowledge."[40]

So we see that he thought intellectual culture was in itself both good and desirable. Virtue being equal, he always held that a Saint Augustine was superior to an unlettered hermit.

Nevertheless he always maintained that knowledge cannot be its own end. Charity does not exclude knowledge but it does subordinate it. The Salesian is no dilettante. The love he has for knowledge is not based on pleasure but on use. The soul seeking holiness, he says, "studies only to help his neighbor and his own soul"[41] To study to improve one's self morally, to make one's self into a more perfect and more pleasing offering to God, to enlighten others and make them perfect--all these justify and sanctify knowledge.

Until his last hour Saint Francis of Sales will be a man who sees in learning and letters, a powerful force which he wishes to make his ally. In those days there was nothing very surprising in such an idea. For more than half a century the Church welcomed humanism and often controlled it. From the beginning of the sixteenth century in many places, especially at Lerins, Grasse and Carpentras little literary cenacles were formed whose true promoters were Churchmen. At first sight the Bishop of Geneva does not seem an exception. But mark well--and in this is to be found his originality--while many Christians and many religious looked on letters as a concession made to the fashion of the times, in the eyes of Saint Francis as well as of Saint Ignatius, human culture was part of Christian culture. Do not underestimate the daring of his attitude at a time when many and powerful were the descendants of a Gaguin or a Francesco Pic who despised every kind of literature, and the formidable Cardinal Adrien of Corneto who, out of hatred for humanism, did not recoil from the thought of poisoning Leo X in order to deliver mankind from its dangers.
The tranquil sincerity of the Saint's passion for letters can be seen in the foundation he made at Annecy of an Academy. Through this institution he made sure that a love of literature flourished in his dear mountains of Savoy. He established this "Academie Florimontane" with the help of his friend, the president Favre, during the winter of 1606-1607 and as its president he quite rightly referred to it as "our Academy". He never thought of it as a gathering of theologians. To him it was in every sense a literary areopagus, a kind of senate for the intellectuals of the province. There the members met, we learn from the statutes, to discuss "the beauty of languages especially of French" and to form themselves to "a fine style."

He took good care not to recommend the same kind instruction for men of every class. This Bishop who himself was not limited to one special field and who loved to draw light from every branch of learning, realized that no one can be a living encyclopedia and that each one must first master what is connected with his own profession. He did not recommend the study of mathematics to a jurist like President Fremyot, but he did exact this of a military leader like the Duke of Mercoeur.

He allowed women to acquire as much learning as they liked provided that they made no display of what they knew and did not neglect their household obligations to the profit of astronomy or grammar. He once made the pointed remark that "It is unfortunate that when women possess an ounce of learning they usually cannot be prevented from talking about it, so desirous are they to be thought learned". But with the reservation that feminine knowledge be useful and according to the duties of their state, he approves heartily. In this our saint quite obviously goes further than his dear Montaigne who in his middle class way, just as Chrysale was to do later, tolerated no learning in a woman beyond what would enable her to distinguish a doublet from a pair of breeches.

A friend of literary art as well as of learning, the Saint's disciple, when writing or speaking must try to express the truth with as much grace as possible. In a letter of August 17, 1608 he wrote:

"It is my opinion that we must be greatly attentive to the way we propose Catholic doctrines so that, while truth is on our side, form, brilliance and beauty will not be lacking to us."

Therefore let us "go over" our "little exercises" as he called them, in order to make them more attractive. This is why he never stopped polishing and repolishing his work as one edition succeeded another, clarifying the meaning, sharpening the focus, improving the rhythm. In the presence of such concern for literary elegance, how far away we are, not only from Calvin's unhappy and deliberately plain style, but also from Saint Cyran and the many others who despised this art. "At Port-Royal", Andre Hollays has said, "beauty was hated as a corrupting foe".

Saint Francis of Sales was inspired by an altogether different theology: beauty to him was a powerful educator and an auxiliary. He loved all the arts: music, painting, sculpture, provided that they be kept in their place as means and freed from whatever in them might be accidentally carnal and voluptuous. All that is connected with intellectual life finds place in his spirituality, as well as all that springs from affective life.
It has been said: "Choose whether you want to be a man or a Christian." How frivolous such a dilemma seems to anyone who has only glanced at Saint Francis of Sales! Recall his well-known word: "I am more man than anyone else". How charmingly he used to paraphrase this sentence. He once wrote: "No one in the world cherishes others more cordially, tenderly and to tell the whole truth, more lovingly than I." In the order of feeling as in the order of knowledge, his Christianity was always human, perhaps we could say that it was the flowering of the human, for the supernatural was always based on the natural. Provided that human love does not turn us against the divine order, provided that we know how to establish the necessary hierarchy in our affections, all tenderness is allowed us. He explains this in a luminous text.

"The divine Goodness is not displeased by seeing in us other loves besides His, so long as we preserve for Him the submission and reverence which are His due... Jacob who is called a saint of God... loves Rachel with all his strength; but that does not mean that he loves Rachel in the same way that he loves God, or God in the same way he loves Rachel... He loves God with a sovereignly supreme and absolute love and he loves Rachel with a supreme nuptial love. And these loves are not contrary to one another because his love for Rachel in no way violates the privileges and sovereign advantages of his love for God."[42]

Few saints have expressed themselves so frequently and in so charming a fashion on the question of human affection, especially on the love of husband and wife, a subject which is often a matter of anxious concern. Spiritual authors have at times approached it with a kind of reticence and shame. Our Saint, whose own heart was admirably pure, on the contrary goes into details in a way that might scandalize prudes. The great controversy on marriage, whose echoes can be heard in the whole "Third Book" of Rabelais, perhaps helped to emancipate his pen on this point. Although he never goes beyond the bounds of the most delicate Christian discretion, he knows how to accent, even how to underline facts that other writers would have replaced with a row of little dots.

He sought to give peace of heart to men and women who were married or about to be married and who came to him for direction. He found that they were scrupulous about loving one another too tenderly. He invited these married couples to show their love by acts of kindness and caresses, even in public. He disapproved of the "distant" attitude and ceremonial reserve praised by Rousseau and at that time popular in France. Contrary to certain modern legislation on good manners, such as M. Jules Lemaitre, he believed that to forbid exterior marks of affection is to dry up the source.[43]

"Love and fidelity joined together always produce familiarity and confidence; and therefore the saints have used many reciprocal caresses in their marriage; caresses truly affectionate, but pure, tender, and sincere. Thus, Isaac and Rebecca, the most chaste married couple of antiquity, were seen through a window caressing one another in such manner that, though there was no immodesty, Abimelech was convinced that they could be no other than man and wife. The great St. Louis, equally rigorous to his own flesh, and tender in the love of his wife, was almost blamed for the abundance of such caresses; though, indeed, he rather deserved praise for being able to bring his martial and courageous spirit to stoop to these little duties so requisite for the preservation of conjugal love; for, although these demonstrations of pure and free affection bind not the hearts, yet they tend to unite them, and serve for an agreeable disposition to mutual conversation."
In his "Maxims and Reflections on Comedy" he turns to the same example of Rebecca and Isaac and his remark shows clearly how different life can be when it is directed by what we have called theological optimism or theological pessimism.

"Had the holy name of marriage sufficed to hide the demonstrations of married love, Isaac and Rebecca would not have hidden their innocent playfulness and the mutual signs of their modest tenderness. This will show you that the licit, far from preventing the illicit, may provoke it."

This is an indication of the saint's spirit of fear in the presence of a trustful spirit of love.

If married love is to last, our Saint believed that it must be pure in its source. While he did not entirely forbid marriage based on reason, he required that it be also a marriage of love. This love must be serious, reasonable, tested. Marriage must not be sudden, hasty, based on sense-appeal. There must be a great deal of heart. The marriage must begin with love, and marriage must make love last.

For this reason he was implacable in the presence of the foolish conduct which we benignly label "flirting" and which seemed to him opposed to strong and lasting love. He advised young girls who aspired to marriage to guard their first love jealously for their first husband. To young men he gave the same advice: "Take care", he wrote to Celse-Benigne de Chantal, "not to become involved in love-affairs". To take part in gallantries that so often go to excess is to make the heart old and to waste its strength: "I think it a great deception to offer instead of a whole and sincere heart, one that is worn out, sophisticated and tormented by love-affairs."[44]

This sentence contains so deep a truth precisely expressed, that M. Faguet is correct when he observes:

"Each of these expressions is packed with good sense and could be turned into an excellent and searching chapter on the wasting of life before life."

What causes these breaches through which love escapes? Whence comes the jealousy and distrust that destroys once happy union? Is it not these misplaced gallantries which waste stored-up affection, lead to certain incidents that must be kept secret and makes it necessary to veil in silence certain memories and emotions. Saint Francis of Sales was well aware that all these things greatly imperil married life, so he expressed himself on this point with more than his usual vivacity. "Friendships of this nature are always criminal, foolish and vain."[45]

He energetically castigates them as thoughtless, meaningless and a source of evil. He does not tire analyzing and attacking these "foolish flirtations" that can never lead to marriage and he insists that they be broken off without any mercy. Twice he excoriates them in his "Introduction." But beneath all these anathemas, can be discerned the man who has understood the necessity of conjugal love and his vituperations against "flirtations" are the result of his desire to safeguard this fundamental love.

Much more could be said about his understanding of other forms of human affection, especially of friendship for he knew and had experienced how it can help the soul and what charm it can
add to social relations. God's love which possessed him so completely and which he wished others to possess as he did, had not dried up a single fiber of his heart. Family, friends, country—none of these were excluded from his love, nor should they be from ours.

Nor did his love for God make him hate his body. Prudent physical culture seemed to him to be a condition for a healthy soul. Like a good humanist he believed that a sound soul is usually found in a sound body. Let us begin by saying that his kindly attitude toward what Moliere later called our "guenille" has a theological foundation. Our "guenille" should be dear to us, he said, because it is the work of God.

"The Christian should love his body because it is the living image of that of the incarnate Savior and has sprung from the same stock; consequently it is related to Him by kinship and consanguinity."[46]

By this supernatural motive, like Dante, he made human affections legitimate. Let us love all living beings, animate and inanimate, because God who created them first loved them.

But to justify care given to the body he offered more utilitarian motives similar to those offered today by secular masters for other ends and far too complacently. Contrary to Descartes, Malebranche and the Jansenists, true legatees on this point of the school of Alexandria, he does not consider the soul to be a transient stranger in an inn. Here as so often elsewhere, he is the disciple of Saint Thomas who teaches that the human being rising from vegetative life to sensitive life and then to intellectual life never ceased to be a being made up of related parts. When Origen and the men of Alexandria claim that the strength of the soul depends on the weakening of the body, he firmly opposes the contrary principle. The body must be given rest, sleep, exercise and care in order to keep it in or restore it to a condition in which it can give good service. He taught that

"Charity obliges us to bestow suitable love on our bodies insofar as they are needful for good works, they are part of us, and they will have a share in our eternal happiness."[47]

That is why he gave a spirited rebuke to Madame of Chantal when he learned that she was imprudently cutting down on her sleep. He wrote on March 5, 1608:

"Why do you do this, my dear daughter? No, certainly not, you are not to weigh down the spirit in order to torment the body... because afterwards you will not be worth anything all day long."

This is the principle which illumines and controls his teaching on this subject: to crush the body is to crush the mind and this is to unarm it for the struggle. We will soon see that Port-Royal lightly allowed crippling austerities. To him, on the contrary, to be useful was essential to life.

Health is necessary if we are to serve others effectively and if we are to give ourselves the more successfully to the pursuit of perfection. On April 8, 1607, he wrote to a religious, telling her she could not make the long Holy Thursday vigil because "this prolonged watching will leave you out of breath all the next day and will stifle the spirit of devotion". Experience had taught him the same lesson that it had taught Saint Ignatius that excessive fatigue and penance is harmful to the apostolate and to devotion.
He had still another fear. This, too, was the result of experience. Beginners, he used to say, instinctively go too far in penitential exercises. But when their first fervor fails they free themselves from all their obligations and begin to dislike even the most elementary acts of piety. In this connection it is well to read the delightful thirteenth chapter of the third part of the "Introduction."

Of course, as we know, he does not deny a reasonable fast to those whom he directs, or does he hesitate to allow them a few good strokes with the discipline. But he likes to resort to these energetic measures especially when an overly-demanding body threatens the soul's freedom, as for example, when it is likely that some such vigorous diversion will put an end to temptation. Then, yes, thirty or sixty strokes of the discipline are most effective. But harsh remedies like this are rarely imposed by him.

Let us face the fact that our saint has given asceticism a new direction, one unlike that of the preceding age. His counsels of moderation were startling in his day. Murmurings against the recently founded Visitation and its rule, which was considered far too easy, tell us much about men's ideas at that time and reveal the originality of the holy founder.

He went still further. Persuaded that the soul's vigor depends on the good condition of the body, he completed his doctrine by prescribing a certain positive physical culture because he believed that within the limits of what is useful, relaxation, cleanliness, strength, and even beauty help to make the body a better instrument of conquest. Therefore he considered that gay recreations, walks, games, hunting and all that today we call sports are excellent for the well-being of the human composite.

His Visitation nuns were told to enjoy their recreation. At all costs he wanted an atmosphere of joy because joy seemed to him to bring refreshment and restore strength.[48]

THE CULTIVATION OF LOVE

We have said that the essential objective of Saint Francis of Sales was to instill so deep a love in hearts that vices will decrease and virtues increase.

Now among all the means of giving us divine love and making it grow, mental prayer far exceeds all the others. Our saint did not invent prayer in its present form. It was a distinct and methodical exercise from the fifteenth century, and perhaps from the last part of the fourteenth century. Nevertheless, he taught this prayer in a way peculiarly his own and which is unlike any other. It does not resemble the method of Saint Ignatius who is in this domain both an innovator and a master. The originality of his teaching consists of this: he wishes mental prayer to be possible for worldlings and he never tires of recommending it to them.

To his contemporaries this was amazingly novel. They thought it naive to try to teach people living in the world, working people at that, how to meditate. Only religious and a few unusually gifted and leisured people could possibly meditate from one definite time to another.
This was the opinion of the bishop of Montpellier, the famous Fenouillet. As soon as he had read the "Introduction" he wrote a friendly reproach to the author because he had introduced Philothea so thoroughly to interior practices: without a special gift, he did not believe that it would be useful for a soul to meditate. The bishop of Geneva weighed this objection but did not change his mind. He agreed that it is necessary to receive the gift of praying well. But the point seems irrelevant. Everyone ought to meditate (such is his optimism) because everyone can and should receive this gift.

In a new edition of his book he boldly wrote:

"It will be objected that I take for granted that my Philothea possesses the gift of mental prayer, a gift not given to all... It is true that I take this for granted and it is also true that not all have this gift, but it is also true that all can have it even the least cultivated, provided that they have good guides and that they are willing to work to acquire it."[49]

It is clear that the bishop of Geneva considered mental prayer as the great and almost universal means of perfection and the pivot of all his spiritual pedagogy. So we understand its place in his "Introduction," in his "Treatise on Love," and in his correspondence.

If he cannot draw on the technical terminology of our modern psychologists, men like Ribot, Janet and William James who discuss our thought processes and the transition of ideas from a cold to a hot state, he does possess all the practical conclusions that these men have reached. He has scientifically plotted the progress of our ideas and he has recognized the conditions of their growth and their passage into act.

The cultivation of good spiritual seeds which will flower into acts of virtue he wishes to ensure by the practice of mental prayer or its substitutes because he believes that everything can and ought to be transformed into interior prayer, even the examination of conscience and vocal prayer. Limited in time and space, considered as an independent exercise his meditation is bound by general rules, not absolute ones, but rules within the reach of most souls. His thought on this subject and the reasons for his thought he gives us with perfect clarity.

In speaking of these desires of perfection which are at the beginning of holiness and of prayer, he wrote to Madame de Chantal on October 9, 1607: "Have these good desires, form them resolutely... For this, my dear daughter, you must keep them fresh with the water of meditation". If it is meditation that makes this root desire grow, it is because during the time of prayer this desire is kept in the mind and it is showered with a fructifying dew. In a word, meditation is efficacious because it is a showering of the desires, that is to say it is an exercise of some duration. According to Saint Francis when we meditate we "chew" an idea, we examine it from every angle, we make it part of our soul. This is one of his key thoughts. He said in a clothing sermon of October 17, 1620:

"The Latin meaning of 'to meditate' is 'to chew'. The only difference is that the word 'chew' is used for corporal things and 'meditate' for spiritual things. To eat meat, it must be placed in the mouth, chewed and swallowed; so for spiritual eating the meat that nourishes the soul must be chewed, that is meditated so that it can be swallowed and changed into one's self. To meditate well is a very important thing."
And in drawing a conclusion, he says a little further on: "We must digest well what we have meditated, that means we must form good desires, good affections and resolutions". The power of meditation, he thinks, comes from the fact that in it we chew, ruminate, digest ideas that help us to love God.

This is far different from the diffusive meditation of the middle ages which its recent defenders tell us consisted of a kind of free "reverie" based on liturgical texts. Salesian prayer would keep us occupied for a greater or lesser period each day with one idea chosen because of its own value or because it is suited to our state. This does not mean that we can flit like a butterfly, according to our fancy, among the sacred texts, or wander from flower to flower, glancing superficially at twenty different ideas in a quarter of an hour. What is needed is to consider at length a determined idea in order to "change it into blood and nourishment".

Our saint did not underestimate, surely, the sanctifying power of the divine Office, for which he had so great a devotion, but he knew that the very rapidity of its recitation does not usually permit the beautiful thoughts it contains to develop in us their full beneficent effect. That is why, like all the great mystics of his time, he sought, in a complementary exercise, a means of a deeper inner development.

We have said, an exercise that will complement, not an exercise that will replace. Let us meditate, he said, to make us more open to the beautiful ideas of the liturgy, to make us more receptive. The sanctifying power of a text, in fact, does not depend on its beauty alone but also on the mental work we spend on it. David will have given us his divine words in vain: if we pronounce them mechanically, they will traverse our soul without taking root. To make them operative we must re-think them. To retain the idea that has impressed and touched us, we must give it time to gather to itself similar ideas already present in our minds, to amalgamate all these ideas and pattern them into, what are called today, mental syntheses which are resistant and as far as possible indestructible.

To attain this result, can meditation be made by chance and without any rules? Saint Francis of Sales, at least at the beginning of his life, did not think so. In a letter of October 5, 1604, he said: "Above all hold on to a method". It seemed to him that for beginners especially, a minimum of organization is indispensable. He certainly was not superstitious about methods. He even held that for certain people and under certain circumstances, the best method was not to have one. And it is noticeable that the longer he lived the more tolerant and simple he became. In speaking to his Visitation nuns about those who become too subtle about methods, he merely said: "They are like people who finding themselves at their destination, go back to their starting place because they did not arrive there by the route they had been taught."[50] He declared in a Sermon on February 2, 1620: "I do not say that use must not be made of methods but that you must not become attached to them". What attitude to methods could be more moderate than this?

It is true that in the "Introduction" he proposed a form of prayer for beginners but in doing so he asked, or rather he ordered them not to become enslaved by it. The method of prayer that he outlined and to which we refer is only a plan, a very simple plan without any of the meticulous classification which might at first discourage worldlings. Saint Francis believed in prayer but
not in a universal type of prayer. The ideal, of course, would be to have as many ways of praying as there are souls. Laws should operate here as in the world of corporal bodies where the same law of gravity makes stones fall and soap bubbles rise. The same kind of prayer can lift one soul and make another descend. Under the direction of our spiritual father we must be guided by experience.

With good reason has Francis been called "Doctor experimentalis." He always gave permission for what has been tried and found to be good. To those, for example, who had trouble using their own wings and thought they needed a book, he used to say: Take a book! He wrote as early as 1606 to a woman: "With a book in hand... or without a book, what does it matter?" That is why the saint would probably have accepted without astonishment the strange "written meditation", practiced and recommended by Monsignor Dupanloup and Father Gratry in the last century; and Saint Therese of the Child Jesus who used to meditate holding the Gospels in her hand following, on this point as on so many others, the tradition established by Saint Francis of Sales.

Granted that freedom is no way jeopardized there is, nevertheless, a Salesian prayer. Usually, prescinding from prayer in its higher forms, it is composed of four sharply defined parts: an introductory part or a preparation, an intellectual or cognitive part, an affective part and finally an active part or resolution. This prayer is an exercise specifically distinct from all other exercises. It establishes us in a climate of recollection and attention to God. It introduces a sanctifying thought into our minds, where intelligence considers it, where imagination and memory work on it. This consideration is meant to move us to form resolutions which will produce acts conformed to the idea or the virtue on which we have meditated. These affections and resolutions are the sole "raison d'etre" of Salesian prayer. Once the will is committed, everything is settled. And any means that does this is good: any means that leads us to act in love or to love in act.

If Saint Francis of Sales considers mental prayer to be the best way to cultivate love, we must not fail to note the great value he attaches to two other forms of prayer: ejaculatory prayer and vocal prayer.

Ejaculatory prayer is a brief cry of the heart, that prolongs and extends the fruitful influence of the principal prayer over our whole life. These living invocations without any definite form "springing from the other great prayer" are like irrigating canals that flow from the mighty river and carry its waters into all our daily activities. But they are not only a kind of prolonged prayer but are a supplementary exercise for those who were not able or did not know how to make "the other kind of great prayer."

The quintessence of prayer, a compressed form of prayer, ejaculatory prayer is in fact within everyone's reach. When it was a question of deciding who ought "to meditate", he has said: almost everyone. This time the rule is universal and absolute. No dispensation is possible for this elementary prayer that the simplest of hearts can formulate. It is possible even for the seriously ill who can "sigh in God, to God, and for God". All such a soul need do is to make conscious and deliberate the plaintive pleas of "O my God", that escape his lips and which are the beginnings or the ends of prayer.
Even if we go to the depths of the thought of Saint Francis of Sales, we will find that ejaculatory prayer is to him the essential prayer, the only one that can make up for all the others, and the only one that nothing or almost nothing can replace. To quote his exact words: "This exercise is the great work of devotion. It can be substituted for the others but the others can never be substituted for it."[51]

If there is a secret hidden in his spirituality, this is it. The importance he attaches to ejaculatory prayer is one of his most significant and novel contributions. For no other exercise has he so multiplied his appeals, his insistent requests, his supplications. "On this point", he wrote, "dear Philothea, I most affectionately wish that you follow my advice."[52] He corrected and refashioned this chapter more than any other chapter in his book.

In his teaching on this subject he comes close to those men of the middle ages who were in favor of "diffusive prayer". But ejaculatory prayer is less restricted than the prayer of the "liturgists" because it is not necessarily based on a sacred text, it is above all the creation of mind and heart, the soul's spontaneous cry to God. So the saint is full of misgivings about stereotyped formulae which few Christians fail, eventually, to recite mechanically. He is a staunch defender of habit in the order of act but he mistrusts it in prayer. So he takes care not to offer formulae of ejaculatory prayer to Philothea, as do some of his unfaithful disciples. "You are not to limit yourself to any special kinds of words, but pronounce with your lips or your heart whatever words love suggests at the moment."[53] Note the expression at the moment. It indicates his desire that our ejaculatory prayers be an invention, an improvisation springing straight from the source. They may even be wordless, that is, a look of "simple regard" like contemplation. When he wrote to a woman: "Look on the crucified Savior with your inner eyes", he was in fact recommending ejaculatory prayer of "simple regard", similar to contemplative prayer which is known to have been his own ideal.

Following the example of Saint Ignatius, who consumed time and energy at the beginning of his conversion in laborious vocal prayer, Francis of Sales also began by following the opinion of the time and for a while seemed eager for prayer formulae. In 1584 he wrote to his friend Antoine Favre asking for some beautiful new prayers which were then popular. But he was soon to free himself and those near him. In 1608 he wrote to a woman of the world: "Do not trouble yourself about saying many vocal prayers".

In one and the same sermon on April 6, 1612 he said: "The best way of praying is to pray without many words and with much ardor", and "Pray we must but let our words be few". In this we recognize his principle of "non multa sed multum." He wrote in the "Introduction," "Where love reigns, exterior words are needless."[54] The soul suffices for this mysterious operation which has no other end than "to unite and join" two wills—God's will and ours.

There is no reason for us to fear that there is anything inordinate in this or that he is cutting himself off from a tradition consecrated by centuries of Christian life. He is not unaware that for certain souls and for all of us at certain times articulated prayer and set forms is a necessary stimulant and the vehicle of interior prayer. Like Pascal, he knows that the gesture, the attitude, the movement of the lips generate thoughts and arouse feelings. Naturally, to attain this end, it is in the vocal prayers recommended by the Church—the "Pater," "Ave" and "Credo"—that he prefers to trust. In fact each day he recited the rosary which is nothing more than a combination
of the "Pater," "Ave" and "Credo," and he composed three methods for saying the rosary well. We have a curious proof of the importance he attached to the recitation of these prayers. In the first edition of the "Introduction" he recommended them as a conclusion to mental prayer, without, however, insisting on their use. But in the final edition of 1618, he added this characteristic commentary: "This is the usual and necessary prayer of all the faithful."

Therefore it would be unjust to associate Saint Francis of Sales with certain seventeenth century campaigns against vocal prayer. At the same time it must be admitted that the further he goes the more he tends to lift vocal prayer to the dignity of mental prayer. He explained in a sermon of April 5, 1615: "Prayer is nothing else than a conversation with God, and surely He would not find this very agreeable if we failed to pay attention to what we are saying to Him."

Some Christian writers, such as Huysmans, plead in favor of this "inattention of heart" which God forgives, they say, because of our weakness. God may forgive. But can we be spiritually deepened by a prayer made with our lips while our heart is far away? That is the point our saint considers vital.

In all that concerns the sacraments, Saint Francis of Sales, the pupil of the Jesuits, is a perfect disciple of Saint Ignatius. (Here we are discussing, of course, not the sacraments of initiation but the strengthening sacraments of the Blessed Sacrament and Penance). In all that concerns the reception of Holy Communion and Confession the Bishop of Geneva is in the vanguard of the movement that brings Christians to these two sources of life and he prepared for the sacramental teaching of today.

Of course, it is almost an impertinence to observe that the Saint never loses sight of the fact that the sacramental act is of itself efficacious and that it acts, as theologians say, "ex opere operato." In speaking of the graces given at the reception of these same sacraments, he says: "It is indeed true that these are the accompanying graces" and granted that we have fulfilled the necessary conditions "we will always receive the grace connected with the sacrament."[55] This is one reason why he urges the faithful to frequent and very frequent Confession and Communion.

But when our saint finds spiritual guides who are concerned above all with the mathematics, as it were, of the way the sacraments confer grace and grossly neglect the sacramental act, that is to say, the soul's preparation and thanksgiving, then he becomes very solicitous about the soul's dispositions and cooperation. Deeply convinced that the sacrament is a cause of grace, he is no less convinced that we are the condition of that grace. That is why he says in reference to our needed collaboration, without it: "we will not receive graces connected with the preparation, that is, strength to set about the correction of our evil inclinations, and courage to embrace the practice of virtues and perfection."[56]

As the result of considering in the sacraments only their action "ex opere operato," their power of automatically distributing grace, he saw clearly the inevitable strange abuses, abuses of which we can today find examples. The faithful go to Holy Communion as they take holy water. They receive Communion no matter when, and no matter how.

An eminent pastor of Saint-Sulpice, M. Letourneau, in his "Guide du pretre" (1917) said of this indecent liberty:
"Certain people nowadays under pretext of reacting against rigorism receive Holy Communion with a certain cavalier casualness. They hurry to the altar rail as soon as they enter the Church and as soon as they have received Holy Communion they leave."

Such a way of thinking and acting would have worried Saint Francis of Sales. It is utterly opposed to his doctrine which can he read in this letter sent in 1612 to President Brulart:

"You do well to obey your confessor, whether he has deprived you of the consolation of communicating frequently to try you, or because you have not made enough effort to correct your impatience...And if you obey humbly one communion will be of more value to you than two or three made under other circumstances, for there is nothing that makes food more profitable than to take it with an appetite."

Having noted this, it is still true that Saint Francis of Sales is among those who have done most to restore the practice of frequent and even daily Communion. His pen often traces the word food when speaking of this sacrament. Now food must be taken at frequent intervals. The saint is faithful to the principles he has laid down. In the "Introduction" he recommends Holy Communion to the weak and to the strong (it will be remembered how insistently he does this), "to the strong so that they will not become weak", "to the weak so that they will become strong".

How vigorously he reacts against the still powerful rigorist opinion represented by Arnauld and the Jansenists. When he speaks of the Eucharist it seems as if he was confronting an extremely powerful force. This same force that induced the Council of Trent to require seminarians to receive Communion but once a month. His words ring with a polemic note and suggest the presence of an invisible foe. On April 30, 1610, he wrote to Madame de Vignod:

"Let others philosophize on the subject of receiving communion... And if you want to explain this to anyone you may very well say that you need to eat this divine meat so frequently because you are very weak and without this source of strength your spirit would soon grow weaker."

Where Arnauld would say, "the food of the strong", the Salesian says "the food of the weak and the strong".

But to be efficacious this eucharistic food must be taken with good appetite, that is with attention and with affection. Here we find on this important point the Saint's constant teaching. We must treat the Bread of Life just as we do the holy idea on which we meditate in prayer. We must, if we may express it this way, envelop it with affection after having thoroughly prepared ourselves: "Begin the evening before to prepare for Holy Communion with several aspirations and longings..."[57]

This ceremonial of expectancy, these preliminary actions which are focused on the coming Communion are a legitimate and fruitful use of our affections, our imagination, even of our body by way of consolidating the pact of love we are about to make with Christ. The Bishop of Geneva never makes the mistake of treating us like pure spirits. He uses the whole man. By
making the act of communion more solemn, he makes it more fruitful, just as nations ensure the value of their treaties by surrounding them with an elaborate protocol.

As to the sacrament of Penance, it is as a means of education and in relation to mental prayer that Saint Francis of Sales loves to present it to us. After describing with a few rapid strokes its purifying and justifying role in the "Introduction" he at once begins to speak lovingly of its strengthening role. He considers that confession followed by absolution is indeed the cleansing act that effaces the past, but that it is more especially "light" and "strength" for the future. It was instituted to cure, in the true sense of the word, that is to say to restore our temperament and not only to make some local ill disappear temporarily.

In this way Confession and Communion, vocal prayer and the examen of conscience, like the whole spiritual life must tend to become, according to Saint Francis of Sales, a perpetual interior prayer. The effort of the heart to be united in love to the God of Love must never come to an end.

ENDNOTES

1. 1, pp. 224-226.
5. Sermon of March 22, 1622.
12. "Entretiens," XII.
15. Letter of August 1, 1612.
18. "Entretiens," X.
19. "Entretiens," VII.
20. "Entretiens," X.
22. "Entretiens," VII.
29. "Entretiens," XXI.
32. "Entretiens," IV.
37. Letter of February 18, 1605.
38. Letter of March 1605.


48. Translator's note: Several examples of unbecoming conduct are omitted because they have no bearing on conditions today.


50. "Entretiens," XVIII.


52. Ibid. XII.


54. Part 1 chapter 1.

55. "Entretiens," XVIII.

56. Ibid.