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INTRODUCTION TO THE  
DEVOUT LIFE

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*The* COMPLETE  
*Introduction to the*  
*Devout*  
*Life*  
ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

*Translation and Commentary by*  
*Father John-Julian, OJN*



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*May it please God that this book, the most perfect of its kind in the opinion of contemporaries of the saint, be read now as it formerly was by practically every one. If this were done, Christian piety certainly would flourish the world over and the Church of God could rejoice in the assurance of a widespread attainment of holiness by her children.*

—POPE PIUS XI, *Rerum Omnium Perturbationem*, 1923



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## TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

### THE MAN

**T**he European Savoy is a peculiar territory. In the sixteenth century, its area straddled the western Alps and overlapped bits of what are now France, Switzerland, and Italy, and it included a Mediterranean port at Nice. Since the early fifteenth century it had been an independent duchy, a mini-nation, ruled by the Duke of Savoy, and because of its location—just across the bay from Calvin's Geneva and between Catholic France and Italy—it was the scene of much religious disruption during the years following the Reformation. François de Sales, Lord of Boisy,<sup>1</sup> was a Savoyard Catholic aristocrat in the diplomatic service of the Duke of Savoy. His son François—our Francis de Sales—was born in the elegance of the family's alpine Château de Sales<sup>2</sup> near Annecy<sup>3</sup> on August 21, 1567. It may have been a portent that the room in which he was born was adorned with a large painting above the fireplace of Saint Francis of Assisi preaching to the birds, and when he was baptized he was named by his godparents "François Bonaventure."<sup>4</sup> He was the firstborn of thirteen children and the eldest of six brothers.<sup>5</sup>

Francis's earliest education was in the hands of his young mother and the Abbé Déage, who was to become Francis's tutor and remain his companion for over forty years.<sup>6</sup> At the age of six,<sup>7</sup> Francis was sent—with three of his cousins—to the nearby College de la Roche<sup>8</sup> on the Arve River (which flows through Geneva as well) and two years later to the Chappuchin College<sup>9</sup> in Annecy, where in the nearby St. Dominic's Church<sup>10</sup> he received First Communion and later was confirmed. When he was eleven, he took the first step toward a life in the Church by the emotional act of requesting and receiving the tonsure.<sup>11</sup> (His father considered this merely a boyish phase and still intended that his son have a career in public life.)

When Francis was fifteen, his father arranged for him to enter the College of Navarre in the University of Paris (because that was the college that had traditionally been attended by the noble families of Savoy). But Francis begged off and, with his mother's intercession, was allowed instead to enter the College of Clermont—because it was supervised by the Jesuits and famous for both piety and academics.<sup>12</sup> At the college, Francis did extremely well in the academic disciplines of philosophy and rhetoric (the latter clearly evident in the style and literary quality of his later writings). The study of theology and Scriptures was predictably his favorite, but in deference to his father (who still intended him for high social position) he took lessons in horsemanship, dancing, and fencing. He remained at the college for six years.

During his youth, the extreme Calvinist version of the Augustinian doctrine of predestination had become central in Protestant teaching (that is, that one's state

in eternity was predetermined by God at one's birth, and no action during life could alter that—one was either “saved” or “damned” regardless of the life one lived), and this doctrine was thus much in the mind of religious thinkers of the day and widely debated. In November 1585, at the age of nineteen, Francis came face-to-face with this doctrine and began to be obsessed with the fear that he might not be among the predetermined “elect.” This theological anxiety grew until it became overwhelming and began to affect his physical health. For a month he suffered this mental torture until one evening (as Abbé Déage tells us<sup>13</sup>) he entered the Church of St.-Etienne-de-Grés in Paris and found there a prayer tablet with a copy of the *Memorare*<sup>14</sup> on it. He began reciting the prayer fervently and ran to the chapel of the Black Madonna. After an hour kneeling there, he made a heroic act of abandonment, saying: “Whatever you have desired concerning me, Lord, in your eternal secret of predestination and reprobation, you whose judgments are unfathomable.... I will love you always, at least in this life, if it is not given me to love you in eternity. If, deserving it, I am to be...among the damned who will never gaze upon your face, grant that at least I may not be among those who curse your holy name.”<sup>15</sup> All fear and despair left him, and he was at peace. From that time on, Francis credited the Blessed Virgin's prayers with saving him from total desolation and heresy, and soon thereafter he made a vow of lifelong chastity.

In 1588, Francis was called home by his father and dispatched to the University of Padua to study jurisprudence. He remained there for four years—again excelling in his studies. He came under the influence of the humanist Jesuit Antonio Possevino, who remained a lifelong friend and advisor. In the summer of 1590 an epidemic of typhoid hit Padua. Francis became seriously ill and expected to die (to the extent that he willed his body to the medical school, saying, “At least I will offer something to the public since I have offered nothing else in my life”<sup>16</sup>). He recovered, but continued to be troubled in his mind by theological problems. It was at this time that he developed two practices of piety that would later influence his writings: The first he labeled “Preparation”—each morning upon arising, he examined the day ahead, considering what his duties would be, what possible obstacles he might encounter, and how he would deal with them. The second he called “Spiritual Sleep”—a rudimentary mental prayer, wordlessly considering God's goodness, his past kindnesses, the vanities of the world, and the virtues of the saints.<sup>17</sup> Finally, at the age of twenty-four, he was awarded a doctoral degree in both law and theology.

After graduation, in 1592, Francis made a pilgrimage to the Holy House at Loreto,<sup>18</sup> paid a visit to Rome and Venice, and then returned home. During his eighteen months there, he was admitted as an advocate to the senate, and his father formally granted him lands in the eastern Savoy so that he would have a title: Seigneur de Villaroget.<sup>19</sup> His father had also chosen a wealthy heiress as a bride for his son. However, Francis courteously rejected the marriage and refused an offer from the Duke of Savoy of a seat in the Senate of Chambéry. At this point, only his

mother and a few close friends knew of Francis's hope and intention to enter a life of religion, and he dreaded the thought of telling his father.

At just this time, the provost<sup>20</sup> of the Cathedral Chapter of Geneva died, and Francis's cousin, Canon Louis de Sales, put forth Francis's name for the post to the pope, who sent approval. So Francis finally told his father of his hopes for the priesthood. The reaction was extremely and unqualifiedly negative. But when his father learned of the significance and authority of the ecclesiastical position Francis had been offered, he relented, and the post of Provost of the Chapter and Vicar General<sup>21</sup> of the diocese of Annecy was formally awarded to Francis. On the very day of his father's consent, Francis formally gave up all his birthright and titles and put on clerical dress. Three weeks later he was admitted to the minor orders,<sup>22</sup> in June he was ordained Subdeacon and Deacon, and six months later—in December 1593—he was ordained priest by the bishop of Geneva in the parish church of Thorens. In late December he was formally installed as Provost. In his installation homily, Francis defined his program: "It is by charity that we must shake the walls of Geneva, through love that we must invade, through love that we must recover it.... I propose neither steel nor that [gun]powder that has the odor and flavor reminiscent of the infernal furnace.... We must live according to Christian tenets in such a way that we may be truly canons—that is to say, men living under a holy rule—and children of God not only in name, but in fact."<sup>23</sup>

At this point we must understand that during the upheavals of the Protestant Reformation, John Calvin had established his headquarters in Geneva and eventually persuaded the city council to outlaw Catholicism, the practice of any Catholic rites, and the presence of ordained Catholics in the city.<sup>24</sup> This meant that the Catholic bishop of Geneva—while retaining his title—was forced to establish a cathedral-in-exile twenty-five miles away in Annecy, across the border in the Savoy. It was there that Francis had become Provost.

Meanwhile, in the Chablais—the northernmost province of the Duchy of Savoy—the Protestants had also gained control. The Duke of Savoy wanted the province returned to Catholicism, but the first missionary sent to the area had been driven out by Calvinist soldiers. Francis and his cousin Louis volunteered themselves, and in 1594 the grateful bishop assigned them as missionaries to the Chablais.<sup>25</sup> They set out on foot but found that they could not safely stay in Thonon, the capital of the province, because they were threatened with murder—so they settled three miles away in the garrisoned fortress of Allinges. Every day they went to the one Catholic church in Thonon and preached (often to only four or five terrified Catholics), and every night they returned to Allinges. They were harassed by ruffians, endangered by the extreme winter cold, and even attacked by wolves during their travels.<sup>26</sup> A public ordinance forbade the Calvinists to listen to his sermons, so Francis printed up leaflets and tracts and plastered them all over the city, even slipping them under doors—a means of communicating unheard of before then.<sup>27</sup> (These handouts were later gathered

with Francis's sermons and published under the title of *The Controversies*, also known as *Open Letter to Protestants*.)

In the first seven months, the priests made only one convert. Then they began to preach in the public squares and invited Calvinists to debate with them publicly. In their second winter in the Chablais, they made nearly two hundred converts. At about that time, at great personal risk to himself and at the bidding of the pope, Francis traveled secretly to Geneva three times to meet with Théodore de Bèze (Calvin's successor and the leader of the Geneva Protestants) to discuss possibilities of reconciliation. The discussions between the thirty-year-old Francis and the seventy-year-old de Bèze were irenic and amiable but produced no conversion.

The Visitation Sisters recorded an event about this time that demonstrates Francis's integrity. He was just leaving the church after having preached on the verse from Matthew's Gospel (5:39b): "If one strikes you on your right cheek, turn to him also the other" when a Calvinist confronted him: "If I were to slap you now, would you turn the other cheek so that I could do it again?" After a moment's silence, Francis replied, "My friend, I know well what I *ought* to do, but I do not know what I *would* do, for I am so weak. However, you can always go ahead and try."<sup>28</sup>

In 1595, for lack of financial support, Louis had to leave the Chablais, and Francis, at some risk, moved his own residence into Thonon proper. He had hoped financial help would come from his father, but it was refused, and he only secretly received some clothing and a little money from his mother. On Christmas in 1596, Francis celebrated the first Mass in the Thonon Church of St. Hippolytus in sixty years. A year later Francis arranged a celebration of the Forty Hours Devotion.<sup>29</sup> Since it was still too dangerous in Thonon, a procession of some 500 marched the eighteen miles to the city of Annemasse, Francis himself led another procession from Annecy, and still others joined with a final attendance reported to be 30,000. A year later, the celebration was held *twice* with the Duke of Savoy and the Papal Legate present. According to Vatican records, 2,300 converts were made in eleven days.<sup>30</sup> Finally, having spent four years in the Chablais, and having reopened some eighteen abandoned parishes, providing them all with books, sacred vessels, and crucifixes, Francis turned the ministry over to others and returned to Annecy.<sup>31</sup>

The next two years Francis spent assisting the bishop—often on diplomatic assignments. On one occasion he was sent to Paris as an envoy to King Henry IV and made a great impression. "If I had not already been converted, M. de Genève would have done it!" said the king. "He is a rare bird indeed: devout, learned, and a gentleman into the bargain...gentle and humble—deeply pious but without useless scruples."<sup>32</sup>

Bishop de Granier sent his vicar general to propose to Francis that he allow his name to be submitted to be bishop coadjutor.<sup>33</sup> Francis absolutely declined: "I was not born to command.... I will write, I will come, I will go, I will do anything to please his Lordship apart from that, but I must not consider the bishopric." With much persuasion, however, he finally yielded under obedience, but within



days was struck with a serious illness. He fell so deeply into a coma that it was believed he had died, but he survived and was bedridden for four months.<sup>34</sup> After his recovery, Francis traveled to Rome, underwent a deep examination before thirty cardinals and bishops (which he passed with the pope's highest praise) and, when he returned, was finally consecrated bishop on December 8, 1602. In 1604, with his friend Madame Barbe Acarie (who took the name of "Marie of the Incarnation" when she professed vows), Francis was instrumental in bringing Teresa of Ávila's Discalced Carmelites to France. While helping them settle in, he was informed of the death of Bishop de Granier and hurried back to Annecy to begin his own years as Prince-Bishop of Geneva.<sup>35</sup>

Francis was a very hands-on bishop, highly valuing personal contact with his people. He arranged diocesan synods, reorganized administrative patterns, and commenced the practice of parish visitations, twice visiting every parish in his diocese. He also formed the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine and personally taught catechism classes—even to the point of inventing a kind of sign language by which he taught prayers to a young man born deaf (for which Francis would later be named patron saint of the deaf).

At one point in later years Francis was improbably accused of joining a plot against the king. He traveled immediately to Paris, where the king not only laughed at the accusation but also offered to make Francis the bishop of Paris. Francis's reply was: "Sire, I have married a poor bride, and I cannot desert her for a richer one."

In Lent of 1604, when preaching a series of Lenten sermons in Dijon, he had a dream/vision of meeting a young woman dressed in widow's clothes, and a few days later he saw her in the church. She was the woman we know as Jane Frances de Chantal. Their meeting led to an extremely intense spiritual relationship that produced a remarkable and world-famous correspondence and a new religious order.<sup>36</sup>

In 1606 the new pope, Leo XI—who had long been a friend of Francis's—wrote that he wished to make Francis a cardinal. Francis was devastated and distraught by the offer. He wrote to a friend, "If it rested with me, and I had to take only three steps to receive the Cardinal's hat, I would not take them."<sup>37</sup> Francis was much relieved when the sudden death of the pope brought an end to proposals of the cardinal's hat for him.

Meanwhile, Francis also met Madame Louise de Charmois (who had become his cousin by marriage).<sup>38</sup> She wanted to live a devout life while remaining with her family. His writings to her became the basis of his most famous book, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, in 1609. The book was re-edited and augmented five times by Francis until his final edition in 1619. It became so popular that the French queen Marie de' Medici sent an English translation adorned with diamonds to King James I of England.<sup>39</sup>

In 1600 Francis's father had died, and since the duke had never really been reconciled to his son's life in religion, it was a relief for Francis and he drew nearer

to his mother and his siblings. But in 1608 his much beloved youngest sister also died, and he wrote Madame de Chantal: “I am just a man and nothing more. My heart has been broken in a way I could not have thought possible.”

Two years later—in the same year in which his mother died—Francis and Madame de Chantal formally established the Institute of the Visitation of Saint Mary,<sup>40</sup> which was meant to provide a religious structure for women of fragile health and for widows—those who would ordinarily not be admitted to a traditional religious order. Their purpose was to go out in threes to visit the sick and poor, and while that may sound to the modern ear like a singularly appropriate undertaking for nuns, the fact is that it was utterly scandalous and unheard of in seventeenth-century France. All women religious under vows were to be totally enclosed and strictly cloistered—allegedly for their own protection (but, of course, that allowed the male hierarchy to maintain its patriarchal control over all women religious). So Francis’s founding of such a wide-open and actively ministering religious community is a classic example of his own reforming humanism. However, a few years after the founding, the archbishop of Lyon required that the Sisters be formed into a traditional religious order and be rigorously cloistered.<sup>41</sup> Francis’s efforts for an open order had failed.

In 1615 Francis began a major literary work, *A Treatise on the Love of God*—written partly for the Sisters of the Visitation—it contains most of his own spiritual and mystical insights. Like all his writings, its purpose is to increase and strengthen devotion, but this work includes much more by way of theological elucidation than the rest of his writing—which tends to be more practical and pragmatic. It also has neither the literary style nor the practical simplicity of his earlier book. It was his intention to write a companion volume called *A Treatise on the Love of Neighbor*, but that was never realized.

During these years Francis lived a life of simplicity and selflessness. He became famous for his almsgiving (to such a degree that he was reproached by his steward, who pleaded that there was little money left to run the house). On one occasion a servant gave one of the bishop’s old tunics to a poor man, who complained that it was badly worn—so Francis invited him into his rooms and opened his closet: “Go, see if there is anything better.” And the surprised complainant admitted: “This was the best that was there.”<sup>42</sup>

On another occasion the bishop entered a room unexpectedly and saw his valet drop a pen and try to hide a piece of paper on which he had been writing. When asked, the young man reluctantly admitted that it was a love letter to a young widow he was in love with and showed the bishop the letter. “You do not know how to do it,” said Francis, who sat down and wrote a love letter. “Here,” he said, “copy out this letter, seal it and send it, and you will see that everything will be all right.” The valet and the widow were married soon thereafter.<sup>43</sup>

In 1618 Francis had occasion to travel to Paris—his first visit in sixteen years. When it was announced that he would preach in the Church of the Oratory there,

the crowds were so dense that he had to climb through a window to get into the church. During this visit to Paris, Francis became a close friend of Vincent de Paul, who later wrote of him, "On thinking over his words, I felt such admiration for him that I was inclined to see him as the man who most closely resembled the Son of God upon earth."<sup>44</sup>

In 1621 a gift was given Francis: his young brother Jean-François de Sales was consecrated bishop and named coadjutor in Francis's own diocese—so his own brother became his assistant and eventual successor. However, while Jean-François proved to be intelligent and active, he was also unlike Francis in that he was severe, reserved, and lacking in humane gentleness. Francis spent long hours teaching his brother the vagaries of episcopacy and said, "He will correct many mistakes that I have made in my charge, where I confess I have failed in all things—except in affection."<sup>45</sup> Since Francis's health was beginning to fail, his brother's assistance was important and appreciated.

In the next year, the Duke of Savoy and King Louis XIII<sup>46</sup> arranged a festive gathering in Avignon to celebrate the end of the war between France and Spain, and the duke asked Francis to join him. The bishop was interested in obtaining some religious privileges for the French part of his diocese, so he accepted. However, before he left home, he made unusually thorough arrangements—including his last will and testament—that suggest he may have suspected he would not return.

Traveling in full state, the ducal cavalcade arrived in Avignon in October after a bitterly cold journey. Francis had already become too ill to participate in the ceremonies, and he turned back. On the way home—having endured some wretched accommodations along the way—he eventually met his beloved Mother Jane Frances de Chantal in Lyon, where the Sisters provided a gardener's cottage for him on their grounds. He remained there for a month and tried to keep up with preaching and letter writing and caring for the Sisters. But just after Christmas he suffered a stroke.

At the time, the only treatments for stroke victims involved (1) the application of cantharides<sup>47</sup> to the temples, which blistered the skin, and (2) the pressing of red-hot metal plates against the nape of the neck, producing excruciating pain.<sup>48</sup> Francis was thus tortured with the latter twice—both times just as he regained consciousness. The Sacrament of Extreme Unction (the anointing of the sick) was administered, but he was unable to receive Communion because of his recurrent vomiting. Then one of the nuns asked for a last word of advice. By then Francis could not speak, but he gestured for a piece of paper and on it wrote one word: *HUMILITÉ*. He died on December 28, 1622.<sup>49</sup> One source says that his Jesuit friend Father Jean Fourier was present at his deathbed.<sup>50</sup>

In postmortem examination, it was reported that his liver had been "burnt up," one lung had been wounded "by a sword," part of the brain had been "bloodied," and three hundred (sic!) gallstones were found.<sup>51</sup> His body was embalmed and taken—all save the heart<sup>52</sup>—in solemn procession to Annecy, where his funeral

obsequies were held on January 29, and he was interred by his own request near the high altar in the first Visitation convent church in Annecy. During the French Revolution, Francis's relics were removed and hidden, and when peace had come, they were returned to the restored church and to a new shrine in 1912.

Pope Alexander VII (1599–1667)—who was twenty-three years old when Francis died and would have known the Savoyard's work—was a great supporter of the Jesuits who strongly promoted Francis's work. Alexander beatified Francis in 1661 and formally canonized him in 1665. The pope had written about Francis to his nephew: "I entreat you once again to find your delight in studying the writings of M. de Sales, in being an assiduous reader of them, and in being his obedient disciple, and faithful imitator. It is to his *Philothea* (which is the best guide one can have for walking in the path of virtue) that I owe, for the last twenty years the correction of my conduct; and if there is any good in me, I owe it to this book. I have read it over and over again, and I could not do without it."<sup>53</sup>

Pope Pius IX (1792–1878) formally declared Francis to be a "Doctor of the Church"<sup>54</sup> in 1877 and wrote: "This universally held opinion of the excellence of De Sales' wisdom arises from the quality of his teaching which, because of his holiness, so exceeds the norm that it is judged to be fitting for a Doctor of the Church and impels us to acknowledge that this man should be counted among the most distinguished teachers Christ our Lord has given to his spouse, the Church.... He showed all Christians that the path to virtue was so easy that thereafter true piety shone its light everywhere and gained entrance to the thrones of kings, the tents of generals, the courts of judges, custom houses, workshops, and even the villages of herdsmen.... Moreover we order that the books, commentaries, and all the works of this Doctor of the Church, be cited, introduced, and used both privately and publicly in schools, academies, colleges, lectures, disputations, interpretations, assemblies, other ecclesiastical studies, and all Christian activities as the case requires."<sup>55</sup>

In 1923 Pope Pius XI (1857–1939) named Francis to be the patron saint of writers and journalists: "It appears that Francis de Sales was given to the Church by God for a very special mission. His task was to give the lie to a prejudice that the ideal of genuine sanctity is impossible of attainment or, at best, is so difficult that it surpasses the capabilities of the great majority of the faithful and is, therefore, to be thought of as the exclusive possession of a few great souls. St. Francis likewise disproved the false idea that holiness was so hedged around by annoyances and hardships that it is inadaptable to a life lived outside cloister walls.... since St. Francis, up to this time, has not been named the Patron of Writers in any solemn and public document of this Apostolic See, We take this happy occasion, after mature deliberation and in full knowledge, by Our Apostolic authority, to hereby publish, confirm and declare by this encyclical, everything to the contrary notwithstanding, St. Francis de Sales, Bishop of Geneva and Doctor of the Church, to be the Heavenly Patron of all Writers."<sup>56</sup>

The Order of the Visitation continues to thrive to this day, and the Salesians of Don Bosco, the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, and the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales are named in his honor—as is the uninhabited St. François Atoll in the Alphonse Group of the Seychelles Islands,<sup>57</sup> and a tiny Francophone municipality in south-central Quebec, Canada.

## THE WOMAN

It sometimes seems that Francis spent much of his life surrounded by women. His mother had been the major influence on his youth and vocation and even the sole support of his missionary work. There was his famous relationship with Madame Jean Frances de Chantal, his celebrated correspondent, with whom he founded the Order of the Visitation. With Madame Barbe Acarie, he brought the first Discalced Carmelites to France. Jacqueline Coste followed him from Geneva to Annecy and became a founding member of the Visitation Community. Francis was spiritual director to the abbess Angelique Arnaud of the famous Jansenist convent at Port Royal. He served as Chief Almoner for Princess Christine of Turin. And then there was Louise de Charmoisy—the little-known and anonymous “Philothée” of *An Introduction to the Devout Life*.<sup>58</sup>

In 1586 she was born Louise de Châtel in Parfondel, Normandy—the daughter of Jacques de Châtel, Seigneur d’Hasteville, Esquire, and Françoise de Rueil. Louise was related to Catherine de Clèves, the dowager Duchess of Guise, to whom she became lady-in-waiting and with whom she spent her early years at the royal court in Paris. In the summer of 1600, at the age of fourteen, she was married to Jean-Claude de Chaumont Vidomne, Seigneur de Charmoisy—a second cousin and close friend of Francis de Sales—and she left Paris for the Savoy. The change from the bustling, sophisticated royal court of Paris to the rural country of the Savoy was a shock for the beautiful and brilliant young girl. Jean-Claude owned four chateaus and several farms and vineyards, and she had responsibility for the ordering of all these residences.

In 1603 Louise met Francis (who at that time had been a bishop for only a month), and thereafter she attended Mass at the cathedral in Annecy whenever possible. She was deeply impressed by Francis’s preaching and wanted to ask his advice, but it would be another four years before she finally approached him to request spiritual guidance. The earliest surviving letter from Francis to Louise is from May 1606, and it seems to carry hints that he would be “available” for spiritual direction were she to ask. After becoming Louise’s director in 1607, Francis wrote to Jane Frances: “In our holy nets I have discovered a fish that I have wanted for four years. I must confess the truth: that I am extremely happy about this worthy woman. I commend her to your prayers that our Lord may make fast in her heart the resolutions that he has put into it. She is quite a golden soul, who is very earnest

to serve her Savior. If she keeps it up, it will bring ripe fruit.”<sup>59</sup> It is clear that from their first meeting Francis had recognized in Louise a serious, conscientious, and sincere desire for the devout life, and had hoped she would speak to him about it. Sister Rosalie Greiffier (who knew her personally) described Louise: “She was a remarkable woman for her beauty and her brilliant qualities; she had been raised at court, and nature and fortune had combined their gifts. In one word, she possessed all the advantages that the world values. These adulations made her the object of nourishing in her soul the spirit of frivolity and vanity—but when she heard the holy bishop she threw herself at his feet, deplored her past life, and gave herself to God without reserve.”<sup>60</sup>

Louise bore three children, for whom Francis stood as godfather: Henri, Françoise, and Jean-François, the last of whom received emergency baptism at birth and died before he was a year old.<sup>61</sup> As a close friend and relative of the family, Francis often celebrated Mass in the household chapel of Louise’s Château de Villy.

Shortly after Francis had assumed her spiritual direction, Louise was called away to Chambéry for a time and asked Francis to write to her. First, he recommended that she be in touch with Father Jean Fourier, the head of the Jesuit College in Chambéry. Second, he had previously prepared several brief tracts or memos (*mémoires*) on the spiritual life that he sent along with her. Third, he carried on a fulsome correspondence with her (as well as with many others). These various writings came to be the core of *An Introduction to the Devout Life*.

In 1613 Louise’s husband Claude was involved in a scandal. He had been secretary to the Duke of Nemours for nearly fifteen years when he was suddenly replaced by a new favorite of the duke named Berthellot (who was, apparently, an unctuous sycophant much despised by all the local officials). On February 20, 1613, this Berthellot was passing through the forest of Sonnaz by night when he was waylaid and thrashed. It was dark night and no one could be recognized, but he accused Claude de Chamoisy, and Francis’s own brother Janus, and the whole party that had opposed him. Without evidence or investigation, Claude was banished from Annecy by the duke and put under house arrest in his Château de Marclaz. Louise was visiting in Paris and Normandy during this time and received much sympathy from friends and family when the news reached her.

Francis immediately began interceding on behalf of Claude and Janus with all the authorities, and by October they were released and absolved of all charges. During his mediations, Francis used a phrase that became famous: “If it is enough merely to accuse, then who can remain innocent?”

In the winter of 1616, Francis heard that Louise was dangerously ill in Samoëns (forty-five miles from Annecy), and he set off with a doctor immediately. After staying in Samoëns three or four days, he returned to Annecy, but three days later he had word that she was worse and he set off again. However, there were ten-foot snowdrifts and he could not get through and had to return to Annecy—where word soon came that she had recovered.

In 1618 Claude died and left his son, Henri, the land and Château de Villy. Louise purchased for her son the Barony of Couvette so he would have a proper title. Although she disapproved of his “excesses and violence” she lived with him through his marriage in 1626 until her own death in June 1645—nearly a quarter of a century after her mentor and director, Francis de Sales. Her funeral was conducted in the nearby town of Contamine-sur-Arve (where her death certificate is still preserved), and she was buried with her husband in the Church of St. Francis de Sales in Annecy.

## THE BOOK

Francis had an extremely close and devoted relationship with his mother. From his earliest years—indeed, even before his birth—she believed that his vocation was to be in religion. When his father refused to support this calling, his mother privately backed him with aid and some financial assistance. She was extraordinarily devout and pious, and to her Francis was both son and spiritual father. After he was ordained, he served as her confessor and spiritual director.<sup>62</sup> She frequently consulted him on spiritual matters and followed his advice. For her use, Francis wrote a number of brief articles and memos on the spiritual way that she read and followed faithfully through her whole life.<sup>63</sup>

Consequently, when Francis met Louise de Charmoisy and was asked to provide her with some written materials to introduce her to the devout life, he had on hand these articles and memos that he had written for his mother, and he sent them on to Louise. In addition, he wrote numerous personal letters to her in answer to her spiritual questions.

Louise shared Francis's writings with her director, Father Jean Fourier (head of the Jesuit College in Chambéry), and in 1608 he wrote to Francis asking that he publish the material in book form. “What!” replied Francis. “Those wretched scrawls? And the good Father has even had the patience to wade through them?” But finally when all the priests at the college joined in the request and threatened to publish the book themselves, Francis said, “Well, it certainly is strange that according to these good Fathers, I seem to have written a book without knowing it.”<sup>64</sup> And so he asked that all his letters, notes, and tracts be returned to him. He combined, edited, and augmented them, and so was born his classic opus *An Introduction to the Devout Life*, published in 1609.<sup>65</sup> Francis obviously intended the first edition to be a trial run: he wrote in the preface to the reader of that edition (a sentence removed in subsequent editions): “If this attempt meets with your approval, you will see what is lacking in it at my first leisure.”

He did as he had pledged, and the second edition of the book came out less than a year after the first. This second edition differed significantly from the original one (which had contained only three parts). Francis reorganized the chapters and

inserted others to fill it out. He explained what he had done in a short “Notice to the Reader,” in which he wrote, “Dear Reader, the second edition presents my little book to you corrected and augmented by several chapters and noteworthy things.”<sup>66</sup> But it turned out that portions were omitted from the second edition during the printing, so in 1610 a third edition was issued (which was also found to contain faults), and finally a fourth in 1619. In all, Francis had made more than a thousand stylistic alterations since the first edition.<sup>67</sup> This final 1619 edition must be considered definitive, since it was the last one published under Francis’s own supervision.

Francis’s major life commitment as an ecclesiastic was to undo what he believed to be the Protestant errors of the Reformation but *also* to correct the Catholic extremes, abuses, and flaws that had provoked the Reformers. For Francis, what came to be called the Catholic Counter-Reformation was still definitely a reformation—and for him that meant wherever possible giving love precedence over law, reason over judgment, and humanity over convention. He was very critical of clerical corruption, indulgences, slack discipline in monastic houses, inadequately educated clergy, absentee bishops, and an upsurge of critical condemnation of humanity by the church.<sup>68</sup> This put Francis in the train of the great Renaissance humanists Petrarch, Giovanni Boccaccio, Leonardo Bruni, Lorenzo de’ Medici, Gerhart Groote, Desiderius Erasmus, Thomas More, Baldassare Castiglione, François Rabelais, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Michel de Montaigne, Giordano Bruno, and Michelangelo. Indeed, it was the humanist Lorenzo Scupoli whose 1589 *Spiritual Combat* (along with Thomas Kempis’s *Imitation of Christ*) became a primary influence in Francis’s spiritual life and writings. Francis could arguably be described as embodying the ultimate maturation and flowering of the Counter-Reformation. He never compromised basic Catholic teaching or core practice but handled all of it with a compassionate and temperate style. To contrast the medieval Church’s approach to that of Francis would be like comparing the twisted skeletal corpus of the Plague Crucifix in Cologne to the radiant humanity of Michelangelo’s David.

At times the exceeding gentleness with which Francis received heretics and sinners almost scandalized his friends, and one of them said to him, “Francis of Sales will go to Paradise, of course; but I am not so sure about the Bishop of Geneva—I am almost afraid his gentleness will play him a shrewd turn.” “Ah,” said the Saint, “I would rather account to God for too great gentleness than for too great severity. Is not God all love? God the Father is the Father of mercy; God the Son is a Lamb; God the Holy Ghost is a Dove—that is, gentleness itself. And are you wiser than God?”<sup>69</sup>

The *Introduction* is one of the earliest books that laid out an effective, systematic, structured process for the development of a life of devotion<sup>70</sup>—and the first one addressed primarily to the laity. (As one author put it: “It is clear that the composition of a purely theoretical work was beyond him.”<sup>71</sup>) This idea that deeply serious piety was within the proper sphere of lay Christians who were not clergy



or vowed monastics tended to be submerged again in the following centuries only to resurface in the work of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s.

In a very real sense, Francis redefined “devotion” and what it meant to be “devout.” For him, “devotion” did not mean pious posturings or multiplied rote prayers, but a simple and true love of God.<sup>72</sup> His spirituality aimed to enhance, embellish, and refine all that is human—one’s life, one’s friendships, one’s relation to others and to God—rather than to deny, abnegate, and warp that humanity.<sup>73</sup> He does not advocate unrealistic austerity and severity, but rather active and willing cooperation with God’s will. His spirituality was a “well-mannered devotion.”<sup>74</sup>

But Francis’s advice was never merely permissive or laissez-faire. He also made strong spiritual demands on his readers and directees. In one case Madame de Chantal’s servants amusingly testified, “Madame’s first guide made her pray only three times a day, and we were all annoyed by it, but the bishop of Geneva makes her pray *all* hours of the day, and this disturbs no one.”<sup>75</sup>

The classical pattern of spiritual growth that lies behind Francis’s directions is that of the Purgative, Illuminative, and Unitive States (or Ways). This paradigm seems to have originated with Pseudo-Dionysius in the late fifth century, and is referred to in the work of Thomas Aquinas, Ignatius of Loyola, Garcia de Cisneros, and John of the Cross, among others.<sup>76</sup>

The Purgative State describes the condition of beginners who have been purged of mortal sin and strive toward true humility by mortification of earthly desires, renunciation of one’s own will in favor of God’s, and the embrace of charity. Most of one’s prayer in this state is meditation on the danger and results of sin. In this state, God is purifying the soul and preparing it for heavenly life.

The Illuminative State describes one for whom mortal sin is fairly easily avoided, and one is absorbed with fresh insights and perceptions concerning the true nature of God. One’s prayer is usually meditation oriented to the Incarnation, and silence and retirement are normative. It is often characterized by fluctuation between significant spiritual solace and desolate barrenness and pain. Patience and faithful loyalty to God are the positive products of this state.

The Unitive State describes one who has entered completely into the love of God and finds total peace in that divine union. All one’s motives are of charity and fulfillment, and prayer becomes mainly a sweet contemplative gazing upon the mystical reality of God and peaceful endurance of whatever trials or ordeals may present themselves. One is not without pain, but the suffering tends to be contextualized and borne with patience and willingness.

The reader will find that Francis has followed this classical paradigm of spiritual development without using the above specific terms. In Part I, he provides his reader with methods to disconnect from the proclivities or desires for sin and earthly consolation. In Part II, he provides instruction about how to raise the soul closer to God in prayer and the reception of the sacraments. In Part III, he advises on ways to develop and practice the virtues. In Part IV, he gives suggestions about

how to avoid temptation. In Part V, he helps the reader to form resolutions and remain steadfast in the peace of the devout life.

From the moment of its first publication, *An Introduction to the Devout Life* has been one of the five or six foundational texts for serious Christian spiritual development, joining such works as Kempis's *Imitation of Christ* and the writings of Ignatius Loyola, Bonaventure, Teresa of Ávila, and John of the Cross—with the advantage that unlike the *Introduction* most of the other works were not addressed to the ordinary Christian layperson. Francis's systematic and methodical proposals remain valid, applicable, and tremendously useful to the modern Christian who wishes seriously to seek a truly devout life.

We might remember Francis's words in his *Treatise on the Love of God* (10, 1):

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

## NOTES ON THE TRANSLATION

Francis personally revised and augmented his book through five editions from 1609 to 1619. Our translation is based on his final 1619 edition. (The *privilege du roi*—royal permission to publish—was given in 1608, but the first edition was not actually printed until 1609.) During the seventeenth century and thereafter, there have been many *unauthorized* editions—mostly by Protestant writers who made illicit additions and omissions. By 1656 the book had been translated into more than seventeen different languages.

Francis addresses the book to an unidentified “Philothea” (Latin: female “Lover of God”). In my translation, I have replaced that specific name with “my child.” Francis was criticized for addressing the book to a female, and some men apparently dismissed the book for that reason. But Francis replied to the criticism in his (later) *Treatise on the Love of God* by saying: “It is the *soul* that aspires to devotion that I chose to name ‘Philothea’—and men have souls as well as women.”

In this work I have attempted to take the reader along with me on the translation path by frequently explaining a particular turn of phrase or unusual grammatical structure. I do this especially since my translation sometimes varies considerably from other “standard” translations and I want the reader to know why.

One of a translator’s challenges has to do with French names and titles. *François de Sales* is a French name that in simple translation would be “Francis of Sales.” However the name “Francis de Sales” (translating the *François* but retaining the French *de*) has become virtually universal. So, I make no claim to any consistency in my translations of names and titles—I have tended to keep the French forms, translating when it seems necessary. In order to simplify matters somewhat, I have also resorted to the use of first names rather than extended proper names and titles for the major characters.

I have frequently chosen to retain Gallicisms when they most accurately convey Francis’s specific meaning—however stilted they may sound in English. Father Henry Mackey, OSB, wrote in his preface to his translation of de Sales’s *Treatise on the Love of God* (Benziger; New York; 1884): “One must be extremely careful, in obliterating Gallicisms, not to injure or destroy what belongs to the very texture of the style. St. Francis’s work cannot be made to read as easily as do the empty, superficial writings of the day, or to appear in a spick-and-span modern English dress.”

To my mind, modernization of such a historical text saps it of its beauty, its power, and its historical setting. Consequently, unlike so many current translators, I have tried to avoid modernizing or remodeling Francis's often elegant language as long as its meaning is plain and clear—however over-formal it may sound in English. For example, in Part V, Chapter 13, Francis wrote: "Ah! My God! How deeply must we imprint this upon our memory!" One modernizer translated that as "Surely we ought ever to remember this." (Rivingtons; London; 1876).

Possibly the greatest challenge to a de Sales translator are the words that over the years have come to carry a formal and technical meaning in systems of ascetical theology. It is doubly awkward because for the most part these narrowly defined words have been brought over into English—but they have such a particularity of use that they sound extremely odd. For example, *profession* describes a declaration of acceptance of God's will, an open avowal or expression of dedication; *protestation* describes an affirmation or assertion (never a modern "protest"); *résolution* describes a determination to act or behave in a certain way; a *consolation* describes a kind of spiritual reward or emotional recompense following a virtuous act; an *action* ("act" in English) of contrition (or of thanksgiving, or of oblation, or the like) describes a short prayer of that particular nature. Unlike most translators, I have tried to avoid the use of these technical words and replaced them with more meaningful and accurate synonyms wherever possible.

Unless otherwise noted, all scriptural references are in my own translation of the Latin Clementine Vulgate of 1598 (the Bible Francis would have known and used). The numbering of the Psalms and the naming of some books in the Vulgate differ from the more familiar modern numbering and naming. When that occurs, I have used the Vulgate citation and added the more familiar citation in brackets, for instance, Psalm 76:4 [77:3] or 2 Kings 14:24 [2 Samuel].

Francis uses the French *Vive Jésus* almost as a maxim. It cannot be adequately translated into English. Literally, it would be "Live, Jesus!" which sounds rather foolish. (Usually, the *Vive* is translated as "Long live...", as in *Vive le roi* meaning "Long live the king"—probably originally a version of the older Eastern salutation, "O King, live forever" [see Daniel 5:10 or Nehemiah 2:3]—but that seems simply too odd when applied to Jesus.) I think the sense of it is almost something like "Hoorah for Jesus." I have chosen to leave the phrase in French in my translation.

I have occasionally repeated commentary notes, when a matter arises more than once and several chapters apart. I assume that few will read the book straight through, and so the reader may well have forgotten a particular notation when encountering the same words some days later.

Finally, it must be recognized that while the *Introduction* is an extremely useful and deeply significant document for the modern Christian, it is, after all, a historical document, and it must be read with the understanding that its language, images, and ethos reflect the culture of early seventeenth-century,

post-Reformation, French Catholicism. (It may be remembered that Galileo Galilei was born only three years before de Sales and Galileo's heliocentric writings were condemned by the papacy in exactly the same year as the last autograph edition of the *Introduction*.) Certainly any intelligent reader can make the obvious and necessary historical adjustments while enjoying this treasure of a book.

John-Julian, OJN



# PREFACE

BY ST. FRANCIS  
DE SALES

## COMMENTARY ON THE PREFACE

- a. Pausias was an ancient Greek painter, living in the early fourth century BC in the city of Sicyon, which at the time was home to several great classical Greek sculptors, artists, and poets. It is said that Pausias invented the encaustic method of painting in which beeswax was colored with pigments and then applied to the surface using heated metal tools, so that the resulting painting would be thick and three-dimensional. Francis refers to the legend that Pausias attempted this new technique in an effort to portray flowers as beautifully as his mistress, the flower-girl Glycera, did in the floral wreaths she made for sale. Pausias is said to have painted Glycera with a garland of flowers in what was considered his masterpiece, a copy of which was purchased by Lucullus at Athens at the massive price of two talents—over \$600,000 today (Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 21.2).
- b. Francis seems to use the Pausias/Glycera story as emphasizing the *variety* of flowers tried by the painter rather than the *realistic depiction* of them, which was the point of the original story.
- c. The author takes special pains to protest that he does not mean to introduce any new doctrines, but only to propound some *methods* that may be new to his reader. It must also be remembered that Francis is writing during the lifetimes and teachings of Teresa of Ávila and John of the Cross, when there was great controversy and suspicion concerning contemplative prayer.
- d. *Palma Christi* was the medieval name for the plant *Ricinus communis* (the seeds of which are the source of castor oil). The plant was called “Palma Christi” because of its shiny green hand-shaped leaves and its almost miraculous healing powers. Animals tend not to eat the plant because of its unpleasant taste. This is another of Francis’s extreme analogies: as animals avoid the plant, so ordinary Christians avoid true sanctity.
- e. A belief of the ancients found in Pliny’s *Naturalis Historia* 9.35.
- f. The Chelidonian Isles are in the Mediterranean Sea in the Gulf of Lycia in southwest Turkey. Pliny the Elder (AD 23–79) in his *Historia* (2.105) wrote, “There are many places in which fresh water may be procured from the sea, as at the Chelidonian Isles....”
- g. The “firemoth” (also called “atlas moth”) is a moth of the genus *Pyroi* (Greek for “fiery”) of the Noctuidae family. It is colored in brilliant oranges, reds, and yellows, and the legend is that its colors come from its flying through flame (Aristotle, *Historia Animalium* 5.19 and Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 11.36).



## PREFACE BY ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

My dear Reader, I ask that you read this Preface for your own benefit and for mine.

It is said that in ancient times Glycera knew how to vary the design and arrangement of her flowers so completely that with the very same blooms she could create such a huge variety of bouquets that the painter Pausias was simply stopped short when he tried to imitate that diversity of expression, for he could not vary his painting technique in as many ways as Glycera did her bouquets.<sup>a</sup> So, too, the Holy Spirit orders and displays the lessons of holiness that he gives through the tongues and the pens of his servants, with so great a variety that while the doctrine is always the same, nevertheless, the expressions in which it is articulated are certainly different, according to the varied means by which they are expressed.<sup>b</sup> I cannot, of course (nor do I want to) write in this *Introduction* what has already been published by our predecessors on this subject; they are the same flowers that I present to you, my Reader, but the bouquet that I have made will be different from theirs, because of the variety of designs in which it is fashioned.<sup>c</sup>

Almost all who have written about the holy life have mainly paid attention to those who have completely withdrawn from the business of the world; or at least, they have taught a kind of devotion that leads to such complete withdrawal. But my purpose here is to instruct those who live in towns, on farms, or at court, and whose situation necessitates that they live an ordinary life in external matters. These people are apt to avoid all efforts to lead a holy life, under the pretext of it allegedly being impossible—that since no animal ventures to eat the plant called *Palma Christi*,<sup>d</sup> so no one living in the press of earthly affairs ought to venture to seek the palm of Christian piety.

And so I have meant to show them that as the oysters live in the sea but absorb not even a drop of salt water in their shells,<sup>e</sup> and as near the Chelidonian Isles<sup>f</sup> springs of sweet water spring forth in the middle of the ocean, and as the firemoth<sup>g</sup> flies in the flames without burning its wings, so a strong and faithful soul can live in the world untainted by the worldly atmosphere, finding a spring of holy piety among the bitter waves of this age, and flying amidst the flames of earthly lusts without singeing the wings of sacred desires for the sanctified life. Truly this is difficult, and because of that I would like Christians to give more effort and energy than before in the present, and so it is that, while aware of my own weakness, I shall attempt by this book to provide some help to those who are beginning this noble work with a benevolent heart.

However it is not by my own choice or inclination that brings this *Introduction* out in public. A soul, truly rich in honor and virtue, at one time received from God the grace to seek the holy life and begged my own assistance with this matter. We

- a. This was Louise de Châtel, Madame de Charmois, wife of Francis's first cousin once removed, Claude de Charmois, who was the ambassador of the Duke of Savoy. She placed herself under Francis's direction in April 1607, when she was about to leave Annecy for six months. Francis gave her some brief treatises (*Mémoires*) he had written, and these became the core of the resulting book. (Mme de Chamoisy's home—the Chamoisy House in Annecy—has been preserved and is open to visitors.)
- b. A marginal note in the 1609 edition: "It was R. P. Jean Fourier, SJ, then Rector of the Jesuit College of Chambery." Fourier was also Francis's spiritual director at the time, and his letter to Francis of March 25, 1608, urging him to publish his memos to Mme. de Charmois survives.
- c. The clause in italics is a variant reading found in some manuscripts.
- d. The French is *religieux et gens de dévotion*—literally, "religious and people of devotion." When the word "religious" is used as a noun it refers to monks and nuns; "people of devotion" means those who have given themselves entirely to God, often translated as "hermits."
- e. Francis was bishop of Geneva, Switzerland, where he was faced with a primary stronghold of Protestantism and the one-time residence of John Calvin himself. The bishops of Geneva had had the status of princes of the Holy Roman Empire but were literally ejected from the city in 1536 by the Protestants.
- f. In the Middle Ages, it was believed that the Dionysius referred to in Acts 17:34 was St. Denis, the first bishop of Paris who was also author of the famous mystical composition *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, which claimed (5:6–7) that the *potestas magisterii* ("power of teaching") belongs only to those who have also the "power of order," that is, to the pope and the bishops—thus supporting Francis's claim that he was an appropriate teacher. In about 1121, the famed scholar Abelard separated the confusing three Dionysiuses, and modern scholarship proved the book was written by an anonymous Christian in late fifth to early sixth centuries.

were linked by various ties, and for a long time I had noted her inclination toward this goal, so I undertook carefully to teach her, and after leading her through a variety of procedures appropriate to her wish and situation, I allowed her to write down records of my teachings, to which she could turn when needed.<sup>a</sup> These she shared with a great, wise, and devout monk<sup>b</sup> who, believing that they might benefit others, urged me strongly to make them public. His effort was successful mainly because his friendship had great impact on my decision, and his judgment great influence over my own judgment.

So, in order to make the material more useful and suitable, I have reviewed the papers and arranged them together, adding some bits to carry out my intention, but all of this has been done in a great rush. That is why you will find very little precision, but please see it rather as a collection of well-meant advice, which I explain in clear and intelligible words, for that at least is what I have tried to do. But I have given no thought to refinement because I have had so many other projects at hand.

I have addressed my advice to an imaginary “Philothea,” adapting what was at first written for a particular person to apply to the common needs of a wider number. I have chosen a name appropriate for all who seek after a holy life, since “Philothea” means “a lover of God” *and the soul which seeks the love of God begins to be in love*<sup>c</sup> Thus placing before me a soul who seeks the love of God through a holy life, I have set up this *Introduction* in five parts: in the first of which I try by recommendations and activities to change Philothea’s simple desire into a strong resolution to act—which resolution she is to make after a general confession, by an intentional profession, followed by receiving Holy Communion, during which she gives herself to her Savior and receives him in return and is gladly received into his holy love. That done, I guide her onward by showing her two important means of closer union with his divine Majesty: the Sacraments (by which our gracious Lord comes to us) and holy prayer (by which he draws us to himself). This is the second part. In the third part I describe how she should put into practice specific virtues most appropriate to her development, only emphasizing such particular items that she might not find anywhere else or be unable to work out for herself. In the fourth part I point out the traps set by some of her spiritual enemies and show her how to pass safely through these traps and escape unharmed. And, last, in the fifth part, I lead her aside to rejuvenate herself, take a long breath, and restore her strength, so that thereafter she can go on more boldly and make good progress in the holy life.

This age is very peculiar, and I predict that many would say that it seems that only monastics and people under vows are fit to undertake the guidance of souls in such exceptionally holy ways:<sup>d</sup> that it requires more time than a bishop of as so important a diocese as mine could spare,<sup>e</sup> and that it must take too much attention away from being used for important things. But, dear reader, I reply with the great Saint Denis<sup>f</sup> that the task of leading souls toward perfection appertains above all others to bishops because their order is supreme among mortals, as the seraphim are among

- a. In the Christian tradition, the seraphim are a category of angels. The Hebrew word *seraphim* is related to the word for “to burn” and led to the idea that the seraphim were extremely fervent in their burning love for God, and so they were ranked the highest in the nine orders of angels.
- b. Timothy, Titus, and Philemon are found in their eponymous epistles in the Bible. Thecla appears in the apocryphal second-century book *The Acts of Saints Paul and Thecla* that told of Thecla’s conversion and her martyrdom. Onesimus appears in Philemon and Colossians. “Appia, our sister” appears in Philemon 1:2.
- c. According to Papias (c. 60–130), Mark was Peter’s “interpreter” and Peter refers to him as “my son Mark” (1 Pet. 5:13). Early legend held that Petronilla was the daughter of Saint Peter (see the apocryphal *Acts of St. Peter*). However, the Oratorian historians Cesare Bronius (1538–1607) and Antonio Galonius (1557–1605) disproved the legend. Petronilla may have been Peter’s servant or a convert, or the tradition may have developed merely from their similar names.
- d. The opening of the Second Epistle of John: “The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth . . .” (2 Jn. 1). Some modern scholars have suggested that the “elect lady” may refer not to an individual person but metaphorically to one or more of the churches founded by St. John in Asia Minor. Francis seems to think the word *electa* (“elect”) was the lady’s *name* rather than an adjective—hence, it is often translated as “the lady Electa.”
- e. Italian grape-pickers to this day are usually women, who carry massive four-foot-tall conical baskets on their backs.
- f. “Arabia Felix” is one third of ancient Arabia—comprising the present Yemen and Oman. The Greek geographer Strabo mentions cinnamon from Arabia Felix (*De situ Orbis*. 1. 937).
- g. Francis overcomplicates his metaphor by introducing tiger *hunting*: his point is made simply by indicating that the tigress carries her cub to safety, no matter how large or heavy the cub.
- h. Pocetto claims that this “great man of letters” was Erasmus (*Ecclesial Dimensions* 12).
- i. This seems to be the woman St. Augustine referred to as “our most religious daughter Flora” in his treatise “On Care of the Dead,” which he wrote to Bishop Paulinus (Augustine, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Father, First Series*, Philip Schaff, ed., vol. 3, *S. Augustine’s Short Treatises*).

the angels,<sup>a</sup> and therefore their leisure time cannot be more appropriately spent. The ancient bishops and Fathers of the Church were, to say the least, as devoted to their responsibilities as we are, yet they did not refuse to undertake the individual guidance of several souls who sought their help, as we see by their epistles—thereby imitating the apostles themselves, who, while reaping the world-harvest, yet found time to gather up certain individual sheaves with special and personal affection. Who can fail to remember that Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Onesimus, Thecla, and Appia<sup>b</sup> were the beloved spiritual children of the great Saint Paul, as Saint Mark and Saint Petronilla<sup>c</sup> were of Saint Peter (for Baronius and Galonius have given learned and absolute proof that Saint Petronilla was not his carnal but spiritual daughter)? And is not one of Saint John's canonical epistles addressed to the "elect lady" whom he loved in the faith?<sup>d</sup>

I concede that the guidance of particular souls is an effort, but an effort that is a comfort, just as that of harvesters and grape-pickers<sup>e</sup> who are never more pleased than when most busy and heavily burdened. It is a work that refreshes and revives the heart by the comfort that it brings to those who bear it; as is said to be the case of those who carry bundles of cinnamon in Arabia Felix.<sup>f</sup> It is said that the tigress, having found one of her young left behind by the hunter on the road in order to distract her while he carries off the rest of her litter, takes it up—no matter how big—without seeming overweighted, and speeds only the more swiftly to her den, natural love lightening the burden.<sup>g</sup> How much more readily will a fatherly heart bear the burden of a soul that he finds longing for holy perfection carrying it on his breast as a mother her little child, without feeling the beloved burden? But without doubt, it is necessary that this must be a fatherly heart; and that is why the apostles and their apostolic followers are wont to call their disciples not merely their children but, even more tenderly still, their "little children."

But, besides that, my dear reader, it is true that I write about the devout life without being devout myself (but most certainly not without the desire to become so, and it is this desire which gives me the courage to instruct you), for, as a great man of letters has said, "A good way to learn is to study; a better way is to listen; and the very best way is to teach."<sup>h</sup> It happens often, said Saint Augustine, writing to his devout Florentina,<sup>i</sup> that the position of giver includes the right to receive, and the position of teacher, the basis for learning.

- a. The story is told in Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia* (1.25.10). Apelles used Campaspe as the nude model for his famous painting of Aphrodite rising out of the sea. Interestingly, the apocryphal account appears in none of the five major biographies of Alexander.
- b. It is significant that Francis makes a distinction between "the common virtues" and the spirituality he intends to promote in this book—so, although he claims his advice is not just for monastics, it is clear that what he offers is not the normal spiritual fare of the ordinary Christian but is offered only to those who wish to take their spirituality more seriously than most.
- c. The French genders are confusing here, and most translators have been trapped by the fact that while the French *Majesté* is a feminine noun, it is masculine in definition. So, the words *elle me la donnera* seem to say "*she* may give me *herself* in marriage eternal," when in fact the pronouns refer to the noun "Majesty" and should be translated in the masculine. Francis here refers to a kind of "spiritual espousal" so common in the literature of the mystics.
- d. The reference is to Genesis 24, in which Abraham's elderly servant has been sent back to his native city of Nahor to obtain a bride for his son Isaac. When the servant arrives at the well of Nahor, he meets Rebecca, who offers to draw water for his camels, which he takes as a sign that she is to be Isaac's wife, and he then gives her "jewelry of gold and of silver."
- e. Francis shows himself to be an exemplary Catholic—submitting everything he says or does to the judgment of the Church. This would have been a significant statement in the midst of the Reformation fever rampant in Europe at the time.
- f. Although Francis originally dated his Preface in 1608, the work was not published until 1609. St. Mary Magdalen's liturgical feast day is July 22. (Note: Although this Preface is dated 1608, Francis updated it for its inclusion in this 1619 edition.)

Alexander caused the beautiful Campaspe,<sup>a</sup> who was so dear to him, to be painted by the hand of the matchless artist Apelles, who, forced to gaze upon Campaspe lengthily, just as he painted the picture on his table, so love was imprinted in his heart, and he became so passionate that Alexander, having recognized it and having pity on him, gave her to him in marriage, depriving himself for love of Apelles, his dearest friend in the world: in which, says Pliny, he showed the grandeur of his heart, as much as he did in his greatest victory.

And now it is my opinion, my reader, my friend, that being a bishop, God wishes that I engrave on the hearts of people not only the common virtues,<sup>b</sup> but even God's dearest and most beloved devotion; and for my part, I undertake this willingly, as much out of obedience and to do my duty as for the hope that what I engrave on the spirit of others may lead my own to become a holy lover. Thus, if his Divine Majesty sees me deeply in love, he may give me himself in eternal marriage.<sup>c</sup> The beautiful and chaste Rebecca, watering the camels of Isaac, was destined to be his bride and received her share of earrings and golden bracelets;<sup>d</sup> just so I count on the immense goodness of my God that, while leading his beloved lambs to the wholesome waters of devotion, he will take my soul to be his spouse, putting in my ears the golden words of his holy love, and in my arms the strength to carry out his works, in which lies the essence of true devotion, which I beg his Majesty that he will wish to provide to me and to all the children of his Church—the Church to which I would always submit my writings, my actions, my words, my wishes, and my thoughts.<sup>e</sup>

*Annecy, St. Magdalen's Day, 1608<sup>f</sup>*





# PART ONE

CONTAINING  
RECOMMENDATIONS  
AND ACTIVITIES  
NECESSARY TO GUIDE  
THE SOUL—FROM HER  
FIRST LONGING FOR THE  
DEVOUT LIFE TO HER  
FINAL FIRM RESOLUTION  
TO EMBRACE IT

PART ONE  
COMMENTARY ON CHAPTER I

- a. This may account for more spiritual “failures” than almost any other aspect of the spiritual life: that is, setting out with an erroneous (and usually far too exalted) understanding of the goal one hopes to reach. It is a pitfall when one insists on measuring one’s “spiritual growth” by comparing it to some objective distant aspiration. Far better to concentrate on faithfulness in the present, and leave the outcome to God.
- b. Arelius (also, Arellius) was a Roman painter “near the age of Augustus.” (Brewster, David, ed.; *The Edinburgh Encyclopædia*...; J. & E. Parker; Philadelphia; 1832, 15:287). The oddity Francis recounts is found in Pliny (*Naturalis Historia* 24.22, 25.10).
- c. It seems strange that Francis includes the nonpayment of debts at the same level of spiritual significance as malice, spitefulness, slander, harmful language, and refusing forgiveness to one’s enemies. It seems a clear indication that he addresses a reader more deeply committed than may have been common.
- d. Another example of Francis’s intention to press for a “more than ordinary spirituality.”
- e. A reference to 1 Samuel 19:11–16: “Saul sent his guards to David’s house to take custody of him, that he might be killed in the morning. And when Michal, David’s wife, had told him, saying: ‘Unless you save yourself this night, tomorrow you will die.’ She let him down through a window. And he went and fled away and escaped. And Michal took a statue and laid it in the bed, and put a goat’s skin with the hair at the head of it, and covered it with clothes. And Saul sent officers to seize David: and it was answered that he was ill. And again Saul sent messengers to see David, saying, ‘Bring him to me in his bed, that he may be slain.’ And when the officers had come in, they found the image upon the bed and a goat’s skin at the head.”
- f. The French has *statues et fantômes*—literally, “statues and phantoms.”
- g. Francis distinguishes between “grace” (uniting one with God), and “charity” (motivating good works), and “sanctity” (habitual goodness integrated into one’s personality). [Note: again I have translated Francis’s *dévotion* as “sanctity.”]

## ☞ PART I. CHAPTER 1.

### *A Description of True Sanctity*

You long for a sanctity, most dear one, because, since you are a Christian, you know that that is a way of living that is very pleasing to the divine Majesty; but since small mistakes committed in the beginning of this kind of undertaking expand a lot as you go along and at the end become too strong to overcome,<sup>a</sup> so it is of crucial importance that you know what the reality of that holiness is—especially since, while there is only one true sanctity, there is a great assortment of false and futile imitations, and if you do not know which one is the true one, you can deceive yourself and think it is pleasant to follow some notion that is disrespectful and false.

It is said that the artist Arelius<sup>b</sup> used to portray all the faces of the figures he painted with the air and appearance of the women he loved, and similarly everyone portrays sanctity as agreeing with their own desire and fantasy. One who is devoted to fasting considers himself truly holy as long as he is fasting, even though his heart may be full of malice. And in this fasting, while he may not allow himself to dip his tongue into wine or even water, he does not hesitate to soak it in another person's blood by his spitefulness and slander. Someone else considers himself holy because he says a great many prayers every day, but afterward his same tongue is aimed at harmful, haughty, and destructive words among his family and neighbors. Another freely takes the contents of his purse to give as alms to the poor, but he cannot open the warmth of his heart to forgive his enemies; while another may pardon his enemies but will never pay what is due to his creditors unless forced by law.<sup>c</sup>

All those people are ordinarily considered to be religious, but they are not in any way truly holy.<sup>d</sup> Saul's men searched for David in his house, but David's wife, Michal, having put a statue in a bed and covered it with David's bedclothes, persuaded them that it was David himself who lay ill;<sup>e</sup> in the same way, so many people cover themselves with a number of external actions that look like holy sanctity, and the world thinks they are truly devout and spiritual people; but in truth they are nothing but hollow mannequins and caricatures of holiness.<sup>f</sup>

But true and living sanctity takes it for granted that one loves God—so sanctity is really nothing else than true love of God—but not merely a love that is ordinary, because when divine love adorns our soul, it is called “grace,” making us amenable to his divine Majesty; when it gives us the strength to do good, it is called “charity”—but when it attains the degree of perfection in which it is not only doing good but acting intentionally, constantly, and without hesitation, then it is called “sanctity.”<sup>g</sup> The ostrich never flies at all—chickens do fly, but they do so heavily, miserably, and seldom—but the eagles, the doves, and the swallows fly repeatedly, swiftly, and they rise sky-high. In the same way, sinners do not rise upward toward God, because all

- a. Psalm 118:35 [119:35]: “Lead me into the path of your commandments....”
- b. The French is *conseils et inspirations*—literally, “counsels and inspirations.” It is interesting that the traditional monastic vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience are based on the “Dominical Counsels” (that is, “counsels of the Lord”)—which differentiate between the Lord’s “commands” (that are mandated) and his “counsels” (that are only suggested or advised). Monastics do “more than is required” of ordinary Christians—and it seems that that is what Francis is asking of his directee.

#### COMMENTARY ON CHAPTER 2

- c. Numbers 13:33–34 [13:32–33]: “And they spoke ill of the land, which they had viewed, before the children of Israel, saying: ‘The land which we have viewed, devours its inhabitants: the people that we observed are of a tall stature...in comparison with whom, we seemed like locusts.’”
- d. See Numbers 13:31, 14:6–8 [13:30, 14:6–9]: “In the meantime, Caleb, to still the murmuring of the people that rose against Moses, said: ‘Let us go up and possess the land, for we shall be able to conquer it’” and “Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephone, who themselves had also viewed the land, rent their garments, and said to the multitude of the children of Israel: ‘The land which we have gone round is very good: if the Lord be favorable, he will bring us into it, and give us a land flowing with milk and honey. Be not rebellious against the Lord: and fear not the people of this land, for we are able to eat them up as bread. All aid is gone from them: the Lord is with us, fear not.’”
- e. Francis compares the labor involved in devout living to Israel’s winning possession of the Promised Land—it involves pain, suffering, and deprivation, but in the end it is sweet, happy, and cordial.

their efforts are earthly and intended for the earth; the good people who have not yet reached sanctity fly to God by their good actions, but rarely, slowly, and heavily; the holy people fly to God frequently, without delay, and to lofty heights. In short, sanctity is nothing but a spiritual agility and alertness by means of which charity does its work in us, or we by means of that charity act swiftly and lovingly; and just as charity makes us generally and universally to practice all the commandments of God, so too sanctity makes us do them swiftly and diligently. That is why one may not consider a person who does not obey all the commandments of God either good or holy, because to be good one must have charity, but to be holy in addition to charity one must add great energy and alacrity to charitable actions.

And since all that sanctity lies in some degree of exceptional charity, not only does sanctity make us prompt and active and diligent in observing all God's commandments, but besides that, she provokes us to do promptly and affectionately as many good deeds as we can—even those which are not required of us but are only recommended or encouraged. For just as a man who has recently recovered from some illness walks only as far as is necessary, but slowly and heavily, so the sinner recovering from his iniquity walks as far as God commands him, but slowly and heavily until he attains to sanctity; for then, like a fully cured man, he not only walks, but he runs and leaps in the path of God's commandments<sup>a</sup> and, moreover, he goes and runs in the paths of the heavenly suggestions and inspirations.<sup>b</sup> Finally, charity and sanctity are no more different from one another than “flame” and “fire”—in that charity is a spiritual fire that when it is fanned into flame becomes sanctity: so that sanctity adds nothing to the fire of charity except the flame that makes charity swift and diligent—not only in observing God's commandments, but in the exercise of the counsels and heavenly inspirations.



## PART I. CHAPTER 2.

### *The Property and Excellence of Sanctity*

Those who discouraged the Israelites from going into the Promised Land told them that it was a land that devours the inhabitants;<sup>c</sup> that is, that the climate was so unhealthy that one could not live long, and that also the inhabitants were men of so great a stature that they ate other men like locusts. It is just so, my dear child, that the world deprecates holy devotion as much as possible, depicting devout people with a melancholy visage, sad and sorrowful, and affirming that religion gives dismal and miserable moods. But even as Joshua and Caleb protested that not only was the Promised Land good and fair, but also that the Israelites would take an easy and pleasant possession of it,<sup>d</sup> so the Holy Spirit tells us through the mouth of all the saints, and our Lord has told us with his own lips, that a holy life is sweet, happy, and genial.<sup>e</sup>

- a. Francis has here compiled a list of the actions and attitudes he considers valuable and laudable in the life of a Christian. It could be used as a checklist for Christian virtue.
- b. True thyme honey is usually touted as the finest honey on earth and is available only from bees in Greece, Malta, North Africa, and New Zealand.
- c. Known as “the breaking wheel,” it was a medieval instrument of torture: the victim was spread-eagled on a large wagon wheel with spokes, and then, with a cudgel, the bones of the victim’s limbs were broken between the spokes. Unless a *coup de grâce* were given, the mutilated victim could live for hours or days.
- d. St. Paul’s words: “I know both how to be humiliated, and I know how to abound both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound, and to suffer destitution” (Phil. 4:12).
- e. The reference is to Genesis 28:12—“And [Jacob] saw in his sleep a ladder standing upon the earth, and the top of it touching heaven: and also the angels of God ascending and descending by it.” [Note: The Hebrew word *sullam* might better translate as “staircase” than as “ladder.”]
- f. Jacob’s vision included seeing angels ascending and descending on the ladder: it is the flight of Francis’s imagination that he can describe them as “mortals with the heart of angels” or “angels with human form.” If, as Genesis describes, they were “angels,” then they had to take human form to be seen, but to call them “mortals with the heart of angels” is pious fantasy.
- g. Francis’s rhapsodizing on the metaphor of Jacob’s ladder is an extensive Gallican fancy in which he imagines the scene and projects his personal vision of the dream as an expansive allegory of spiritual perfection. It is interesting that he sees these beings as “descending” by helping and supporting their neighbors and “ascending” by contemplative prayer to union with God—thereby validating a Christian’s obligations both to (1) service of one’s fellow humans and (2) prayerful union with God.
- h. A translation challenge—because *la charité* can be translated either as “charity” or “love” and *la dévotion* can be translated as “devotion” or “sanctity.” One is also reminded of St. Paul’s words: “We are the good odor of Christ to God, in those who are saved” (2 Cor. 2:15).

The world sees that devout persons fast, pray, endure injuries, minister to the sick, give to the poor, are careful, restrain their anger, smother and stifle their passions, deny themselves all sensual pleasures, and do many other things which in themselves and in their nature are tough and rigorous.<sup>a</sup> But the world does not see the inner and heartfelt devotion that makes all these actions pleasant, sweet, and easy. Watch a bee hovering over the thyme—they gather very bitter juices—but by sucking, the bee turns them all to honey<sup>b</sup> because that is the bee's true nature. O, worldly ones, though admittedly the devout souls find much bitterness in their exercises of mortification, in doing them they convert them into sweetness and pleasure. The fires, the flames, the wheel,<sup>c</sup> the swords seemed like flowers and perfumes to the martyrs because they were godly people. And if devotion can soften the cruelest torments and even death itself, what will it do for exercises of virtue?

Sugar sweetens unripe fruits and compensates for the rawness and bitterness even of those that are ripe. Just so, devotion is the real spiritual sweetening that takes away all the bitterness from mortifications and the pain of the consolations: it removes sorrow from the poor, and presumption from the rich, desolation from the oppressed, insolence from the prosperous, sadness from the solitary, and dissipation from those who are in society; it serves as fire in winter and dew in summer; it knows how to abound and how to suffer want;<sup>d</sup> how to use both honor and contempt; it accepts pleasure and pain with an equal heart and fills us with a marvelous sweetness.

Ponder Jacob's ladder<sup>e</sup> (for it is a true picture of the devout life)—the two sides that support the steps represent (1) the prayer which seeks the love of God, and (2) the Sacraments which confer that love; the steps themselves are simply the various degrees of love by which one goes on from virtue to virtue, either descending by the exercise of help and support of our neighbor, or ascending by contemplation to a loving union with God. Consider, too, those who are on this ladder: they are mortals who have the hearts of angels, or angels with human forms.<sup>f</sup> They are not youthful, but they seem to be because of their vigor and spiritual liveliness. They have wings to fly and soar into God by holy prayer, but they also have feet to walk with humans for a holy and cordial conversation; their faces are beautiful and merry, the more so as they accept all things gently and sweetly; their legs, their arms, and their heads are all uncovered, because their thoughts, their affections, and their actions have no motive or object except to please God. The rest of their bodies are covered with a beautiful and light robe, because while they truly use the world and the things of the earth, they use all in a very pure and sincere way, taking only what is necessary for their condition—such are the truly holy persons.<sup>g</sup>

Believe me, dear child, sanctity is the sweetest of sweets, the queen of virtues, for it is the perfection of charity. If charity is milk, sanctity is the cream; if it is a plant, sanctity is the flower; if it is a precious stone, sanctity is its brightness; if it is a precious balm, sanctity is its perfume, even that sweet odor that delights mortals and delights the angels.<sup>h</sup>

COMMENTARY ON CHAPTER 3

- a. See Genesis 1:11–23: “And [God] said, ‘Let the earth bring forth the green herb and the fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind, which may have seed in itself upon the earth. And it was so done. And the earth brought forth the green herb, and such as yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that bears fruit, having seed each one according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.’”
- b. Psalm 51:10 [52:8]: “But I, as a fruitful olive tree in the house of God, have hoped in the mercy of God forever, yea for ever and ever.”
- c. Carthusians live separately as hermits, coming together only for worship and a weekly meal.
- d. Capuchins are an order of strict Franciscans founded in 1520. They stress a life of strict poverty, solitude, and penance. Their name comes from the hood (*cappuccio*) they adopted as part of their habit.
- e. Francis was the bishop of Geneva, where all Catholics had been driven from the city and everything Catholic was despised. The “complaint and ridicule” came from the critical Protestants.
- f. The exact quote is not found in Aristotle, but the source may be Virgil, who declares the bees are “just” in that they do no harm and repay a farmer’s investment in them (*Georgics* 4.i).



## ☞ PART I. CHAPTER 3.

### *That Sanctity Is Suitable to Every Vocation and Profession*

In creating the world, God commanded each plant to bear its own fruit,<sup>a</sup> and in the same way he bids Christians—who are the living plants of his Church<sup>b</sup>—to bring forth fruits of devotion, each one according to his nature and calling. Devotion must be exercised differently for the noble, the craftsman, the servant, the prince, the widow, the young girl, and the wife; and not only that, but it is necessary to accommodate the practice of devotion according to the strength, the business, and the duties of each separate individual. I ask you, my child, would it be fitting that the bishop should wish to be a hermit like the Carthusians?<sup>c</sup> And if the married men wished to put aside nothing more than the Capuchins<sup>d</sup> do, if the craftsman spent all day in church like a monk, if the monk involved himself in all manner of business for the good of his neighbor as a bishop does, would not such a devotion be ridiculous, disorderly, and intolerable?

Nevertheless such a mistake is often made, and the world—which cannot or will not discriminate between true sanctity and the impropriety of those who *think* they are holy—complains and ridicules the practice of devotion, which cannot defend itself against such disorders.<sup>e</sup>

No indeed, my child, devotion does not harm anything when it is true, but on the contrary it improves everything; and when it goes against the proper vocation of anyone it is undoubtedly false. Aristotle says that the bee sucks its honey from flowers without bothering them,<sup>f</sup> leaving them as whole and fresh as it found them; but true devotion does better still, for not only does it not harm any sort of vocation or activity, but, contrariwise, it adorns and embellishes them. All kinds of precious stones thrown into honey become more brilliant—each one according to its color—and each person becomes better in his or her calling when coupled with devotion. The care of the family is made peaceful there, the love of husband and wife more sincere, service to our King more faithful, all kinds of occupations more pleasant and agreeable. It is an error, indeed a heresy, to wish to banish the devout life from the company of soldiers, the workshop of the craftsman, the court of princes, or the households of families. It is true, my child, that a purely contemplative, monastic, and ascetic devotion cannot be practiced in these other callings, but in addition to these three kinds of devout life, there are several others proper to guide those in the secular state toward perfection. Examples from the Old Testament are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, David, Job, Tobias, Sarah, Rebecca, and Judith; and in the New Testament Saint Joseph, Lydia, and Crispus led perfectly devout lives in their trades; we have Saint Anne, Martha, Saint Monica, Aquila and Priscilla in their households; Cornelius, Saint Sebastian, and Saint Maurice with their military arms; Constantine, Saint Helena, Saint Louis, the Blessed Amadeus,

- a. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were the Hebrew patriarchs. David was the king of Judea. Job was the protagonist in the book of Job. Tobias appears in the apocryphal book of Tobias. Sarah was Abraham's wife, Rebecca the wife of Isaac, and Judith the Israelite heroine who assassinated Holofernes, the commander of the enemy troops besieging her city. Joseph was the husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary; Lydia was "a certain woman a seller of purple [dye] of the city of Thyatira" with whom St. Paul lodged (Acts 16:14–15, 40); Crispus was the "ruler of the synagogue" in Corinth who was converted and personally baptized by St. Paul (Acts 18:8, 1 Cor. 1:14). St. Anne was traditionally held to be Mary's mother but does not appear in Scripture; Martha is the housekeeper at Bethany (Lk. 10:39–41, Jn. 11:1–29, 12:2). St. Monica was the mother of St. Augustine; Aquila and Priscilla were a married couple who were driven from Rome to Corinth, where they met Paul, who called them his "helpers in Jesus Christ" (Rom. 16:3). Their home was a refuge for Christians. St. Cornelius was the Roman centurion of Damascus and baptized by Paul (Acts 10) as the first Gentile Christian; legend has it that St. Sebastian was a captain in the Prætorian Guard of the Roman emperor Diocletian, who ordered him killed by archers when he was discovered to be a Christian; another legend tells that St. Maurice was a leader of the (Christian) Theban Legion in the Roman army of the Emperor Maximian. When the Legion refused pagan sacrifice, the entire company was martyred. Constantine was the first Christian emperor of the Roman Empire. St. Helena was his mother; St. Louis IX was the saintly king of France; "Blessed Amadeus" was probably the Duke of Savoy (1435–1472) who was beatified in 1677 and known for his charity and concern for the poor. St. Edward was Edward the Confessor.
- b. The referenced account appears in St. Gregory the Great's *Homilies on Ezekiel* 1, i, Homily 9, § 52. Lot was Abraham's nephew and was held to be a "righteous man" when he lived in Sodom. But after he and his daughters had fled Sodom and the city was destroyed, they hid in the mountains living in a cave, where his daughters got Lot drunk and copulated with him—hence, he "fell into sin."

## COMMENTARY ON CHAPTER 4

- c. Tobias 5:4: "But go now, and seek out some faithful man to go with you for his hire."
- d. St. John of Ávila (1500–1569), *Audi, filia* 55:1. This was an essay on Christian perfection.
- e. St. Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582) in her *Book of the Relations* 3.