

The Reform of Zeal
François de Sales and Militant
French Catholicism



Thomas A. Donlan



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by
THOMAS A. DONLAN

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Front cover: St. Francis de Sales, 17th century, oil on canvas.
Philadelphia, Old St. Joseph's Church.
Photo: courtesy of Saint Joseph's University Press, Philadelphia

To my mother, Pat Donlan,
and the memory of my father, Herb
Donlan

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Abbreviation

OEA

François de Sales, *Œuvres de François de Sales, évêque et prince de Genève et docteur de l'Église*, 27 vols (Annecy: Nierat, 1892-1964)

Introduction

Over the past four decades, historiography on early modern French Catholicism has profited from groundbreaking studies. One compelling paradigm of scholarship to emerge has illustrated the interplay between piety and violence in Counter-Reformation France. Inspired by Natalie Zemon Davis's pioneering work on the 'Rites of Violence' in the 1970s, historians documented the militant Catholic cultures characterized by combat against Protestantism and sin, especially during the French Wars of Religion.¹ Led by Philip Benedict, Barbara Diefendorf, and Denis Crouzet in the 1980s and early 1990s, this new historiography revealed how certain theological-emotional dispositions among French Catholics, especially the fear of heresy, God's wrath, and the End Times, contributed to violence in the era.² Equally important, this scholarship revealed that many Catholics were simultaneously 'militants' and 'penitents', waging war not only on Huguenots, but also on themselves, through severe penitential mortification.³ Since the late 1990s, studies have continued to explore the nexus between devotion and violence, as a new cadre of scholars has examined liturgy, printed religious propaganda, and preaching within militant French Catholicism.⁴

Despite the contributions of this historiography, one weakness has been the absence of commensurate examination of nonmilitant and

¹ Natalie Zemon Davis, 'The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France', *Past and Present*, 59 (1973), 53-91.

² Philip Benedict, *Rouen during the Wars of Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Denis Crouzet, *Les guerriers de Dieu: la violence au temps des troubles de religion, vers 1525-vers 1610*, 2 vols (Seysssel: Champ Vallon, 1990); Barbara B. Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

³ Benedict, *Rouen*, p. 202; Denis Pallier, *Recherches sur l'imprimerie à Paris pendant la Ligue: 1585-1594* (Geneva: Droz, 1975), p. 173.

⁴ Megan Armstrong, *Politics of Piety: Franciscan Preachers During the Wars of Religion, 1560-1600* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2004); Luc Racaut, *Hatred in Print: Catholic Propaganda and Protestant Identity during the French Wars of Religion* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002); Ann W. Ramsey, *Liturgy, Politics, and Salvation: The Catholic League in Paris and the Nature of Catholic Reform, 1540-1630* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1999).

nonviolent religious cultures in Counter-Reformation French Catholicism. To be sure, there is excellent scholarship on political and legal strategies employed by French Catholics to address the bloodshed of the French Wars of Religion.⁵ The study of the interplay between piety and nonviolence in early modern French Catholicism, however, remains underdeveloped. This is a significant imbalance, considering that, for large portions of the French Catholic population, religious belief and practice did not result in militancy or severe penitence, and, in some cases, actually produced opposition to them. Indeed, as Diefendorf has acknowledged, there was ‘profound tension within Catholicism, a contest over the nature and practice of the true faith’ in the era of the French Wars of Religion.⁶

A more recent scholarly trend has begun to redress this imbalance by documenting alternatives to the prevailing militant-penitential piety, especially among *dévots* in the seventeenth century. Diefendorf, for instance, has shown that in the 1630s, Parisian women practiced works of mercy rather than the aggressive penitence typical of Catholic Leaguers and early *dévots*.⁷ Examining the years 1629 to 1645, Anthony D. Wright has revealed pastoral differences between the rigorist ‘proto-Jansenists’ and the Society of Jesus, which took a more forgiving approach to confession and the Eucharist.⁸ Recently, Alison Forrester has illustrated how, from the 1620s to the 1650s, Vincent de Paul and the Lazarists drew on the virtue of charity far more than on hostility toward Protestants.⁹

This book contributes to this emerging historiography by exploring nonmilitant sites within French Catholicism even earlier, during the French Wars of Religion (1562-1629) themselves. This study also selects as its primary object of inquiry the spiritual evolution of one Catholic priest, François de Sales (1567-1622), whose entire life unfolded during the conflict, thus offering an exceptional window into diverse Catholic cultures in the period. Documenting the transformation of de Sales’s understanding

⁵ See, for example, Jérémie Foa, *Le Tombeau de la paix: une histoire des édits de pacification (1560-1572)* (Limoges: PULIM, 2015); Penny Roberts, *Peace and Authority in the French Religious Wars* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Mark Greengrass, *Governing Passions: Peace and Reform in the French Kingdom, 1576-1585* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁶ Barbara B. Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity: Pious Women and the Catholic Reformation in Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 203-4.

⁸ Anthony D. Wright, *Divisions of French Catholicism, 1629-1645: ‘The Parting of the Ways’* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 136-47.

⁹ Alison Forrester, *Vincent de Paul, the Lazarist Mission, and French Catholic Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 269.

and practice of Catholicism from his youth to his death against the backdrop of the French Wars of Religion, this book explores competing approaches to the faith in the late 1500s and early 1600s, which have been insufficiently examined in the literature.

It contends that, after adopting aspects of militant-penitential piety early in his life, de Sales grew increasingly ambivalent toward eschatological preoccupations, anti-Huguenot brutality, and aggressive self-mortification, the hallmarks of League and early *dévo*t religiosity. Indeed, following his priestly ordination in 1593, de Sales, troubled by the violence of the Wars of Religion, began to develop a robust, multi-faceted reform of militant Catholic zeal. From the 1590s to the early 1620s, as a missionary, spiritual director, and head of the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary, de Sales exhorted the faithful to abandon piety defined primarily by warfare on heresy and sin. Undergirding de Sales's critique was a vision of Catholic *douceur* (gentleness), which championed a humble, nonviolent imitation of Christ, while characterizing militant zeal as destructive and unchristian. Appealing to thousands of the faithful in the seventeenth century, the Salesian reform of religious militancy affirmed a gentle, pastoral, and charitable zeal as superior to one of spiritual, psychological, and physical combat.

THE REFORM OF ZEAL AND SALESIAN SCHOLARSHIP

François de Sales is, of course, familiar to students and scholars of Catholic history. The Savoyard priest was well-known in his own day and commemorated in hagiographies soon after his death in 1622.¹⁰ In modern times, scores of studies have emerged, giving rise to three primary interpretations, defining de Sales as a 1) devout humanist, 2) Tridentine reformer, or 3) Counter-Reformer. While these schools of thought capture important aspects of de Sales's religious career, they insufficiently consider the context of the French Wars of Religion. Lacking this crucial contextualization, Salesian scholarship has overlooked changes in de Sales's spirituality over time and struggled to account for the origins, nature, and goals of Salesian *douceur*. The following discussion assesses the prevailing schools of Salesian scholarship and argues for a fresh interpretive paradigm.

¹⁰ Jean Goulu, *La Vie du bienheureux Mre François de Sales* (Paris: J. de Heuqueville, 1624); Louis de la Rivière, *La Vie de l'illustrissime François de Sales* (Lyon: P. Rigaud, 1625); Charles-Auguste de Sales, *Histoire du bienheureux Francois de Sales* (Lyon: La Bottière et Juillard, 1634).

DE SALES AS DEVOUT HUMANIST

A century ago, Henri Brémond (1865-1933) presented his influential interpretation of François de Sales, dubbing him a champion of ‘devout humanism’ in his *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France*.¹¹ According to Brémond, whose thesis still carries scholarly weight today, de Sales made Catholic piety attractive and accessible in a time when the laity abandoned devotion, finding it unintelligible and cold.¹² Viewing Salesian *douceur* mainly as a ‘sweet’ writing style, Brémond measured de Sales’s influence in terms of spiritual publications that ‘dripped with honey’, thereby renewing religious devotion among French Catholics.¹³

Brémond's *Histoire littéraire* has great merit, as it captures the optimistic, picturesque artistry of de Sales’s writing and its influence on subsequent devotional publications. Its main contentions concerning French Catholicism and de Sales’s place within it, however, do not jibe with modern historical scholarship or de Sales’s own commentary on the state of Catholicism in his time. The claim of religious apathy or laxity in the period, for instance, is difficult to substantiate; indeed, a number of studies illustrate widespread pious engagement and fervor in early modern French Catholicism.¹⁴ As for de Sales, he consistently addressed *how* Catholics lived out their faith, not a lack of engagement. In the first chapter of his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, for instance, he laments the ‘great quantity of false and vain’ forms of Catholic devotion, and regrets that, despite being ‘angry, arrogant, and injurious’, certain Catholics are deemed holy.¹⁵ Even more problematic, Brémond’s view of Salesian *douceur* as literary ‘sweetness’ intended to spark devotion, grossly overlooks the religious conflicts and bloodshed of the era, as well as de Sales’s profound moral objection to them. Across his career, in personal letters, sermons, and

¹¹ Henri Brémond, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France depuis la fin de guerres de religion jusqu’à nos jours*, 12 vols (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1916-36).

¹² Joseph Bergin, *Church, Society, and Religious Change in France, 1580-1730* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 138; Paul Chilton, ‘Devout Humanism’, in *A New History of French Literature*, ed. by Denis Hollier and R. Howard Bloch (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 253-8; Emmanuel Bury, ‘Relire saint François de Sales’, *Dix-septième siècle*, vol 235 (2007), 337-9.

¹³ Brémond, *Histoire*, I, 78.

¹⁴ Mack Holt, ‘Putting Religion Back into the Wars of Religion’, *French Historical Studies*, 18 (1993), 524-51 (p. 535); Lucien Febvre, ‘Aspects méconnus d’un renouveau religieux en France entre 1590 et 1620’, *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 13 (1958), 639-50 (pp. 640-1).

¹⁵ OEA, III, 14.

published works, de Sales critiqued the brutality and anxiety so prevalent in the French Wars of Religion. While using a variety of terms to exhort his coreligionists to nonviolence, de Sales eventually relied on *douceur* as the primary theological concept for his reform of Catholic militancy. Far more than a ‘sweet’ or attractive writing style, Salesian *douceur* constituted a moral vision of a nonviolent Catholicism formed in the crucible of religious strife and violence.¹⁶

DE SALES AS TRIDENTINE REFORMER

Another prevailing interpretation of François de Sales is that of Tridentine reformer. André Ravier, S.J. (1905-99), for instance, viewed the Council of Trent (1545-63) as the crucial influence on de Sales’s religious career, maintaining that its doctrines shaped his theological imagination and vision for religious renewal.¹⁷ Ravier also saw de Sales’s pastoral care as a bishop as evidence of Trent’s influence on him. Unquestionably, Ravier’s perspective has merit, for de Sales certainly understood and respected the teachings of Trent, drawing on them in his leadership and policy-making as bishop of the Diocese of Geneva.

We must note, however, de Sales’s divergence from Trent. While the Council demanded strict enclosure for female religious, for example, de Sales and Jeanne de Chantal (1572-1641) had the original Visitandines (the French term for Sisters of the Visitation) doing charitable work in public, an apostolate they later ceased due to fierce opposition from French churchmen. Had it not been for this opposition, Visitandines would have continued to minister actively beyond the cloister in contravention to Trent. Even more important, de Sales’s efforts to address violence within Catholicism surpassed those concerned with Tridentine doctrine and discipline. De Sales’s vision of Catholic *douceur*, developed in his

¹⁶ For other critiques of Brémond and ‘devout humanism’, see Julien-Eymard d’Angers, *L’Humanisme chrétien au XVII^e siècle: St. François de Sales et Yves de Paris* (Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague, 1970), pp. vii-xxii, 164-86; Emile Goichot, “‘L’Humanisme dévot’ de l’abbé Brémond: réflexions sur un lieu commun”, *Revue d’ascétique et de mystique*, 45 (1969), 121-60.

¹⁷ André Ravier, ‘Saint François de Sales: un évêque postconciliaire’, in *Saint François de Sales: témoignages et mélanges à l’occasion du IV^e centenaire de sa naissance* (Ambilly-Annemasse: Éditions franco-suissees, 1968), pp. 77-88; idem, *Un Sage et un saint, François de Sales* (Paris, Nouvelle Cité, 1985), pp. 48-54. Emphasis on Trent is also found in François Corrigan, *La Spiritualité de François de Sales: un chemin de vie* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1989); Jill Fehleison, *Boundaries of Faith: Catholics and Protestants in the Diocese of Geneva* (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2010), pp. 41-2.

missionary work, spiritual direction, and the Visitation, reflect a response to the anxious, turbulent state of French Catholicism during the Wars of Religion with little reference to the Council of Trent.

DE SALES AS COUNTER-REFORMER

A formidable obstacle to seeing the Salesian vision of Catholic nonviolence is the interpretation of de Sales as, first and foremost, a Counter-Reformer. According to this perspective, de Sales's primary concern across his lifetime consisted of battling Protestantism, however civilly he may have done so.¹⁸ In the seventeenth century, Catholic commentators cited de Sales's opposition to heresy as his defining contribution to the Church, portraying him as a Counter-Reformation warrior, while ignoring or obscuring his critique of Catholic militancy. Louis Bourdaloue (1632-1704), for instance, declared that de Sales 'was chosen by God' to 'destroy heresy'.¹⁹ In modern scholarship, historians have continued to view de Sales primarily through a counter-Protestant lens. In the 1960s, Ruth Kleinman contended that combatting heresy constituted the 'implacable purpose' of de Sales's 'life and doctrine'.²⁰ More recently, Aimé Richardt has characterized the Savoyard priest as a 'tough fighter' and 'ardent defender of the Counter-Reformation'.²¹

Such interpretations of de Sales as a fervent Counter-Reformer are too simplistic, however, as they gloss over remarkable changes in de Sales's spirituality and priorities over time. De Sales certainly engaged the issue of heresy actively in his missionary tenure in the Chablais (1594-98). After this mission, however, Protestantism gradually garnered less and less of his attention. This is evident in de Sales's personal correspondence and spiritual writings after the Chablais (that is, from 1598 to his death in 1622) which reveal a gradual turn from the challenge of Protestantism to the state of Catholicism. At the heart of this shift, moreover, was a growing critique of Catholic militancy and expansion of his vision of *douceur*, which thereafter defined his primary religious endeavors. In the final analysis, de Sales devoted far greater energy and time to reforming what French Catholicism had become in its war on heresy than with confronting heresy itself.

¹⁸ de Sales, *Histoire du bienheureux François de Sales*; Ruth Kleinman, *Saint François de Sales and the Protestants* (Geneva: Droz, 1962), p. 60.

¹⁹ Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, Esprit Fléchier, and Louis Bourdaloue, *Panégriques de Saint François de Sales* (Paris: Blaise, 1834), p. 26.

²⁰ Kleinman, *François de Sales and the Protestants*, p. 31.

²¹ Aimé Richardt, *François de Sales et la Contre-Réforme* (Paris: Guibert, 2013), p. 241.

We must also note that even when de Sales engaged in Counter-Reformation work as a young missionary, he had already made a solemn, moral commitment to nonviolent strategies. In an era in which Catholics made routine use of violence against Huguenots, de Sales relied overwhelmingly on non-confrontational, pastoral methods consisting of education, dialogue, and the liturgy. Indeed, as we shall see, even prior to the Chablais mission, de Sales preached to fellow clergymen that charity and love, rather than aggression, constituted the authentic Christian means for addressing heresy. To dub de Sales a ‘Counter-Reformer’ *tout court*, even for just the Chablais period, is to miss his early criticism of militant Catholicism and initial break from French Counter-Reformation norms.

SALESIAN REFORM AND SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY RENEWAL OF FRENCH CATHOLICISM

The Reform of Zeal seeks to expand, therefore, Salesian scholarship beyond the interpretations of de Sales as a devout humanist, Tridentine bishop, and Counter-Reformer, by situating him squarely within the French Wars of Religion and documenting his vision of Catholic *douceur*. Furthermore, by illustrating the evolution of de Sales’s spirituality and his emergence as a reformer of Catholic militancy, this study also contributes to debates on renewal in seventeenth-century French Catholicism.

In the 1600s, the French Church witnessed remarkable vitality, as illustrated by new and reformed religious orders, the popularity of devotional texts and works of mercy, as well as the proliferation of Catholic education and missions. In recent decades, historians have shown that the militant-penitential fervor of Catholic Leaguers in the 1580s and 1590s persisted into the seventeenth century, fueling much of this religious activity.²² Diefendorf, in particular, has illustrated how ex-Leaguers and League-sympathizers, such as Barbe Acarie (1566-1618), Ange de Joyeuse (1563-1608), Marie de Luxembourg (1562-1623), and Madeleine Luillier (1562-1620), among others, became the very *dévôts* sparking religious reform in the post-League era.

This book, however, argues that, in the case of de Sales, we have an exception to League-*dévo*t spiritual continuity, and, in Salesian *douceur*,

²² Benedict, *Rouen*, pp. 190-3; Michel Cassan, ‘Laïcs, Ligue, et réforme catholique à Limoges’, *Histoire, Économie, Société*, 10 (1991), 159–75 (p. 164); André Latreille, É. Delaruelle, and Jean-Rémy Palanque, *Histoire du catholicisme en France*, 3 vols (Paris: Éditions Spes, 1960), II, 269-70; Denis Richet, ‘Aspects socio-culturels des conflits religieux à Paris dans la seconde moitié du XVI^e siècle’, *Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 32 (1977), 764-89 (pp. 778, 783).

a distinct source of religious renewal in seventeenth-century French Catholicism. This study maintains that de Sales began to break from League piety in the 1590s. Consider, for instance, that while de Sales lamented the violence of the League wars in a 1591 commencement speech, Acarie and fellow Leaguers praised them as ‘an age of gold’ at roughly the same time.²³ In the early 1600s, moreover, de Sales increasingly championed a gentle, pastoral imitation of Christ over the militant-penitential piety dominant in the period. While respectful of the *dévots* of the Acarie circle, de Sales increasingly exhorted the faithful to a Catholicism of *douceur* rather than one of combat.

In de Sales’s own lifetime, thousands of the faithful embraced Salesian *douceur*, particularly through his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, which became a best-seller, and the Order of the Visitation. Moreover, de Sales’s friends and followers who supported his critique of militant Catholicism, such as Jeanne de Chantal, Vincent de Paul, and Jean-Pierre de Médaille, went on, after de Sales’s death, to play key roles in Catholic renewal. When we study the religious sensibility and ministries that they cultivated among the Visitandines, Sisters of Charity, Lazarists, or Sisters of Saint Joseph, among other Catholic communities that flourished in the 1600s, we find little evidence of the militant, penitential, or apocalyptic. Rather, we witness the pursuit of a gentle, humble imitation of Christ expressed through works of mercy and loving interpersonal bonds that de Sales had championed as a fuller embodiment of Catholic zeal.

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Several terms in this book require additional commentary and clarification. The following discussion will examine what this study means by ‘militant Catholicism’, ‘violence’, ‘French Catholicism’ and the French word, *douceur*. The use of 1562 and 1629 as the dates for the French Wars of Religion will also be addressed.

I use the term ‘militant Catholicism’ for religious cultures within French Catholicism in which 1) the faithful believed that French Protestants and the sins of Catholics posed grave threats and 2) violence became a normative response to those perceived threats. The emergence of Huguenot churches aroused great fears among Catholics, who widely viewed them as endangering their physical existence, the Catholicity of France, and the

²³ OEA, XXII, 84. For Leaguer praise of the suffering and combat of the siege of Paris, see, Diefendorf, ‘An Age of Gold? Parisian Women, the Holy League, and the Roots of Catholic Revival’, in *Changing Identities in Early Modern France*, ed. by Michael Wolfe (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 169-90, (p. 169).

salvation of their souls. In light of this, countless individuals and groups deemed urgent, aggressive action essential, advocating violence as the proper remedy.

As for the term ‘violence’, I use it for a variety of behaviors. Catholic violence, of courses, refers to physical attacks on Huguenots themselves. Across the French Wars of Religion, Catholics engaged in assaults, riots, and massacres, intending to injure or kill Protestants. Militants also physically assaulted fellow Catholics deemed too tolerant of Huguenots. The assassinations of Henry III in 1589 and Henry IV in 1610 are the best-known examples of such Catholic-on-Catholic violence. This study also views certain forms of communication as violent. In this period Catholics often mocked, intimidated, and demonized Protestants and Catholic moderates by means of the spoken word (sermons, songs, prayers) and written word (placards, pamphlets, treatises). In these instances, they frequently aimed to inflict psychological and emotional suffering, if not physical harm.

This book also considers certain aggressive penitential acts as forms of violence. French Catholics widely believed that their own sins, vices, and religious laxity gave rise to heresy. In militant circles, this meant the faithful had to destroy impurity and corruption within themselves, in addition to that embodied in Huguenots. During the Wars of Religion, penitential violence included extreme fasting, mutilation, and aggressive flagellation, even to the point of death.²⁴ While some readers may object to calling such behaviors ‘violent’, this study maintains that French Catholics often viewed them as such, practicing them with the intention of inflicting pain and punishment on themselves. In the words of Benedict, anti-Huguenot brutality and self-imposed penitential suffering ‘sprang from similar impulses’.²⁵

Finally, under the category of ‘violence’, I also include certain forms of psychological and emotional mortification. During the French Wars of Religion, clergymen often prescribed relentless self-scrutiny and self-castigation; such was the case in Laurent de Paris’s spirituality of ‘hatred of self’ (*la haine de soi*) and other *dévo*t pieties of self-annihilation (*anéantissement*).²⁶ Practicing this aggressive penitence, some of the

²⁴ Barbara Diefendorf, ‘A Monastery in Revolt: Paris’s Feuillants in the Holy League’, *Historical Reflections/Réflexions historiques*, 27 (2001), 301-24, (p. 315).

²⁵ Benedict, *Rouen*, p. 202.

²⁶ Yann Rodier, ‘Un Soliloque sur l’amour pur de Dieu et la haine de soi dans la découverte d’un “placard mystique” du capuchin Laurent de Paris’, *Études*

faithful fell into debilitating sorrow and guilt.²⁷ As we shall see, de Sales encountered scores of men and women overwhelmed by guilt, shame, and impurity. Since de Sales himself regarded this personal self-denunciation as violent, this study incorporates them within the larger category of religious violence as well.

As for 'French Catholicism', I use the term to refer to beliefs, spiritualities, and institutions of Catholics within France and neighboring lands, like Savoy, which shared the linguistic, cultural, and religious heritage of France. Following John Bossy and Joseph Bergin, this study, therefore, speaks of de Sales as a 'French Catholic' operating within the matrix of 'French Catholicism', although his birthplace was Savoy, which, at this time, was a duchy independent of the kingdom of France.²⁸ The fact that de Sales lived and studied in Paris for ten years (1578-88), preached and oversaw parishes in France, and established most of his Visitation convents within it also justifies characterizing him as a part of, and a historical agent within, 'French Catholicism'. We must also note that de Sales described himself as a *sabaudius gallus* or 'French Savoyard'.²⁹ Studies stressing the Savoyard identity of de Sales have had the ahistorical effect of cutting him off from French Catholicism and the French Wars of Religion, the very violence of which sparked his reform of militant religious zeal.³⁰

As for *douceur*, this book argues that this concept served as the central organizing principle of de Sales's reform of militant Catholic zeal. Throughout his career, de Sales used various terms for critiquing religious militancy, including *amour*, *paix*, *charité*, *unité*, and *tolérance*, in addition to *douceur*. Yet, from the start of his work as a spiritual director in the early 1600s until his death in 1622, he relied on *douceur*, above all, to exhort believers to abandon aggression and anxiety.

Franciscaines, 2 (2009), 343-64 (p. 350); Charles E. Williams, *The French Oratorians and Absolutism, 1611-1641* (New York: Peter Lange, 1988), pp. 15-20.

²⁷ For more on psychological self-punishment in militant Catholicism, see Benedict, *Rouen*, pp. 199-203; Andrew E. Barnes, 'Religious Anxiety and Devotional Change in Sixteenth Century French Penitential Confraternities', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 19 (1988), 389-406.

²⁸ Bergin, *Church, Society, and Religious Change*, p. 320; John Bossy, *Peace in the Post-Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 37.

²⁹ Antoine Dufournet, *La Jeunesse de saint François de Sales (1567-1602)* (Paris: B. Grasset, 1942), p. 149.

³⁰ Viviane Mellinghoff-Bourgerie, *François de Sales, 1567-1622: un homme de lettres spirituelles: culture, tradition, épistolarité* (Geneva: Droz, 1999), pp. 16, 35-6.

While the word *douceur* can be translated as either ‘gentleness’ or ‘sweetness’, in most instances I translate it as ‘gentleness’. The reason for this is that de Sales typically used *douceur* (along with the adjectives, *doux/douce*, and adverb, *doucement*) as the opposite of violence, severity, and hostility. The English word ‘gentleness’ is much more appropriate for conveying this contrast because it evokes more effectively ideas of peace, calm, and nonviolence than does the English term ‘sweetness’, which is often associated with the sense of taste or an agreeable social demeanor.

Concerning the dating of the French Wars of Religion, with 1562 as the start and 1629 as the terminus, this study follows Mack P. Holt and other scholars who have demonstrated the persistence of Catholic-Huguenot hostilities beyond the 1598 Edict of Nantes.³¹ Given that confessional violence occurred, albeit less frequently, into the late 1620s, these revisionists have seen 1629, when the monarchy finally eliminated Huguenot military strength, as the end of the French Wars of Religion.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

While quite innovative, the Salesian vision of Catholic *douceur* drew heavily on late medieval and early modern reform movements and devotional trends. Chapter 1 examines the religious currents that aided de Sales in imagining and developing his reform of militant Catholic zeal. Here, the study explores how de Sales absorbed theological and pastoral emphases of *Devotio Moderna*, Erasmus’s ‘philosophy of Christ’, and early Jesuit spirituality, especially as embodied by Ignatius of Loyola and Pierre Favre, co-founders of the Society of Jesus. The influence of the *moyenneur* critique of violence in mid sixteenth-century France, especially its appeal to *douceur*, is also investigated.

Chapter 2 begins the biographical examination of de Sales and his spirituality which underpins the rest of this book. The analysis explores divergent religious cultures of de Sales’s childhood in Savoy (1567-78) and schooling in Paris (1578-88) when the Catholic League emerged. The chapter considers de Sales’s attraction to both religious militancy and merciful, pastoral piety, illustrating his struggle in navigating different and,

³¹ Mack P. Holt, *The French Wars of Religion, 1562-1629*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 1-3; Brian Sandberg, *Warrior Pursuits: Noble Culture and Civil Conflict in Early Modern France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), p. xv; Alison Forrestal and Eric Nelson, eds., *Politics and Religion in Early Bourbon France* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 1.

in certain respects, contradictory practices of the faith. Here, I present a new interpretation de Sales' spiritual crisis of 1587, viewing it as an interior conflict over how to express his Catholic faith, rather than overwhelming sexual temptation, as E.J. Lajeunie has suggested.³² The chapter also illustrates how de Sales's Jesuit educators directed his religious appetite toward intellectual engagement, prayer, and works of mercy, tempering his attraction to League militancy.

Chapter 3 examines de Sales's first reform of militant Catholicism, the development of a nonviolent model for addressing heresy in the Chablais mission from 1594 to 1598. The analysis first considers the moderating influences on de Sales during his legal studies in Padua from 1589 to 1591. It also explores the anti-war content of his 1593-4 sermons prior to the Chablais mission, which has received little scholarly attention. Here we encounter de Sales's earliest emphasis on peace and *douceur*. The chapter then examines de Sales's nonviolent strategies in the Chablais. Analyzing de Sales's missionary correspondence and conduct, the study illustrates his break from the fearful mentality and aggression typical of Leaguers and early *dévots*, which leading studies on the Chablais mission have overlooked.³³

After his missionary tenure, de Sales pivoted quite considerably from the issue of Protestantism to the state of Catholic piety, devoting himself to the pastoral care of his coreligionists. Chapter 4 examines de Sales's work as a spiritual director from 1600 to 1610, when *douceur* emerged as the core principle of his *cura animarum* and reform of Catholic militancy. Finding penitential asceticism during the Wars of Religion excessively fearful and aggressive, he identified the *douceur* of Jesus described in Matthew 11. 29 as the authoritative model for Catholic spirituality. Examining de Sales's letters of spiritual direction and his *Introduction à la vie devote*, the chapter reveals how Salesian teachings on divine gentleness, the goodness of creation, and human imperfection delegitimized the theologies of purity and danger underpinning Catholic militancy. Here, I also discuss Catholic pastoral strategies for relieving the religious anxieties documented by Denis Crouzet and others.³⁴

In the last quarter of de Sales' life, nothing inspired him like the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary, a new community of religious sisters

³² E. J. Lajeunie, *Saint Francis de Sales, the Man, the Thinker, his Influence*, trans. by Rory O'Sullivan, 2 vols (Bangalore: S.F.S. Publications, 1986), I, 66.

³³ Kleiman, *Saint François de Sales*; Fehleison, *Boundaries of Faith*.

³⁴ Crouzet, *Les Guerriers*, I, 178, 183, 376, II, 9-10, 195-6; Barnes, 'Religious Anxiety', 389-406.

that he and Jeanne de Chantal created. Scholars have viewed the Visitation as a refuge for women desiring the religious life, but unable to endure the mortification required in orders of the day.³⁵ Alternatively, certain historians have viewed the Visitation as an innovative effort to balance a contemplative way of life with an active apostolate.³⁶ Offering an original interpretation, chapter 5 presents the Visitation as the culmination of the Salesian reform of militant zeal, intended as a prophetic witness to Catholic *douceur* amidst the Wars of Religion. The discussion examines de Sales's pastoral work and friendship with de Chantal prior to the Visitation which set the foundation for the Order and its unique emphasis on affectionate interpersonal bonds. The analysis then explores the birth of the Visitation and its culture of gentleness, which boldly differentiated itself from the militant spirituality of Carmelite, Ursuline, and Capucine convents. Lastly, the chapter examines how de Sales' 'theology of weakness' led him to choose women instead of men to witness to a Catholicism of *douceur*.

³⁵ Elizabeth Rapley, *The Dévotes: Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France* (Montreal: Quebec Press, 1990), p. 35; Elisabeth Stopp, *Madame de Chantal: Portrait of a Saint* (London: Faber and Faber Press, 1963), pp. 123-4.

³⁶ Joseph Boenzi, *Saint Francis de Sales: Life and Spirit* (Stella Niagara: DeSales Resource Center, 2013), p. 79; Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, pp. 176-7.

1 **The Salesian Reform of Militant Catholicism and Its Roots**

François de Sales offers exceptional access to Catholicism in early modern Europe. A highly-educated priest and bishop, de Sales interacted with kings and cardinals as well as common folk in villages and parishes. Additionally, de Sales engaged in a remarkable range of religious activity. Over the course of his ecclesiastical career (1593-1622), he devoted himself to missionary work, spiritual direction, devotional writing, church visitations, and preaching. De Sales also founded and directed the Visitation of Holy Mary, one of the fastest-growing women's religious orders in the period.

Perhaps the greatest dividend of studying de Sales is the insight it provides concerning French Catholicism in a time of exceptional strife and bloodshed. De Sales lived during the French Wars of Religion (1562-1629) and thus witnessed conflict between French Catholics and Huguenots throughout his life. Equally important, though often less appreciated, is that the confessional strife of the Wars of Religion gave rise to bitter divisions within French Catholicism. Particularly divisive was the question of how the faithful ought to respond to the challenge of Protestantism. In this matter, two major responses emerged. On the one hand was a militant Catholicism that waged war on Huguenots and Catholics who tolerated them. Catholic militants often engaged in aggressive self-mortification as well, determined to destroy sin and impurity believed to cause heresy. Within this religious militancy, which prevailed across the French Catholic world, the devout deemed violence an essential means for restoring moral purity and order to society. On the other hand was an irenic minority of French Catholics who neither identified with nor approved of militant religiosity. While opposed to heresy, these Catholic moderates recognized the humanity of Huguenots and preferred to address heterodoxy through education, preaching, and dialogue. Within this irenic Catholicism, works of mercy, pastoral care, and social concord took precedence over combat against Protestantism and sin.

This study tells the compelling story of how de Sales, initially drawn to both Catholic cultures, came to critique the former and champion the latter. Attracted to militant Catholicism in his youth, de Sales gradually concluded that a nonviolent, merciful religiosity constituted the authentic practice of the faith. Deeming aggression and violence incompatible with the example and teachings of Jesus, de Sales envisioned a Catholicism of

douceur, or gentleness. As he gradually broke from his co-religionists whose reform vision emphasized the destruction of heresy and sin, de Sales advocated Catholic renewal by means of a gentle, pastoral imitation of Christ. By the end of his life, de Sales had mounted the most influential critique of religious violence in the period, carving out a stream of Catholic spirituality fundamentally distinct from the militant-penitential piety dominant during the Wars of Religion.

Developing over the course of three decades, the Salesian reform of militant Catholic zeal consisted of an ever-expanding pastoral exhortation to Catholics to practice the faith in ways that fostered interior and interpersonal harmony. It urged them to temper fear and hatred by cultivating tranquility and joy. It spoke of God as an affectionate parent or friend rather than a wrathful, punitive judge. It rejected aggression against oneself and Huguenots, prescribing the care of mind and body, as well as love of neighbor. The Salesian reform of militant religiosity, briefly put, invited the faithful to integrate the imagination, the body, and the emotions into a hopeful, nonviolent Catholic zeal.

Central to the Salesian Catholicism of *douceur* was putting merciful, loving relationships — with oneself, others, and God — at the heart of the practice of the faith, for such bonds, de Sales came to believe, constituted the crucial site of Christian maturity, moral excellence, and unity with God.¹ The definitive authority behind this gentle, relational Catholicism was the person of Jesus in the New Testament and most notably, Matthew 11. 29 in which Jesus states *je suis doux et humble de coeur*, that is, ‘I am gentle and humble of heart’. Across thirty years, de Sales drew on this passage repeatedly as his authoritative text, teaching that since Jesus lived nonviolently, his followers must do likewise.² Using this Christocentric *douceur* as the core organizing concept of his reform, de Sales exhorted Catholics to renew the Church by cultivating relationships of compassion, affection, and unity.

SALESIAN REFORM OF MILITANCY: PRECEDENTS AND INSPIRATIONS

In recent decades, scholars have emphasized continuity between the militant-penitential piety of Catholic Leaguers in the final decades of the sixteenth century and French Catholic fervor in the seventeenth century.

¹ On the personal bond between François de Sales and Jeanne de Chantal, see Wendy M. Wright, *Bond of Perfection: Jeanne de Chantal & François de Sales* (Stella Niagara: DeSales Resource Center, 2001).

² OEA, XXVII, 266.

This is for good reason as ex-Leaguers often participated actively in *dévo*t reform projects of the early 1600s as a means for continuing their combat on heresy and sin. When we turn to François de Sales and his approach to Catholicism over the course of his life, however, change and evolution are the defining dynamics. As a teenager in Paris in the 1580s, de Sales adopted aspects of militant piety, greatly fearing sin and God, practicing harsh mortifications, and rooting for the Catholic League.³ In time, however, he shed the notion of himself as a soldier of the Church Militant as he increasingly lived as a disciple of the gentle, humble of Jesus. This transformation would not have occurred if de Sales had not encountered vibrant spiritual trends which conceived of religious renewal quite differently from Leaguers and early *dév*ots. These alternatives facilitated his break from militant zeal and provided much of the pastoral and theological foundation for his Catholicism of *douceur*.

DEVOTIO MODERNA

Prominent in Catholic spirituality was an interior, prayerful affection for Jesus, popularized by the *Devotio Moderna* movement and the spiritual bestseller it produced, *Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis.⁴ Finding late medieval devotion excessively focused on externals and scholastic theology impersonal, *Devotio Moderna* promoted religious interiority rooted in a loving relationship with Jesus. Reading the Gospels, meditating on the life and passion of Jesus, and frequent reception of the Eucharist helped to cultivate one's bond with Christ.⁵ Kempis's *Imitation of Christ* also prescribed regular self-examination, so that the love of God and neighbor reigned in one's thoughts, emotions, and deeds, while sin and selfishness were tempered. François de Sales found great inspiration in the *Imitation of Christ*, adopting its emphasis on an interior union with Jesus and the practice of Christlike humility.⁶

³ *Ibid.*, XI, 2.

⁴ Roland H. Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom* (New York: C. Scribner, 1969), p. 10.

⁵ John H. Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna: Basic Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), p. 26.

⁶ Joseph Daniëls, *Les Rapports entre Saint François de Sales et les Pays-Bas, 1550-1700* (Nijmegen: Centrale Drukkerij, 1932), pp. 35-7.

ERASMIAN REFORM

A crucial precedent for the Salesian reform of militant Catholic zeal was the humanist critique of war and violence emerging in the early 1500s. Inspired by the eloquence, piety, and virtue they found in Greco-Roman and Christian antiquity, Renaissance humanists advocated social and religious reform in their own day.⁷ Of the various ills corrupting European societies, they viewed war and violence as particularly corrosive to Christian virtue and social well-being. These reformers cited prayer, penance, Scripture, dialogue, preaching, and education as the ideal means for creating virtuous societies and resolving conflict.⁸ Receiving a Christian humanist education at the Collège de Clermont and the University of Padua, de Sales absorbed much of this Catholic irenicism.

Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536), in particular, provided an influential precedent for the Salesian reform of militant Catholicism. A Dutch priest, humanist, and reformer, Erasmus exhorted Catholics to adopt a ‘philosophy of Christ’ by adhering closely to the example and teachings of Jesus in the Gospels. Erasmus insisted on the gentle nature of Jesus, asserting that Jesus’s ‘whole life is a lesson in gentleness’, a notion which would become the centerpiece of Salesian *douceur*.⁹ Troubled by widespread conflict and violence in Europe, Erasmus wrote *Handbook of a Christian Soldier* (1503), *Dulce Bellum Inexpertis* (1514), and *The Complaint of Peace* (1517) in which he decried the destructive effects of war, attributing its origins, variously, to hell, the ancient furies, and the devil.¹⁰ Erasmus hoped that a ‘philosophy of Christ’ would spark a moral, spiritual renewal in Catholic Europe, proclaiming that Jesus’s most important ‘commandments’ consisted of ‘love’ and ‘peace’.¹¹

A hallmark of Erasmus’s ‘philosophy of Christ’ – later adopted by François de Sales in his reform of the Catholic war on heresy – was to call

⁷ Robert P. Adams, *The Better Part of Valor: More, Erasmus, Colet, and Vives, on Humanism, War, and Peace, 1496-1535* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962); Joseph Lecler, *Histoire de la tolerance au siècle de la Réforme* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994), pp. 127-57; J. G. Russell, *Peacemaking in the Renaissance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), pp. 1-20.

⁸ Lecler, *Histoire* pp. 125-6.

⁹ Desiderius Erasmus, *Collected Works of Erasmus*, ed. by John M. O’Malley and others, 84 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974-2017), XXXV (2005), 417.

¹⁰ Adams, *Valor*, p. 22.

¹¹ Desiderius Erasmus, *The Adages of Erasmus*, ed. by M. M. Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), p. 327; Jean-Claude Margolin, *Guerre et paix dans la pensée d’Érasme* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1973), pp. 9-10.

Christians to turn from literal, physical combat against others to interior, spiritual warfare against themselves. Through the disciplines of prayer and penance, Erasmus wrote, 'we must make war upon ourselves' and 'do battle with our vices'.¹² Erasmus argued that battling one's own sins was morally superior to literal, worldly warfare. 'Earthly war deals only with the body', but 'spiritual struggle deals with the soul'.¹³ The Dutch reformer taught that interior, spiritual combat helped one to contain violent impulses, while cultivating humility and compassion.

As for dealing with physical threats against oneself or community, Erasmus's 'philosophy of Christ' urged Catholics to practice nonviolent spiritual tactics. Perhaps the boldest example of this was Erasmus' prescriptions for addressing the threat posed by the Ottoman Turks. While conceding the Ottomans posed a certain danger to Europeans, Erasmus taught that dialogue, education, penance, and prayer were the proper, moral methods for addressing that threat. 'We will defeat the Turks with Christ's teaching', communicated through letters, pamphlets, and books. Rather than resorting to the force of arms, 'we will pray that heaven will send them salvation'. Erasmus also humanized the Ottomans: 'Turks are human beings', he insisted, 'and we are not Christian by killing as many of them as we can'.¹⁴

Only a handful of Salesian scholars have explored Erasmus's influence on de Sales. Yet, the two priests held a great deal in common. Both strongly affirmed lay piety and emphasized interiority in devotion. They also both expressed a theological optimism with regard to human nature and free will.¹⁵ De Sales, as Alexander Pocetto has shown, also deeply respected Erasmus' biblical scholarship, recommending it on multiple occasions.¹⁶ Most importantly, the Salesian reform of militant Catholicism closely parallels Erasmian irenicism in both style and substance. At times, de Sales associated war with the mythical furies as Erasmus did and observed that 'war [was] sweet for those with no

¹² Erasmus, *Collected Works*, LXX, 38.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

¹⁵ Charles Béné, 'La Piété mariale chez Erasme et Saint François de Sales' in *L'Univers Salesien: Saint François de Sales hier et aujourd'hui: actes du colloque international de Metz, 17-19 septembre 1992*, ed. by Jacques Hennequin and Hélène Bordes (Metz: Champion Slatkine, 1994), pp. 37-45; Léon E. Halkin, 'D'Erasmus à François de Sales', *Les Études Classiques*, 10 (1941), 3-13.

¹⁶ Alexander Pocetto, *Ecclesial Dimensions of Salesian Thought* (Hyattsville: Institute of Salesian Studies, 1972), pp. 10-13.

experience of it', the sentiment serving as title for one of Erasmus' critiques of war.¹⁷ Like Erasmus, de Sales argued for the superiority of spiritual warfare over physical warfare and consistently referred to Jesus as the author and model of peace. Lastly, de Sales's humanization of Huguenots and call for nonmilitant strategies for engaging them echoed the Erasmian approach to non-Catholics.

JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

The Society of Jesus also exposed de Sales to alternatives to Catholic militancy, tempering his attraction to League piety in his youth. De Sales was a student in the Jesuit Collège de Clermont in Paris for ten years (1578 to 1588), as well as the protégé of the humanist Antonio Possevino, S.J., in Padua for two years (1589-91). Under the tutelage of the Jesuits, de Sales encountered many priests committed, above all, to education, works of mercy, and administering the sacraments, generally favoring nonviolent, pastoral means for addressing heresy. De Sales became particularly fond of Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) and Pierre Favre (1506-46), founders of the Society of Jesus. Although born a generation after their deaths, de Sales modeled his approach to spirituality and the priesthood very much on their example.

Although long characterizing the Society of Jesus as providing the 'shock troops' of the Counter-Reformation, scholarship in recent decades has documented the pastoral priorities and irenic inclinations of early Jesuits.¹⁸ Ulrike Strasser, for instance, has shown how Ignatius's conversion experiences, which shaped the *Spiritual Exercises* and early Jesuit spirituality, involved the refashioning of violent impulses into a compassionate, pastoral religiosity.¹⁹ After reading *The Life of Christ and Imitation of Christ* in the wake of his war injury, Ignatius lost his affinity for knightly warfare, desiring an active spirituality consisting of charity, pious fellowship, and the consolation of souls. In light of Ignatius's example, the Society of Jesus often validated a gentler masculinity, training new Jesuits to pursue cooperation, dialogue, and good will over

¹⁷ OEA, VII, 159, XI, 111.

¹⁸ Peter James Klassen, *Europe in the Reformation* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1979), p. 38.

¹⁹ Ulrike Strasser, "'The First Form and Grace': Ignatius of Loyola and the Reformation of Masculinity", in *Masculinity in the Reformation Era*, ed. by Scott H. Hendrix and Susan C. Karant-Nunn (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2008), pp. 47-70 (pp. 59-62).

confrontation and combat.²⁰ The findings of John W. O'Malley and John Bossy bear out and build upon Strasser's interpretation, documenting the centrality of mercy, consolation, and peacemaking in the early decades of the Society of Jesus.²¹

Another defining moment in Ignatius's personal evolution was his abandonment of aggressive, punishing asceticism. When Ignatius first embarked on his spiritual quest, he practiced harsh corporal and psychological mortifications, refusing to eat or bathe, praying on his knees for hours, and constantly rebuking himself. In time, however, Ignatius concluded that the ferocity of his penitence, which had found support in *Imitation of Christ* and Erasmus, had in fact become spiritually problematic.²² Indeed, he came to believe that it actually impeded rather than enhanced an interior bond with Jesus and the imitation of Christ in the world.²³ When he founded the Society of Jesus, therefore, Ignatius directed Jesuits to temper, if not cease altogether, their rigorous asceticism, teaching the necessity of bodily and emotional health for ministering to others.²⁴ François de Sales would later adopt this Ignatian perspective, teaching his Visitandines, 'Less rigor for the body means more *douceur* of heart'.²⁵

During the French Wars of Religion, it is true, some Jesuits lost sight of these crucial aspects of Ignatian spirituality. Indeed, against the orders of Ignatius and subsequent superior generals of the Society, certain members of the Society embraced the militant-penitential fervor of the French Counter-Reformation. Edmund Auger (1530-91), for instance, praised war against the Huguenots and the flesh, while Jacques Commolet (1543-93) advocated violence against Henry IV.²⁶ During his school days in Paris, François de Sales may have heard of and even admired such Jesuits. Ultimately, however, it was not the handful of militant Jesuits who left a

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 47-50.

²¹ John W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 165-88; John Bossy, *Peace in the Post-Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 8-10.

²² John C. Olin, ed., *The Autobiography of St. Ignatius Loyola with Related Documents*, trans. by Joseph F. O'Callaghan (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1974), p. 39.

²³ Ibid., p. 36.

²⁴ Strasser, 'Ignatius of Loyola and the Reformation of Masculinity', pp. 57-8.

²⁵ OEA, VI, 229.

²⁶ Eric Nelson, *The Jesuits and the Monarchy: Catholic Reform and Political Authority in France (1590-1615)* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 25; A. Lynn Martin, *Henry III and the Jesuit Politicians* (Geneva: Droz, 1973), pp. 29-30.

lasting impression on him, but those who favored a gentle, pastoral approach to the priesthood.

Pierre Favre, above all, captured the religious imagination of de Sales. Favre, also a French Savoyard, dedicated himself to the care of souls, primarily through works of mercy, confession, and the *Spiritual Exercises*, all of which he performed in a compassionate, pastoral style. For Favre, the priesthood consisted of healing and consoling others as Jesus did, a conviction revealed in personal writings. Prior to the birth of the Society of Jesus, for instance, Favre proclaimed his desire to be a ‘servant’ of ‘Christ the consoler’ and ‘minister of Christ the helper’. Favre also prayed that he would offer sustenance to ‘the soul and body of each and every one of [his] neighbors whomsoever’.²⁷

We also find in Favre strong moral opposition to violence against Protestants. Having learned of the execution of Protestants in Germany, where he engaged in his pastoral ministries, Favre lamented the reliance on the sword, arguing that Catholic reform itself constituted the proper response to heresy:

It pains me to see that the authorities [...] consider the public execution of known heretics to be their only course of action in these our days. I mean - and I have often told them this to their faces- that the builders of the City of God are using both hands to brandish their swords in the presence of the enemy. Good Lord! Why do we not leave one hand free for the work of restoration? Why is nothing being done to bring about a reform of all Christian life and states?²⁸

Favre exhorted Catholics to a religious zeal of service, healing, and love, even toward their enemies. For this Savoyard Jesuit, the *douceur* of Jesus revealed the authoritative model of Christian conduct. When ‘I consider Jesus Christ’, Favre wrote on one occasion, ‘I feel the great power of Christian gentleness (*douceur*) that our divine master taught by words and works’. In all seasons, Favre taught, a Catholic should strive to remain ‘gentle’ (*doux*) like Jesus and navigate adversity in a ‘spirit of gentleness’ (*douceur d’esprit*).²⁹

François de Sales expressed deep affection for Pierre Favre and the kind of priest he had been, though he had never met him. De Sales learned

²⁷ Pierre Favre, *Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre*, ed. by John W. Padberg (Saint Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), p. 157.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

²⁹ *Idem*, *Mémorial du bienheureux Pierre Le Fèvre*, ed. by Marcel Bouix (Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1874), p. 148.

about Favre from Jesuits who had known him and Favre's own personal writings known as the *Mémoriale*. After reading this work, de Sales praised the 'holy life' of Favre, 'a saint to whom for many reasons I am and ought to be devoted'.³⁰ In the search for precedents and inspirations for Salesian *douceur*, therefore, we must include the irenic, pastoral emphases within early Jesuit spirituality and the gentle Catholicity of Jesuit priests such as Pierre Favre.

FRENCH MOYENNEURS AND DOUCEUR

We must also consider a circle of French Erasmians critical of anti-Huguenot violence in the mid 1500s as an important precedent to the Salesian reform of militant Catholicism.³¹ There is, admittedly, no clear evidence that de Sales read or knew these humanists, dubbed *moyenneurs* (moderates) by Catholic hardliners in the early stages of the French Wars of Religion. Yet, his use of the word *douceur* to critique religious violence closely resembles theirs, suggesting that their irenic discourse persisted in French Catholic circles in the late 1500s. If de Sales did not draw directly on these Catholic humanists, he absorbed aspects of their vision and rhetoric which still had currency.

Influenced by Erasmian reform, the *moyenneurs* appealed to *douceur* in their calls for peace in the early stages of the French Wars of Religion.³² Michel de l'Hospital, for instance, exhorted French leaders to reconcile religious differences not by 'arms and oppression', but '*douceur*' in his 1561 address to the Estates General.³³ The poet Jacques Béroze wrote in 1562 that rather than assaulting heretics Catholics must treat them with '*douceur et humilité*'.³⁴ Similarly, in *Praise and Recommendation of Peace*,

³⁰ OEA, XV, 146.

³¹ For Erasmus's influence on French Catholic irenicism in the mid 1500s, see James Hutton, 'Erasmus and France: The Propaganda for Peace', *Studies in the Renaissance*, 8 (1961), 103-27.

³² Thierry Wanegffelen, *Ni Rome ni Genève: des fidèles entre deux chaires en France au XVIe siècle* (Paris: H. Champion, 1997), pp. 100-1.

³³ Michel de l'Hospital, and P. J. S. Dufey, *Oeuvres complètes de Michel de L'Hospital: ornées de portraits et de vues*, 3 vols (Paris: Boulland, 1824), I, 455. On the centrality of *douceur* in L'Hospital's politics, see, Loris Petris, *La Plume et la tribune: Michel de l'Hospital et ses discours (1559-1562)* (Geneva: Droz, 2002), pp. 87-97, 310-16.

³⁴ Jacques Béroze, *Oeuvres poétiques* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1969), p. 167.

published in 1563, Jean Saugrain wrote that the Gospels called Catholics to ‘*douceur et charité*’, not the ‘the bloody sword’.³⁵

Certain of these French Erasmians, such as Claude d’Espence, rejected Counter-Reformation militancy absolutely, contending that Catholic piety consisted of a gentle, loving imitation of Jesus.³⁶ D’Espence, a priest and theologian, exhorted the faithful to spread the ‘*douceur* of Catholicism’ rather than fixating on the ‘obstinacy’ of Protestants.³⁷ Arguing that the Catholic faith did not exist to destroy heresy, d’Espence urged the faithful to embody consolation and compassion, as Jesus did in the New Testament. ‘Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ left commandments for all Christians’, he wrote, consisting of ‘alleviating suffering’ and ‘deeds of mercy for the afflicted’.³⁸ Though separated from d’Espence and other *moyenneurs* by a generation, de Sales nonetheless inherited aspects of their vision of a Catholicism of *douceur*, renewing and refashioning it in the latter stages of the French Wars of Religion.

LIMITS OF SALESIAN *DOUCEUR*

While de Sales urged the humane treatment of Protestants and developed a nonviolent approach for addressing heresy, he nonetheless believed a ruler could declare a territory officially Catholic and proscribe Protestantism, the political doctrine of *cuis regio, euis religio*. At the close of the Chablais mission, as we shall see, de Sales supported such a policy by the Duke of Savoy. It is possible that de Sales later questioned this as his vision of *douceur* expanded, but there is no clear proof of reconsideration in his extant writings. The Salesian reform of militant Catholicism, then, was not

³⁵ Jean Saugrain, *Les Louanges & recommandations de la Paix* (Lyon: Jean Saugrain, 1563), p. 4. This work is an adaptation of Erasmus’ *Dulce bellum inexpertis*. On this point, see Hutton, ‘Erasmus and France’, p. 103.

³⁶ Marie Barral-Baron, ‘Claude d’Espence au miroir de l’*Enchiridion* d’Erasmus’, in *Un autre catholicisme au temps des Réformes?* ed. by Alain Tallon (Turnout: Brepols, 2010), pp. 15-38 (pp. 17, 33). This collection explores the irenicism of Claude d’Espence in depth.

³⁷ Claude d’Espence, *Apologie contenant ample discours, exposition, response et deffense de deux conférences avec les ministers de la religion prétendue réformée* (Paris: M. Sonnius, 1569), p. 81.

³⁸ Claude d’Espence, *Consolation en adversité, faite par M. Claude d’Espence* (Lyon: J. de Tournes, 1547), pp. 3-4.

so bold as to advocate religious pluralism as did certain *moyenneurs* before him.³⁹

Nor can we equate Salesian *douceur* with pacifism. Although de Sales viewed the humble, gentle Jesus of Matthew 11. 29 as a definitive model for Catholics, he was also a member of the nobility which deemed war a duty in certain circumstances. De Sales himself never engaged in warfare, but was acquainted, through family ties, with those who did. This is evident in de Sales's 1602 funeral sermon for Philippe Emmanuel de Lorraine, Duke of Mercoeur, who had fought in the French Wars of Religion and imperial wars against the Ottomans.⁴⁰ In this sermon, de Sales mentioned the links between his own family and that of the Duke and his wife, Marie de Luxembourg. He also praised the Duke's vigor, tenacity, and heroism in battle, thanking him for his willingness to die in Europe's efforts to confront the Turks. From such instances we can see that while de Sales critiqued religious violence, his vision of Catholic *douceur* did not reject the use of martial force in all circumstances.

³⁹ Keith Cameron, Mark Greengrass, and Penny Roberts, *The Adventure of Religious Pluralism in Early Modern France: Papers from the Exeter Conference, April 1999* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2000).

⁴⁰ OEA, VII, 400-35.

2 Early Religious Influences and the Question of Zeal

French Catholicism offered François de Sales a wide range of religious practices and mentalities in his youth and early adulthood. Two models of Catholicism, or Catholic cultures, stand out as particularly influential on him, competing for his allegiance. These models of Catholicism differed considerably, being, incompatible and contradictory in certain ways. In his family upbringing in Savoy (1567-78), de Sales experienced a relational, pastoral Catholicism emphasizing interpersonal unity, works of mercy, and a tolerant posture toward Protestants. In his Jesuit education in Paris (1578-88), this gentler Catholicism often, if not always, prevailed as well. Beyond his immediate Jesuit environment, in contrast, de Sales experienced a militant Catholicism defined by war on Protestantism and sin. In this religious militancy, which dominated much of Paris, Catholics routinely resorted to violence in the name of doctrinal and moral purity.

During his decade in Paris, de Sales participated in both of these cultures simultaneously, absorbing beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors normative to each. Eventually, in the wake of a spiritual crisis in 1587, however, he began to distance himself from Catholic militancy, while increasingly embracing a religious zeal defined by gentleness and compassion. This shift proved to be the birth of de Sales's critique of religious violence and vision of a Catholicism of *douceur* (gentleness) which would leave an indelible mark on French Catholicism.

THE RELIGIOUS CULTURE OF DE SALES'S CHILDHOOD, 1567-1578

Piety in de Sales's upbringing fused devotion and family cohesion. As a young child, de Sales attended Mass, performed charitable works, and joined community processions accompanied by his siblings and parents.¹ This family-centered piety continued into de Sales's adult years after he was ordained. His mother and father joined a religious confraternity (the Confraternity of the Holy Cross) that de Sales had formed in 1593 and received the sacraments from him in their household chapel.² For de Sales,

¹ Roger Devos, ed., *Saint François de Sales, par les témoins de sa vie* (Annecy: Gardet, 1967), pp. 34-8, 42-3.

² OEA, XXIV, 347.

practicing the faith together as a family was inseparable from loving unity in the home. Illustrating this is a 1606 letter in which de Sales recounts how he administered the Sacrament of Penance to his siblings and parents. Describing the occasion to a friend, de Sales reported, ‘there is here [in the family] only one heart and only one soul [...] it is a good, beautiful, and sweet thing to see how such fraternity endures’.³

Madame de Boisy, de Sales’s mother, modeled a tender, compassionate religiosity. As a small child, de Sales is believed to have proclaimed, ‘The good God and mama love me!’⁴ While perhaps apocryphal, this comment captures the role Madame de Boisy played in his early experiences of religion in terms of loving bonds. De Sales’s mother taught him prayers and other devotions, stressing kindness and works of mercy.⁵ Their mutual affection and shared religious sensibility endured until Madame de Boisy’s last moments. Near the end of her life, during which time she was quite ill, Madame de Boisy engaged in spiritual conversation and reading with de Sales. When she died, he closed her eyes and mouth, giving her a final ‘kiss of peace’. After this, de Sales explains, ‘my heart gave out and cried over this good mother’.⁶

Caring for strangers and the poor also figured centrally in the Catholicism practiced in de Sales’s home. According to a family friend, François Terrier, there was food for the hungry in times of famine and a ‘general alms-giving’ in the ‘house of de Sales every Holy Thursday’.⁷ Madame de Boisy led the family’s charitable activities, earning a reputation for generosity in the community.⁸ De Sales’s father taught works of mercy as well. In one instance, the family encountered thirsty men on a hot day. ‘We must show them compassion’, de Sales’s father told his children, proceeding to offer the strangers water.⁹ It is possible this compassionate religious orientation derived from a family devotion to Francis of Assisi (1182-1226). De Sales’s parents named their son after Francis of Assisi and

³ Ibid., XIII, 348.

⁴ E. J. Lajeunie, *Saint Francis de Sales, the Man, the Thinker, his Influence*, trans. by Rory O’Sullivan, 2 vols (Bangalore: S.F.S. Publications, 1986), I, 23; Antoine Dufournet, *La Jeunesse de saint François de Sales (1567-1602)* (Paris: B. Grasset, 1942), p. 21.

⁵ Devos, *Témoins*, p. 44.

⁶ OEA, XIV, 262.

⁷ Devos, *Témoins*, p. 37.

⁸ Ibid., p. 35.

⁹ Ibid., p. 45.

had a room in their home called the ‘Francis of Assisi room’ with a painting of the Italian holy man in it.¹⁰

Attitudes toward Huguenots in de Sales’s family were more complicated, characterized by both caution and civility. Monsieur de Boisly did not view Protestantism favorably, in part, because Berne and Geneva, both Protestant strongholds, had invaded Savoy in his youth.¹¹ Reservations about Protestantism, however, did not prevent respectful engagement with Protestants themselves. De Sales’s father received Huguenots in his home on occasion, possibly developing friendships in some cases. De Sales, himself, seems to have had fairly regular contact with Huguenots, believing that, while they were different and misguided, they were not particularly threatening or dangerous.¹² Even if de Sales’s family did not look approvingly upon Protestantism, then, their commitment to compassion and mercy nonetheless produced a tolerant, non-confrontational posture toward the Protestants in their midst.

MILITANT CATHOLICISM IN PARIS (1578-1588)

In 1578 de Sales left Savoy for Paris to continue his studies. He did not see his parents and siblings again for a decade. Only eleven years old, this was de Sales’s first experience of a large urban environment and one imagines him both excited and intimidated. Perhaps most provocative for young de Sales was the militancy of Parisian Catholicism, which contrasted sharply with the Catholicism of his childhood. Perceiving the world in stark polarities of good and evil, orthodoxy and heresy, many Parisian Catholics deemed Protestantism absolutely dangerous and destructive.¹³ Indeed, as Denis Crouzet has shown, apocalypticism often infused this mindset.¹⁴ If

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 34; Jean Goulu, *La Vie du bienheureux Mre François de Sales* (Paris: J. de Heuqueville, 1624), pp. 18-19; Elisabeth Stopp, *A Man to Heal Differences: Essays and Talks on St. Francis de Sales* (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph’s University Press, 1997), p. 163.

¹¹ Devos, *Témoins*, p. 38; Charles-Auguste de Sales, *Histoire du bienheureux François de Sales* (Lyon: La Bottière et Juillard, 1634), p. 94.

¹² Dufournet, *La Jeunesse*, pp. 21-2; François Trochu, *Saint François de Sales: évêque et prince de Genève, fondateur de la Visitation de Sainte-Marie, docteur de l’Église*, 2 vols (Paris: E. Vitte, 1941), I, 52; Fortunat Strowski, *Saint François de Sales* (Paris: Plon, 1928), pp. 64-5.

¹³ Natalie Zemon Davis, ‘The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France’, *Past and Present*, 59 (1973), 53-91 (pp. 57-60).

¹⁴ Denis Crouzet, *Les Guerriers de Dieu: la violence au temps des troubles de religion, vers 1525- vers 1610*, 2 vols (Seysssel: Champ Vallon, 1990), I, 178, 183, 376, II, 9-10, 195-6.

the Crown permitted Protestantism to exist in the capital and throughout the kingdom, many Parisians believed, God would soon punish France severely, initiating the End Times. Given this mentality, violence became a common method for dealing with heresy. Indeed, in 1572, just six years prior to de Sales's arrival, Paris witnessed the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day in which Catholics murdered hundreds of Huguenot men, women, and children. Few Parisian Catholics criticized the slaughter; in fact, many deemed it pleasing to God.¹⁵

In starting a new life in Paris, de Sales immersed himself in a milieu of revered religious institutions and traditions, some dating back to the early Middle Ages.¹⁶ Residing on rue Saint Jacques in the Latin Quarter, he dwelled among the city's most sacred sites. Just south of his residence, stood the church of Saint Geneviève, named after the patron saint of the city. To the north was the Cathedral of Notre Dame, perhaps the most famous church in Western Europe. Near Notre Dame sat Sainte-Chapelle, constructed by Louis IX (1214-1270) to house the Crown of Thorns and other precious relics attracting pilgrims from all of Christendom. And, at the heart of the Latin Quarter, was the prestigious University of Paris, home to the Sorbonne's theologians: the architects and defenders of Catholic orthodoxy. In the time of de Sales, the Sorbonne produced some of Europe's most vitriolic sermons, lectures, and publications against Protestants.

Medieval and early modern Parisians viewed their city as a sacred Catholic community, the 'second capital of the Christian world'.¹⁷ They honored Sainte Geneviève, patroness of Paris, for protecting the city against Hun aggression in the fifth century, venerating her relics thereafter.¹⁸ Parisians also consecrated their city through public devotions and rituals.¹⁹ On holy days, the clergy, confraternities, students, theologians, and royalty processed from Notre Dame to the Sainte-Chapelle, then to the Latin Quarter, and on to the Church of Sainte-Geneviève, linking the city's holiest

¹⁵ On Catholic reactions to the massacre, see Barbara B. Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 105.

¹⁶ Moshe Sluhovsky, *Patroness of Paris: Rituals of Devotion in Early Modern France* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 4-5, 113.

¹⁷ Robert Descimon, 'Le Corps de ville et le système cérémoniel parisien au début de l'âge moderne', *Statuts individuels, statuts corporatifs et statuts judiciaires dans les villes européennes (Moyen Âge et Temps modernes)*, ed. by Marc Boone and Maarten Prak (Louvain: Garant, 1996), pp. 73-128; Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, pp. 29-48; Sluhovsky, *Patroness*, pp. 45-70, 113.

¹⁸ Sluhovsky, *Patroness*, pp. 11, 65-6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-6.

Catholic sites and institutions.²⁰ Against a backdrop of royal, municipal, and civic banners, the relics of Sainte Geneviève and the Eucharist took pride of place, sanctifying the procession.²¹ Through such rituals, as Barbara Diefendorf has shown, the body social and the body politic of Paris formed a sacred bond with the patron saint of the city and the body of Christ.²² A prayer from the early 1500s illustrates this political-religious Catholic identity of the city:

And let us all state together:
Live the Catholic religion
Live the King and good parishioners,
Live faithful Parisians,
And may it always come to pass
That everyone goes to Mass.
One God, one Faith, one King.²³

The emergence of Protestantism in the mid sixteenth century, therefore, posed an unprecedented challenge to the Catholic identity of Paris. Viewing Protestantism as a spiritual and moral pollutant, some Catholics resorted to expiatory rituals of penance and violence. In the 1550s and 1560s, they took to the streets, engaging in emotional penitential processions, which sometimes culminated in the burning of Huguenot books and homes.²⁴ Radical priests integrated violence into the liturgy, praying curses against Protestants and piercing wax effigies of heretics with needles at Mass.²⁵ This combat against heresy reached a bloody apex in the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572, erupting in Paris and spreading throughout France. Across the 1570s and 1580s, when François de Sales lived in the city, placards, pamphlets, and sermons continued to call for the destruction of heretics. For some time, de Sales embraced aspects of this religious militancy and its theology of purity and triumph. Ultimately, however, it did not win his allegiance, and the Jesuits in Paris played a crucial role in this, channeling his religious zeal in nonviolent directions.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 75-8.

²¹ Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, pp. 40-8.

²² Ibid., pp. 47-8.

²³ *Archives curieuses de l'histoire de France*, ed. by L. Cimber and F. Danjou, 1st ser., 15 vols (Paris: Beauvais, 1834-37), VII, 259.

²⁴ Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, pp. 45-7, 53, 65, 161; David Nicholls, 'The Theatre of Martyrdom in the French Reformation', *Past and Present*, 121 (1988), 49-73 (p. 50).

²⁵ Sluhovsky, *Patroness*, pp. 119-21.

THE JESUITS IN PARIS

The first Jesuit communities of Paris formed in the late 1550s and early 1560s, creating the Collège de Clermont in 1564. Most of the original Jesuits in France came from abroad, primarily from Italy and Spain, and, generally, they abstained from the militant fervor in the kingdom. Scholars once maintained that the Society of Jesus actively participated in the Catholic militancy of the French Wars of Religion, but this no longer appears tenable.²⁶ Henri Fouqueray, A. Lynn Martin, and others have demonstrated that claims of Jesuit militancy in sixteenth-century France have been greatly overstated.²⁷ In fact, with the exception of a few individuals, there is little evidence for direct Jesuit involvement in the bloodshed of the French Wars of Religion. This is not surprising given that Ignatius and subsequent superior generals of the Society of Jesus consistently urged Jesuits in France to avoid contentious social and political matters.²⁸ Heeding the directives of their superiors, most Jesuits devoted themselves to education, administering the sacraments, and works of mercy. When it came to heresy, the Jesuits in France typically approached it as a pastoral problem better resolved through preaching, teaching, dialogue, and personal virtue than through confrontation.²⁹

The difference between the pastoral, irenic inclinations of the majority of Jesuits and the militancy of the Catholic establishment in Paris becomes evident when examining the Society's attempts to found a school in the city. When royal authorities first considered a Jesuit school in the capital in the 1550s, the Sorbonne and Parisian clergymen vehemently

²⁶ For such claims, see Aristide Douarche, *L'Université de Paris and les Jésuites* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1970), pp. 55-9, 100-1; Lajeunie, *Saint Francis de Sales*, I, 46-8.

²⁷ A. Lynn Martin, *Henry III and the Jesuit Politicians* (Geneva: Droz, 1973), pp. 20-3; Henri Fouqueray, *Histoire de la Compagnie de Jésus en France: des origines à la suppression (1528-1762)* (Paris: A. Picard et Fils, 1910), pp. 135-9. For the origins of the legend of Jesuit extremism, see, Eric Nelson, 'The Jesuit Legend: Superstition and Myth-making', in *Religion and Superstition in Reformation Europe*, ed. by Helen Parish and William Naphy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 94-118.

²⁸ Martin, *Henry III*, pp. 21, 88; ; John W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 289.

²⁹ Antanas Liuima, *Aux sources du Traité de l'amour de Dieu de Saint François de Sales*, 2 vols (Rome: Librairie éditrice de l'Université gregorienne, 1959), I, 106-7; André Schimberg, *L'Éducation morale dans les collèges de la Compagnie de Jésus en France sous l'ancien régime* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1913), pp. 271-3.

opposed. Certainly, they objected to the Society of Jesus due to the foreign origins of the Order, but they also found Jesuit piety suspect. In 1554, the Sorbonne formally questioned the orthodoxy of the Jesuits, citing the fact that they did not pray the daily office or observe rigorous penances. Sorbonne theologians also objected to Jesuit willingness to teach illegitimate and disreputable young people.³⁰ Accusing the Society of Jesus of questionable doctrine and morals, they refused to incorporate a Jesuit college into the University of Paris.³¹ Not unlike Protestants, then, the Jesuits had become targets of Paris's Catholic establishment.

When Ignatius of Loyola learned of the Sorbonne's heated opposition, he urged the Jesuits to remain calm and patient.³² Eventually, the Sorbonne did relent, due in part to royal pressure, permitting one Jesuit school in Paris. As part of the agreement, the Jesuits had to submit to the authority and traditions of the University of Paris, while also abstaining from using the terms 'Society of Jesus' or 'Jesuit' in the name of their college.³³ Diego Laínez, Ignatius' successor as head of the Society, agreed to these conditions and accepted the offer of a Jesuit-friendly prelate, Guillaume du Prat, to provide property for a school. Du Prat, Bishop of Clermont, gave his residence in the Latin Quarter to the Society of Jesus for its college. Named after this bishop, the Collège de Clermont opened on rue Saint Jacques facing the Sorbonne.³⁴

THE COLLÈGE DE CLERMONT

The Collège de Clermont, François de Sales's school and home for ten years, offered a Christian humanist education stressing academics, virtue, and devotion. Particularly influential in shaping the intellectual and religious culture of the school was the renowned Spanish humanist, Juan Maldonado, S.J. (1533-83), a specialist in Greek, Scripture, and Patristics. Although Maldonado left Clermont just before de Sales's arrival, his legacy informed the curriculum and mission of the school in subsequent years.³⁵

³⁰ Philippe Lécrivain, S. J., 'The Struggle for Paris: Juan Maldonado in France', in *The Mercurian Project: Forming Jesuit Culture, 1573-1580*, ed. by Thomas M. McCoog (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2004), pp. 295-321 (pp. 296-7).

³¹ Douarche, *L'Université de Paris*, p. 60.

³² O'Malley, *First Jesuits*, p. 289; Christoph Genelli, *La Vie de saint Ignace*, trans. by M. Charles Sainte-Foi, 2 vols (Paris: LeCoffre, 1857), II, 267-8.

³³ Douarche, *L'Université de Paris*, pp. 63-5.

³⁴ Dufournet, *La Jeunesse*, p. 52.

³⁵ Alexander Pocetto, *Ecclesial Dimensions of Salesian Thought* (Hyattsville: Institute of Salesian Studies, 1972), pp. 10-12.

Serving as professor and administrator for over a decade (1564-76), Maldonado promoted a curriculum rooted in Jesus of the Gospels and Christian antiquity, while also being responsive to the moral and spiritual needs of contemporary society.³⁶ As for the Catholic-Huguenot conflict within France, Maldonado favored preaching, education, and dialogue over aggression. Like Michel de Montaigne (1533-92), his close friend, Maldonado believed that French Catholics needed to distinguish between Protestants and Protestantism, treating the former with civility even when contesting the latter.³⁷ In his inaugural Clermont address in 1565, the Spanish Jesuit affirmed an Erasmian approach to heresy that relied on learning and personal virtue rather than on arms.³⁸

In 1574, Sorbonne hardliners resumed their attacks on the Jesuits, now aiming at Maldonado. The Paris theologians opposed Maldonado's teaching that souls in purgatory likely did not remain there more than ten years. They also rejected his claim that the Immaculate Conception was not an article of faith to which Catholics had to assent. Accusing Maldonado of heresy and disrespecting the Virgin, the Sorbonne litigated against him and moved to close Clermont.³⁹ Meanwhile, militant associates of the Sorbonne beat Maldonado and vandalized the grounds of the school with rocks, mud, and possibly musket shots.⁴⁰ Regarding the Sorbonne's outrage over dissenting views on the Immaculate Conception, one Jesuit wrote, 'They spread threats publicly and privately, saying that anyone claiming the contrary would be considered a heretic and expelled from the university. Others added that there was a need for "Bartholomizing" or burning of adherents of the contrary opinion'.⁴¹

Across the 1560s and 1570s, the Sorbonne harassed and maligned the Jesuits. Although the bishop of Paris had declared Maldonado orthodox, the Sorbonne asserted otherwise, refusing the Collège de Clermont the right to grant licentiate and doctorates. Increasingly, the Jesuits in France appealed to Rome for help in fending off Sorbonne militancy. One Jesuit,

³⁶ Paul Schmitt, *La Réforme catholique: le combat de Maldonat (1534-1583)* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1985), pp. 298-9; Lécivain, 'The Struggle for Paris', p. 304.

³⁷ Clément Sclafert, 'Montaigne et Maldonat', *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* (1951), 1-146 (p. 140).

³⁸ Lécivain, 'The Struggle for Paris', p. 303.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

⁴⁰ O'Malley, *First Jesuits*, p. 290; Paul Schmitt, *La Réforme catholique: le combat de Maldonat (1534-1583)* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1985), pp. 265-6.

⁴¹ Letter from Claude Matthieu to Superior General Everard Mercurian in Rome, quoted in Jean-Marie Prat, S. J., *Maldonat et l'Université de Paris au XVI^e siècle* (Paris: Julien Lanier, 1856), p. 365.

Claude Matthieu, wrote to Pope Gregory XIII reporting that the Sorbonne had begun to turn Parisians against the Society of Jesus, which, he feared, would force the Jesuits to flee the kingdom.⁴² Finally, in 1577, one year before the arrival of François de Sales, Maldonado left Paris, worn down, but hopeful his departure would temper the Sorbonne's anti-Jesuit fervor. In these episodes, then, we witness the intra-Catholic turbulence into which de Sales was entering.

DE SALES'S JESUIT EDUCATION, 1578-1588

De Sales's decade in Paris was marked by a voracious religious appetite. A classmate, Michael Favre, claimed that de Sales 'took singular pleasure' in 'visiting churches, listening to sermons, [and] conversing with devout people'.⁴³ De Sales, himself, reported that he had become so 'taken by a fervor and a desire to be holy and perfect' that, when praying, he would 'lean his head on his shoulder'. He had developed this pious habit because 'another student who was truly a saint would do this'.⁴⁴ De Sales also drew up rules of devotion and asceticism, imposing penalties on himself when he failed to observe them.⁴⁵ Given his intense religiosity, de Sales might have embraced the militancy of Parisian Catholicism more fully than he ultimately did. That he did not is due primarily to the Collège de Clermont, which directed his religious impulses toward intellectual competence, Christian fellowship, and the pastoral care of others.

At the Collège de Clermont, de Sales immersed himself in rigorous academics and devotional reading. After studying classical Latin, Literature, and Rhetoric early in his curriculum, he moved on to Patristics, Scripture, and Theology.⁴⁶ It is likely that in this period de Sales first encountered the religious thought of Erasmus through certain Jesuit instructors.⁴⁷ De Sales's peers noticed his desire for religious study and exploration. One classmate recalled that de Sales often engaged in 'spiritual reading, like the *Lives of the Saints*', preferring such reading over recreation.⁴⁸ We also know that, in 1584, de Sales attended lectures on the

⁴² Ibid., p. 399.

⁴³ Devos, *Témoins*, p. 54.

⁴⁴ OEA, VI, 141.

⁴⁵ Ibid., XXII, 11-3; Devos, *Témoins*, p. 60.

⁴⁶ For an examination of de Sales's coursework, see Morand Wirth, *François de Sales et l'éducation: formation humaine et humanisme intégral* (Paris: Don Bosco, 2005), pp. 56-60. On de Sales as a Latinist, see A. Delplanque, *Saint François de Sales, humaniste et écrivain latin* (Lille: Facultés Catholiques, 1907).

⁴⁷ Pocetto, *Ecclesial Dimensions*, p. 11.

⁴⁸ Devos, *Témoins*, p. 54.

Song of Songs delivered by Gilbert Générard (1535-97) at the Collège Royale.⁴⁹

Outside of the classroom, the Clermont Jesuits aided de Sales in developing a piety that synthesized devotion, spiritual friendships, and pastoral outreach. The Marian Congregation (or Sodality) in which de Sales participated actively, eventually assuming the position of prefect, illustrates this.⁵⁰ The Jesuits created the Marian Congregation to guide lay people in building communities of piety and fellowship and both de Sales and his classmates attest to the importance of the sodality during his student days in Paris.⁵¹

Devotion to Mary and Jesus, cultivated through prayer, liturgy, and spiritual conversation, served as the foundation of the confraternity. Bonds of affection then extended to the other members of Congregation. Guidelines for the Clermont chapter of the sodality stated that members had to reach out to another in friendship and mutuality. Fraternal unity found expression in prayers for sick classmates and funeral services for deceased students as well.⁵² Members of the Congregation also bonded with the Jesuit fathers who directed them in the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius.

Marian Congregations required members to practice works of mercy in the wider community, as well. According to Louis Châtellier, leading historian of the Congregation, ‘charity’ in ‘all its forms clearly emerged from the beginning as one of the major activities of the sodalities’. Visiting hospitals and providing meals for the poor were commonplace and, in some cases, serving those in need emerged as the top priority of Congregations.⁵³ Indeed, one chapter of the Congregation simply did not accept students averse to serving and caring for others.⁵⁴ It is likely, therefore, that de Sales engaged in works of mercy in Paris much as he had as a child in Annecy.

⁴⁹ Wendy M. Wright, *Heart Speaks to Heart: The Salesian Tradition* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004), pp. 24-5.

⁵⁰ François Charmot, S. J., *Deux maîtres, une spiritualité: Ignace de Loyola, François de Sales* (Paris: Éditions du Centurion, 1963), p. 26.

⁵¹ Devos, *Témoins*, p. 52; Fouqueray, *Histoire*, p. 16. On the foundation and goals of the sodality, see Louis Châtellier, *Europe of the Devout: The Catholic Reformation and the Formation of a New Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 1-13.

⁵² Châtellier, *Europe of the Devout*, pp. 6, 23.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 129.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

De Sales grew fond of the Jesuits at the Collège de Clermont.⁵⁵ Antoine Bouvaud, a friend who visited him in 1588, reported that as soon as he had arrived in Paris, de Sales insisted that they dine and converse with the Jesuit fathers.⁵⁶ This affection for Jesuits endured the rest of his life. Throughout his ecclesiastical career, de Sales worked closely with them, praising the Society of Jesus in his writings and arranging for Jesuit priests to work closely with his Visitandines.⁵⁷ De Sales did the *Spiritual Exercises* under the direction of Jesuits at different points in his life as well.⁵⁸ It is also telling that de Sales strongly encouraged King Henry IV to allow the Jesuits to return to France after their expulsion from the kingdom in 1595.

FEARS AND FRACTURES IN CATHOLIC PARIS

During de Sales's tenure in Paris from 1578 to 1588, Catholics increasingly criticized the Crown, causing unprecedented rifts between militants and moderates within Parisian Catholicism. In the late 1570s, the Sorbonne, backed by much of clergy and laity, publicly denounced Henry III and Catherine de Medici for tolerating Protestantism in the kingdom. The Peace of Monsieur edict of 1576, which permitted Protestant worship throughout France, with the exception of Paris, sparked this protest.⁵⁹ While Henry III may not have intended to honor this edict, many concluded that the Crown had abandoned the Catholic identity and heritage of France.⁶⁰

In response, militants denounced the Peace of Monsieur, demanding total war on Protestantism in France. Furthermore, they began to demonize fellow Catholics who tolerated Protestants, illustrating a deepening radicalization of the French Counter-Reformation. Across

⁵⁵ Concerning student approval of the Jesuits and Clermont's curriculum, see, Charmot, *Deux maîtres*, pp. 25-6.

⁵⁶ Devos, *Témoins*, p. 56.

⁵⁷ For Salesian-Jesuit ties, see Liuima, *Aux sources*, pp. 115-43; Joseph Bergin, *Church, Society, and Religious Change in France, 1580-1730* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 139. For Salesian-Jesuit ties in de Sales's own words, see OEA, XIV, 74, 225, 304, 307, XVI, 246, 333, XVII, 238, XX, 296, XXII, 222, XXVI, 343, 357.

⁵⁸ OEA, XIII, xix, 139, XIV, 219; Charles-Auguste de Sales, *Histoire*, I, p. 327; Elizabeth Stopp, *St Francis de Sales: A Testimony by St Chantal* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p. 54.

⁵⁹ Ann W. Ramsey, *Liturgy, Politics, and Salvation: The Catholic League in Paris and the Nature of Catholic Reform, 1540-1630* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1999), pp. 10-16.

⁶⁰ Mack P. Holt, *The French Wars of Religion, 1562-1629*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 105-6.

France, preachers and pamphlets lambasted Catholic moderates as *politiques*, an insult implying they cared for political interests more than the Catholicity of the kingdom.⁶¹ As passions intensified, belief in anything less than the extermination of Huguenots made one vulnerable to attack by militants.

No location saw more outrage than Paris, where radicals denounced the *Parlement* for approving 'the introduction of the so-called reformed religion into the kingdom' by having made a pact 'with the enemies of God'.⁶² Militant anger, however, pinpointed Henry III, above all, as popular poems and songs accused the monarch of atheism, heresy, and sodomy, while militant sermons and pamphlets claimed he lost the royal touch.⁶³ In a 1583 Lenten sermon at Notre Dame, the preacher Pierre Poncet mocked the king's piety and commitment to Catholic France.⁶⁴ Through such measures, militants alienated Henry III from the sacred institutions and traditions of French Catholicism. Such alienation later culminated in his assassination by the Dominican friar Jacques Clément in 1589.

Calls for moral purification and penance intensified in the wake of the Peace of Monsieur as well. As Thierry Amalou has shown, efforts to combat sin and immorality quickened among Catholics of all social classes.⁶⁵ In 1578, the Sorbonne demanded stricter sumptuary laws, forbidding students and faculty from wearing short-sleeved garments, as well as ordering all instructors to practice celibacy. In the 1580s, radicals warned women against luxurious and revealing clothing. According to the chronicler, Pierre L'Estoile, militants accosted Parisian women whose attire they deemed immodest and a 1582 pamphlet alleged that a devil had strangled a scantily-clad woman.⁶⁶

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 108-9.

⁶² Paul Robiquet, *Paris et la ligue sous le règne de Henri III: étude d'histoire municipale et politique* (Paris: Hachette et cie, 1886), p. 47.

⁶³ David A. Bell, 'Unmasking a King: The Political Uses of Popular Literature under the French Catholic League, 1588-89', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 20 (1989), 371-86 (pp. 379-82).

⁶⁴ Dufournet, *La Jeunesse*, p. 101; Jehan de la Fosse, *Les 'mémoires' d'un curé de Paris (1557-1590): au temps des guerres de religion*, ed. by Marc Venard (Geneva: Droz, 2004), p. 147.

⁶⁵ Thierry Amalou, 'Entre réforme du royaume et enjeux dynastiques: Le magistère intellectuel et moral de l'Université de Paris au sein de la Ligue (1576-1594)' *Cahiers de Recherches Médiévales* 15 (2008), 145-66 (pp. 9-10).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*; Denis Richet, 'Aspects socio-culturels des conflits religieux à Paris dans la seconde moitié du XVI^e siècle', *Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 32 (1977), 764-89 (p. 783).

The militant fixation on doctrinal and moral purity also produced emotional, public displays of penitence, as illustrated by the ‘white processions’ of 1583 and 1584.⁶⁷ Across northern France, Catholics donning white garments marched through towns and countryside, exhorting coreligionists to turn from license and apathy. Opting to impose suffering on themselves rather than on Huguenots, these penitents walked barefoot, flagellated, and cursed themselves for their sins.⁶⁸ By means of this penitential violence, these militants sought to purify the kingdom and avert God’s punishment.⁶⁹

FRANÇOIS DE SALES AND MILITANT PIETY

Despite his affinity for gentle, pastoral expressions of faith, François de Sales also admired aspects of this Catholic militancy. Certain scholars have overlooked this attraction, arguing that de Sales did not encounter Catholic militancy during his Paris years.⁷⁰ This, however, is untenable, for the Latin Quarter, where de Sales lived, studied, and worshipped for a decade, hosted the most radical Catholic leaders.⁷¹ Jean Boucher, the Sorbonne theologian, served as a pastor at the parish of Saint-Benoît, where he preached the extermination of heresy and moral depravity. It is likely that de Sales frequented this parish.⁷² The church of Saint Séverin, a short walk from the Collège de Clermont, was the ‘cradle of Left Bank militancy’.⁷³ Its pastor, Jean Prévost, also a militant clergyman, worked closely with the Duke of Guise, head of the Catholic League.⁷⁴ Beyond the Latin Quarter, de Sales had family ties to the Duke of Mercoeur, perhaps the fiercest Catholic Leaguer and an opponent of Henry IV in the 1590s.⁷⁵ It is possible that de

⁶⁷ Crouzet, *Les Guerriers*, II, 296-310.

⁶⁸ Idem, ‘La Représentation du temps à l’époque de la Ligue’, *Revue historique*, 270 (1984), 297-388 (pp. 320-1).

⁶⁹ Idem, *Les Guerriers*, II, 9-14.

⁷⁰ Maurice Henry-Couannier, *Saint Francis de Sales and his Friends* (Chicago: Scepter, 1964), pp. 30-1; Lajeunie, *Saint Francis de Sales*, I, 48.

⁷¹ Dufournet, *La Jeunesse*, pp. 98-101.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 101.

⁷³ Stuart Carroll, ‘The Revolt of Paris, 1588: Aristocratic Insurgency and the Mobilization of Popular Support’, *French Historical Studies*, 23 (2000), 302-37 (p. 318).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 318-20.

⁷⁵ De Sales mentions family ties to the Mercoeur house in *Traité de l’amour de Dieu*. See, OEA, IV, 18.

Sales spent time in Mercoeur's residence in Paris, witnessing League piety and politics up close.⁷⁶

The words and conduct of de Sales himself reveal a certain absorption of the militant-penitential fervor of the French Wars of Religion. He practiced rigorous bodily mortification, including fasting and wearing a hair shirt several days a week.⁷⁷ In light of his 'imbecility and nothingness', de Sales also created religious rules for himself, promising to impose 'extraordinary' penalties on himself should he fail to observe them. These punishments were to be both 'spiritual and bodily' and performed with 'austerity, humility, and abjection'. Through such discipline and asceticism, de Sales wrote in personal notes, he intended to embody a 'militant' and 'triumphant' Catholicism.⁷⁸

De Sales also fixated on moral purity in a fashion typical of Catholic militancy. Witnesses for his canonization testified that he eschewed games and parties during his student days, deeming them sinful. De Sales also lashed out against those threatening to corrupt him. On one occasion, de Sales furiously rejected an acquaintance's invitation to Carnival festivities, denouncing them as unclean.⁷⁹ Another account even has de Sales spitting on a woman who had expressed romantic interest in him.⁸⁰ In such instances, we see that, despite his strong religious inclinations toward fellowship and compassion, the young de Sales also displayed moral aggression in interpersonal relations.

De Sales's fondness for Capuchin Franciscans and the friar, Ange de Joyeuse, in particular, demonstrates his attraction to militant-penitential Catholicism as well. Megan Armstrong has shown that the Capuchins, perhaps more than any other religious order, championed the militancy of the French Wars of Religion.⁸¹ Their extreme asceticism, poverty, and hatred of Huguenots appealed to many young men, including Henri de Joyeuse (1563-1608), member of the royal court. In 1587, at the age of

⁷⁶ Harold Burton, *The Life of Saint Francis de Sales* (London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1925), p. 26.

⁷⁷ André Ravier, *Francis de Sales: Sage and Saint* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), pp. 29-30; Devos, *Témoins*, p. 23.

⁷⁸ OEA, XXII, 11-2.

⁷⁹ Lajeunie, *Saint François de Sales*, I, 57.

⁸⁰ Ravier, *Sage and Saint*, p. 41.

⁸¹ Megan Armstrong, *Politics of Piety: Franciscan Preachers During the Wars of Religion, 1560-1600* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2004), pp. 2-10. Jean Dagens also sees Capuchins active in the Catholic League in his, *Bérulle et les origines de la restauration catholique* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1952), pp. 113-4.

twenty-four, this courtier abruptly renounced his wealth and privilege for a life of mortification with the Capuchins, assuming the religious name, Ange (Angel) de Joyeuse.⁸² Later, growing increasingly fearful of Protestants, Joyeuse joined the Catholic League. Refusing to accept Henry IV's conversion to Catholicism as authentic, Joyeuse waged war on the monarch until 1597, at which time he returned to a Capuchin monastery.

Joyeuse's militant religiosity impressed de Sales for some time. Jean Pasquelet de Moyron, a classmate of de Sales, maintained that he and de Sales frequently visited the Capuchin monastery where Ange de Joyeuse resided: 'I accompanied [de Sales] often to the Monastery of the Reverend Father Capuchins [...] in order to see Seigneur de Joyeuse, who shortly before had left the world to die in the habit of a Capuchin'.⁸³ De Moyron explained that de Sales wished to be near Joyeuse, stating, he 'tried as much as he could to make it to the church of the Capuchins to hear Mass served by the said Joyeuse'. De Moyron thought that de Sales might join the Capuchins, given his attraction to Joyeuse: 'I noticed by the gestures and speech of [de Sales] that he was full of zeal, desire, and affection to imitate and make himself religious like [Ange de Joyeuse]'.⁸⁴

POLITICAL CRISIS, SPIRITUAL CRISIS

Tensions between Catholic moderates and militants reached a boiling point in de Sales's final years in Paris. In 1584, the death of the Duke of Anjou, the younger brother of King Henry III, made the Huguenot, Henry of Navarre, heir to the throne. The prospect of a Protestant king shocked Catholic France, sparking the formation of militias committed to preventing such an outcome. Soon after, the nobility, led by the militant Duke of Guise, aligned with the militias to form the Catholic League. The oaths for the League required a commitment to fight for Catholic France: 'We have all sworn and solemnly promised to use force and take up arms to the end that the holy church of God may be restored to its dignity'.⁸⁵ Meanwhile, League literature spoke of the moment in apocalyptic terms, warning of God's judgment and exhorting the faithful to penitence.

Within Paris, militants mobilized in unprecedented fashion. In 1585, the Sorbonne radicals, Jean Boucher and Jean Prévost, met with lawyers and civic leaders to form the *Seize* (Sixteen).⁸⁶ This Parisian wing

⁸² Dufournet, *La Jeunesse*, pp. 115-6.

⁸³ Devos, *Témoins*, p. 53.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 53-4.

⁸⁵ *Archives curieuses*, XI, 15.

⁸⁶ Carroll, 'The Revolt of Paris, 1588', p. 315.

of the Catholic League sought the elimination of Protestants and moderate Catholics from each of the sixteen *quartiers* of the city. Tensions between the Crown and the *Seize* intensified in 1587 when news arrived that Queen Elizabeth of England had executed Mary Stuart, the Catholic queen of Scotland and member of the Guise family.⁸⁷ In response, the *Seize* posted placards in the parish of Saint Séverin depicting the torture of English Catholics, warning that French Catholics would meet the same fate if Henry of Navarre took the throne. Increasingly, militants called for the death of Huguenots. One 1587 pamphlet painted a bleak picture, advocating violence:

Will it always be so, poor Catholics, that you will live in this calamity, waiting for someone to come to you at any hour to cut your throats in your beds? [...] What will put you at your ease for good is chasing all heretics from the city. Do not stop at words and promises anymore [and] know that God saves only those who deserve salvation [...] do not hesitate any longer [and] do not fear those loyal to the prince of Béarn [Henry of Navarre] of whom this city is filled [...] make them feel your hands: HURRY.⁸⁸

Thousands flocked to the church of Saint Séverin to see the images of dying English Catholics and to support the *Seize*. Meanwhile, preachers angrily denounced Henry III's tolerance of Huguenots and the ties he had established with Queen Elizabeth in preceding years. They also declared the imminence of God's punishment of France. Finally, the militant fervor reached a boiling point on the Day of Barricades in 1588, when the *Seize* attacked royal officials in the capital, seizing control of the city and forcing the king to flee. Within a year, the king was murdered in a militant plot.

In 1586 and 1587, amidst this religious and political turbulence, de Sales became embroiled in his own spiritual crisis. Uncertainty as to how to live out his Catholic faith and identity defined this crisis. The problem for de Sales, who so desired to be 'holy and perfect',⁸⁹ was that he identified with divergent, and ultimately contradictory, forms of religiosity. While he internalized the compassionate, pastoral Catholicism promoted by his family and Clermont Jesuits, de Sales also admired the penitence and militancy of League piety.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 317.

⁸⁸ Pierre de l'Estoile, *Registre-journal du règne de Henri III*, ed. Madeleine Lazard and Gilbert Schrenck, 6 vols (Geneva: Droz, 2001), V, 251.

⁸⁹ OEA, VI, 141.

The fear of God and divine judgment also figure centrally in de Sales's crisis. Brief comments, observations, and prayers jotted down in 1586 and 1587 illustrate a guilt-ridden soul before a merciless God. Among his writings are Psalm-like laments, such as 'Lord, have pity on me [...] I have sinned against you' and 'Me, wretched, alas!'⁹⁰ De Sales poses urgent, probing questions such as, 'Will God forget to have pity? Or withdraw his mercy in anger?' and 'Will my soul not be given to God?'⁹¹ In one instance, de Sales begs for divine mercy: 'Throw a look to me and do not turn your face from your servant, for I am tormented'.⁹²

TOWARD A CATHOLICISM OF *DOUCEUR*

Unsure how to live his Catholic faith in accord with divine will, de Sales oscillated emotionally between fear of God's punishment and trust in divine mercy. Gradually, however, as de Sales emerged from his spiritual crisis, he embraced the latter. After several tumultuous weeks, de Sales visited a small chapel devoted to the Virgin within the Church of Saint-Étienne des Grès.⁹³ In this chapel stood a statue, known as Our Lady of Deliverance, which depicts Mary holding and gazing upon the infant Jesus with affectionate calm.⁹⁴ According to Jeanne de Creil, a colleague of de Sales to whom he recounted this episode, he 'humbly knelt before the statue and said a 'prayer to the holy Virgin'. In that moment, de Creil maintains, de Sales felt 'free from his cruel, awful temptation' concerning divine punishment.⁹⁵

The tenderness and affection expressed in the embrace of Mary and Jesus seem to have tipped the scales for de Sales in favor of a fundamentally compassionate and gentle God. In the months following this moment with Our Lady of Deliverance, we witness a new optimism and assurance in de Sales. Notes and prayers of hope now replaced those of trepidation and doubt. In one fragment we read, 'you will ascend the mountain of the Lord' and 'my name is not "damner" but "Savior"'.⁹⁶ There are also lines from the Bible, perhaps recalled from Génébrard's course on Hebrew Scripture,

⁹⁰ Ibid., XXII, 17-8.

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 14, 17.

⁹² Ibid., p. 16.

⁹³ Devos, *Témoins*, p. 327.

⁹⁴ Stopp, *A Man to Heal Differences*, p. 42.

⁹⁵ Devos, *Témoins*, p. 59. Jeanne de Chantal describes this moment similarly in *ibid.*, p. 58.

⁹⁶ OEA, XXII, 66. According to Dom Mackey, editor of the Annecy collection, de Sales wrote this between 1587 and 1591. For discussions on the dating of de Sales's writings, see *ibid.*, v-xxxv.

that affirm divine mercy, depicting a God who values, above all, life, growth, and redemption:

Have confidence my son for I do not will the death of the sinner, but rather that he be converted and live [...] I have made you like all other things, for myself [...] My will is nothing other than your sanctification and my soul hates nothing that it has made [...] Have confidence in my mercy.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Ibid., 65.

3 Reforming the War on Heresy

Modern treatments of François de Sales's relationship with Protestants often emphasize his opposition to Protestantism and efforts to combat it.¹ We read in the *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Theologians*, for instance, that 'in all of his pastoral as well as published work', de Sales aimed to 'counter' Calvinism.² Scholars argue that, however kindly de Sales interacted with Huguenots, he was nonetheless a fervent Counter-Reformer determined, above all, to achieve their conversion. Jill Fehleison, for example, holds that 'despite his reputation for gentleness', de Sales stands out as an 'ardent Counter-Reformation leader' of early modern Catholicism.³

Absent in this historiography, however, are the ways in which de Sales broke from Counter-Reformation militancy early in his priesthood, even as he sought to win Huguenot converts to Catholicism. Unlike most Catholic clergymen during the Wars of Religion, de Sales recognized the humanity of Huguenots and exhorted Catholics to engage them nonviolently. Dubbing de Sales a champion of the Counter-Reformation without further qualification or comparative analysis, this historiography ignores the Salesian rejection of the fear and aggression typical of Catholic Leaguers and early *dévots*. To overlook this initial development of Salesian nonviolence is to miss evidence of Catholic irenicism during the French Wars of Religion and the diversity of religious cultures in the French Counter-Reformation.

This chapter argues that even as de Sales engaged in the work of the Counter-Reformation in the 1590s, he also embarked on a reform of the Catholic war on heresy, which constituted his first reform of militant Catholicism. Early signs of his critique are evident in the anti-war commentary of his earliest sermons, delivered in 1593 and 1594. The reform then blossomed in the Chablais mission (1594-98) where de Sales developed a nonviolent model for engaging Protestants and the challenge of

¹ Ruth Kleinman, *Saint François de Sales and the Protestants* (Geneva: Droz, 1962), p. 31.

² *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Theologians*, ed. by Patrick W. Carey (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000), p. 199.

³ Jill Fehleison, 'Ministering to Catholics and Protestants Alike: The Preaching, Polemics, and Pastoral Care of François de Sales', in *Episcopal Reform and Politics in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Jennifer Mara DeSilva (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2012), pp. 128-46 (p. 144).

heresy. While the clergy and laity often resorted to the demonization, intimidation, and killing of Protestants, de Sales actively pursued nonviolent strategies.

Although an active Counter-Reformer in the 1590s, de Sales viewed heresy as a pastoral issue best addressed through pedagogical and liturgical strategies that affirmed Catholic tradition rather than attacking Huguenots or Huguenot worship. Eschewing popular Catholic tropes of the Protestant as the embodiment of filth and pollution, de Sales also put interpersonal relationships at the heart of his engagement with Protestants. During much of the Chablais mission, he lived among Huguenots, interacting with them in a respectful, civil manner. De Sales's humanization of the Protestant helped to prevent bloodshed in the Chablais mission while challenging militant discourses and methods of the French Counter-Reformation more broadly. By examining this Salesian reform of the Catholic war on heresy, this chapter highlights the diversity of Catholic responses to Protestantism during the French Wars of Religion.

THE BIRTH OF FRENCH PROTESTANTISM AND THE CATHOLIC MOBILIZATION

For many sixteenth-century French Catholics, violence became a normative response to the challenge of heresy. In the late 1520s and 1530s, the French monarchy began to execute Protestants with broad, popular Catholic support. By midcentury, Catholic citizens began to take matters into their own hands, backed by clergymen who demanded the destruction of heresy. In the Affair of Rue Saint Jacques (1557), for example, students from Plessis College in Paris assaulted Huguenots at worship. In 1562, independent of the Crown, the ultra-Catholic Duke of Guise and his soldiers massacred a community of Protestants at prayer in Vassy, sparking the French Wars of Religion.

When Protestantism first emerged in Germany in the 1520s, few French Catholics believed the same fate would befall their kingdom. Shock and outrage erupted, therefore, when France witnessed its first iconoclastic incidents. In 1528, militant Protestants destroyed a statue of the Virgin in Paris and, then, in the 1534 Affair of the Placards, they spread posters mocking the Mass across northern France.⁴ The executions of the perpetrators and expiatory processions to cleanse their sacrilege, however,

⁴ Mack P. Holt, *The French Wars of Religion, 1562-1629*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 17-18.

seem to have assured French Catholics that the monarchy had eliminated Protestantism in the kingdom.⁵

Their optimism was unfounded. In fact, in the 1550s and 1560s, France witnessed a seismic shift in its religious landscape. Backed by Calvinist Geneva, the first Huguenot churches took root in France in 1555. Over the following decade, more than 900 Reformed Protestant communities emerged, totaling nearly 1.5 million members, roughly ten percent of the population.⁶ The political ambitions of French Protestants also alarmed French Catholics. In 1560, Huguenots attempted to abduct the young king, François II, to check the influence of the ultra-Catholic Guise family over the Crown. Despite this audacious plot, which failed, the regent, Marie de Medici, granted Huguenots the right to worship in the Edict of January in 1562.

The Edict shocked many French Catholics as unconscionable and unholy. In their eyes, accommodation of Huguenots equated to the desecration of Catholic France, provoking God's rage and punishment.⁷ One Catholic articulated this perspective, protesting that Huguenots rejected 'customs' existing 'since Clovis' and thus tolerance for them was 'execrable' and 'pernicious to the honor of God'.⁸ Perceptions of disorder and evil spread quickly. 'Since the world was created, never was seen so strange a time [...] a worse time', lamented one Frenchman.⁹ In response, Catholics called for an armed mobilization against Huguenots. If the Crown would not defend French Catholicity, then the clergy and the people would.¹⁰ In the words of one militant, 'We have taken up arms to defend our religion, prevent tyranny, and protect our possession'.¹¹

⁵ Joseph Bergin, *Church, Society, and Religious Change in France, 1580-1730* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 2-3.

⁶ Philip Benedict, *Faith and Fortune of France's Huguenots, 1600-1685* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 281-2; Holt, *The French Wars of Religion*, p. 30.

⁷ Barbara Diefendorf, 'Waging Peace: Memory, Identity, and the Edict of Nantes', in *Religious Differences in France: Past and Present*, ed. by Kathleen Perry Long (Kirkville: Truman State University Press, 2006), pp. 19-50 (p. 23).

⁸ *The French Wars of Religion: Selected Documents*, ed. by David Potter (London: MacMillan, 1997), p. 38.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

¹⁰ Natalie Zemon Davis, 'The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France', *Past & Present*, 59 (1973), 53-91 (p. 61).

¹¹ François Cromé, *Dialogue d'entre le maheustre et le manant*, ed. by Peter M. Ascoli (Geneva: Droz, 1977), p. 50.

THE CLERGY AND THE DEMONIZATION OF PROTESTANTS

The clergy played a crucial role in promoting violence against Huguenots, especially in their preaching.¹² The theologian Jean Boucher, for instance, openly demanded ‘holy war’ and the ‘extermination’ of Protestants in sermons.¹³ Preachers often expressed the threat of Protestantism in eschatological terms, scaring the faithful. The war on heresy was imperative not only for saving the Catholic identity of France, they preached, but for delaying the End Times as well.¹⁴ In numerous cases, priests, friars, and monks practiced what they preached, engaging in acts of anti-Protestant violence.¹⁵

The clergy’s vocal, public condemnation of Huguenots gave rise to dehumanizing discourses that became commonplace. In daily speech and the printed word, Catholics routinely spoke of Huguenots as diseases, criminals, and animals that polluted the body social. Referring to the Catholic war on heresy, Antoine de Mouchy wrote that, ‘it is necessary to amputate gangrenous flesh [...] to prevent the house [and] the body [from] being corrupted’.¹⁶ The priest René Benoist taught that Huguenots constituted ‘a pernicious and contagious cancer’.¹⁷ Catholics also portrayed heresy in society as a form of sexual violence. The author and politician, René de Lucinge, for example, likened Protestantism to the raping of nuns in convents: ‘Holy places have been profaned [...] sacred virgins have been polluted, soiled in their cloisters’.¹⁸ Similarly, Jean Boucher, rejecting talk of peace treaties, exhorted Catholics to persist in eliminating Huguenots:

¹² Scholarship on clergy-driven violence is extensive. One excellent resource is, Judith Pollmann, ‘Countering the Reformation in France and the Netherlands: Clerical Leadership and Catholic Violence 1560-1585’, *Past and Present*, 190 (2006), 83-120 (pp. 96-7).

¹³ Jean Boucher, *Sermons de la simulée conversion, et nullité de la prétendue absolution de Henry de Bourbon* (Paris: Chaudiere, Nivelles, and Thierry, 1594), pp. 201, 604.

¹⁴ Denis Crouzet, *Les Guerriers de Dieu: la violence au temps des troubles de religion, vers 1525-vers 1610*, 2 vols (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1990), II, 292-4.

¹⁵ Davis, ‘Rites’, 68; Barbara Diefendorf, ‘A Monastery in Revolt: Paris’s Feuillants in the Holy League’, *Historical Reflections/Réflexions historiques*, 27 (2001), 301-24, (pp. 301-302).

¹⁶ Luc Racaut, *Hatred in Print: Catholic Propaganda and Protestant Identity during the French Wars of Religion* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002), p. 85.

¹⁷ Barbara B. Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 152.

¹⁸ Lucinge, René de, and Alain Dufour, *Dialogue du François et du Savoyisien (1593)* (Geneva: Droz, 1963), p. 21.

‘In war we defend the honor of our mother: in peace we permit her to be raped’.¹⁹ This dehumanizing discourse convinced many Catholics that by killing a Protestant they harmed not a fellow Christian or a human being, but a monstrous, evil menace.²⁰ According to the militant François Cromé, anything less than violence for heretics was unacceptable; Huguenots deserved only ‘punishment and force’, while ‘gentleness’ and ‘mercy’ for them was an ‘injustice’.²¹

As scholars have shown, the ways in which Catholics killed Huguenots and abused their bodies illustrates the perception of the heretic as an abhorrent, polluting entity. In dozens of cases, militant Catholics dragged, dismembered, and hung Huguenots in public view so as to cleanse society from the filth of heresy.²² Ritualistic forms of violence mocking Protestant belief also occurred. The mouths of the dead were stuffed with pages of scripture (to belittle Protestant belief in *sola Scriptura*), stomachs ripped open (to ridicule the Protestant critique of fasting), and genitals removed (to mock the Huguenot critique of celibacy).²³ As Diefendorf has shown, the fixation on the body of the heretic was so intense that Paris officials forbade touching corpses at execution sites. Authorities took these measures after incidents of frenzied crowds seizing and mutilating Protestant cadavers.²⁴ For many Catholics, then, the cleansing of the body social demanded the destruction of the body of the heretic.²⁵ Given this emphasis on the pollution of the very person of the Protestant, it was no easy task for a Catholic priest – often viewed as the guardian of purity – to question this violence or humanize the heretic in any fashion. Yet, this is precisely what François de Sales began to do in the 1590s as a clergyman.

FROM PARIS TO PADUA

De Sales left Paris in 1588 soon after the Day of the Barricades, when the Catholic League seized control of the city, forcing King Henry III to flee for his life. De Sales returned to Savoy to reunite with family and

¹⁹ Boucher, *Sermons*, p. 604.

²⁰ Davis, ‘Rites’, pp. 57-69.

²¹ Cromé, *Dialogue*, pp. 46, 128.

²² Philip Benedict, *Rouen during the Wars of Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 111-12; Davis, ‘Rites’, pp. 82-4; Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, pp. 71, 84-6, 100-103; Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 30-1. On the reliability of the accounts of these macabre incidents, see Davis, ‘Rites’, 55 and Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, 102-103.

²³ Crouzet, *Les Guerriers*, I, 246-54; Davis, ‘Rites’, p. 57.

²⁴ Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, p. 53.

²⁵ Davis, ‘Rites’, pp. 77-8.

contemplate his future. At this juncture, he considered the priesthood, but postponed for additional schooling, choosing legal studies (civil and ecclesiastical) at the University of Padua. De Sales's tenure at Padua, lasting from 1588 to 1591, exposed him to relatively tolerant attitudes toward Protestants, nudging him further into a moderate Counter-Reformation posture. Compared to the militancy of Parisian Catholicism, the religiosity of Paduan Catholics was quite accommodating.²⁶ The University of Padua, as well as the city of Padua itself, was cosmopolitan, permitting considerable intellectual and religious freedom. Renaissance humanism had long flourished at the university, producing some of the most gifted and humane minds of the late medieval and early modern eras, including Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-94), Nicolas Copernicus (1473-1543), and Michel l'Hospital (1507-73).²⁷ According to Paul Grendler, the Counter-Reformation did not diminish the open spirit of the University of Padua, an assertion supported by the presence of Protestant students at the institution in the period.²⁸ For de Sales, this proximity to Protestants must have challenged the notion of the heretic as an abhorrent, polluting entity, which he had encountered in Paris.

Among other influences on de Sales in Padua, the Jesuit humanist and diplomat, Antonio Possevino (1533-1611) stands out. De Sales's spiritual mentor and friend, Possevino affirmed the legitimacy of a moderate Counter-Reformation posture that eschewed violence. Hailing from Jewish ancestry, Possevino attended the University of Padua and, after becoming a Jesuit in 1559, engaged in education and diplomacy across Europe.²⁹ As a diplomat in Sweden, Russia, and Poland, Possevino advocated dialogue and compromise in conflict resolution, successfully mediating delicate religious and political disputes.³⁰ As for the Catholic

²⁶ Joseph Boenzi, *Saint Francis de Sales, Life and Spirit* (Stella Niagara: DeSales Resource Center, 2013), pp. 35-6.

²⁷ Paul F. Grendler, *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), pp. 37-8; Boenzi, *Life and Spirit*, p. 307.

²⁸ Grendler, *The Universities*, p. 194.

²⁹ John W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 189.

³⁰ John Patrick Donnelly, 'Antonio Possevino: From Secretary to Papal Legate in Sweden', in *The Mercurian Project Forming Jesuit Culture, 1573-1580*, ed. by Thomas M. McCoog (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis, 2004), pp. 323-50 (p. 341); idem, 'Antonio Possevino, S.J. as Papal Mediator between Emperor Rudolf II and King Stephan Bathory', *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu*, 69 (2000), 3-56 (pp. 8-9); Jan Joseph Santich, *Missio Moscovitica: The Role of the Jesuits in the Westernization of Russia, 1582-1689* (New York: P. Lang, 1995), p. 97.

response to Protestantism, Possevino favored nonviolent methods.³¹ In France and Savoy in the 1560s and 1570s, Possevino endorsed preaching, catechism, and improved Catholic schools as the proper means for addressing heresy, refusing to countenance the aggression of fellow clergymen. Indeed, on one occasion in Rouen, Possevino pacified a Catholic mob poised to assault the city's Huguenots.³² As we shall see, de Sales would conduct himself with a similar ethical ethos in the Chablais mission.

During his Padua years, de Sales developed a strong moral aversion to violence and militancy. This is evident in a short 1591 speech delivered at the commencement ceremony for his legal studies. In this address, de Sales thanked his law professors, praising them for their wisdom and eloquence. Briefly, however, he digressed to reflect on his previous education in Paris. France, he explained, allowed him to immerse himself in *belles-lettres*, Scripture, and theology. De Sales then lamented how Paris was being 'ravaged' by the 'terrors of war' amidst the fighting among Catholic Leaguers, royalist Catholics, and Huguenots. The schools of Paris had been flourishing, de Sales observed, 'but today, alas, what change!' 'May God take away this calamity', de Sales prayed, lest Paris turn into a moral and intellectual 'desert'.³³

ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD AND ANTI-WAR PREACHING

After earning his legal degree in 1591, de Sales returned to Savoy once again. In 1593, he entered the priesthood. Soon after his ordination, de Sales preached about war and peace in a manner reminiscent of the Catholic irenicism of Erasmus and other early sixteenth-century humanists.³⁴ In a Pentecost sermon in June of 1593, for instance, de Sales taught that war was a product of sin and that to eradicate sin was to eradicate war. If we 'make peace with God', he told his listeners, 'we will soon after have peace on

³¹ Luigi Balsamo, 'How to Doctor a Bibliography: Antonio Possevino's Practice', in *Church, Censorship, and Culture in Early Modern Italy*, ed. by Gigliola Fragnito (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 50-78 (p. 53).

³² Philip Benedict, 'The Catholic Response to Protestantism: Church Activity and Popular Piety in Rouen, 1560-1600' in *Religion and the People, 800-1700*, ed. by James Obelkevich (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), pp. 168-90 (pp. 171-6).

³³ OEA, XXII, 84.

³⁴ John Bossy, *Peace in the Post-Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p. 37.

earth'.³⁵ On Palm Sunday in the following year, he expanded on the point. Too many Catholics, de Sales lamented, 'take repose and ease in war', engaging in 'stealing, plundering, vandalizing, and assassinating'.³⁶ De Sales's reference to assassination here doubtlessly called to mind for his listeners the murder of Henry III by the Dominican priest, Jacques Clément, in 1589. 'War', he continued, is the 'horrible, awful Megaera', the 'common ruin of republics' in 'this miserable age'.³⁷ De Sales urged Catholics to cultivate attitudes of peace: 'let us exchange bad will for good will, bad courage for good courage'. For, 'if we have charity among us', the young priest explained, 'we will have peace, we will have the Holy Spirit'. 'I exhort you', he proclaimed, to 'friendship' and 'peace'.³⁸

De Sales's critique of war and conflict in these sermons was thoroughly Christocentric, consistently citing Jesus as the authoritative model of nonviolence. Here we encounter de Sales's first appeals to the *douceur* of Jesus, which would become the defining principle of his reform of militant Catholicism. In his 1593 Pentecost sermon, he discussed Jesus's first appearance to the disciples after the crucifixion. De Sales asserted that peace was Jesus' first message: 'When greeting the disciples, the Lord said, "peace be with you, it is I; do not be afraid."'"³⁹ This 'gentle presence' of the 'Lord', de Sales taught, consoled his followers.⁴⁰ In these sermons, de Sales taught that Jesus, by nature, inclined toward people of peace and strengthened them. In his 1594 Pentecost homily, de Sales proclaimed that Jesus is 'found only in places of concord'.⁴¹ On another occasion, he preached that the 'gentle Jesus' blesses 'people in peace'.⁴² By repeatedly associating Jesus with peace, de Sales contested the legitimacy of Catholic militancy while affirming nonviolent alternatives.

These sermons also contain the Erasmian strategy of praising spiritual warfare on oneself as morally superior to literal, physical warfare against others. Like Erasmus, de Sales urged Catholics to combat their own sins rather than the inequities of others.⁴³ The human soul must battle the 'flesh' and 'concupiscence', de Sales taught, rather than focusing on the

³⁵ OEA, VII, 24.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 158-9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 159.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴³ Pollman, 'Countering', 110.

faults of others.⁴⁴ We attribute evil to ‘the sin of others’, while, the truth is, ‘we all share in the guilt’.⁴⁵ Self-examination, humility, and penance, de Sales preached, were the proper starting points for Christian living and spirituality. ‘All must speak to their own consciences, not the conscience of others [...] let us confess our own faults and let others confess theirs’.⁴⁶ De Sales exhorted his listeners to imitate the apostles who had battled inwardly through the penitential practices of ‘thirst, hunger, and tribulation’, rather than outwardly with ‘corporal arms’.⁴⁷ On another occasion, he preached similarly, endorsing ‘the discipline, fasting, [and] hair shirts’, that is, the asceticism of spiritual warfare, over the weapons of earthly warfare.⁴⁸

Here, a remark on de Sales’s views on asceticism is in order. In light of his strong affirmation in these early sermons of rigorous fasts, flagellation, and other forms of self-mortification, one might rightly question just how ‘gentle’ his approach to religion was. On this point, we must note that, in this early stage of his reform of militant Catholic zeal, de Sales did not critique aggressive forms of mortification, whether bodily or psychological. Only gradually did he come to embrace and expand the Ignatian critique of asceticism, which deemed rigorous austerities an impediment to a fuller imitation of Christ. In the early years of his priesthood, therefore, de Sales’s incipient vision of Catholic *douceur* focused on the nonviolent treatment of others, while deeming rigorous spiritual warfare on oneself an effective restraint on aggression in social and political domains. With time, however, the gentle treatment of the self would be integrated into his reform of militant zeal.

THE PROVOST INDUCTION SERMON

Among de Sales’s early sermons, the provost induction homily deserves extra scrutiny, due to the intensity of its anti-war critique and its developed argument for the moral superiority of spiritual combat over physical warfare. In this sermon, delivered in December of 1593, de Sales presented his sharpest criticism of Catholic militancy yet. Preaching during the Mass for his induction as provost of the Cathedral Chapter for the Diocese of Geneva, de Sales exhorted Catholics to adopt nonviolent methods for addressing heresy, calling physical force unfitting for followers of Jesus.

⁴⁴ OEA, VII, 159.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 23, 25.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 24-5.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 163.

This oration ranks among the period's most fervent appeals to abandon the religious militancy of the French Wars of Religion.

In his opening, de Sales remarks that induction ceremonies often feature the inductees' 'grand, magnificent projects' that they envision. He then boldly asserts that his goal as provost 'consists of recovering Geneva' for the Catholic Church.⁴⁹ This assertion likely startled his audience, which included his parents, friends, the chapter canons, and the bishop. The city of Geneva had turned Protestant more than fifty years earlier and showed no signs of returning to Roman Catholicism. How could de Sales, or anyone for that matter, 'recover' Geneva, the stronghold of Reformed Protestantism, once led by John Calvin and now headed by Theodore Beza? De Sales proposes 'charity' as the answer: 'It is by charity that the walls of Geneva must be shaken, by charity that [the city] must be invaded, and by charity that it must be recovered'.⁵⁰

Here de Sales seeks not to explain how charity would bring the Genevans back to Catholicism in a concrete, practical fashion. We are dealing, rather, with a rhetorical appeal to his co-religionists to renounce their faith in violence. De Sales rejects religious warfare with dramatic flair in the subsequent lines of the sermon:

I propose to you neither iron nor powder whose odor and taste call to mind the infernal furnace. I am not forming one of those armies who soldiers have neither faith nor piety. May our camp be the camp of God whose trumpets proclaim with accents full of gentleness (*douceur*) this song: Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God of armies. It is on this camp that you must fix your gaze.⁵¹

Here de Sales sharpens his appeal to charity by equating war with evil and faithlessness, while associating nonviolence with piety and trust in God. He rejects 'iron' and 'powder', the raw materials of war, for they resemble the ways of hell ('the infernal furnace'). Instead, he explains, Catholics must entrust themselves to the 'Lord' whose ways are characterized by *douceur*. With these assertions, de Sales denies the moral legitimacy of an armed response to heresy, and the notion, so prevalent among Catholics, that God desired violence against heretics.

De Sales also urges his listeners to consider their own sins rather than those of heretics. The clergy, in particular, de Sales argues, must seek moral and spiritual improvement, for their bad example led others into heresy. De Sales likely absorbed this view from Jesuits, who often viewed

⁴⁹ Ibid., VII, 100.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 107.

⁵¹ Ibid., 107-108.

the ignorance and misconduct of priests as a crucial factor in the growth of Protestantism.⁵²

There is an aqueduct that feeds and animates [...] all manner of heretics: it is the example of perverse priests, their actions, their words, in a word, the inequity of all, but especially the clergy. It is because of us that the name of God is blasphemed every day.⁵³

The proper 'weapons' for meeting the challenge of Protestantism, de Sales continued, consisted of 'prayer and good works'.⁵⁴ The asceticism of spiritual combat was also essential: 'It is by hunger and thirst endured not by our adversaries, but by ourselves that we must repel [heresy]'.⁵⁵ Breaking from the militant focus on inflicting pain and punishment on Huguenots, de Sales urges Catholics to submit themselves to penance and sacrifice.

Concluding the sermon, de Sales returns to the theme of charity: 'We must upend the walls of Geneva with ardent prayers and execute the assault with brotherly charity. It is by this charity that our lead forces must attack'.⁵⁶ If heaven can be attained through prayer and good works, he argues, then earthly goals could be too. Finally, de Sales closes the sermon by asserting the power of charity and love: 'Everything submits before charity; love is strong as death and nothing is difficult for those who love'.⁵⁷

THE CHABLAIS MISSION: BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY

Within a year of this induction sermon, de Sales put his convictions to the test. In September of 1594, the Duke of Savoy, Charles-Emmanuel (1562-1630), and the bishop of Geneva, Claude de Granier (1532-1602), sent de Sales into the Chablais, the northernmost region of Savoy. Although the Chablais fell under Charles-Emmanuel's legal jurisdiction, it hosted a predominately-Huguenot population that looked to Geneva for governance more than to the duke. Charles-Emmanuel and Granier instructed de Sales to minister to the few Catholics in the region and to test the possibility of winning Huguenots to Catholicism. Strikingly, by the close of the mission, in the fall of 1598, much of the Chablais had indeed converted to Catholicism. As the head missionary, de Sales played the primary role in

⁵² See, A. Lynn Martin, *The Jesuit Mind: The Mentality of an Elite in Early Modern France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 91-2.

⁵³ OEA, VII, 109.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

this outcome. Following the example of the Jesuits in France, de Sales relied almost exclusively on preaching, teaching, the liturgy, and dialogue, demonstrating that violence was not essential for the Catholic response to heresy.

The Chablais bordered the shores of Lac Léman (Lake Geneva), east of Geneva. Today this is the northern-most section of the French department of Haute-Savoie. When de Sales began the mission there in 1594, this region had already seen several decades of political and religious conflict.⁵⁸ In the late Middle Ages, Geneva fell under the jurisdiction of the duke of Savoy and the prince-bishop whom he appointed to govern it. In 1535, in a major geopolitical upheaval, the Protestant Swiss city of Berne invaded Geneva and the Chablais, forcing Pierre de la Baume, the Catholic bishop of Geneva, into exile in Annecy, some forty kilometers south. Hereafter, Annecy served as the cathedral city for the Diocese of Geneva.⁵⁹ With the military backing of Berne, Calvin made Geneva a formidable Protestant stronghold, which required Reform worship in neighboring Chablais, while suppressing Catholicism.⁶⁰

In the 1540s and 1550s, Bernese-Genevan dominance of the Chablais went unchallenged by Emmanuel-Philibert (1528-80), then the Duke of Savoy, as Reformed ministers took over Catholic churches. However, in the 1560s, Berne shifted attention from Geneva and the Chablais to pressing concerns in neighboring Swiss cantons. With the 1564 Treaty of Lausanne, Berne agreed to return control of the Chablais to Savoy, provided that Emmanuel-Philibert did not promote Catholic worship in the region.⁶¹ The duke accepted the conditions of the treaty, neither confronting Protestants nor restoring Catholicism in the reclaimed territory.

Emmanuel-Philibert's son, Charles-Emmanuel, however, adopted a more assertive posture, seeking to return Geneva to Savoyard control. In 1588, Charles-Emmanuel blockaded the city, impeding commerce and travel.⁶² In response, Geneva and Berne, backed by France, declared war on Savoy and invaded the Chablais in 1589. Soon after, however, Berne

⁵⁸ Jill Fehleison, 'Appealing to the Senses: The Forty Hours Celebrations in the Chablais, 1597-1598', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 36 (2005), 375-96 (p. 377).

⁵⁹ Kleinman, *Saint François de Sales*, p. 57.

⁶⁰ Théodore Claparède, *Histoire de la Réformation en Savoie* (Geneva: A. Cherbuliez, 1893), p. 25.

⁶¹ Hubert Wyrill, *Réforme et contre-Réforme en Savoie, 1536-1679: de Guillaume Farel à François de Sales* (Lyon: Réveil Publications, 2001), p. 105.

⁶² Paul-Edmond Martin, *Trois cas de pluralisme confessionnel* (Geneva: Droz, 1961), pp. 60-1.

withdrew its forces, making a separate peace with Savoy in the Nyon Treaty of 1589. Although Bernese officials ultimately refused to ratify the treaty, they nonetheless denied Geneva the military support they once had provided. As for Geneva and France, they maintained a military presence in the Chablais until 1593, at which time they made their own truces with Savoy.⁶³

In the wake of this truce, Charles-Emmanuel wished to test the possibility of renewing Catholicism in the Chablais. Consequently, the bishop of Geneva, Claude de Granier, sent de Sales into the region with the duke's blessings. Yet, Charles-Emmanuel would actually devote little attention to the Chablais and Geneva for most of the 1590s, focusing primarily on the Wars of Religion in France.⁶⁴ As a consequence, the duke maintained only minimal contact with de Sales, leaving the missionary uncertain as to whether Charles-Emmanuel fully endorsed his work. Despite this and other obstacles, de Sales began to win converts in 1595 and 1596. Then, joined by other missionaries in 1597, de Sales led several Forty Hours celebrations, which witnessed waves of conversions to Catholicism.⁶⁵ By 1598, most of the Chablais had either converted or expressed openness to do so. Only at this late stage of the mission did the Duke of Savoy publicly endorse it, attending the final Forty Hours celebration, after which he declared Catholicism the official religion of the Chablais.

BEGINNING THE MISSION

De Sales left Annecy in September of 1594, traveling north and reaching the château of Allinges in the Chablais after several days. Here he resided with the Baron d'Hermance, the Catholic governor of the Chablais, for the initial months of the mission. The château was close to Thonon, the regional capital of the Chablais and primary town in which de Sales would minister to Catholics and preach to Huguenots.

At its inception, de Sales felt confident about the mission and his approach to it. He believed that Protestants adhered to their faith due to misinformation about Catholicism, as well as the misconduct of certain clergymen. He felt that if he, a priest, taught about Catholic tradition clearly and treated Huguenots charitably, many of them would find Catholicism attractive. De Sales also believed that spiritual combat would serve the mission better than any physical confrontation with Protestants. In an early

⁶³ Ibid., p. 68.

⁶⁴ Kleinman, *Saint François de Sales*, p. 59.

⁶⁵ For an excellent summary of the celebrations, see Fehleison, 'Appealing to the Senses'.

letter from the Chablais, he declared he would commit himself to penitence and ‘make use of all the patience and wisdom that God would provide’.⁶⁶

Despite this confidence, de Sales likely experienced some trepidation as well, for he had never encountered a predominately-Protestant culture. Up to this point, de Sales had only lived in Catholic-majority environments in central Savoy, Paris, and Padua. In Thonon, however, there were perhaps only fifty Catholics among its three thousand inhabitants with no priests or formal Catholic worship in the vicinity.⁶⁷ Huguenot pastors loyal to Geneva constituted the only religious authorities in Thonon; they led Reformed worship in the formerly Catholic church of Saint Hippolyte.

PUTTING SPIRITUAL WARFARE INTO PRACTICE

Soon after his arrival, de Sales introduced himself to Thonon’s *syndics* (aldermen) with a letter indicating permission to be in the Chablais from the Duke of Savoy. Unfortunately, the exact contents of this letter and what privileges it afforded de Sales are unknown. Apparently, it was not a very impressive document, for certain *syndics* and Chablaisians would soon doubt whether Charles-Emmanuel in fact backed de Sales.

In the initial months of the mission, de Sales preached in Thonon’s streets and Saint Hippolyte church after Protestant services had finished. In response, the Huguenot leaders of the town issued a ruling against listening to Catholic preaching. Writing to a friend, Antoine Favre, in October of 1594, de Sales explained that Thonon’s leaders, having gathered in a council, swore that neither they nor the people ‘would ever attend Catholic preaching’.⁶⁸

De Sales continued to preach, but few Huguenots listened. Some expressed interest in Catholicism, but feared fines or the loss of their jobs if they defied the will of the *syndics*. Others claimed that showing sympathy for Catholicism would provoke backlash from Geneva and Berne.⁶⁹ Before long, de Sales grew frustrated. In a letter dated 29 November 1594, he wrote, ‘Today I start to preach on Advent’, but only to ‘four or five’ locals.⁷⁰ Later, in April of 1595, he lamented to his Padua mentor, Antonio Possevino, that after several months in the Chablais, he succeeded only in

⁶⁶ OEA, XI, 92, 103

⁶⁷ Ibid., XXII, 141.

⁶⁸ Ibid., XI, 91.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 94.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 102.

preaching ‘to walls’.⁷¹ In the same month, de Sales wrote to his bishop, lamenting his failure to win a hearing from Huguenots.⁷²

Adapting to the circumstances, de Sales began to interpret these challenges as an essential facet of spiritual warfare. Writing to his own father, de Sales explained that ‘tribulations’ often led to a higher, spiritual good and that the ‘crown’ went only to those who ‘have battled legitimately’. In a letter to his bishop, he stated that his struggles only ‘make me stronger’.⁷³ These comments reflect de Sales’s conviction, previously articulated in his induction sermon, that personal pain and sacrifice were necessary parts of an ethical response to heresy.

On several occasions, de Sales explicitly affirmed that this spiritual warfare constituted the moral way of proceeding, while literal warfare and violence did not. He informed Antoine Favre, for example, that he would continue to mount an ‘assault’ on Thonon’s town officials, not with arms, but with ‘prayer, alms-giving, and fasting’.⁷⁴ Like David in Psalm 20, de Sales explained, he would trust ‘in the name of the Lord’ rather than in ‘chariots’ and ‘horses’. ‘May these words of David’, he added, ‘be cited’ in an era of ‘saber-rattling’.⁷⁵ Some Catholics, however, doubted de Sales’s moral vision. His own father requested that he abandon the mission, arguing that his gentle approach would not win converts, and a Capuchin friar urged de Sales to use ‘force’ against the Chablais Huguenots.⁷⁶ Yet, de Sales replied that he did not care for aggressive tactics. It is not with ‘force’ that ‘I have entered the arena’, he wrote, but ‘patience’.⁷⁷ With this reference to early Christians martyred in Roman amphitheaters, de Sales revealed his commitment to undergoing personal, penitential suffering, coupled with a refusal to harm others.

NEW STRATEGIES

Having attracted few listeners to his preaching, de Sales developed others strategies for communicating with Chablais Huguenots. I categorize these approaches as 1) relational, 2) pedagogical, and 3) liturgical, arguing that, in sum, they served as the crucial means for the nonviolent restoration of

⁷¹ Ibid., 121.

⁷² Ibid., 118-19.

⁷³ Ibid.,

⁷⁴ Ibid., 103.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 114.

⁷⁶ Charles-Auguste de Sales, *Histoire du bienheureux François de Sales* (Lyon: La Bottière et Juillard, 1634), p. 94.

⁷⁷ OEA, XI, 115-16.

Catholicism in the Chablais. These methods, which facilitated hundreds of conversions, demonstrated that Catholics could negotiate the challenge of heterodoxy without persecution or bloodshed.

RELATIONAL APPROACH

In his recently published work of historical fiction, *Saint François de Sales: aventurier et diplomate*, Michel Tournade explores how the Savoyard priest crossed paths with a fictitious childhood acquaintance, Germain, intermittently across several decades. While not an academic study, Tournade's novel effectively captures de Sales's preference for engaging Huguenots in a patient, conversational manner and building positive relationships. Although Germain, a Huguenot, repeatedly denounces the Catholic Church as evil and corrupt, de Sales steadfastly extends goodwill to him.⁷⁸

Building relationships with Huguenots was, indeed, a hallmark of de Sales's missionary work in the Chablais. Throughout his mission correspondence, we find evidence of sustained interactions and dialogue with Huguenots. Writing his bishop in late October 1594, de Sales mentioned conversations on the Eucharist with certain members of the community. In a note from November of the same year, he stated that he was pleased with the friendly rapport he had established with a Huguenot.⁷⁹ Seeking more interpersonal contact, de Sales moved from the château of Allinges into Thonon in March of 1595.⁸⁰ A month later, he reported that he 'never misses an opportunity' to approach town leaders to converse with them.⁸¹ This conduct, while unremarkable for us today, violated the popular Catholic taboo against regular, not to mention cordial, interactions with heretics for fear of moral and spiritual pollution.

Eventually, Huguenots responded to de Sales's relational approach, engaging him on matters of religion more extensively. One of the first Protestants to speak with him regularly was the lawyer Pierre Poncet, whom de Sales had met early in 1595. Over the course of several months, they discussed Scripture and devotional literature and, within a year, Poncet converted to

⁷⁸ Michel Tournade, *Saint François de Sales: aventurier et diplomate* (Paris: Salvator, 2017). See, for instance, pp. 207-12.

⁷⁹ OEA, 95-6.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 120.

Catholicism.⁸² During this process, a mutual respect developed between them. In communication with other Catholics, de Sales complimented Poncet as ‘learned’ and ‘erudite’.⁸³ After Poncet’s conversion, the two of them sustained a relationship; we know, for example, that in July 1595, Poncet and de Sales met to discuss Scripture and Hebrew.⁸⁴

By October 1595, one year after his arrival, de Sales met regularly with groups of Huguenots. One of these groups consisted of *syndics* and Reformed ministers. Although they themselves had prohibited listening to Catholic preaching, these town leaders met with de Sales privately.⁸⁵ As with Poncet, de Sales developed a cordial rapport with these men as they discussed theology and biblical texts. On one occasion, de Sales shared with them devotional poems penned by his friend, Antoine Favre. According to de Sales, they approved of Favre’s poetry, prompting one Huguenot to ask de Sales to forward his own religious poems to Favre.⁸⁶ With these amicable exchanges, de Sales’s faith in dialogue intensified. In fact, in 1597 de Sales boldly journeyed into Geneva to meet with Theodore Beza himself on multiple occasions.⁸⁷ De Sales’ extant writings, unfortunately, do not describe these meetings in much detail. Yet, it is clear that he hoped to persuade Beza to consider converting to Catholicism, which never came to pass. Although he risked arrest or even death at the hands of Genevan authorities, de Sales was willing to try. Such was his commitment to nonviolent interpersonal encounters.

In assessing de Sales’s relational approach to missionary work, it is tempting to dismiss his civility as merely a ruse for winning converts, masking a deeper fear of or disdain for Protestants. Such a conclusion is difficult to sustain, however, in light of respectful comments made in private communication with fellow Catholics, as well as esteem for Huguenots who refused to

⁸² Ibid., 142.

⁸³ Ibid., 124, 142.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 143.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 158.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 162-3. On this exchange of poetry, see Fortunat Strowski, *Saint François de Sales: introduction à l’histoire du sentiment religieux en France au dix-septième siècle* (Paris: Plon, 1928), pp. 65-6.

⁸⁷ OEA, XI, 268-70. For an excellent summary, see Jill Fehleison, *Boundaries of Faith: Catholics and Protestants in the Diocese of Geneva* (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2010), pp. 62-3.

convert. One illustration of this is the case of Claude de Prez, a lawyer belonging to the group of *syndics* meeting with de Sales for discussion. Well-versed in Calvinist doctrine, de Prez engaged in heated debates with de Sales, repeatedly rejecting the case for Catholicism put forth by him. Despite this rejection, de Sales had, as he explained in a letter to Antoine Favre, ‘a lot of affection’ for de Prez, believing that ‘there is much virtue in him’.⁸⁸ Favre echoed this positive sentiment, replying that he too had heard honorable things about de Prez. Favre also asserted that he did accept the notion popular among Catholics that Protestants ‘could have no good within’ them.⁸⁹ Here, it is clear that Favre and de Sales did not share the theological anthropology of militant Catholicism which deemed Protestants absolutely threatening and evil.

THE PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH

De Sales also increasingly relied on pedagogical methods in the Chablais, consisting primarily of disseminating religious pamphlets, which he himself penned and dubbed *Méditations*. Since Huguenots refused to listen to his public preaching, de Sales decided the printed word might be more effective in reaching them. It is possible that Antonio Possevino, with whom de Sales remained in contact during the mission, suggested this strategy, as this Jesuit had relied on printed tracts and catechetical texts in his missionary work. With these pamphlets, de Sales aimed to expose Protestants to Catholic belief and traditions, as well as to counter Protestant charges against the faith. It is true that de Sales occasionally critiqued Protestant leaders in the *Méditations*.⁹⁰ Yet, these pamphlets overwhelmingly sustained a civil, conversational tone that recognized Huguenots as thinking, feeling human beings, a rarity in Catholic discourse in the period.

De Sales began working on the *Méditations* in January 1595, completing them over the next ten months.⁹¹ From the first tract, de Sales displayed direct, yet disarming, rhetoric. He explained that he was in the Chablais on orders from his bishop and the duke

⁸⁸ OEA, 163.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 408.

⁹⁰ François de Sales, *The Catholic Controversy*, trans. by Franklin Pinter (Rockford: Tan Books, 1989), pp. 83, 103, 337.

⁹¹ OEA, XI, 108.

to communicate with them about Catholicism.⁹² He also gave his reason for writing the pamphlets: ‘Gentlemen, having prosecuted for some stretch of time the preaching of the Word of God in your town, without obtaining a hearing from you [...] [and] wishing to leave nothing undone on my part [...] I have set myself to put into writing some principal reasons [...] in defense of the Church’.⁹³

As de Sales proceeded in these tracts, he sustained a diplomatic tone. He achieved this, in part, by affirming Catholicism rather than attacking Protestantism. In one pamphlet, for example, de Sales praised Catholic religious orders, asserting that Protestants would appreciate them if they only knew more about them:

I have no doubt that if you had frequented the assemblies of the Chartreux, Camaldolese, Celestine, Minims, Capuchins, Jesuits, Theatines and numberless others among whom religious discipline flourishes, you would be uncertain whether you should call them earthly angels or heavenly men, and you would not know which to admire more ... [their] chastity [...] humility [or] fraternity: all like heavenly bees work in and compose [...] the honey of the Gospel, some by preaching, some by writing [...] others by teaching ... [and] some by caring for the sick.⁹⁴

De Sales also acknowledged imperfections within the Roman Catholic Church, displaying a humility rare for French Counter-Reformation literature. While discussing religious authority and leadership, for example, he mentioned ‘abuses which have crept into the administration of benefices’, conceding the problem of simony.⁹⁵ He also cited the failure of Catholics to pray with reverence: ‘It is quite true that this impropriety of praying without devotion occurs very often among Catholics’.⁹⁶ De Sales admitted to cases of avarice in the monastic life as well. Due to greedy monks, he lamented, ‘monastic discipline’ was often ‘ruined’. De Sales argued that most Catholics ‘regret the ill-behavior of these people [...] who, being determined to have power and authority, hinder [...] the order of disciple, in order to make the temporal goods of the Church their own’.⁹⁷

Perhaps most remarkable about the *Méditations* was the manner in which de Sales humanized Huguenots with his language. As we have seen,

⁹² de Sales, *Catholic Controversy*, p. 3.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 309.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 201.

Catholics routinely referred to Protestants in derogatory terms. In polemical works and daily speech, Catholics equated Protestants with animals, diseases, and demons. In the *Méditations*, however, we find respectful terminology throughout the text. This is illustrated, for instance, by de Sales's use of the term 'gentlemen'. We read, for example, 'I have said all this, gentlemen, to make known to you whence comes this great dissension of wills'.⁹⁸ And, 'Take then, gentlemen [...] this present which I make to you'.⁹⁹ De Sales's private correspondence with Catholics also revealed a humanizing discourse. In a letter to a Catholic colleague, dated 2 November 1594, de Sales referred to a certain Huguenot as a 'gentleman' and in a letter from October 1595 letter, he called a group of Thonon Protestants, 'gentlemen'.¹⁰⁰

THE LITURGICAL APPROACH

By early 1596, scores of Chablaisians had warmed to de Sales and the prospect of a revitalized Catholicism. At this point, de Sales had been meeting regularly with *syndics* for months and had accepted from this group the conversion of a certain Monsieur Crest, in addition to Pierre Poncet.¹⁰¹ As summer ended, Antoine d'Avully, head of the Thonon consistory, also converted, encouraging others to follow suit. Writing to Monsignor Jules-César Riccardi, the apostolic nuncio at the court of the Duke of Savoy, de Sales reported that conversions 'multiply more and more'.¹⁰² In Thonon, then, the mission had made significant headway, largely by means of relational and pedagogical methods.

De Sales found interest in Catholic renewal in other areas of the Chablais as well. In March of 1596, de Sales reported that outside of Thonon, 'ten to twelve parishes request that the exercise of the Catholic faith be provided to them'.¹⁰³ This brings us to the third principle method employed by de Sales in his missionary effort: the liturgical approach. As the openness to Catholicism grew, de Sales increased his focus on celebrating the Mass, administering other sacraments, and promoting traditional devotions. This is not surprising since he had mentioned the importance of Catholic ritual from the start. In his first month in the Chablais, de Sales told a colleague that, in addition to preaching, he wished

⁹⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰⁰ OEA, XI, 95, 162.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 159.

¹⁰² Ibid. 196.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 189.

to reestablish the celebration of the Mass soon.¹⁰⁴ Having established good relations with many Huguenots and detected considerable interest in the practice of Catholicism, de Sales felt that he could now provide traditional Catholic worship openly without provoking public disorder.

Some historians have viewed the Catholic use of the liturgy in the Chablais mission as aggressive and overwhelming. One scholar holds, for instance, that de Sales and fellow missionaries put the Chablais Huguenots 'under siege', causing great suffering.¹⁰⁵ I take a different view. While the Calvinists most offended by Catholic worship likely found its restoration very disconcerting, it is difficult not to characterize the use of ritual by the missionaries as quite restrained. This becomes clear when we contrast de Sales's approach to the liturgy in the Chablais with that of his militant coreligionists more broadly during the French Wars of Religion.

Since the 1970s, historians have shown that violence and liturgy often intermingled in the French Wars of Religion.¹⁰⁶ Richet illustrated that during Advent and Lent preachers in Paris aroused fear and anger at Mass, prompting the faithful to assault Protestants.¹⁰⁷ Themes in this preaching often consisted of God's vengeance and the urgency of purifying society from heretical pollution. Some priests also engaged in symbolic forms of violence at Mass by leading prayers of cursing and piercing wax effigies of Huguenots and Catholics who tolerated them.¹⁰⁸ Scholars have also documented religious processions featuring sinister-looking penitents in habits and hoods, in some cases whipping themselves brutally.¹⁰⁹ We also know that Catholic processions frequently spilled over into violence against

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁰⁵ Fehleison, 'Appealing to the Senses', pp. 377, 394.

¹⁰⁶ Davis, 'Rites', p. 73, Ann W. Ramsey, *Liturgy, Politics, and Salvation: The Catholic League in Paris and the Nature of Catholic Reform, 1540-1630* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1999), p. 24.

¹⁰⁷ Denis Richet, 'Aspects socio-culturels des conflits religieux à Paris dans la seconde moitié du XVI^e siècle', *Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 32 (1977), 764-89 (p. 770).

¹⁰⁸ Moshe Sluhovskiy, *Patroness of Paris: Rituals of Devotion in Early Modern France* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 119-21.

¹⁰⁹ Robert R. Harding, 'Mobilization of Confraternities against the Reformation in France', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 11 (1980), 85-107 (pp. 93-4); Frances A. Yates, *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1975), p. 176.

the persons or property of Huguenots, as Catholics sought to cleanse society of the filth of heterodoxy.¹¹⁰

In the Chablais mission, however, we find little to no intermixing of liturgy and violence. One crucial reason for this is that de Sales typically performed ritual as invitation and celebration rather than confrontation or purification. While de Sales certainly opposed Calvinism and resented the history of assaults on Chablais Catholics by Berne and Geneva, he refrained from infusing anger into his liturgical practice or employing ritual to mobilize fellow Catholics into aggressive action. In neither his preaching nor other forms of ritual performance do we find de Sales communicating ideas of God's wrath, the End Times, or the Protestant as violent or unclean. Rather, de Sales seems to have felt that, by presenting Catholic worship and devotion in an attractive, dignified manner while inviting Huguenots to participate, the mission would succeed.

In the spring of 1596, de Sales asked for assistance in cultivating Catholic worship and devotion. His priorities consisted of repairing the war-damaged churches in the Chablais and supplying them with the basic materials for religious services. 'It is imperative to have the churches fixed up', de Sales reported to Charles-Emmanuel.¹¹¹ Regarding the church of Saint Hippolyte in Thonon, he told a fellow clergyman that he hoped he could 'restore the church, and procure ornamentation'.¹¹² De Sales's requests were often quite specific. In letters to Monsignor Riccardi, he requested holy water, candles, missals, and chalices.¹¹³

In December of 1596, de Sales celebrated Mass in the church of Saint Hippolyte. Encountering little opposition from local Protestants, he contemplated inviting more clergy to make sacraments available beyond Thonon. In a letter to Riccardi, de Sales reported that, historically, Chablais had forty-five parishes in total.¹¹⁴ He cited widespread desire for traditional Catholic worship and requested that more clergymen be assigned to the mission field, whether as itinerant preachers or permanent parish priests.¹¹⁵

New clergy began to arrive in 1597. It is not clear whether de Sales received as much support as he had hoped, but his personal correspondence

¹¹⁰ Harding, 'Mobilization', p. 99; Davis, 'Rites', p. 73; Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, p. 73.

¹¹¹ OEA, XI, 169.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 187.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 257.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 237.

shows that Capuchins, Jesuits, and secular clergy made contact with him and began administering the sacraments beyond Thonon. From this point, the restoration of Catholicism occurred rapidly across much of the Chablais, as counter-measures by Geneva or Berne never materialized. Records of the Genevan Company of Pastors reveal awareness of these developments, but a lack of consensus on how to respond.¹¹⁶ Meanwhile, Catholic clergymen traveled freely across the region, restoring worship and accepting additional converts.

In the final stages of the mission, ritual played an increasingly important role in the Chablais. In a series of Forty Hours celebrations between September of 1597 and October of 1598, entire communities abjured Calvinism and converted at the hands of the missionaries.¹¹⁷ De Sales and fellow missionary, Chérubin de Maurienne, organized these services, which consisted of Eucharistic adoration, plays, songs, processions, and preaching. Through these religious rituals, de Sales aimed to foster an ambiance of joy and welcome, steering clear of the sinister, threatening tone typical of militant Catholicism.¹¹⁸ Although certain Huguenot ministers objected, most Chablaisians welcomed the pageantry and fervor of the Forty Hours celebrations. As Fehleison has shown, active participation in religious ritual appealed greatly to the people, facilitating mass conversions.¹¹⁹ In mid October 1598, de Sales wrote to Riccardi that the ‘harvest of several thousands of souls [...] has given us an incredible consolation’.¹²⁰ Soon after, he reported that, ‘an innumerable multitude of people’ had ‘embraced the Catholic faith’.¹²¹

THE DUKE’S SILENCE

Given the large number of conversions and the relatively-rapid restoration of Catholicism in the Chablais, one might speculate that intimidation by the Duke of Savoy played a crucial role. Yet, it appears that this was not a significant factor. Indeed, a striking aspect of the Chablais mission is the extent to which the duke kept a distance from it. Although Charles-Emmanuel had instructed Bishop Granier to send a missionary into the Chablais in 1594, the duke did not publicly endorse the mission or provide resources until 1597. This silence is evident in de Sales’s correspondence

¹¹⁶ Martin, *Trois cas*, pp. 101-102.

¹¹⁷ Fehleison, ‘Appealing to the Senses’, p. 376.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 382.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 377, 383.

¹²⁰ OEA, XI, 356.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 364.

from the missionary period. In the first year of the mission, when de Sales reached few Huguenots with his preaching, he wrote to Charles-Emmanuel requesting logistical support. And, in June of 1595, he asked the duke for an additional letter affirming the mission more explicitly. ‘If it would therefore please his Highness to favor this work with a letter’, de Sales explained, it would persuade more people to attend his sermons. De Sales elaborated, stating that, because he lacked unambiguous evidence of ducal backing, many Chablaisians doubted whether Charles-Emmanuel and his court, in fact, supported the mission. ‘Several have said’, de Sales told the duke, ‘that if he [Charles-Emmanuel] wanted’ the people to pay their respects to a missionary, ‘he would have invited the inhabitants’ to do so.¹²² Strikingly, Charles-Emmanuel gave little response to this and other requests made by de Sales.¹²³ This lukewarm support frustrated de Sales; indeed, on one occasion, he complained to a friend that the restoration of Catholicism in the Chablais was impeded significantly by Charles-Emmanuel’s inconsistent advocacy. When ‘the least word from the duke would suffice’, de Sales explained, ‘his silence is a compelling argument’.¹²⁴

DE SALES’S NONVIOLENT APPROACH TO HERESY

In the fall of 1598, Charles-Emmanuel did ultimately visit the Chablais, attending the final Forty Hours celebration in Thonon. As the religious services and fanfare concluded, the duke declared Roman Catholicism the official religion of the Chablais, forbidding the practice of Protestantism. In the subsequent weeks and months, others in this northern region of Savoy abjured Protestantism, although some never did. It is important to note that de Sales endorsed this declaration of Charles-Emmanuel. Some studies have suggested that de Sales opposed this use of legal and political pressure or even championed religious liberty.¹²⁵ This is unlikely, however, as de Sales’s reform of the Catholic war on heresy simply did not include this kind of latitude. A number of de Sales’s letters from his missionary tenure indicate his support for *cuis regio, eius religio*, the principle that a head of state possesses the legal and moral authority to designate an official religion.¹²⁶

¹²² Ibid., XXII, 143

¹²³ Ibid., XI, 193-4.

¹²⁴ Ibid., XI, 139.

¹²⁵ Alexandre Alvin, *Saint François de Sales, apôtre de la liberté religieuse et de la raison* (Strasbourg: E. Huder, 1870); André Ravier, *Francis de Sales: Sage and Saint* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), p. 76.

¹²⁶ OEA, XI, 171, 188.

On the other hand, the significance of de Sales's acceptance of the duke's course of action at the end of the mission has been overstated. Ruth Kleinman, for instance, has maintained that his endorsement of Charles-Emmanuel's decision to forbid Protestantism proves his 'active prosecution of Protestantism'. This claim is rooted in her larger argument that eradicating heresy was the 'implacable purpose that underlay [de Sales's] life'. In Kleinman's view, little in de Sales's missionary work differentiated him from the most militant of Catholics in the era.¹²⁷

Such an interpretation, however, obscures the extent to which the Salesian approach to Protestantism broke with the prevailing militancy of the French Counter-Reformation. Although opposed to Protestantism and determined to reestablish Catholicism in northern Savoy, de Sales committed himself to nonviolent methods in the Chablais mission. Prior to the mission, he had already developed a moral critique of war and violence, rooted in his conviction that Jesus calls Christians to peace, charity, and gentleness. Subsequently, when called to missionize the Chablais, de Sales obeyed, yet did so embracing spiritual combat over physical confrontation. In light of this, he believed he had to undergo trials and suffering, rather than forcing Protestants to do so. While de Sales's conduct would be deemed intolerant in today's liberal, western democracies, it was quite restrained compared to the militant status quo among French Catholics. Indeed, while many Counter-Reformers during the Wars of Religion aimed to punish and purify through 'rites of violence', de Sales wished to imitate early Christian martyrs who 'entered the arena' with 'patience'.

De Sales's burgeoning commitment to a nonviolent, Christocentric Catholicism enabled him to avoid the aggression that triggered untold bloodshed during the French Wars of Religion while also humanizing Huguenots in a manner rare for a French Catholic priest. Across the four years of the mission, de Sales pursued personal encounters with Huguenots, many of which consisted of respectful dialogue over Scripture, theology, and devotional writings. This relational approach implicitly rejected the militant Catholic narrative of the Protestant as monstrous and unclean. De Sales's pedagogical strategies, especially as displayed in his *Méditations*, maintained a disarming, civil tone generally praising Catholicism more than critiquing Protestantism, while also conceding imperfections within the Roman Catholic Church. Lastly, de Sales's approach to the liturgy did not threaten Huguenots or belittle Reformed worship as militant Catholics did. Abstaining from provocative public displays of apocalyptic, penitential

¹²⁷ Kleinman, *Saint François de Sales*, pp. 31, 34.

piety as well as ritual expressions of symbolic violence, de Sales opted to perform Catholic worship in a nonviolent manner.

4 Reforming Spiritual Warfare

Exhorting the faithful to practice spiritual warfare on themselves rather than physical aggression against Huguenots became a hallmark of the Salesian reform of the Catholic war on heresy in the 1590s. Following Erasmus, François de Sales preached that humility, penance, and asceticism constituted a higher form of Christian combat. Troubled by the bloodshed of the French Wars of Religion, de Sales deemed this spiritual warfare a more Christ-like manner of dealing with the challenge of Protestantism. Yet, as he took up the spiritual direction of Catholics in the early 1600s, he grew ambivalent about rigorous penitential attitudes and conduct. Indeed, de Sales increasingly felt that the self-mortification of many French Catholics amounted to a spiritual violence that harmed souls more than edifying them. He thus began to envision nonviolence in the realm of personal devotion much as he had in the realm of Catholic-Huguenot interactions.

This chapter examines de Sales's work as a spiritual director and writer from 1600 to 1610, through which he expanded his reform of militant Catholic zeal to include spiritual combat. In this pastoral work, de Sales concluded that the *douceur* exhibited by Jesus in the Gospels constituted the definitive model for Christian conduct, including the treatment of oneself. Matthew 11. 29, in which Jesus identifies himself as '*doux et humble*' (gentle and humble), emerged as de Sales's authoritative text. Finding the anxious efforts of Catholics to destroy imperfection and sin within themselves ineffective and violent, de Sales exhorted his counselees to practice a Christlike *douceur* in their piety and daily lives.

During this decade of pastoral work, de Sales's critique of spiritual combat focused on its psychological and emotional dimensions more than its physical, bodily aspects. Although he began to critique severe corporal mortification in this period, de Sales spoke most emphatically on *douceur* for the body during the 1610s in his work with the Order of the Visitation. Focusing on the inner life of Catholics, de Sales addressed the affective and cognitive dimensions of spirituality above all. To this end, his efforts consisted of 1) critiquing the emotional comportment prescribed by Catholic militancy, 2) dismantling the theological imagination of militant Catholicism, and 3) promoting gentleness (*douceur*) as a fundamental requirement of authentic Christian living. By means of these strategies, de Sales guided the faithful in refashioning the aggressive, anxious penitence so dominant during the French Wars of Religion.

FROM MISSIONARY TO SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

Following his missionary tenure in the Chablais, de Sales became bishop of Geneva in 1602. Despite his many episcopal responsibilities, de Sales devoted himself to the spiritual direction of countless French Catholics. Indeed, in studying his correspondence early in his episcopate, one senses that this pastoral work appealed to him above all else. Like his Jesuit model, Pierre Favre, de Sales felt that the primary charge and joy of the priesthood consisted of serving and healing as Jesus did and, thus, took up the care of souls quite easily. De Sales's approach to spiritual direction consisted primarily of personal counseling, which he conducted through written correspondence and face-to-face exchanges with Catholics in Savoy and France.

The analysis and interpretation presented here rely on letters of pastoral counseling written between 1600 and 1610, the period in which de Sales gave himself most fervently to the cure of souls. Although most of the letters received by de Sales have not survived, we have his responses in which he often summarized the concerns of his counselees. This summarizing, likely a pastoral technique for expressing understanding and empathy, provides an exceptional window into the religious mentalities and practices of Catholics during the French Wars of Religion. This chapter also draws on de Sales's *Introduction à la vie dévote* (*Introduction to the Devout Life*), his guide to spirituality based on his extensive work in spiritual direction. The *Introduction*, first published in 1609, saw over forty new editions in the following two decades, emerging as one of the most popular religious texts of seventeenth-century Europe.¹ The *Introduction* established de Sales's reputation within French Catholicism as one of the most respected spiritual guides in the early modern period.

The interpretation offered here seeks to expand scholarly understanding of de Sales as a spiritual director and writer. Since the early modern period, commentators have been content to define de Sales's pastoral work in terms of championing lay piety and the potential for holiness in everyday life. Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704), for instance, wrote that de Sales was 'chosen' by God to cultivate 'devotion outside the cloister'.² In the last century, Jean Calvet (1874-1965) contended that de Sales's primary concern consisted of showing ordinary

¹ Viviane Mellinghoff-Bourgerie, *François de Sales, 1567-1622: un homme de lettres spirituelles: culture, tradition, épistolarité* (Geneva: Droz, 1999), p. 69.

² Jacques Bénigne Bossuet, Esprit Fléchier, and Louis Bourdaloue, *Panégryriques de saint François de Sales* (Paris: J.-J. Blaise, 1834), p. 7.

people that ‘Christian perfection was possible in daily life’.³ More recently, Mellinghoff-Bourgerie has identified the ‘sanctification of the laity’ as de Sales’s chief priority, at least prior to the birth of the Visitation.⁴ Missing in this historiography, however, is a detailed examination of the *kind* of piety that de Sales tirelessly championed and that which he consistently critiqued. Scholarly treatment of Salesian pastoral care has also tended to ignore the wider context of the French Wars of Religion. This comparative analysis and historical contextualization, however, are crucial for grasping the reforming impulses behind de Sales’s work as a spiritual director and author.

SPIRITUAL WARFARE WITHIN MILITANT CATHOLICISM

During the French Wars of Religion, Catholics often viewed spiritual warfare on oneself and violence against heretics as complementary aspects of Counter-Reformation activism. Due to the popular belief that immorality and religious laxity gave rise to heresy, Catholics envisioned two enemies or targets in the era: actual heretics *and* the impurity of the faithful themselves. Many Catholics, therefore, felt compelled to destroy the evil within themselves through punishing penances, much as they assaulted Protestants in their midst. In the words of an anonymous 1564 pamphlet, Catholics had to wage ‘continual war’ against personal sin and vice.⁵ It is for this reason that historians, such as Denis Pallier, have observed that Catholics were both militants and penitents during the French Wars of Religion.⁶

The fear of God’s wrath and the End Times often fueled this militant penitence. Scores of pamphlets, books, and sermons from the period illustrate this apocalyptic mindset at work in French Catholic piety, as Crouzet has shown. In 1562, the priest François Le Picart (1504-56) preached: ‘O Christians! It will be a pitiful and calamitous time [...] we can well see how the Day of Judgment soon approaches [...] Christians, think about this, as there will not be time after death’.⁷ In a 1589 treatise,

³ Jean Calvet, *La Littérature religieuse, de François de Sales à Fénelon* (Paris: J. de Gigord, 1938), p. 54.

⁴ Mellinghoff-Bourgerie, *François de Sales*, p. 87.

⁵ Denis Crouzet, *Les Guerriers de Dieu: la violence au temps des troubles de religion, vers 1525-vers 1610*, 2 vols (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1990), I, 376

⁶ Denis Pallier, *Recherches sur l'imprimerie à Paris pendant la Ligue: 1585-1594* (Geneva: Droz, 1975), p. 173, Philip Benedict, *Rouen during the Wars of Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 202.

⁷ As quoted in Crouzet, *Les Guerriers*, I, 207-8.

clergyman René Benoist (1521-1608) warned Catholics of the Final Judgement, citing the ‘extreme miseries and calamities and the greatest of fears’ if France ‘does not do penance’.⁸ Similarly, League placards in Rouen proclaimed that without rigorous penance Catholics would face eternal damnation.⁹

In response, Catholics waged war on the flesh, engaging in bloody flagellation, going barefoot, walking on knees, extreme fasting, sleep deprivation, among other mortifications.¹⁰ Our concern in this chapter, however, is how this militant spirituality operated internally, that is, by means of thoughts, emotions, and attitudes. Within French Catholic militancy, authentic religious zeal consisted of continuous self-denunciation, part of what Crouzet has called an ‘interiorized violence’.¹¹ This required constant awareness of one’s personal corruption, sin, and guilt before God. Devotional poetry from this period reflects this self-castigating mentality. In a 1579 poem, for instance, Jean de Boyssières (1555-84) confesses the filth of his soul:

If you wish to punish me according to my filthy sin
I can only hope that my spirit stained
By evils, horrors, offenses, and vices
Might avoid the eternal tortures of hell¹²

In his 1604 poem, *Miserere mei*, the bishop Philippe Desportes (1546-1606), also laments profound personal impurity:

Thus, I was soiled since I was received
In this valley of misery
I saw myself guilty as soon as I was conceived
And covered with sin in the womb of my mother¹³

Penitence during the Wars of Religion also required confessing that French Catholics, as a group, had failed God, and therefore, deserved collective punishment and suffering. According to René de Lucinge (1553-1610), ‘We have drawn on ourselves divine vengeance ... [we are] guilty of

⁸ René Benoist, *Advertissement et conseil notable a la France, touchant ses presentes extremes miseres & calamitez, & la crainte de plus grandes, si elle ne fait penitence* (Paris: Pierre Hury, 1594).

⁹ Benedict, *Rouen*, p. 194.

¹⁰ Crouzet, *Les Guerriers*, I, 376.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, II, 9-14.

¹² Jean de Boyssières, ‘Prières en Piramide renversées’, in *Devotional Poetry in France, c. 1570-1613*, ed. by Terence Cave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 129.

¹³ Philippe Desportes, ‘Miserere mei’, in *Devotional Poetry*, p. 100.

so many crimes'.¹⁴ The preacher Simon Vigor (1515-75) stated the matter thusly: 'What is the cause of our malady? ... [these] evils come from our sins'.¹⁵ Through such confessions, the faithful sought to amend for the perceived moral and doctrinal corruption of France, the 'eldest daughter of the Church'.

This fearful, guilt-ridden mentality often colored Catholic liturgical life in the period, as well. Rituals that might have otherwise facilitated spiritual consolation or new moral resolve became occasions for assuaging divine wrath.¹⁶ Yet, such ritual participation often exacerbated religious anxiety, as Catholics doubted the quality and competence of their observance. Indeed, François de Sales found that, for many French Catholics, religious devotion had often become a site for profound fear and uncertainty.

WIDESPREAD SPIRITUAL MALADIES

As a spiritual director, de Sales encountered scores of Catholics reeling from interior stress and upheaval. In letters of spiritual direction, as well as his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, he addressed 'affliction', 'torment', 'anxiety', and 'fear' in Catholic piety.¹⁷ Crouzet has observed a pervasive 'eschatological anguish' in sixteenth-century French Catholicism.¹⁸ While Crouzet may have overstated the prevalence of End Times fears,¹⁹ his emphasis on emotional tumult certainly matches what de Sales found in his

¹⁴ René de Lucinge, *Dialogue du françois et du savoysien*, ed. by Alain Dufour (Geneva: Droz, 1961), p. 28.

¹⁵ Simon Vigor, *Sermons catholiques pour tous les iours de Caresme & Feries de Pasques, faits en l'Eglise S. Etienne du mon à Paris* (Paris: Michel Sonnius, 1588), fol. 87.

¹⁶ Natalie Zemon Davis, 'The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France', *Past and Present*, 59 (1973), 53-91 (p. 59); Ann W. Ramsey, *Liturgy, Politics, and Salvation: The Catholic League in Paris and the Nature of Catholic Reform, 1540-1630* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1999), 25; Moshe Sluhovskiy, *Patroness of Paris: Rituals of Devotion in Early Modern France* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), p. 119.

¹⁷ OEA, III, 45, 56, 90, 129, 133-4, 138, 156-7, 162, 166, 169, 314, 317, 351, XII, 168, 278, 334, 357, 383, 387, 394, XIII, 11, 30, 56, 83, 113, 167, 261, 264, 300 XIV, 29, 54, 168, 203, 382, 473.

¹⁸ Crouzet, *Les Guerriers*, I, 182-4.

¹⁹ For such critiques, see Barbara B. Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 6, Mack P. Holt, 'Putting Religion Back into the Wars of Religion' *French Historical Studies* 18 (1993), 524-51 (pp. 535-6); Luc Racaut, *Hatred in Print: Catholic propaganda and Protestant Identity during the French wars of religion* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 28-9.

spiritual counseling in the early 1600s. Indeed, de Sales routinely described his counselees as having a spiritual malady (*maladie spirituelle*), spiritual melancholy (*mélancolie spirituelle*), malignity of spirit (*malignité d'esprit*), or similar religious ills.²⁰

De Sales, himself, as we have seen, had undergone a spiritual crisis in Paris in 1587 and this doubtlessly sharpened his sensitivity to similar experiences of his coreligionists. Indeed, in his care of souls, de Sales sometimes referred explicitly to his period of spiritual turmoil.²¹ Taking spiritual anxiety quite seriously, de Sales assured his counselees of his commitment to aiding them to find interior peace. 'I beg you to believe', he wrote to one counselee, 'that I am entirely and irrevocably at the service of your soul and that I will attend to it'.²² To others, he urged them to write him 'with total confidence' and to trust the 'extreme zeal' he had for their spiritual well-being.²³

Breaking from many fellow clergymen, de Sales came to believe that relentless, rigorous penitence often amounted to spiritual and psychological violence. 'Do not do violence to yourself', he told a counselee anxious over the quality of her prayers.²⁴ To another Catholic who nervously repeated pious practices, he urged replacing 'a violent diligence' with a 'gentle diligence'.²⁵ In letters to Jeanne de Chantal, de Sales instructed her 'not to do violence to [her] head' and to avoid violent imagery in her prayers.²⁶ With this development in de Sales's spiritual direction we can see that his critique of militant spirituality resembled his reform of the Catholic war on heresy; at the heart of both was a call to abandon a religious mentality and praxis of violence.

THE SALESIAN 'DIAGNOSES'

In his pastoral care of Catholics, de Sales discussed the causes and consequences of their interior troubles, as he understood them. Let us consider his chief concerns, as well as the 'diagnoses' that he made.

²⁰ OEA, III, 19*, 24, 25*, 235, 336, XII, 181, 349, 364, XIII, 112, 392, XIV, 135.

²¹ *Saint François de Sales, par les témoins de sa vie*, ed. by Roger Devos (Annecy: Gardet, 1967), pp. 57-9.

²² OEA, XII, 341.

²³ *Ibid.*, 163, XIII, 32.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, XIII, 334.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, XIV, 22.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, XIII, 123, 184.

ANXIOUS RUSHING (*EMPRESSEMENT*)

A recurring theme in de Sales's pastoral work is *empressement*, which we might translate as 'anxious rushing'. De Sales used the term to refer to nervous, hurried performances of devotion, as well as the scrupulous analysis of one's religious practices. In a number of cases, counselees sought to accomplish as many pious deeds as they possibly could, including confession, Eucharist, and acts of mortification.²⁷ For some counselees, the quality of their observance troubled them more than the quantity. They doubted, for instance, whether they had handled prayer, confession, or other devotional matters correctly.²⁸ Whether the issue was quantity or quality, the faithful feared that their devotion displeased God and put their souls in jeopardy.²⁹

MORAL ANGER

De Sales also frequently addressed anger over moral or spiritual imperfections. In the opening chapter of the *Introduction*, de Sales laments how easily people of faith observe the externals of religious devotion dutifully, on the one hand, and yet, indulge in righteous indignation, on the other. Catholics fast or pray faithfully, but think nothing of condemning others or themselves.³⁰ In de Sales's estimation, this moral anger not only compromised love of neighbor, but caused the moral deterioration of the person experiencing the emotion as well.³¹

De Sales taught that moral indignation at oneself was often unjustified, sparked by impatience and perfectionism. Catholics rebuked themselves for failing to engage in proper self-mortification, to keep a regular prayer schedule, or to abandon worldly ambitions sufficiently.³² They denounced themselves for recurring sins, lack of spiritual progress, and bad habits.³³ Still others condemned themselves for sexual thoughts and feelings. In de Sales's view, moral anger often produced punishments far exceeding the 'crime'. One 'who values chastity', he teaches, 'vexes himself with unparalleled bitterness over the least fault he commits against

²⁷ Ibid., XII, 181-2, 204, XIII, 321, XIV, 22, 53-4, 121-2, 135-6, 167-8.

²⁸ Ibid., XIII, 55, 114, 334, 367-8, XIV, 54, 86, 120.

²⁹ Ibid., XII, 149, 181-2, 383, XIII, 22-3, 29, 210, XIV, 119.

³⁰ Ibid., III, 14.

³¹ Ibid., 213, 156-7.

³² Ibid., XII, 364, XIII, 58, XIV, 62.

³³ Ibid., XII, 204, 383-4, XIII, 373-5, XIV, 21-3.

it', while another, 'who hates gossip, torments himself for having made the slightest murmur'.³⁴

SORROWFUL PIETY

De Sales encountered profound religious sorrow and fatalism among French Catholics, describing counselees as being 'attacked by sadness' and falling into 'misery' and 'heaviness of spirit'.³⁵ Counselees despaired when their devotion did not produce 'consolations' or 'feelings' of God's affirmation.³⁶ One nun fell into 'misery' over the 'coldness' of her prayer life.³⁷ A certain Madame Fléchère had become hopeless, 'unable to know beyond a doubt' that she had fulfilled her duty 'to serve God'.³⁸ Some counselees were chronically saddened by other religious uncertainties, succumbing to 'torpor' and 'lassitude'.³⁹ 'You have [...] a truly worn out spirit', de Sales told an individual who had 'fallen into sadness and discouragement'.⁴⁰ To another, de Sales stated that her scruples have rendered her 'poor spirit [...] sad and trembling'.⁴¹

CRITIQUING EMOTIONAL NORMS OF MILITANT CATHOLICISM

In recent decades, historians have drawn on the insights of psychologists, anthropologists, and other social scientists concerning the role of emotions in culture and society.⁴² Scholars of medieval and early modern Europe have participated in this development, exploring the Crusades, the German Reformation, and the French Revolution through the lens of the emotions.⁴³ Among the concepts emerging from this scholarship, particularly compelling is Barbara Rosenwein's notion of an 'emotional community',

³⁴ Ibid., III, 157.

³⁵ Ibid., XIII, 110-12, 202, 313.

³⁶ Ibid., 29, 187, XIV, 148.

³⁷ Ibid., XIII, 313.

³⁸ Ibid., XIV, 135-7.

³⁹ Ibid., XII, 380-8, XIII, 313, XIV, 27, 119-21.

⁴⁰ Ibid., XIV, 135.

⁴¹ Ibid., XIII, 374.

⁴² For a summary of this approach, see Willemijn Ruberg, 'Interdisciplinarity and the History of Emotions', *Cultural and Social History*, 6 (2009), 507-16.

⁴³ Damien Boquet and Piroska Nagy, *Le Sujet des émotions au moyen âge* (Paris: Beauchesne, 2008); Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling: Shaping the Religious Emotions in Early Modern Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

which she defines as a social group that privileges certain emotions while discouraging others as a means of defining communal norms and boundaries.⁴⁴

Rosenwein's concept of 'emotional communities' can be applied fruitfully to the French Wars of Religion and the Salesian reform of militant Catholicism. As we have seen, Catholic militancy prescribed certain affective experiences and expressions. Faithful men and women were *supposed* to feel constant sorrow for sins that produced heresy and enraged God. A devout Catholic *ought* to be angry and hateful toward Huguenots for rejecting godly doctrine and practice. Good Catholics *should* fear the many dangers around them, whether heretics, the flesh, God's punishment, or the End Times. In the 'emotional communities' of militant Catholicism, then, sorrow, anger, and fear constituted community-defining emotions.

In de Sales's pastoral work, however, he challenged these very emotional norms. De Sales highlighted fear as particularly problematic, maintaining that 'fear is a greater evil than evil' and that, 'except for sin, anxiety is the greatest evil for the soul'.⁴⁵ De Sales drew on the Gospels to teach that fear jeopardized union with God. It was fear, he asserted, that sabotaged Peter's efforts to walk on water with Jesus (Mt 14. 30), much as it prevented Martha from enjoying Jesus's company when he visited her (Lk 10. 40-1).⁴⁶ De Sales routinely cited the negative effects of fear, stating that it ignored reason, provoked reckless judgments, and tired the spirit.⁴⁷

De Sales addressed anger in his pastoral work as well, teaching that true devotion restrains it.⁴⁸ Drawing on James 1. 20, he observes that outrage 'does not advance the justice of God'.⁴⁹ De Sales asserted that few humans could put anger to constructive ends: 'Live without anger,' [for] it easily takes charge of us and 'we are no longer master of ourselves'.⁵⁰ De Sales's proscriptions against anger were, at times, nearly absolute. In Book 4 of the *Introduction*, he teaches, 'I tell you directly and without exception: do not get upset at all', and do not open the 'door of your heart to anger'.⁵¹ De Sales often exhorted Catholics to abandon anger directed against

⁴⁴ Barbara H. Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions in History', *The American Historical Review*, 107 (2002), 821-45.

⁴⁵ OEA, III, 133, XIII, 211.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, III, 159, XIII, 211.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, III, 132-4, 234, 310-13 XIII, 338.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, III, 15.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 155*, XIV, 105.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, III, 164.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 162.

themselves, teaching that no amount of it would eliminate perceived weaknesses and frailties. Indeed, bitter self-correction only exacerbated ‘emotional displeasure’:

It is reasonable when we are at fault that we are displeased and sorry, but we must refrain from bitter, spiteful, and emotional displeasure. Many people are greatly at fault in this way. When overcome by anger they become angry at being angry, disturbed at being disturbed, and vexed at being vexed. By such means they keep their hearts drenched and steeped in passion.⁵²

De Sales discussed sadness with more nuance than with anger and fear, teaching that it sometimes had a role in spiritual development. It was appropriate, for instance, to feel sad for someone suffering or one’s own sins.⁵³ De Sales also affirmed the healing effects of crying. On the topic of tears, he told a friend that, ‘it is marvelous how much this liquid is just right for all sorts of heartache’.⁵⁴ However, when sadness became chronic, resulting in sorrow, it produced more bad effects than good. Sorrow, he explained, led to all manner of emotional and spiritual troubles:

Sorrow disturbs and upsets the soul, arouses inordinate fears, creates disgust for prayer, stupefies and oppresses the mind, deprives the mind of prudence, resolution, judgment, and courage, and destroys its strength. In a word, it is like a severe winter which spoils all the beauty of the country and weakens all the animals.⁵⁵

De Sales sometimes associated sorrow with evil. Though he generally attributed little power to the Devil, de Sales did claim that Satan welcomes human despair: ‘The evil one is pleased with sadness and melancholy because he himself is sad and melancholy [...] hence he desires that everyone should be like himself’.⁵⁶ De Sales also taught that the Devil could use sorrow to manipulate souls by making evil seem agreeable and virtue undesirable.

De Sales urged Catholics to abstain from sorrow as best as they could. ‘Give at every moment your heart to our Savior’ and be done with ‘melancholy’ and ‘despondent devotion’, he urged one counselee.⁵⁷ He advised another to ‘soften [her] displeasure’ and leave ‘excessive sadness’

⁵² Ibid., 166.

⁵³ Ibid., 314

⁵⁴ Ibid., XIII, 134.

⁵⁵ OEA, III, 314

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., XIII, 59.

to those who have no ‘hope’.⁵⁸ De Sales taught that the devout person must strive for calm and confidence, even in the midst of sorrow: ‘If you find yourself feeling heavy, sad, and somber, do not fail nonetheless to remain in peace’.⁵⁹ De Sales did not exempt his own mother from this counsel. After Madame de Boisy had refused a new pair of shoes, claiming she would not live long enough to wear them, de Sales instructed her to ‘detach [herself] from’ such ‘base affections and thoughts’, and to take up ‘ones better and more agreeable to Our Lord’.⁶⁰

A SPIRITUALITY OF TRANQUILITY, COURAGE, AND JOY

As his directives to his mother illustrate, de Sales paired his critique of afflictive emotions with invitations to foster alternative attitudes and affectivity. A defining feature of his reform of militant spirituality consisted of exhorting the faithful to refashion fear, anger, and sorrow into their emotional opposites.

Breaking from militant Catholicism, de Sales preached a piety of inner tranquility and peace. To a protégée who rushed from one religious activity to another, de Sales taught that, ‘God is neither in this strong wind, nor in this excitement, nor these fires’, but through a ‘tranquil doorway’.⁶¹ Rather than living fearfully, he elaborated, Catholics had to cultivate ‘tranquility and quietude’.⁶² Indeed, at every step of the spiritual journey, de Sales asserted, interior peace was essential: ‘In all things and all places, we must live peacefully. We must flee evil [but] this must be done peacefully [...] We must do good, [but] we must do it peacefully [...] The same for penitence; we must do it peacefully’.⁶³ De Sales also prescribed confidence and hope amidst uncertainty and heartbreak. ‘Stoke up your courage’, he instructed a counselee, despite ‘imperfections and miseries’.⁶⁴ Similarly, he advised another counselee to speak not of ‘dangers’, but ‘confidence’ in ‘God’.⁶⁵ As for anger, de Sales said it had little place for those committed to Mt 11. 29 where Jesus champions gentleness and humility.⁶⁶

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, XII, 177-8.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, XIV, 52.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, XIV, 212-3.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, XII, 166-7. De Sales draws on 1 Kings 19. 11-12 here.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 173.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, XIII, 30-1.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, XIV, 57.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, XII, 108.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, III, 161

De Sales exhorted the faithful to practice their faith in a spirit of joy, as well. ‘Devotion’, he asserted, did not consist of having an ‘angry, sad, and despondent face;’ but, rather, of living ‘joyously’ and ‘courageously’.⁶⁷ De Sales praised Catholics when they lived with joy and shared it with others. ‘I am delighted’, he wrote to a counselee, ‘that you are giving to others’ the ‘gaiety with which you are living’. ‘God is a God of joy’, he continued, ‘[so] continue and persevere, since the crown is for those who persist’.⁶⁸ By emphasizing joy, de Sales preached a spirituality that broke from the angst permeating Catholic militancy during the Wars of Religion.

REFORMING THE MILITANT WORLDVIEW

In addition to dealing with emotions, de Sales critiqued the theological underpinnings of militant Catholicism, refashioning popular views on the nature of God, creation, and divine-human relations. In the militant Catholic worldview, sin, heresy, Satan, and God, posed untold threats to body and soul. In his spiritual direction, de Sales presented to the Catholic imagination an optimistic, incarnational theology that affirmed the goodness and redemptive potential inherent in creation and human existence.

GOD AS LOVING CREATOR

At the heart of militant Catholicism reigned a punitive, wrathful God. In monasteries, confraternities, parishes, and homes, the faithful often believed that God regarded them with disgust and rage. Due to immorality and religious apathy, they believed, Catholic France itself had produced heresy. Having allowed the ‘eldest daughter of the Church’ to be corrupted, they would soon see divine punishment. Regardless of social class or educational background, fear of God’s wrath was common. Philippe Desportes’s poem, ‘Prayer’ (*Prière*), from 1604, illustrates this terrifying predicament:

Alas! What will I do? Will I dare raise
My eyes to the sky for my cry to address you
In this fear that surrounds my soul?
I am confused, all of my spirit fails me
My sight is troubled, my shaking heart
Faints, so much does my fault shock it.

Let us hide therefore: but where can I go
In the sky, in the waters, on land or in the air,

⁶⁷ Ibid., 17, XII, 169.

⁶⁸ Ibid., XIII, 16.

Oh Lord God, to avoid your face?⁶⁹

While Scripture and Catholic tradition offered a rich variety of metaphors for imagining God, French Catholics often portrayed the divine as a punitive king or judge. In Desportes's 'Prayer', for instance, we read:

Unable to evade your Justice
I dare, oh my God, I dare to present myself
Pale and trembling, before your holy majesty.⁷⁰

In 1613, Jean-Baptiste Chassignet expresses similar sentiments in a devotional poem, speaking of the rulings of God:

Temper, alas! Lord, temper the sentence
That condemns to death my soul and its offense
Do not pronounce your ruling of punishment
Resheath your knife before your hand delivers blows⁷¹

In his teen and early adult years, de Sales had feared God in a similar fashion. Yet, as we have seen, he came to believe in a divine proclivity for mercy and tenderness, as embodied in the statue of Our Lady of Deliverance he encountered in 1587. Now, as a spiritual director, de Sales invited his coreligionists to view God as a loving, compassionate Creator. One of de Sales's strategies consisted of asserting, casually and briefly, the patient, merciful nature of God in his communication with others. In one letter of spiritual direction, for instance, he urged an anxious counselee to be resilient for the simple reason that 'God is a God of joy'.⁷² On another occasion, he told a protégé to be hopeful because God 'is a God of peace'.⁷³ In a number of cases, de Sales repeated these pithy assertions to the same people over several years, consistently promoting an alternative theology to that of militant Catholicism.

De Sales challenged notions of an angry, punishing God in an assertive, explicit fashion as well. When counselees insisted that God intended them harm, the Savoyard priest asserted that they were mistaken. In a 1607 letter to Jeanne de Chantal, he dismissed her preoccupation with divine 'ire and indignation', for God's ways, he asserted, were full of

⁶⁹ Philippe Desportes, 'Prière' in *La Muse sacrée: anthologie de la poésie spirituelle française (1570-1630)*, ed. by Terence Cave and Michel Jeanneret (Paris, Corti, 2007), p. 86.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Jean-Baptiste Chassignet, *Les Paraphrases sur les cent cinquante psaumes de David* (Lyon: Claude Morillon, 1613), p. 36.

⁷² OEA, XIII, 16.

⁷³ Ibid., XII, 149.

‘gentleness and consolation’.⁷⁴ On another occasion, de Sales told a counselee that fixating on divine punishment was misguided. ‘Do not fear God at all’, he urged this protégé, ‘for he wishes you no harm’.⁷⁵

De Sales also refashioned the militant imagery of God by using alternative language and metaphors. Only rarely referring to God as a ‘judge’ or ‘king’, he often employed the term ‘protector’ instead. In one instance, a certain Catholic feared God’s punishment for the inadequacy of her faith. De Sales entreated her to abandon this concern, asserting that God was actually her ‘protector’.⁷⁶ On another occasion, he referred a counselee to the Book of Genesis, for in it, God told Abraham, ‘Fear nothing, for I am your protector’.⁷⁷ De Sales also signed his pastoral correspondence with phrases affirming the protective ways of God. One finds, for example, ‘may God always be your protection’ at the end of his letters, just above his signature.⁷⁸ The *Introduction to the Devout Life* consistently speaks of God as a source of ‘protection’ as well.⁷⁹ By portraying God as protector, de Sales provided ‘word-paintings’ of divine care and sustenance, rather than imagery of imminent punishment.⁸⁰

THE GOODNESS OF CREATION

Since the early centuries of Christianity, a mentality of *contemptus mundi* (contempt of the world) has cautioned the faithful against spiritual and moral threats inherent in creation and daily life on earth. During the French Wars of Religion, an acute form of this theological pessimism took hold of many. In the militant Catholic imagination, a profound fracture separated God and creation and, consequently, evil permeated the natural world.⁸¹ ‘All evils descend on earth’, wrote a Catholic Leaguer in the 1589, adding that

⁷⁴ Ibid., XIII, 340.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 210.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 152.

⁷⁷ Ibid., XIII, 211.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 181. See *ibid.*, XII, 115, 145, 152, 188, 211, 392 for other references to God as protector.

⁷⁹ Ibid., III, 34, 45, 89, 156, 159, 163.

⁸⁰ Joseph F. Chorpenning, *Lectio Divina and Francis de Sales’s Picturing of the Interconnection of Divine and Human Hearts*, in *Imago Exegetica: Visual Images as Exegetical Instruments*, ed. by Walter S. Melion (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 449-77 (p. 451).

⁸¹ Crouzet, *Les Guerriers*, I, 176.

‘all vices, all bad doctrines [...] all impieties; in short, all viciousness that ever was, is gathered like an army [...] and puts the world under its yoke’.⁸²

The natural world threatened humans, in part, because God used it to afflict humanity. French Catholics often believed, for instance, that God punished sinners through floods, droughts, and diseases.⁸³ According to the poet Robert le Rocquez, it is ‘on account on our sins, which erase all grace’, that ‘God sustains famine [and] plagues’.⁸⁴ Many of the faithful also viewed sick or aggressive livestock similarly.⁸⁵ In the words of the preacher René Benoist, ‘it seems that, wanting to punish us, the eternal God [...] has turned all of his creatures against man’.⁸⁶

Satan threatened human life on earth as well. During the French Wars of Religion, some Catholics adopted a quasi-Manichean theology in which the Devil and God engaged in constant combat with the earth serving as the battleground of their conflict. The notion of the Devil’s presence and power in daily life and human affairs, therefore, was commonplace. A 1595 poem, ‘Satan’, by Antoine Favre, a friend of de Sales, illustrates this:

In what straits, alas, we miserable ones live!
Always before our eyes, however invisibly
The devil spins and circles and insensibly
Having become vanquisher, renders us both dead and guilty⁸⁷

A preoccupation with the monstrous and grotesque also illustrates the belief in a frightful, fallen world. In both learned and popular circles, Catholics shared accounts of attacking grasshoppers, multi-headed infants, and human-animal hybrids.⁸⁸ François de Belleforest, finding such tales prevalent, published a collection of them, entitled *Histoires prodigieuses (Prodigious Stories)*.⁸⁹ While such accounts likely served as entertainment in some cases, they also indicate a perception of the world overrun with corruption, sin, and disorder.

⁸² Anonymous, *La Consolation de tous fideles Catholiques qui sont affligez et persecutez par la tyrannie des ennemis de la Religion Catholique, Apostolique, et Romaine* (Paris: G. de S. Gilles, 1589), p. 5.

⁸³ Davis, ‘Rites’, p. 59.

⁸⁴ Robert Le Rocquez, *Le Miroir d’eternité comprenant les sept aages du monde* (Caen: Pierre la Chandelier, 1589), p. 107.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ René Benoist, *Exhortation chrestienne aux fideles et esleuz de Dieu, de batailler par tous moyens pour le grand Seigneur contre l’Antechrist* (Paris: Guillaume Chaudiere, 1566), p. 12.

⁸⁷ Antoine Favre, ‘Satan’, in *La Muse sacrée*, p. 41.

⁸⁸ Crouzet, *Les Guerriers*, I, 172-4.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 174.

De Sales rejected this frightful, pessimistic worldview. Affirming an incarnational, sacramental view of nature, he taught that Creator and creation existed in fundamental harmony and that, since God was good, creation necessarily shared in that goodness. He expressed this in his 1604 letter to André Frémyot, archbishop of Bourges.⁹⁰ Frémyot, seeking advice on preaching, had inquired whether one could speak positively of nature from the pulpit. In his response, de Sales affirmed that, without question, one could do so: ‘Stories from nature? Of course, since the earth speaks the word of God [...] feels [it] in all its parts; all its parts sing the praise of the Creator’. De Sales cited Scripture to make his point. In Romans 1, he told Frémyot, Paul asserted that, ‘the invisible perfections of God are made comprehensible in what has been created’, while Psalm 18 taught that, ‘the heavens tell the glory of God’.⁹¹

De Sales admired the natural world deeply, an admiration that fueled his critique of the fearful, dualistic theology of militant Catholicism. In his spiritual direction, he praised lakes, mountains, stars, and flowers, among other faces of nature. Like Francis of Assisi, de Sales also loved animals, speaking of them in his pastoral work. Many creatures, such as wolves, bears, eagles, ostriches, chickens, bees, and flies, offered moral lessons if humans observed them carefully.⁹² De Sales’s objections to hunting also illustrate his reverence for animals. He discouraged lay people from hunting solely for entertainment and believed that clergymen should never hunt.⁹³

In his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, de Sales taught prayers and meditations inviting Catholics to conceive of creation and the divine in harmony. In one meditation, he leads the reader in imagining heaven, using the beauty of the natural world as his point of departure. ‘Consider a beautiful night fully serene and think how good it is to see the sky with its multitude and variety of stars’. ‘Now join this beauty’, he continues, ‘with that of a handsome day, the kind’ in which ‘happy birds fly and sing the praises of the Creator’. This, de Sales asserts, reveals a bit of heaven.⁹⁴

Accordingly, de Sales encouraged Catholics to trust nature and creation as trustworthy paths to the divine. In one instance, a nun wrote to him, concerned about the contentment she had experienced in prayer. She hesitated to accept this consolation, fearing that it might have come from

⁹⁰ OEA, XII, 299-325.

⁹¹ Ibid., 307.

⁹² Ibid., III, 14, 62, 64, 140, 163.

⁹³ Ibid., XII, 302.

⁹⁴ Ibid., III, 50.

herself, a mere 'creature', rather than from God. De Sales urged her to abandon this worry. Those things which 'are from a creature [...] are not to be rejected' automatically, he asserted, for the things of nature often 'lead to God'.⁹⁵

Strikingly, de Sales also broke with many Catholics, both militant and nonmilitant, in rendering Satan relatively powerless over humans or human affairs.⁹⁶ Indeed, de Sales portrayed the Devil as an obnoxious dog barking loudly outside one's door: it produced a jarring disturbance, but posed relatively little threat. The Savoyard priest advised one counselee to 'let the dog bark at the door as much as it wants', for there is nothing to fear.⁹⁷ On another occasion, de Sales asserted that the Devil is just a '*grand clabaudeur*' ('big barker') whose increasing volume only proved powerlessness. De Sales insisted that humans had the power to keep Satan at bay, as long as they kept 'the door shut'.⁹⁸ In one instance, de Sales even prescribed mocking and laughing at the Devil.⁹⁹

RENEWING THE DIVINE-HUMAN RELATIONSHIP

Distance, fear, and violence characterized the relationship between God and humanity in the militant imagination. One Frenchman concluded that Catholics, having become a 'false, filthy people', would soon see 'fire from heaven'.¹⁰⁰ According to the writer, René de Lucinge, 'we have revolted against his divine Majesty [and] his anger [...] is rightly thrust against our guilty heads'. The poet-priest Philippe Desportes feared that God would break him 'into a thousand shards':

I want to flee, I want to flee before
The ardent anger of this great living God
Who holds the storm and the tempest in hand.

For my sin makes him angry
Well justifying that his thrust lightning
Divides my head into a thousand shards.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Ibid., XII, 166.

⁹⁶ Gilles Jeanguenin, *Saint François de Sales: son combat contre le démon* (Paris: Éditions de l'Emmanuel, 2009), pp. 25-7.

⁹⁷ OEA, XIII, 89.

⁹⁸ Ibid., XII, 355, XIII, 10.

⁹⁹ Ibid., XIII, 392.

¹⁰⁰ 'Catholic invective ii', in *The French Wars of Religion: Selected Documents*, ed. by David Potter (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), pp. 38-9.

¹⁰¹ Desportes, 'Prière' in *La Muse sacrée*, p. 86.

In sharp contrast, de Sales taught that God yearned for union with humanity, eager to form a 'divine-human world of hearts' as Wendy M. Wright aptly puts it.¹⁰² In his spiritual direction, therefore, de Sales consistently employed imagery depicting the Creator-creature relationship as capable of deep, enduring tenderness and affection. For instance, he frequently invited Catholics to give themselves to God as one would to a loving father. In a 1609 letter, he encouraged a counselee to trust in the 'aid and help of the gentle, heavenly Father'.¹⁰³ A recurring metaphor for the divine in his *Introduction* is a father with outstretched hand. In this work, de Sales invites readers to 'take [God] by the hand as a small child does with its father' and 'hold always' the 'hand of the heavenly Father'.¹⁰⁴

De Sales often spoke of the divine in maternal terms as well.¹⁰⁵ In his use of feminine imagery, de Sales resembled twelfth-century Cistercians who had referred to Jesus and abbots as mother. According to Caroline Walker Bynum, Cistercian writers and preachers did this, in part, to temper the severity of religious superiors and spiritual directors in monastic life. Bernard of Clairvaux, for instance, praised abbots who, by imitating the motherly ways of Jesus, nurtured monks in their care rather than oppressing them.¹⁰⁶ Bernard of Clairvaux also spoke of God's breasts, using suckling imagery to depict divine sustenance for the faithful. Given de Sales's familiarity with Bernard of Clairvaux's writings, amply demonstrated by Viviane Mellinghoff-Bourgerie, it is likely that the Savoyard priest drew on the Cistercian author in this regard.¹⁰⁷

De Sales invited French Catholics, lay and religious, to confide in a tender, protective maternal God. When confronted by temptation, for example, de Sales exhorts the faithful to go to God, just as a child 'runs into the arms' of its 'mother' upon seeing a frightening animal.¹⁰⁸ The *Introduction* urges Catholics to trust in the 'loving and maternal hand of God' and to accept consolations offered by God like children accepting

¹⁰² Wendy M. Wright, *Heart Speaks to Heart: The Salesian Tradition* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004), p. 23.

¹⁰³ OEA, XIV, 194.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 94, 160.

¹⁰⁵ Michael J. Buckley, S.J., 'Seventeenth-Century French Spirituality: Three Figures', in *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern*, ed. by Louis Dupré (New York: Crossroad, 1996), pp. 28-68, (p. 39).

¹⁰⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus As Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 117-8.

¹⁰⁷ Mellinghoff-Bourgerie, *François de Sales*, pp. 120-9.

¹⁰⁸ OEA, III, 151.

candy from their mother.¹⁰⁹ In a letter to a certain Madame de la Fléchère, de Sales advised her to entrust her worries to God ‘like a tender child to its mother’.¹¹⁰ Countering the militant imagery of God as judge or king who destroys, then, de Sales offered his coreligionists a vision of God as mother who comforts and nurtures.

The Salesian vision of divine-human affection called into question not only God’s violence, but God’s distance as well. In the militant Catholic imagination, God was far away from humans. Whether sending lightning from the sky or ‘fire from heaven,’ God existed at an emotional, relational distance, as well as a moral and ontological one. De Sales’s use of embodied, tactile imagery, in contrast, fused the human and divine, and healed, as it were, the fracture envisioned in militant Catholicism, making God as close and intimate as a parent holding a child. On occasion, de Sales illustrated this intimacy even more strikingly, depicting God as offering breast milk. In one instance, de Sales teaches that God’s ‘breasts are abundant with milk of sweetness’ and that his spiritual children should partake of this ‘heavenly liquid’.¹¹¹ On another occasion, he entreated a protégée to embrace the joy and consolation emerging in her prayer life. Accept this ‘milk of the breasts of your Father’, he urges, as an expression of ‘his compassion’.¹¹² Here again we must note the probable indebtedness of de Sales to Bernard of Clairvaux, who, as we have seen, employed the imagery of suckling to depict divine sustenance and affection for the faithful.¹¹³

A CATHOLICISM OF *DOUCEUR*

This intense pastoral care in the early 1600s touched off the most significant development in the Salesian reform of militant zeal, for in this work *douceur* emerged as the core principle of his vision of Catholicism. Viewing the anxiety and aggression that defined piety for so many Catholics as a profound corruption of the faith, de Sales invited his coreligionists to nonviolent piety. With the concept of *douceur*, de Sales brandished an effective rhetorical and theological tool for doing so, proclaiming that gentleness and peace should define the faith. For roughly 20 years, de Sales employed *douceur* as his rallying cry for Catholic renewal, winning countless disciples in the process. Within decades after de Sales’s death in

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 324.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., XIV, 54.

¹¹¹ Ibid., XIII, 310.

¹¹² Ibid., XII, 85.

¹¹³ Bynum, *Jesus As Mother*, pp. 115-7.

1622, Salesian *douceur* had achieved widespread affirmation in French Catholicism and early modern Catholicism more broadly.

The concept of *douceur* had already been present in de Sales's approach to Catholicism prior to his work as a spiritual director. In his provost induction sermon of 1593, de Sales had taught that God called the faithful with 'trumpets' whose sound was 'full of gentleness'. One also finds *douceur* in other early sermons criticizing war and violence, as well as in his missionary work in the Chablais. During his pastoral work from 1600 to 1610, however, de Sales increasingly employed the notion of *douceur* as an all-encompassing concept, citing it as a defining aspect of Catholic piety. In a 1607 letter, he taught a counselee that the 'true method' of serving 'our Lord' is 'gentleness'.¹¹⁴ To another individual, he commented, 'I still advise, above all', the practice of 'gentleness'.¹¹⁵ De Sales urged yet another Catholic to approach 'everything' with 'gentleness'.¹¹⁶ In his *Introduction*, first published in 1609, no other concept guides the spirituality being prescribed more than *douceur*. Among the scores of examples are, 'gentleness surmounts all things', endure 'afflictions' with 'gentleness', and show 'gentleness' in 'all actions in life'.¹¹⁷ Indeed, de Sales portrayed Catholic devotion and gentleness as inseparable, teaching that 'the devout life is a gentle life' and 'devotion is the gentleness of gentlenesses' (*la douceur des douceurs*).¹¹⁸

CHRISTOCENTRISM OF *DOUCEUR*

The primary source for the Salesian vision of Catholic *douceur* was the example and teachings of Jesus in the New Testament. De Sales consistently presented Jesus as the authoritative model of gentleness for French Catholics. Tirelessly, he asserted that Jesus was *doux* and that a 'spirit of gentleness' was the 'true spirit of Jesus'.¹¹⁹ In 1609, he taught that the *douceur* of Jesus constituted the most important religious lesson to learn and practice in one's own life:

I am coming from prayer where, asking myself the reason for which we are in this world, [and] I learned that we are here only to receive and carry the gentle Jesus [...] in proclaiming him

¹¹⁴ Ibid., XIII, 298.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., XIV, 171.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 159.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., III, 126, 134, 161.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 16-17.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., XII, 206, 287, 387, 392, XIII, 68, 75, 274, 276, XIV, 14, 104, 132, 156.

[and] doing good works. Oh blessed are those who carry him gently and constantly!¹²⁰

De Sales used Matthew 11. 28-30 as his chief primary biblical text to advocate a gentle, Christocentric Catholicism. In Matthew 11. 28-30, as we have seen, Jesus teaches that he is ‘gentle and humble of heart’ and that his ‘yoke is easy’ and his ‘burden light’. De Sales often cited this passage in his letters of spiritual direction. In 1607, for instance, he instructs a protégée to imitate the ‘virtues’ of ‘humility and gentleness of heart’ because ‘Our Lord’ taught them (Mt 11. 29).¹²¹ On another occasion, de Sales urges a counselee to ‘study well this lesson, because it is the ultimate lesson of our sovereign Master: Learn from me as I am gentle and humble of heart (Mt 11. 29).’¹²²

***DOUCEUR* AS REMEDY FOR RELIGIOUS PERFECTIONISM**

De Sales applied the concept of gentleness widely and flexibly in his reform of spiritual warfare. One application concerned the relentless pursuit of religious perfection in Catholic piety. De Sales consistently cited perfectionism as a cause of religious anxiety among the faithful. Consider the case of Sister Soulfour, a Parisian nun, who wrote to de Sales several times, feeling anxious and agitated over her sins and faults. De Sales attributed this to perfectionism. ‘Your imagination has formed for you an idea of absolute perfection’, he explained, and these ‘interior troubles that you have suffered are caused by a ‘rush to attain [this] imaginary perfection’.¹²³ De Sales cited perfectionism in his pastoral work with Madame Brulart too. ‘You lament [your] many imperfections’, he explained, but the unrealistic ‘desire that you have for perfection and purity’ itself causes ‘miseries’.¹²⁴

De Sales’s Catholicism of *douceur* exhorted the faithful to see the inevitability of moral and spiritual imperfection in human existence. The ‘divine and angelic’ ways ‘of ‘eternity’ will be tasted in the next life, de Sales instructed a counselee, but on earth one must proceed ‘according to the ways of this world, where perfection does not reside’.¹²⁵ ‘Do not push

¹²⁰ Ibid., XIV, 211.

¹²¹ Ibid., 339.

¹²² Ibid., 149.

¹²³ Ibid., XII, 164, 202.

¹²⁴ Ibid., XIII, 18-9.

¹²⁵ Ibid., XII, 167.

[your heart] so hard’, he entreated Jeanne de Chantal, ‘with desires of perfection’, for daily life is marked by both ‘light’ and ‘darkness’.¹²⁶

DOUCEUR AS SELF-AWARENESS AND SELF-FORGIVENESS

Salesian *douceur* also called the faithful to a peaceful awareness of their thoughts and emotions. Consider ‘often if your soul is in your hands’, he instructed one counselee; if it is not, ‘search for it and take it back’.¹²⁷ In his *Introduction*, de Sales prescribed self-awareness as one turns from prayer to the business of daily activity:

You must be attentive not to permit your heart to be shaken, since you will spoil the balm that you received [during prayer]; you must maintain [...] a bit of silence [as] you shift your heart from prayer to your affairs, holding as long as you can the sentiments and affections that you have experienced. A man who receives a beautiful porcelain bowl holding some precious liquid walks gently [...] in order not to spill the bowl at all.¹²⁸

In contrast to the self-denunciation promoted in militant Catholicism, Salesian *douceur* emphasized forgiveness for one’s own sins and faults. ‘Please’, de Sales entreats a counselee, ‘have patience with everyone, but primarily with yourself’.¹²⁹ ‘Take a breath [and] breathe a little’, he instructs another, for ‘if we must have [patience] for others, we must have it for ourselves’.¹³⁰ In both letters of pastoral direction and the *Introduction* de Sales discouraged bitter self-denunciation: ‘Regard your faults with compassion rather than indignation, with more humility than severity’.¹³¹ De Sales sometimes juxtaposed harsh, punitive self-judgment with gentle self-evaluation to instruct Catholics. Upon realizing that one has been vain, for instance, one ought to avoid thinking:

Aren’t you wretched and abominable, you who have made so many resolutions and yet let yourself be carried away by vanity?
You should die from shame. Never against lift up your eyes to heaven, blind insolent traitor that you are, a rebel against your God!

Instead, de Sales recommends:

¹²⁶ Ibid., XIII, 306.

¹²⁷ Ibid., XIV, 106.

¹²⁸ Ibid., III, 84.

¹²⁹ Ibid., XIII, 19.

¹³⁰ Ibid., XIII, 203.

¹³¹ Ibid., XIV, 55.

Alas, my poor heart, here we are, fallen into the pit we were so firmly resolved to avoid! Well, we must get up again and leave it forever. We must call on God's mercy and hope that it will help us to be steadier in the days to come. Let us be of good heart [...] God will help us; we will do better.¹³²

***DOUCEUR* IN DEVOTION AND DAILY LIFE**

De Sales encouraged Catholics to integrate *douceur* into personal prayer and worship as well. For de Sales, this meant engaging in religious activity mindfully and calmly. Agitation or rushing had no place. Responding to a counselee who wished to go to confession more frequently, de Sales replied that, if this produced more 'disquietude and scruple', then it was not advisable.¹³³ Indeed, reducing the quantity of religious observances for the sake of greater emotional stability was a common injunction in de Sales's spiritual direction. 'Do not seek to do everything', he urges counselees, for 'God seeks fidelity in small things'.¹³⁴ 'Proceed gently', rather than taking up 'the practice of everything that strikes your attention'.¹³⁵

On some occasions, de Sales even prescribed shifting attention to activities not typically associated with devotion to help ease religious scrupulosity. De Sales recommended physical exercise and recreation, for instance, for renewing peace of mind.¹³⁶ He assigned this to a counselee experiencing chronic spiritual anxiety: 'Concerning temptations against the faith [...] do a positive act of faith [...] without disputing or examining [the temptations] and divert your heart with other occupations, preferably physical ones'.¹³⁷ On another occasion, de Sales prescribed walking, reading, and singing as a means to relieve anguish:

If you find yourself [...] attacked by a spirit of sadness and bitterness [...] divert yourself in contrary exercises [...] go out for a walk, read some book that pleases you. You should do this often ... [and thus] you will break, little by little, all bitterness and spiritual melancholy.¹³⁸

Another frequently-prescribed remedy for inner turmoil was to disclose it to others. In scores of cases, de Sales urged the faithful to

¹³² Ibid., III, 157.

¹³³ Ibid., XIII, 216.

¹³⁴ Ibid., XII, 182, XIII, 298.

¹³⁵ Ibid., XIII, 334-5.

¹³⁶ Ibid., III, 92, 110, 246-8, 336.

¹³⁷ Ibid., XIV, 113.

¹³⁸ Ibid., XIII, 112.

communicate their spiritual-emotional woes to others, especially to a priest. In the *Introduction*, he teaches Catholics to ‘go to your confessor and open your heart to him.’¹³⁹ De Sales encouraged counselees to confide in family and friends as well:

If you can disclose your anxiety to [...] a devout friend, do not doubt that [...] you will be soothed quickly; because communication of the pains of the heart has the same effect on the soul as bloodletting does for the body of one who has a continual fever; it is the remedy of remedies.¹⁴⁰

De Sales taught the faithful to speak directly to God too, emphasizing God’s eagerness to console souls in need. He urged Catholics, for instance, to go ‘to God, crying out, have mercy on me, Lord’ and to ask ‘God for help’ when they fell into anger.¹⁴¹ Similarly, when one felt overwhelmed by sorrow, one should ‘make use of words that tend to confidence in God and his love, such as ‘O God of mercy!’, ‘My gentle Savior!’, [and] ‘O God of my heart, my joy and my hope!’¹⁴² Rather than fleeing from God in shame and fear, a common notion within militant Catholicism, de Sales encouraged direct encounters with the divine in a spirit of trust.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, III, 328.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 313.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 164.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 314.

5 Order of the Visitation: Witness to a Catholicism of *Douceur*

In 1610, French Catholic militancy struck once again in dramatic fashion when the radical François Ravallac murdered King Henry IV. Since the monarch's conversion to Catholicism in 1593, critics, including Parisian *dévots*, had questioned the authenticity of Henry's faith. In militant circles, Catholics perceived the king as a wolf in sheep's clothing, hungry to devour the Catholic flock. Given the prominence of this fear within French Catholicism, several attempts on Henry's life were made across the 1590s and early 1600s. In 1609, Ravallac sought a meeting with the monarch to urge him to convert all Huguenots. Unsuccessful in this endeavor, Ravallac stabbed Henry to death a year later when the royal carriage halted momentarily in a Paris street.

In sharp contrast, François de Sales, in the same year, initiated the boldest expansion of his reform of militant Catholicism: the creation of the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary, a new religious community of women. Collaborating with Jeanne de Chantal, de Sales created the Visitation as a concrete, institutional means for cultivating and witnessing to a Catholicism of *douceur* during the French Wars of Religion. With this unusual and provocative new Order, de Sales further challenged the faithful to embody a zeal of Christ-centered gentleness rather than one of militancy. In the seventeenth century, over one hundred and fifty Visitation houses were founded, revealing the yearning for a nonviolent approach to Catholic piety.¹

Prior to the Visitation, de Sales's pastoral work had focused primarily on the inner life of Catholics, addressing attitudes, beliefs, and emotions that he believed amounted to spiritual and psychological violence. With the Order of the Visitation, de Sales now urged the nonviolent treatment of the body as well. Breaking further from the militant penitence of the era, he required Visitandines to maintain physical health and well-being. Even more important, de Sales asserted with unprecedented fervor that interpersonal relationships characterized by *douceur* constituted a fundamental requirement of the Catholic faith. Insisting that the gentle, merciful treatment of others was inseparable from the love of God, he taught that violence destroyed human relationships and alienated one from the

¹ R. Po-Chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540-1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 38.

divine. With the Visitation, de Sales and de Chantal championed a gentle, Christlike relationality which had become a casualty of the French Wars of Religion.

This interpretation brings a fresh perspective to Visitation historiography. Scholars have contended that de Sales's primary aim with the Visitation was to provide an institute for women who, due to age or fragile health, could not observe the ascetic rigor of other religious orders.² Rapley, for instance, states that de Chantal's poor health and that of other devout women rendered them 'unfit for so strenuous a life'.³ De Sales, according to Rapley, therefore created a religious congregation for such women. Yet, while de Sales certainly welcomed women of frail constitution in the Visitation, it is not clear that de Chantal's health suffered or that such a concern was paramount in de Sales's mind. The fact that de Sales envisioned Visitandines engaging in active service to the poor and sick also challenges the notion of the Visitation as a community intended for frail women. Another common assertion in scholarly literature is that 'littleness' defined religious culture within the Visitation.⁴ I acknowledge that littleness or the 'little virtues' appear in de Sales's commentary on the Visitation, but as this chapter will illustrate, de Sales relied, above all, on *douceur* as the crucial concept for defining religious life in the Visitation and its witness to Catholic nonviolence.

De Sales had no greater passion in his final years than the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary. Among his many episcopal projects and duties, de Sales spoke of his work with the Visitandines most enthusiastically.⁵ Fortunately, we have abundant historical sources concerning the foundation and early development of the Order. Among the most important texts are de Sales's written correspondence with Jeanne de Chantal and the Visitandines. Critical documents also include the talks which de Sales delivered to members of the community. These presentations, known as *Entretiens Spirituels* (Spiritual Conferences), reveal de Sales's vision for the Order and his hope that it would renew French Catholicism. Although

² Barbara B. Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity: Pious Women and the Catholic Reformation in Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 176; Elisabeth Stopp, *Madame de Chantal: Portrait of a Saint* (London: Faber and Faber Press, 1963), pp. 123-4.

³ Elizabeth Rapley, *The Dévotes: Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France* (Montreal: Quebec Press, 1990), p. 35.

⁴ *Ibid.*; Wendy M. Wright, *Heart Speaks to Heart: The Salesian Tradition* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004), p. 55.

⁵ OEA, XIV, 190, XVI, 327, XVII, 240.

strikingly honest and informative, the *Entretiens* have not been sufficiently integrated into Visitation scholarship.

CORPORAL MORTIFICATION AND THE FRENCH WARS OF RELIGION

In recent decades, scholars have examined corporal mortification in Christian history, including fasting, flagellation, and self-mutilation, among other practices.⁶ One argument emerging from this literature is that reliance on modern constructs of mental health and human well-being to interpret such phenomena is problematic and unconvincing.⁷ Caroline Walker Bynum, for instance, has warned that extreme bodily asceticism, at least in the case of medieval female ascetics, should not be interpreted as violent, self-hating, or punitive, as much as an attempt to unite with Jesus by experiencing His suffering.⁸

As for aggressive bodily mortification during the Wars of Religion, however, evidence indicates that French Catholics *did* often view it in terms of self-hatred or self-punishment essential for combatting heresy. We have already seen how Catholics deemed violence against the persons of heretics necessary for punishing and cleansing spiritual pollution. Similarly, French Catholics widely believed that the moral and spiritual damage caused by their own sins necessitated aggressive, punitive mortification of their own flesh. This mentality runs through the sources from the era. In 1583, for instance, the priest Hubert Meurier proclaimed that, ‘we [French Catholics] have soiled our robe of innocence’, requiring severe asceticism ‘to clean us of our stains’.⁹ A Catholic confraternity asserted that, since the faithful had ‘wrecked the ship of innocence’, they had to walk ‘the plank of penitence’.¹⁰ An anonymous 1564 work exhorted Catholics to ‘apply all pain’ against themselves and ‘to mortify fleshly members’ to amend for sin.¹¹

⁶ Rudolph M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

⁷ Bynum, *Holy Feast*, pp. 6, 208-9, 293-4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 114, 120, 208-9, 293-4.

⁹ Denis Crouzet, *Les Guerriers de Dieu: la violence au temps des troubles de religion, vers 1525-vers 1610*, 2 vols (Seysssel: Champ Vallon, 1990), II, 315.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 359.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Philip Benedict has shown that militant penitence and anti-Protestant violence often ‘sprang from similar impulses’ during the French Wars of Religion.¹² Indeed, religious discourse from the period illustrates this phenomenon, as Catholics spoke of war on their own flesh much as they did violence against heretics. The Penitents of the Holy Cross, a confraternity of flagellants, for example, whipped themselves in a manner so ‘bloody’ it produced ‘tears and sobs’.¹³ In the early 1600s, the layman Étienne Molinier (1580-1650) punished his body, because only ‘force and rudeness’ could destroy the ‘love for the flesh’.¹⁴ Marie de Beauvilliers (1574-1667), abbess of a Montmartre convent, taught that the faithful must ‘practice hate’ for ‘the body’ through penance that caused ‘serious suffering’.¹⁵

RELIGIOUS ORDERS AND MILITANT-PENITENTIAL PIETY

During the French Wars of Religion, religious orders figured centrally in this ‘hate for the body’.¹⁶ This fact is crucial for grasping the unique and provocative nature of de Sales’s Order of the Visitation. The Minim Order, for instance, gained popularity in the 1550s and 1560s through fiery anti-Protestant preaching and extreme austerities. Viewing corporal mortifications as an essential weapon for combatting heresy, Minims called the faithful to harsh asceticism.¹⁷ The Feuillants advocated this militant asceticism too. One Feuillant abbot, Jean de la Barrière (1554-1600), taught mastery of the body through ‘force’ and ‘destruction’.¹⁸ Few religious orders in France, however, could match the militant-penitential fervor of the

¹² Philip Benedict, *Rouen during the Wars of Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 202.

¹³ Louis Darmangeat, *Histoire de la royale et dévote compagnie des Pénitents gris d’Avignon* (Avignon: J. Roumanille, 1903), p. 64.

¹⁴ Étienne Molinier, *Des Confrairies pénitents, ou il est traité de leur institutions, reigles et exercices* (Toulouse: R. Colomiez, 1625), pp. 238, 250.

¹⁵ Mme de Beauvilliers, *Conférences spirituelles d’une supérieure à ses religieuses* (Paris: L. Gaudreau, 1837), pp. 9, 32. For a ‘hatred of self’ (*la haine de soi*) spirituality, see Yann Rodier, ‘Un Soliloque sur l’amour pur de Dieu et la haine de soi dans la découverte d’un “placard mystique” du capuchin Laurent de Paris’, *Études franciscaines* 2 (2009), 343-64.

¹⁶ Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, pp. 58-62.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁸ Jean-Baptiste de Sainte-Anne, *Histoire de la fondation du monastère des religieuses feuillentes de Toulouse, avec les éloges de plusieurs religieuses de cette maison... par un religieux feuillant* (Bordeaux: Vve de G. de La Court et N. de La Court, 1696), p. 13.

Capuchin Franciscans. Donning tattered, coarse habits over their emaciated bodies, French Capuchins denounced Huguenots while exhorting Catholics to subjugate the flesh.¹⁹ The Capuchin Order grew rapidly in France, especially in Paris during the 1570s and 1580s, developing close ties with the Catholic League.²⁰ Indeed, several Capuchins participated in the armed conflicts of the League.²¹

Diefendorf has shown that French Catholic women became increasingly attracted to this penitential mortification in the latter half of the sixteenth century.²² As male membership in the Minims, Capuchins, and Feuillants grew and the 'ascetic impulse' intensified over the course of the French Wars of Religion, women pressured these austere orders to create sister houses. Devout women cited the example of Teresa of Avila, who practiced penitential rigor to combat heresy.²³ Devout French laywomen expressed their desire to offer themselves to the French Counter-Reformation, proclaiming that, 'they too had bodies capable of suffering' and a willingness 'to undertake the sacrifice of their bodies'.²⁴

In the wake of Henry IV's defeat of the Catholic League and his proclamation of the Edict of Nantes in 1598, this penitential fervor flourished in female religious orders, both old and new. As Diefendorf and other scholars have shown, ex-Leaguers played a crucial role in this development. With their military and political strength depleted by 1598, these Catholic hardliners continued their war against heresy and sin by promoting severe asceticism at every turn. Between 1603 and 1615, Paris witnessed a boom in female houses in which the expiation of sin and punishing ascetic practices defined religious life.²⁵

Barbe Acarie, a former Catholic Leaguer, promoted women's communities devoted to combatting the flesh.²⁶ The wife of Pierre Acarie, a financial backer of the League, she collaborated with the Sorbonne's André Duval (1564-1638), the Capuchin Benoît de Canfield (1562-1610), and Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629) in this endeavor. Deeply fearful of

¹⁹ Megan Armstrong, *Politics of Piety: Franciscan Preachers During the Wars of Religion, 1560-1600* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2004), pp. 2-9.

²⁰ Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, pp. 59-60.

²¹ Armstrong, *Politics of Piety*, pp. 2-4, 26-8.

²² Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, pp. 58-64. Diefendorf's pioneering scholarship on the penitential culture prevalent in women's religious orders shapes much of the discussion here.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

²⁴ Jean-Baptiste de Sainte-Anne, *Histoire*, p. 26.

²⁵ Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, p. 7.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 39, 43.

heresy, Acarie and associates reformed existing convents and founded new orders dedicated to harsh austerities and strict claustration. The most prominent project of the Acarie circle was the establishment of Carmelite communities in France in 1604, aided by Spanish Carmelites who had participated in Teresa of Avila's reforms in Spain. Diefendorf has shown that, as these new French Carmelite communities grew, tensions arouse between the Spanish and French members. Yet, when it came to rigorous asceticism and hatred of heresy, they shared the same religiosity.²⁷

The French Ursulines also participated in the ascetic fervor. Madaleine Luillier (also known as Madame de Sainte-Beuve), an active Leaguer across the 1580s and 1590s, served as the chief benefactor of the Ursulines in France.²⁸ The original Ursulines had emerged in Lombardy, founded in 1535 by Angela Merici. Working outside the cloister, Merici's Ursulines educated girls and cared for the sick. Under Luillier, however, French Ursulines adopted a penitential, Counter-Reformation religious culture. Knowing the Italian Ursulines specialized in education, she hoped the Order would weaken heresy by teaching young French women orthodoxy and ascetic purification.²⁹ Collaborating with Jacques Gallement, a priest devoted to extreme mortification, Luillier established the first Ursuline convent in Paris in 1610.³⁰ Diverging from Italian Ursulines, Luillier required the sisters to observe absolute enclosure, irrevocable vows, and punishing penances, in addition to teaching.³¹ Gallement instructed the nuns in living a 'mortified life', practicing the 'annihilation' and 'abasement' of the body.³² Drawn to this rigorous asceticism, thousands of women joined the Ursuline Order, making it one of France's largest female orders in the sixteenth century.

The Capucines, the sister branch of the French Capuchins, also emerged amidst the militant-penitential milieu of the era.³³ Marie de Luxembourg (Duchess of Mercoeur) collaborated with Ange de Joyeuse, the ascetic Capuchin whom Francois de Sales had admired in his youth, to found the first Capucine convent in 1603. The Duchess, an ex-Leaguer

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 103-12.

²⁸ H. de Leymont, *Madame de Sainte-Beuve et les Ursulines de Paris, 1562-1630* (Lyon: Vitte & Perrussel, 1890), p. 24.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 149-50.

³⁰ Placide Gallemant, *La Vie du Venerable Prestre de I.C. M Jacques Gallemant* (Paris: Edme Coverot, 1653), pp. 22, 233-5.

³¹ Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, p. 127.

³² Gallemant, *La Vie*, pp. 100-3.

³³ Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, pp. 118-24.

herself and widow of the Duke of Mercoeur (also a former League commander), admired Capuchin militancy and envisioned that sister convents would bolster Catholic orthodoxy.

Corporal mortification prevailed in Capucine convents. In the inaugural ceremony for the community, the sisters donned crowns of thorns, symbolizing their vocation as ‘Daughters of the Passion’.³⁴ Thereafter, the Capucines subjected their bodies to punishing penances, wearing heavy, course cloth habits, and living without shoes. Sisters also flagellated and practiced night vigils. At times, their meals consisted of bread and water, which they consumed in a kneeling position. The Capucines moderated this penitence only slightly for sisters approaching death.³⁵ Undaunted by this asceticism, scores of French women joined the Capucines in the early modern era.

FRANÇOIS DE SALES AND BODILY MORTIFICATION

Against this background, we can better appreciate the uniqueness of the Visitation of Holy Mary and situate it within the broader Salesian vision of Catholic *douceur*. From the foundation of the Visitation in 1610, de Sales forbade rigorous corporal penances in the community. This policy was the product of his reevaluation of asceticism. As we have seen, de Sales had practiced harsh mortifications as a student in Paris (1578-88). He created rules of pious observance and personal purity and, if failing to live up to them, he submitted himself to ‘austerity, humility, and abjection’ in both ‘spiritual and bodily’ forms.³⁶ During difficult times in the Chablais mission (1594-98), de Sales also increased his penances as a way of overcoming adversity.

In the early 1600s, however, ambivalence began to color de Sales’s attitude toward corporal asceticism. On the one hand, he still affirmed certain physical penances. In one letter of spiritual direction, written in 1604, de Sales instructed a counselee that flagellation could assist in handling negative, fearful thinking.³⁷ Additionally, in his *Introduction*, he taught that wearing a hair shirt could help one to ‘tame’ the body.³⁸ On the other hand, we also encounter frequent misgivings concerning rigorous penitence. In pastoral letters, de Sales encouraged counselees to reduce the

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

³⁵ M. Denis, *Les Clarisses capucines de Paris (1602-1792)* (Couvain: Maison Saint-Roch, 1911), pp. 17-8.

³⁶ OEA, XXII, 21.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, XII, 179.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, III, 220.

intensity or frequency of corporal mortification.³⁹ In his *Introduction*, he also exhorted Catholics to value interior mortification over exterior, bodily asceticism. Without indicating whom he was criticizing (he rarely does), de Sales states: 'I have never approved of the method of those who, seeking to reform a man, start with his appearance, clothing, [or] hair. On the contrary, it seems to me that we must begin with the interior'.⁴⁰ De Sales also taught that bodily austerities could be counter-productive. In some cases, they rendered one too weak to handle temptation; individuals prone to 'excess of fasting', for instance, succumbed at the sight of 'delicacies'.⁴¹

In the *Introduction*, de Sales's concerns gradually coalesced in the conclusion that bodily mortification sometimes devolved into the violent abuse of body and soul. To illustrate the point, he drew on the account of Balaam's donkey from the Book of Numbers.

Mounted on a donkey, Balaam was seeking Balak, but since he did not have just intentions, an Angel waited for him along the path with a sword in hand to kill him. The donkey, who saw the Angel, stopped three times out of concern. Balaam however beat [the donkey] cruelly with his baton to make her advance, until the third time she miraculously spoke to him saying: What have I done to you? Why have you now beaten me three times?⁴²

De Sales taught that Catholics engage in similar brutality when they punish their own bodies with mortifications. A man, he explained, finds himself repeatedly sinning and says to himself:

'Oh, wicked flesh, oh treacherous body, you have betrayed me!' Immediately he inflicts great blows on his body with excessive fasting, immoderate use of the discipline, and intolerable hair shirts. Oh poor soul, if your flesh could speak like Balaam's donkey, it would say to you, 'Wretched man, why do you strike me?'⁴³

De Sales concludes that Christians ought not to 'undertake bodily austerities' without the oversight a spiritual director.⁴⁴

³⁹ Ibid., XII, 336, XIII, 13, XIV, 53, 168.

⁴⁰ Ibid., III, 216-17.

⁴¹ Ibid., 218.

⁴² Ibid., 220-1.

⁴³ Ibid., 221.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 222.

FRANÇOIS DE SALES AND JEANNE DE CHANTAL: SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE VISITATION

We can see, then, that de Sales had gradually grown skeptical of rigorous corporal mortification. By 1610 and the founding of the Visitation, however, de Sales went further, teaching that physical health and well-being were integral to spiritual maturity. Furthermore, de Sales's emerging concern for care of the body reflected the growing conviction that *douceur* ought to characterize virtually *all* relationships for a follower of Jesus. This expanding vision of gentle relationality, which would define the Visitation, found its inspiration in de Sales's pastoral work with Jeanne de Chantal prior to the birth of the Order.

Wendy M. Wright has documented the profound friendship that developed after de Sales became de Chantal's spiritual director in 1605. Among Wright's discoveries was how de Sales gently cautioned de Chantal, early in her spiritual journey, against a premature commitment to the abstract mysticism of Barbe Acarie and the French Carmelites.⁴⁵ Building on Wright, the discussion here will examine how de Sales addressed the psychological and physical violence in de Chantal's piety. For just as de Sales shepherded de Chantal away from the mystical proclivities of the Acarie circle, he also led her to abandon the aggressive penitence championed by the Parisian *dévots*. This pastoral work of transforming militant piety into one of gentle relationality served as the foundation of the unique religious culture that would define the Visitation.

De Sales first met de Chantal while preaching in Dijon in 1604. After this visit, de Chantal wrote to de Sales seeking additional religious guidance. Perceiving her hunger for spiritual growth, de Sales praised the 'desire for holiness' that the 'Lord planted in [her] soul'. Yet, he found de Chantal deeply fearful of God and aggressive in her penitence. Indeed, a Minim priest, who served as de Chantal's spiritual director, urged her to take up severe ascetic practices. Following this priest's counsel and her own inclinations, de Chantal practiced extreme corporal mortification, culminating in the branding of Jesus's name on her chest with a pointed, steel instrument.⁴⁶

Troubled by this violent zeal, de Sales became de Chantal's spiritual director in 1605. Over the subsequent months and years, we

⁴⁵ Wendy M. Wright, *Bond of Perfection: Jeanne de Chantal & François de Sales* (Stella Niagara: DeSales Resource Center, 2001), pp. 78-9.

⁴⁶ Françoise-Madeleine de Chaugy, *Sainte Jeanne-Françoise Frémyot de Chantal, sa vie et ses oeuvres* (Paris: Plon, 1893), p. 108; Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal*, p. 150; Stopp, *Madame de Chantal*, p. 82.

witness the emergence of themes and teachings that would become hallmarks of the Order of the Visitation. Most notable is de Sales's exhortation to pivot from a religiosity of combat to one of Christlike *douceur*. De Sales urged de Chantal to live 'gently' rather than 'by force of arms'.⁴⁷ He invited her to proceed with 'gentleness' and 'softness', instead of 'force' and 'violence'.⁴⁸ De Sales consistently presented piety as an encounter with Jesus and his *douceur*. He entreated de Chantal, for example, to seek rest in the 'gentle presence of Our Lord' and to trust the 'gentle Jesus'.⁴⁹ In time, de Sales relied on the pithy exhortation, 'Live Jesus!' (*Vive Jésus!*), to prompt her to a gentle imitation of Christ. 'Live Jesus!' would later become the motto of the Order of the Visitation.⁵⁰

De Sales also encouraged de Chantal to practice forgiveness for herself and others as a prerequisite for spiritual advancement and holiness.⁵¹ Appealing to Jesus's teaching on pardoning one's enemies, de Sales even urged de Chantal to forgive the man who had killed her husband in a hunting accident.⁵² He also taught de Chantal that ministering to others should supersede strict adherence to an ascetic or pious routine. Serving others as Jesus did, for instance, should precede scrupulous attachment to a personal program of fasting or prayer.⁵³

OPENING OF THE FIRST VISITATION CONVENT

In the course of this pastoral work, a profound friendship developed between the two. Gradually, de Sales began to share his vision of Catholic renewal, revealing his own hopes and fears to de Chantal. At such times, their typical roles were reversed, with de Chantal serving as de Sales's spiritual mentor, as Ruth Manning has shown.⁵⁴ This interdependence delighted de Sales, inspiring him to tell de Chantal that her letters brought him 'consolation' and 'joy'.⁵⁵ As for de Chantal, she discerned a call to the

⁴⁷ OEA, XII, 136.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, XII, 186, XIII, 56.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, XII, 179, XIII, 15, 58.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, XIV, 29, 78.

⁵² *Ibid.*, XIII, 53.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, XII, 185.

⁵⁴ Ruth Manning, 'A Confessor and His Spiritual Child: François de Sales, Jeanne de Chantal, and the Foundation of the Order of the Visitation,' in *The Art of Survival: Gender and History in Europe, 1450-2000: Essays in Honour of Olwen Hufton*, ed. by Ruth Harris and Lyndal Roper (Oxford: Oxford Journals, 2006), pp. 101-17 (p. 109).

⁵⁵ OEA, XII, 381, XIV, 77.

religious life, but felt unsure how to pursue such a vocation. Eventually emerging from this spiritual friendship was de Sales's decision to gather women who, under his and de Chantal's lead, would form a religious community devoted to Catholic *douceur*.

In June of 1610, de Chantal and three other women moved into a small house in Annecy that de Sales had obtained for them.⁵⁶ Thus was born the Visitation. At this time, de Sales did not wish to make the Visitation a formal religious order.⁵⁷ Rather, he intended a flexible arrangement by which the women lived communally as a 'congregation' or 'institute'. The women took simple vows rather than permanent vows, while total enclosure was neither required nor desired.⁵⁸ Paramount for de Sales was cultivating a religious life of compassion, charity, and gentleness. In light of this, Visitandines served the poor and sick of Annecy one to two days a week.⁵⁹ They also received laywomen seeking spiritual renewal for short retreats.⁶⁰ Within the community itself, Visitandines were to develop bonds of friendship, encouraging one another in humble service to God and neighbor. For this reason, de Sales and de Chantal gave the new institute the name 'Visitation of Holy Mary', referring to the Lucan account of Mary's visit to Elizabeth and their mutual pastoral care amidst their unexpected pregnancies.⁶¹

De Sales taught the Visitandines that a 'spirit of *douceur* is truly the spirit of the Visitation'.⁶² This meant that they should value their physical well-being rather than aggressive penitence. The Visitandines were to sleep at least seven hours each night and, when ill, receive a doctor's care.⁶³ In his *Spiritual Conferences*, de Sales urged the sisters to maintain their health, teaching, 'you must attend to the requirements of the body, such as eating, warmth, and clothing'.⁶⁴ De Sales also discouraged the pursuit of physical discomfort or pain. It was no sin, he explained, to enjoy food when they ate and, if sitting were more comfortable than kneeling when at prayer, then they should sit.⁶⁵ In order to minimize the physical

⁵⁶ Ibid., XIV, 184.

⁵⁷ Ibid., XVI, 97.

⁵⁸ Ibid., XIV, 207.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 69, 299, 306, 330, XV, 39, XVI, 105.

⁶⁰ Ibid., XIV, 194.

⁶¹ Ibid., 204, 218.

⁶² Ibid., VI, 229.

⁶³ Ibid., 248, XIV, 62, 330

⁶⁴ Ibid., VI, 419.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 418, 424.

demands of prayer, de Sales chose an abbreviated daily office, known as the ‘Little Office of Our Lady’, for the official prayer book of the community.⁶⁶

To promote *douceur* for the body, de Sales and de Chantal did not permit the rigorous corporal mortification practiced in other religious orders. De Sales taught that aggressive bodily asceticism contradicted the religious life intended for the community, and thus strongly discouraged flagellation, hair shirts, night vigils, and other forms of harsh penitence. Such practices, he taught, ‘would destroy’ the ‘Visitation’, for they would ‘go against the end for which it was created.’⁶⁷ De Sales stated explicitly that their religious community differed from others. ‘Let the great established orders of the Church honor our Lord with heroic practices and striking virtues’, he told the Visitandines, but ‘I would like my daughters’ to be ‘like a humble dove-cote of innocent doves’.⁶⁸ De Sales even critiqued saints of old who, despite virtue and holiness, succumbed to excessive mortification. According to de Sales, their insistence that one must ‘boldly macerate the body to please God’ was ‘blameworthy’.⁶⁹

De Sales felt great pride in the Visitation and its witness to *douceur*. In April of 1611, he cited the ‘great progress of the congregation’ to a colleague.⁷⁰ In 1612, he reported that ‘everyone in the Visitation is doing extremely well’, noting that the community had grown to sixteen members.⁷¹ Due to this growth, the sisters moved into a larger home in Annecy. As for rigorous corporal mortification, the Visitandines generally abstained from them. De Sales and de Chantal supervised the sisters, praising love of neighbor over harsh bodily austerities. In one instance, de Sales learned of a Visitandine cutting back on meals and sleep to complete more manual tasks in the community. Concerned, de Sales wrote to her, ‘I am told you are overburdening yourself’ and ‘that you do the most painful work’. He urged this sister to be ‘ardent but gentle’ and to remember that, ‘success’ lies not in ‘pain,’ but ‘loving goodness’.⁷²

SPREADING THE WORD AND THE REFORM

Determined that the Visitation and its life of *douceur* should inspire other Catholics, de Sales actively promoted the Order. In the first two years of the

⁶⁶ Ibid., XIV, 194, XV, 31.

⁶⁷ Ibid., VI, 229.

⁶⁸ Ibid., XVII, 16-7.

⁶⁹ Ibid., VI, 248.

⁷⁰ Ibid., XVI, 33.

⁷¹ Ibid., 176-7.

⁷² Ibid., XV, 112-3.

community, de Sales wrote to secular priests, Jesuits, the Duke of Savoy, his court, and others to praise the new community.⁷³ De Sales encouraged Visitandines themselves to spread the word as well. When he sensed some of them were hesitant to do so, de Sales urged bold, persistent communication about the ‘spirit of the Visitation’, stating:

Do not withhold what is profitable to your neighbor [...] I want all the good that is in the Visitation to be recognized and known. For this reason, I have long thought that our *Rules* and *Constitutions* should be printed, so others may draw on them. May it please God, my dear sisters, that many people will want to follow them, even men! We would see a great change in them, which would serve the glory of God and the salvation of their souls [...] [so] communicate the spirit of the Visitation to others.⁷⁴

Some French Catholics lauded the Visitation and its culture of gentleness. Even before founding the community, de Sales received support for his unique vision. The Jesuit, Ignace Armand, wrote to de Sales that, ‘several people have spoken of your intention’ and anticipate that the Visitandines will become the ‘true spouses of Jesus’. Armand lamented that other religious orders ‘taxed’ their members ‘with an indiscreet rigor’, expecting them to wear ‘camelhair like that of the great Baptist’ and live on a diet of ‘roots’. He praised de Sales for championing an alternative to such penitence. ‘You have found’, he told de Sales, ‘the nucleus and the secret in your Visitation’ for imitating the ‘meekness’ of Jesus.⁷⁵

Another Jesuit, Jean de Villars, praised the Visitation in 1611: ‘Your growing congregation is like a new Jerusalem [...] it seems to me that the Church has been in need of this congregation. God sustains you so you can build it. You have erected a Temple of Solomon for our century’.⁷⁶ In 1612, the priest Dom Sens de Sainte Catherine wrote to de Sales praising de Chantal and the Visitandines. ‘Madame de Chantal’, he observed, ‘seems like a sun’ while the Sisters of the Visitation ‘light up the world’. Having visited the Annecy Visitation, this clergyman reported that it was ‘as excellent in love as it [was] profound in humility’. He encouraged de Sales

⁷³ Ibid., XIV, 304-8, 328-32, 348-51, XV, 39-40, 82, 343-4, 388-9, XVII, 239-40; Manning, ‘A Confessor’, p. 114.

⁷⁴ Ibid., VI, 303.

⁷⁵ Letter cited in de Chaugy, *Sainte Jeanne*, pp. 145-6.

⁷⁶ OEA, XV, 225.

to found new houses, for ‘this Congregation deserves to be welcomed by all’.⁷⁷

PROMOTING RELATIONSHIPS OF *DOUCEUR*

In letters, sermons, and conferences, de Sales actively encouraged relationships of *douceur* within the Visitation.⁷⁸ In these sources, we encounter constant emphasis on diversity of expression, refraining from judgment, and showing affection as foundations for gentle relationality in the Order.

DIVERSITY OF EXPRESSION

De Sales instructed the Visitandines to tolerate the diverse personalities and preferences within the community: ‘You must tolerate the variety of spirits that will be found in the Congregation’.⁷⁹ This meant granting each Visitandine some freedom in how she expressed her piety. While common rules guided the community, de Sales explained, each sister could pray, confess, and worship slightly differently. One Visitandine might publicly admit to a fault, while another may not. One could choose to bow to the ground at times, though others might not.⁸⁰ Catholicism, de Sales taught, consisted of a ‘diversity of inspirations and a variety of channels for divine grace’. No expression of devotion, therefore, should be ‘despised’ by others.⁸¹

THE ‘EVIL’ OF JUDGING OTHERS

Building on these teachings, de Sales strongly warned against the habitual judgment of others. In his *Spiritual Conferences*, de Sales taught that chronic moral judgments were ‘a very dangerous evil’.⁸² He discouraged looking for vice and sin in others: ‘When we knowingly look upon the imperfections of others, Oh God, [...] this is truly wrong and we must not do it’.⁸³ As a general rule, de Sales taught, it was an ‘unacceptable presumption’ to ‘despise’ or ‘censure’ one’s neighbor.⁸⁴

⁷⁷ Ibid., 226.

⁷⁸ Ibid., VI, 229.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 13.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 15-16, 440.

⁸¹ Ibid., 15.

⁸² Ibid., 72.

⁸³ Ibid., 417.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 440.

At times, de Sales linked moral judgements with religious violence in his *Spiritual Conferences*. On one occasion, for instance, he discussed the Lucan account in which James and John wish to punish a Samaritan village (Luke 9. 54):

Our Lord [...] wanted to pass by a village in Samaria [...] but the Samaritans did not want to permit him; so Saints James and John entered into zeal [...] They became so furious that they [...] asked, ‘Master, shall we call fire down from heaven to destroy and punish them for the outrage they have committed against you?’⁸⁵

De Sales asserted that Jesus immediately rejected the violent proposal of the disciples. ‘Our Lord [...] responded, “you do not know of what spirit you are”’. De Sales remarked that, in the era of the ancient Hebrews, Elijah had punished sinners by calling down fire from heaven, but since the birth of Jesus, ‘we are no longer in the time of Elijah’. Concluding the discussion, de Sales taught that Jesus did not come ‘to punish sinners’, but to reach them through ‘charity’ and ‘*douceur*’.⁸⁶

PHYSICAL EXPRESSIONS OF AFFECTION

Breaking from other French Catholic orders, de Sales affirmed that physical expressions of affection enhanced relationships in a religious community. ‘I say that sometimes we must make use of embraces [...] such as when a sister is sick or afflicted with a bit melancholy’. An embrace on such occasions, de Sales asserted, ‘would do her much good!’⁸⁷ De Sales also taught that hugging after time apart was permissible for the Visitandines. Such a practice, de Sales contended, existed among early Christians: ‘It was a custom to embrace one another when they met’. He maintained that Jesus did this as well: ‘Our Lord used this form of salutation with his apostles’. Such affection, de Sales explained, helped to express ‘great contentment upon seeing another’. Provided that it did not lead to ‘indecent familiarity’, then, de Sales encouraged physical affection as an integral aspect of Catholic *douceur*.⁸⁸

GENTLENESS FOR OTHERS AND THE LOVE OF GOD

This cultivation of relationships of *douceur*, de Sales asserted, was inseparable from the love of God. Throughout his *Entretiens Spirituels*, de

⁸⁵ Ibid., 224.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 225.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 58.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 61.

Sales paired the love of neighbor with the love of God. On the topic of accommodating others, he taught, ‘to sacrifice our will for another is true union with our neighbor, and we must do this for the love of God’.⁸⁹ On another occasion, de Sales proclaimed that, ‘with the virtue of *douceur* of heart, we unite ourselves with others’ and this ‘*douceur* for our neighbor’ strengthens our ‘union with God as much as with others’.⁹⁰

Despite this emphasis on relationships of *douceur*, disputes nonetheless arose within the Visitation. When this occurred, de Sales and de Chantal addressed them promptly and charitably. In 1616, Sisters Brécharde and Gouffiers had a verbal altercation in the Moulins Visitation. Soon after, de Sales wrote both of them, ordering them to reconcile. De Sales told Brécharde that they must ‘tolerate one another for the love our Savior’.⁹¹ A week later, he instructed Gouffiers to commit to ‘peace’ and ‘gentleness’ in the community.⁹² In 1619, de Sales corrected Sister Blonay for scolding her fellow sisters excessively. ‘Your zeal’, he explained, ‘is a bit bitter’ and ‘fastidious’. He exhorted her, instead, to ‘live joyously and courageously’ and to embody a ‘gentle, gracious, peaceful, [and] tolerant’ demeanor in daily life.⁹³ On another occasion, de Sales counseled Sister Favre as she mended fences with a Visitandine she had offended. De Sales praised Favre for her ‘honest confession’ that she had been ‘malicious’ in her conduct. He added that authentic Catholic zeal consisted of ‘tolerating each other’s imperfections’. ‘In what other way’, he asked Favre, ‘can we exercise love of neighbor, if not in this tolerance?’⁹⁴

CRITICISM AND CHANGE

Across his ecclesiastical career, de Sales faced criticism for his gentle approach to Catholic spirituality. In the Chablais, fellow missionaries objected to the civility he showed Huguenots.⁹⁵ The Capuchin friar, Chérubin de Maurienne, even complained to Church authorities in Rome that de Sales tolerated heresy.⁹⁶ Critics of his *Introduction* charged that it lacked orthodox doctrine and ascetic rigor, prompting Benedictine abbot

⁸⁹ Ibid., 166.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 237.

⁹¹ Ibid., XVII, 279.

⁹² Ibid., XVII, 280.

⁹³ Ibid., XIX, 91.

⁹⁴ Ibid., XVI, 75-6.

⁹⁵ Charles-Auguste de Sales, *Histoire du bienheureux François de Sales* (Lyon: La Bottière et Juillard, 1634), p. 212.

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 520-2; Fortunat Strowski, *Saint François de Sales* (Paris: Plon, 1928), p. 81.

Grégoire Tarrisse to forbid his monks from reading it and a certain Capuchin to burn it.⁹⁷ When de Sales founded the Visitation, a religious community of women committed to *douceur*, therefore, he expected resistance. On the eve of the Visitation's birth, he confided in Nicolas Polliens, a Jesuit friend, that he and the new community would come under fire. 'I know that I will attract opposition', de Sales asserted. Despite this anticipated criticism, de Sales remained confident: 'I am not worried about this, for whoever did anything good without [opposition]?'⁹⁸

Criticism indeed materialized after the founding of the Visitation in 1610. Certain critics denounced de Sales's opposition to rigorous mortifications. The Wars of Religion demanded nothing less of Catholics, they felt, than combat against the body and sin. A letter of support from the Ignace Armand illustrates aspects of this critique. 'Some say you have created a hospital rather than an assembly of devout women', Armand wrote. He encouraged de Sales to dismiss such criticism as coming from 'foolish minds' that did not grasp the 'mild life of Jesus'.⁹⁹

Charges that the Visitation was a 'hospital' did not faze de Sales. A separate critique, however, troubled him, and ultimately prompted him to modify a critical dimension of the community. This criticism concerned the issue of enclosure. When de Sales first formed the Visitation, he established modified enclosure to allow Visitandines to perform works of mercy in Annecy. This active apostolate constituted an important part of de Sales's vision of relationships of *douceur*. Having anticipated objections to religious women serving in public, de Sales had stipulated that, typically, only the older Visitandines would leave the convent and, ideally, minister to women, not men.¹⁰⁰ In Annecy, which was located not in France but the Duchy of Savoy, no one objected to this arrangement. Indeed, Annecy's inhabitants came to admire this pastoral ministry of de Chantal and the Visitandines.¹⁰¹

In the French Kingdom, where Catholic militancy held greater sway, however, the clergy did not tolerate nuns outside their convents. We

⁹⁷ Louis Cognet, *La Spiritualité Moderne: L'essor 1500-1650* (Paris: Aubier, 1966), p. 284; Jacques Bénigne Bossuet, Charles Frey de Neuville, Esprit Fléchier, and Louis Bourdaloue, *Panégryriques de saint François de Sales* (Paris: J.-J. Blaise, 1834), p. 109.

⁹⁸ OEA, XIV, 194.

⁹⁹ Letter cited in de Chaugy, *Sainte Jeanne*, pp. 145-6.

¹⁰⁰ OEA, XIV, 207, XVI, 69.

¹⁰¹ Jean-Pierre Camus, *The Spirit of Saint François de Sales*, trans. by C. F. Kelley (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), p. 188.

must recall that the Wars of Religion touched off heightened concerns regarding sexual purity, with the sexuality of women, in particular, coming under increased scrutiny. As for religious women, they were expected to practice constant mortification and safeguard their virginity within their cloisters. The Carmelites, Ursulines, Capucines and other female orders in France, as we have seen, observed this enclosure quite strictly.

Denis-Simon Marquemont, archbishop of Lyon, emerged as the primary critic of the Visitation's modified enclosure. In 1616, he had invited de Sales to found a Visitation house in Lyon. De Sales responded quickly, arranging for a new convent in the city. When the Lyon Visitandines emerged publicly to serve the community, however, Marquemont resisted, informing de Sales that this active apostolate had to cease. The open nature of the Visitation was 'dangerous', Marquemont explained, given the current religious and political turbulence in France. 'Those [...] seeing a nun in the world and its affairs will be scandalized', and this would only strengthen Protestant criticism of Catholicism.¹⁰²

De Sales and Marquemont debated the matter for months. Marquemont insisted that the Visitation would never take root in the kingdom of France, unless de Sales imposed strict enclosure. He also counseled de Sales to transform the Visitation from a 'congregation' into a formal religious order with permanent, solemn vows. The sexual purity of religious women and the reputation of the Church loomed large in the mind of Marquemont. 'Open doors', he explained, create 'sin and anxiety' and the resulting 'disorder and the shame' would cause 'scandal'.¹⁰³

Despite great reservations, de Sales eventually acquiesced, making the Visitation a formal religious order with strict enclosure. He did so, however, on two conditions. First, de Sales explained to Marquemont, the Visitation would continue to forbid rigorous penances. Second, de Sales insisted that Visitandines would continue to receive laywomen for brief spiritual retreats.¹⁰⁴ With these modifications, French prelates found the Visitation acceptable, while Rome recognized the community as an official religious order of the Catholic Church in 1618.

With strict enclosure, the Visitandines ceased all public ministries in Savoy and France. They also took solemn vows. De Sales disliked these changes yet, agreed to abide by them. Scholars have debated why de Sales

¹⁰² OEA, XXV, 164.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 337-8.

submitted to Marquemont's demands, but little consensus has emerged.¹⁰⁵ It seems likely, however, that de Sales' acquiescence was rooted in his determination to promote the Visitation as a witness to Catholic *douceur*. De Sales had been engaged in his reform of militant Catholicism for two decades as a missionary, preacher, and spiritual director. Now the Visitation presented an unprecedented opportunity to expand his vision of Catholic renewal in a concrete, institutional fashion. Even in a modified form, the Visitation could still cultivate Christocentric *douceur*, thus renewing the Church. Simply put, de Sales accepted strict enclosure and formal vows to sustain his ever-expanding reform of militant Catholicism in the era of the French Wars of Religion.

FRANÇOIS DE SALES AND WOMEN

In the 1610s, the Visitation convents in Annecy and Lyon grew rapidly. In the 1620s, Moulins, Paris, and seven other towns within France founded new Visitation houses. By 1641, the year of de Chantal's death, over fifty Visitation convents in French-speaking lands had emerged.¹⁰⁶ It is clear, then, that while many women embraced the militant-penitential piety of the Carmelites, Capucines, and Ursulines in the seventeenth century, certain Catholic women gravitated toward the *douceur* of the Visitation. This resonance between the Salesian way of proceeding and women's spirituality, however, did not begin with the Visitation. Indeed, throughout de Sales' priestly career, he ministered to women, scores of whom favored a gentle, pastoral approach to the faith. A certain noblewoman, deeply moved by de Sales's teachings, illustrates this. After reading *Introduction to the Devout Life* 'six times' and embracing its 'gentle laws', she wrote the following to de Sales:

I find your practices and your devotion so accommodating to my temperament and the weakness of my sex [...] I also know several women who have the wherewithal to live under your holy direction and have assured me that God had you born in this century to teach us virtue [...] I choose you for my good

¹⁰⁵ Joseph Boenzi, *Saint Francis De Sales: Life and Spirit* (Stella Niagara, New York: DeSales Resource Center, 2013), p. 79; Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, pp. 174-83; Rapley, *The Dévotes*, p. 35; Stopp, *Madame de Chantal*, pp. 123-4; Wright and Power, *Letters of Spiritual Direction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), pp. 66-7.

¹⁰⁶ Stopp, *Madame de Chantal*, p. 123.

Father and my good director ...[may you] continue to make [...] so many saintly women.¹⁰⁷

With the Visitation de Sales affirmed women and women's spirituality more boldly than ever. The Visitation was co-founded with a woman and open only to women. The new community, furthermore, was named in honor of two heroines of the Gospels, Mary and Elizabeth. Few French Catholic priests included women in the life of the Church so openly, something which vexed de Sales's critics. The clergyman Adrien Bourdoise, for instance, was disappointed 'that a bishop to whom God has given such great talents devoted himself almost entirely to the direction of those of the weaker sex'.¹⁰⁸ According to Bourdoise, de Sales's work with women, or at least how he approached such work, did not contribute effectively to the Counter-Reformation.¹⁰⁹ On a separate occasion, a certain prelate challenged de Sales similarly, peppering him with questions about the Visitation:

But what is it that you wish to do with this congregation of women and girls? What use are they to the Church of God? Aren't there already enough [congregations of women religious]? Wouldn't you do better to create one for clergymen?¹¹⁰

This raises the question of why de Sales affirmed women in this exceptional manner. Linda Timmermans has maintained that de Sales' attention to women 'cannot be separated from the progress of the Counter-Reformation'.¹¹¹ In her study, *L'accès des femmes à la culture (1598-1715)*, Timmermans argues that de Sales envisioned women playing a crucial role in Catholic combat against French Protestantism. Whether teaching children in convent schools as religious sisters or instructing them in the home as mothers, Catholic women could promote orthodox doctrine and weaken heresy.¹¹² Timmermans' interpretation certainly applies to certain women's orders, such as the Ursulines, whose charge clearly was to serve

¹⁰⁷ OEA, XVII, 428.

¹⁰⁸ Philibert Descourveaux, *La Vie de Monsieur Bourdoise* (Paris: 1714), p. 110.

¹⁰⁹ Th. Schueller, *La Femme et ses problèmes d'après saint François de Sales* (Paris: Éditions Ouvrières, 1970), p. 7.

¹¹⁰ François de Sales, *Oeuvres complètes de S. François de Sales*, 9 vols (Paris: J.P. Migne, 1861-4), II, 633.

¹¹¹ Linda Timmermans, *L'accès des femmes à la culture (1598-1715): un débat d'idées de Saint François de Sales à la Marquise de Lambert* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1993), p. 399.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 399-405.

the French Counter-Reformation by means of children's education and severe asceticism.

It is difficult, however, to apply this interpretation to de Sales and the Visitation, as Timmermans does. First, by 1610, de Sales had long shifted his attention from Protestantism to Catholic piety. After the Chablais mission, as we have seen, de Sales focused, above all, on the lives and piety of his coreligionists. Second, regarding the Visitation, de Sales and de Chantal never intended it to be a teaching order, nor did it become one. In the primary sources related to the Visitation there are simply no discussions on educating young Catholics. Finally, de Sales makes clear his desire that a 'spirit of gentleness' grounded in love of others and God was the 'unique spirit of the Visitation', with no mention of combatting heresy or sin.¹¹³ It would seem highly unlikely, then, that de Sales's affirmation of women was pursued with Counter-Reformation combat in mind.

WOMEN AND THE SALESIAN 'THEOLOGY OF WEAKNESS'

To interpret de Sales's affirmation of women and women's spirituality one must first take stock of the primacy of the maternal and feminine in his early experiences of Catholicism. De Sales' initial encounters with religion, as we have seen, typically involved his mother. Madame de Boisy instructed him in the prayers and practices of the faith, emphasizing compassionate, loving relationships. During his Paris school days, moreover, de Sales developed a devotion to the Virgin, as an active participant in the Jesuits's Marian Congregation. This pious affection for Mary played a crucial role in resolving his spiritual crisis of 1587. As de Sales recounted on several occasions, it was before Our Lady of Deliverance that he found interior peace.

In time, de Sales's admiration for women's spirituality grew, as he came to believe that women, as the 'weaker sex', actually served as privileged vessels for God's grace.¹¹⁴ This perspective developed as part of de Sales's broader view that God, paradoxically, preferred to work through the weak, lowly, and humble, what we might call a 'theology of weakness'. De Sales expressed this conviction on numerous occasions. 'I prefer to be infirm rather than strong before God', de Sales once wrote, 'since [God] takes the weak into his arms'.¹¹⁵ He also asserted that the 'awareness' of weakness leads the faithful to God, because such knowledge prompts 'trust

¹¹³ OEA, VI, 229.

¹¹⁴ Wendy M. Wright and Joseph F. Power, *Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal: Letters of Spiritual Direction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), p. 67.

¹¹⁵ OEA, XV, 62.

in the mercy and the goodness of God'.¹¹⁶ De Sales found inspiration for this theology in Pauline thought.¹¹⁷ Paraphrasing 2 Corinthians, he once told a friend, 'I am certainly weak and infirm which I nonetheless celebrate, so *that the virtue of my Lord may live in me* (2 Cor 12. 9)'.¹¹⁸

With this theology of weakness, de Sales eventually came to view women as ideal partners in his vision of Catholic renewal. We glimpse this in his response to a clergyman who questioned his creation of a women-only religious institute:

It is not for me to work with rich materials. Gold and silver I leave to be handled by jewelers and confine myself like a potter to clay. But believe me, God is a skilled worker. Even with the poorest tools He can do wonders. He is always choosing the weak to confound the strong, the ignorant to baffle the wise.¹¹⁹

On another occasion, de Sales observed that the truth and power of Teresa of Avila's writings also revealed God's preference to renew the Church through the 'weaker sex':

The blessed Teresa of Jesus has written so effectively of the sacred movements of love in all the books she has left us, that one is delighted to see so much eloquence masked under such profound humility [...] her most learned ignorance makes the knowledge of many learned men appear ignorant, who after long and laborious study have to blush at not understanding what she writes. Thus does God raise the throne of his power upon our infirmity, *making use of weak things to confound the strong* (1 Cor 1. 27).¹²⁰

When de Sales founded and led the Order of the Visitation, he did so believing that, by gathering the 'weaker sex', he assembled those prone to serve as effective vessels for God's work. De Sales communicated this to the Visitandines themselves. 'You must refrain from thinking that the infirm are less adept in the religious life than the strong and robust', he taught the sisters, for 'virtue perfects itself in infirmity' and 'Our Lord' can be 'glorified' in human imperfection.¹²¹ When a certain nun once lamented both her moral and physical limitations, de Sales urged her to 'glorify

¹¹⁶ Ibid., VI, 19-20.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., XIII, 392.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., XV, 62.

¹¹⁹ As quoted in Camus, *The Spirit*, p. 218.

¹²⁰ OEA, IV, 7.

¹²¹ Ibid., VI, 164, 242.

herself in her weakness' since 'God often preferred to work through those who are weak'.¹²²

Contrary to Timmerman's argument, then, de Sales ministered to and collaborated with women not as fellow soldiers in Counter-Reformation combat, but, rather, as co-participants in his vision of Catholic renewal rooted in *douceur*. Indeed, in certain respects the Salesian theology of weakness constituted a complete inversion of Counter-Reformation militancy. While militants understood religious power in terms of aggression and destruction, de Sales gathered the 'weaker sex' to witness to the sacred power of gentleness.

OUTGROWTH OF THE VISITATION: *TREATISE ON THE LOVE OF GOD*

By 1616, de Sales's corpus of talks and sermons given to the Visitandines provided enough material to publish a final book, *Treatise on the Love of God* (*Traité de l'Amour de Dieu*). Longer and more theologically complex than his *Introduction*, this work features an incisive critique of religious militancy. The *Treatise* consists of twelve books exploring the role of love in human relationships and human-divine relations. Despite his emphasis on love in this work, de Sales still relied on *douceur* as the central organizing principle in his vision of Catholic renewal. Indeed, throughout the *Treatise* de Sales appeals to *douceur* as the core concept for summoning Catholics to peace, nonviolence, and tolerance as he had since the early 1600s. As Mellinghoff-Bourgerie has shown, *douceur* figures in 108 of the *Treatise*'s 177 chapters.¹²³ What is new, however, is that de Sales often intertwines notions of love and gentleness in the work, sometimes to the point of being indistinguishable.

Given the length and scholarly style of *Treatise*, historians have overlooked its practical, pastoral applications, as well as its role within the wider Salesian reform of militant Catholicism. A crucial feature of the work is its critique of unbridled, violent passions among Catholics. De Sales gives his most developed treatment of this topic in Book Ten. He begins by exploring the duty to love others as ourselves. Since our neighbors are made 'in the image and likeness of God', 'we' are to 'love them as ourselves'. De Sales then proceeds to describe the inseparability of loving others and

¹²² *Ibid.*, XV, 46.

¹²³ Viviane Mellinghoff-Bourgerie, 'Dulcedo dei, lenitas hominis: théorie et pratique de la douceur selon François de Sales', in *La Douceur en littérature de l'Antiquité au XVII^e siècle*, ed. by Hélène Baby and Josiane Rieu (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2012), pp. 223-46, (p. 223).

loving God. ‘To love our neighbor in charity is to love God in man and man in God’. De Sales teaches that the love of neighbor and love of God are rooted in the same source of ‘charity’:

Therefore the same charity which produces the acts of the love of God produces at the same time those of the love of our neighbor. And even as Jacob saw that one same ladder touched heaven and earth, serving the angels, both for descending and ascending, so we know that one same charity extends itself to both the love of God and our neighbor.¹²⁴

As de Sales elaborates, his calls for the love of neighbor grow increasingly urgent. ‘All men are endowed with the same dignity’ and must therefore establish ‘loving society with [their] neighbors’.¹²⁵ This ‘loving society’, in de Sales’s view, consists of bold acts of affection rather than brutality:

When we see our neighbor who is the created in the image and likeness of God, ought we not to say: Observe and see this creature, how he resembles the Creator? Might we not cast ourselves upon his neck, to caress him and weep over him in love? Should we not bless him a thousand and a thousand more times?¹²⁶

‘ADVICE FOR THE DIRECTION OF HOLY ZEAL’

De Sales finally addresses how religious zeal often leads, not to inclusion and embrace, but to the violent abuse of others. While de Sales stops short of stating that militant French Catholics are the subject of his critique, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this is precisely whom he calls to a change of heart. In the chapter entitled ‘Advice for the Direction of Holy Zeal’, de Sales teaches that ‘zeal’ is a form of religious ‘ardor or vehemence’ in ‘need of guidance’.¹²⁷ Catholics, he asserts, frequently allow this ardor to give way to ‘boldness and anger’, which is then embodied in ‘rough and violent’ religiosity. Once religious zeal has reached this state of militancy, it is ‘unable to contain itself’ and ‘carries the heart away into disorder’.

De Sales draws on Scripture to illustrate his point. First, he cites the Old Testament account in which King David orders Joab not to harm Absalom. ‘But being engaged and being hot in pursuit of victory’, Joab

¹²⁴ OEA, V, 204-5.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 206.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 218.

killed Absalom, ignoring what the king had said to him'. Such conduct, de Sales maintains, is 'bad and blameworthy'.¹²⁸ He then turns to the Gospel story of the servants working their master's field (Matthew 13. 29). The landowner orders them not to touch the weeds lest they 'root up the wheat also together with it'.¹²⁹ De Sales contends that Catholic militants are like these 'violent servants' who, consumed by their hatred of sin and impurity, forget 'their master's intention'. A good and holy zeal infused with love and *douceur*, however, will 'spare the sinner' when confronting 'wickedness and sin'.¹³⁰ De Sales cites anger, perhaps the defining emotion of militant Catholicism, as particularly dangerous, for it creates a zeal 'so ardent, so agitated, inconsiderate, and impetuous' that it does 'much evil'. Righteous anger is 'like a fire' that 'in just a moment consumes a building'.

De Sales employs provocative anecdotes to examine violent zeal further, arguing that its 'usefulness' is never 'comparable to the harm' it causes.¹³¹ In one account, we learn of a priest whose response to sin is unconscionably brutal.¹³² In the story, two clergymen stand by a church altar when a 'notorious sinner' throws himself at the feet of a 'good and worthy priest' who is willing to receive the man. The other priest, however, resenting that an unclean sinner came 'so close to the holy altar', attacks him. This enraged priest falls 'into so violent a fit of anger' that he thrusts himself upon the sinner, kicking and punching him. He also denounces his fellow priest for receiving the sinner and, then, 'running to the altar', removes all holy objects 'lest they be profaned by the sinner's presence'. Using this fictitious priest to critique militant Catholics, de Sales asserts that, 'zeal' for 'holy things' is 'good and laudable', but the use of 'kicks, outrages, railing, and reproaches' is 'against all reason'. 'Zeal', de Sales concludes, 'practiced with such great disorder' cannot 'be good'.¹³³

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 219.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 218.

¹³¹ Ibid., 219.

¹³² Ibid., 220.

¹³³ Ibid.

Conclusion

In December of 1602, François de Sales wrote a short letter to Pierre de Bérulle which, despite its pleasantries and good will, hinted at a fundamental divergence in their respective theological and pastoral orientations. In previous correspondence, Bérulle had lamented his inability to eliminate sin and imperfection from his life. Responding to this Parisian *dévo*t, de Sales asserted that moral perfection was unattainable in human life. ‘We will always need to wash our feet’, de Sales observed, so long ‘as we walk the dust’ of the earth. De Sales encouraged Bérulle to trust that, ‘Our good God’ would provide whatever Bérulle needed to grow spiritually.¹ In the years after this exchange, the two priests developed strikingly different visions of Catholic renewal. While de Sales increasingly advocated a Catholicism of *douceur*, Bérulle espoused a spirituality of purity and annihilation.²

In his youth in the 1580s, de Sales would have responded quite differently to Bérulle’s lament, likely urging him to increased mortification in the name of the Church Militant.³ At that time, de Sales participated in Paris’s militant-penitential fervor, admiring Ange de Joyeuse, the ascetic, soon-to-be Leaguer, as a Catholic hero. Fearing sin and God, the young de Sales also subjected himself to severe mortification. Yet, the allure of Catholic militancy did not last very long for him, as he began to question the apocalypticism, severe penitence, and anti-Protestant brutality of League piety. Indeed, after his ordination to the priesthood in 1593, de Sales, deeming the violence within French Catholicism a profound moral corruption, embarked on his reform of militant zeal which expanded until his death in 1622. Salesian scholarship has overlooked this evolution of de Sales’s spirituality, content seeing him as a devout humanist, Counter-Reformer, or Tridentine reformer. Yet, for three decades, in his work as a missionary, spiritual director, and founder of the Order of the Visitation, de Sales exhorted the faithful to a gentle, pastoral imitation of Christ, while contesting the Leaguer-*dévo*t militancy so prevalent during the French Wars of Religion.

Given the strength of League piety in the 1580s and 1590s, it was no easy task for a young man like de Sales to question its moral validity. He

¹ OEA, XII, 156.

² Charles E. Williams, *The French Oratorians and Absolutism, 1611-1641* (New York: Peter Lange, 1988), pp. 15-20.

³ OEA, XXII, 11-12.

was able to do so, in large part, because of his exposure to religious cultures of nonviolence early in his life. In his childhood, de Sales experienced faith in terms of loving relationships, primarily due to his mother. For Madame de Boisy, Catholicism required affectionate bonds in the home and charity in the wider community. At the Collège de Clermont, Jesuits invited de Sales to a piety of fellowship, works of mercy, the *Spiritual Exercises*, and theological study. And, in Padua, de Sales encountered a more tolerant Catholicism which did not deem heterodoxy an apocalyptic threat. In these Catholic cultures, belief and praxis fostered compassion, charity, and unity, not 'rites of violence', enabling de Sales to embrace a Catholic zeal distinct from League piety and politics.

De Sales's continued evolution toward a Catholicism of *douceur* faced considerable obstacles, given the hallowed place of violence in French history and piety. French Catholics had killed religious enemies, whether Saxons, Cathars, or Muslims, across the medieval era. When French Protestantism emerged, many deemed it yet another threat 'against the eldest daughter of the Church' that required a new crusade. The anxious, apocalyptic fervor of the Wars of Religion also fostered aggressive penitence to repel threats from God, Satan, heretics, and nature itself. How could de Sales develop and promote a spirituality of *douceur* when religious combat had assumed such prominence in French Catholic history? To a great extent, de Sales found his answer in the New Testament. De Sales came to believe that the *douceur* of Jesus, especially as depicted in Mt 11. 29, revealed the authoritative model of Christian conduct. If Jesus engaged others, including enemies, with gentleness and humility, then the faithful should do likewise, irrespective of French norms and customs.

Christocentric currents running through late medieval and early modern Catholicism emboldened de Sales as well. The *Imitation of Christ*, among other devotional texts, inspired him to pursue an interior, personal bond with Jesus and Christ-like humility. De Sales also absorbed elements of Erasmus's 'philosophy of Christ' which called Catholics to embody the gentleness of Jesus in social and political life. Additionally, Pierre Favre, a disciple of 'Christ the consoler', captured his imagination. De Sales sought to emulate the humane, pastoral spirit of this Jesuit. Without such precedents of nonviolent, Christocentric piety, de Sales may have doubted the orthodoxy or practicality of his vision of Catholic *douceur*.

In recent scholarship, historians have emphasized divisions among the *dévots* occurring in the 1630s and 1640s. This study, however, contends that divergent approaches to Catholic renewal were present and growing in the first decade of the seventeenth century. For as de Sales expanded his Catholicism of *douceur* in the early 1600s, his spirituality increasingly

differentiated itself from the militant politics and penance of Parisian *dévots*. Consider that, in the wake of the Edict of Nantes, members of the Acarie circle continued to oppose Henry IV, demonize Huguenots, perform public exorcisms, and promote severe mortification.⁴ For these *dévots*, the Wars of Religion had not ended. De Sales, in contrast, devoted himself to healing the *maladies spirituelles* of French Catholics, consistently critiquing the enduring militancy. In this pastoral work, de Sales exhorted the faithful, above all, to love God and neighbor in a spirit of joy, speaking rarely of the dangers of heresy, the body, or sin.

This study maintains that the Salesian reform of zeal not only reveals differences among early *dévots*, but constitutes a unique catalyst for religious renewal in the seventeenth century as well. Scholars have tended to attribute the rejuvenation of French Catholicism primarily to the militant-penitential fervor of ex-Leaguers and *dévots* in Paris.⁵ This interpretation, while true of certain reformers and endeavors in the period, does not fit for de Sales and his followers. For the Salesian vision of Catholic renewal inspired the faithful not to an apocalyptic, warrior spirituality, but to a gentle imitation of the gentle Christ. And this piety of *douceur* flourished among religious orders and countless lay people within French Catholicism and early modern Catholicism more broadly.

⁴ Jean Dagens, *Bérulle et les origines de la restauration catholique (1575-1611)* (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1952), pp. 150-4.

⁵ Ramsey even credits League piety with shaping early modern Catholicism across Europe. See Ann W. Ramsey, *Liturgy, Politics, and Salvation: The Catholic League in Paris and the Nature of Catholic Reform, 1540-1630* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1999), p. 16.

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