

PIETY AND  
PERSONALITY



PIETY AND  
PERSONALITY

THE TEMPERAMENTS OF THE SAINTS

ROSEMARY MCGUIRE BERRY

TAN Books  
Gastonia, North Carolina

*Piety and Personality* Copyright © 2024 Rosemary McGuire Berry

All rights reserved. With the exception of short excerpts used in critical review, no part of this work may be reproduced, transmitted, or stored in any form whatsoever, without the prior written permission of the publisher. Creation, exploitation, and distribution of any unauthorized editions of this work, in any format in existence now or in the future—including but not limited to text, audio, and video—is prohibited without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the Douay-Rheims Bible. Public domain.

Cover design by Jordan Avery

Cover images: *St. Thomas Aquinas* by Alessandro di Mariano di Vanni Filipepi (oil on panel). Bridgeman Images. *The Dream of St. Joseph* by Anton Raphael Mengs. In the Public Domain, via Wikimedia Commons. *Teresa of Ávila* by Peter Paul Rubens (oil on oak wood). In the Public Domain, via Wikimedia Commons. *St. Paul* by Pompeo Girolamo Batoni (oil on canvas). National Trust Photographic Library/John Hammond / Bridgeman Images. *Mary Magdalen with a night light* by Georges de la Tour (oil on canvas). Bridgeman Images. *St. Peter* by Pompeo Girolamo Batoni (oil on canvas). National Trust Photographic Library/John Hammond / Bridgeman Images. Portrait of Sir Thomas More by Hans Holbein the Younger (oil on oak panel). In the Public Domain, via Wikimedia Commons. *St. Therese of Lisieux, 20th century* by F. Roytelet (mural). G. Dagli Orti /© NPL - DeA Picture Library / Bridgeman Images.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2024945027

ISBN: 978-1-5051-3411-7

Kindle ISBN: 978-1-5051-3499-5

ePUB ISBN: 978-1-5051-3498-8

Published in the United States by

TAN Books

PO Box 269

Gastonia, NC 28053

[www.TANBooks.com](http://www.TANBooks.com)

Printed in the United States of America

*“How consoling it is to examine the lives of the saints, and to find them so great, but with natures so similar to our own.”*

—St. Margaret Mary Alacoque<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Pichon, *Seeds of the Kingdom*, 69.

To the person who wrote that most of the saints were  
Melancholic, which prompted a Sanguine to write a whole  
book to prove him wrong.

And to my husband and daughters, with unending love.

# Contents<sup>2</sup>

<i>Light the Fire: Introduction to the “Why” of This Book . . . . .</i>	<i>1</i>
1 Francis de Sales Learns Self-Control: Melancholic-Choleric . . . . .	11
2 Conversion of St. Paul: Choleric . . . . .	31
3 St. Teresa Finds Her Mission: Choleric-Sanguine . . . . .	45
4 Simon is “Petrified”: Sanguine . . . . .	61
5 The Sensitivity of St. Thérèse and the Playfulness of St. Philomena: Melancholic and Sanguine . . . . .	75
6 St. Mary Magdalene and Her Sister St. Martha: Sanguine-Melancholic and Choleric . . . . .	93
7 St. Thomas Aquinas: “The Dumb Ox”?: Phlegmatic . . . . .	135
8 Another Phlegmatic Thomas—Married with Children . . . . .	153
9 Was St. Joseph a Phlegmatic?: Phlegmatic-Melancholic . . . . .	167
10 Discouragement & Depression by Temperament . . . . .	179
11 Fear of Things to Come . . . . .	193
12 Ode to Joy . . . . .	197
<i>Bibliography . . . . .</i>	<i>203</i>

---

<sup>2</sup> Note: Each chapter shines a light on one or two saints in particular, and draws brief examples from other saints like them.





## THE CHOLERIC TEMPERAMENT

*Choleric [kə-lə-rik, kə'ler-ik] people are dominant, fearless, and opinionated. Choleric make the best CEOs; they are born with leadership qualities. They usually see the “big picture” at a glance, and they expect everyone else to see what they see and agree with their plans for what should be done about it. Some of their main strengths are courage, decisiveness, a strong work ethic, and absolute commitment to the goal. Some of their main weaknesses can be bossiness, inclination to anger, lack of pity for those who are seemingly weaker than they are, and willful stubbornness.*

## THE MELANCHOLIC TEMPERAMENT

*Melancholic [me-lən-'kə-lik] people are idealistic, artistic perfectionists. They pay close attention to details and expect others to do the same. They act from their “gut” or instinct and are strongly influenced by their feelings. Their greatest strengths are their desire to do the right or most perfect thing, their dedication to ideals, and their sympathy toward others. Their weaknesses can be too much perfectionism, indecision because they want to make the perfect decision, and an inclination to depression, often because of too much rumination on their wrongs and disappointments.*

## THE SANGUINE TEMPERAMENT

*Sanguine* [saŋ-ɡwən] people are impetuous and loving, and they are enthusiastic optimists. Sanguines want to please others and lighten the loads of others with their cheerfulness and spontaneous humor. Their strengths are energy, joy, enthusiasm, positivity, and an inability to bear grudges. Their weaknesses can be instability, inconsistency, and changeability.

## THE PHLEGMATIC TEMPERAMENT

*Phlegmatic* [fleg-ˈma-tik] people are imperturbable and peaceful. They avoid conflict, don't seek center stage, and are loyal and loving. Their strengths include sympathy, patience, and calm amidst storms. Their weaknesses can be laziness, stubbornness, and an unwillingness to stand up for the truth because they don't like confrontation.

# Light the Fire: Introduction to the “Why” of this Book

Were the saints *born* holy? Did they pop into the world filled with virtue and sanctity, astounding everyone around them, and putting “normal” people to shame? Some hagiographers (saint-storytellers) would have us believe that, giving accounts of miracles from the cradle, or of astounding acts of penance at two years old. Every saint had to work out his or her salvation. Each saint struggled against his weaknesses and faults; each saint had to plant and cultivate virtue. God’s grace is sufficient for every one of us to become great saints.

Yes, you.

And yes, me!

But how?

You may say, “I’m not as brave as St. Isaac Jogues. I’m not as smart as St. Thomas Aquinas. I’m not a world traveler like St. Frances Cabrini.” But they did not start out doing amazing things for God. They got there by determined effort and floods of God’s grace. Let us take a look at how they did it and see what we can apply to our own lives.

Here. Now. In this modern world.

We can begin by knowing more about ourselves. Fr. Raoul Plus, SJ wrote:

Who am I? The mystery of each personality! It is a mystery which even the most perfect and most intimate union with another personality cannot completely pierce, as for example in marriage. There is a limitless diversity in personalities, since God made all souls originally without ever copying any previous model . . . Who am I? What are my resources? What are my good points? What are my faults? What is the color of my desires, the force of my will, the intensity of my religious need, my thirst for an integrated life, my Christian fervor, the value of my fidelity?<sup>3</sup>

Saint Augustine, after his conversion, longed to kindle the love of God in his heart. "Let me know Thee who knowest me, let me know Thee even as I am known," he prayed. "I will confess therefore what I know of myself and what I do not know; for what I know of myself I know through the shining of Your light; and what I do not know of myself, I continue not to know until my darkness shall be made as noonday in Your countenance."<sup>4</sup> As a philosopher, he realized that the better he knew himself, the more he could know his Creator. The more we know ourselves, the more we can know, love, and serve God. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart" (Matt. 22:37).

"The difficult study of temperament takes for granted an earnest longing after self-perfection," wrote Father Joseph Massmann in his book *Nervousness, Temperament and the Soul*. "The man who is not striving to become a better man resists the truth and keeps out of its way. For those who are

---

<sup>3</sup> Plus, *Christ in the Home*, 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Confessions*, 173, 176.

striving after inward perfection—even for those who merely want to make a success of life—it is useful, indeed necessary, to examine these questions.”<sup>5</sup>

If we study our weaknesses, we can battle them more effectively. If we acknowledge our strengths, we can thank our Maker and work to develop those good tendencies.

The second greatest commandment can also be fulfilled through the study of the human temperament: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matt. 22:39). If we comprehend our neighbor’s strengths and weaknesses, and why he or she acts and reacts the way they do, we can be more patient and charitable toward them. We can learn to fulfill the needs of others, even if they are different from our own.

Hippocrates, who died c. 375 BC, established the theory of four major personality types and called them the four “humors.” He believed that they were caused by an excess of various bodily fluids. Centuries later, scientists of the day commented that when Saint Francis de Sales died, they found a large quantity of excess bile built up in his body. This was believed to have been from his containing his temper and controlling his natural temperament so that he was kind and patient at all times.

As medical science advanced, the discovery was made that a Phlegmatic person did not necessarily have more phlegm in his body, and the Sanguine did not necessarily have more blood than others, but they confirmed that there *are* four distinct classes of people. Understanding these four types—still referred to as Choleric, Sanguine, Melancholic, and Phlegmatic—helps us to comprehend

---

<sup>5</sup> Massmann, *Nervousness, Temperament and the Soul*, 13.

ourselves and recognize our fellow human beings. Most of us are a combination of at least two temperaments, but many of us have a dominant one.

We might be tempted to think that studying the lives of the saints in order to discover their dominant personality type is inherently difficult because they spent their lives overcoming their weaknesses. It is easy to identify the temperament of someone who is domineering, or ditzzy, or lazy, or finicky and hair-splitting; but the saints were not that way!

Or were they?

If we can surmise the probable temperament of, say, a Saint Peter, then we can follow his example in conquering those failings. It is generally accepted that he was of a Sanguine temperament: outgoing, impetuous, excitable, enthusiastic . . . and not terribly consistent or stable. If I have a Sanguine temperament, I can take courage from the story of Saint Peter and see that I, too, can become a great saint.

The Almighty and All-merciful God would not have created a kind of person (Choleric, Sanguine, Melancholic, or Phlegmatic) that could not get to Heaven. He would not have created us with a temperament that was a stumbling-block to our salvation. On the contrary, He gave us exactly the right temperament to *help* us gain Heaven. He placed the right people in our lives, with the right temperaments, to save our souls and everyone around us.

He knows what each soul needs—after all, He created everyone. He knows our strengths and weaknesses, our experiences and knowledge, our joys and our sorrows.

We are not all cookie-cutter images of each other. Our children are not all potatoes that can be cut into matching

French fries of the same size and length. No, rather, every soul is a diocese, as a great saint said. Every soul has heights and depths that we do not know, but God does. Understanding them, and understanding ourselves, is the first key to perfecting ourselves and becoming saints.

If I am a Melancholic mom with a Choleric-Sanguine husband and seven Sanguine children who cannot sit still, cannot stop talking, and cannot remember from one moment to the next what they are supposed to be doing, I will not throw up my hands in despair. God's will is perfect. Maybe I am meant to be the calm, consistent influence in their lives. Maybe they are supposed to be the leaven in my loaf that reminds me that life doesn't always go according to our plans, and that "saints are not sad."

Imagine if everyone in the world was Choleric. Nothing would ever get done because they would all be arguing over the best way to do it, and each would think that he should be the boss. Imagine if the whole world was Melancholic. Since they are perfectionists, nothing would ever be good enough to please all of them, so they would just give up and be depressed. Imagine if the whole world was Phlegmatic. God needn't have bothered to give them free will, because they would rather sleep anyway. And if the whole world was Sanguine, well, they would have a lot of fun, but there would be mass chaos.

The omniscient Creator knew that if He created these four basic types of people, and each person strove to be the best he or she could be, then the world would run like a well-oiled machine: the Choleric would decide what needed to be done and come up with the perfect plan; the Sanguines would wax

enthusiastic and sell the idea to everyone else; the Phlegmatics would quietly do the work, with the Melancholics working alongside and checking to be sure it is done right.

The Master, who made us and redeemed us, is the pinnacle and perfection of all four temperaments. He has the strengths of all four, without any of the weaknesses. He has the decisiveness and farsightedness of a Choleric, joined to the joyfulness and sweetness of a Sanguine, merged with the idealism, diligence, and deep thinking of a Melancholic, with the added peacefulness and patience of a Phlegmatic.

He tells us to take up our cross daily and follow Him (see Luke 9:23). The only way to walk in His footsteps is to keep our eyes on Him and imitate His example. But as I try to follow Him, why am I walking so slowly? Why do I keep tripping and falling?

Let us be conscious of the blister on our left big toe, the old sprain in our right ankle, the twisted knee, aching back, or whatever other “weakness” is slowing us down. The more we identify these deficiencies, the more we can bring them to the Savior to be healed and do the prescribed exercises and physical therapy on them to make those weak points stronger. Maybe we need to shift the cross from our left shoulder to our right shoulder because that is where our strength lies. Understanding our strengths (e.g., forgiving, sympathetic, a good organizer, cheerful, peacemaker) and weaknesses (e.g., forgetfulness, pessimism, over-sensitivity, bossiness) will help us and help those around us.

If I am a religious who feels my superior’s temperament is diametrically opposed to mine, I can watch and see what



the Master wants me to learn from him or her. If I am a layperson, I can try to discover what He wishes me to learn from my spouse, parents, children, or co-workers. He planted us in this century, in this nation, in this neighborhood, with these particular human beings, and with this temperament, because it would give us, as the individual snowflakes that we are, the best chance to achieve heavenly glory with Him forever.

How can we ever become discouraged with a foundation and support like that? God *believes* in us. He believes that if I use my free will to correspond with His grace, I *will* become a saint. We should have the same confidence that He has. Without Him, we can do nothing. With His grace empowering our free will, we can succeed and become the wonderful people He created us to be.

Ah, but there's the rub, we say. Our free will. It runs away with the passions, like the dish running away with the spoon. Instead of letting our passions elope with our free will, we should strengthen that will, by prayer and effort, to follow our Faith and our reason. Plato called the passions wild, beautiful horses pulling their owner in a chariot. We must keep a firm rein on them and use them to get where we want to go, or they will very easily take flight, with our crazed chariot careening wildly along the path of this life.

Mary Magdalene's life story is a perfect example of this. In the beginning of her life as a Melancholic-Sanguine, her wild horses took her where they pleased, and later, after she met the Master, she learned how to harness their strength and power to take her where she wanted to go—Heaven.

The love of God has been compared to a flame, burning inside the human heart. St. Philip Neri<sup>6</sup> was probably Sanguine, at least partly, and he burned with Divine love. If he *were* Sanguine, it could explain why he avoided women so assiduously, and did most of his work among the men of Rome. He may have been crushing a tendency toward flirtatiousness. Sanguines flirt so easily, they sometimes do it unintentionally. So, he may have been purposely avoiding women because he knew of this natural tendency. Saint Philip's heart was so inflamed with love for God that his body would actually burn up like he had a fever. Let us allow the fire of God's Love to inflame our hearts and brighten our lives with light and warmth.

The flames of the love of God in the Heart of Our Blessed Lady, fueled by the wood of the cross, produced a fragrant incense that enchanted the Most Blessed Trinity. Each of us feeds the flames of love in our hearts with our daily thoughts, words, and actions.

Those of us who are Sanguine might have a tendency to fuel the flame of love with spiritual paper: we flare up dramatically with great sacrifices or great plans or great words, but quickly sputter out into discouragement or changeability. We must learn to cultivate a steadier, more consistent flame.

A visitor to the countryside of Ireland on a spring evening is entranced by the smoky, sweet smell of a turf fire. Like the aroma of a beloved grandfather's pipe, it comforts and warms and tickles the sense of smell. Some Melancholics and Sanguines burn with this kind of steady, fragrant warmth.

---

<sup>6</sup> Saint Philip Neri (1515–1595).

If I am Melancholic or Choleric, I should beware of burning with too high of an intensity, angrily or anxiously feeding my fire in a frenzy to find perfection at my own speed. If we make too extreme of a heat, it will be too much. No one will be able to get close to us because of the fury of our inflammable natures, and we will drive people away.

If I am Phlegmatic, I might find myself lazy or carelessly optimistic in feeding and stoking my fire. We might work for a while and then fizzle out, then procrastinate about finding new fuel, do a little, and fade out again. If those of us who are Phlegmatic are not careful, our ashes may become cold from inactivity and lack of fuel. But virtuous Phlegmatics keep a low, steady flame, from which others can rekindle their own dying embers.

The strongest and most pleasing fire to the Almighty will be the one that is lively, consistent, vigorous, and fueled by the Cross. This will produce the sweetest perfume, the most fragrant incense. Moment by moment, we can feed our daily frustrations, setbacks, disappointments, and trials into the fire of our love for God.

*Note: If you are uncertain of your own temperament, do an internet search for the Personality Plus temperament test.*



# Francis de Sales Learns Self-Control

## *Melancholic-Choleric*

This masterful director of souls and brilliant writer of spiritual works was born on August 21, 1567. He was blessed with noble blood, wealth, and a good Catholic family. He was an intellectual genius with a generous heart and a large dose of charm. Like many Choleric, he probably would have succeeded in any area of life. At the age of thirteen, his father sent him to the University of Paris to help him with worldly success, but Francis chose to enter the Jesuit College. He mastered Greek, Hebrew, and theology and Scripture study. When he was twenty, he entered law school at the University of Padua.

In his biographies, the young man's attention to detail and excellence in every subject lead us to believe that he was a combination of Melancholic and Choleric. Melancholics who are not Choleric are idealistic perfectionists, but do not have the follow-through and stick-to-it-iveness that Melancholic-Choleric have. At the University of Padua, a favorite professor of St. Francis's was the Jesuit Antonius

Possevinus. He taught the young Francis to meditate according to the method of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

“This method,” writes Rev. James F. Cassidy, BA, consists in “making chivalrous devotion to Jesus Christ as King of an army, one of the leading principles designed to direct from above the entire life, emphasizing strictly regulated progress in the conquest of self, and dwelling considerably on detail as making for spiritual enlightenment, proved very attractive to a man profoundly chivalrous, and strictly methodic and thorough in whatever he undertook.”<sup>7</sup> One can see how this type of spirituality would have strongly appealed to a Melancholic-Choleric person. St. Ignatius of Loyola, a strong Choleric himself, has much to teach Choleric down through the ages.

At the age of twenty-four, Francis earned the degree of Doctor of Law, and in 1593, at the age of twenty-six, he was ordained a priest. For the next twenty-nine years, he labored to save souls by uplifting, encouraging, and fortifying them. He became Bishop of Geneva, converted thousands back to the Catholic Faith, and wrote numerous letters and spiritual books which are still in print, over four hundred years later. Most notable among these are his *Introduction to the Devout Life* and *Treatise on the Love of God*. With the help of St. Jane Frances de Chantal, he founded the Order of Visitation nuns. He departed this life for Heaven on December 28, 1622, at the age of fifty-five.

---

“Everything in this admirable Saint enchants and fascinates us,” writes Father Gaspar Gilli, “Whoever reads his writings

---

<sup>7</sup> Cassidy, *St. Francis de Sales*, 13.

attentively, feels constrained, not only to honor and venerate him, but also to love him.”<sup>8</sup>

Yet his gentleness did not come naturally to him. It is said that when someone asked him why he did not show his frustration with a certain difficult boatman, Francis admitted to those closest to him, “I am afraid to lose in a quarter of an hour that little sweetness which I have gathered up, drop by drop, like dew in the vessel of my heart, through the efforts of twenty years.” In other words, he had worked so hard to gain his meekness that he was afraid if he let the wild horses have their heads, his anger would rage out of control. This can also be compared to an alcoholic person who knows he shouldn’t take a single sip of an alcoholic drink, because he knows his weakness.

Meekness is a much-misunderstood virtue. It does not mean mousiness, lack of courage, or making oneself a doormat. It is the opposite of anger, the opposing virtue to the capital sin of anger. Our Lord Jesus Christ exemplified meekness when He patiently suffered His Passion, instead of destroying His persecutors with a lightning bolt.

St. Francis de Sales is often quoted to have said, “Nothing is so strong as gentleness, nothing so gentle as real strength.”

By nature, Francis de Sales possessed a fiery temperament, but by prolonged efforts, he has become a saint renowned through the centuries as a saint of sweetness and consolation, placing countless souls on the way of perfection. He determined never to speak when he was upset. What a courageous resolution for a Choleric to make!

*Tip for Cholerics:  
Fight for patience  
and meekness in  
hand-to-hand  
combat with  
yourself—moment  
by moment, hour  
by hour.*

<sup>8</sup> Gilli, *The Month of Mary*, preface.

“It is a difficult task to preserve peace in the soul, and well he knew it,” continues Father Gilli. “St. Francis acquired all his benignity, fighting for it, we may say, hand to hand against his natural impetuosity. This virtue by degrees penetrated the inmost parts of his soul, so that it was not only manifested in all the actions of his life, but it directed also his pen.”<sup>9</sup>

He fought against his temper and his own sharp wit—the man was brilliant and highly educated—moment by moment, thought by thought, word by word. St. Francis de Sales is famous for telling the faithful that if we fall, we must jump right up again and keep trying. He spoke from his own experience.

Sigrid Undset writes in her life of another Choleric—*Catherine of Siena*<sup>10</sup>—thus: “[Her family] could not help noticing at home that Catherine became more and more patient and calm. Many years later she came to call patience the very marrow of piety, and in view of the fact that grace does not alter our inborn nature, but perfects it, one must believe that this young woman who was later, with such awe-inspiring energy and whole-heartedness, to do all that her visions told her was God’s will, must have been born with an unusual reserve of natural willfulness.”<sup>11</sup>

*Tip for Choleric:*  
Make a  
determined act  
of your powerful  
will: I will become  
a saint!

Catherine used her strong will in the direction of cultivating meekness and patience. Once a Choleric’s will is turned and tuned to God’s will, he or she can do great things because of this “natural willfulness” and tenacious

<sup>9</sup> Gilli, *The Month of Mary*, preface.

<sup>10</sup> Saint Catherine of Siena (1347–1380).

<sup>11</sup> Undset, *Catherine of Siena*, 17.



concentration on the final goal. The Choleric can and will conquer his shortcomings once he is convinced of their existence—sometimes that is the tricky part. Whether they are courting their future spouse or starting a company, whether they are scrubbing the floor or starting a Catholic youth group, Choleric are almost always successful once they set their mind to something.

Marcelle Auclair describes St. Teresa of Ávila's work to overcome her Choleric-Sanguine weaknesses: "She knew for the future that feelings, desires, wishes, attitudes, that which can form our character and yet is nothing but a collection of tendencies which practice and habit can overcome or develop, are under the control of the will. God created man free to choose perfection." Then she quotes the saint herself as saying, "This act of the will (*determinacion* in her native Spanish) is what He wants."<sup>12</sup>

*Tip for all  
Temperaments:  
Understanding  
our temperament  
and our weaknesses  
is the first step.  
Then use them as  
a springboard to  
"choose perfection,"  
as Marcelle  
Auclair says, and  
work toward it.*

Understanding our temperament and our weaknesses is the first step. The next step is to realize that our temperament is not an *excuse* but a springboard. Beginning with a knowledge of these strengths and these weaknesses, we can "choose perfection," as Marcelle Auclair wrote above, and work toward it.

When we study the life and words of Saint Francis de Sales, the temperament we see *least* in him is Choleric. We see the friendliness of the Sanguine, the unflappability of the Phlegmatic, and the intuition and empathy of the

<sup>12</sup> Auclair, *Saint Teresa of Avila*, 35. Saint Teresa of Ávila was born in 1515 and died in 1582.

Melancholic. He desires perfection like a Melancholic, he finds peace like a Phlegmatic, and he loves like a Sanguine.

The only Choleric quality we still see in the Bishop of Geneva is his clinging to the objective despite all odds. He made a choice of will (Teresa's *determinacion*) and stuck to it even if it meant crushing his natural tendencies—*especially* if it meant crushing his natural tendencies—to become what God wanted him to be. His personal plans for sanctity sound like someone with a strong dose of both Choleric and Melancholic. For instance, he wrote out what he was going to do if this or that happened, what he would say or do if he met this difficult person, and what he would do if he encountered this or that particular temptation. Choleric are good at making plans, and Melancholics are good at details.

St. Francis de Sales was gentle and kind to all. To find Christian perfection, the saint built on his innate tendencies. He cultivated the strengths of the Sanguine, like sweetness, warmth, and affability, and those of the Phlegmatic, like calmness, patience, and gentleness. Father Hock, in his book, *The Four Temperaments*, even opines that this saint was Sanguine by nature.<sup>13</sup>

The fact that Francis made lists of specific ways to avoid imperfections, faults and sins, and lists of possible temptations and ways to avoid them leads us to think that he was more Melancholic. We will have to ask Bishop de Sales when we get to Heaven. The fact remains that he worked so hard at the strengths of the four temperaments, and battled so bravely against the weaknesses, that he provides an excellent

---

<sup>13</sup> Hock, *The Four Temperaments*, 11.

example of self-mastery to all of us, no matter what our temperament might be.

When he co-founded the Order of the Visitation with St. Jane Frances de Chantal,<sup>14</sup> he made meekness its heart. Monseigneur Bougaud, in his wondrous two-volume work, *St. Chantal and the Foundation of the Visitation*, compares the Visitation nuns with two other major orders popular in the 17th century. He talks about the charity of St. Vincent de Paul's<sup>15</sup> Daughters of Charity, and the spirit of penance of the Carmelites, as reformed by St. Teresa of Ávila. St. Francis and St. Jane, however, gave the Visitandines a different focal point.

“The daughter of St. Francis de Sales,” writes Monseigneur Bougaud, “immolates herself by interior sacrifice, and by her attention to maintaining herself recollected, meek, humble, amiable, and agreeable to all and at all times . . . Her distinctive characteristic is meekness.”<sup>16</sup>

Meekness is an attractive virtue. A person who never loses their temper often has many friends. “The patient man is better than the valiant: and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh cities” (Prov. 16:32). St. Vincent de Paul said that a meek superior is one who is obeyed. His or her good temper makes others want to follow and obey.

Our Lord showed His meekness time and again in His public life. When a Samaritan town would not let Him enter, James and John, the “Sons of Thunder,” (Mark 3:17)

---

<sup>14</sup> Saint Jane Frances de Chantal (1572–1641).

<sup>15</sup> Saint Vincent de Paul (1581–1660).

<sup>16</sup> Bougaud, *St. Chantal and the Foundation*, vol. 1, 37.

asked Him, “Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them?” (Luke 9:54).

But He turned and rebuked them, saying, “You know not of what spirit you are. The Son of man came not to destroy souls, but to save” (Luke 9:55–56). Who has more authority than Jesus Christ? And yet He was meek. Many Choleric in authority have a tendency to “lord it over” others. Let us learn from the meek Savior and His followers how to treat others.

St. Alphonsus de Ligouri<sup>17</sup> often talks about and quotes St. Francis de Sales. He writes: “St. Francis of Sales says that nothing edifies our neighbor so much as meekness in our conduct. Hence everything in him partook of this beautiful virtue; his air, his words, his manners, all was meekness . . . If he was obliged in conscience to refuse any favor, he accompanied the refusal with so much charity, that the unsuccessful applicant went away satisfied.”<sup>18</sup>

*Tip for Choleric:*  
Who has more authority than Jesus Christ? Yet He was meek. Let us learn from Him and His followers how to treat others.

St. Alphonsus goes on to talk about how the best corrections (of a supervisor to an employee, a superior to a nun or priest, a parent to a teenager, etc.) are made with meekness. He says that St. Vincent de Paul only made three “severe reprimands” in his life, and he regretted them, because they were unsuccessful. Meekness has a much greater success rate in achieving the goal of correcting someone and guiding their behavior in a new direction.

We talked about “lighting the fire” in the introduction, but there is more than one type of fire. St. Alphonsus writes,

<sup>17</sup> Saint Alphonsus de Ligouri (1696–1787).

<sup>18</sup> de Ligouri, *Love of Our Lord*, 54.

“St. Bernard<sup>19</sup> observes, that there are some who are affable and meek only as long as things go on according to their wishes; but if a contradiction, or a cross befall them, they are immediately inflamed, and emit smoke like Mount Vesuvius; they resemble burning coals, that are concealed under ashes.”<sup>20</sup> A man or a woman such as St. Bernard describes quite literally “blows their top” like a volcanic eruption. Though a person of any temperament can have a temper, Choleric are prone to this. Therefore, wise and prudent Choleric will cultivate meekness.

“The heart of the wise shall instruct his mouth; and shall add grace to his lips. Well ordered words are as a honeycomb: sweet to the soul, and health to the bones” (Prov. 16:23–24).

As we said, meekness attracts people. St. Gregory Nazianzen<sup>21</sup> said that his contemporary St. Athanasius<sup>22</sup> was a magnet to the hesitant. These words can, with equal accuracy, be applied to St. Francis de Sales. He converted tens of thousands of Calvinists back to the Catholic Faith. He drew souls with his magnetic personality. Want to know his secret? In addition to his meekness, he truly loved the souls of others and wanted to help them. They felt this and were imperceptibly pulled toward him and what he taught.

By the end of his life, he had become what we all aspire to be, a reflection of his Master, Our Lord Jesus Christ. St. Vincent de Paul, a contemporary of St. Francis who knew him in life, said “that he never knew any man more meek;

---

<sup>19</sup> Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153).

<sup>20</sup> de Ligouri, 58–59.

<sup>21</sup> Saint Gregory Nazianzen (329–390 AD).

<sup>22</sup> Saint Athanasius (c. 296–373 AD).

and added, that he seemed to find him the living image of the meekness of our Savior.”<sup>23</sup>

Katherine F. Mullany, in her short work, *Miriam of Magdala: a Study*, draws a vivid word picture of the people witnessing Our Lord’s death on Calvary and how they felt about Him. Just as St. Vincent de Paul was reminded of Our Lord’s love and gentleness by St. Francis de Sales, we are reminded of what grace and effort wrought in Francis’s soul by meditating on this scene of Our Lord’s life. Thus, we learn from the lives of the saints. They are like rainbow reflections from the sparkling crystal of Our Lord’s own life. Each saint reflects a different color of the prism.

Here is Katherine Mullany’s reflection on how the disciples on Calvary saw Him: “[He had been] the sweetest influence their lives had ever experienced; the consoler of their sorrows; the healer of all their ills. His preaching had lifted their souls heavenwards in holy aspirations; His teaching had softened hearts, and sweetened minds, and smoothed away difficulties between friends. Never had His Lips uttered aught but kindly words; never were His deeds but those of love and mercy. In His footsteps sprang up blessings for those who followed Him. His time was given to them without limit, and none there were, who appealed to Him for help in vain.”<sup>24</sup>

Think of the Choleric you know, or perhaps of the Choleric side of your own temperament. Can you imagine these

*Tip for All  
Temperaments:  
We learn from the  
lives of the saints.  
They are like  
rainbow reflections  
from the sparkling  
crystal of Our  
Lord’s own life.  
Each saint reflects  
a different color of  
the prism.*

<sup>23</sup> de Ligouri, 55.

<sup>24</sup> Mullany, *Miriam of Magdala*, 88.

words being applied to the Choleric you know? Or to yourself? Ah, but God's grace can work great wonders in a soul, if we are willing to work with His grace and overcome our weaknesses and unworthy tendencies!

Twenty-five years after the death of St. Francis de Sales, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque<sup>25</sup> was born. This well-known visionary who was privileged to see the Sacred Heart of Jesus and receive the revelation of the First Fridays, became a Visitation nun, and therefore a spiritual daughter of St. Francis de Sales. Father Jean Croiset, SJ (1656–1738), wrote a small introductory biography of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque in his spiritual classic *The Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ*. Like the sainted founder of her order, she learned to control and harness her passions.

“Her meekness and evenness of temper were all the more admirable because they did not proceed from her natural disposition;” wrote Father Croiset. “She had acquired this admirable tranquility of soul by constant vigilance over herself, by constant interior mortification, and especially by continuous union with God; and grace elevated her to such a high degree of peace and evenness of spirit that she was proof against all the vicissitudes and occupations of life.”<sup>26</sup>

It is easy to think that if we could just keep from blowing our top, we would be showing perfect meekness. Remember, meekness is neither mousiness nor inactivity. Meekness is the strong virtue that is opposed to anger.

Our Lord said, “Learn of me, because I am meek, and humble of heart” (Matt. 11:29). Our Lord certainly wasn't a weak

---

<sup>25</sup> Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647–1690).

<sup>26</sup> Croiset, *Devotion to the Sacred Heart*, 7.

man, a doormat, or a spineless sissy. And neither were any of the saints. Meekness, especially in a Choleric, is the result of untiring effort and intrepid courage in the face of battling the greatest enemy of all—our own self-love and failings. Simply being quiet when we want to rant and rage is not enough, either. Seething inside while not vocalizing it is not true meekness.

“The first degree of the virtue of meekness is to give no outward token of anger, by sign, by word, or by action,” wrote Father Collins in 1880.<sup>27</sup>

This is not a mastery of meekness; it is merely the first step. Father Collins continues, “The second degree [of meekness] is to hold one’s spirit in sweet peace within when thwarted . . . and the third degree is to rejoice at tribulations, and to find in crosses a sweet hidden manna.”<sup>28</sup>

*Tip for Choleric:*  
Comprehend and  
cultivate true  
meekness.

St. Francis de Sales accomplished this third degree of meekness. He became so peaceful and calm amid frustrations and disappointments that people felt they had to ask, “Aren’t you going to tell him off?” That is when he explained that it had taken him years to be able to greet such occasions with tranquility, and he was not about to “blow it” now.

Francis often told his spiritual children, “Ask for nothing, refuse nothing.”<sup>29</sup> This spirit of maintaining peace of soul, and accepting what God sends in His perfect providence and wisdom, gave the two saints—Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal—and their disciples an enviable tranquility.

<sup>27</sup> Collins, *Heaven Opened*, 176.

<sup>28</sup> Collins, 176.

<sup>29</sup> Bougaud, *St. Chantal and the Foundation*, vol. 2, 168.



God often uses peace of soul to communicate with us. In this crazy world, filled with distractions and noise, with endless chatter in our own heads and the din of the electronics which surround us and enter our minds via electronic wireless devices imbedded in our ears, sometimes we forget the importance of slowing down to listen.

Listen.

To what?

To God.

Are we restless? Are we in inner turmoil?

The answer is meditation with the one true God. The devil does not want us to examine the state of our soul, heart, and mind. He wants us to keep a mad, restless, careening pace through life. Then, if we do crave peace and quiet, some people turn to something like yoga or zen that empties the intellect and makes the mind blank, but that has been known to invite the devil to enter and possess that space. “And when an unclean spirit is gone out of a man he walketh through dry places seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith: I will return into my house from whence I came out. And coming he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then he goeth, and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is made worse than the first. So shall it be also to this wicked generation” (Matt. 12:43–45).

So instead of emptying our souls and making them blank, let us fill our hearts with God. Each time we do an act of love

*Tip for All  
Temperaments:  
True Catholic  
meditation fills  
the soul with  
the fragrant  
sweetness of God,  
thoughts of God,  
movements of  
love for God, and  
conversation with  
God. This kind of  
meditation brings  
deep peace and  
tranquility.*

while in the state of sanctifying grace (e.g., saying a prayer, attending Mass, going to Confession, showing kindness to someone, fulfilling our daily duties for His glory), we add drops of perfume to our soul. True Catholic meditation fills the soul with the fragrant sweetness of God, thoughts of God, movements of love for God, and conversation with God. This kind of meditation brings deep peace and tranquility.

Now and again, we should take inventory of our internal supplies. Are we depleted by sins, faults, and complaints? Are we collecting bits of honey drop by drop to fill up our soul with His love and His grace, like St. Francis de Sales? If we do, we will find peace: a little taste of the peace of the hereafter—forever with Him.

We should not permit the devil to make so much noise that we cannot grasp the truth. Sometimes he just makes a lot of disturbance and distraction and distress just for the heck of it, and our soul is doing just fine! (Notice how all those “d” words begin with the same letter as “devil.”) A good spiritual director and a devout Ignatian retreat can help us to tell the difference.

The devil brings sadness, despair, negativity, dissatisfaction, and irritation wherever he goes. He cannot help himself. Those emotions linger around him like a cloud of acrid smoke. When we feel these negative feelings, whether it is the sadness and depression that Melancholics are prone to, or the anger and hostility that Choleric are prone to, let us turn to God instead.

The peace, quiet, and sweet contentment to be found in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in a Traditional Catholic Church is something the devil hates. The endless chatter,

raucous music, and handshaking of more modern ceremonies do not offer this silence. Maybe that is why the lines for the Sacrament of Penance are so short these days. No one has a quiet moment (even in church) to examine one's soul.

Some believe that meditation is only for mystics, those who have ecstasies, raptures, and who are “caught up to the third heaven,” like St. Paul (2 Cor. 12:2). Our friend, the Choleric Saint Teresa of Ávila, tells us that it is not only accessible but necessary.

*Tip for Choleric:*  
Find inner peace through Catholic meditation, spiritual direction, and if possible, a retreat.

“She assures us,” writes St. Alphonsus, “That the reason why the devil makes such efforts to withdraw our souls from meditation, is because he knows that he has no chance of gaining the soul which perseveres in this holy exercise.”<sup>30</sup>

St. Alphonsus, St. Ignatius,<sup>31</sup> St. Francis de Sales, and St. Teresa, all offer step-by-step instructions on how to achieve meditation on the things of God. Though it takes practice, it is not as hard as it sounds. St. Alphonsus admonishes, “He who does not meditate on eternal truths cannot, without a miracle, lead a Christian life, because, without meditation, he is without light, and walks in darkness.”<sup>32</sup> There is that image of fire again. Fire brings warmth and light. “My heart grew hot within me: and in my meditation a fire shall flame out” (Ps. 38:4). Instead of a flaming volcano of rage, let us enkindle the fire of love of God through meditation.

<sup>30</sup> de Ligouri, *The Love of Our Lord*, 80.

<sup>31</sup> Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556).

<sup>32</sup> de Ligouri, 79.

St. Francis de Sales wrote his famous *Introduction to the Devout Life* specifically for laypeople. In it, he describes the process of meditation. He begins by instructing us to place ourselves in the Presence of God mentally. We can think of Him as present everywhere, as present specifically in our soul, in His humanity looking down from Heaven, or as a man standing beside us. The best method for you is whichever of these moves your heart the most.

The next step, St. Francis tells us, is to call upon God with “short, burning words.”<sup>33</sup> “Oh God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Oh my Lord, I love Thee.” The Psalms are full of such words of love and fervor. The saint also suggests that we call upon Our Lady and the angels and saints to help us in our meditation, especially those who are connected to the topic of our meditation that day.

Step three is to begin thinking about the subject you have chosen. Are you drawn to the mystery of Christmas—God born in a stable for love of you? Is it more appealing to you to think of the Savior treading the dusty roads of the Holy Land on His tired sandaled feet, preaching and healing the multitudes? Maybe you are more moved to contemplate His silent, obscure life, when He spent thirty years learning a carpenter’s trade and not revealing His true identity. Perhaps the earth-quaking event of the Resurrection inspires your heart with faith and joy. Whatever you choose, imagine the mystery.

St. Francis says, “By means of the imagination we confine our mind within the mystery on which we meditate, that it may not ramble to and fro, just as we shut up a bird in a cage

---

<sup>33</sup> de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, 82.

or tie a hawk by his leash so that he may rest on the hand.”<sup>34</sup> Using our imagination to picture Our Lord or His Mother in some mystery like this helps us to concentrate.

The fourth step is to understand what we are seeing in our imagination. Dwell on it; think about it; place yourself there. Absorb what you are seeing.

The fifth step is to move our hearts toward what God wants us to learn from this. “Yet you must not dwell upon these general reflections,” says St. Francis, “without determining to reduce them to special and particular resolutions for your own correction and amendment.”<sup>35</sup> Basically, in lay terms, “Now what are you going to do about it?” Christ died on the Cross for you: What are you going to do about it?

Finally, we make acts of thanksgiving, offering, and supplication. We’ve made our resolutions, now we finish with a short vocal prayer.

“Besides all of this,” he concludes, “You must gather a little devotional bouquet. This is what I mean. Those who have been walking in a beautiful garden do not willingly depart without gathering in their hands four or five flowers to smell and keep for the rest of the day. Thus ought we . . . to select one or two or three of those points in which we have found most relish and which are most proper for our advancement, to think frequently on them, and to smell them spiritually during the course of the day.”<sup>36</sup>

The habit of daily meditation will do wonders for our meekness and peace of soul. Physical exercise on a regular

---

<sup>34</sup> de Sales, 83.

<sup>35</sup> de Sales, 85.

<sup>36</sup> de Sales, 86.

basis, in the temporal realm, keeps us strong in our bodies. Meditation with God makes our souls strong in the spiritual life and brings us peace.

True peace cannot coexist with evil. Peace and love, contrary to the 1960s moral revolution, do not equal tolerance of the devil, his works, and his pomps. We are the Church Militant. Often, the battle will rage around us externally, but we seek true peace of the soul. Storms of persecution, suffering, misunderstandings, sickness, death, worry, and anxiety will blow; however, we can look inward and focus on a well-formed conscience, solid principles of Catholic teaching, and wise, prudent spiritual direction from a Traditional Catholic priest.

When I say that storms and battles will rage around us, I do not mean that we should conflict with others through our own fault. Many Catholics nowadays go around with their “dukes up” looking for an argument or a fight. The saints did not seek conflict. We cannot convert people to the one true Faith by hitting them over the head with it. Let us share joyfully and peacefully when we have the opportunity, but not cause rancor, distrust, and conflict between Catholics and non-Catholics, and between Catholics and Catholics.

Even among Catholics, we are not all on the same page at the same time. Maybe you can see clearly the imprudence, vanity, or worldliness of your Catholic neighbor, but it does not necessarily mean that it is your job to tell him so. We should only admonish the erring when we have peace of soul ourselves, like Francis de Sales did.

*Tip for All  
Temperaments:  
We cannot guide  
a soul until we  
love that soul, and  
until that soul  
knows that and  
feels loved by us.*

One time, he attended a sermon in which the priest was scolding because more people had not come. St. Francis said afterward the equivalent of, “What was he yelling at us for? We were there. Did he want us to split ourselves into pieces to fill the empty pews?”<sup>37</sup> In his witty way, he was teasing that riding, berating, and scolding souls does not appeal to them and help them on the way to sanctity. He advised others that we cannot guide a soul until we love that soul, and until that soul *knows* that and *feels* loved by us.

*Tip for Choleric:*  
We should only admonish the erring when we have peace of soul ourselves, like Francis de Sales did.

If we have faults and shortcomings, (which of course, we do, there is no doubt about that), how do we want others to show *us* the error of our ways? Do we want them to criticize us or tear us down? No, we want them to show that they care about our well-being by loving us, praying for us, and then only saying something at a time that we are open to hear it and ready to change. When our hearts are filled with Christ’s own peace and love, and we feel that the person who is speaking truly cares about us, then we can be amenable to their input.

Let us seek the red rose of true charity, and the white rose of God’s peace of soul, instead of sticky-sweet, cheap drug-store perfume that is supposed to smell like roses. None of that cheap, fake stuff for us.

Let us speak kindly and patiently to others like St. Francis de Sales, rather than charging around on our high horses, telling everyone what they are doing wrong and how they ought to fix it. Otherwise, we may find ourselves, like Saint Paul, being “knocked off our high horse.”

---

<sup>37</sup> See Roche, *A Bedside Book of Saints*, 75.