

# ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

## SIGNATURE SET

VOLUME I

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE DEVOUT LIFE

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# CHAPTER ONE

## *TRUE DEVOTION DESCRIBED*

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**Y**OU aim at true devotion, my dear Philothea, because, as a Christian, you know how acceptable it is to the Divine Majesty. But inasmuch as trifling errors at the outset of any undertaking are wont to increase rapidly as we advance, frequently becoming almost irreparable, it is needful that, first of all, you should ascertain wherein lies the virtue of devotion; for there are many counterfeits, but only one true devotion; and, therefore, if you do not find that which is real, you will but deceive yourself, and vainly pursue an idle, superstitious form.

Aurelius gave to all his works of art the countenance of the women he loved; and so every one colors his devotion according to his tastes and inclinations. One is given to fasting, and whilst he fasts he holds himself to be devout, although his heart is full of bitterness; and whilst he will not touch his lips with wine, nor even with water for abstinence' sake, he scruples not to sully them with his neighbor's blood in slander and calumny. Another would fain be devout because he daily repeats many prayers, although, at the same time, he gives way to angry, proud, and injurious language amongst his servants or associates. Another willingly opens his purse to give alms to the poor, but he cannot open his heart to forgive his enemies.

Another forgives his enemies, but only force obliges him to do justice to his creditors. Such men may pass for devout, but they are not really so.

When the messengers of Saul sought David, they found only an image in his bed, which, being dressed by Michol in David's garments, deceived them so that they imagined it to be David himself. Thus many persons clothe themselves with a garb of external devotion, and the world believes them to be really devout and spiritual, whilst in truth they are mere statues or phantasms of devotion.

True, living devotion, my Philothea, implies the love of God. Indeed it is itself a true love of Him in the highest form, for whereas divine love enlightening our soul is called Grace, and makes us pleasing in His sight; so giving us power to do good, it is called Charity; and when it reaches that point of perfection wherein it not only causes us to do good, but to do it earnestly, frequently, and readily, then it is called Devotion. The ostrich never flies, the common fowl flies but seldom, and then heavily and near the ground; but the swallow, the dove, and the eagle are ever on the wing, they fly far and easily. Even so sinners rise not to God, but always grovel on the earth in pursuing earthly things; well-meaning people who are as yet not truly devout, mount up to God in good works, but rarely, slowly, and heavily; whilst the devout fly to Him perpetually, soaring lightly. In short, devotion is spiritual agility and vivacity, by means of which charity works in us, or we in her, with love and readiness; and as charity leads us to obey and fulfill all God's commandments, so devotion leads us to obey them with promptitude and diligence. Therefore no one who fails to observe all these commandments can be truly virtuous or

devout, since to that end he must have charity, and further, thorough readiness and eagerness to fulfill the laws of charity.

And as devotion consists in perfect charity, so it not only makes us active, ready, and diligent in keeping God's commandments, but furthermore it stimulates us to the eager and loving performance of all the good works we can attain unto, even such as are not enjoined us, but only suggested or counseled. Even as a man just recovered from an illness walks on his journey only as far as is absolutely necessary, with pain and difficulty, so the repentant sinner treads in God's ways heavily and slowly until, having attained the grace of devotion, he resembles the healthy and light-hearted traveler, who not only proceeds on his way, but runs, and leaps with joy in the way of God's commandments, hastening into the paths of His heavenly counsels and inspirations. In truth, charity and devotion differ no further than flame and fire, for charity is a spiritual fire which when it flames brightly, becomes devotion; and devotion adds to the fire of charity a flame which renders it ready, active, and diligent, not only in keeping His commandments, but in carrying out His heavenly inspirations and counsels of perfection.

# ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

## SIGNATURE SET

VOLUME II

CONSOLING THOUGHTS

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# CHAPTER ONE

## *THE INCLINATION GOD HAS TO DO US GOOD*

---

AS SOON as man thinks attentively on the Divinity, he perceives a certain sweet emotion of heart which testifies that God is the God of the human heart; and never does our understanding experience more pleasure than in this thought of the Divinity, the least knowledge of which, as the prince of the philosophers says, is more precious than the greatest of all things else: as the least ray of the sun is brighter than the brightest of the moon or of the stars, yea, is more luminous than the moon and stars together. And if any accident surprises our heart, immediately it has recourse to the Divinity, acknowledging that when the world looks dark, It alone is good, and when danger threatens, It alone can save and preserve.

This pleasure, this confidence, which the human heart naturally takes in God, can only proceed from the conformity that exists between the Divine Goodness and the soul. There is a great, but secret, resemblance between them—a resemblance that cannot be denied, yet cannot be understood. We are created to the image of God, we have a close connection with His Divine Majesty.

Besides this conformity, there is a constant intercourse between God and man for their reciprocal perfection. Not that God can receive any perfection from man, but because, as man can be perfected only by the Divine Goodness, so the Divine Goodness can nowhere outside of itself be so well displayed as in regard to our humanity. The one has great need and capacity to receive, the other great abundance and inclination to bestow. Nothing is more suited to indigence than affluence; and the kinder affluence is, the stronger its inclination to give. The more needy indigence is, the more eager it is to be satiated. The meeting, then, of affluence and indigence is sweet and happy; and we could scarcely say which should enjoy the more contentment, abundance to be communicated, or deficiency to be filled, had not Our Lord told us that it is a more blessed thing to give than to receive. But where there is more of happiness, there is more of satisfaction; the Divine Goodness, then, has greater pleasure in giving its graces, than we have in receiving them.

Mothers have sometimes their paps so full that they cannot refrain from presenting them to an infant; and while one takes the breast with avidity, the other yields it yet more willingly; the infant drinking, pressed by its necessity, and the mother supplying drink, pressed by her fecundity.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "To make you better understand by sound doctrine how immense is the mercy of Our Lord, I beg you to consider a truth which I have taken from Tertullian. This great man teaches us that God began His works by an outpouring of His goodness on all His creatures, and that His first inclination is to do us good. And indeed, it appears to me that the reason is quite evident; for to know well what the first inclination is, we must select that which should be the most natural, inasmuch as nature is the root of all. But is there anything more natural in our God, than to enrich us with the profusion of His graces?"

Thus our deficiency has need of the divine abundance through the misery of its dearth, but the divine affluence has no need of our indigence, unless through the perfection of its goodness: a goodness which, nevertheless, does not become better by being communicated, for it acquires nothing by expending itself; but our indigence would remain failing, if the abundance of the Divine Goodness did not succor it.

Has not our soul then—considering that nothing can perfectly content it, that its capacity cannot be filled by anything in this world, that its understanding has an infinite longing after more extensive knowledge, and its will an insatiable desire to find and love what is good—has it not reason to exclaim: Ah! I am not made for this world! There is some sovereign good on which I depend, some infinite Creator who has placed within me this boundless desire of knowing and this hunger which cannot be satisfied. It is therefore necessary that I should tend forward and stretch out towards Him in order to be united to His goodness, to which I belong. Such is the conformity that we have with God.

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“As a fountain sends out its waters naturally, as the sun sends forth its rays naturally, so God does good naturally: being good and abounding in riches by His natural condition, He should also be by nature liberal and beneficent. When He punishes you, O wicked man! The reason is not in Himself; He does not wish that any person should perish; it is your malice, your ingratitude, that draws down His indignation upon your head.”—*Bossuet*.



**ST. FRANCIS DE SALES**  
SIGNATURE SET

VOLUME III

SERMONS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

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# CHAPTER ONE

## *THE GOAL OF PRAYER*

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*Sermon for the Third Sunday of Lent, given on March 22, 1615, concerning the usefulness and necessity of prayer, the operations of the understanding, meditation, petitions, contemplation, and the goal of prayer.*

**S**T. Bernard—whose memory is dear to those who have to speak on prayer—in writing to a bishop, advised him that all that was necessary for him was to speak well (meaning to instruct, to discourse); then to do well in giving good example; and finally, to devote himself to prayer. And we, addressing this to all Christians, shall dwell upon the third point, which is prayer.

First, let us remark in passing that, although we condemn certain heretics of our time who hold that prayer is useless, we nevertheless do not hold with other heretics that it alone suffices for our justification. We say simply that it is so useful and necessary that without it we could not come to any good, seeing that by means of prayer we are shown how to perform all our actions well.

I have therefore consented to the desire which urges me to speak of prayer, even though it is not my intention to explain

every aspect of it because we learn it more by experience than by being taught. Moreover, it matters little to know the kind of prayer. Actually, I would prefer that you never ask the name or the kind of prayer you are experiencing because, as St. Antony says, that prayer is imperfect in which one is aware that one is praying. Also, prayer which one makes without knowing how one is doing it, and without reflecting on what one is asking for, shows clearly that such a soul is very much occupied with God and that, consequently, this prayer is excellent.

We shall treat, then, on the following four Sundays, of the final cause of prayer; of its efficient cause; of that which properly should not be called the "material cause," but rather the "object" of prayer; and of the effective cause of prayer itself. For now, I shall speak only of its final cause. But before entering upon the subject of prayer, I must say three or four little things that it is well to know.

Four operations pertain to our understanding: simple thought, study, meditation, and contemplation. Simple thought occurs when we go running over a great number of things, without any aim, as do flies that rest upon flowers, not seeking to extract any juice from them, but resting there only because they happen upon them. So it is with our understanding, passing from one thought to another. Even if these thoughts be of God, if they have no aim, far from being profitable, they are useless and detrimental and are a great obstacle to prayer.

Another operation of our understanding is study, and this takes place when we consider things only to know them, to understand them thoroughly or to be able to speak correctly of them, without having any other object than to fill our memory. In this we resemble beetles which settle upon the roses for no

other end than to fill their stomachs and satiate themselves. Now, of these two operations of our understanding we shall speak no more, because they are not to our purpose.

Let us come to meditation. To know what meditation is, it is necessary to understand the words of King Hezekiah when the sentence of death was pronounced upon him, which was afterward revoked on account of his repentance. "I utter shrill cries," he said, "like a swallow," and "I moan like a dove,"<sup>1</sup> in the height of my sorrow. [Cf. *Is.* 38:14]. He meant to say: When the young swallow is all alone and its mother has gone in search of the herb called "celandine" in order to help it recover its sight, it cries, it pips, since it does not feel its mother near and because it does not see at all. So I, having lost my mother, which is grace, and seeing no one come to my aid, "I utter shrill cries." But he adds, "I moan like a dove." We must know that all birds are accustomed to open their beaks when they sing or chirp, except the dove, who makes her little song or cooing sound whilst holding her breath—and it is through the movement up and down which she makes of it, without letting it escape, that she produces her song. In like manner, meditation is made when we fix our understanding on a mystery from which we mean to draw good affections, for if we did not have this intention it would no longer be meditation, but study. Meditation is made, then, to move the affections, and particularly that of love. Indeed, meditation is the mother of the love of God and contemplation is the daughter of the love of God.

But between meditation and contemplation there is the petition which is made when, after having considered the

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<sup>1</sup> The old French for "I moan" is "mediteray," which St. Francis de Sales is using as a pun for "meditate."



goodness of Our Lord, His infinite love, His omnipotence, we become confident enough to ask for and entreat Him to give us what we desire. Now there are three kinds of petition, each of which is made differently: The first is made by justice, the second is made by authority, and the third is made by grace.

The petition which is made by justice cannot be called “prayer,” although we use this word, because in a petition of justice we ask for a thing which is due to us. A petition which is made by authority ought not be called “prayer” either; for as soon as someone who has great authority over us—such as a parent, a lord or a master—uses the word “please,”<sup>2</sup> we say immediately to him, “You can command,” or “Your ‘please’ serves as my command.” But true prayer is that which is made by grace, i.e., when we ask for something which is not due to us at all, and when we ask it of someone who is far superior to us, as God is.

The fourth operation of our understanding is contemplation, which is nothing other than taking delight in the goodness of Him whom we have learned to know in meditation and whom we have learned to love by means of this knowledge. This delight will be our happiness in Heaven above.

We must now speak of the final cause [that is, the goal] of prayer. We ought to know in the first place that all things have been created for prayer, and that when God created angels and men, He did so that they might praise Him eternally in Heaven above, even though this is the last thing that we shall do—if that can be called “last” which is eternal. To understand this better we will say this: When we wish to make something

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<sup>2</sup> Francis de Sales is capitalizing on the fact that in the French language “please,” “pray” and “prayer” are related.

we always look first to the end [or purpose], rather than to the work itself. For example, if we are to build a church and we are asked why we are building it, we will respond that it is so that we can retire there and sing the praises of God; nevertheless, this will be the last thing that we shall do. Another example: If you enter the apartment of a prince, you will see there an aviary of several little birds which are in a brightly colored and highly embellished cage. And if you want to know the end for which they have been placed there, it is to give pleasure to their master. If you look into another place, you will see there sparrow hawks, falcons and such birds of prey which have been hooded; these latter are for catching the partridge and other birds to delicately nourish the prince. But God, who is in no way carnivorous, does not keep birds of prey, but only the little birds which are enclosed in the aviary and destined to please Him. These little birds represent monks and nuns who have voluntarily enclosed themselves in monasteries that they may chant the praises of their God. So their principal exercise ought to be prayer and obedience to that saying which Our Lord gives in the Gospel: "Pray always." [*Lk.* 18:1].

The early Christians who had been trained by St. Mark the Evangelist were so assiduous in prayer that many of the ancient Fathers called them "suppliants," and others named them "physicians," because by means of prayer they found the remedy for all their ills. They also named them "monks," because they were so united; indeed, the name "monk" means "single." Pagan philosophers said that man is an uprooted tree, from which we can conclude how necessary prayer is for man, since if a tree does not have sufficient earth to cover its roots it cannot live; neither can a man live who does not give special attention to heavenly things. Now prayer, according to most

of the Fathers, is nothing other than a raising of the mind to heavenly things; others say that it is a petition; but the two opinions are not at all opposed, for while raising our mind to God, we can ask Him for what seems necessary.

The principal petition which we ought to make to God is that of union of our wills with His, and the final cause of prayer lies in desiring only God. Accordingly, all perfection is contained therein, as Brother Giles, the companion of St. Francis [of Assisi], said when a certain person asked him what he could do in order to be perfect very soon. "Give," he replied, "one to One." That is to say, you have only one soul, and there is only one God; give your soul to Him and He will give Himself to you. The final cause of prayer, then, ought not to be to desire those tendernesses and consolations which Our Lord sometimes gives, since union does not consist in that, but rather in conforming to the will of God.

**ST. FRANCIS DE SALES**  
SIGNATURE SET

VOLUME IV

THE CATHOLIC CONTROVERSY

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## CHAPTER ONE

### *THE LACK OF MISSION IN THE MINISTERS OF THE NEW PRETENDED CHURCH LEAVES BOTH THEM AND THEIR FOLLOWERS WITHOUT EXCUSE.*

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FIRST, then, your ministers had not the conditions required for the position which they sought to maintain, and the enterprize which they undertook. Wherefore they are inexcusable, and you yourselves also, who knew and still know or ought to know this defect in them, have done very wrong in receiving them under such colors. The office they claimed was that of ambassadors of Jesus Christ Our Lord; the affair they undertook was to declare a formal divorce between Our Lord and the ancient Church his spouse, to arrange and conclude by words of present consent, as lawful procurators, a second and new marriage with this young madam, of better grace, said they, and more seemly than the other. For in effect, to stand up as preacher of God's Word and pastor of souls—what is it but to call oneself ambassador and legate of Our Lord, according to that of the Apostle:<sup>1</sup> *We are therefore ambassadors for Christ?* And to say that the whole of Christendom has failed, that the whole Church has erred, and all truth disappeared—what is this but to say that Our Lord has abandoned his Church, has

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. v. 20.

broken the sacred tie of marriage he had contracted with her? And to put forward a new Church—is it not to attempt to thrust upon this sacred and holy Husband a second wife? This is what the ministers of the pretended church have undertaken; this is what they boast of having done; this has been the aim of their discourses, their designs, their writings. But what an injustice have you not committed in believing them? How did you come to take their word so simply? How did you so lightly give them credit?

To be legates and ambassadors they should have been sent, they should have had letters of credit from him whom they boasted of being sent by. The affairs were of the greatest importance, for there was question of disturbing the whole Church. The persons who undertook them were extraordinaries of mean quality and private persons, while the ordinary pastors were men of mark, and of most ancient and acknowledged reputation, who contradicted them and protested that these extraordinaries had no charge nor commandment of the Master. Tell me, what business had you to hear them and believe them without having any assurance of their commission and of the approval of Our Lord, whose legates they called themselves? In a word, you have no justification for having quitted that ancient Church in which you were baptized, on the faith of preachers who had no legitimate mission from the Master.

Now you cannot be ignorant that they neither had, nor have, in any way at all, this mission. For if Our Lord had sent them, it would have been either mediately or immediately. We say mission is given mediately when we are sent by one who has from God the power of sending, according to the order which he has appointed in his Church, and such was the mission of S. Denis into France by Clement and of Timothy by S. Paul.



Immediate mission is when God himself commands and gives a charge, without the interposition of the ordinary authority which he has placed in the prelates and pastors of the Church: as S. Peter and the Apostles were sent, receiving from Our Lord's own mouth this commandment: *Go ye into the whole world, and preach the Gospel to every creature,*<sup>2</sup> and as Moses received his mission to Pharaoh and to the people of Israel. But neither in the one nor in the other way have your ministers any mission. How then have they undertaken to preach? *How shall they preach,* says the Apostle, *unless they be sent?*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mark xvi. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. x. 15.