

Sydney College of Divinity

**The Enlightenment – François de Sales and Jean-Pierre de Caussade**

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## SP412 – Studies in Historical Spirituality

## Assignment #2

**The Enlightenment – François de Sales and Jean-Pierre de Caussade**

This essay first gives an overview of a number of essential elements of the spiritual doctrine, or *spirituality*, emerging from François de Sales (1567-1622 A.D.) and Jean-Pierre de Caussade (1675-1751 A.D.). It then presents a selection of elements which hold relevance for contemporary Christian spirituality. Biographical details are included only where relevant to the essay theme.<sup>1</sup>

**François de Sales (1567-1622 A.D.)**

The main body of François' written work is *The Introduction to the Devout Life* (1608), *Treatise on the Love of God* (1616), and his posthumously published letters and talks, the *Conferences* (1629).<sup>2</sup> His abiding influence on spirituality came through preaching, spiritual writing, and the direction of souls<sup>3</sup> – his spirituality being indissolubly linked with the manner and method of his direction and writing.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The following background may be given for François de Sales: He was born at Savoy in 1567; studied under the Jesuits at Paris; received his doctorate in civil and canon law at Padua; ordained to the priesthood in 1593; consecrated Bishop of Geneva in 1602. (From *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition* by J. Aumann, footnoted elsewhere in the essay.)

For Jean-Pierre de Caussade: He was born near Toulouse in 1675; studied the humanities at the university of Cahors; entered the Jesuit novitiate at Toulouse; ordained a priest in 1704; became a doctor of theology in 1705. (From *The Study of Spirituality* edited by Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold, SJ.)

<sup>2</sup> Elisabeth Stopp, "François de Sales", in *The Study of Spirituality*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold, SJ (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 380.

<sup>3</sup> J. Aumann, "St Francis de Sales", in *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1980), 211.

<sup>4</sup> Stopp, "François de Sales", 380.

François' spirituality has *humanist underpinnings* due to his education in France and Italy.<sup>5</sup> He sees a glorious side to humankind in spite of its fallen nature, Christ having undertaken its redemption.<sup>6</sup> He thus chooses to focus on helping people to live by the joyful and consoling truths of the Christian faith and revelation.<sup>7</sup> His method of meditation, while similar to Ignatius, is gentler and more conscious of the goodness of the human soul, and as Wakefield notes, "less dominated by the thought of the awesome warfare against demonic powers".<sup>8</sup> Also, as Stopp concludes, he desires to help people to accept themselves and their circumstances and so make them independent of both – that is, abandoned to God's providence and his will.<sup>9</sup>

Although the doctrine behind François' spirituality is basic and not new (love holds primacy and is the way; Jesus Christ, meek and humble, is the model), his was a *spirituality for all*.<sup>10</sup> Spirituality – devotion, that is, holiness – is not something reserved for a spiritual élite<sup>11</sup> (within a monastic framework as it had been for centuries<sup>12</sup>), but is attainable to those who live in the world, in towns, households, and under ordinary circumstances.<sup>13</sup> According to Jeanne de Chantal (1572-1641 A.D.), an articulate witness to François' spirituality, he wrote and spoke in such a way that he was understood by the unlearned and yet not despised by the learned – "he used such precise and easily understood terms that he made people grasp very readily the most delicate and subtle truths of the spiritual life".<sup>14</sup> François himself states in his preface to the *Introduction* that

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 381.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> G. Wakefield, "Francis de Sales", in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. G. Wakefield (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), 158.

<sup>9</sup> Stopp, "François de Sales", 383.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 382.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 380.

<sup>12</sup> Aumann, "St Francis de Sales", 212.

<sup>13</sup> Wakefield, "Francis de Sales", 158.

<sup>14</sup> Elisabeth Stopp, trans., ed., *St Francis de Sales: A Testimony by St Chantal* (London: Faber, 1967) quoted in Elisabeth Stopp, "François de Sales", in *The Study of Spirituality*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainbright, and Edward Yarnold, SJ (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 380.

he wanted to give spiritual instruction to people in all walks of life and that spirituality was not impossible for them.<sup>15</sup> Stopp notes that “though the emphasis was new, the message itself was a return to the Gospels: a call to universal holiness”.<sup>16</sup>

Another characteristic of François’ spirituality is the clear distinction he makes between the role of feelings and that of the will in one’s love of God and neighbour.<sup>17</sup> Stopp states that “insight into this *distinction between the feelings and the will*, and the determination to live by it, releases positive energies for Christian action in a spirit of faith; it uncovers an unending well-spring of serenity of the kind that François himself radiated in his lifetime”.<sup>18</sup> In this context, François understood that spirituality does not necessitate any kind of extraordinary grace or favour such as ecstasies, raptures, visions, or deific unions.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, true spirituality does not consist of any special or particular spiritual exercises (François uses the term “perfections”) involving such elements as austerity, abstemiousness, almsgiving, or penance.<sup>20</sup>

François, while insisting that Christian spirituality does not consist of any particular practice or exercise, he shows that a vital element of spirituality is the expression of the love of God and neighbour.<sup>21</sup> This is the fulfilment of the *twofold precept of love* given by Christ – loving God with all of one’s heart and one’s neighbour as oneself (see Matthew 22:34-40).<sup>22</sup> In fact, François writes that true and living spirituality presupposes the love of God – indeed, it is nothing else but the true love of God, empowering one to do good.<sup>23</sup> Naturally, spirituality is lived out differently by people in different life situations,

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<sup>15</sup> Aumann, “St Francis de Sales”, 212-213.

<sup>16</sup> Stopp, “François de Sales”, 381.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 384-385.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 384.

<sup>19</sup> Aumann, “St Francis de Sales”, 213.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

each according to their gifts and calling<sup>24</sup> – however, love is the vocation of all Christians.<sup>25</sup> Also, a spirituality of love includes obedience to the commandments and accepts suffering.<sup>26</sup>

While love to God and good works flow from true spirituality, equally essential to spirituality is the *interior life*.<sup>27</sup> A starting point is the purgation from sin – a total renunciation of all attachment to sin, otherwise progress in spirituality is not lasting.<sup>28</sup> From there, François suggests a daily schedule of spiritual exercises, including: daily mental prayer, morning and evening prayers, examination of conscience, spiritual reading, and interior recollection.<sup>29</sup> He emphasizes the importance of meditation on the life of Christ, and stresses the virtue of meekness (see Matthew 11:29).<sup>30</sup>

Finally, the spirituality of François was marked by a *peaceful approach*. Reardon writes “he sees a clear division between two ways of living: a harsh, quarrelsome and difficult way, which is the way of sin, and an easy, happy and peaceful way, which is the way of spirituality”.<sup>31</sup> In attracting people to spirituality, his approach would be through the honey of devotion rather than a sword’s point of compulsion.<sup>32</sup> While this may give the impression of a gentle and pleasant spirituality, in reality it also demanded a total dedication of the self to Christ.<sup>33</sup> People have not always been aware of François’ strong determination, his uncompromising approach in self-sacrifice, and his insistence on unconditional surrender to God.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>31</sup> M. Reardon, “Francis de Sales: Man of Peace”, *Spirituality* 1, no. 2 (September-October 1995): 83.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Wakefield, “Francis de Sales”, 158.

<sup>34</sup> Stopp, “François de Sales”, 381.

### Relevance of de Sales for Contemporary Christian Spirituality

Since François de Sales has been such a strong influence on spirituality from the seventeenth century to the present,<sup>35</sup> most of his principles of spirituality are relevant for today. Only three are addressed in the space available.

One of the enduring characteristics of François' spirituality is the strong *spirit of optimism* in his entire outlook.<sup>36</sup> While well aware of human frailty and weakness, his emphasis was on humankind's restoration in Christ.<sup>37</sup>

Secondly, Healey concluded that the *love of God* was the foundation of François' life.<sup>38</sup> His book, *Treatise on the Love of God*, is a carefully written study of divine love.<sup>39</sup> He was kind and sensitive of heart, and desired to bring the love of God to life in the hearts of people he encountered.<sup>40</sup> François wrote that "the kindling power of our words must not come from outward show but from within, not from oratory but straight from the heart. Try as hard as you like, but in the end only the language of the heart can ever reach another heart".<sup>41</sup> This love of God, then, was the foundation of his spirituality – and likewise must be the underpinning of spirituality for all Christians.

Finally, a strong emphasis in François' spirituality is his teaching of the *universal call to holiness*. Still relevant today is François' understanding that one's response to that

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<sup>35</sup> Aumann, "St Francis de Sales", 211.

<sup>36</sup> Charles J. Healey, *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction to the Heritage* (New York: Alba House, 1999), 282.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 286.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* Quoted in in *The Study of Spirituality*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainbright, and Edward Yarnold, SJ (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 380.

call occurs in fulfilling the duties of one's state in life.<sup>42</sup> In other words, whatever a person's God-given vocation, it is not an obstacle to holiness.<sup>43</sup>

### Jean-Pierre de Caussade (1675-1751 A.D.)

De Caussade published one book in 1741, *Spiritual Instructions in the Form of Dialogues on the Various States of Prayer According to the Teaching of M. Bossuet*.<sup>44</sup> A collection of his letters, sent mainly to the sisters of the Nancy convent,<sup>45</sup> as well as notes of conferences given at the convent, was published in 1861 by H. Ramière under the title *L'Abandon à la Providence Divine*.<sup>46</sup>

A distinctive element of de Caussade's spirituality is a particular kind of *abandon*.<sup>47</sup> True abandon is a moment-by-moment active self-offering through every kind of circumstance.<sup>48</sup> The concept of abandonment as a complete and loving conformity to God's will involved not only a passive acceptance but also an active embrace.<sup>49</sup> Consequently, it exceeds mere obedience to God's will, and is more than patience or resignation.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps one of the best descriptions of self-abandonment is that by Knowles: "It means the real, effective gift to God of all the powers of the soul. It means the attitude,

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<sup>42</sup> Margaret S. Margeton, "St. Francis de Sales and the Universal Call to Holiness", *The Catholic Faith* 5, no. 2, March-April 1999 [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.catholic.net/rcc/Periodicals/Faith/MARAPR99/universal.html>; Internet; accessed 23 May 2008.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Mark Gibbard, "Jean-Pierre de Caussade", in *The Study of Spirituality*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainbright, and Edward Yarnold, SJ (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 415.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 417.

<sup>46</sup> J. N. Ward, "Caussade", in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. G. Wakefield (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), 81-82. According to D. Knowles in his book, *Self Abandonment to Divine Providence* (London: Fontana, 1977), Père Ramière divided de Caussade's material into two divisions. In the first section, *Letters*, he addresses beginners and those not involved in religion. In the second section, *L'Abandon*, he addresses converted individuals.

<sup>47</sup> Gibbard, "Jean-Pierre de Caussade", 417.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 418.

<sup>49</sup> S. Noffke, "Abandonment", in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. M. Downey (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1993), 1.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

the outlook of a soul so given”.<sup>51</sup> Its basic meaning is an acceptance of, and a submission to, the will of God.<sup>52</sup> However, human effort is still, and must be, present.<sup>53</sup> An example of true abandon appears in Mary’s words at the Annunciation: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word”.<sup>54</sup> In quoting de Caussade, Gibbard adds that “such an *abandon* can only be sustained through our own assurance of God’s unalterable love. In spite of the suffering and evil which we see around us, we are sure that God’s love ever streams to us . . . ‘that sublime sun, which from dawn to dusk – however dark and heavy the clouds which hide it – illuminates, warms and inspires us’”.<sup>55</sup>

Consequently, a second feature of de Caussade’s spirituality is a particular kind of living described as *the sacrament of the present moment*.<sup>56</sup> Gibbard continues de Caussade’s analogy of the sun: “We cannot live in yesterday’s solar heat nor in tomorrow’s, but only in its present warmth. In the very same way we can receive God’s love through each of today’s events, not yesterday’s or tomorrow’s.”<sup>57</sup> As a result, as de Caussade implies, every moment of one’s life can be a sort of communion with the divine love.<sup>58</sup> God intends that his love reaches a person through the duty of the *present moment*.<sup>59</sup> In fact, Caussade teaches that God makes of *all* things mysteries and sacraments of love.<sup>60</sup> It must be stated, however, that the sacrament of the present moment is not a form of quietism (referring to the emphasis on human inactivity and passivity that

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<sup>51</sup> D. Knowles, “Introduction”, in *Self Abandonment to Divine Providence* (London: Fontana, 1977), 12.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>54</sup> Luke 1:38 NRSV (New Revised Standard Version).

<sup>55</sup> Gibbard, “Jean-Pierre de Caussade”, 418.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

has accompanied the mystic experience<sup>61</sup>) but rather an active and passive cooperation with God moment by moment.<sup>62</sup>

Finally, another prominent element of de Caussade's spirituality is its *practical nature*. Little interest is shown, as Ward observes, "in exceptional states of prayer and complex analysis of the route to perfection".<sup>63</sup> (In this respect, one can see a parallel between de Caussade and François de Sales.) By God's grace, the way to perfection is open to all, and it involves one's self-giving to God's providence and doing his will as it is revealed.<sup>64</sup> The basis of his practicality lies in his own experience of the life of faith and all that he learned from the sisters of the Order of the Visitation at Nancy that he had counselled.<sup>65</sup>

### **Relevance of de Caussade for Contemporary Christian Spirituality**

The two primary principles of de Caussade's teaching continue to have relevance for Christian spirituality today: the value of the present moment and abandonment to divine Providence (God's will).

To begin with, the *sacrament of the present moment* is an enduring relevant principle. It helps one to recognize God in all the moments of life, including times of pain and suffering, as well joyful and happy times.<sup>66</sup> Each moment can be seen as an encounter with God, and each moment has the potential as a religious experience of God.<sup>67</sup> In other

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<sup>61</sup> R. G. Clouse, "Quietism", in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2d ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2001), 976.

<sup>62</sup> Ward, "Caussade", 81-82.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Trystan Owain Hughes, "A Contemplative Theology to Combat Depression, Anxiety, and Stress", available from *Mind & Soul: Exploring Christianity and Mental Health* website at <http://cn.churchinsight.com/Publisher/Article.aspx?id=99864>, accessed 23 May 2008.

<sup>67</sup> David Walker, *SRG400 Introduction to Spirituality: Study Guide* (Pennant Hills, NSW: Broken Bay Institute, 2006), 23.

words, every passing moment can be seen as being the veil of God – and when carefully viewed through the eyes of faith – can be recognized as the unveiling of God.<sup>68</sup> According to Bishop David Walker, “this awareness of the religious dimension of everyday life has been a consistent emphasis in Christian spirituality throughout the centuries”.<sup>69</sup>

This leads to what de Caussade describes as *self-abandonment to divine providence*.<sup>70</sup> Through recognizing God’s loving purpose, even in the midst of trials and tribulation, a person can contentedly and even joyfully surrender themselves to God’s will in their lives.<sup>71</sup> Since the overarching goal of human life is conformity with the divine,<sup>72</sup> one’s own self-centred designs and plans for life must be abandoned – implying that the principle of abandonment to God remains an integral part of spirituality.<sup>73</sup> This abandoning and trusting in God is a letting go. It recognizes that one’s ego, or the self, is not central or in charge.

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<sup>68</sup> Ward, “Caussade”, 81-82.

<sup>69</sup> Walker, *SRG400 Introduction to Spirituality*, 23.

<sup>70</sup> Hughes, “A Contemplative Theology to Combat Depression, Anxiety, and Stress”, 4.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Noffke, “Abandonment”, 2.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

In conclusion, Table 1 below suggests that the elements of spirituality of both de Sales and de Caussade, described in this essay, would be relevant for Christians today.

Table 1. Elements of Spirituality from de Sales and de Caussade Relevant Today

<u>François de Sales</u>	<u>Jean-Pierre de Caussade</u>
1. Positive devout humanist underpinning	1. Self-abandonment to divine providence
2. Spirituality for all classes of people	
3. Distinction between feelings and will	2. Sacrament of the present moment
4. Love of God and neighbour	
5. Necessity of an interior life of spirituality	3. Practical nature of spirituality
6. Peaceful path of spirituality	

*Source:* Broken Bay Institute, *Studies in Historical Spirituality (SP412): Readings*, vol. 2 (Pennant Hills, NSW: The Broken Bay Institute, 2008) and other sources listed in the Bibliography.

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