



STUDIES IN SALESIAN SPIRITUALITY

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Love and Belief, Francis de Sales, and the New Evangelization

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“Faith...is first and last of all a divine gift exceeding the best understandings and most balanced doctrines yet formulated. Every aspect, therefore, lies open to continual discovery and new appreciation”¹

Year of Faith

The thought expressed above appears to be at the basis of the Year of Faith, a special time to reflect on the inexhaustible richness of this gift. The Apostolic Letter announcing this event notes the theme for the Synod of Bishops as “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith.”² It is intended to mark the 50th anniversary of the opening of Vatican II and the 25th anniversary of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. One of its primary purposes is to reread the Vatican documents with a “hermeneutic of reform” or continuity and not one of discontinuity.³ Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Letter of 1967 commemorating the fourth centenary of the birth of St. Francis de Sales heralded Francis de Sales as a precursor of Vatican II: “No one of the recent Doctors of the Church more than St. Francis de Sales anticipated the

¹ Thomas Hughson, SJ, “John Courtney Murray and Post Conciliar Faith,” *Theological Studies* 58/3 (Sept. 1997): 481.

² *Porta Fidei*, (no.4).

³ “Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI To the Roman Curia, 22 December 2005,” no.5.

deliberations and decisions of the Second Vatican Council with such a keen and progressive insight.”⁴ This is especially seen, among others, in his optimistic concept of human nature and his insistence on the universal call to holiness. The purpose of this study is to show how Francis de Sales’ views on faith and love can contribute to a hermeneutic of continuity⁵ which is essential for the new evangelization, one that approaches the spreading or reawakening of the faith in our age based on emphasizing with new approaches and methods the affective and dynamic aspects of faith and belief that embrace human dignity and freedom.⁶

Francis and the Challenges of Faith

In De Sales’ very early writings, we find twice the phrase: “*Foi sans des-calier*,” an anagram of his name.⁷ The phrase means “Unshakeable Faith,” which gives us an intriguing insight on how he understood and viewed himself in his early manhood. Furthermore, it reveals the prominence his faith and accompanying beliefs had in his mind and in his life. In view of all the attacks made by the reformers on traditional Catholic teaching, especially on the real presence in the Eucharist, it is quite understandable how he felt challenged to grapple with and deepen his understanding of the truths of faith and to explain and defend them, as he so effectively later did in his missionary work in the Chablais.⁸ His missionary approach proved to be refreshing and creative, traits that should certainly characterize the new evangelization. This strong commitment he felt for the truths of the Catholic faith is also understandable in view of his crisis of faith regarding the doctrine of predestination as it was being taught in Paris in his student years and the seriously debilitating impact it had on his physical health and also happily on the optimistic, joyful development of his spirituality. Although, he experienced emotional relief from this faith crisis by praying before the statue of Our Lady of Deliverance, the intellectual understanding came later at Padua where he opted for a loving and merciful God that predestines us to the Church,

⁴ *Sabaudia Gemma*

⁵ For another point of view regarding the importance of a hermeneutic of continuity, see John Conley, SJ, “Interpreting Vatican II: Beyond Continuity/Discontinuity,” *Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Quarterly*, no. 2 (Summer 2012):14: “I believe the conciliar texts themselves provide at least three possible paths for an alternative hermeneutics of the council. These hermeneutical approaches include development of doctrine, the analogy of faith, and *ressourcement/aggiornamento*.”

⁶ “Through the new evangelization, the Church seeks to insert the very original and specific character of her teachings into today’s world and everyday discussion. She wants to be the place where God can be experienced even now, and where, under the guidance of the Spirit of the Risen Christ, we allow ourselves to be transformed by the gift of faith. The Gospel is always a new proclamation of salvation, accomplished by Jesus Christ, to make every human life share in the mystery of God and his life of love, thereby opening human life to a future of hope, which is inspiring and trustworthy” (*Synod of Bishops XIII Ordinary General Assembly The New Evangelization for the Transmission of Christian Faith: Instrumentum Laboris*, Vatican City 2012), no. 88.

⁷ It appears once in the excerpts of his notes from a law course (1591) and again at the end of the “*Simple consideration sur le Symbole*,” his brief meditation on the Apostles Creed from the perspective of the real presence in the Blessed Eucharist. (1597). See *Oeuvres de Saint François de Sales, Edition Complète* (Annecy: Monastère de la Visitation, 1892-1964)22:68-69 and 23:25. Hereafter designated as OEA. OEA, 22:68-69 and 23:25.

⁸ Since the people were forbidden by their ministers to come to hear him preach, Francis printed leaflets explaining the Catholic teaching as opposed to that of the Calvinists and posted them in public places. These were published posthumously and given the unfortunate title of “Controversies.” They should be more aptly called “Meditations on the Church.” See Elizabeth Stopp, *A Man to Heal Difference: Essays on St. Francis de Sales* (Philadelphia: St. Joseph’s University Press, 1997), pp. 51-74.

the assembly of love.⁹ He had to resolve the problem of predestination in a manner that was consonant with the worth and value of human nature. So the unshakeable faith that revealed his self-understanding was deeply rooted in the profound personal encounter he had with the living God whom he stressed was both the God of Creation and of the Reformation or Redemption.¹⁰

His personal struggle with his faith and his experience in evangelizing those who had succumbed to the blandishments of the reformers or to apathy and indifference ably prepared him to guide others on their faith journey. This gift is particularly evident in his advice to St. Jane de Chantal on how to deal with temptations against faith with which she was bedeviled. Although the nature of these temptations is not known with certainty, by inference it appears that they dealt with the real presence in the Holy Eucharist.¹¹

With this very sketchy overview of the saint's relationship to faith and belief, we can now proceed to delve more deeply into the way his grasp and presentation of them were shaped by the Catholic tradition in which he so profoundly immersed himself and gave the particular cachet of his teaching on religious faith that can contribute to a hermeneutic of reform or continuity.

Faith or Belief and Love

Love is very closely related to faith and belief. We can appreciate this relationship by looking at the etymology of the Latin word “*credo*,” which appears to be “a compound from *cor*, *cordis*, ‘heart’ ..., plus to *do, ‘put, place, set,’ also ‘give.’” In the ceremony of Christian baptism, “*credo* came close to its root meaning of ‘I set my heart on,’ ‘I give my heart to Christ.’”¹² From this perspective, the creeds are viewed not so much as a body of truths to which we give intellectual assent but rather as a loving attachment and commitment to a personal God who bestows on us his unfathomable love. It not only bestows new knowledge but a new vision, an entirely new way of imagining God, ourselves and our world. “The little word *credo* contains a basic option vis-à-vis reality as such; it signifies, not the observation of this or that fact, but a fundamental mode of behavior toward being, toward existence, toward one's own sector of reality, and toward reality as a whole.”¹³ Rather than viewing our profession of faith as merely an intellectual assent to a body of truth, De Sales understood it as a profession of our love for God: “Our confession of faith is not so much an act of the intellect and of faith as an act of the will and love of God”¹⁴

⁹ See Alexander Pocetto, OSFS, “An Introduction to Salesian Spirituality,” *Salesian Studies*, (Summer 1969):40-41. Available also online at: <http://web1.desales.edu/default.aspx?pageid=10076#Pocetto>.

¹⁰ See OEA, 7:33.

¹¹ See Alexander Pocetto, OSFS, “Freedom to Love: A Close Reading of Francis de Sales' Letter of 14 October 1604 to Jane de Chantal,” in *Human Encounter in the Salesian Tradition: Collected Essays Commemorating the 4th Centenary of the Initial Encounter of St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane Frances de Chantal*, ed. Joseph Chorpenning, OSFS, et al (Rome: International Commission for Salesian Studies, 2007),133.

¹² William Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 76. The author is aware that this etymology is disputed and has an extensive explanation of his position on pp. 223-225 as well as pp. 255-257. So I am relying on his sources and well-reasoned explanation.

¹³ Pope Benedict XVI, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 50-51.

¹⁴ Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, trans. by J.K. Ryan, 2 vols. (Stella Niagara, NY.: De Sales Resource Center, 2007) 2:40. Hereafter TLG.

Interestingly, the etymology of the English word “believe” also reveals a close association with the idea of love. “The word ‘believe’ ...began its career in early Modern English meaning ‘to belove’, to regard as lief’, to hold dear, to cherish....To believe a person, or to believe ‘in’...a person, was to orient oneself towards him or her with a particular attitude of relationship, of esteem and affection, also trust – and more earnestly, of self-giving endearment.”¹⁵ Cardinal Newman clearly grasped this relationship and succinctly stated: “We *believe* because we *love*.”¹⁶

To fully appreciate this relationship of belief or faith to love, we should ask ourselves not so much “What do you believe or believe in?” but rather, “What do you set your heart on?”, “What or Whom do you love?” or more colloquially, “What makes you tick?” We do not set our hearts on “persons, causes, institutions or ‘gods’ because ‘we ought to.’ We invest or devote ourselves because the other to which we commit has, for us, intrinsic excellence or worth and because it promises to confer value on us.”¹⁷

Now this view of faith and belief is transformative because it shapes the way we think about ourselves and how we imagine or define our self-identity. The reason is that: “We become like the things we love.”¹⁸ So if we truly love and cherish someone, we place our confidence and trust in that person and try to do whatever we believe will please him or her.

Although love and belief are closely related, they are obviously not interchangeable. “Belief...means to accept something unconditionally as real and true on the testimony of someone else who understands the matter out of his own knowledge.”¹⁹ This is incontestably essential for human life both on a personal and social level. An individual could not possibly acquire on his own the knowledge needed to stay alive and thrive. Day-in-and day out, we must rely on the word, on the trustworthiness of others for our health and well-being.²⁰

There is, however, an essential difference between religious belief or religious faith “and every other kind of belief; the Someone on whose testimony the religious believer accepts as true and real – that Someone is God Himself. The telling difference, therefore, is that in a manner scarcely to be encountered anywhere else in the world the content of the testimony and the person of the witness are identical.”²¹ The link, however, between love and belief or faith can help us to better understand the nature of religious faith, especially as viewed by Francis De Sales.

¹⁵ Smith, pp.106-107.

¹⁶ John Henry Newman, “Faith as a Safeguard Against Superstition,” preached on Whit-Sunday, May 31, 1839, par. 20. <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/oxford/sermon12.html>.

¹⁷ James W. Fowler, *The Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 18.

¹⁸ Francis de Sales, *Introduction to a Devout Life*, trans. J.K. Ryan (New York: Doubleday, 1950), pt.3, ch.15). Hereafter IDL.

¹⁹ Josef Pieper, *Belief and Faith: A Philosophical Tract* (New York: Random House, 1963), 52.

²⁰ John Paul II expresses the same idea thusly: “There are in the life of a human being many more truths which are simply believed than truths which are acquired by way of personal verification....This means that the human being – the one who seeks the truth – is also the one who lives by belief” (*Fides et Ratio*, no. 31).

²¹ Pieper, 53.

A Hermeneutic of Continuity

It is not all surprising that the Doctor of Love, as Francis de Sales is known, should stress the voluntaristic or more appropriately the affective aspects of religious faith and belief without ignoring or minimizing the intellectual or cognitive aspect. He was educated in the scholastic method at Clermont College in Paris, which honed his thinking skills, but he was not enamored of its methodology which became too cerebral and abstract and frequently debated theoretical questions of dubious value. When a doctor of theology at the Sorbonne, asked him his advice on a *summa theologica* that he was writing, De Sales advised him to make it more attractive “by cutting out all the methodological terminology and useless questions like: ‘Whether angels are in a place by their essence or by their operation.’” Moreover, to make the scholastic theology more palatable, he recommended that arguments be presented in an “affective style.”²²

St. Augustine had a preponderant influence on Francis de Sales.²³ He cites him numerous times in the *Treatise*, especially from his *Confessions* and the *City of God*. What struck Francis, among others things, in the teachings of Augustine was the prevalence and power of love, especially the love of God. Augustine certainly understood the role and importance of reason in the act of faith. “No one, he states, believes anything unless he has first thought it ought to be believed,”²⁴ i.e., that there are strong reasons for believing. Yet, none of the reasons or motives of themselves can sufficiently explain the act of faith in God. It is not simply an intellectual assent to doctrinal propositions. It is a gift of grace, a pure gift which moves us to be attached to the person in whom we place our faith. When he writes, “It is love that asks; it is love that seeks; it is love that makes one adhere to revelation; and it is love that maintains the adherence once it is given,”²⁵ he clearly stresses the necessary relationship between love and belief and that the act of faith results from a love of God that is brought about through grace. Joseph Pieper, following Augustine, stressed the freedom involved in love: “*Nemo credit nisi volens* – No one believes except of his own free will.” He goes on to say, “We believe not because we see, perceive, deduce something as true, but because we desire something good.”²⁶

We also know how greatly St. Thomas Aquinas influenced De Sales. In the very first chapter of the *Treatise* where he cites approvingly Aquinas’s definition of beauty, he strikes the optimistic note of his spirituality.²⁷ Now both Augustine and Aquinas understood the act of faith as resulting from the love of God that is poured into our hearts by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Following the approach of the Council of Orange (a.d. 529), Thomas described the act of will in faith as an “affection” which influences the intellect: “the beginning of faith is an affection insofar as the will determines the intellect to assent to the things of faith.”²⁸

²² OEA,15:118-20.

²³ See Antanas Liuima, S.J., *Aux sources du Traité de l’Amour de Dieu de Saint François de Sales*, (Rome, Pontificia Università Gregoriana,1959).

²⁴ *De praedest. sanctorum*, 2:5 as cited by Dulles, p. 26.

²⁵ *De moribus ecclesiae*, Bk.1, ch.17, no.31 as cited by Dulles, p. 26.

²⁶ Pieper, 27

²⁷ TLG, Bk. 1, ch.1.

²⁸ *De veritate* q. 14, a. 2 ad 10; trans. James A. Mohler, *The Beginning of Eternal Life: The Dynamic Faith of Thomas Aquinas, Origins and Interpretation* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1968) 147, no. 23) as cited by Hughson, p. 491.

Initium Fidei and Love

De Sales describes the beginning of the act of faith (*initium fidei*) in the following way: “When God gives us faith, he enters into our soul and speaks to our mind. He does this not my way of discussion [discourse or reasoning] but by way of inspiration. So pleasantly does he propose to the intellect what it must believe that the will thereby receives such great complacency [delight] that it incites the intellect to consent to the truth and acquiesce in it without any doubt or opposition whatsoever.”²⁹

Let us look in detail at this description of the beginning of faith. We first note that faith comes to us by way of inspiration. The word inspiration in his writings has a wealth of meaning, especially in the *Treatise* where he treats it extensively. Just as the sun’s rays give both heat and light, so “inspiration as a heavenly ray that brings to our hearts a warm light and makes us see the good and fires us to pursue it.”³⁰ So it is a grace that affects both the will and the intellect but first stirs up the will which entices the intellect by the pleasure, delight or *complaisance* that the will takes in the good that is presented to it. Although De Sales is influenced here by Aquinas, his choice of word “incites” the intellect instead of “determines the intellect,” as Thomas expresses it, gives a nice nuance that stresses the freedom involved in the act of faith.

To come to a deeper understanding of the role of complacency or *complaisance* (delight) in the *initium fidei*, it is helpful to look more closely at what De Sales says about love in general. In the *Treatise*, he stresses the nature of the will in relation to the good and defines one by the other, viz., that the will is the faculty that seeks and pursues what the intellect perceives as good and the good is what the will seeks. Although the object of the will is the good and that of the intellect is the true, when discussing the dynamic nature of love, he is more inclined to replace the faculty of the will by the word heart or to use them interchangeably:

the complacency [delight] and the movement towards, or effusion of the *will* upon, the thing beloved is properly speaking love; yet in such sort that the complacency is but the beginning of love, and the movement or effusion of the *heart* which ensues is the true essential love, so that the one and the other may truly be named love, but in a different sense:... We may express it thus: the good takes, grasps and ties the *heart* by complacency, but by love it draws, conducts and conveys it to itself, by complacency it makes it start on its way, but by love it makes it achieve the journey. Complacency is the awakener of the *heart*, but love is its action; complacency makes it get up, but love makes it walk. The *heart* spreads its wings by complacency but love is its flight. Love then, to speak distinctly and precisely, is no other thing than the movement, effusion and advancement of the *heart* towards good.(emphasis added).³¹

We notice in this passage that he speaks of love both as a movement of the will or of the heart toward the good. So the reader is left with the impression that in describing the nature of love in general, it is too limiting to speak strictly in terms of the will seeking and pursuing the good; it is

²⁹ TLG, Bk. 2, ch. 14; 1:138.

³⁰ TLG, Bk. 2, ch. 10; 2:81.

³¹ TLG, Bk. 1, ch. 7, Mackey trans.

also viewed by him as a movement of the heart.³² Unlike Thomas Aquinas, who located faith primarily in the intellect,³³ De Sales presents it as residing in the heart along with the other theological virtues of hope and charity.³⁴ It is for him, if you will, a virtue of the heart and not merely “a virtue of the intellect.” This clearly shows that the saint found faculty psychology to be inadequate to explain the nature of love and also the nature of faith as the beginning of love.

Thus far, we have been discussing the subjective aspect of the act of faith or what is commonly called *fides qua creditur*. However, if we focus on the *fides quae creditur* or the truths of the faith, our saint tells us that we discover they are both good and beautiful. He first reminds us that the object of the intellect is truth and that of the will is the good, but then in further explaining their interrelatedness, this distinction becomes somewhat blurred. In a sermon on the faith of the Canaanite woman, De Sales makes it clear that truth, beauty and goodness are inseparable: “These truths [of faith] are good, sweet and true, and are not only loved and desired by the will, but are also valued by the understanding because of the beauty it finds in them. They are beautiful because they are true; for beauty is never without truth, nor truth without beauty. Moreover, beautiful things which are not true are not really beautiful.”³⁵

In elucidating the role of the intellect and the will in the act of faith, the saint observes: “[Jesus] continues to reveal the beauty of truth in such a manner that the intellect sensing itself attracted or *smitten* [emphasis added] communicates this truth to the will which loves it for the goodness and beauty that it recognizes in it.”³⁶ The choice of the word “*espris*” reveals an interesting and arresting insight on how the saint, though guided by the scholastic faculty psychology that attributes various actions to specific faculties, senses the inadequacy of this psychology to express the nature of the act of faith. The intellect in the act of faith seems to take on some of the properties of the will because it falls in love with or is besotted with (“*espris*”) the truths of faith.

For De Sales the role of delight or complacency, the beginning of love, is what moves the person to adhere to or embrace the truths of faith. “The love that these two powers have for revealed truths prompts the person to forsake everything in order to believe them and embrace them.”³⁷ Note both the intellect and the will come to love these truths. So he is saying in effect that not only the will loves but also the intellect loves as well as understands. Essentially, for De Sales, the act of faith is similar to falling in love; it is the beginning of a love affair involving the heart or the whole person.

³² For a clear and concise explanation of De Sales’ understanding of the interrelationship between the will and the heart, see Eunan McDonnell, *The Concept of Freedom in the Writings of St. Francis de Sales* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), 358-360.

³³ See Nicolas E. Lombardo, O.P., *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotion* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2011), 150 where he states: “For Aquinas, faith is primarily a virtue of the intellect, though it also involves the will.” He then proceeds to speak at length of the role of affectivity with regard to faith in Aquinas’ thought.

³⁴ See TLG, Bk. 1, ch. 12.

³⁵ *The Sermons of St. Francis de Sales for Lent Given in the Year 1622*, trans. Nuns of the Visitation, ed. Lewis Fiorelli, OSFS (Rockford, IL.: 1987), 35. Hereafter Lenten Sermons.

³⁶ [Jesus] luy en descouvre tousjours la beauté ; de sorte que l'entendement se sentant attiré ou *espris*, communique cette verité à la volonté laquelle l'ayme aussi pour la bonté et beauté qu'elle y reconnoist. ” (OEA, 10:216).

³⁷ Lenten Sermons, 35

Now how do we reconcile this with the Thomistic-Aristotelian faculty psychology to which he resorts to introduce the role of these two faculties in explaining the nature of the act of faith? If we recall that De Sales insists that the “heart is the seat of love,” that the symbol of the heart represents the whole person³⁸ and the theological virtue of faith along with those of hope and charity dwell in the “summit of reason” or “the heart of the soul,”³⁹ then this organ of the body both metaphorically and physiologically can help us explore more deeply the relationship of love to belief and faith. In telling us that the will along with the intellect acquiesce to the truths of faith, De Sales is consciously alluding to what he previously wrote regarding the four degrees of reason and, in particular, the highest level which he calls, among other things, “the summit of reason,” or “the heart.”⁴⁰ As in so many other ways, De Sales’ conception of the heart is profoundly influenced by its biblical meaning, which in addition to being considered as the pumping organ of the body, is also at the same time the center of cognition, emotion, love, clairvoyance and conviction. So the heart has both cognitive and affective aspects and makes no clear distinction between the faculties of the intellect and the will. The cognitive and affective aspects that characterize the heart are particularly noticeable in his phrase “a reasonable heart”⁴¹, which emphasizes the close link and interaction between the head and the heart.

Interestingly, recent findings of neurophysiologists appear to confirm these multiple facets of the heart. By carefully studying the pattern of changes in heart rate variability, these researchers have discovered fascinating influences of the heart on brain activity:

Scientific research has established a significant, complex, and highly sophisticated connection between the human heart and the brain. The heart directly influences the activity of higher brain centers involved in perceptual and cognitive processing and in the creation of emotional experience. . . . Research has shown that sustained positive emotions facilitate an emergent global shift in psycho-physiological functioning which is marked by a distinct change in the rhythm of heart activity. . . . As people experience sincere positive feelings, the more ordered information flowing from the heart to the brain acts to facilitate cortical function and improve cognitive performance. These findings may help explain the significant shifts in perception, increased mental clarity, and heightened intuitive awareness many individuals report when practicing heart-centered positive emotion–refocusing and restructuring techniques.⁴²

This research can possibly help us get a clearer grasp of the role the heart plays in the act of faith and appears to corroborate the views of De Sales regarding love and belief.

³⁸ See IDL, pt. 3, ch. 23.

³⁹ OEA, 4:135.

⁴⁰ As Wendy Wright rightly notes, De Sales never defines what he means by the word “heart,” because of its very rich multivalent symbolism. So the word cannot always be equated with the “summit of the soul” or the “supreme point of the soul.” However, in the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, he does appear to equate the heart with the deepest level of our being when he says, “God is present in a most particular manner in your heart, in the center of your spirit” (OEA, 3:75).

⁴¹ IDL, pt. 3, ch. 36.

⁴² Rollin McCraty and Robert A. Rees, “The Central Role of the Heart in Generating and Sustaining Positive Emotions,” in *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*, ed. By C.R. Snyder & Shane J. Lopez (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 527.

The Transcendentals, Faith or Belief and Personalism

Although the three transcendentals – truth, beauty and goodness – are distinguishable, they are really inseparable and can only be fully understood in relation to each other. The heart or the person in making the act of faith through the intellect is really falling in love with the beauty and goodness of the truth. Because of the inner unity among truth, beauty and goodness, faculty psychology does not hold up very well in understanding the act of faith, especially when De Sales states that the intellect is “smitten” by truth and the will loves the truth because of “the goodness and beauty it recognizes there,” as noted above.⁴³ So true faith is not only the adherence of the intellect or understanding to divine truths but also of the will because of the goodness that it sees in them. Now the goodness for which the will has a natural affinity and without which it cannot be understood is not looked upon by De Sales as an abstract idea or mere object of the will. Goodness or *divine bonté* is associated in his mind with the very person of God as Eunan McDonnell has meticulously and persuasively demonstrated.⁴⁴ So the will or the heart in seeking the good is essentially attracted by a personal encounter with God and not with a cold, abstract concept. As explained above, for De Sales, the heart is equivalent of the person. “Whoever wins a man’s heart has won the whole man.”⁴⁵ So when we commit our heart to God by faith, we are committing our whole person and not just our will or intellect.

Faith – An Affirmation of Human Dignity and Worth

What is of particular interest is how the saint views the act of faith as affirming our human dignity and worth. Remember this is what troubled him so much about the doctrine of predestination as propounded by the Calvinists and others drawing on Augustine and Aquinas. These views seemed to him to dismiss or minimize human agency, thereby making human beings the mere playthings of God if our actions were not taken into consideration and taken seriously. Was human freedom just a myth without foundation, purpose, or value? This is what was so upsetting to the young De Sales and eventually led him to focus on the mercy, goodness and love of God for all that he created, especially the human person and human freedom.

We have already pointed out the important connection the saint makes between knowledge and love by the image of the sun to which he compares inspirations. Now, let us consider briefly his view of inspirations and freedom. In a chapter of the *Treatise* entitled “How God’s Inspirations Leaves Us in Complete Freedom to Follow or Reject Them,” he stresses that God has great respect for our human dignity and deals with it so sensitively and graciously. He draws us, citing Hosea, “ ‘with human cords and with bands of love’ and not by iron chains like bulls and buffaloes, but by holy inspirations. In short these are the bonds of Adam and humanity, bands that are proportionate and fitted to the human heart to which liberty is natural.”⁴⁶ True love in his mind is inseparable from freedom. So the inspiration that moves us to faith or to belief does so respecting our human dignity and freedom. It emphasizes religious freedom and the connaturality of faith and human dignity because we have a natural inclination to love God

⁴³ OEA, 10:216.

⁴⁴ “Indeed, a thorough analysis of the term *Bonté* ensures us of the personal nature of God’s goodness. “*Concept of Freedom*, 517-20.

⁴⁵ IDL, pt. 3, ch. 23.

⁴⁶ TLG, Bk. 2, ch. 12; I:132,

above all things.⁴⁷ This connaturality arises from the *imago Dei* imprinted in human nature. This impulse toward God or what the medieval theologians called *voluntas ut natura*⁴⁸ is what defines our humanity. So the act of faith is not something alien or foreign to our nature but rather perfects it. One theologian speaking of the theology of Pope Benedict XVI states this idea in this way: “The personal nature of faith according to the logic of Christian faith, the question of truth is, in the final analysis, the quest for a truth that is really humane, that is, the truth of love, which permits the person to realize himself precisely in what most fully characterizes him: his being a person....Only where truth is connected with love does truth become a possibility that does not need to be forced upon a person, but rather one that he can take up in freedom. Love is thus the true center of Christianity.”⁴⁹ Faith, then, is the breathtaking discovery of the truth that we are loved. So we believe because we are beloved.

The irenic tone with which De Sales speaks of grace and freedom avoiding the technical theological terms like *prevenient grace* makes it stand out from the many rancorous polemics that prevailed in what was known as the controversy *de auxiliis*. It is also a gentle rebuke of the Reformers’ position on the nature of grace which appears to leave very little room for human freedom. We have an excellent example here of how he states in the preface of the *Treatise* he intends to treat theological matters, viz., “not in a contentious spirit” nor in the manner of scholastic disputation.⁵⁰ This non-confrontational approach should certainly characterize the new evangelization, one that does not intend to win arguments but rather win hearts because it demonstrates a deep respect for the dignity and religious freedom of others. Moreover, it is the very approach to faith that Vatican II takes: “Conciliar orientation to human dignity imparts a new quality to reverent love (*pia affectio*) for the Creator internal to the habit of faith. Affirmation of human dignity characterizes the believer's self-understanding and awareness of the Creator. This respecified *pia affectio* within the [interiority] of faith begins to guide faith-understanding and the life of faith along ways respectful of conscience, personal dignity, relational autonomy and, in society, religious liberty. This is faith being true to its renewed voluntary dynamic.”⁵¹

Faith, Reason and Love

The dispute between Christian faith and reason, especially with regard religion and science, has been “wearying” as Pope Benedict describes it. He does note, however, that the texts of Vatican II “determined its essential direction, so that the dialogue between reason and faith, particularly

⁴⁷ See TLG, Bk. 1, ch. 16.

⁴⁸ “Prior to the deliberative operations of intellect and will is the impulse within human being toward the good. That in human being which is described by *voluntas ut natura* is an affective tension, as distinct from the pursuit of the good which follows deliberation and choice. *Voluntas ut natura* specifies the radical impulse toward the good and the true at the root of being. It is a synthetic concept because it designates a unity prior to specific operations of intellect or will.” (Michael Downey, “Jean Vanier, Recovering the Heart, *Spirituality Today*,” no. 38 [Winter 1986]:337:348). Online: <http://www.spiritualitytoday.org/spir2day/863844downey.html>.

⁴⁹ Siegfried Wiedenhofer, “Ratzinger Foundation on Key Aspects of the Pope’s Theology: “Not a Theology for All Times...But Rather a Theology for This Time,” trans. Lesley Rice. <http://www.zenit.org/article-24950?l=english>

⁵⁰ TLG, 1:44.

⁵¹ Hughson, 507.

important today, found its bearings on the basis of the Second Vatican Council.”⁵² It is precisely in furthering this dialogue that the teachings of De Sales can be helpful.⁵³

We know how highly De Sales praised the gift of reason calling it “a tree that God has planted in us” and “the fruits that spring from it cannot be but good”⁵⁴ He states that faith and reason are “affectionate sisters” of the same Father not squabbling siblings.⁵⁵ Now how do we reconcile the two which seem to the modern world to be in constant conflict? Well, if the act of faith is respectful of human freedom and dignity, then it must also be compatible with the great gift of reason which makes us human. Part of the problem of faith versus freedom and science is due to the various concepts of reason. Scientists speak of reason primarily as a discursive or inferential faculty.⁵⁶ But De Sales views it in a much broader way which includes the *raison raisonnante* but goes beyond it to embrace an intuitive and non-discursive level which integrates the other levels of *raison* or reason.⁵⁷ De Sales’ genius consists of reconciling reason with the heart.⁵⁸ We see this in particular when he speaks of reason as related to virtue. He uses such expressions as “reason, which is as it were the soul of our heart”; “the affection the heart has for the integrity and beauty of reason”; “[virtues] are born of the heart endowed with reason”⁵⁹

Conclusion

De Sales’ method of winning hearts rather than winning arguments should prove very attractive in spreading the faith and endearing others to fall in love with the person of Jesus in our world today. One of the sayings commonly associated with him that embodies the idea of winning hearts is: “Always be as indulgent as you can, never forgetting that one can catch more flies with a spoonful of honey than with a hundred barrels of vinegar.”⁶⁰ This method was put to great effect by none other than Abraham Lincoln himself when he said: “It is an old and a true maxim, that a ‘drop of honey catches more flies than a gallon of gall.’ So with men. If you would win a man to your cause, first convince him that you are his sincere friend. Therein is a drop of honey that catches his heart, which, say what he will, is the great high road to his reason, and which, when once gained, you will find but little trouble in convincing his judgment of the justice of

⁵² Address of Benedict to the Curia.

⁵³ See Alexander Pocetto, “Francis de Sales, Galileo and the Autonomy of Modern Science,” *Proceedings of the PMR Conference*, Augustinian Historical Institute, Villanova University, vol. 14 (1989):203-22, which focuses on the confirming role of faith or religion vis-à-vis modern science. It is a study of how Francis de Sales’ view on the dialogue or relationship between faith and reason demonstrates the hermeneutic of continuity in the sense that the seeds of this dialogue were already present in the Catholic Church tradition and just needed to be cultivated. Available on line at: <http://web1.desales.edu/default.aspx?pageid=10076#Pocetto>.

⁵⁴ TLG, 2:197.

⁵⁵ OEA, 1:330-33.

⁵⁶ “When they speak of reason, different schools of theologians envisage different operations. The Platonists and Augustinians have in mind a kind of contemplative or intuitive reason (‘higher reason’) that makes contact with eternal truth and sees all reality in relation to that truth. The Aristotelians and positivists are generally referring to discursive or inferential reason (‘lower reason’), either deductive or inductive. Some inferentialists are concerned with demonstrating the truth of revelation before the bar of reason, which consciously follows logical rules, and informal or tacit reason, which is guided by what Blaise Pascal called the ‘reasons of the heart’” (Dulles, 207).

⁵⁷ See TLG, Bk. 1, ch. 12.

⁵⁸ See Hélène Michon, *Saint François de Sales: Une nouvelle mystique* (Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 2008), 18.

⁵⁹ TLG, Ryan 2:213-14.

⁶⁰ Jean-Pierre Camus, *The Spirit of St. Francis de Sales*, ed. and trans. C.F. Kelley (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952), 23

your cause, if indeed that cause really be a just one.”⁶¹ This is precisely the persuasive method that the God of Gentleness uses in touching our hearts and our persons with his gift of faith and which De Sales has so convincingly demonstrated. His emphasis on the affective aspect of faith and belief reveals a hermeneutic of continuity that keeps faith with the great Christian tradition rooted and promoted by such spiritual giants as Augustine, Aquinas, Bernard of Clairvaux and Bonaventure⁶² whose writings and lives were of great inspiration to him but not uncritically. It is especially notable in the role the heart plays in the thought and life of De Sales that assures that necessary continuity with the past and its further development to meet the needs and temperament of our age. Everyone yearns to fall in love and De Sales has shown how the new evangelization, respecting the dignity and religious freedom of the person, lures the person into falling in love with God and staying in love with God by reminding us that we believe because we are beloved.

⁶¹ “Temperance Address,” Springfield II, Feb. 22, 1842. Available at:

<http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/speeches/temperance.htm>.

⁶² “In the eleventh-century monasticism Bernard’s type of affective and voluntaristic theology [of] faith was widespread. William of Saint Thierry (1080/85-1148/49), standing with Bernard against Abelard, emphasized the affective experience of faith, and moved toward a kind of mystical gnosis. The will, he insists, must draw reason to assent to God’s word, and the will, he adds, is powerless without grace. Faith relies on the authority of God, attested by many and eminent human witnesses” (Dulles, p. 30). “While granting that faith, insofar as it is a stable quality (*habitus*), is related in some sense to the speculative intellect, [Bonaventure] connected faith especially with the practical intellect and the affections (Dulles, p. 32). See R. Pernin, “S. Bernard et S. François de Sales,” *Annales Salésiennes*, XIV, 1901:65-73, 97-104, 129-138, 161166; R.-J. Hesbert, “Deux âmes fraternelles: S. Bernard et S. François de Sales,” *Collectanea Cisterciensia, Revue de Spiritualité monastique*, XLIV, 1982, pp. 210-237; B. Jacqueline, “L’influence de S. Bernard au XVIIe siècle: l’influence de la doctrine de S. Bernard sur S. François de Sales,” *Collectanea Cisterciensia. Revue de Spiritualité Monastique*, XLII, 1980, pp. 22-35, praec. 24-25.