



STUDIES IN SALESIAN SPIRITUALITY

ALEXANDER T. POCETTO, O.S.F.S., PH.D.

Senior Salesian Scholar

Love and Critical Thinking: A Salesian Reflection

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Most modern authors who write on the subject of critical thinking seem to treat it almost exclusively as a cognitive skill, as something totally detached from our other faculties. This approach can readily lead to a kind of lunacy because lunatics are not people who have lost their reason, but those who have lost everything but their reason.ⁱ[i] Once their major premise is granted, everything follows with an implacable logic. The major thrust of this article is to demonstrate that such a treatment of critical thinking can result in a rather incomplete and even distorted and lopsided view of our critical faculties and hence a hindrance to the proper exercise of these faculties in our search for truth.

A narrow approach to critical thinking is undoubtedly influenced by the amazing developments in computer technology and their effects on such people like cognitive psychologists, who, for the most part, look upon "the mind as an all purpose reasoning machine."ⁱⁱ[ii] So-called "knowledge communities," a new buzzword that applies to various disciplines and specializations within disciplines, contribute also to a restricted notion of critical inquiry. Given the exponential growth in our knowledge in recent years, the need, especially for physical scientists to narrow their field of research is understandable. Francis de Sales, an outstanding Christian humanist, recognized this need even in his day. According to him, "Rarely, do men who know many things likewise thoroughly know what they know. When the strength and power of the intellect are directed to a knowledge of many subjects, they are less strong and vigorous then when restricted to a consideration of a single subject."ⁱⁱⁱ[iii]

Granted the need for a cognitive framework and tradition that knowledge communities provide its adherents to make and keep abreast of the rapid advances in science and technology, there are significant obstacles that these groups can put in the way of critical thinking and the search for truth. The limitations that they can place on our intellectual powers can easily lead us into error because they are inclined to see and to judge things and people according to their tastes and intellectual formation. This defect was pointed out by Aristotle and recalled by La Mothe Le Vayer, a seventeenth-century French independent thinker who admired Francis de Sales. This writer states: "The one who is given to mathematics wants to submit everything to the demonstrations of his art, the one who loves fables and mythology...explains himself only by stories." He continues by pointing out that Pythagoras wanted to reduce reality to the "mystery of numbers," Plato to "his ideas," and Aristotle himself to "the rules of logic." In a word, "each forms for himself a way of thinking" peculiarly his own.^{iv}[iv] To deviate from established and recognized methods of research in a given knowledge community is to invite ridicule and even ostracization from the group.

No doubt a strong human desire to see order, unity and a wholeness to reality led and continues to lead thinkers in these knowledge communities attempt to reduce reality to one or two basic principles. But fairly often, these people accept unquestionably certain basic assumptions upon which their disciplines or specialty rests. The story is told about King Charles II who called together members of the Royal Society to explain to him why a dead fish weighs more than the same fish alive. They gave him a number of sophisticated and subtle explanations. Imagine their embarrassment when he declared that there was no difference. Critical thinking not only involves sound reasoning but a questioning of the premises from which certain conclusions are derived. One writer defines it in the following manner: "Critical thinking is the development and evaluation of arguments". He explains that the word "arguments" refers in the definition to the reasoning process, i.e., drawing conclusions from a set of statements or premises.^v[v] The emphasis here is obviously on the intellectual process.

To appreciate the relationship between love and critical thinking, we must see the latter in a much broader framework. Stephen Brookfield in his book entitled *Developing Critical Thinking* helps us to view it in a wider context when he speaks of the components of critical thinking. Not only is critical thinking a process that identifies, challenges, questions, and evaluates assumptions upon which assertions rest, but it is also an awareness of the context in which this thinking is done. Furthermore, critical thinking involves the ability "to imagine and explore alternatives to existing ways of thinking and living." This process, in turn, leads to "reflective skepticism."^{vi}[vi] The ability to imagine alternatives obviously involves the use of the imagination as well as faculties in the emotive and affective domain and permits us to consider the possibility of the role of love in critical thinking.

Blaise Pascal, one of the foremost critical thinkers of his age and, in fact, of our civilization, a mathematical and scientific genius, approached critical thinking from the perspective of the search for truth. At the beginning of his treatise on *The Spirit of Geometry*, he states: "There are three principal objectives in the study of truth; one is to

discover it when one looks for it; the other is to demonstrate it when one possesses it; the third is to be able to discern it from error when one examines it." He then explains his principal purpose in writing this treatise: "I am not going to speak about the first objective. I will treat particularly the second which contains the third."vii[vii] Even though he treats critical thinking here primarily as a cognitive skill, nonetheless he is well aware, as I will note later, of not relegating the acquisition of truth solely or exclusively to the intellectual sphere. He distinguishes among the various orders of knowledge. There is not only an *esprit géométrique*, but also an *esprit de finesse* by which we grasp certain truths intuitively.

At this point, we might ask ourselves how a Christian humanist perspective enters into the discussion of love and critical thinking. A critical, inquiring mind or spirit is an essential trait or ingredient of Christian humanism. The challenge for a Christian humanist, such as Erasmus, of trying to harmonize Christian values with human values requires a careful, critical examination and sifting of primary sources, the writings of Classical Antiquity, Sacred Scripture and the Fathers, to determine their authenticity and relevance to the transcendental values of Christianity, not the least of which is love. Critical reflection and judgment are absolutely essential if these values are to be appropriately integrated into the life of a Christian.

Our particular task is to demonstrate the role of love in critical thinking as seen by one pre-eminent Christian humanist, St. Francis de Sales. At first glance, it might seem surprising to associate a saint with critical thinking since the lives of saints are singularly marked by faith and obedience, which do not appear to have anything in common with critical thinking or a questioning mind. One might readily conclude that the Church and the Pope do their thinking for them. We hope to show that this saint, at least, did a good deal of critical thinking that helped the Church and many outside the church to think for themselves in a critical manner. His conception of love will enable us to best make this rapprochement. In his *Treatise on the Love of God*, Francis proclaims: "Man is the perfection of the universe; the mind is the perfection of man; love is the perfection of the mind, and charity is the perfection of love."viii[viii] These words encapsulate the saint's Christian humanist philosophy and allow us to see a wholeness and a connectedness in human nature which can have and should have profound implications not only with regard to critical thinking, but also the manner in which Christian education and pedagogy are conceived, planned, and implemented.

Through the perspective of faith, Christian humanists can see a unity and coherence in human nature that transcend[] the purview of secular humanists. The humanism of Sartre, for example, sees a discreteness and a disconnectedness to human actions that "lead nowhere...and have no order..."ix[ix] In Chesterton's view "Detached intellectualism is (in the exact sense of a popular phrase) all moonshine; for it is light without heat and it is a secondary light reflected from a dead world". There is no room for an intoxicating "moonshine" or a "detached intellectualism" in Salesian humanism, but only for the bright, warm, and life-giving sunshine of God's divine love. The biblical truth that we are made in the image and likeness of God is fundamental to his anthropology. The wholeness and the interconnectedness of our various faculties as well

as our solidarity with other human beings derive from this truth. Our various human faculties reflect this resemblance that we have to God. To be created in the image and likeness of God means for our saint that "we have the utmost congruity with his divine majesty." It is our innermost being, the heart or the soul, that most resembles God. "Our soul, he explains, "is spiritual, indivisible, immortal. It understands, it wills, and it wills freely. It is capable of judging, of knowing and of having virtue." (*Love of God*, I, 9) The inter-relatedness of our faculties is a concept stressed by St. Thomas Aquinas and restated clearly by Anthony Levi in his work on *French Moralists*:

The faculties cannot operate independently of one another and, indeed, the will is in some sense the dynamism of the intellect itself, inducing it to make judgments by desiring the perception of truth as a good. Without the appetite in the will the intellect could not function. But the will is in turn dependent on the operation of the intellect for its object is the '*bonum intellectum*' and its acts depend on the final and formal causality of the good which can be perceived by the intellect alone.x[x]

To express this inter-relatedness and the role that love plays in harmonizing the natural and supernatural levels, Francis uses the analogy of the river of Paradise. "Reason," he says "is the river which waters the...paradise of our hearts...." Just as reason brings its life-giving water to the four cardinal virtues, prudence to the practical intellect, justice for the will, temperance for the concupiscible appetite and fortitude for the irascible appetite, so charity like a divine river, flows over the various parts of the heart to elevate, improve, enrich, and enhance all of the natural virtues which operate not only in the sensible part of our being, but also over the will and practical intellect. The image of the two rivers is intended to show the marvelous organic unity between reason and virtue on the one hand and between the waters of reason and that of grace or charity on the other. They commingle but without losing their specific properties or separate identities (*Love of God*, 2, 216-19)..

To get a better grasp of the relationship between love (charity) and reason, we need to understand what De Sales meant by the word *raison* (reason). In the 17th century, the word *raison* (reason) meant more than just the discursive faculty. It was generally conceived of as a "blending of consciousness with feeling, with taste and with sensibility...and could refer...to something like the rational soul, the source of all that is reasonable in man, to a moral conscience and to an aesthetic sense."xi[xi] This description is good as far as it goes, but it does not go as far as the Salesian conception of *raison* and does not indicate how the many mystical writers understood it, especially as explicated by De Sales. For our Christian humanist, *raison* was equivalent to the soul or *l'âme*, to the principle of human life and activity. Following Augustine and the Augustinian tradition, he distinguishes between an inferior and superior portion of the soul, which is one and indivisible. The inferior part "reasons and draws conclusions according to what it learns and experiences by the senses..." and the superior part "...reasons and draws conclusions according to intellectual knowledge, not grounded on sense experience, but on the discernment and judgment of the spirit...."

Francis further refines his conception of *raison* or the soul by comparing it to various parts of the Temple of Jerusalem. The distinctions he makes here are of Capitol importance not only for an understanding of his mystical theology, as he notes, but also of the role that love must play in critical thinking. For this reason, I will quote him extensively:

In the mystical temple there are also three courts, which are three different degrees of reason. In the first we reason discursively according to sense experience; in the second we reason discursively according to human sciences; in the third we reason discursively according to faith. Finally, beyond this, there is a certain eminent or supreme point of reason and the spiritual faculty. This is not guided by the light of the discursive thought or of reasoning, but by a simple intuition of intellect and a simple movement of will, whereby spirit acquiesces in and submits itself to the truth and to God's will. (*Love of God* I, 85).

It is in the supreme point of reason, or of the soul or heart (he uses all of these expressions interchangeably) that the supernatural virtues of faith, hope, and charity dwell, i.e., in the very center and core of our innermost being. This is the part of our being in the Salesian view, which gives a unity and wholeness to all of our human actions.

This rather detailed explanation of *raison* or reason still remains incomplete without a precise understanding of what De Sales means by love. Francis distinguishes between two kinds of love, a love of concupiscence which loves objects or persons for what it can get out of them and not for their own sakes, and a love of benevolence which loves a thing or a person for its own sake. The etymology of the French word *bienveillance* (from the two Latin words *bene volens* meaning to wish someone well) aptly describes this kind of love. So the former is a selfish love and the latter an unselfish love.

If the one for whom we have benevolence already possesses the good we desire the person to have, then benevolent love makes us take pleasure and contentment in the fact that the person already possesses it. This pleasure or contentment that we experience is called a love of complacency.

The non-reciprocal benevolent love that we have for another is called simple benevolence. If it is mutual and reciprocal, then it is a love of friendship. The benevolent love of friendship that is preferential is called dilection. The word "charity" is the highest form of dilection or benevolent love and is used to describe our love of God (cf. *Love of God*, I, 13).

As mentioned above, it is essential to keep these distinctions in mind as we try to get a deeper appreciation of the relationship of love to reflective, critical thought. Even on a purely natural level, De Sales emphasizes the centrality and primacy of love. All our passions and affections "...have their source and root in love." The worth and value of all of our actions are determined by love.

This is why the other passions and affections are good or bad, vicious or virtuous, as the love from which they proceed is good or bad. Love diffuses its qualities through them in such ways that they seem to be identical with love itself...as the first mover and first affection, love gives its impetus to all the rest and causes all other movements of the soul. (*Love of God*, 1, 60-61).

The place that love holds in Salesian humanism in no way is intended to denigrate the importance nor diminish the reverence and respect that the saint has for reason as a discursive faculty. It is here, in particular, that we see a marvelous balance to his teaching and can appreciate why his Christian humanism is so attractive. An overriding truth that makes his thought so approachable and human is his insistence on the unity between God-the-Creator and God-the-Redeemer. This is a truth, which, unfortunately, down through the ages many Christian writers either obscured or distorted. Our natural reason comes to us from God, who "does not despise anything that he has made...." There is no inherent contradiction or opposition between this natural light and the supernatural light of faith. "They are, daughters of the same Father.... They can and must live together as very affectionate sisters." With an admirable clarity, he adds: "Both in nature and supernature, reason is always reason and truth, truth." Just as our eyes receive light to see various objects, so our understanding is given the light of reason and the light of faith to arrive at truth which is indivisible. "Thus, it is certain that truth, whether supernatural or natural, is always the same. There are only different lights that show it to our understanding... ."xii[xii]

Francis De Sales believes that reason ordinarily has its beginning in love, and he refers to it as "the life of our heart" and "the life of our souls" since it vivifies our other faculties and holds a place of honor with regard to the virtues. He says "...all virtues are virtues by their adaptation or conformity to reason. No action can be called virtuous unless it proceeds from the affection the heart has for the integrity and beauty of reason." A mutual respect, so to speak, must obtain between love and reason for persons to maintain their integrity, both moral and psychological. "Now if the love of reason possesses and animates a soul, it will do whatever reason wishes on all occasions and consequently it will practice all the virtues" (*Love of God*, 2, 213). This is essentially what he means by living with a "reasonable heart" in our interpersonal relations. We will touch upon this idea later when we discuss the necessity of reasonableness in our dealings with others.

De Sales' Christian humanism shines through very clearly when he simply and boldly states: "It is reason alone that makes us men, and yet it is a rare thing to find men truly reasonable." xiii[xiii] This idea of reason can be better appreciated when considered in conjunction with his thought on the purpose of the Incarnation, one of the central Christian mysteries. He tells us that the purpose of the Incarnation is "to teach us how to live not like animals as man lived since the fall of Adam, but with and according to reason."xiv[xiv] In a sense, the purpose of the Incarnation was not so much to divinize us but to make us more human, more reasonable.

Although Francis had a very high esteem for our reasoning power, he as well as some of the most renowned critical thinkers like Montaigne, Erasmus, Pierre Charron, Pascal, and the foursome of critical thinkers was keenly aware of its shortcomings and limitations. They and he developed a healthy skepticism in the sense of a suspension of judgment regarding the ability of reason to arrive at truth.

One of the reasons that Paschal gives for a mistrust of our reasoning power is that it has limitations that it is not aware of. The strength of reason is found in recognizing its own limitations.^{xv}[xv] Pascal observes that many laws and customs all supposedly founded on reason, contradict each other and are very arbitrary. This makes him exclaim: "...this beautiful, corrupt reason corrupts everything..."^{xvi}[xvi] He even expresses pleasure at seeing "proud reason hoisted with its own petard."^{xvii}[xvii]

A number of the other critical thinkers can be quoted in this regard, but Paschal's thoughts are fairly representative. Montaigne, whom critical thinkers of the 17th century and of the Enlightenment so admired for his incisive reasoning ability, was also very much aware of its shortcomings. The *Essais* of Montaigne influenced Francis de Sales and it is evident in his first writings where he favorably quotes from this work. This contact helped to sharpen the saint's critical abilities, especially by reflecting on the relativity of a good part of our knowledge and the role that social contexts play in arriving at truth. As we have seen, he had a great admiration for our reasoning faculty, but like Montaigne, he knew that it was not without its flaws. He believed that experience and sense knowledge were reliable "...but the conclusions we draw from them can betray us... The one who fights against knowledge and one's own experience, fights against reason and overturns it. For the foundation of all reasoning depends on the knowledge of the senses and on experience."^{xviii}[xviii]

This understanding of the limitations of reason led De Sales to exercise a healthy skepticism in the sense of a suspension of judgment in a number of important matters. We see De Sales' skepticism in the long drawn-out controversy over the nature of grace known as *De auxiliis*. In this bitter debate that pitted Jesuits against the Dominicans for a period of about twenty years, the saint advised Pope Paul V not to define any one position but to leave theologians free to follow either position because the matter could not be settled with certitude. Although Francis was educated and formed in the deductive reasoning method of scholastic philosophy, his writings are singularly marked by the absence of its method and terminology. This is all the more remarkable when we consider that he wrote his *Meditations on the Church* (more commonly known as the *Controversies*) almost at the same time that Pierre Charron, the writer considered as one of the titular gods of critical thinkers of both the 17th and 18th centuries, wrote his book *Les trois vérités* in a style and presentation that was completely in the scholastic tradition.

Francis was very careful in his public debates with the Reformers to avoid the scholastic method "because this method ordinarily gives as much obstinacy to the will as it does light to the intellect."^{xix}[xix]^{xx} To recall Chesterton's phrase, it was simply "moonshine." His skeptical attitude toward scholastic philosophy endeared him to the

foursome of critical thinkers, who criticized it as an obstacle to critical thinking. In their eyes, it tended toward dogmatism and tried to absolutize and divinize its own positions.

This skeptical attitude led De Sales to criticize the way theology manuals were written at the time. He was recognized as one of the foremost theologians of his day by the doctors of the Sorbonne, the greatest center of Catholic theology of that period. One of them, Dom Eustache de St. Paul, asked his advice on a *Summa theologica* he was writing. Francis advised him to drop the scholastic terminology dealing with method and to avoid such useless questions as "Whether angels are in a place by their essence or by their operations. Whether they move from one place without passing through another." Instead of a dry, lifeless, detached intellectual style, he advised that the book be written in an "affective style" (OEA 15, 117-120).

This attitude carried over also into the realm of critical, scientific inquiry. There was a young, brilliant Barnabite priest named Redento Baranzano, who taught the Copernican theory at the Chappusian College of Annecy at the very time that Copernicus' book *De revolutionibus* was placed on the Index by the Holy Office. Baranzano published a book on the subject without the proper ecclesiastical permissions and was recalled by his Superior General. Francis interceded on his behalf and had him reassigned to Annecy. He never faulted Baranzano for teaching the Copernican theory, and after the young scientist refined his position, the saint gave his written approval to a later work, which taught this same theory.xxi[xx]

The healthy skepticism that De Sales exhibited here toward the received scientific knowledge of that time leads to a kind of liberation, to a spirit of freedom (*liberté d'esprit*) that is necessary for exercising our critical faculties. However, to understand this *liberté d'esprit* (spirit of freedom) as conceived by De Sales, we have to see it also in a context of love. Francis says that fish can only be free when they are in water. Take them out of water and they lose the ability or freedom to move.xxii[xxi] God's love is our sea of freedom. "Love," the saint explains, "has no convicts or slaves but brings all things under its obedience by so sweet a force that, just as nothing is as strong as love, so nothing is as loveable as its strength" (*Love of God*, 1, 66). We can say that the only constraint that love knows is freedom. Take us out of this sea of love and we are no longer free. This immense sea of God's benevolent love is our "natural" habitat, so to speak, because we have a natural tendency to love God above all things and we have been created in, by and for love (*Love of God*, 1, 16 and 17).

Within this framework of a biblical anthropology, human nature is understood as being created in complete freedom. Francis liked to emphasize that the mass of clay at the moment of creation became man by the "breath of life," by the Spirit of Love.xxiii[xxii] And St. Paul reminds us that "where there is the Spirit of the Lord, there is freedom" (2 Cor. 3, 15). It is this spirit of freedom, which presided at the creation of the universe, and especially at the creation and birth of man. For our saint, it is freedom that defines man because without freedom he would not be able to love God. It is in loving that we make a gift to God "of the richest part of man, for freedom is the life of our heart" (OEA 9, 335). The word "heart" has to be understood here as the innermost part of our being.

The spirit of freedom plays an extremely important role in Salesian spirituality. It is a fundamental principle of his spiritual direction. He emphatically states in a letter to St. Jane de Chantal that "a holy and frank spirit of freedom" must obtain in all of her spiritual exercises. "I fight for a good cause," he says, " when I defend the holy and charitable spirit of freedom, which, as you know, I singularly honor."xxiv[xxiii]

It was this spirit of freedom that made him very flexible and pliable in so many areas that were matters of opinion and allowed for multiple solutions. He simply did not want to be tyrannized by his feelings, passions, and opinions in these areas. He applied the principle of a spirit of freedom, especially in our desire to serve God. This should be done with a receptivity and spirit of freedom and cannot be achieved if we permit our desire to serve God to get out of hand because then "it will subject all of our interior faculties and tyrannize reason in making choices."xxv[xxiv] He deeply esteemed pliable, flexible hearts and exclaims: "Blessed are pliable hearts for they will never break."xxvi[xxv] Pliable hearts make for pliable, flexible minds.

Although De Sales champions the cause of the spirit of freedom, he was aware of its limitations. Self-love, our own selfish interests, and our passions can blind our judgments and make us adhere[] obstinately to our opinions and our way of doing things. It is this awareness that prevented him from imposing his opinions on others.

Francis, along with the foursome and their forbearers, by their insistence on the spirit of freedom, on a skeptical and open mind, prepared the way for the refinement of experimental science developed in the 19th century, especially by Claude Bernard, the founder of experiential medicine. Here is what Bernard has to say regarding a spirit of freedom and benevolence in scientific inquiry:

When one discusses and experiments, however, in order to prove a preconceived idea, one no longer has an open mind (*l'esprit libre*) and one no longer searches for the truth. One restricts science to something that mixes personal vanity or different human passions. Self-love, however, should have nothing to do with all these vain disputes.... The truly scientific mind should then make us modest and benevolent.... In a word, the scientist who wants to discover truth must have his mind free, calm, and, if possible, never have his eyes, as Bacon says, moistened by human passions.xxvii[xxvi]

Bernard brings out very clearly the role of the spirit of freedom in those things which involve our judgment, will and benevolent attitude, an attitude which results from an experimental mind. But what he considered an effect, i.e., benevolence, De Sales would convince as a condition necessary for exercising this method. Of course, Francis' conception of benevolence is much more profound than Bernard's.

Practically every aspect of Salesian thought that we have touched on has been discussed in relation to the all pervasive power and presence of love. It is God's purpose and intention that in human nature everything be organized and structured by love,

benevolent love: "...charity [benevolent love] governs and tempers all of the [virtues]...because God created man to his own image and likeness, and wills that just as in himself so also in man all things must be set in order by love and for love. He even tries to find a biological basis for the primacy of love in our make-up: " (*Love of God* 1, 66). They say that the heart is the first part of man that receives life by union with the soul, and the eye the last. Contrariwise, when one dies a natural death, the eye is the first to die and the heart the last."xxviii[xxvii] The heart here symbolizes love and the eye, knowledge. So, in effect, De Sales states that love is the first thing to come alive in us, then knowledge, which is the first to die in us, and love the last. This may be faulty embryology, but it certainly expresses in a vivid way the pre-eminence and primacy of love in his anthropology.

Far from clashing with the spirit of critical inquiry, faith can help us to gain a fuller understanding of this essential human activity. Any discussion on critical thinking in Salesian humanism should be considered against the background of faith, especially the mysteries of creation and the Incarnation. In the eyes of Montaigne and Charron, the word spoken at the creation of the universe and at the Incarnation demystified the world.xxix[xxviii] The "demystifying" word of God emphasizes and establishes the otherness of God in the sense that God is not to be identified with either human nature or with the world.

At the very heart of De Sales' teaching is the benevolent love of God which created the universe: "In the love God shows us, he always begins with benevolence since he wills and makes whatever good there is in us and then takes complacency in that good... He first created the universe for man and man in the universe and gave to each thing such measure of goodness as was suitable to it. All of this was done by pure benevolence" (*Love of God* 1, 249). The universe and the hierarchy of being of which it is composed are incomprehensible apart from the love of God. In this conception, "the world is nothing more than the birthplace and, so to speak, the cradle of love."xxx[xxix] It is benevolent love, which created goodness, value, and distinction in the universe.

Created in the image and likeness of God, man should have the same attitude toward creation that God has. As image of God, man is called to recognize the goodness, value and distinction in each created thing with a love of benevolence, a love "by which we love a thing for its own good" (*Love of God* 1, 80).. Man must, therefore, look upon the universe with a disinterested or unselfish love which makes him accept it for the value it has in itself and not for any purely utilitarian reasons.

Here we come up against the problem of sacralization and secularization. Sacralization is a process whereby creatures and created things become so united and identified with God that we can no longer distinguish them from God. This identification tends to attribute a divine power to created things thereby bringing into play magic and superstition. The attitude engendered by benevolent love, which accepts the world and all created things for their own sake, as good in themselves, depending on God but distinct from Him, secularizes or desacralizes the universe. Without this desacralization, it becomes impossible to have a critical mind. Genesis presents God the Creator in an attitude of

benevolence toward the universe. (cf. *Love of God* 1, 281-282). To be like God implies then this same attitude toward creation.

This is precisely the position of Francis, who points out the value and importance of every creature in the concert of praises that each offers to God precisely because of the value that each creature has in itself. Creatures "provide matter for praising him by their various wonderful properties which manifest the grandeur of their Maker." (*Love of God* 1, 256-257). It is for this reason that we must accept, look upon, and appreciate all of creation for what it is in itself.

Unlike Pascal and, particularly, Descartes, Francis, to paraphrase Descartes, would not say: "I think, therefore I am" ("*Je pense, donc je suis*"), but rather: "I love, therefore I am" ("*J'aime, donc je suis.*"). We see the frightful consequences of trying to grasp the universe only with our intellects as Descartes would have us do and not with our hearts. Admittedly, it has resulted in marvelous advances for human beings, but it has also led to unbelievable horrors and can lead to the total annihilation of the planet. This intellectual approach to scientific inquiry is being criticized as an obstacle to critical thought and to the search for truth. Modern science has its roots in 16th and 17th century thinkers, above all, in Francis Bacon, who viewed science as a way of dominating nature. He thought that the emotions and other faculties, except our intellect and reason, have no role in doing science.

A contemporary woman scientist levels the following criticism against the traditional method of scientific inquiry.

scientific inquiry, if it serious in its commitment to the most reliable and fullest description of the natural world, requires the full use of all our talents and available pathways to knowledge not only those that have historically been labeled masculine. Feeling, identification with nature, even love...have a necessary as well as productive place in the pursuit of science. xxxi[xxx]

Salesian humanism would harmonize nicely with the above approach. It would not be so much that of the thinker but of the lover. Our saint's aim would be "not to get the heavens in his head," but "his head into the heavens," as Chesterton expresses it (p. 20). De Sales' goal would not be to grasp the world through his intellect but rather to discover order, value, truth, and its *raison d'être* by benevolent love.

It is especially in understanding De Sales' views on the virtue of prudence that love becomes indispensable for exercising critical judgment. As a law student at the University of Padua, Francis understood so well the imperfections of man-made laws that he formulated this rule of life for himself: "It will still be necessary for me to exercise my judgment and prudence since there is no rule so general that does not have at times its exceptions, save this one that is the foundation of all others: NOTHING AGAINST GOD."xxxii[xxxi] It is really remarkable for a young man to speak in this way about human freedom and personal responsibility. In an *opusculum* entitled "How Love Utilizes

the Cardinal Virtues and primarily Prudence", written much later, the saint emphasizes this same idea: "The variety of human occurrences is so great that we can never prescribe a suitable order for all of them." For this reason, we need the integrating power of the virtue of prudence called *gnome*, which is "an ability to judge well, to discern or choose according to reason the just and equitable thing contrary to the words and the meaning of the laws by a consideration and knowledge of the intention and sentiment of the lawgiver...." But he hastens to add that we need a holy prudence, that is, a prudence inspired by charity so that we can become the paradise of God.xxxiii[xxxii]

It is in this little treatise that Francis draws our attention to the very strong link between love and judgment. "This statement," he remarks, "is noteworthy: Love makes us judge." He explains it in the following manner:

Love like the weight and counterweight of the clock of our soul, makes us judge in favor of the good that we like. If it is the love of charity, it will make us judge in favor of the true good. This is why it uses and governs prudence in a saintly manner. xxxiv[xxxiii]

As we noted at the outset of this study, we must not restrict critical thinking to the intellectual realm so that it becomes a mere academic exercise to be practiced in college classrooms. It is especially in the area of our personal relations that critical thinking and judgment and a "reflective skepticism" must be practiced. As Brookfield observes: "Only if we are able objectively to understand another's criticisms, reservations, and doubts can we begin to assess our own actions critically" (p. 216).

It is interesting to compare what this author states on the subject of critical thinking and personal relations with the words of Francis de Sales.

One of the most difficult tasks of critical analysis occurring within intimate personal relationships has to do with being able to take on the perspectives of others, that is, to reinterpret our actions in the light of our partner's views of these. The possibilities for self-deception in relationships are immense. (Brookfield 223).

Francis de Sales:

Philothea, be just and equitable in all your actions. Always put yourself in your neighbor's place and put him in yours, and then you will judge rightly.... We are obliged to correct them [our unreasonable behavior and judgments in our personal relations] since they are defects against reason and charity. In the end, they are nothing but deceit, for a man loses nothing by living generously, nobly, courteously, and with a royal, just and reasonable heart. (*Devout Life* 211)

There is a striking similarity in these two passages, even though they were written in two different contexts. The one was written in a context on the importance of critical thinking

in our intimate personal relations, the other on the role of reason guided by love in our comportment with others.

De Sales' context is much broader. He talks about being reasonable in all our human relationships and realizes that there is a critical self-examination that a person must conduct in all of his dealings with others. This is why he goes on to say: "Do not neglect, Philothea, frequently to examine whether your heart be such with respect to your neighbor as you would desire his to be with respect to you, were you in his situation. This is the touchstone of true reason" (*Devout Life* 211). If De Sales calls for this critical self-examination in our general dealings with other human beings, it is to be practiced a fortiori in our intimate personal relationships. He speaks about this at great length in the chapters on friendship[] in his *Introduction to a Devout Life* (cf. pp. 164-179).

How can we "take on the perspective of others" or put ourselves in our neighbor's place and do it with a "reasonable heart"? Brookfield states that critical thinking takes imagination. Other writers on critical thinking, as well, note that a creative imagination can play an important role in developing critical thinking skills. It facilitates what is called divergent thinking and is utilized extensively in various techniques to imagine alternative patterns or ways in which we think. Such techniques as lateral thinking proposed by De Bono and synetics "focus on developing creative thought through metaphors, analogies, and the adoption of unfamiliar perspectives in identifying problems and generating solutions" (Brookfield 117). In this view, the poet, the artist, the musician can and must also be critical thinkers as well as scientists, theologians, philosophers, and just plain ordinary folk.

Here again, Francis' thought has to be understood in relation to love. Raymond de Sebonde was one of the many writers that he was familiar with and drew upon, especially through his reading of Montaigne. De Sebonde analyzed and deepened the idea of the unifying and transforming power of love. "Love," de Sebound states, "has the virtue and power of uniting, changing, converting and transforming, such are its natural and inseparable powers. It unites the lover to the beloved."xxxv[xxxiv] These characteristics of love are fully developed by Francis, especially in his *Treatise on the Love of God*. He describes the kiss as a perfect symbol of the unifying power of love and states in several places that love makes lovers equal.

It is especially the idea of the equalizing power of love that helps De Sales to utilize the imagination in critical thinking. "Love," he says, "has a wonderful power to sharpen the imagination so that it can penetrate beyond itself". The imagination powered by love can have a marvelous transforming effect so as to reach out to others in the sense that they are drawn by their love to feel, to think, and to see what the other feels, sees and thinks, in a word, to what the other experiences. We see this especially in the love of compassion, which is the ability to feel acutely the pain and suffering of another. This can have physical effects on our bodies as evidenced by the stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi. De Sales tells us that he thought long and hard on how this phenomenon can and does occur, and he explains it through the power of the imagination in experiencing compassion under the influence of an ardent love. Certainly psychosomatic medicine attests to the

mind's ability to cause physical pain and suffering. De Sales stresses the unifying power of compassion" "We do not desire compassion because of the pain it brings to our heart, but rather because such pain unites us and associates us to our beloved who is in pain". The important thing to conclude from Salesian thought here is that the imagination, through the proper love, can bring about an incredible openness to the other, especially to the other's sufferings.

Francis had an extremely fertile, poetic imagination which he used very effectively in making others understand the mysteries of God's love that are not readily accessible to our discursive faculty. It gave a truly marvelous flexibility and pliability to his mind and his thinking, especially in imagining alternative ways of looking at things, even to imagining the impossible: "But if to imagine the impossible, I could think [God] lacked any good, I would never cease to wish it for [Him], even at the cost of my life, my being, and all else in the world". This is a clear instance where he uses his imagination to increase his love for God. "To imagine the impossible" certainly takes us to the limits of creative imagination.

Conclusion

Benevolent love is not incompatible with an inquiring and skeptical mind. In fact, this love enriches and enhances all of our faculties and engenders an openness, flexibility, and spirit of freedom without which our critical faculties cannot be fully exercised. Love as conceived in the Christian humanism of Francis de Sales, because of its primacy and pre-eminence, is able to energize, govern, and integrate all of our faculties in the search for truth. The comprehensive view of human nature that emerges in Salesian humanism appears to accommodate very well the contemporary critique of the way scientific inquiry is conducted. The scientist should not approach the universe with the idea of dominating it. This purely intellectual approach does not allow for the use of our other faculties to understand more fully the secrets of nature. Benevolent love which causes us to meditate, contemplate, and feel in harmony with creation allows the affective domain to play a significant role in all fields of critical inquiry.

Francis was fascinated by the interplay of the sun's rays on the neck plumage of pigeons which yields such deep golden, varied colors; and he frequently uses this image to express spiritual truths. Using this same imagery, we can say that just as rays of sunlight shining on a pigeon reveal all of its many, rich, beautiful colors, so the rays of God's benevolent love shining on our faculties highlight the beauty of all of them in arriving at truth and thereby reveal critical thinking as a multicolored, splendored thing. [] - not as a cold, lifeless, detached intellectualism, "moonshine," but rather as a warm, scintillating, and life-giving "sunshine." This perhaps can make us appreciate why de Sales says that "love[] is the perfection of the mind" Unlike Pascal, who saw thought as constituting man's grandeur ("*La pensée fait la grandeur de l'homme.*"), our Christian humanist sees love as constituting man's grandeur ("*L'amour fait la grandeur de l'homme*").

i[i] *Orthodoxy* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1959), p. 32. "The madman is the man who has lost everything but his reason."

i[iii] Geoffrey Cowley, "How the Mind Was Designed," *Newsweek* (13 Mar., 1989), 57.

i[iv] Frances de Sales, *On the Love of God*, trans. John K. Ryan, 2 vols. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1963), 1, 77.

i[v] François. La Mothe LeVayer, *Deux dialogues faits à l'imitation des anciens sur l'opiniâtreté et la divinité* (Paris: Coll. Chfs.-d'oeuvre Méconnu, 1922), pp. 165-166. There are several references made in this study to a group of seventeenth-century French critical, independent thinkers who were among those known as "*les libertins érudits*." A foursome made up of La Mothe Le Vayer, Gabriel Naudé, Guy Patin and Pierre Gassendi were dubbed "La Tétrade." Hereinafter they will be referred to as the "foursome of critical thinkers" or simply the "foursome." Cf. Alexander Pocetto, "St. Francis de Sales et *les libertins érudits*," Diss. Université de Laval, 1970.

i[vi] Peter Facione, "Toward a Theory of Critical Thinking," *Liberal Education* 70 (1984), 257.

i[vii] Stephen Brookfield, *Developing Critical Thinkers: Challenging Adults to Explore Alternative Ways of Thinking and Acting* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987), pp. 7-9.

i[viii] Pascal, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Jacques Chevalier (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), p. 575.

i[ix] François de Sales, *Oeuvres de saint François de Sales, Evêque et Prince de Genève et Docteur de l'Eglise, édition complète*, 26 vols. (Annecy: J. Nirat, 1892-1932), 4, 165. Hereinafter referred to as OEA. The French text reads as follows: L'homme est la perfection de l'univers, l'esprit est la perfection de l'homme, l'amour celle de l'esprit, et la charité celle de l'amour."

i[x] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A study in Moral Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1981), p. 199. The author describes here Sartre's vision of human nature in *La Naissance*.

i[xi] Anthony Levi, *French Moralists: The Theory of the Passions, 1585-1649* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 32.

i[xii] Jeanne R. J. Haight, *The Concept of Reason in French Classical Literature, 1635-1690* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), p. 155. This author seems to be unaware of the use of *raison* among the many mystics, especially Francis de Sales. She does not include in her bibliography H. Bremond's monumental work on the *Histoire du sentiment religieux en France au XVIIe siècle*. This work radically changed the rather limited and one-sided view of seventeenth-century France and the concept of French Classicism.

i[xiii] OEA, 1, 330-33. The French text reads as follows: "*Dieu est auteur en nous de la rayons naturelle, et ne hait rien de ce quil a faict, si que, ayant marqué nostre entendement de ceste sienne lumiere, il ne faut pas penser que l'autte lumiere surnaturell quil depart aux fidelles, combatte et soit contraire a la naturelle; elles sont filles d'un mesme Pere... elles donques peuvent et doivent demeurer ensemble comme seurs tres affectionnées. Soit en nature soit sur nature la rayson est toujours la mesme, ce sont seulement diverses lumieres qui la monstrent a nos entendemens; la foy nous la monstre sur nature et l'entendemens en nature, mays la verité n'est jamais contraire a soy mesme.*"

i[xiv] Francis de Sales, *Introduction to a Devout Life*, trans. John K. Ryan (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955), p. 209.

i[xiv] OEA, 9, 456: "...*Pourquoi l'incarnation a-t-elle été faite? Pour nous enseigner à vivre non plus brutalement comme l'homme avait vécus depuis la chute d'Adam, mais avec et selon la raison.*"

i[xv] Pascal, p. 1219. "*La dernière démarche de la raison est de reconnaître qu'il y a une infinité de chose qui la surpassent: elle n'est que faible, si elle ne va jusqu'à connaître cela.*"

i[xvi] Pascal, p. 1150. "...*Il y a sans doute des lois naturelles, mais cette belle raison corrompue a tout corrompu....*"

i[xvii] Pascal, p. 569. "*Je vous avoue, Monsieur, que je ne puis voire sans joie dans cet auteur la superbe raison si invinciblement froissée par ses propres armes...*"

i[xviii] OEA, 1, p. 332. "*L'expérience doncques et la connoissance des sens est très véritable, mais les discours que nous en tirons nous trahissent: hors de la qui combat la connoissance et la propre expérience, combat la raison et la renverse, car le fondement de tout discours dépend de la connoissance des sens et de l'expérience.*"

i[xix] Cited by E.J. *La Jeunie, Saint François de Sales, l'homme, sa pensée, l'action*, 2 vols. (Paris: Guy Victor, 1966), 1, p. 516.

i[xx] OEA, 18, 94-5. For a more detailed discussion of this matter, see Pocetto, 200-07.

i[xxi] Déposition de Louis de Genève, 1er Procès de Genève, MS, ad ar. 26, Archives of the Visitation monastery, Annecy. "...*les poissons lorsqu'ils sont hors de la mer ou de leur eau, ils sont hors de la liberté à quoy l'ame s'attache hors de Dieu, elle perd sa liberté.*"

i[xxii] OEA, 5, 268. "...*Dieu de sa main maîtresse le forma du limon de la terre, mais cors néanmoins qui seroit sans mouvement, sans vie et sans grace, jusques à ce que Dieu inspirast en icelluy le spiracle de vie, c'est à dire la sacrée charité, sans laquelle rien ne nous profite.*"

i[xxiii] OEA, 13, 184. "*Je combatz pour une bonne cause quand je défend la sainte et charitable liberté d'esprit; laquelle comme vous sçavez j'honore singulièrement....*"

i[xxiv] OEA, 9, 300. "*Il sera toujours meilleur d'ouyr Notre Seigneur avec indifférence et l'esprit de liberté ce qui ne se pourra faire si ce desir de servir Dieu complètement grossit, car il assujettira toutes les facultés intérieures et tyranniserà la raison sur le choix.*"

i[xxv] OEA, 6, 17. "*Bien heureux sont les cœurs pliable, car ils ne rompent jamais.*"

i[xxvi] Claude Bernard, *Introduction à la médecine expérimentale* (Paris: Larousse classique, 1951), 59. "*Que l'on discute et que l'on expérimente pour prouver quand même une idée préconçue, on n'a plus l'esprit libre et l'on ne cherche pas la vérité. On fait de la science étroite à laquelle se mêlent la vanité personnelle ou les diverses passions humaines. L'amour propre, cependant, ne devrait rien avoir à faire dans toutes ces vaines disputes.... En un mot, le savant qui veut trouver la vérité doit conserver son esprit libre, calme, et si c'était possible, ne jamais avoir, comme dit Bacon, l'œil humecté par les passions humaines.*"

i[xxvii] OEA, 5, 257. "*On dit que le cœur est la première partie de l'homme qui reçoit la vie par l'union de l'ame, et l'œil est la dernière; comme au contraire, quand on meurt naturellement, l'œil commence le premier à mourir et le cœur le dernier.*"

i[xxviii] Cf. *Essais*, 3 vols. Ed. Maurice Rat (Paris: Garnier Frère, 1962), 1, 651.

i[xxix] Louis Lavelle, *Quatre Saints* (Paris: A. Michel, 1957), p. 199. "...le monde n'est rien de plus que le lieu de naissance et pour ainsi dire, le berceau de l'amour."

i[xxx] Evelyn Fox Keller, "Contending with a Masculine Bias in the Ideals and Values of Science, " *Chronicle of Higher Education* 2(Oct. 1985), 96.

i[xxxii] I/ea 22m 39. "Encores me faudra-t-il par tout exercer le jugement et la prudence, puysqu'il n'y a regle si general qui n'aye quelquefors son exception, si non celle-ci, fondement de toutes autres: RIEN CONTRE DIEU."

i[xxxiii] OEA 26, 46. "...le gnome, un'habileté de bien juger, discerner ou choysir selon la rayson, le droit et l'equitee contre les paroles et le sens des loix, par la consideration et connoissance de l'intention du legistateur ... la varieté des occurences humaines estant si grande que jamais on ne peut prescire l'ordre convenable pour toutes."

i[xxxiiii] OEA 26, 47. "L'amour, comme estant le poids et contreponds de l'horloge de nostre ame, il nous fait juger en faveur du bien qu'il affectione. Que si c'est l'amour de charité, il nous fait juger en faveur du vray bien: c'est pourquoy il employe saintement la prudence et la gouverne."

i[xxxv] Raymond de Sebonde, *Théologie naturelle*, cxxx, 221, cited by André Comparot, *Amour et Vérité: Sebon, Vivès et Michel de Montaigne* (Paris: Klincksiek, 1983), p. 11).
