

# Mystics of the Church 11

John of the Cross, French Mystics

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## John of the Cross, French Mystics

- I. John of the Cross
  - Although scarcely noticed for four centuries, John of the Cross (1542-1591) has become for many the standard by which to measure mystical theology and experience. Thomas Merton thought so. He constantly cross-referenced his own ideas with John's, and one of his early works, *The Ascent to Truth*, is a sort of mertonizing of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*. John of the Cross equaled even Teresa of Avilá in the profundity of his mystical experience and perhaps surpassed her in the subtlety with which he interpreted it. He had the benefit of university training, whereas she depended far more heavily on experience alone. Despite their age differential, however, in 1567 she elected him her confessor and called on him to assist her in reforming the Carmelite Order.

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### – A. Life

- John was born at Fontiveros, about 25 miles north of Avilá, a son of noble but poor parents. In 1563 he entered the Carmelite monastery of Medina del Campo. From 1564 to 1568 he studied theology at Salamanca, one of the newly founded institutions taking part in Francisco Ximenes's reform movement. He was ordained a priest in 1567. Disgusted with the laxity of the Carmelite Order, he contemplated becoming a Carthusian. Teresa persuaded him instead to join her in her reform movement. He served as Master of the Discalced Carmelite College at Alcalá de Henares (1571-1572) and as confessor of the Convent of the Incarnation at Avilá (1572-1577), to which Teresa had returned as prioress in 1571. Following the anti-reformist General Chapter of the Calced Carmelites held at Piacenza,

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- Italy, in 1575, he was arrested by order of the Visitor General, taken to Toledo, and imprisoned in December 1577. After nine months confined to a tiny cell, he escaped and fled to the monastery of El Calvario in Adalusia. Separation of Calced and Discalced Carmelites ensued in 1579-1580. From 1579 to 1582 John served as rector of the college he established at Baeza. In 1582 he went to Grenada as prior. In 1588 he assumed the office of prior in Segovia. Hostility of Nicolás Doria, vicar general of the Discalceds, led to his banishment to the province of Andalusia in mid-1591. After severe illness and great suffering, he died at Ubeda at the end of the year. He was beatified in 1675 and canonized in 1726. In 1926 Pope Pius XI declared him a "Doctor of the Church."

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### – B. Writings

- John's writings combine the imagination and sensitivity of a poet with the intellectual precision of a theologian trained in Thomist philosophy as he sought to articulate a mystic's apprehension of God as a living, loving Being beyond the feeling, imagination, or understanding. John's extensive writings on the mystical life consist almost entirely of commentaries on his own poems, including the classic "On a Dark Night." He composed most of the poem known as *The Spiritual Canticle* during his imprisonment in 1578. Much of it was taken from the Song of Songs. Subsequently, at the urging of many, John composed a verse-by-verse commentary on the canticle. In it he sought to "describe the soul's habitual progress ere it come to this estate of the Spiritual Marriage." As he summarized the work:

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- first of all [the soul] exercised itself in the trials and bitternesses of mortification, and in meditation, as the soul said at the beginning, from the first stanza down to that which says: "Scattering a thousand graces." Afterward it passed through the pains and straits of love which have been described in the stanzas following, as far as that which says: "Withdraw them, Beloved." And in addition to this, the soul then relates how it has received great communications and many visits from its Beloved, wherein it has reached ever-increasing perfection and knowledge in His love, so much so that, passing beyond all things, and even beyond itself, it has surrendered itself to Him through union of love in the Spiritual Betrothal, wherein, as one that is now betrothed, it has received from the Spouse great gifts and jewels, even as it has described in its son, from the stanza wherein this Divine betrothal was made, and which says: "Withdraw them, Beloved." (*The Living Flame*, trans. E. Allison Peers. Doubleday Image Books, 173.)

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- He wrote *The Ascent of Mount Carmel—The Dark Night* soon after his release, *The Living Flame of Love* around 1583-1584. Unlike *The Spiritual Canticle*, John did not adhere closely to the text of the poem in later writings. In the originally combined former treatise he commented only on the first two verses of his brilliant poem “On a Dark Night” in which he expressed the mystery of God to which he had gained access through faith, scriptures, and his own experience. In *The Living Flame of Love*, composed at the behest of Doña Ana de Peñlosa, who gave lodging to the Discalced Carmelite nuns when they first came to Granada in 1582, he treated “the very intimate and exalted union and transformation of the soul in God.” He used again an image he had introduced in *The Dark Night*, a log burning until it became “a living flame.” (*John of the Cross: Selected Writings, Classics of Western Spirituality*, 292.)

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- C. The Mystical Journey
  - 1. John of the Cross belonged to the apophatic tradition of Pseudo-Dionysius. God remains incomprehensible. In *The Spiritual Canticle* he insisted that God, the transcendent and incomprehensible God, must be sought because God is “hidden.”
    - You do very well, O soul, to seek Him ever as one hidden, for you exalt God immensely and approach very near Him when you consider Him higher and deeper than anything you can reach. Hence, pay no attention, neither partially nor entirely, to anything which your faculties understand about God, but to what you do not understand about Him. Never stop with loving and delighting in your understanding and experience of God, but love and delight in what is neither understandable nor perceptible of Him. (*Spiritual Canticle*, Stanza 1, no. 12.)

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- 2. Kieran Kavanaugh has summed up the Johannine perspective in this way: “In his major works John showed how the path of searching for the Beloved who is hidden (*The Spiritual Canticle*), or of ascending to the summit of the mountain (*The Ascent of Mount Carmel*), or of escaping at night to meet the Beloved (*The Dark Night of the Soul*) involves a process that is gradual with its alternating periods of apparent progression and regression until the soul is completely transformed into God as the log of wood is transformed when placed in the fire.” (“Spanish Sixteenth Century: Carmel and Surrounding Movements,” *Christian Spirituality*, III, 82.)

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- 3. John of the Cross condensed the spiritual journey to three phases. **The first is life in the senses.** Initially the beginner feels the love of Christ with sensible fervor and takes the first solid steps forward. **The dark night and negation** follow as phase two. In *The Dark Night* John divided this phase into two: the night of the senses and the night of the spirit. By senses he did not mean *physical* but *spiritual* senses. Spiritually we wrestle with the same deadly sins of pride, avarice, luxury, wrath, gluttony, envy, and sloth that we confront physically. If the “night of the senses” seems bad, the “night of the spirit” gets worse. In transition, John warned, “The first purgation or night is bitter and terrible to sense, as we shall now show. The second bears no

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- comparison with it, for it is horrible and awful to the spirit, as we shall show presently.” (*The Dark Night*, translated by E. Allison Peers. Doubleday Image Books, 61.) Why worse? Because “God now sees that they have grown a little, and are becoming strong enough to lay aside their swaddling clothes and be taken from the gentle breast; so He sets them down from His arms and teaches them to walk on their own feet; which they feel to be very strange, for everything seems to be going wrong with them.” (*The Dark Night*, 1.9.3; Peers, 63.) The first benefit that accrues to someone who has grown a little is “the knowledge of oneself and one’s misery.” (*The Dark Night* 1.12.2; Peers, 76.) God will also enlighten the soul about the greatness and excellence of God and teach humility, “the contrary virtue to the first capital sin,” pride (1.12.7; Peers, 81.)

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- 4. Where humans play some role in the dark night of the senses, in the dark night of the spirit God takes over.
  - This dark night is an inflowing of God into the soul, which purges it from its ignorances and imperfections, habitual, natural and spiritual, and which is called by contemplatives infused contemplation, or mystical theology. Herein God secretly teaches the soul and instructs it in perfection of love, without its doing anything, or understanding of what manner is this infused contemplation. Inasmuch as it is the loving wisdom of God, God produces striking effects in the soul, for, by purging and illumining it, He prepares it for the union of love with God. Wherefore the same loving wisdom that purges the blessed spirits and enlightens them is that which here purges the soul and illumines it. (2.5.1; Peers, 100.)

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- Why is this called “the dark night”? For two reasons—because Divine Wisdom so transcends the soul that it is darkness to it and because of the soul’s vileness and impurity. Through the many pains the soul experiences God humbles it in order to exalt it afterwards. This is a happy night, therefore, for the darkness of the spirit prepares the soul for illumination. John invoked here his analogy of the log consumed by fire so that it might become a living flame. Initially, as it burns it appears unsightly and gives off a bad odor, but finally “it begins to kindle it externally and give it heat, and at last transforms it into itself and makes it as beautiful as fire.” (2.10; Peers, 127.)

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- 5. Purging, therefore, prepares the way for the third stage, **union**. Freed from its constraints, the soul now develops a vehement passion for Divine Love, as in the line of the poem, “Kindled in love with yearnings.” Contemplation is “an infused and loving knowledge of God, which enlightens the soul and at the same time enkindles it with love, until it is raised up step by step, even unto God its Creator. For it is love alone that unites and joins the soul with God.” (2.18.5; Peers, 166.) John envisioned a ladder of love with ten steps by which the soul mounts to God. Step one “causes the soul to languish” (2.19.1; Peers, 167.) Step two “causes the soul to seek God without ceasing.” (2.19.2; Peers, 168.) Step three “causes the soul to work and gives it fervour so that it fails not.” (2.19.3; Peers, 169.)

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- 6. Step four causes the soul “an habitual suffering because of the Beloved, yet without weariness.” (2.19.4; Peers, 170.) Step five “makes the soul to desire and long for God impatiently.” (2.19.5; Peers, 171.) On step six “the soul runs swiftly to God and touches Him again and again, and it runs without fainting by reason of its hope.” (2.20.1; Peers, 172.) Step seven “makes the soul to become vehement in its boldness.” (2.20.2; Peers, 172.) Step eight “causes the soul to seize Him and hold Him fast without letting Him go, even as the Bride says, after this manner: ‘I found Him Whom my heart and soul love; I held Him and I will not let Him go.’” (2.20.3; Peers, 173.) Step nine “makes the soul to burn with sweetness. This step is that of the perfect, who now burn sweetly in God.” (2.20.4; Peers, 174.) Step ten “causes the soul to become wholly assimilated to God, by reason of the clear and immediate vision of God which it then possesses; when, having ascended in this life to the ninth step, it goes forth from the

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- flesh. These souls, who are few, enter not into purgatory, since they have already been wholly purged by love.” (2.20.5; Peers, 174.) In *The Living Flame of Love* John has noted that the difference between the transformation in love and the flame of love is like the difference between the wood that is on fire and the flame that leaps up from it. The flame of love is the Holy Spirit. In the actual union “the soul feels Him within itself not only as a fire that has consumed and transformed it, but as a fire that burns and flares within it.” (*The Living Flame of Love*, Stanza 1, no. 3.)

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- II. Madame Acarie (Mary of the Incarnation)
  - Henry of Navarre ended the religious wars in France by agreeing to be received into the Catholic Church in 1593 and, in the Edict of Nantes in 1596, gave Protestants some assurance of a place in the country. The writings of Teresa of Avilá appeared in French translation in 1601, those of John of the Cross two decades later. A great new century of French spirituality opened with the classic by Benoît de Canfeld entitled *Règle de perfection réduite au seul point de la volonté divine* (1609) and closed with an equally striking treatise on the will of God by Jean Pierre de Caussade (1675-1721). Among the mystics in this century the towering figures were Madame Acarie (1566-1618), Francis de Sales (1567-1622), Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629), and Blaise Pascal (1623-1662). Manifest in French spirituality in the 17<sup>th</sup> century

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- was an effort to offer alternatives to stern and demanding Jesuit piety. Francis de Sales adapted Ignatius Loyola's spiritual exercises for devout Christians who found them originals too challenging. Jansenists, notably Blaise Pascal, attempted to revive Augustinian thinking. Carmelite Lay Brother Lawrence (c. 1611-1691) proposed as an alternative to demanding methods *The Practice of the Presence of God*. Quietist leader in French high society Madame Guyon offered as an alternative *A Short and Easy Method of Prayer* (1685). The Church condemned both Jansenists and Quietists, however.

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### – A. Life

- Barbe Jeanne Avrillot was born into a wealthy bourgeois family. Educated at the convent of Longchamps, near Mont-Valerien, she showed signs of exceptional piety. Although she wanted to become a nun, she married Pierre Acarie, Viscomte de Villemore, in 1584 in obedience to her parents. The French translation of the *Autobiography* of Teresa of Avilá by Francisco de Ribera (1601) made a deep impression on her. Convinced by visions that God wanted her to introduce the Carmelites into France, she persuaded Mademoiselle de Longueville to obtain King Francis I's consent and actively assisted in the establishment of the Carmel in Paris in 1603. She also assisted Madame de Sainte-Beuve in founding the Ursulines in Quebec and encouraged Pierre de Bérulle in the founding of the Oratory

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- in Paris in 1611. The Ursulines were a teaching order. The French Oratory sought to enhance the spirituality of secular priests and to reestablish the priestly office among the laity. Following the death of her husband in 1613, she entered the Carmel of Amiens as a lay sister. In 1615 she took vows under the name "Mary of the Incarnation" and a year later transferred to Pontoise to reform the finances of the house. She was beatified in 1791.

### – B. Mystical Experience

- Madame Acarie experienced numerous ecstasies and visions. Unfortunately she left no record, so we cannot assess them. She gained fame for her charity and was greatly respected as a spiritual guide. Francis de Sales held her in high repute.

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- III. Francis de Sales
  - We are fortunate that Francis de Sales could not discharge his duties as the Bishop of Geneva, for it left him free to become one of the master spiritual guides. He did much of his direction by letter, but he incorporated some of his best insights into his classic *Introduction to the Devout Life* and a treatise *On the Love of God*.

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- A. Life
  - Francis was born in the castle of Sales in Savoy. He was educated at Annecy, Paris (1581-1588), and Padua (1588-1592). In response to an overpowering sense of calling to the priesthood, he relinquished brilliant secular opportunities. Ordained in 1593, he was appointed Provost of Geneva. He immediately launched a mission to win the Chablais from Calvinism to Catholicism. Of particular concern, surfacing during his student days in Paris, was Calvin's virtual determinism, that God has predestined some to salvation and some to damnation. As Michael J. Buckley has observed, Francis "insisted on the abundance of grace offered to all and that whatever damnation did occur

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- happened only *post praevisa merita*." ("Seventeenth-Century French Spirituality," *Christian Spirituality*, III: 35.) In the face of great personal sufferings and dangers, he succeeded. In 1599 he was named Coadjutor Bishop of Geneva, taking the title of Bishop of Nicopolis, but was not consecrated until he succeeded to the see in 1602. In addition to fulfilling whatever duties related to his diocese, he regularly preached, heard confession, offered spiritual direction, and organized the teaching of the catechism. In 1603 he met and soon became the spiritual director of Jane Frances de Chantal. Together in 1610 they founded the Visitandines or Sisters of Visitation. He suffered a stroke and died suddenly on December 28, 1622. He was beatified in 1661 and canonized in 1665. In 1877 Pope Pius IX declared him a "Doctor of the Church." In 1923 Pope Pius XI entitled him "Patron on the Catholic Press."

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- B. Writings
  - Francis de Sales' most noted writings originated out of his spiritual direction by letter. He refused to think of two quite distinct levels of spiritual life—one for religious and another for ordinary saints. At the beginning of his *Introduction to the Devout Life* in 1609 he averred, "My intention is to write for those who have to live in the world and who, according to their state, to all outward appearances have to lead an ordinary life; and who, often enough, will not think of undertaking a devout life, considering it impossible; no one, they believe, ought to aspire to the palm of Christian piety while surrounded by the affairs of the world." (*Introduction to the Devout Life*, Everyman's Library; Preface, 1.) In line with his stated purpose, the bishop crafted a "gentler" approach than Loyola's. "The practice of devotion must differ for the gentleman and the artisan, the servant and the prince, for widow, young girl or wife," he said. "Further, it must be accommodated to their particular strength, circumstances and

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- duties” (1.3, EL 13-14.) As Loyola insisted, one would need a guide, but a gentle one. De Sales cautioned against expecting to achieve perfection in a short while. “One of the best exercises of gentleness is to be patient with ourselves and our imperfections,” he noted. (II.9; EL, 117.) With God’s grace people in any walk of life can observe the commandments of God and live Christ-like lives as they fulfill duties required by their state in life. While writing his *Introduction to the Devout Life* de Sales discerned already that he needed to write a second book that would be both a sequel to the *Introduction* and yet more fundamental in character and exalted in purpose than it was. He first mentioned the project in a letter to Jane de Chantal dated February 11, 1607. He occasionally referred to his progress on it in succeeding years, but he did not give the publisher a final manuscript until March 28, 1616. The work got an imprimatur May 25, 1616.

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### – C. Sources

- Francis de Sales was thoroughly trained in scholastic methodology, as is evident in the careful structuring of his thought. A Christian humanist, he used Socratic doctrine as developed by Plato and Aristotle. He drew philosophical principles and factual materials from many other Greek and Roman writers such as Pliny, Aulus Gellius, Plutarch, Theophrastus, Diogenes Laertius, Livy, Tacitus, Vergil, and Horace. He blended the classical greats with the Church Fathers—Origen, Ambrose, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Gregory the Great. He added to these great spiritual writers closer to his own time—Bernard of Clairvaux, Bernardine of Siena, Catherine of Siena, Catherine of Genoa, Teresa of Avilá, and

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- Louis of Grenada. None of these, however, surpassed his use of scriptures. The books he cited most were the Psalms and the Song of Songs, but scholars have tallied 110 references to Genesis, 96 to Matthew, 69 to Romans, and 27 to Revelation. As John K. Ryan has remarked, however, “The other great source of his doctrine is his own character, mind, and experiences in life.” (*On the Love of God*, Preface, I: 22.) Ryan added, “His knowledge of Scripture is exhaustive and furnishes him with unlimited material to clarify and corroborate his thought.” (Ibid. 24.)

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- D. Themes in Francis de Sales
  - Wendy M. Wright and Joseph F. Power, OSFS, have listed six themes in Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal. Although Jane de Chantal possessed her own originality, Francis probably was chiefly responsible for these.
  - 1. **God is a God of merciful love and compassion.** In Book 2 of his treatise *On the Love of God* de Sales described how the loving God desired from all eternity to be in intimate communion with the creation. Despite the fall, a result of free choice that God foresaw, God acted through the loving sacrifice of the Son to offer humankind redemption. Out of love God gives each creature enough grace freely to participate in his or her own salvation and God desires intensely to draw each person into the intimate communion for which God created each.

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– See, this divine lover is at the gate. He does not merely knock, but he remains there knocking. He calls to the soul, “Come, arise, make haste, my love,” and “puts his hand into the lock” to try if he can open it. If he utters his voice in the streets, he does not simply speak, but he goes about crying out, that is, he continues to cry out. If he proclaims that everyone must be converted, it seems as if he has never repeated it often enough. “Be converted! Be converted! Do penance! Return to me! Live! Why do you die, O house of Israel?” In a word, our divine Savior never forgets to show that “his mercies are above all his works,” that his mercy surpasses his justice, that “his redemption is copious,” that his love is infinite, and, as the Apostle says, “that he is rich in mercy,” and consequently, that he “wishes all men to be saved,” and that none should perish.” (*On the Love of God*, II.8; translated by John K. Ryan. Doubleday Image Books, I: 123.)

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- God’s eternal love prepares human hearts to respond in love to God’s love. Each person must respond voluntarily. All are called, but, sadly, some do not respond. “God did not deprive you of the operation of his love, but you deprived his love of your co-operation. God would never have rejected you if you had not rejected his special love for you.” (II.9; Ryan, I: 128.) Grace does not force itself upon us. Instead “the Holy Spirit pours into our hearts the first rays and perceptions of his light and vital heat.” (II. 10; Ryan, 136.) The consciousness of Divine love is acquired by faith and manifests itself in charity.

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- **2. The Christian life is a life lived between the two wills of God—the “signified will of God” and “the will of God’s good pleasure.”** The first is “God’s will to be done.” We know it through what God says, directs, and inspires. It may manifest itself in scripture, Church teaching, devotional literature, private and communal prayer, or spiritual direction. In it human liberty reaches its widest parameters. In a sense, we become co-creators with God of God’s will. Once we see what it is, we conform to it. The “will of God’s good pleasure,” however, is done without human consent. It is manifest in events, facts, and existing realities. De Sales did not take the view that God causes whatever happens. Rather, he believed that nothing that happens is outside

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- God’s loving embrace. God is wherever we are. Living between two wills of God means that we must maintain a creative tension that refuses to limit God to one expression or another. Human response, according to de Sales, requires “the love of submission.” That could mean responding in different ways—“resignation” in a patient way or “holy indifference” or “holy disinterestedness.” Grace-filled acceptance of what is beyond our control is a mark of Christian character. De Sales wanted to steer a course between otherworldliness and fatalism so often found in Christian thought. To live *between* the two wills is to live in harmony with the unique will of God.

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- 3. **God's voice is raised and heard in a life lived in the midst of the world as well as in the "desert."** De Sales was convinced that all—lay or clergy, man or woman, celibate or married—are called to the devout life. Wright and Power cited a letter to his own sister:
  - Let us all belong to God, my daughter, in the midst of so much busyness brought on by the diversity of worldly things. Where could we give better witness to our fidelity than in the midst of things going wrong? Ah, dearest daughter, my sister, solitude has its assaults, the world its busyness; in either place we must be courageous, since in either place divine help is available to those who trust in God and who humbly and gently beg for His fatherly assistance. (Letter to Mme. de Cornillon, DCXIV; *Francis de Sales. Jane de Chantal: Letters of Spiritual Direction*. Classics of Western Spirituality, 45.)

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- The goal is, as they headed their letters, to "Live Jesus!" Jesus lived in the midst with the householder, worker, statesman, merchant, or courtier. Devotion need not take one away from daily experience, for true Christian life could be lived anywhere. Of central importance is developing the art of letting Jesus live. As Wright and Power say, "Jesus is seen *among* persons, in the grace-filled way they gently lead each other to greater love and conformity to the will of God. . . . The way one is, the way one loves one's fellow human beings, the atmosphere of mutual charity this creates, marks one as a Christian." (Ibid. 47.) Devotion is not so much a matter of how we pray as how we enter into relationships with one another. Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal tried to implement this idea in the Sisters of Visitation.

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- **4. Walking in the presence of God in liberty of spirit.** In the Salesian view human freedom is central in the divine scheme of things. By its very nature freedom to choose and to act is central. God never violates that principle. Humans can exercise that freedom by the way they choose to love. They can either love for self-serving ends or as God has modeled love for us, unconditionally. Loving with “pure love” may not come easily, for human love has been wounded. Recovering the ability to love is the essential task of human life. To do so requires “detachment” or “indifference”—loving deeply without controlling. De Sales thought “indifference” was the virtue which could free one for the liberty of the children of God. It entered in an important way into spiritual direction. De Sales and Chantal did not superimpose a set of ideals or a set method on the directee. They viewed their task as enabling persons to respond fully to the Spirit of God living and

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- speaking within them. Similarly, they did not propose one type of prayer as superior to other types. Wright and Power quote Jane de Chantal:
  - The great method of prayer is to have no method at all. When the Holy Spirit has taken possession of the person who prays, it does as it pleases without any more need for rules or methods. The soul must be in God’s hands like clay in the hands of a potter so that he might fashion all sorts of parts. Or the soul must be like soft wax to receive a seal’s impression
  - If, going to prayer, one can become pure capacity for receiving the spirit of God, that will suffice for any method. Prayer must happen by grace not by artfulness. Go to prayer by faith, remain there in hope and go out only by charity which requires simply that one act and suffer. (*Sa Vie et ses oeuvres*, III: 260; Wright and Power, 51.)

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- “Methodless” prayer became the Visitandine method. The focus is waiting on God. De Sales cautioned Jane de Chantal about “feeling” something in prayer. Holy disinterestedness should “be content with naked, dry, and insensible acts carried out by the superior will alone.” (Letter DCCLXIV; cited by Wright and Power, 52.) Human liberty rests *not* in not caring what happens but in caring more that God’s will be done, whatever the outcome. In practice Salesian liberty becomes freedom to serve. In his own life it extended to unconcern for sanctification and salvation; such matters are best left up to God. As Wright and Power have said, “One loves, one realizes the kingdom proclaimed in Jesus when, free from the desire to possess anything, even one’s own ultimate good, one enters into the service of the created order desiring only the manifestation of the will of God. In this, Jesus lives.” (Wright and Power, 53.)

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- 5. **The heart is “where it’s at.”** De Sales and Chantal did not consider withdrawal from the world the place to begin the spiritual life. The place to begin is with the heart. In his *Introduction to the Devout Life* Francis noted that he had “never approved the method of those who, to reform a man, begin with exterior things such as deportment, clothing or hair. On the contrary, it seems to me that we must begin with the heart.” He went on to remark that “it is certain that whoever has Christ in his heart soon has him in all that he does. That is why, Philothea, I have desired above all to impress the Holy Name of Jesus on your heart, confident that, from then on, all that comes from your heart, as the almond tree from the nut, will be stamped with this name, and that as Jesus lives in your heart so also he will live in your every act, will be seen in your eyes, your mouth and hands; with all your heart and in all reverence you will be able to say

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- with St Paul: *I am alive; or rather, not I; it is Christ that lives in me.* (Introduction, III.23; EL, 149-150.) De Sales rejected the idea that monks alone could live the devout life, and he insisted that those in traditional forms of religious life also needed to begin with the heart. To “live Jesus,” as the above quotation implies, “meant to engrave that name on the human heart.” (Wright and Power, 57.) In De Sales’ anthropology the heart is the vital center of a person. It is the seat of both the intellect and the will. It supplies our best analogy for the love of God. As a union with God takes place, the heart expands. Obviously this image plays an important role in spiritual direction. God’s heart draws other hearts to itself like a magnet. The object in direction, therefore, is not to instruct but to appeal to the other person’s heart, “to make Jesus live by winning the heart through persuasion and gentle encouragement.” (Wright and Power, 59.) Francis appealed to the

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- heart as the way the Sisters of Visitation would function. He wrote Jane de Chantal:
  - I beg you, my dear Sister, govern your community with a great expansiveness of heart; give the sisters a holy liberty of spirit and banish from your mind and theirs a servile spirit of constraint. If a sister seems to lack confidence in you, don’t for that reason, show her the least coldness but gain her trust through love and kindness. . . . The more solicitous, open and supportive you are with them, the more you will win their hearts. This is the best way of helping them advance toward the perfection of their vocation. (Letter MDCCCLXXII; cited by Wright and Power, 59.)

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## John of the Cross, French Mystics

- **6. Little things matter.** As Jesus yielded his life in dying on the Cross, we should follow his example by surrendering in ordinary circumstances. A key word: "Come unto me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly of heart" (Matt 11:29-30). Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal urged patient endurance of work rather than observance of lengthy fasts, practice of charity toward an unlikable neighbor rather than wearing a hair shirt, and curbing immoderate impulses in one's heart rather than assaulting one's sensual flesh. De Sales cited a long list of virtues in *The Introduction to the Devout Life*, but the ones that stand out are: *douceur* (sweetness, gentleness, graciousness, meekness, suavity), humility (recognition of human dependence on God and not humiliation), and simplicity (lifestyle, food, shelter, dress). In such qualities Jesus truly lives!