

**François de Sales (1567-1622), the Catholic Reformation, and the “Love of
God”**

Reform and Theology in Early Modern Catholicism

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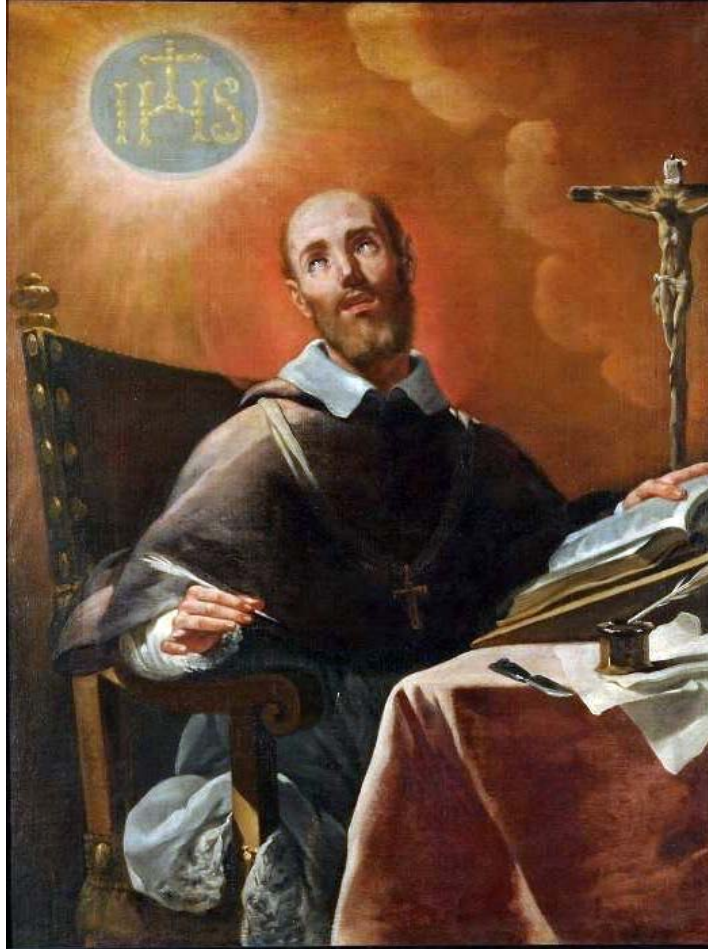


Fig 1: St. François de Sales Writing in a State of Divine Contemplation of Christ¹

“I say nothing of the excellent *Bellarmino*, nor of that prime man among the learned, the most illustrious *Peron*, nor of the great light of sanctity my Lord Bishop of *Geneva*, whose lives are printed...So since I cannot crown their merit with humane praise, I will offer up prayers and vows for their prosperities, with all submission due to their eminent qualities...All these will tell you, we have nothing immortal in us, but the riches of the mind, and all this exterior lustre of the world which charmeth the eyes of men, is but a cloud in painting, a petty vapour of water, a fable of time, a dial, which we then only behold, when the sun of honour reflecteth on it, and which must in the end be buried in an eternal night of oblivion.”

-From *The Holy Court in Five Tomes* by Nicolas Caussin, Jesuit priest and Confessor to King Louis XIII of France²

¹ Francisco Ignacio Ruiz de la Iglesia, *San Francisco de Sales*, 1691-1700, painting, 138 cm x 105 cm. National Sculpture Museum, Valladolid, Spain, <https://picryl.com/media/san-francisco-de-sales-ruiz-de-la-iglesia-5755c3>.

² Nicolas Caussin and T. H., *The Holy Court in Five Tomes* (London: Printed by William Bentley, and are to be sold by John Williams, in Pauls Church-yard, 1650), 196.

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Introduction:

In January of 1587, a young student walked into the Couvent de Saint-Jacques in Paris and prostrated himself before the Black Madonna, a statue of the Virgin Mary. He had been visiting this church daily for the past two months. This young Catholic man, François de Sales, had been suffering from a feverish theological conundrum – believing he might be damned to hell. Once he was at the Church, he would recite a prayer of spiritual abandonment, in which he prayed that even if he were to be damned, he might still love God. It would have looked like this prayer, which he wrote during this period of his life:

“Whatever may happen, O God, you who hold all things in your hand, whose ways are *justice and truth*, whatsoever you may have decreed concerning me in the eternal secret of your predestination and reprobation, you whose judgments are unfathomable, you who are ever Just Judge and Merciful Father, I will love you always, O Lord, at least in this life! At least in this life will I love you, if it is not given me to love you in eternity!”³

After then saying a prayer to the Virgin Mary, he rose and, in the words of his future confidant and friend Jeanne-Françoise de Chantal, “instantly found himself perfectly and entirely cured.”⁴ He walked out of the church changed, having had a profound spiritual experience that according to his biographers would be the bedrock of his faith for the remainder of his life.

What is to be made of this story? This dramatic recounting of an episode in Francis’s spiritual journey may seem to contemporary readers like an insignificant matter, but it was not so for Francis nor for Christians, both Catholics and Protestants, of his time.⁵ The young Francis found himself, both in the personal context of this conversion story and in a broader historical sense, a part of what historians would later identify as the “Catholic Reformation,” a set of

³ Here, I quote a translation from Saint Francis’s own writings of his description of his spiritual trial in his youth [Francis de Sales, *Oeuvres*, ed. Benedict Mackey, and Peter Paul Mackey (Annecy: Monastère de la Visitation, 1892), XXII, 19-20] from Etienne Jean Lajeunie, *Saint Francis De Sales: The Man, the Thinker, His Influence*, vol. 1, (Bangalore, India: S.F.S. Publications, 1986), 71.

⁴ Lajeunie, *Saint Francis De Sales*, 71.

⁵ This thesis will anglicize the name of “François de Sales” and use “Francis de Sales.”

sixteenth and seventeenth-century reform movements, thinkers, and players within the Catholic Church who worked toward developing, refining, and spreading Catholic doctrine and practice through Europe primarily and to the broader world through missionary efforts.⁶ Most reformers usually displayed a firm adherence to the Catholic Church, a desire for the Church's unity in opposition to Protestantism, and a commitment to the Council of Trent.⁷ Convened in 1545 by Pope Paul III and concluded in 1563, the Council of Trent was an ecumenical council meant to offer a response to Protestant objections to Catholic doctrine, to reform clerical corruption and inefficiency within the Church, and to clarify and dogmatize several points of Catholic belief.⁸ Seen as the starting point of the era of Catholic Reformation, over approximately the next 150 years, the Council of Trent would be a starting point for the reforms of actors within the Church who sought to defend Catholic doctrine or develop localized Catholic practices.

Writers and apologists for the Catholic faith during this period responded to the concerns of Protestants and Catholics, seeking to preserve some Catholic traditions and reform others, often in consequential and unprecedented ways. This was also an era of internecine religious conflict and warfare between Protestants and Catholics across Europe. The damage of these conflicts was felt acutely in the Diocese of Geneva, where years of war and turmoil intensified religious divisions. Francis, a Savoyard and native to the Diocese of Geneva who would come to

⁶ The term "Catholic Reformation," is "large; its definition and analysis difficult; its literature, scattered over many European languages, not always easy of access." [Henry Outram Evennett, *Spirit of Counter-Reformation: The Birbeck Lectures in Ecclesiastical History given in the University of Cambridge in May 1951*, ed. John Bossy (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge U.P, 1968), 1].

⁷ As Robin Briggs notes, French Catholics always experienced a religious and political tension between king and pope in terms of their primary allegiance, a debate that was inflamed in the conciliar debates and controversies of the preceding fifteenth century and which would remain a problem during the reigns of the French kings of the sixteenth century, notably Henry II [Cf. Robin Briggs, *Early Modern France 1560-1715* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1977), 166-169; Norman Tanner, *The Church in the Later Middle Ages* (New York, NY: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2008), 1-32].

⁸ John W. O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 1-22.

be one of the foremost Catholic reformers of this period, would experience the fracturing caused by this hostility extensively.

However, Catholic reform was by no means a monolithic reality. As Francis certainly knew and demonstrated in his pastoral efforts as a missionary to the Diocese of Geneva and later the Bishop of Geneva, an adept sensitivity to the particular needs of dioceses and to the needs of individual people was necessary for sixteenth-century Catholic reformers. Very often, conventions and habitual religious practices dominated over adherence to the Council of Trent's decrees. The success of a reformer often hinged on his ability to not dissuade his diocese or region of influence while warily correcting old abuses. And while his involvement in these efforts was still several years away, Francis's experience of a conversion to uncompromising faith in the Catholic Church in Paris in 1587 began his journey toward playing a major role in these movements for reform.

Historical Overview of the Catholic Reformation and a Portrait of St. Francis de Sales:

As historian Jill Fehleison remarks in her work on Francis de Sales and Geneva, Francis's origins seem to have offered a suitable background for his future career.⁹ Born in 1567 to an aristocratic family in the Savoy province of France, Francis became a priest in the Diocese of Geneva in 1592.¹⁰ He had completed studies at the Jesuit College of Clermont in Paris from 1578 to 1581 and a law degree at the University of Padua from 1581 to 1588.¹¹ This intellectual formation would contribute substantially to the roles which Francis would play on the Catholic stage in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries – an anecdote of the Savoyard as a young adult concerns a forced ecclesiastical examination which he was administered upon his

⁹ Jill Fehleison, *Catholics and Protestants in the Diocese of Geneva* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State Univ. Press, 2010), 39-42.

¹⁰ Fehleison, *Catholics and Protestants*, 39-40.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

return to the diocese of Geneva after completing his studies at Padua. When Francis explained the appropriate canonical method for dealing with the obscure legal question of secret marriages, he obtained the commendation of the Bishop of Geneva, who reportedly proclaimed the young Francis would be “a great man, a great servant of God, and a great luminary of the Church.”¹² Regardless of the accuracy of this story, it reveals that people within the young man’s milieu were overwhelmingly disposed toward suggesting that he would become a significant figure in some capacity.

The youthful Francis was described as gentle and courteous despite his choleric disposition, courageous though not brash, intellectual but not unapproachable, and reserved but not cold.¹³ He had an attractive personality, but he disdained frivolity and debauchery on account of his love of simplicity and chastity, and this would have a profound impact on his developing spiritual commitments. He refused marriage despite his father’s opposing desires and gravitated toward celibacy from a desire to serve the Church.

¹² Lajeunie, *Saint Francis De Sales*, 131-132.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 97-102.



Fig 2: A 1618 Portrait of Francis de Sales as Bishop of Geneva¹⁴

This 1618 portrait of a middle-aged Francis points toward certain features that would have caught the eyes of his contemporaries: his dignified ecclesiastical robes and his air of nobility. Lajeunie notes that Francis consciously strove to be a model of *l'honnête homme*, or a gentleman who embodied courtly ideals of honor and discipline.¹⁵ But, he was regarded, importantly, as a gentleman for the people, a man who was flexible enough to adapt his behavior to the demands of any circumstance but humble enough to work with whoever came into his charge.

The later appointment of Francis as successor to the bishopric of the Diocese of Geneva by Bishop Claude de Granier in 1597 accompanied Francis's prodigious efforts to evangelize Protestants as a missionary to the Chablais region between 1594 and 1599.¹⁶ The population of

¹⁴ Jean Baptiste Costaz, *St. Francis de Sales*, 1618, oil painting, in "Salesian Spirituality: A Path to Perfection for All: in tribute to Rev. John F. Harvey, O.S.F.S.," Remembering Father John F. Harvey, OSFS, accessed April 4, 2023, <https://www.frjohnharvey.com/spirituality>.

¹⁵ The ideal of *l'honnête homme* was an ideal of courtly aristocratic gentlemanliness and perfect conduct in high society that was prevalent throughout the 16th and 17th centuries and which surfaced noticeably in *The Courtier* of Castiglione, which detailed an ideal of aristocratic male conduct (Lajeunie, *Saint Francis de Sales*, 98-100).

¹⁶ Fehleison, *Catholics and Protestants*, 53-55.

the Chablais was majority Calvinist, and John Calvin's disciple and successor Theodore Beza, with whom Francis had a few unsuccessful meetings, was present in the region by the time of Francis's arrival.¹⁷ Francis, with the assistance of converted local elites, with a group of fellow missionaries, and with his own pamphlets against Calvinist theology, succeeded in converting 14,000 to 15,000 Calvinists by 1597, and conversions increased well into the first years of the 1600s.¹⁸ By the time of the 1601 treaty of Lyons (an attempt to end military conflict in the region), Francis had established a strong Catholic base in the town of Thonon and, alongside his subsidiary missionaries, had achieved an exceptional advance for the Catholic cause in the region.¹⁹

Following his consecration as bishop in Annecy in 1602, Francis began to reform his diocese through the formation of his parish priests and the organization of new orders while overseeing and often modifying local Catholic activity.²⁰ To ensure that there was unity in the diocese, to preserve doctrinal orthodoxy, and to fix clerical abuses, he held diocesan synods with priests subject to his oversight.²¹ Despite limitations on Francis's capability to reform existing Catholic practice due to the disparate population of the diocese and the insistence of the laity to cling to established church customs, Francis's commitment to the prerogatives of the Council of

¹⁷ Ibid., 62-63. The circumstances of these meetings are unclear and commentators generally favor Francis or Beza. [See Henry M. Baird, *The Huguenots and Henry of Navarre*, (2. Vol. 2. 2 vols. New York, NY: Scribner, 1886), 471].

¹⁸ Fehleison, *Catholics and Protestants*, 55-59. The exact numbers of Genevan converts is hard to calculate, given that many Catholics likely retroactively inflated what they attributed to Francis's personal efforts. The extent of conversion was nevertheless astonishing to Catholics of Francis's time (Lajeunie, *Saint Francis de Sales*, 444-449).

¹⁹ Fehleison, *Catholics and Protestants*, 93-94. There were military efforts to retake the region by Catholics. Evidence seems to indicate that Francis was at least aware of certain military efforts to take back control of Geneva, and there are claims that he was involved in other persecutions of Protestants in the Chablais in the Protestant historian M. Gaberel's *History of Geneva* (See André Ravier, S.J., *Francis de Sales: Sage and Saint*, trans. by Joseph D. Bowler, O.S.F.S. (Stella Niagara, NY: DeSales Resource Center, 2007), 101-103; Baird, *The Huguenots*, 473).

²⁰ Fehleison, *Catholics and Protestants*, 233-236; Lajeunie *Saint Francis de Sales*, 442.

²¹ Fehleison, *Catholics and Protestants*, 234.

Trent and his efforts to institute potential reforms was strong even as he faced challenging problems.²²

Due to frequent warfare and to hostilities from Protestant populations, religious dissension, and military activity in the Diocese of Geneva, Francis remained, for the most part, confined to the areas surrounding Annecy in southeastern France during his bishopric. There, he became an ardent preacher, instituted the Order of the Visitation, and also began a campaign to spread devotion to the faith beyond the diocese through his writings.²³ Yet, he continued to struggle with the Diocese of Geneva and its efforts at securing and retaining conversions to Catholicism. In one of his letters, he urged his spiritual devotée Jeanne-Françoise de Chantal, a widow who became the co-founder of the Order of the Visitation with Francis in 1610, to “pray once in a while for the conversion of my poor Geneva.”²⁴ His immense responsibilities, though, made it difficult for Francis to meet with his family and friends. In one letter, Francis lamented that he could not find sufficient time for Jane de Chantal: “I was ten whole weeks without a word from you, my dear, my very dear daughter...my patience had almost given out and I think it would have given out entirely if I hadn't remembered that I must preserve it in order to be free to preach it to others.”²⁵

By the time of Francis’s death in 1622, he left behind a legacy of reform in parts of Geneva and in Annecy to his relative and successor Bishop Jean-François de Sales, great spiritual works such as the *Introduction to the Devout Life* and the *Treatise of the Love of God*,

²² Ibid., 234. As an example of a limitation, Francis tried but could not, to his disappointment, establish a diocesan seminary that had been one of the injunctions of the Council of Trent [see Henry Joseph Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent: Original Text* (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder, 1941), 5th Ss., Decree on Reformation, ch. XI, for the Council’s expectations for seminaries in dioceses].

²³ Lajeunie, *Saint Francis de Sales*, 442-444.

²⁴ Francis de Sales, Jeanne-Françoise de Chantal, Wendy M. Wright, and Joseph F. Power, *Francis De Sales, Jane De Chantal: Letters of Spiritual Direction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 144.

²⁵ Francis, *Letters of Spiritual Direction*, 144. As with the name “Francis,” this thesis will anglicize the name of Jeanne-Françoise de Chantal and use “Jane de Chantal.”

and a devoted group of followers that soon venerated him as a saint upon his death.²⁶ Rumors regarding miracles attributed to his intercession and other supernatural events associated with his veneration gradually circulated to the Holy See in Rome. Francis was officially canonized a saint in 1665 by Pope Alexander VII.²⁷ During and after his life, he was widely admired by Catholic contemporaries as an example of piety and devotion to the Church. This has prompted modern historians to think of him within the context of the era of Catholic reform.

Historiography: Understanding the People of the Catholic Reformation:

Despite the difficulties of comprehensively defining the Catholic Reformation or providing a cohesive narrative, there are various ways in which historians have attempted to think about people like Francis, the phenomenon of popular devotion, and relations between the clergy and Catholic peoples of the era. Even though they occupy a smaller part of a larger picture of the Catholic Reformation, historical interpretations of “popular Catholic practice” differ based on the interpretations of Catholic reformers’ attempts to implement the Council of Trent’s provisions for reform, and whether historians view the reformers as opposed to or permissive of the particular local devotions that were common throughout Europe.

One type of historiography views popular Catholic practice as severely impacted by the onset of Protestantism during the sixteenth century, and these historians see the post-Trent reformers as principal agents of Catholic reform across Europe. The historian Arthur Tilley, in his book *Modern France*, claims that Catholic France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed an abandonment of the old faith due to the Protestant Reformation that required a return to Catholic mysticism and ancient forms of piety and “propaganda” for its revival among

²⁶ Local cults to saints were common throughout Catholic Europe, and St. Francis’s fame in Geneva predisposed people toward venerating him [See Simon Ditchfield, *Liturgy, Sanctity, and History in Tridentine Italy: The Preservation of the Particular* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 1-16].

²⁷ Fehleison, *Catholics and Protestants*, 42.

the laity. Because the Protestant Reformation had failed to end the abuses of the Catholic Church and instead led to the French religious wars, a sort of religious “dissolution” occurred in which many people simply resolved to join a confession out of convenience or nominally due to the dictates of their conscience.²⁸ Reformation historian John Bossy makes a different argument in *Peace in the Post-Reformation* and other works, interpreting the Catholic Reformation within the post-Tridentine period as having “fatal consequences” on pre-Trent systems of local Catholic worship that Bossy terms a “moral tradition.”²⁹ In Bossy’s view, these moral traditions were old systems of communal activity and worship for Catholic believers which the Tridentine reformers generally opposed to the chagrin of many of the laity.³⁰ While notably different from Tilley’s analysis, Bossy’s views have similar consequences. Bossy claims that the Reformation engendered a kind of disaffection with the hierarchical clergy among the laity in Italy, especially under Cardinal Borromeo’s reform of Milan. Additionally, he claims that Catholic clergy were wary of the laity, which was the case for Francis de Sales, whose Savoyard heritage made him a native to the Catholic part of Geneva’s “moral” liturgical and festive traditions, but a cautious and skeptical one according to Bossy.³¹ In his essay on “The Counter-Reformation and the People of Catholic Europe,” Bossy suggests that even though reform was heteronomous, gradual, and not always effective, these trends are more attributable to the challenges reformers had with managing Catholic communities with peculiar feasts, liturgical devotions, and practices than to a desire on the part of reformers to encourage or permit the activities of communities that usually opposed to Tridentine reform.³²

²⁸ Arthur Tilley, *Modern France* (Cambridge: Univ. Pr., 1922), 92-98.

²⁹ John Bossy, *Peace in the Post-Reformation* (Cambridge, UK: University Press, 1998), 48.

³⁰ Bossy, *Peace*, 31-49.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 12-13, 37-38.

³² John Bossy, “The Counter-Reformation and the People of Catholic Europe” (*Past & Present*, no. 47 (1970)), 51-70.

Historian Robin Briggs in his 1977 book on *Early Modern France: 1560-1715* like Bossy emphasizes the slow extent of the Catholic Reformation's work to abolish practices abhorrent to Trent's decrees. Briggs details the Gallican clergy's fractious interactions with the uneducated local populace of Catholic France. He estimates that a majority of the Catholic clergy continued abusing their positions due to ineffective and infrequent censures of clerical abuse and, thus, that the Church had difficulty correcting local misinformed religious conventions.³³ Jesuit priest and historian Marvin O'Connell interprets both the movement for Catholic Reform and the growth of Protestantism in *The Counter-Reformation: 1560-1610* as two forms of religious awakening that sought to instill holiness and ideological conformity.³⁴ O'Connell sees Trent as an attempt to restore some foundational "conservative" principles to the Catholic Church to prevent the dissolution of Catholic observance.³⁵ For O'Connell, Trent effectively galvanized Catholic ideology and spirituality through the proliferation of writings such as Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, which heralded the beginning of the end of Aristotelian scholasticism and the advent of a period in which religious questions would recede from their previous contentious primacy.³⁶ Like Bossy and Briggs, O'Connell argues that despite the flourishing of the Catholic Reformation under figures such as Francis de Sales, there was a low degree of Tridentine influence on the broader French Catholic culture, perhaps in part due to the French royalty's permission of Protestantism under Henry IV's 1598 Edict of Nantes.³⁷

O'Connell's account, comprehensive in its overview of the historical players and major events of the era in France and beyond, offers little in the way of analysis of the interactions between clergy and laity or of the effects of reforms on contended areas and on popular Catholic

³³ Briggs, *Early Modern France*, 168-197.

³⁴ Marvin R. O'Connell, *The Counter Reformation 1559-1610* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1974), 104, 340, 353.

³⁵ O'Connell, *The Counter Reformation*, 104.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 341-342.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 328-331.

piety. Other historians of the Catholic Reformation examine these aspects of the era. Historian Jean Delumeau in *Catholicism Between Luther and Voltaire* argues that there were similarities between Catholic and Protestant revival movements, and he also notes the significant statistical rise in the number of pastoral visitations after Trent and also the expansion of seminaries and religious orders.³⁸ Delumeau's *Sin and Fear* attempts to provide a diagnostic of the extent of an ethic of guilt which created fear and dread in relationship with God within the divergent cultures of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Christianities, offering insight into the psychology of the period.³⁹ Looking at institutional reform in greater detail, historian Anthony D. Wright argues in *The Counter-Reformation: Catholic Europe and the Non-Christian World* that at the heart of the Catholic Reformation were the internal and external struggles of the Church to deal with the theological legacies of Augustine and the medieval Church.⁴⁰ These debates had political ramifications in intra-Catholic clashes such as the conflicts between pro-papal Jesuits and Dominican friars in Spain, and they exacerbated the religious wars of the era between Protestant and Catholic forces.⁴¹ Though the attempt to rectify these controversies at Trent failed to resolve intra-Catholic disagreements, Wright does note that Trent produced active diocesan bishops who were responsible for the revival of Catholicism at the monastic, religious, and lay levels through their visitations, seminarial establishments, and synodal assemblies, corroborating Delumeau's findings.⁴²

Complementing some of the arguments visible in Delumeau and Wright's work, another line of historiographical work on the Catholic Reformation approaches the Catholic Reformation as an era of varied reforms in which reformers were tremendously attentive to the idiosyncrasies

³⁸ Jean Delumeau, *Catholicism Between Luther and Voltaire* (Search Press Limited, 1977), 9-16, 31-42.

³⁹ Jean Delumeau, *Sin and Fear: The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture, 13th-18th Centuries* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1991), esp. 9-85.

⁴⁰ Anthony D. Wright, *The Counter-Reformation* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1988), 1-27.

⁴¹ See Wright, "Religious Divisions and Political Similarities," in *The Counter-Reformation*, 129-162.

⁴² Wright, *The Counter-Reformation*, 183-186.

of popular, localized church practices and sensitive to local conditions. Reformation historian Simon Ditchfield in his book *Liturgy, Sanctity, and History in Tridentine Italy: The Preservation of the Particular* treats of the hagiography, or stories of saints and martyrs, the liturgy, and the popular Catholic literature of Early Modern Italy. The “historia sacra,” or chronicles of “sacred histories” written by literate clergy who detailed saints’ stories and developments in the Catholic Church relied for its material and structure on local cult traditions of saints’ lives and veneration.⁴³ Similarly, the Italian liturgical systematizers of the period often sought to incorporate aspects of older liturgical rites into the new forms, often with the permission of the local population.⁴⁴

Broader claims similar to those of Ditchfield have been made about Catholic devotion and reform in Europe outside of Italy. As historian Keith P. Luria holds in his book *Sacred Boundaries* and in his essay “‘Popular Catholicism’ and the Catholic Reformation,” Tridentine reformers across Europe grew not to embody a kind of spirituality antagonistic to “common” piety but rather accommodated local practice despite their desire to centralize and refine common observances.⁴⁵ Like Ditchfield in the Italian case, Luria discusses these sympathetic Tridentine efforts in order to minimize the interpretive claims found in other historiography that an “elite,” reformed Catholicism was pitted against a “popular religion.” Luria and Ditchfield both take a Trent-centered approach to be too simplistic in analyzing the affairs of this period and insist that grassroots devotional activity was foundational to Catholicism in this era.

These historical interpretations offer methods for analyzing the lives and the activity of reformers of the Catholic Reformation. However, for the work of a reformer like Francis de

⁴³ Ditchfield, *Liturgy*, 9-13.

⁴⁴ Ditchfield, *Liturgy*, 9-13.

⁴⁵ Keith P. Luria, “‘Popular Catholicism’ and the Catholic Reformation” ed. Kathleen M. Comerford and Hilmar M. Pabel, in *Early Modern Catholicism: Essays in Honor of John W. O’Malley, S.J.* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 114-130; There is also a passing discussion of the effects of these reforms in Keith P. Luria, *Sacred Boundaries* (Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 88-90.

Sales, who developed a specific spiritual style, situating his extensive literary work within the context of his reforms and the history of Catholic popular devotion remains an important problem for the historian attempting to understand Francis as a reformer.

Thesis: Problem and Argument:

The central question of this thesis regards how Francis's spirituality, centered on the notion of the "love of God," related to his pastoral activity and how it influenced Catholics in his period. Francis's literary output, including pamphlets to Calvinists in the Diocese of Geneva, his spiritual works such as *Introduction to the Devout Life*, and countless letters and reflections, offers insight into his approach to Catholic reform provided one understands the context of Francis's life and the political and religious factors that contributed to his actions.

This thesis will argue that Francis's spiritual writings on the "love of God," an ideal that involved a call to ardent devotion among the Catholic faithful, provided a model for addressing various controversies, political and religious questions, and practical issues in the lives of believers. As a result, the spiritual concept of "the love of God" allowed Francis to form people from different levels of society in his spiritual methods. His devoted followers ranged from the Catholic clerical elite to lay people both during his life and, due to the activities of his followers, after his death.

By examining Francis's pastoral work in the light of his spiritual writings, this thesis aims to avoid embracing the theory that "popular Catholic activity" and "elite" Catholic writings and practice did not interact with each other or had little influence on each other. Francis's actions as a missionary and the Bishop of Geneva "preserved the particularities" of his diocese, corroborating some of Ditchfield's arguments regarding the nature of Reformation activity. However, Francis made these efforts in a manner that remained rooted in a type of reform

characteristic of a Catholic culture living after the Council of Trent. Francis, as an aristocratic Savoyard figure who was nevertheless admired by many locals of the Diocese of Geneva, was responsive to local issues and abuses. The notion that he was an “elite” isolated from the concerns of “popular” Catholic activity fails to account for much of his activity as a reformer and his background as a native to the region.

Nevertheless, Francis was also willing to use his position as an aristocrat and a well-connected cleric to advance his own visions for enterprises, secure additional resources for the diocese, and to develop adherents to his spiritual vision. Francis’s conquest of the souls of his local diocese required the persuasion of the diplomats and political actors of the Catholic elite, and Francis’s unique background gave him the prestige and the experience to engage in these complex endeavors. At certain moments, Francis would make these decisions at the cost of eroding the type of “moral tradition” in late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century Catholicism that Bossy claims most Tridentine reformers generally set about overthrowing.⁴⁶ Francis’s willingness to cast away older practices in favor of new, frequently less-corrupt ones, however, does not entail an attempt at complete erasure of local customs – new practices were instituted and encouraged in Francis’s writings and diocesan activities, but old customs remained in place in many cases.

Finally, in engaging Francis as a writer and a reformer, this thesis will not consider these two categories as necessarily distinct from each other. Indeed, many of Francis’s correspondences and written materials had a longer-term influence on the Gallican Church and on religious orders than did his personal interventions and efforts, and much reform also occurred in Francis’s diocese through his letters and personal records. This thesis will rather develop a more general picture of Francis. In doing so, Francis’s emphasis on the need for

⁴⁶ Bossy, *Peace*, 31-49.

Catholic holiness for all Catholics regardless of circumstance and his willingness to actually work with people who were laymen, nuns, and prelates emerge as unique and defining traits for Francis which are often overlooked in historiography of the Catholic Reformation. Francis always prescribed “true devotion” to God as the root of all virtue and the greatest sign of his pastoral success, writing at one point: “True, living devotion, my Philothea, implies the love of God. Indeed it is a true love of Him in the highest form.”⁴⁷ It is to this consequential idea of the love of God at the heart of Francis’s spirituality that this thesis now turns.

⁴⁷ Francis de Sales, *Philothea, or an Introduction to the Devout Life* (Charlotte, NC: TAN Classics, 2010), 4. Philothea is the Hellenized term for God-lover Francis uses throughout the *Introduction* to describe the reader who, he presumes, desires advancement in Francis’s spiritual methods.

Section 1: Francis de Sales' Spiritual Writings, the Centrality of the "Love of God," and the Politics of Piety and Devotion in a Religious Age:

The unifying doctrine of the writings of Francis de Sales is his idea of *amour de Dieu*, or the "love of God." By the phrase "love of God," Francis meant the love that a believer was supposed to have toward God, the "Supreme goodnesse [sic]," above all things.⁴⁸ This love for God, as he would write in his *Spiritual Conferences*, implied obedience to God's will and a degree of love and submission to one's neighbors and superiors.⁴⁹ To Francis, this love was meant to be both a guiding principle of the spiritual life and, due to its centrality within the spiritual life of the faithful Catholic, the principle for *all* action, including the specifically pastoral type of activity he demonstrated during his own lifetime as the Bishop of Geneva. Beyond the theological debates of the time, this ideal had political influences and ramifications, and it involves an interesting dimension of Francis's own identity as both a Tridentine reformer and an ecclesiastical actor on the outskirts of the Gallican church.⁵⁰

Within the economy of Francis's spiritual system, "love of God" is the fruit of the free gift of God's grace to the believer, who receives God's grace according to his desire to cooperate with God and his free decision to reciprocate God's love for him. Francis placed enormous emphasis on the individual's ability to respond to this gift with full acceptance of God's love and thus to submit himself to God's will, and he also noted the individual's ability to refuse this gift and thus refuse to accept God's will. This belief that the individual's cooperation was necessary for God's grace was a contested point of doctrine during the Protestant Reformation and something which the Council of Trent sought to defend in its decrees.⁵¹ The Protestant Reformer

⁴⁸ Francis de Sales, *The Treatise of the Love of God* (Gerard Pinchon, 1630), 67.

⁴⁹ Francis de Sales, *The True Spiritual Conferences of St. Francis of Sales*, trans. and ed. Nicholas Patrick Wiseman (Dublin: Richardson and Son, 1892), 299-300.

⁵⁰ The Gallican Church was the Church under the supervision and control of the kings of France.

⁵¹ "If anyone says that man's free will moved and aroused by God, by assenting to God's will and action, in no way cooperates toward disposing and preparing itself to attain the grace of justification, that it cannot refuse its assent if

John Calvin would quote St. Augustine in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, claiming that “the will of God...cannot possibly be resisted by the will of man...since he controls the wills of men according to his pleasure.” Francis, like Calvin, would claim that God’s choice to bring someone near to Him or not was an inscrutable act of divine providence by also referencing Augustine in his *Treatise on the Love of God*.⁵² However, Francis would insist, quoting the Council of Trent’s decree on human cooperation in matters of the doctrine of justification and in contradistinction to the Calvinists of his day, that with the first divine inspiration to live a life of holiness came a choice on the part of man to cooperate with that inspiration. He would write, “the divine inspiration doth come unto us...And if we doe not repulse her she walks with us, and doth environ us, continually to advance us; not abandoning us, if we abandon her not, till such time as she hath brought us to holy Charities [sic].”⁵³ While Francis was therefore faithful to the Catholic Church’s doctrines in upholding that the individual needed to accept and thus cooperate with this gift of grace, he was nevertheless attentive to the Church’s doctrine that God’s grace was first needed for the believer to be justified in loving God in this spiritual sense. In essence, this ensured that his conception of the “love of God,” those “holy Charities” that were the fruit of continued cooperation with God’s gift, was securely rooted in Catholic doctrine and could serve as the basis for the pursuit of a life of holiness within the Catholic fold.

From what did this conception of the “love of God” originate within the life of Francis? And why did it attain such centrality within his spiritual worldview? In the first case, Francis’s earlier, more polemical writings from his time as a missionary to the mostly Protestant Chablais region on the outskirts of Geneva from 1595 to 1599 do not contain the same emphatic

it wishes, but that, as something inanimate, it does nothing whatever and is merely passive, let him be anathema” (Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 6th Ss., Canons Concerning Justification, can. 4)].

⁵² Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John Allen (United States: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work, 1911), 177; Francis, *Treatise*, 156.

⁵³ Francis, *Treatise*, 158.

declarations on the indispensability of the love of God. Francis here dealt in forceful rhetorical ways with Calvinist objections to the Catholic episcopacy, church traditions, the papacy, purgatory, and other doctrinal matters. Because these were his main preoccupations, Francis's meditations on the "love of God" were at most secondary to attempted refutations of Calvinist heterodoxy on disputed matters of the faith at this time. While his spirituality was likely active in the saint's life or probably started to develop during his time as a missionary, the full force of his theology as contained in his writings became apparent after Francis had assumed the position of Bishop of Geneva in 1602.

The 1608 publication of *Introduction à la Vie Dévote* and the choice to begin dealing with Catholic preoccupations and concerns about living a holy life probably appeared to be the most promising opportunity for evangelizing people after the Treaty of Lyons in 1601 and the disastrous debacle of Duke d'Albigny's 1603 invasion of Geneva entrenched both sides in their religious and political commitments. These events obstructed much of the longer-term possibility of greater conversions from Protestantism to Catholicism within the Diocese of Geneva, though attempts to proselytize Protestant areas continued well into the early decades of the seventeenth century. For Francis as a bishop, a central part of his mission therefore became defensive preservation of Annecy, Catholic Savoy, and France at large from heresy and toward a greater exhortation to living lives of virtue. This permitted both an encouragement of specifically Tridentine reform in much of his pastoral activity and the flourishing of a distinctive spirituality that measured its success not in the number of converts but in the quality of their conversions.

Because Francis's spiritual system had roots in a Catholic theological vision of the world, defining it as principally anti-Protestant is reductive. With the exception of his collected *Controversies* that were written for the Protestants of the Chablais region (and which hardly

feature his signature spirituality), his words were intended for a Catholic audience, even though they were circulated to Protestant countries during his life and after his death. The great majority of Francis's writings were pastoral works, synthesizing practical admonitions to the laity from his own clerical experience with insights from Church Fathers, theologians, and reputed spiritual masters. Francis demonstrated particular admiration for Church Fathers such as the fourth and fifth-century figures of Augustine of Hippo and Ambrose of Milan and for medieval spiritual masters such as Benedict, Bonaventure, and, especially, Bernard of Clairvaux. St. Bernard, a twelfth-century Benedictine monk and preacher who was known for his writings on the papacy and his exegesis of Scripture, wrote in a distinctively allegorical style and emphasized virtues such as humility and love in the Christian life in his commentaries on the *Canticle of Canticles*.⁵⁴ Francis was also influenced to a lesser extent by the contemporaneous humanist essayist Michel de Montaigne and even the Roman stoic figure Epictetus, though he would write extensively about the supremacy of Church writings over the pagan figures promoted in the new humanistic movement that dominated at the University of Paris where he studied.⁵⁵ He also incorporated the hagiographic accounts of the saint's lives that were popularized during the era of Catholic reform in the sixteenth century.

The complex political and cultural circumstances of Francis's era interacted with and formed the writings of Francis. Therefore, in order to understand the centrality of Francis's views on the *amour de Dieu* to his methods of practicing and instilling the faith, it is necessary to first situate him within the political and theological context of his time. The historical influences of the Gallican Church and Francis's own religious formation influenced the pious ideal of the "love of God" despite the ideal of retreating from the world which Francis and his friend and

⁵⁴ Bernard of Clairvaux, *St. Bernard's Sermons on the Canticle of Canticles* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1920), esp. p 488.

⁵⁵Lajeunie, *Saint Francis*, 55-57.

confidant Jane de Chantal idealized. Its applicability to “worldly” matters and ecclesiastical intrigues demonstrates the effect of Francis’s call to a devout Catholicism in this era. But, in order to understand the effect of Francis’s spiritual writings, one must first understand his exposure to the politics of his day and the Gallican Church more specifically.

1.1: Henry IV, the Gallican Church, and the Political Potential of Francis’s Spirituality:

Within his immediate historical context, Francis consistently claimed in his personal letters and correspondence that he was desirous of avoiding political difficulties and controversy: “I must confess that in the matter of business and affairs, particularly worldly ones, I am a poor priest more than ever I was, having learnt at court to be more simple and less worldly.”⁵⁶ Writing to a man about to go to the French court in 1610, Francis would admonish him to remain committed to living a life of virtue without succumbing to the vanities and pleasures of the court: “It is most important that you should let it be known from the first what you mean to be; there should be no doubt about the matter; and it will help you much if you have some like-minded friends, with whom to exchange counsel and sympathy.”⁵⁷ Perhaps due to his experience as a student from an aristocratic background living in Paris in the 1580s and his own conversion story, Francis became wary of the French court’s temptations towards worldliness and the disdain of the “pious” life. He urged his confidants to be wary of all vice, cautioning against the books of people “of low morals” such as the satirist François Rabelais and forbidding all playing of games.⁵⁸

This caution, however, should not be mistaken for an insistence on complete abstention from any activity that involved “worldly” affairs. Francis would preface the letter to his friend by

⁵⁶ Francis de Sales, *Library of St. Francis de Sales, Works of this Doctor*, vol. 4 (London: Burns and Oates, 1866), *Letters to Persons in Religion*, Letter XII, 190.

⁵⁷ Francis de Sales, *A Selection from the Spiritual Letters of S. Francis de Sales* (United Kingdom: Rivingtons, 1871), 133.

⁵⁸ De Sales, *A Selection*, 132.

saying “I am not so timid as some people, nor do I hold this manner of life to be the most dangerous for well-trained souls who are bold and brave.”⁵⁹ Francis personally claimed to disdain high offices, but he possessed a certain reputation for astute political thought that brought influential Catholics in the religious and secular worlds to consult him and desire to use him as an authority in the prominent ecclesiastical intrigues of the era. One of the most noteworthy instances of this desire to use Francis as a political actor occurred early in his episcopal career, during Francis’s first contact with the King of France.

The King of France Henri IV would see in Francis potential for a diplomatic ecclesiastical actor who could evade the kind of intensely pro-Catholic *dévot* activity and corrupt ecclesiastical politics which had affected the royal court during the beginning of his reign. Assuming the throne of France in 1594, Henry of Navarre converted from Calvinism to Catholicism in 1593.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 130.



Fig 3: A Drawing of, in French, “Henry III, King of France and of Navarre: To Henry III Augustus, King of France and Navarre, Very Christian, Very Valiant, Very Clement, Very Magnanimous, Restorer of his Kingdom, Father of his People.”⁶⁰

In the engraving of a picture of Henry IV in Figure 3, the artist Léonard Gaultier places great emphasis on Henry IV’s status as “Augustus,” or the August, king of France who possesses the virtues of a ruler in a superabundant degree and acts as “Father of his People.” In Gaultier’s work, he is presented as a conquering military hero who has brought peace to the realm. In contrast, among some of Henry’s foremost opponents, the members of the Catholic League, a faction of Catholic royalists vehemently opposed to the Huguenots who desired the political supremacy of the Catholic faith and advocated the elimination of French Protestantism, there was a long history of opposition to Henry of Navarre due to Henry’s military conflicts against the

⁶⁰ Léonard Gaultier, “Henry III roy de France & de Navarre,” from the Collection of Henry IV roi de France 1553-1610 Portraits (Archives et bibliothèques Pau Béarn Pyrénées, 250050). [The description in Figure 3 was translated in part by DeepL Translator].

League during the 1590s.⁶¹ Henry's subsequent conversion prompted the fading Catholic League to question the sincerity of the king's conversion. Even before Henry IV's coronation, there was hostility against Henry III. Because the pre-conversion Huguenot Henry of Navarre had become the heir presumptive of the Catholic King Henry III of Valois prior to Henry III's death in 1589, and because the League despised Henry III for his involvement in the 1588 death of the League's Cardinal de Guise, or Henry of Lorraine (the principal perpetrator of the 1572 St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre), the Catholic League accused Henry III of heretical and demonic collusion using satire and propaganda.⁶²

LE FAVX MVFLE DECOUVERT

DV GRAND HYPOCRITE DE. LA FRANCE, CONTENANT
les faits plus memorables par luy exercez enuers les Catholiques
en ces derniers temps.



⁶¹ See Biggs, *Early Modern France*, 24-32.

⁶² Cassidy Bronack, "Representations of a Beleaguered King: The Satirical Prints of Henri III of France," (Dissertation, University of North Carolina, 2021), 25.

Fig 4: 1589 Catholic League Woodcut Depicting the Death of the Duke Henry of Guise at the hands of “Henry of Valois,” the King Henry III. The French reads: “The false boor of the great hypocrite of France, containing the most memorable deeds by him towards the Catholics in recent times.”⁶³

This 1589 Catholic League woodcut published by Didier Millot in Paris depicts Henry III as a devil in collusion with wicked, murderous Lords who are all pleased at the murder of the Duke of Guise and have betrayed France by their imprisonment and execution of the Duke, represented by the prison tower on the right. Meanwhile, the Catholic faithful in stark contrast to Henry’s diabolical activity attempt a penitential procession in the background. The devilish features of Henry’s countenance undermine his ostensible Catholic piety signified by his rosary and clerical robes.⁶⁴ The League describes Henry as a “hypocrite” in the caption and presents him as a falsifier and consort of the devil.⁶⁵ The message could not be more explicit.

Certainly, Henry III’s denunciation of the League in 1586 prior to Guise’s death encouraged this dark political satire. Henry III’s relative the future Henry IV also drew the League’s ire due to his military actions against them and his defense of Henry’s condemnation of the League in a letter to the “To the Lords of the *Nobilitie*.” In the letter, Henry of Navarre chastises the League’s spilling of blood, argues that his own military actions against the League were done in self-defense and for the preservation of the realm, and exhorts the non-League nobles to obey King Henry III and thereby act with honor and rectitude for the sake of France.⁶⁶

Upon Henry of Navarre’s assumption of the French throne in 1594, the League’s remaining “pocket” resistances throughout France gradually collapsed.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, Henry IV would face suspicion of his *politique* Moderate Catholic activity from the *dévo*t Catholic faction

⁶³ Copied and cited in Bronack as Anonymous, *Le faux muflre decouvert du grand hypocrite de la France (The falsehood of the great hypocrite of France uncovered)*. Published by Didier Millot (Paris: 1589). Bibliothèque nationale de France [The description in Figure 4 was translated by DeepL Translator].

⁶⁴ See Bronack, *Representations of a Beleaguered King*, 30.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Navarre (Kingdom). Sovereign (1572-1610 : Henry III). *Three Letters Written by the King of Nauarre* (London: 1586), 6-8.

⁶⁷ Briggs, *Early Modern France*, 32.

of the *parlements* and the nobility for which he advocated through the Edict of Nantes in 1598, which permitted Huguenots to reside within France, forbade religious attacks or reprisals against the French Protestants, and permitted Protestant worship in certain areas.⁶⁸ The *dévots* of the *parlements* attempted to restrict passage of the Edict of Nantes for a time and remained a wary source of political resistance against the former-Huguenot-turned-king until his death in 1610.⁶⁹

Accompanying this complex set of political intrigues during Henry IV's attempted passage of the Edict of Nantes, a war between the forces of France and Francis de Sales's home region of Savoy was provoked by Duke Charles-Emmanuel after Savoyard forces invaded a section of the French "marquisate of Saluces" in 1600. Savoy during this period had had a precarious status with respect to the kingdom of France – it possessed a Savoyard government but often acted as a subsidiary vassal or ally to France in the religious wars. Duke Charles-Emmanuel's actions, however, forced France to respond with political cunning. Henry IV reached a Treaty of Paris with the Duke Charles-Emmanuel in late 1599 that the duke ruptured once he began conspiring against French forces. Henry IV, who had already anticipated this deceit, then invaded a factional and divided Savoy. Having taken Annecy, Henry IV secured the surrender of Savoy and acquired the territory of the neutral Genevois-Nemours.⁷⁰

Hostilities in Savoy ended after the seizure of Annecy, but a massive debacle for Catholic efforts in the Chablais region to the northwest of Geneva occurred after the cessation of the conflict. The invasion devastated the Chablais, which had experienced a massive conversion to Catholicism through the direct actions and the influence of Francis from 1594 to 1599. The chaos and upset that followed prompted an attempted rise of Protestant preaching and activity in the

⁶⁸ For more on the Edict of Nantes and as a reference for this claim, see Barbara B. Diefendorf, *The Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009), 144-147.

⁶⁹ Briggs, *Early Modern France*, 32.

⁷⁰ Ravier, *Francis de Sales*, 101-103.

region in efforts to supplant the presence of the Catholic missionaries and priests. Francis, as Bishop de Granier's main coadjutor, rallied missionaries to pacify the Chablais and reconsolidate Catholic control over the region before he was sent to Paris to negotiate with the king and recover revenues for the now-impooverished Catholic priests of the Chablais.⁷¹

A Jesuit priest and biographer of Francis André Ravier recounts the 1602 diplomatic venture of the prelate to Paris in his biography of Francis.⁷² The actual negotiations were relatively unsuccessful, only providing the diocese with a small sum of money. At one point, lamenting the protracted delays of the king's acquiescence to the financial demands of Bishop de Granier, Francis would confess to Pope Clement VIII who had authorized the mission, "so it is that after nine full months, I have been compelled to put an end to negotiations without having achieved virtually anything."⁷³ The more consequential part of Francis's activity during his second visit to Paris was his preaching. The Catholic liturgical season of Lent began soon after Francis arrived with his entourage on January 22, and at one point the Queen's court selected Francis to fill a vacancy of a Lenten preacher for several sermons.⁷⁴ According to the reports Francis amazed the members of the Court and the rest of Paris with his simple but charming oratorical style, reportedly converting the learned Calvinist noblewoman the Dame du Prederauville when she heard him speak at one of the occasions even though he never addressed Protestantism directly.⁷⁵ The conversions to the pious life Francis secured during this diplomatic trip to Paris greatly endeared Francis to Henry, who would see in Francis a virtuous man with remarkable potential as an ecclesiastical figure for the Gallican church: "He possesses all the virtues to the sovereign degree of their perfection. I know of no one more capable of restoring

⁷¹ Ibid., 102 and 105.

⁷² This is recounted in Ibid., 106-113.

⁷³ Ibid., 109.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 107.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 108.

the episcopal state to its pristine splendor.”⁷⁶ Henry would offer Francis the promise of attaining to “the first vacant archbishopric” in France and possibly Paris, but Francis refused, instead insisting that he would stay loyal to the “poor” Diocese of Geneva, his “fatherland,” and journeyed for Annecy in September 1602.⁷⁷

The king’s admiration of Francis seems to have been motivated by political interests. The ratification of the Edict of Nantes had divided the Gallican church over the question of toleration of French Protestants, and more vigorously anti-Protestant Catholic groups such as the Jesuits had already been expelled from the Parisian court and from “all chief provincial districts” by a 1594 decree of the High Court of the *Parlements*.⁷⁸ Prominent Jesuits backed by Rome had pushed the king to return to the Parisian Court and other wealthy locations since the cessation of the military conflict between France and Spain with the Treaty of Vervins in 1598, which granted France a brief respite to foreign religious wars.⁷⁹ While the *parlement* of Toulouse supported the Jesuit attempts at reversal against the will of the Parisian *parlement*, Henry deferred resolution of the 1594 decree to his personal privy-council and convened a clerical synod to handle the question of whether the Gallican church would adopt the Council of Trent’s decrees. At the synod, the Archbishop of Tours François de Guesle complained that the corruption of the French clergy necessitated approval and implementation of the Tridentine articles.⁸⁰ Henry was sympathetic to these problems but was also suspicious of these clergy whom he as Prince of Navarre had chastised in 1586 for their support of the Catholic League.⁸¹ Henry’s decision at the synod to defer Trent’s implementation (a decision that amounted to continued royal obstruction

⁷⁶ Ibid., 113.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Martha Walker Freer, *History of the reign of Henry IV., King of France*, 2, vol. 2 (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1861), 2-3.

⁷⁹ Freer, *History of the reign of Henry IV.*, 12-14.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 14-15.

⁸¹ Navarre (Kingdom). *Three Letters*, 3-5.

of the articles of Trent) discontented many elite clergy.⁸² Even so, Henry did seek to resolve corruption through appointing more moderate figures to the episcopacy, and trusted skilled episcopal figures like the French Cardinal Arnaud d'Ossat to serve as diplomats to Rome who could defend Gallican interests.⁸³

When the young Francis suddenly appeared on this scene in 1602, Henry likely viewed him as a man who could, with the right formation, work for Henry's *politique* Gallican goals and act as a diplomat both within France and abroad. Francis's residence in the Diocese of Geneva for many previous years conveniently prevented him from becoming a pro-*dévo*t Catholic or, for that matter, a more moderate *politique* figure loyal to Henry's cause. Thus, although Francis as a Savoyard claimed not to be interested in the politics of Paris, Henry no doubt thought he could cultivate Francis's brilliance for his own cause within the Gallican church. Conveniently, Francis's missionary experience could assist in the conversion of the Huguenots across France, since Francis worked to embody his self-professed claim that "whoever preaches with love preaches against the heretics, even though he does not say a single word against them."⁸⁴

The return of Francis to Savoy and his ordination as the Bishop of Geneva at Thorens later that year in 1602 following the death of Bishop de Granier confirmed Henry's efforts at persuasion as ultimately unsuccessful. But, this interaction of two of the most important political and ecclesiastical figures of this era pointed to the possibility that in the face of sixteenth-century France's complicated politics, Francis's theology of the "love of God" might be a system capable of dealing with the internecine Gallican controversies and the precarious relations with Huguenots. Despite its origins in a language of Catholic piety that was intended by Francis to move beyond factional divisions to religious matters, Henry's ideal of a political spirituality

⁸² Freer, *History of the reign of Henry IV.*, 14-15.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

would be realized through the efforts of people influenced by Francis's own politically-relevant actions and correspondences, to which the next section is devoted.

1.2: Introduction à la Vie Dévote: The Political Implications of Seventeenth-Century Popular Pious Literature, and Adoptions and Applications of Francis's Spirituality:

Six years into his episcopate, Francis de Sales wrote the *Introduction à la Vie Dévote* (*Introduction to the Devout Life*). This book was designed to be a devotional guide for advancing in spiritual methods and in leading a life of virtue. Drawn from Francis's pastoral, theological, and literary knowledge, it contained practical admonitions and instruction in three parts; first, the devout aspirant learns the path to overcoming sin and sinful tendencies; secondly, "contact with God through prayer and the sacraments, and most particularly through the Eucharist" is fostered in the faithful man's life; and, in the final section, Francis provides advice on how to grow in virtue so as to reach the perfection of the virtues.⁸⁵ The *Introduction* would serve as an instructive manual designed to lead people in a life of Catholic piety. It would typify the kind of spirituality for which Francis gained a name, and its relatively rapid success shortly after its 1608 publication indicates that works focused on spiritual matters had an audience within Catholic France. As it spread abroad, the *Introduction* grew in popularity during the later part of the seventeenth century in a revised version meant for England with redactions and revisions that attempted to make it acceptable for a Calvinist or Anglican audience.⁸⁶

The first French editions of the *Introduction* often included frontispieces that featured the *pietà*, or a depiction of Jesus Christ in the arms of the Virgin Mary after his death from crucifixion.⁸⁷ With this Biblical reference, editors attempted to emphasize the focus on placating

⁸⁵ Sabine Volk-Birke, *Catholic Devotion Fitted for the Use of Protestants: Francis de Sales's Introduction à la vie dévote in France and Britain* (*Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (2018)), 195.

⁸⁶ Volk-Birke, *Catholic Devotion*, 193-194.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 199.

the sufferings of Christ through developing the virtue of devotion stressed in the guided meditations of the first part of the *Introduction*.



Fig 5: 1609 Second Edition of the *Introduction*. The French reads, “Introduction to the Devout Life by François de Sales, Bishop of Geneva. Second edition, In which the whole has been read, corrected & increased by the Author.”⁸⁸

This 1609 frontispiece focuses on the themes of a grieved Virgin Mother and the dead Christ, whose body the lay faithful, Francis presumes in the *Introduction*, purpose to receive regularly and devoutly in the Eucharist. The compassion for the dead Christ and the “Stabat

⁸⁸ Cited as *Introduction à La vie dévôte* (1609). The British Library Board Cited, c.104.e.30 (In Volk-Birke, *Catholic Devotion*, 200). [The description in Figure 5 was translated by DeepL Translator].

Mater,” the “sorrowful mother,” which the editor underscores with the *pietà*, was for Francis the first spark of a life of devotion to the Lord and a desire to grow in love for God. This compassion was the fruit of affective prayer and willing, proactive meditation upon the mysteries of the faith foundational to the project of reforming the reader’s life within the *Introduction*’s first part. In the tenth and final meditation of the first part of the *Introduction*, for example, Francis expressed the need for the penitent, now purged of affection for Satan’s wiles, to choose the right side wherein Christ is found over the left side that is made of the devil and his legions: “On the right side behold the crucified Saviour, who with fervent love prays for these wretches, that they may escape from their tyrant and come to Him.”⁸⁹ The sinner following this solemn meditation then makes a choice to renounce the world and its empty promises, to obey Jesus Christ alone, and to implore the assistance of his “Guardian Angel” and the Virgin Mary before proclaiming with confidence: “Jesus, be Thou my Lord forever!”⁹⁰ The reader, following a general confession of his sins and past errors, would then begin further instruction in the devout life in the remaining pages.

Francis used these images of Satan and hell not to create a kind of incessant fear of damnation but rather to develop and confirm the reader’s love for God’s salvific love above any other motivation. And, if Francis’s spiritual advice seems formulaic, it is only a product of the structure of the *Introduction* rather than a fixed component of Francis’s spirituality. For Francis, the *Introduction* was meant as a resource for everyone, a kind of guide for spiritual excellence that could be consulted at will when strong temptations, difficulties in prayer, or vices like anger, pride, sloth, or gluttony arose. This is, in many ways, the most consequential element of Francis’s spirituality from a popular standpoint; Francis did not view spirituality as only possible

⁸⁹ De Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, 44-45.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

for clerics or religious, but rather viewed all as capable of living devoutly. He would write, “In the creation God commanded the plants of the earth to bring forth fruit, each after its kind; and in a similar way He commands Christians, who are the living plants of His Church, to bring forth the fruits of devotion, each according to his calling and vocation.”⁹¹ Francis’s *Introduction* was a kind of catch-all for the spiritual life meant to be adapted to the lifestyle, constraints, and needs of the individual believer.

This emphasis on the very possibility of lay piety is one of the most distinguished elements of Francis’s spirituality, and it may be attributable to Francis’s missionary ideals and in part to the nature of literature in his era. Regarding the latter, French popular literature increased substantially over the course of the seventeenth century and encompassed various forms from peasant almanacs to urban pamphlets and much more in order to appeal to diverse audiences. Literacy rates increased during the period, though most people did not know how to read, and authors writing popular works required, as historian Natalie Zemon Davis argues, an ability to express the language of the common people.⁹² Across Europe, most Catholic spiritual literature of the Tridentine era was generally directed to clergy and religious. The corpus of Catholic writings ranges from theological texts for pastors such as the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* to texts for the formation of priests like the *Spiritual Exercises* of the Spanish founder of the Society of Jesus, St. Ignatius of Loyola, or the *Spiritual Combat* of the mysterious Italian Theatine monk Lorenzo Dom Scupoli.⁹³ Beyond the clergy, an audience for pious literature

⁹¹ Ibid., 9.

⁹² Natalie Zemon Davis, “Printing and the People,” in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays* (Stanford, CA: 1975), 189-194.

⁹³ John A. McHugh, Charles J. Callan, and Pius V. *Catechism of the Council of Trent for Parish Priests: Issued by Order of Pope Pius V* (Charlotte, NC: TAN Books, 2017), 25-28 for information on the circulation and use of the Original Catechism of the Council of Trent; Ignatius of Loyola, *The spiritual exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Trans. from the Spanish, with a Commentary, and a Trans. of the Directorium in Exercitiis* (London: Robert Scott, 2019); Lorenzo Scupoli, James William Lester, and Robert Paul Mohan, *The Spiritual Combat and a Treatise on Peace of Soul* (Charlotte, NC: Tan Classics, 2010).

existed at least among aristocrats. The works of St. Teresa of Ávila, the fifteenth-century Spanish mystic and founder of the discalced Carmelites, became a convenient source of inspiration for such figures as Madame Acarie, a lay woman in Paris admired by Francis who attracted a following among the Parisian *noblesse* due to her reputed ecstasies and visions.⁹⁴ A Teresian spirituality with its emphasis on contemplation, virtue, and the knowledge of one's soul in the light of God developed contemporaneously with a fascination among the French elite with Michel de Montaigne's humorous, cynical, and often non-devout *Essays*. Francis, in his youth at Paris and during his 1602 diplomatic venture to the capital city, witnessed these movements and, as Ravier notes, watched attentively as he began to systematize what would become his own spirituality of the "love of God."⁹⁵ More accessible and practicable than Teresa's complex writings, more cordial than Scupoli's hard-edged advice, and more pious than Montaigne's *Essays*, the *Introduction* of 1608 possessed a versatility its predecessors did not.

Although evidence indicates the *Introduction* spread widely among aristocratic laity and in religious circles, its more immediate impact is visible among the ecclesiastical figures of Francis's lifetime. Inspired by his spiritual direction and his writings, these figures conveyed aspects of Francis's spiritual system to the larger French culture. One of the foremost of these figures was an acquaintance of Francis, Jacqueline-Marie-Angélique Arnauld, the Mother Superior of the Port-Royal Convent of Discalced Carmelite nuns in Paris, and the sister of Antoine Arnauld, the great theologian and leader of the Jansenist reform movement within the Gallican church during the seventeenth century.⁹⁶ This movement claimed to derive its theology from the writings of the French Catholic Bishop Cornelius Jansen, who developed an

⁹⁴ Ravier, *Sage and Saint*, 110-112.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁹⁶ A.K.H., *Angélique of PortRoyal 1591-1661*, (London: Skeffington and Son, 1905), 5-9.

Augustinian theology in his book *Augustinus*.⁹⁷ Jansenists emphasized the supremacy of God's grace over man's cooperative liberty, advocated for a heightened sensitivity to the state of one's conscience, and believed the fatalistic doctrine that God's election was a sure matter for those predestined to heaven.⁹⁸

Francis would offer Angélique spiritual instruction at the end of his life in 1619, and Francis insists in letters that Angélique avoid impetuosity and overcome her naturally proud spirit that was wont to criticize others.⁹⁹ He also advised her to learn to remain strong in the face of the "thought, or rather temptation, of despondency as to your fervour."¹⁰⁰ Angélique seems to have suffered from the challenges of prayer and of repentance of sin which Francis's *Introduction* sought to abate. Angélique, however, would turn toward a more rigid and uncompromising spirituality than that of Francis.¹⁰¹ Even prior to the rise of the more vigorous Jansenist controversies under the reign of Louis XIV and the condemnation of Jansenism in 1713 in Pope Clement XI's papal bull *Unigenitus*, Francis had anticipated some of the imperfections in his disciple that would contribute to the type of pessimistic temperament of the Jansenist movement that was distant from Francis's hopeful "love of God."¹⁰²

In a November 1621 letter a year before his death, Francis would warn the Jesuit Father Stephen J. Binet at Paris to beware of Angélique Arnauld's professed desires to either leave religious life and the convent of Port-Royal entirely or to join the Visitation Order as a sister. With respect to the former, Francis was skeptical but advised Father Binet that this would necessitate papal approval, and regarding the latter, Francis insisted it was impossible and

⁹⁷ A.K.H., *Angélique of PortRoyal*, 217-220.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, xxxiv-xxxvi.

⁹⁹ De Sales, *A Selection*, 194-195.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 194.

¹⁰¹ A.K.H., *Angélique of PortRoyal*, xxxiv-xxxvi.

¹⁰² See Pope Clement XI. *Unigenitus: Condemnation of the Errors of Paschasius* (Rome: Vatican, 1713), for the papal condemnation of Jansenism.

improper given her vocation to be a Port-Royal sister. In a seemingly unrelated August 1622 letter to the Abbess of Saint-Catherine near his episcopal city of Annecy, Francis wrote that a long-awaited “general reform order” for convents and monasteries in the Diocese of Geneva was about to be enacted, and that “acts of impatience, immortification, disdain, disobedience, self-love” and other improprieties undermined the monastic discipline pleasing to God.¹⁰³ An angst for reform or change seems to have arisen in many monasteries across France by the early 1620s. While the idea of reform was nothing new for Francis (Francis had himself reformed numerous monasteries during his career as bishop), the intensity of passions and the complexity of the ecclesiastical dynamics of reform in the 1620s prefigured greater ecclesiastico-political controversies that would outlast Francis.

For example, once the Jansenist controversy became a more divisive problem within France after the death of Francis, Jesuits began to accuse Jansenists of various doctrinal heterodoxies, prompting the mathematician and lay theologian Blaise Pascal to respond in a series of letters known as the *Lettres provinciales*. First published in 1657, in Letter XVI, Pascal would criticize the Jesuits in sardonic terms, appealing to Part III, Chapter 29 of the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, in which Francis cites St. Bernard in noting the evils of calumnious conduct: “‘The devil,’ says M. de Geneve, ‘is on the tongue of him that slanders, and in the ear of him that listens to the slanderer.’”¹⁰⁴ In Pascal’s eyes, the unquestioned moral authority of the deceased Bishop of Geneva strengthened his argument. Pascal was not alone in his appeal to the authority of Francis. The Jesuit priest and confessor of King Louis XIII Nicolas Caussin in his 1650 book *The Holy Court in Five Tomes* described Francis as “the great light of sanctity” who could show

¹⁰³ De Sales, *Library of St. Francis de Sales*, Vol. 4, *Further Letters Outside the Visitation*, Letter XXIII, pp. 331.

¹⁰⁴ Blaise Pascal, *Provincial Letters of Blaise Pascal* (United States: Derby & Jackson, 1859), 417.; Francis, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, 208.

the faithful of the court for whom Caussin wrote of the evils of worldliness and the ephemeral nature of all worldly goods in contrast to the virtues that lead men to eternity.¹⁰⁵

In another case, Archbishop François Fénelon, a late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century cleric, would become involved in what would be called “the Quietest Controversy,” in which Fénelon and his teacher and friend Madame Guyon were condemned at first by the French cleric Jean-Jacques Bossuet and later by Pope Innocent XII in 1699 for heretical writings on prayer, contemplation, and piety.¹⁰⁶ The central controversy regarded Fénelon’s belief that it was possible for a Christian believer to have in his words “an absolutely disinterested love of God,” according to which God would reveal his purposes and will only in inactivity, quietude, and indifference before both temporal and heavenly things.¹⁰⁷ Despite departing from Francis’s emphasis on mental and physical effort in the devoted believer’s pursuit of heaven, Fénelon would still revere the Bishop of Geneva in his writings, even imitating the style of the *Introduction* in his work *Christian Counsels* and similarly emphasizing the irrevocable importance of “true devotion” to the Lord’s will.¹⁰⁸ In the *Christian Counsels*, Fénelon stresses the ideal of conformity to God’s will and noted the danger of one of Francis’s chief concerns for the devout life, an absorption in love of the self.¹⁰⁹ Fénelon, despite his stranger adaptations of elements of Francis’s spirituality, recognized the spirituality of the love of God as something that could be crucial in the life of the believer, a mark of the impact of Francis’s emphasis on individual devotion.

1.3: Francis de Sales and the Uniqueness of Individual Devotion as a Means of Piety:

¹⁰⁵ Caussin, *The Holy Court*, 196.

¹⁰⁶ See Charles Butler, *The Life of Fenelon, Archbishop of Cambrey* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1810), 83, 157-158.

¹⁰⁷ Butler, *The Life of Fenelon*, 68-72, 160.

¹⁰⁸ François de Salignac de La Mothe-Fénelon, *Selections from Fénelon* (United States: Little, Brown, & Company, 1914), esp. 178-179.

¹⁰⁹ Fénelon, *Selections*, 42, 138.

These attempts at adapting and referencing Francis's writings indicate that Francis's renowned spirituality with its language of meditation and pious prayer had a long-lasting influence on the elite and aristocratic figures within the Gallican church. Authors of spiritual and polemical literature strove to emulate both Francis's style, as with Fénelon's *Christian Counsels*, and Francis's desire to guide the Catholic faithful through his spiritual direction and letter-writing. The new conveniences of printing in sixteenth-century France accorded Francis's admirers the ability to imitate the master in engaging in these literary endeavors and thereby to circulate Catholic piety as a literary genre for Catholic elites. Reformers, most notably Angélique Arnauld, from across France sought the advice of Francis and took ideas from him.

In some sense, each of these figures were indebted to Francis's unique literary capability to focus on individual devotion due to the conviction that holiness was possible irrespective of one's position within society. Much historiographical literature on the Catholic Reformation tends to focus on the individual efforts of prelates within dioceses, or the extent of changes to liturgical traditions across Europe, or the experiences of persecuted or minority Catholics, or the creation of new religious orders and the rise of missionary groups.¹¹⁰ These subjects are all relevant to a cohesive picture of the era and, interestingly, to Francis's own life. However, the effects of Francis's spiritual writings were manifold because he managed to have his writings sent across Europe despite his origins from a "poor" and lowly diocese in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. His writings found themselves in the hands of religious and secular Catholics alike, a rare phenomenon for Tridentine reformers. And, his prose style won over publishers, endeared him to many of the nobility of France, and made his work a mainstay of pastoral reform activity. Even after his death, his shadow would loom over the controversies of the Gallican church, challenges that he had ironically tried to avoid during his life. Yet, at the more local scale of the

¹¹⁰ Much of this historiographical literature is discussed in the Introduction of this thesis.

Diocese of Geneva, the unique approach and spirituality of this Tridentine reformer would continue to affect local piety and traditions for generations after his death. This thesis will now turn to the consideration of Francis's pastoral efforts within the Diocese of Geneva.

Section 2: Francis de Sales as a Missionary and Reformer: The Active Pastor:

Francis was one of the most prolific writers of the seventeenth century, and the previous section outlined the importance of his spiritual writing to the era of Catholic Reformation for the Gallican Church, French Catholic culture, and the writings of other important ecclesiastical figures of his period. However, many of Francis's most consequential interventions were local to the Diocese of Geneva where he had been a missionary, priest, and a Catholic Bishop for almost thirty years during a contentious period in the area's political and religious history. The influence of Francis's theology of the "love of God" was intimately connected to his proselytizing episcopal career, and this spiritual outlook remained central to his perception of his own efforts as a reformer.

In terms of reform, Francis was able to institute the reforms of the Council of Trent to a greater degree than his counterpart bishops within the Gallican Church, who though sometimes desirous of reform were prevented by royal obstructions of the Tridentine articles. However, Francis still accepted the need to retain the Catholic practices specific to the Diocese of Geneva. Ultimately, Francis developed a position of reform that was sensitive to the concerns that affected the Diocese of Geneva but which did not disavow the reforms desired in Trent and worked to implement these reforms where possible. Francis's work involved the creation of a missionary network of actors in the Chablais region of the diocese, the attempted reforms of existing locations for monasteries, and interventions into parishes.

Francis ranks as a case of a unique reformer. While he was very active in his Diocese, performing many visitations to specific communities and houses over the course of his career, he adopted a different methodology from the often uncompromising style of Cardinal Charles Borromeo in the Diocese of Milan. While labeling Francis's methods as less vigorous than those

of Borromeo would be unfair, Francis's firm but more gentle approach to reawakening religious conviction and to correcting abuses reflects the kind of approach to practical issues that was more common in an area with greater direct friction between Protestants and Catholics. The manner in which this complemented his writings reveals that his spirituality succeeded in its goal of enchanting Catholics just as much as it encouraged Protestant conversions and fostered devotion in a way that reflects his concept of the "love of God."

2.1: Francis's Missionary Efforts to the Chablais, and the Formation and Consolidation of a Catholic Presence in the Diocese of Geneva:

Francis began his efforts in the Diocese of Geneva in a delicate personal situation. Having graduated from the University of Padua, Francis returned to Geneva and was nearly married to an eligible woman named Françoise de Suchet by his father the Monsieur de Boisy, almost impressed into using his aptitude and legal credentials for his family as a lawyer, and was offered the title of Senator of the Savoyard government by the Savoyard Antoine Favre.¹¹¹ Once a new provostship had emerged in the Diocese of Geneva (which incorporated Savoy at the time), Francis seized the opportunity to enter the Church and to become a Catholic priest.¹¹² Officially ordained on December 18, 1593, at the Cathedral in Annecy in Savoy after returning to Savoy in February of 1592, Francis would assume the position of "provost" due to the influence of his father and his family name.¹¹³ This offered Francis a kind of direct subsidiary relationship with the bishop and the authority to supervise the activities of the priests within the diocese.¹¹⁴

In a speech delivered as provost to the priests of the Geneva chapter in Annecy in late 1593 or early 1594 prior to the advent of his mission to the Chablais, Francis would call his

¹¹¹ Ravier, *Sage and Saint*, 47-51.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 51-52.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

fellow priests to adopt the spiritual mission of regaining the Chablais for the Catholic faith. Speaking in militaristic terms, he would say, “We must bring down the walls of Geneva with *charity*; we must invade Geneva with *charity*; we must recover Geneva with *charity*....I do not purpose to you iron or that powder whose odor and stench recall the infernal furnace....Let your camp be the camp of God.”¹¹⁵ The peculiar combination of his call to “charity” that would define his later written works was present in this juxtaposed martial language of reconquest. As Ravier notes in his biography of Francis, Francis would also make a cloaked message of his allegiance to the rules of reform outlined in Trent. The abuses and shortsightedness of the ecclesiastics within the diocese had contributed to the problem with the Protestants, in Francis’s view, prompting him to say, “we must live according to the Christian rule, in such a way that we are canons, that is to say, regulars (living by the Rule), and children of God not only in name but also in fact.”¹¹⁶ As Ravier claims, the apostolic spirit of Francis as a Tridentine reformer was foreshadowed in the profession of the importance of consistency and abandoning hypocrisy in living as clergymen.¹¹⁷

In February of 1594, Francis’s Bishop de Granier called a meeting with the local chapter of Canons, during which Francis emerged both in the eyes of de Granier and by Francis’s own admission as the sole candidate suitable for the task of bringing the Chablais region of the Genevan countryside back to the Catholic faith.¹¹⁸ The area had been reconquered for Catholicism in 1594 by Duke Charles-Emmanuel, but this was really a military effort rather than the enterprise of an evangelist. The area therefore “relapsed” into the Calvinism that had abounded in the region for sixty years, and a later papal nuncio of 1596 noted the desperate need

¹¹⁵ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 57.

¹¹⁶ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 58.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

for a figure who could reconvert the area to Catholicism.¹¹⁹ Francis, despite Bishop de Granier's concerns of sending the promising provost on such a dangerous mission, appeared to be the only priest in the meeting who put his name forward as willing to endure the risks associated with going into this hostile territory and the deprivations that would be necessary for the mission. He commenced his journey with his cousin and fellow cleric Louis (who would be forced to return due to a lack of funds) on September 14, 1594.¹²⁰ A depiction of Francis and Louis begging the intercession of the Guardian Angel of Geneva next to a cross on the ground conveys the sense of urgency and the necessity of prayer that came with the mission in the eyes of Francis and the Canons of the Diocese of Geneva.¹²¹

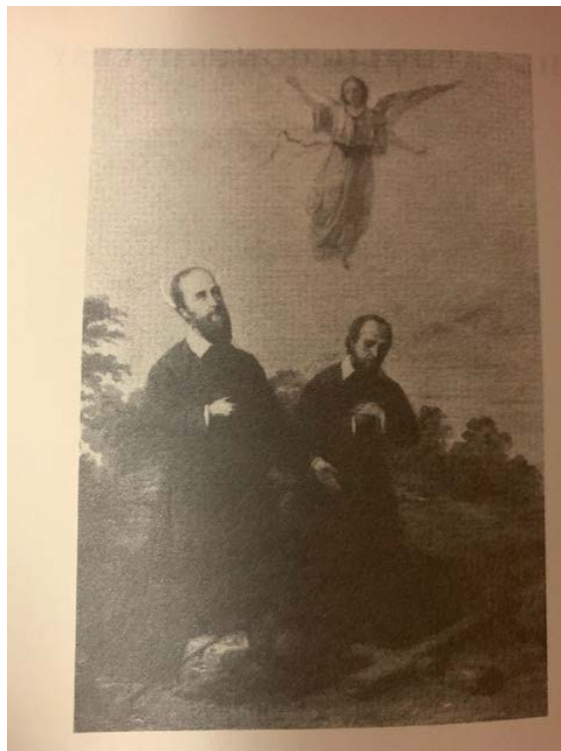


Fig 6: Francis de Sales (left) and his Cousin Louis de Sales (right) praying before they enter the Calvinist district of the Chablais.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 62-63.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 64.

¹²¹ "Canons" are clerical leaders subject to the supervision of a bishop in the Catholic Church.

¹²² Francis de Sales, *The Catholic Controversy: St. Francis De Sales' Defense of the Faith*, ed. and trans. Henry Benedict Mackey (Charlotte, NC: Tan Books, 2012), ii.

The conversion of the Chablais required a great fidelity to the faith for Francis as this painting portrays. In autumn of 1594, Francis entered into the “duchy” of the Chablais. This area comprised several towns and lands to the immediate south of Lake Geneva, to the northeast of the city of Geneva, which was located on the southwestern part of the lake. The city of Geneva had declared its independence and its official adoption of the Reformed religion in 1536, and the surrounding areas became majority Protestant.¹²³ Francis despite initial difficulties began the task of evangelizing in the region, focusing especially on preaching in Protestant towns like Thonon and on the work of converting key figures and community leaders within the Protestant towns such as the local noble Pierre Poncet, who initially converted to Catholicism on account of Francis’s efforts but subsequently abjured the Catholic faith.¹²⁴

¹²³ Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva, and the Reformation: A Study of Calvin as Social Reformer, Churchman, Pastor, and Theologian* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 15.

¹²⁴ Fehleison, *Boundaries of Faith*, 55-57.

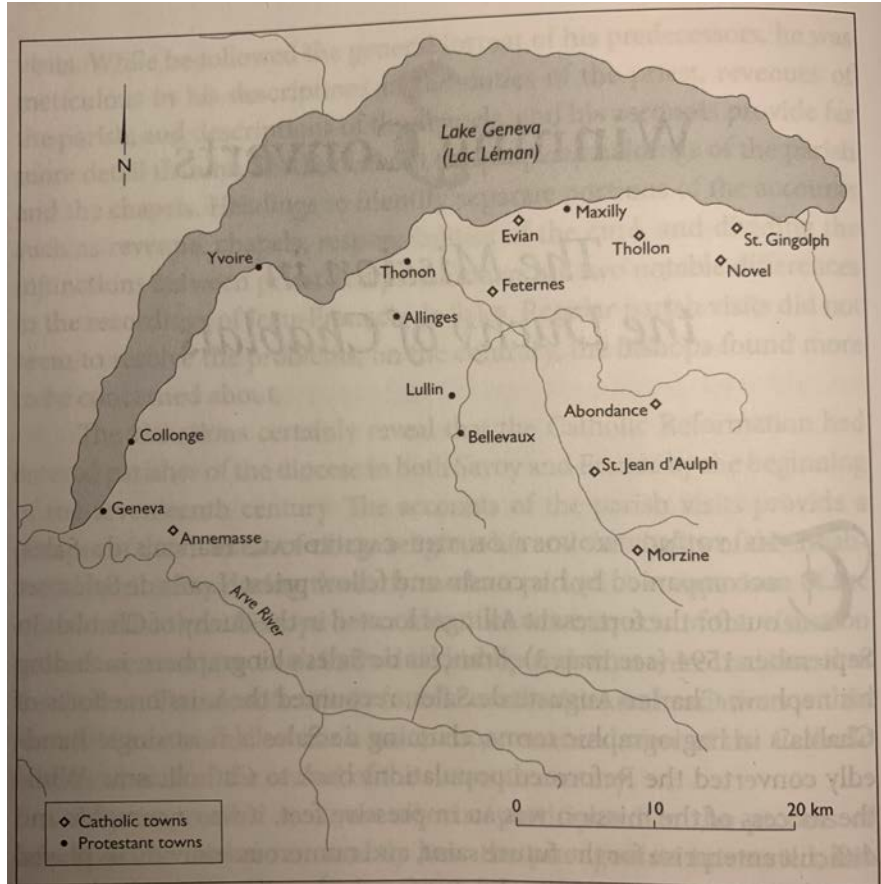


Fig 7: Cited in Fehleison as “Map 3: The Duchy of Chablais Prior to the Catholic Mission of 1594.”¹²⁵

Within the Chablais, despite the small presence of a number of Catholic towns, certain Protestant towns were more resistant than others. In the city of Thonon, Francis faced significant rejections of his preaching.¹²⁶ Among further factors that affected the low rate of initial conversions from 1594 through 1596 was the threat of military action from the Protestants of Bern to the northwest of Lake Geneva if they failed to resist the Catholic preaching publicly.¹²⁷ Frequent infighting in the region and a high degree of military activity left locals with fear of converting if it was possible that Catholicism would not be a fixity in the region. Much of Francis’s strategy therefore rested on converting key local nobles who could then influence and reassure the more cautious parts of society. While converting Pierre Poncet had evidently failed

¹²⁵ Fehleison, *Boundaries of Faith*, 54.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

by 1599, Francis invested much of his catechetical efforts into the promising and knowledgeable Protestant Antoine de Saint-Michel, referred to as “Seigneur d’Avully,” beginning around 1596.¹²⁸ Despite rebukes from the Protestants of the community, Seigneur d’Avully would become a Catholic alongside his family in August of that year and remain an avid promoter of the Catholic faith and a supporter of Francis’s mission.¹²⁹ Continual problems also emerged from the complicated politics of Savoy and the Diocese of Geneva. The Protestants of the Chablais claimed Francis did not have the backing of the Duke of Savoy and sought to exploit some of the tensions between Duke Charles-Emmanuel’s militaristic vision of reconquest and Francis’s desire for spiritual evangelization in the Chablais.¹³⁰ Protestants also threatened that Henry IV of France, who they viewed as a great defender of Protestantism, would defend their religious prerogatives against the missionaries, a belief that Francis denied.¹³¹

Nevertheless, Francis began to achieve some successes. A 1596 letter indicates Francis had thought of leaving the Chablais due to a lack of aid, but a reinvigorated team of missionaries with Capuchins, a Jesuit, and other religious were amassed in that year and sent out under Francis’s purview.¹³² Around early 1597, a series of ultimately fruitless meetings between Francis and the disciple of Calvin and leader of Geneva, Theodore de Beza, took place in the city of Geneva, galvanizing rumors across Europe about the meeting.¹³³ As word spread of Francis’s reputation, a spirit of optimism seemed to have eclipsed the earlier concerns about the mission, and by 1597, plans to bring about greater conversions alongside fellow missionaries were underway.¹³⁴

¹²⁸ Ibid., 56.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 60.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 60-61.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid., 61.

¹³³ Ibid., 62-63.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 61-62.

Meanwhile, Francis continued writing his pamphlets to the Chablais Protestants, instructing them in the Catholic faith and often urging them to return to the apostolic faith, as he put it in an early letter to the inhabitants of Thonon: “I have then put down here some principal reasons of the Catholic faith, which clearly prove that all are in fault who remain separated from the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church.”¹³⁵ These rhetorical pamphlets were sent to various towns and often slipped under the doors of Protestant families in the region, and they included Francis’s commentaries and defense of points of Catholic doctrine against Calvinist objections.¹³⁶ In one letter, Francis resolved to address the infallibility of the Church, claiming that the Calvinist ministers and leaders had fallen into error by arguing the Church was erroneous: “For if the Church herself shall err, who shall not err? And if each one in it err, or can err, to whom shall I betake myself for instruction?”¹³⁷ Francis tried to show what he believed to be the logical consequence of Protestant doctrine as incapable of resolving any fundamental issues of the faith for the typical believer. For some, these letters convinced them to reconsider the Catholic faith, but they did not convince others.

Beyond literary output and discussions with Calvinist leaders such as Beza, a notable part of the missionary project of the Chablais was the re-introduction of Catholic liturgical activity. Francis had held masses throughout his time as a missionary, and despite the Reformed prohibition of the Catholic mass as idolatrous, some people of the Chablais began to attend his sermons and other events in the later years of Francis’s missionary activity.¹³⁸ By the fall of 1597, the mission was developed enough to host three forty-hour devotions over the course of the subsequent year.¹³⁹ A new, eager missionary, Père Chérubin de Maurienne, organized the

¹³⁵ De Sales, *The Catholic Controversy*, xlvi.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹³⁸ Fehleison, *Boundaries of Faith*, 53-55; 68-71.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 64-67. Forty-hour devotions were a commemoration of Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection, which according to Catholic tradition occurred over forty hours, that gained popularity during the seventeenth-century

planning of the event, assuaged aristocratic and ecclesial concerns, and hoped to attract the attention of the Genevan Protestant ministers.¹⁴⁰ The first Forty Hours Devotion was held at Annemasse, only about 12 kilometers from the city of Geneva, with a procession of a large wooden cross by Francis de Sales to the outskirts of Geneva and a sermon by Chérubin on the meaning of veneration of the cross in order to try to disprove the Protestant charge of idolatry.¹⁴¹ The missionaries, according to historian Jill Fehleison, desired Catholics to understand the real purpose of physical symbols like the cross as things not to be worshiped in themselves but rather as signs of greater realities.¹⁴² However, they also used the symbols as testaments to the progress of the mission and to the triumph of the region's growing Catholicism against the iconoclasm that had obstructed Catholicism in the region during the sixteenth century.¹⁴³ Francis, a prelate and a diplomat with experience at this point, updated papal nuncios and Bishop de Granier on these events and the status of his progress in the region. To the former, Francis would delight in a later 1601 letter that the conversion of Thonon was almost totally secured, except for a handful of reversions.¹⁴⁴ Francis had deemed the mission a success by this point.

Nevertheless, an earlier episode reveals the challenges of defining the proper mode for assisting conversions and indicates that the management of a tense religious environment in the Chablais was by no means simple. In October of 1598, the Duke Charles-Emmanuel of Savoy who held jurisdiction over the Chablais held a council in which Francis participated where the Reformed religion was declared illicit and all Calvinists were required to leave most of the

among Catholics (Ibid., 64). These devotions involved “continual display of the Eucharist, preaching, confraternity processions, theater, and music” (Ibid., 64) and were designed by Francis to encourage Calvinists in the Chablais to re-enter the Catholic faith (Ibid., 64).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 65-66.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 68-69.

¹⁴² Ibid., 69.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ravier, *The Sage and the Saint*, 103.

Chablais within three days.¹⁴⁵ Francis did not protest the Duke's demands but did attempt to convert many of the cornered Calvinists at the meeting to Catholicism, with most refusing his requests. This council was conducted prejudicially, but it had the effect of ensuring the consolidation of Catholicism within the region and finishing most of Francis's work (though Francis would continue to intervene actively in the Chablais until his provostship ended in 1602). Later controversies such as the pacification of the Chablais around 1600 (discussed in section one) would require Francis's continued intervention in these sorts of issues, but the aggressively pro-Catholic activity of 1598 to which Francis consented would be moderated by more conciliatory behavior and correspondences that emphasized the spiritual nature of the mission to the Chablais over Francis's own formerly militaristic language as provost.¹⁴⁶

This change in attitude, caused according to his biographer Ravier by Francis's contact with Protestants in the region, was one of the defining features of Francis's method for conversion that distinguished him from other Catholic reformers.¹⁴⁷ One of the most important reformers of the era, Cardinal Charles Borromeo, would reform the Diocese of Milan with a strict attitude and a desire to overcome older Milanese Church traditions he deemed to be in need of reform according to Tridentine ideals.¹⁴⁸ Historian John Bossy notes the overwhelming zeal of Francis's contemporary Borromeo to overthrow local customs he deemed not worth preserving.¹⁴⁹ While capable of authoring some peaceful resolutions throughout his tenure and overseeing the Milanese clergy with a delicate, encouraging hand, Borromeo's reforms of the liturgy, increased formation of rules and episcopal legislation, and formation of a hierarchical order to the Milanese Clergy offered the epitome of aggressive Tridentine reform.¹⁵⁰ Francis de

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 94.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 103-104.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Bossy, *Peace*, 12.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 13.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 13-18.

Sales, though similarly committed to Trent, likely grew at least wary of the merits of this type of intense activity for a diocese in which political divisions coincided with religious divisions and in which political persecutions or inconveniences could cause converts like Poncet to forsake the Catholic faith.¹⁵¹ In time, this attitude would turn Francis into an evangelization-minded Bishop who was willing to force reform by secular means when needed but who was also willing to permit the continuation of customs not prejudicial to the Catholic faith that could not be reformed due to challenging circumstances in the Diocese of Geneva. It would also cause Francis to focus on local circumstances and the importance of active laity such as Seigneur d'Avully in a way that shaped and reflected his spirituality of the "love of God."

2.2: Francis's Reforms of Religious Convents and Monasteries and Parishes in the Diocese of Geneva

Having fostered the conversions of thousands of Protestants in the Chablais region by 1602 due to his eight-year missionary efforts, Francis began a program of reforming the Diocese of Geneva with his ordination as bishop in the winter of 1602. While Francis, seeing the effects of Charles-Emmanuel's heavy-handed policies, seems to have disliked political intrigues and contestations, his diplomatic abilities as a correspondent with the papacy's agents and Bishop de Granier and the incessant political disputes and changing boundaries in the area around Geneva necessitated an adept bishop, for which Francis was primed by his experience. In general, Francis would take an involved approach to the reform of the diocese that was nevertheless sensitive to political circumstances, and this would be particularly important with respect to the parishes, religious orders and confraternities in the area, and his correspondences more broadly.

¹⁵¹ As section one discusses, King Henry IV noticed and prized Francis's more ostensibly moderate qualities that Francis had developed from his time in the Chablais.

The Edict of Nantes in 1598 provided for general “toleration,” insofar as royal commissioners of the edict attempted to pacify military conflict and permitted the preservation of the Reformed faith within certain pockets across France, and it preceded the Treaty of Lyons in 1601, which tried to end hostilities between Savoy and the French crown.¹⁵² In the region of the Pays de Gex, a majority Calvinist area since the 1530s to the northwest of the city of Geneva on the west side of Lake Geneva as shown in the map, the Diocese of Geneva began in the summer of 1601, aided by the military efforts of the Baron de Lux, to attempt a process of re-establishing the ancient Catholic parishes across the Gex.¹⁵³

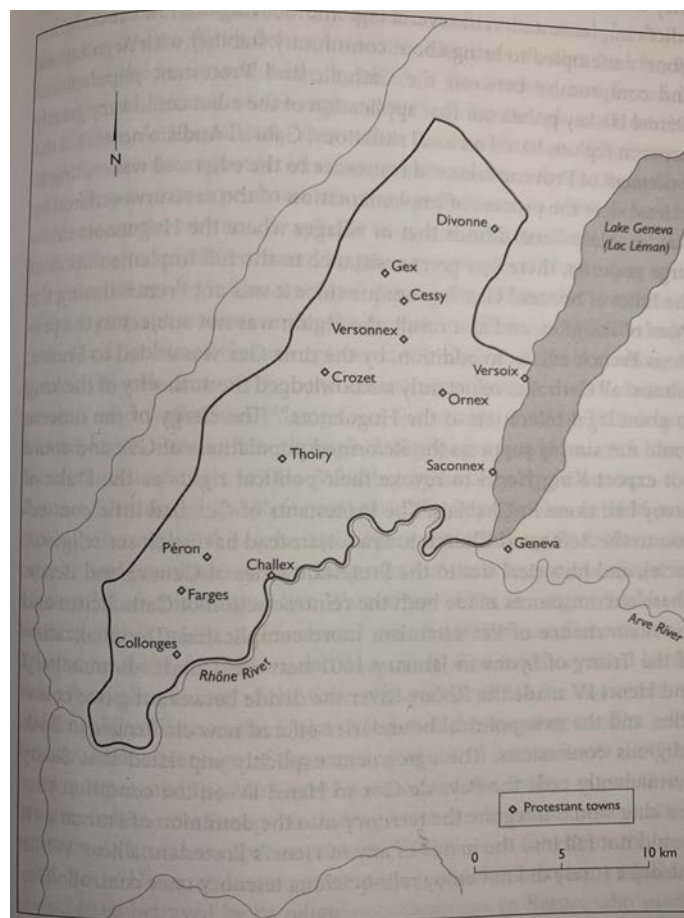


Fig 8: Cited in Fehleison as “Map 4: The Pays de Gex.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Fehleison, *Boundaries of Faith*, 100-104. The 1601 Treaty of Lyons is discussed in section one.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 105-107.

¹⁵⁴ Depicted in *Ibid.*, 101.

The implementation of the Edict of Nantes, besides its provisions for Protestantism, offered provisions for minority Catholic areas like the Gex to recover former parishes and other aspects of Catholic life, and Bishop de Granier sent Francis as a diplomat to Paris to encourage the king to support their endeavors.¹⁵⁵ Francis assumed direct control over this job once he returned as Bishop of Geneva in 1602, as he was tasked with managing the bureaucratic difficulties of appointing rectors within the Gex and the financial challenges of finding the funds to fix churches that were in disrepair.¹⁵⁶ The added jurisdictional challenge of managing a French territory like the Pays de Gex which was separated by the Arnes River and Lake Geneva from most of the rest of the diocese made implementing Tridentine reform more difficult given that the Gallican church had obstructed the articles of Trent.¹⁵⁷ Francis still managed to re-establish some religious houses across the Gex during the 1610s after the death of Henry IV including a Caremlite monastery divested of its property, but the parishes in the Gex were stuck with bad clergy due to their limited resources and were often full of bad clergy with concubines and other problems.¹⁵⁸ Both the failure to attract good clergy to assist with the formidable environment of the heavily-Protestant Gex and the seemingly more pious and more unified presence of the Protestant ministers caused the region to remain predominantly Protestant.¹⁵⁹

Outside the Gex, however, Francis's influence on Catholic activity in the diocese could often be more direct and extensive. Clerical abuse was corrected by means of Francis's synods, held frequently to ensure obedience to Catholic doctrine and morals among subordinate parish priests, and his visitations to parishes. In the spirit of the articles of Trent which had held the importance of the diocesan synods as corrective measures and the need for hierarchical

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 105-107. This story of Francis's journey to Paris is recounted in Section one of the thesis.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 122-123.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 122.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 130-135.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 136.

supervision of the bishop over his parishes, Francis also targeted some of the biggest problems within the diocese.¹⁶⁰ Some of the chief issues included “failure to live in the parish and failure to celebrate the mass.”¹⁶¹ While flagrant violations of moral standards for priests were rare, these did happen on occasion, such as in the case of a priest at Novel on the south of Lake Geneva, an absentee from his parish and purported drunkard who failed to maintain the church as uncovered during a personal Visitation conducted by Bishop Francis in 1617.¹⁶² As Francis noted in his record, the priest Jean Million left the poorly-constructed house in disrepair, even committing what seems to have been a quasi-sacrilege of replacing the offered wheat with straw and placing it over the altar: “The said priest has the habit of filling shirts and the other linens with straw instead of the wheat that was offered, and hang them over the high altar – a very indecent thing; he was advised to raise them [sic].”¹⁶³ Francis viewed the entire situation as one of dereliction of duty, and one which needed immediate correction to avoid scandal.¹⁶⁴ While not all visitations in the recorded *Visites Pastorales* note this degree of dilapidation in the churches which Francis visited, and thus did not require similar heavy-handed Tridentine style interventions, the concern about continued clerical abuses and impoverished circumstances remained an issue in the case of religious houses.

The collected visitation accounts of the Bishop reveal a difficult state of reform for many of the monasteries within the diocese. Laxity in observations of the rules of various monastic orders and some corruption among the religious, except among most collections of Carthusian monks according to Francis, was a perennial problem in the diocese, and one which surfaced as

¹⁶⁰ See esp. Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 24 Ss., Decree Concerning Reform, ch. II, ch. X.

¹⁶¹ Fehleison, *Boundaries of Faith*, 151.

¹⁶² Charles-M. Rebord, *Visites Pastorales Du Diocèse de Genève-Annecy (1411-1900): Analyses détaillées des Visites de saint François de Sales 1604-1618* (Annecy: Impr.-éditeur J. Abry, 1921), 1:341-344.

¹⁶³ Quoted from Rebord, *Visites Pastorales*, 1:342. (Translated by DeepL Translator and Google Translate). Referenced in Fehleison, *Boundaries of Faith*, 151.

¹⁶⁴ Rebord, *Visites Pastorales*, 1:341-344.

an issue intermittently throughout Francis's episcopacy.¹⁶⁵ Due to the severity and scope of the problem, the only solution in the eyes of Francis was to correct each monastery individually either by subjecting the house to appropriate supervision of another congregation or to renew the rules of the house.¹⁶⁶ A well-respected and important monastery in Talloires, a town to the southeast of Annecy in Savoy, became the site of a multi-part reform over violations of the Rules. Francis initially visited the monastery in 1607 and made some injunctions for changes in the required prayers of the house. Francis's 1609 appointment of a new prior from the de Quoex family, an important group of people in the history of the Talloires priory, was followed by more vigorous oversight from papal nuncios of the priory and orders for Francis to engage directly in reform of the place due to a scandal involving two young monks.¹⁶⁷ Talloires resisted the proposed reforms of Francis, likely concerned with the Tridentine consolidation of supervisory authority over religious houses that Francis and other authorities believed was necessary. The multi-prong effort from the episcopal sees of Geneva and of Rome was also utilized in the case of the Abbey of Notre Dame.¹⁶⁸ However, the consistent resistance of many communities of monks reveals, as Fehleison notes, that while parishes began to "approximate" the ideal of an authoritative Tridentine priest, monasteries "remained an independent force within the diocese."¹⁶⁹

Francis continued to allow some local peculiarities to remain in force in the monasteries of the Diocese, but refused to assent to abuses within the orders. Finding himself in a complex political web involving secular and papal authorities, Francis implemented reforms with the justification that he was doing so, as he said as a provost, out of "charity." Attentive to the local circumstances of parishes for the protection and installation of the Catholic faith, Francis would

¹⁶⁵ Fehleison, *Boundaries of Faith*, 169-170.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 171-177.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 175-176.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 180.

try to advocate for the holiness and education of the laity in his writings and devotional promotions.

Still, Francis would not give up on the possibility of monastic reform, placing monastic reform of so great an importance that he resolved to form an Order with the partnership of a good friend and confidant, Jane de Chantal. Her life story and actions would be intertwined with the life story and the influence of Francis, and it is to her that this thesis now turns.

Section 3: Jane de Chantal and Francis de Sales: A Case Study of the Impact of Francis's Spirituality and its Propagation:

Having examined Francis's role as a pastor and his constant efforts to spread the Catholic faith within the diocese of Geneva and through the founding of the Order of the Visitation, Francis's commitment to the ideals of reformation outlined in the Council of Trent remained strong throughout his episcopacy. While monastic weakness within his diocese beleaguered Francis, his resolve to overcome these challenges would manifest in the formation of the Order of the Visitation. In the birth of this Order, Francis's emphasis on devotion and piety would become a cornerstone of the disciplines of the nuns of the Order. At the heart of this formation was the appeal of Francis's personal devotion and spirituality, which influenced his spiritual devotees, notably Jane de Chantal. Jane serves as a prime example of the effect of Francis's writings upon the members of his ecclesiastical milieu and, through them, upon the broader setting of French Catholic culture beginning in the early seventeenth century.

Because Francis was someone who could never divorce theological insight into the "devout life" from its practical application and exercise, he directed his devotee and co-founder of the Order of the Visitation, Jeanne-Françoise de Chantal, a widow and formerly active lay member of the Church to cherish the same need for practical resolutions and tireless work in an enduring spirit of "charity" as a Christian ideal. As Francis relates in a letter to a woman on the subject of Confession, the devout life required patience and hard but vigilant work.¹⁷⁰ This was acutely the lot of Jane de Chantal, who like Francis, desired a "retreat" from the world. In the words of her most important biographer, niece, and fellow religious of the Order of the Visitation Madame de Chaugy: "Although this faithful servant was ever occupied in doing something remarkable in the service of God and her neighbour, yet all this appeared & nothing, unless she

¹⁷⁰ De Sales, *Spiritual Letters*, 220.

gave herself up to the service of God in a life altogether retired, and out of the world [sic].”¹⁷¹

Yet, despite this ideal of removal from the world which was Jane de Chantal’s stated desire, the circumstances of Francis and Jane’s intertwined lives prevented Jane’s stated ideal from coming to full fruition.¹⁷² Instead, Jane became involved in the establishment and development of the Visitation Order and the propagation and renewal of the Catholic faith among clerics, continuing a mission central to her director Francis’s success as a reformer. In examining the life of Jane de Chantal, her formation at the hands of Francis, and her work and correspondences, the extent of Francis’s personal investment in Jane and the influence of his pastoral spirituality upon one of his closest confidants and, through her, to the clergy of her time and to the Sisters of the Visitation becomes evident.

3.1: Jane de Chantal: Life Story, Friendship with Francis, and her Co-Founding and Guidance of the Order of the Visitation:

Jeanne-Françoise Frémiot de Chantal was born to the staunchly Catholic Frémiot family on January 23, 1572 in Dijon, France.¹⁷³ As an infant, her mother died in the birth of Jane’s brother, André Frémiot, the future Archbishop of Bourges and a correspondent of St. Francis de Sales, and she was raised by her father, the President of the Royalists Monsieur Frémiot. President Frémiot served as a noble advisor to the kings Henry III and Henry IV during the Religious Wars of the late sixteenth century.¹⁷⁴ She was married at the age of twenty with the permission of her father to the Catholic league loyalist the Baron de Chantal, and moved to

¹⁷¹ Françoise-Madeleine de Chaugy, *Life of S. Jane Frances de Chantal, Foundress of the Order of the Visitation*, trans. Jacques (United Kingdom: Richardson and Son, 1852), 83.

¹⁷² Jane would write to Mother Marie-Adrienne Fichet, Superior at Rumilly in 1627 of the need of ignoring the offenses of men: “They speak of your monastery as being unfortunate, and ask how it is that it is so afflicted... This is, dearest daughter, the language of the world. That of God is quite otherwise” [Jeanne-Françoise de Chantal, *Selected Letters of Saint Jane Frances de Chantal*, trans. P.J. Kennedy (United Kingdom: P.J. Kennedy, 1918), 171-172].

¹⁷³ De Chaugy, *Life of S. Jane Frances de Chantal*, 6.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 6-11.

Bourbilly to reside with him and minister over the house of the Chantals, who, though a noble family, were in the unfortunate state of declining financial means and had become somewhat impoverished.¹⁷⁵ The financial straits of the family were to become a persistent problem throughout the life of Jane de Chantal and the lives of her children.¹⁷⁶

But, such circumstances were not to deter Jane, who according to Madame Chaugy, aspired to be an effective house-keeper and to live an exemplary life of devotion to the Catholic Church, hearing mass daily and sparing no expense to give alms to the poor and feed them as well, thus striving to help her household be an example of faithful Catholic nobility.¹⁷⁷ In 1601, her husband the Baron de Chantal tragically died in a hunting accident, and her bereavement prompted the already pious Jane, who was left a widow with four dependent children (three daughters and one son), to turn toward God and dedicate her life to Him.¹⁷⁸ She fatefully began seeking a spiritual director to guide her in the spiritual life, out of a great desire to lead a life of holiness, a path that would lead her to the Bishop of Geneva, Francis de Sales.

Initially, however, she returned to Dijon to be with her father the Monsieur de Frémiot, and there came under the direction of Dijon's Reverend Father of Notre Dame de l'Etang. A vow of obedience to this director compelled her to remain under his direction despite her first meeting with Francis de Sales during one of Francis's visits to Dijon in 1604 and their affinity.¹⁷⁹ According to Madame Chaugy, Jane later described this predicament she faced as one that forced her silence on the issue due to the conflict between holy obedience to her existing director and

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 14.

¹⁷⁶ In a letter to her recently-married daughter the Countess de Toulonjon in 1621 which reveals the extent of the family's preoccupation with money, Jane adds a note of concern about a sum of 500 livres which the daughter may have owed as a debt, and urges her to send it to Jane immediately so that Jane could pay off the debt (De Chantal, *Selected Letters*, 104). Jane clearly had concerns of worldly propriety and finances, and wanted to be sure to avoid undue debt while nevertheless allowing her daughter to not feel ashamed of any financial duress on the family.

¹⁷⁷ De Chaugy, *Life of S. Jane Frances de Chantal*, 18-21.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 33-34.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 44-46.

that of, in her eyes, a divinely-inspired pull toward the Savoyard bishop: ““I admired all that he [Francis] did and said, and regarded him as an angel of the Lord; but I was so scrupulously attached to the guidance of my first director, that I could not communicate anything to any one without great fear, although the holy simplicity of the saint often urged me to do so; and yet I was longing to speak.”¹⁸⁰ Perhaps the approachability and charming conversational attitude of Francis, which Jane would later praise in her testimony for St. Francis’s beatification, contributed to the dawn of their mutual friendship.¹⁸¹

In any case, Jane would confer with various religious men who claimed it was God’s will that she should come under the direction of Francis, and she was eventually persuaded to seek Francis’s direction and released from her vows of obedience to her former director by Francis himself.¹⁸² After a first meeting and her brief visit of Francis in Savoy, Jane moved to Annecy to join fellow women who were interested in becoming the first sisters of what would become the Order of the Visitation.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 45.

¹⁸¹ Jeanne-Françoise de Chantal, “In Personal Contact,” in *Way of Life, St. Francis de Sales: A Testimony by St. Chantal*, trans. Elisabeth Stopp (Faber: London, 1967), 138-141.

¹⁸² See De Chaugy, *Life of S. Jane Frances de Chantal*, 48-56, for Madame de Chaugy’s recounting of this story. Francis at his first meeting with Jane would give her a solemn note assuming the responsibility for her spiritual direction: “I accept in the Name of God that charge of your spiritual guidance, and shall employ therein all the fidelity and care that I can, and as far as my ability and my other duties will allow me” (De Chaugy, *Life of S. Jane Frances de Chantal*, 55-56).

¹⁸³ Ibid., 84-118.



Fig 9: Francis in his ecclesiastical chair, inspired by God, gives the Constitutions of the Visitation to Jane de Chantal.¹⁸⁴

Jane de Chantal would spend the remainder of her life overseeing the Order of the Visitation, ceremoniously founded, blessed, and given its Constitutions, as Figure 9 illustrates, by Francis on June 6, 1610, as its principal leader.¹⁸⁵ Despite the great hardships that this would entail, as she would have to remain largely separated from her family, intervene in disciplinary cases within various convents, and work to persuade various clergymen to support the Order financially, she nevertheless tried to manage each of her obligations. In a 1616 letter to Sisters Peronne-Marie-de-Châtel and Marie Aimée de Blonay, she noted there was an ideal to which all Christians should aspire: “Let us not philosophize on things that happen to ourselves or to others, but, as I have already said, remaining sweetly humble, and tranquil, in the condition in which

¹⁸⁴ Francisco Bayeu y Subías, *San Francisco de Sales*, 18th century, painting, 56 cm x 34 cm, Museo de Salamanca, Madrid, Spain, <https://picryl.com/media/san-francisco-de-sales-de-francisco-bayeu-museo-del-prado-9f70-03>.

¹⁸⁵ De Chaugy, *Life of S. Jane Frances de Chantal*, 121-129.

God has placed us. In pain patient, in sorrow enduring, in action active, without stopping to think whether we commit faults in this way or that, for such reflections are nothing but self-love.”¹⁸⁶

This attitude of quiet resignation to the providence of God combined with an active and persevering attitude was one of Jane’s more admirable qualities for people like Madame Chaugy, and it was seen as a sign that Jane had inculcated Francis’s spiritual system enough to love God over her own comfort even in the most difficult challenges.

The widow-turned-religious would serve the Order of the Visitation as a Mother Superior from 1610 to 1641, when she resigned her position as Mother Superior of the Visitation.¹⁸⁷ She would live through the deaths of her son, the Baron de Chantal, in battle, Francis’s death in 1622, her brother’s passing, and at the end of her life, the final moments of her closest companions, the original mothers and female leaders of the Visitation.¹⁸⁸ She worked extensively to establish new Visitation monasteries and to oversee extant monasteries. She died shortly after her resignation as Mother Superior on December 13, 1641 at the age of seventy-one in the company of the Reverend Father de Lingendes and her sisters.¹⁸⁹

Jane de Chantal’s life was replete with moments of sadness and trial and yet moments of happiness and apparent joy. But, Jane’s responses to the former moments (insofar as they are recorded in her letters, testimonies, and other writings) are remarkable in that she remained committed to the ideal of praising God despite the evident pain she suffered and witnessed. On the occasion of the death of Francis in 1622, she enjoined a grieving Mother Anne Catherine de Beaumont, Superior of the First Monastery of Paris to turn from despair to prayer, proclaiming “Oh! What honour and happiness is comparable to that of serving in humble and absolute

¹⁸⁶ De Chantal, *Selected Letters*, pp. 33.

¹⁸⁷ De Chaugy, *Life of S. Jane Frances de Chantal*, 288-289.

¹⁸⁸ On the death of Jane’s son, see De Chantal, *Selected Letters*, 33.

¹⁸⁹ De Chaugy, *Life of S. Jane Frances de Chantal*, 315.

submission the holy will of our good God! Let us only think of, only seek this glorious eternity, for there is our Sovereign Good, with whom we shall eternally rejoice. May He be blessed!”¹⁹⁰

As this passage indicates, Jane’s resolute commitment to the ideal of the “love of God” that was the centerpoint of Francis’s theological system gained the admiration of her fellow Visitation religious sisters and clergymen. This admiration of Francis’s ideal of the love of God which Jane sought to enact, serves as an insight into the extent of Francis’s vicarious influence on French Catholic society through the hands of his most significant and widely-respected disciple, to whose writings and guidance this thesis will now turn.

3.2: Jane de Chantal: Her Correspondences and Spiritual Guidance of the Order of the Visitation:

Following the death of Francis de Sales in 1622, Jane de Chantal would write to a General of the Order of the Feuillants, who was leading an investigation into the cause of Francis’s beatification, that in her view, as the last four books of the *Treatise on the Love of God* indicate, “All his [Francis’s] actions were animated with the sole motive of pleasing God, and truly (as he says in this sacred book) he asked nought of heaven nor of earth but to see the will of God accomplished.”¹⁹¹ As she assumed greater responsibilities due to the growth of the Visitation Order across France during her lifetime, Jane sought to respond to the issues she faced as a co-founder and the Mother Superior of the Order by emulating Francis’s practical application of his spiritual system to concrete issues. She would often use the writings of Francis to buttress her advice in the midst of the clerical intrigues and disciplinary problems that were typical of the time. These issues demanded political adeptness and adaptations of Francis’s writings while

¹⁹⁰ De Chantal, *Selected Letters*, 117.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 133.

seeking to preserve the “spirit” of Francis’s system from rival ideas such as those that the Archbishop of Lyons would attempt to instill.

Numerous instances in Jane de Chantal’s life point to her application of Francis’s spiritual principles, especially the ideal of the “love of God.” Her letters from throughout her career as a Mother Superior bear witness to this desire to implement and disseminate Francis’s ideals. In Annecy in 1623, Jane de Chantal encountered a crisis of behavior among novices and younger sisters and would command her friend, Sister Anne Marie Rosset, at Dijon to guide the novices and younger sisters toward obedience to the order in the name of Francis de Sales. As she writes:

“My daughter, a Religious of the Visitation who should attach herself to anything whatsoever but God is not worthy of her vocation. Make this very clear to our Sisters. Each one must have a holy zeal to attain eternal life by the path which God has marked out for her. If our Sisters really love their holy Founder they will prove it not only by the attention and pleasure with which they read his writings, for all the world delights in them, but also by faithfully carrying out his teachings. That incomparable love and sweetness towards their neighbour, that profound humility and lowliness of which he was so great a lover, and which put him at enmity with all ostentation, should above all be practised by them. Finally, let them make theirs the glorious gift he enjoyed of devout attention to the presence of God.”¹⁹²

In this insightful remark, Jane insists strongly that the sisters of the Visitation needed to focus their attention on God, but commanded them to this obedience in the name of the now widely-acknowledged Francis. Her invocation of the sisters’ memory of him and his rules for the Order defined Jane’s method of tying every right action into a larger picture of man’s duty to love God and his responsibility to pursue sanctity.

As historian Robin Briggs discusses in his work on late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century France, female “regular” religious orders, including Jane’s Order of the Visitation, Angélique Arnauld’s reformed Port-Royals, and the newfound Sisters of Charity, rose and

¹⁹² Ibid., 127-128.

expanded rapidly from 1600-1650.¹⁹³ Orders like Jane's Visitation were not as active in missionary efforts to spread the faith.¹⁹⁴ Because female orders also lacked the clerical authority to reform parishes or dioceses, the sisters channeled much of the missionary zeal for reforming clergy and ensuring the preservation of Catholicism among the laity that Francis embodied into a zeal for the Visitation Order's conformity with the Rule of St. Augustine that Francis adopted as the model for the Visitation.¹⁹⁵ Jane would write to Mother Marie Adrienne Fichet, Superior at Rumilly, in 1626, that "His great fear, our Blessed Father told me, was lest we should not thoroughly devote ourselves to the practice of the Rule. And I, also fearing this, pray God that our very apprehension may make us all the more faithful to our observance."¹⁹⁶ Lest the message about the need to uphold discipline at Rumilly not be communicated to Mother Fichet sufficiently, Jane then reminded her the Visitation members were to become "living Rules, not according to our human wisdom and prudence, but according to what is set down."¹⁹⁷ By "living Rules," Jane meant that the Sisters of the Visitation were to submit without qualification to the Rules, an expectation that, as she stressed to Mother Fichet, Francis had authoritatively set down.

As stern as these statements may sound, Jane possessed a great deal of maternal sympathy that she urged her fellow members of the Order to emulate. Due to her position of power within the Visitation, she also possessed a greater awareness of the specific challenges facing individual members of the Order than Francis could afford. In a later part of the 1626 letter to Mother Fichet, Jane emphasized the centrality of familial maternal affection and care

¹⁹³ "Regular" orders refer here to religious orders within the Catholic Church that are mostly cloistered but often have some sort of apostolate (i.e., a mission that leads them to interact with others in the world). (See Briggs, *Early Modern France*, 172-173).

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹⁹⁵ The Rule of St. Augustine was established as the rule for the members of the Order of the Visitation to follow after the Lyons affair (discussed in section 3.3).

¹⁹⁶ De Chantal, *Selected Letters*, 154.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 154.

within the order especially vis-a-vis the relationship between Mother Fichet and the Sisters.¹⁹⁸ Nevertheless, recognizing her role of carrying on the message of Francis and his spirituality, Jane insisted that Mother Fichet's maternal attitude be subordinate to a deep affection for God: "Above all things, dear daughters, dwell together, I beseech of you, in a great and magnanimous love of His holy will, and a gentle mutual support of one another, which will ravish the Heart of the sovereign Goodness."¹⁹⁹ By this, Jane meant that the Sisters needed to follow "God's will," which involved obedience to the Rules of the Order and to the Mother Superiors as well. Her attachment to "God's will" entailed careful devotion to caring for the sisters of the Order in a charitable manner without imposing excessively strict sanctions on sisters with health issues and circumstances that rendered them unable to observe the rules of the Order concerning fasting or more rigorous disciplines. Jane de Chantal used her own commitment to following God's "holy will" to inspire fidelity to the Order. Francis's spiritual ideals mediated her affection for her fellow sisters of the Order and the uniquely maternal love she claimed to bear for her subordinates. Jane's intimacy with her fellow sisters of the Visitation allowed her to develop an approach to counseling the sisters that did not always have the same authoritative airs of Francis but did, often, have greater maternal empathy than what Francis could offer, on account of her status as a fellow member of the Visitation and her more intimate experience with the Sisters.

Beyond emulating and adapting aspects of Francis's spirituality, Jane would frequently recommend the widely-circulating writings of Francis such as the *Introduction to the Devout Life* to people both in and outside of religious life or even the *Constitutions of the Visitation*, a collection of Francis's writings for members of the Visitation meant to guide them in understanding how to follow the Rules of the Order. She would write to the Mademoiselle de

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 155, 163-164.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 81.

Chantal, her daughter, recommending that she accept her future husband the Count of Toulonjon's marriage proposal, and that she read Francis's works: "take the *Devout Life* for your guide and it will lead you safely...we should use the good things God gives us without being attached to them, and everything that the world esteems should be looked upon in this light."²⁰⁰ Jane recommended Francis's work on the *Devout Life* to her daughter in accord with the ideal for which Francis claimed it was written, to assist people who were living in the world in living a good Christian life. In a correspondence with Mother Jeanne H el ene de G erard, the Superior at Embrun in Southeastern France, she insisted on reading Francis's writings with the purpose of adopting his gentleness: "Read with attention the writings of our holy Founder, and you will there see the extreme sweetness and suavity with which he led souls."²⁰¹ By aiming to foster this "extreme sweetness" she found in the writings of Francis within the Order and its individual members, Mother Chantal avoided the problem of strictness that would define other French orders that claimed to follow Francis's spiritual ideals (such as Ang elique Arnauld's Port-Royal Order) without instilling laxity in the Sisters of the Visitation.²⁰² For Jane, this was the path to the ideal of "spiritual perfection" for which Francis advocated. It also ensured that an order composed of women with poor health or of old age who were unable endure the fasts and penitential practices of other orders could remain committed to the welfare of each other and discipline in the religious life.²⁰³

Charting this delicate "middle path" between firmness without compassion and a dissolution of Francis's zealous commitment to the Rules of the Order would become a much larger problem for Jane as the Order expanded and external pressures on the Visitation Order's

²⁰⁰ De Chantal, *Selected Letters*, 91.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 177.

²⁰² A.K.H., *Ang elique of PortRoyal*, 46.

²⁰³ This is the subject of several letters by Jane de Chantal (Cf. esp. De Chantal, *Selected Letters*, pp. 79-80, 127-128).

nature emerged from influential people like the Archbishop of Lyons. Several conflicts would require attentive intervention from Jane on behalf of her fellow Mother Superiors in challenging situations.

3.3: Jane de Chantal and the Challenges of the Visitation Order: Founding New Convents and the Case of the Archbishop of Lyons:

The Order of the Visitation was originally founded by Francis and Jane as a general *congregation* for women, one which did not entail the taking of strict vows that were generally found in other female orders. The ideal for Francis was to establish a holy congregation mainly for women who had poor physical constitutions or who would be excluded from other orders on account of age or widowhood. In effect, the women would be women from the world who lived a communal life and desired the expansion and holiness of the fellow members of the Congregation. For Francis, the primary apostolate of the Order was meant to be tending to the sick, and Jane de Chantal, who had a recorded passion for this sort of ministry, by all accounts fostered this kind of ministry amongst the women of the Visitation in its early days at Annecy, where the Congregation was first established.²⁰⁴

As the Order expanded, however, this idealized picture of the Congregation of the Visitation became less of a practicable reality. According to the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Council of Trent, all monasteries of nuns “subject to the apostolic see” that were not already extant before the Council ended in 1563 were subject to the supervision of the local bishop, who acted as a “delegate” of the Apostolic See.²⁰⁵ The Tridentine reformers designed this provision to curb many of the monastic abuses and corruption that had been exacerbated by the time of the Protestant Reformation by facilitating episcopal supervision of monastic life as well, one of the

²⁰⁴ The original Visitation Congregation was not the different from the official cloistered Order that it was asked to become at the behest of the Archbishop of Lyons (See De Chaugy, *Life of S. Jane Frances de Chantal*, 65-67).

²⁰⁵ Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 25th Ss., Decree on Reformation, ch. IX.

central preoccupations of Francis's efforts in the Diocese of Geneva.²⁰⁶ There was also another contributing factor to the pressures to change the Order's nature; seventeenth-century France had no female orders into which the sick and the infirm could be placed and become professed religious.²⁰⁷

Thus, shortly after its founding in 1610, the Order began to expand to other parts of southeastern and central France, including Lyons in 1615 and Moulins by 1616.²⁰⁸ The Order then worked to establish new monasteries across France, and in doing so, many monasteries were established within different dioceses, and thus under different jurisdictions; as Delumeau notes, eighty-six convents had been established by Jane de Chantal's death in 1641, many more than the original non-monastic congregation at Annecy.²⁰⁹ Pursuant to the Council of Trent, the Visitation house at Lyons, once it was established in 1615, was then subject to the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Lyons, the "Cardinal of Marquemont," who refused to accept an uncloistered monastery for women.²¹⁰

There were many factors that contributed to this prohibition. A 1566 papal encyclical by Pius V, *Circa Pastoralis*, applied a provision of the 1563 decree of the Council of Trent on Monasteries to all convent nuns and congregations of nuns, enjoining bishops and ecclesial superiors to encourage profession of final vows and to enforce cloistered life.²¹¹ The Archbishop likely desired to follow this decretal and also perceived the potential for the Visitation Order to tend to women who desired a religious life and who were interested in a life of prayer and

²⁰⁶ See John W. O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council*.

²⁰⁷ De Chaugy, *Life of S. Jane Frances de Chantal*, 65-67.

²⁰⁸ De Chantal, *Selected Letters*, 170-174.

²⁰⁹ Delumeau, *Catholicism*, 37.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 37; De Chaugy, *Life of S. Jane Frances de Chantal*, 65.

²¹¹ Maya Maskarinec, "Nuns as 'Sponsae Christi': The Legal Status of the Medieval Oblates of Tor De' Specchi" (*The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 72, no. 2 (04, 2021)), 280; See also Pietro Gasparri, Justinian Serédi, and Pius V, "Circa Pastoralis, 20 Maii 1566" (In *Codicis Iuris Canonici Fontes Cura Emi Petri Card. Gasparri Editi* 1, 1:201-3, Concilia Genera – Romani Pontifices, Romae: typis Polyglottis vaticanis, 1926), 202, §2.

contemplation with formal religious vows, but who would not be accepted into other orders due to physical sickness, age, or widowhood as well.²¹² The prospect of an uncloistered monastery for women was also likely motivated by a controversy involving Madame d'Auxerre, one of the original members and supporters of the Visitation. Madame d'Auxerre had been sent to establish a Visitation house for women at Lyons. When the house attracted unwanted intrigues, petty gossip, and other scandal, the Archbishop of Lyons became quite irritated at these inconveniences and invoked the provision of Trent to constitute the new order under papal authority and place it under his supervision. The Bishop of Geneva, Francis's biographer C.H. Palmer suggests, knew that the Order would not grow outside of Savoy if he let the Lyons house fall apart, and so he permitted this concession so as to preserve the Visitation and help it spread through France.²¹³

The Bishop of Geneva, despite his desire to safeguard the original intent of the Order, was not at all disturbed by this proposed change, and acquiesced to the Archbishop of Lyons' desires. He wrote to Jane de Chantal's recently-appointed Mother Marie Jacqueline Favre at Lyons that she was to inform the Archbishop of Lyons that she had been left in the post of Mother Superior of the Congregation at Lyons so as to preside over the congregation and to "guide the sisters according to the rules of the Congregation," which were to be the Archbishop's new Augustinian rules.²¹⁴ Though he desired the preservation of "spirit" of the Order which contained in the original Rules of the Congregation, Francis still accommodated the Archbishop and claimed that he had acted out of obedience to the Pope and with virtue in doing so:

"It is quite indifferent whether the good of the congregation be done in one way

²¹² De Chaugy, *Life of S. Jane Frances de Chantal*, 65.

²¹³ See C. H. Palmer, *The Prince Bishop: A Life of St. Francis De Sales* (Ilfracombe, Devon: Arthur H. Stockwell LTD, 1974), 162-163, for more details on the Madame d'Auxerre affair.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

or in another, though I should have a special delight in the name of a simple congregation, where the charity and fear of the Spouse would be the cloister. I agree, then, that we make a formal religious order, reserving, however, the two points of tenderness for widows and afflicted ladies. But, my daughter, I speak to you in simplicity and confidence: I give this consent with mildness and tranquillity; and not only my will, but my judgment is quite willing to offer the respect it owes to that of this great prelate [sic].”²¹⁵

Francis insisted that changing the Congregation’s apostolate was done for the “glory of God” rather than his own pleasure.²¹⁶ Francis viewed his acquiescence as an act of extraordinary love: “Believe me, my dear daughter, I have a perfect love for our little congregation, but free from that anxiety, without which ordinary love does not usually exist; but mine, which is not ordinary, exists entirely, I assure you, without that, but with the perfect confidence I have in the grace of our Lord, that His sovereign goodness will do more for this little Institute than men can imagine.”²¹⁷ In speaking about these lofty ideas of confidence in God and grace, Francis both informed the Order’s sisters of the necessity of obedience to the new rules and prohibited any acts of disobedience against the Archbishop from the members of the Visitation.

For Jane de Chantal, her momentary frustrations with Francis’s consent to changing the Order soon gave way to the pressures and demands of being the Mother Superior responsible for overseeing the newly-established monasteries and advising the new Mothers of the Order, all at the behest of Francis.²¹⁸ At one point in a hectic 1615 letter of Jane to Mother Favre at Lyons composed of different injunctions to Mother Favre on her various tasks and responsibilities, Jane commands Mother Favre’s obedience, in the spirit of the obedience she learned from Francis, urging Mother Favre to obey the Archbishop of Lyons.²¹⁹ Conscious of the failure of Madame d’Auxerre which had spawned this larger problem, Jane reminds Mother Favre of the gravity of

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 66-67.

²¹⁷ De Chaugy, *Life of S. Jane Frances de Chantal*, 67.

²¹⁸ Palmer, *The Prince Bishop*, 162.

²¹⁹ De Chantal, *Selected Letters*, 18.

her role in this moment and hints at the cost of failure. But Jane also serves, curiously, as the mediator between the Archbishop of Lyons and the Visitation monastery now under his episcopal supervision. Jane used her authority as the Visitation's founder, her power as a Mother Superior, and her acute attention to the Order's needs in order to ensure obedience both to Francis and to the Archbishop of Lyons while offering reassuring advice to Mother Favre in her typical style. This solution could only have been achieved by someone in the unique position of Mother de Chantal. Her service as a liaison reveals the degree to which she privileged Francis's desires and commands over any of her own and her fidelity to Francis's spiritual prescriptions of obedience to superiors even at the point of denial of her own will.

The Order began to receive infirm women into the cloistered life as a substitute for its original mission of tending to the poor, and eventually began to teach girls as its chief work in the world.²²⁰ Mother Chaugy, Mother Chantal's biographer, stresses the Order's conformity with its original "spirit," defending the Order's changes after the death of Mother Chantal against detractors as an act of great charity to sick and infirm people who desired a cloistered life of prayer sheltered from the world.²²¹ The issues stemming from this change of the Visitation's apostolate continued until at least 1617 for Mother Chantal. A letter from March 1617 from Mother Chantal at Annecy to Mother Jeanne-Charlotte de Brécard, Mother Superior at the new location of Moulins, includes a passing note that the "business with Rome" had had two points successfully granted.²²² Here, Mother de Chantal refers to a letter sent from Francis to Cardinal Robert Bellarmine in Rome requesting three unprecedented authorizations for the Visitation: that interested widows be allowed extended residence without needing to adopt the clothing of the professed sisters; that women with serious intentions be allowed to stay at monasteries for a

²²⁰ De Chaugy, *Life of S. Jane Frances de Chantal*, 65.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² De Sales, *Letters of Spiritual Direction*, 234.

retreat for several days; that the Office of the Virgin Mary, a liturgical devotion, be used rather than the traditional Roman Breviary.²²³ Cardinal Bellarmine granted the first two of the demands, but Mother Brécharde and others eagerly awaited final approval of the third request. Mother Chantal assumed the responsibility of assuaging their anticipations. Her letter indicates she resigned herself to await final approval from the hands of Francis who was attending to other diocesan business at the time.²²⁴

While Mother Chantal was greatly involved in the founding of other Visitation monasteries across France until her death in 1641, this episode that involved herself, the Bishop of Geneva, the Archbishop of Lyons, and other actors within and outside of the Order of the Visitation tellingly underscores broader realities of Catholic reform in the post-Trent world within France. The Visitation Order, though newly-erected in 1610, serves in this case as an example of an institution of Tridentine reform within France. Francis recognized the authority of the Pope and of the Council of Trent's decree concerning "Monasteries of Nuns Immediately Subject to the Apostolic See."²²⁵ His pastoral consistency in advocating for the use of Trent's Catechism and training of clergy (means for reforming dioceses for which the Council advocated) throughout his own diocese did not waver in this case. Given its infancy, the Visitation Order's primary apostolate, organization, and mission were in the process of being determined, but the solidification of the vision of the Order was a collaborative process that respected the rights of episcopal jurisdictions. Such collaborative processes between Church leaders are often overlooked in discussions of the practical implications of Tridentine reform, but

²²³ See *Ibid.* (This note from Mother de Chantal's letter references one of François de Sales's collected letters in *Oeuvres*, XVII: Letter MCCXIX). The "Little Office of the Virgin Mary" was a liturgical devotion that became popularized in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which involved recitations of prayers to the Virgin throughout the day [Some context for this type of Marian devotions is provided in Louis Chatellier, "Public Devotions of the Inner Man," in *The Europe of the Devout* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), 148-155].

²²⁴ De Sales, *Letters of Spiritual Direction*, 234.

²²⁵ Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 25th Ss., Reform of Regulars, ch. IX.

these ecclesial efforts were, as this story reveals, a crucial part of Early Modern Catholic efforts at unification. Notably, because the Bishop of Geneva could control and observe the Visitation Order more easily, unlike some of the remoter, uneducated parts of the Catholic portion of Geneva, both de Sales and Mother Chantal could be more forceful in their attempts to homogenize conduct and policy under the Council of Trent's banners. Francis's submission to the authority of Rome upon the appeal of the Archbishop of Lyons was a sign of his deference to the hierarchy of the Church as well.

Furthermore, the 1615 controversy of the Visitation shows there was no rupture between François's underlying spirituality and his pastoral efforts in the controversy of the Visitation. François's extensive preaching and writing about the priority of the sacrificial act of obedience in the pursuit of sainthood and of a renunciation of "self-management except insofar as obedience permits it," as he would say in a 1613 Christmas Eve sermon were not divorced from his practical actions.²²⁶ For Francis, obedience and the rejection of self-will that was motivated by the "love of God" were a part of his methodology for reform. Despite holding a position of considerable authority within the Church hierarchy, Francis submitted both to the Archbishop of Lyons and to Rome, insisting that he had done so out of "extraordinary love" for the Visitation. Through this act of obedience, he sought to provide an example for Mother Chantal and others within the Order of the practice of this virtue, which he once described in his *Meditations* as a necessity for the attainment of perfection of the virtues, even and especially in the case of something as dear to him as the Order of the Visitation.²²⁷

As a reformer, a spiritual writer, and a church figure, Francis established an example to which Mother Chantal would later appeal as a model and took an approach to handling

²²⁶ Francis de Sales, *The Sermons of St. Francis de Sales for Advent and Christmas* (Charlotte, NC: TAN Books, 1987), 58.

²²⁷ Francis de Sales, *A Diary of Meditations*, trans. and ed. Cuthbert Smith (Chicago, IL: H. Regnery Co., 1957), 32.

controversies that was grounded in his spirituality of the “love of God.” Francis’s relationship with Jane de Chantal, even in its more challenging moments, reveals the extent to which he would go to protect the Visitation Order and to ensure his followers within the Order to remain committed to his spiritual vision.

Conclusion:

The central argument of this thesis has been that the spiritual concept of the “love of God” in the writings of St. Frances de Sales provided a framework for an approach to reform, political issues, and ecclesiastical controversies that allowed Francis’s literature and spirituality to influence Catholic France and the Diocese of Geneva in both lay and ecclesial circles. As section one sought to demonstrate, Francis’s approach to spirituality both respected Tridentine declarations on Catholic theology while borrowing from the writings of Catholic figures from antiquity and the medieval period. People from the King of France to Archbishop Fénelon to the layman Blaise Pascal admired Francis’s style of preaching and writing on the “love of God,” causing many to desire his counsel and involvement in ecclesial controversies during his life and to use his writings as an authority after his death. Section two describes the missionary activity and the reforms of Francis within the Diocese of Geneva, revealing the circumstances under which his signature spirituality was forged and his concerns with establishing Catholic piety among laymen, converting Calvinists, and with resolving church corruption. Section three, developing the picture of Francis as a diplomat and a reformer, discusses the story of Jane de Chantal and her adoption of Francis’s spirituality as a powerful actor within the Visitation Order in the face of the challenges of maintaining Francis’s spiritual vision as the Order spread across France.

Francis’s willingness to work with the local peculiarities of his diocese and to focus many of his efforts on the evangelization and the spiritual growth of local people included management of relations with the Catholic hierarchy of late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century Rome, Savoy, and France. Often, he involved himself in ecclesiastical matters because local problems or disputations necessitated this kind of action, but he often intervened and counseled fellow

Church figures when they had some issue extraneous to Francis's own diocese. Perhaps Francis's ability to act in the roles of diplomat, pastor, preacher, catechist, and evangelist prompted later historians like Jill Fehleison to describe him as the "embodiment of the Catholic Reformation" and "one of the most popular figures of the post-Tridentine Catholicism."²²⁸ Even in his own period, he was described by King Henry IV as a "rare bird on this earth" and was beloved by his contemporaries like Jane de Chantal.²²⁹

Yet, stories from the life of Francis also reveal other characteristics that are often overlooked in his biographies. Francis's often aggressive approach to Catholic evangelization during his time as a missionary to the Chablais often encouraged the behavior of Duke Charles-Emmanuel. The Duke's forced removal of Calvinists from the Chablais in 1597, with the acceptance of Francis, and his war with France in 1600 can be seen as a response to the militaristic rhetoric that Francis was inclined to use in early letters and sermons and to the long-running military conflicts that were commonplace in the region. Francis's establishment of the Visitation Order alongside Jane de Chantal and his acquiescence to the Archbishop of Bourges indicate the actions of an astute ecclesiastical actor willing to advance his own cause within the Church by both forming the people close to him in his own spirituality and adapting to the Church's demands if necessary. Francis's pastoral visitations and activities reveal that he could rally the support of locals but in some cases failed to correct monastical and clerical abuses due to incorrigibility among many in being willing to abide by norms for Tridentine reform.

The scope and the depth of Francis's activity are apparent in examining his writings, his biographies, and his pastoral records. But, these traits of Francis's methodology for reform also reveal that a vision for a revitalization of the Catholic Church and a call for "holiness" or

²²⁸ Fehleison, *Boundaries of Faith*, 39, 42.

²²⁹ Ravier, *Francis de Sales*, 112.

devotion in all vocations and walks of life grounded his efforts at reform. As noted in the Introduction, historiographical literature on the Catholic Reformation seldom focuses on the ability of reformers, who were convinced of the need for reforming the Catholic Church in the generations after Trent, to attend to the spiritual needs and formation of individuals in any vocation. The co-founder of the Visitation Jane de Chantal, the Protestant convert Seigneur d'Avully, and the countless others with whom Francis either directly interacted or corresponded played an important role in Francis's vision for the revival of the Catholic faithful in a time and a place in which Catholicism faced many challenges. Illuminating Francis's story with greater detail and context reveals that this pastor's story, and possibly the stories of many other reformers, is inextricably intertwined with the lives of those under his charge, as he would have desired it.

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