



The Spirituality of Francis de Sales and Spiritual Accompaniment



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ABSTRACT

The present study presents the contributions of Francis de Sales on the theme of spiritual accompaniment. The work is developed from the concept of spiritual accompaniment as friendship, understanding it as a practice that respects the autonomy of the accompanied subject. It follows from this, then, that the vision of the human being must be integral, in the sense that there is a concern with the intellectual, human and spiritual aspect. The path that seems most appropriate and that is followed for this analysis is thematic. This work will make it possible to situate the Salesian practice of spiritual accompaniment as a service to the human person. At the same time, it is hoped to make explicit that Salesian spirituality is an experience open to all, experiencing the "God of the human heart."

Keywords: Christian Spirituality, Spiritual Accompaniment, Francis de Sales, Salesianity.

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INTRODUCTION

To reach Christian perfection, which is the effective love of God, that is, the easy, habitual and rapid execution of his will, it is not good to want to go without support. The search for Christian holiness must not be a solitary undertaking: it is the fruit of collaboration. In short, is it not good to entrust spiritual care to an accompanier? And which companion should be chosen?

According to Strus (2012, p. 774), "the precondition is the choice of the spiritual director that St. Francis de Sales gives to Philothea: 'choose one out of a thousand, says d'Ávila, I tell you: one out of ten thousand, [...]. He must be full of charity, knowledge and prudence.'" Francisco de Sales is not only one of the notables of spiritual accompaniment (COSTA, 2015, 5), he is also one of its first theoreticians and, one could say, one of its founders. There is no doubt that in all periods of history, spiritual accompaniment has been practiced in various forms in Christianity. The letters of St. Jerome to St. Paula, those of St. Augustine to the women of the world, to widows, to virgins, and later those of St. Bernard, are sufficient to prove this².

Certainly, at the time when Francis de Sales appeared, the practice of spiritual accompaniment was not yet widespread outside the monasteries. At the time she became a widow, Madame de Chantal, who had lived in Dijon for a long time, had never heard of an accompanist or spiritual accompaniment. It would take the prodigious success of the "Introduction to the Devout Life" and its distribution throughout the world, for the use of a qualified guide, responsible for accompanying the Christian's journey on a daily basis, to be definitively believed in the lay world. According to Lajeunie (1966, p. 226), Francis de Sales will popularize the art of spiritual accompaniment in the world.

This article proposes to address the theme of spiritual accompaniment in Francis de Sales, as it would be addressed in any great representative of Christian spirituality. But, as will be seen, soon the particularities of the bishop of Geneva began to become evident, and the classic theme, it could be said, of spiritual accompaniment took on its own contours. To this end, it intends to focus explicitly on the knowledge of Salesian spirituality.

SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT, A TRUE FRIENDSHIP

Few teachings have been given by Francis de Sales, in fact, with more vigor and solemnity than the choice of a spiritual accompanist in his quest for holiness. One of the most important chapters of the "Introduction" is the one that deals with the need for an accompanier to enter and

² For an introduction to the history of spiritual accompaniment, see FIROLAMO, G. VOL. I. Storia della Direzione Spirituale – Età antica – G. Firolamo (ed.), Morcelliana, Brescia 2006.

_____. VOL. II History of Spiritual Direction - Medieval Age – G. Firolamo (org.), Edited by Sophia Boesch Gajano. Morcelliana, Brescia 2010.

_____. VOL. III History of Spiritual Direction – Modern Age – G. Firolamo (org.). Edited by Gabriella Zarri. Morcelliana, Brescia 2008.



progress in the Christian spiritual life. Francisco de Sales seems to want to make this clear from the beginning, saying that this is "the warnings of warnings" in the spiritual life (COSTA, 2015, p.12). Let us first re-read the categorical teaching of the author of the "Introduction" on the point that interests us. Francis de Sales considers:

When young Tobias was sent to Rages by his father, he said, "I do not know the way." Go, then, replied the father, and seek a man to guide you. I say the same to you, Philothea: do you want to follow safely on the path of devotion? Seek some man of virtue to guide and guide you. This is the warning of warnings: no matter how hard you try, says the pious Ávila, I will never find God's will so surely as by taking the path of this humble obedience, so commissioned and practiced by all the ancient devotees (SALES, 1893, p. 22).

It seems necessary to have recourse to a spiritual accompanier to walk the path that leads to the perfection of love. In short, we cannot have a perfectly clear vision of ourselves. We cannot be impartial judges in our own cause. According to Tietz (1995, p. 529), in one of the first chapters of his "Introduction to the Devout Life", Francis de Sales strives to convince his readers of the need for a conductor (i.e., a spiritual accompanist) to enter and progress in devotion.

The usefulness of the spiritual accompanier, in the opinion of Francis de Sales, lies not only in his capacity as an observer, as an arbiter with a clear judgment, but also in his capacity as a friend and confidant (cf. SCATTIGNO, 2008). The Bishop of Geneva knows the psychological value of a beloved, dear, close presence, which, by its very existence, is a force for healing and spiritual progress.

He discerned the benefit of a friendly presence. Just like a guide and a teacher, the accompanier is for him the ever-attentive friend whose gaze supports and strengthens. After giving the example of Tobias and showing him in the accompaniment as "guiding and directing", he immediately refers to him as a friend:

The faithful friend, says Holy Scripture, "is a strong protection; He who found it, found a treasure. The faithful friend is a medicine of life and immortality; those who fear God find him" (Sir 6:14-16). These divine words, as you see, concern above all immortality, for which we mainly need to have this faithful friend, who with his warnings and advice guides and governs our actions, and thus frees us from the snares and deceptions of the evil enemy (SALES, 1893, p. 24).

From this text, where the accompanier is presented to us as a friend and consoler, the practice of spiritual accompaniment seems to him to be endowed with all the attributes of friendship, to which must be added those he possesses in his own right. This notion of the friend, applied to the spiritual accompanier, is so dear to Francis de Sales that he emphasizes it with visible complacency:

But who will find this friend? The Sage answers: "Those who fear God", that is, the humble who really desire their spiritual progress. And because it matters and interests you so much,



Philothea, to make this holy journey of devotion with a good guide, ask God with great earnestness to give you one that is after his heart, and do not doubt" (SALES, 1893, p. 24).

For friendship to produce all its beneficial effects on us, the choice of the friend must be based on his excellence. The bishop of Geneva wants the accompanier not only to be loved, but also venerated. He wants us to choose him between a thousand and even ten thousand, in a word, who is truly like Tobit's guide, more than a man: an angel. In this regard, Francis de Sales considers:

Now, this guide must always be an Angel for you; that is, when you meet him, do not consider him as a mere man, [...] and therefore you must listen to him as an Angel, who descends from Heaven to take you to Heaven. He deals with him with his heart in his hands, with all frankness and fidelity, [...]. He places in him an extreme and unveiled confidence interspersed with sacred reverence, so that neither reverence impairs and cools confidence, nor confidence hinders reverence; trust him with the respect of a daughter for her father, respect him with the trust of a son in his mother. In short, this friendship must be strong and gentle, all holy, all sacred, all divine and all spiritual (SALES, 1893. pp. 24-25).

In this way, the practice of spiritual accompaniment, maintained at the level of friendship but strengthened and tempered with filial reverence, takes on a high educational value, that is, a pedagogy of faith towards holiness. According to Lajeunie (1966, p. 228), "direction is nothing other than a spiritual pedagogy". From there, let us enter the topics that will transit through this attractive intertwining: spiritual accompaniment and the freedom of love.

THE SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIER AND AUTONOMY OF THE ACCOMPANIED SUBJECT

For Francis de Sales, the pursuit of holiness is not a simple combination of practices, recitations, and observances. It is not applied from the outside as clothing. It is a gushing of spring, it is the flowering of an inner vitality. The mission of the spiritual accompanier can therefore only be to maintain and encourage him, not to create him (SALES, 1895, pp. 151-152). This clearly means that each of us must make our own spiritual path. The accompanier is only present to enlighten and help us. It is up to us to take and maintain the initiative on the path towards Christian holiness.

Others may have conceived of spiritual accompaniment as molding a soft wax. But Francis de Sales will always conceive as the cultivation of a germ endowed with a life of its own and autonomous. On many occasions, he deliberately used the term "plant" to designate the person who should be accompanied. He used it in a written instruction to the abbess of the Puits d'Orbe for the reform of her monastery. In the words of Francis de Sales: "To take care of the young plants that are there and to inspire them with the spirit of obedience" (SALES, 1902, p. 337). This orientation of a practice of accompaniment respectful of freedom is admirably formulated in the long letter he addressed on October 9, 1604 to the abbess of Puits-d'Orbe, teaching her the art of lovingly reforming her monastery. According to Francis de Sales:



As for the formation of your house, my dear daughter, you must be very careful not to give any weapon of desire for reform: for this would cause all the blind spirits to raise their arms against you and reign. Do you know what to do? They are to reform themselves under his guidance, and bind themselves to obedience and poverty. But how? [...] He should not give any warning about this, but lead them to it through soft and gentle inspirations (SALES, 1902, p. 336-338).

This is the principle that guides and dominates all his accompaniment practice: to lead people to reform, and to avoid the authoritarian accents that awaken the instinct of rebellion. The Bishop of Geneva reminds this principle of any person with spiritual authority and considers the following:

Certainly, he who by force opened the mouth of a friend, put the food in his throat and made him swallow it, would not give him a feast of courtesy, but would treat him like an animal, and like a capon that wants to get fat. This kind of benefit is to be offered by invitations, admonitions, and solicitations, and not violently and forcibly exercised. That is why it is done in the manner of desire, and not of absolute will (SALES, 1894b, p. 66).

The ideal of the Salesian accompanier is to make strong people who can stand on their feet and therefore work to become responsible for their spiritual progress. Therefore, the spiritual quest of the Philothea must be the work of the Philothea. Spiritual education is not a despotic formation.

As soon as Madame de Chantal's spiritual accompaniment began, he committed himself to leading her on the path of freedom. It was for her that he wrote this admirable instruction in which obedience is placed by him at the service of freedom. There are two lines of this instruction that must always be taken into account if we want to understand his thoughts on spiritual accompaniment. In this way, Francisco de Sales conceives that "[...] everything must be done out of love and nothing by force; obedience should be loved more than one fears disobedience. I leave you the spirit of freedom, not the one that excludes obedience, because it is freedom of the flesh, but the one that excludes coercion and scruple or immoderate agitation" (SALES, 1902, p. 359). Thus, freedom takes precedence over obedience. It is even the object of obedience. Education in freedom is fundamental, because only those who are free can begin the journey of Christian perfection.

The great Salesian rule of spiritual accompaniment is the one that the saint of Annecy formulated for Bishop André Fremyot in his instruction on preaching: "These are sufficient methods to begin; because after a little practice he will make others that will be suitable and better for him" (SALES, 1902, p. 319). Intervention, regulation, that is, at the beginning and for the main lines. But then, in detail, initiative and freedom. Addressing Madame de Chantal a small method for practicing God's will during her walks, he explains: "I have almost said what is necessary, but I add that having done this exercise two or three times in this way, it is possible to shorten it, diversify it and accommodate it as you see fit" (SALES, 1904, p. 362). On another occasion, having given him a pamphlet on piety, he wrote to him: "I have prepared it not for you, but for many others; however, he



will see how he can make it count for himself (SALES, 1902. p. 266). The part of self-education is thus always reserved.

Regarding Salesian pedagogy in spiritual accompaniment, we have, on an improvised page where living thought sometimes detaches itself from syntax, the outline of a pedagogical method that Francis de Sales will apply, so to speak, constantly in his accompaniment. And after some special advice on poverty and chastity, he returns to the precept that dominates everything:

But nevertheless one should not be alarmed of all this, but lead them to it by sweet and gentle inspirations, to which also the above-mentioned books will serve. When you encounter difficulties and contradictions, do not try to break them, but to dexterously bend and bend them, with meekness and time, and if they are not ready, have patience, and advance as far as you can with others. Do not witness wanting to win; excuse the inconvenience of one, the age of the other, and say as little as possible that it is due to lack of obedience [...]. It is necessary to have a broad heart; great plans are made only by patience and the duration of time; things that grow one day are lost the next (SALES, 1902. p. 337-339).

It is in the way of suggestion, persuasion, inspiration. It is the method of investment, of slow circumvolution, preferred to that of direct assault, which in a single blow can subdue a person, but also put him in revolt. In this way, there is a multiplied call for collaboration that transfers responsibility to the will of the person accompanied. Francis de Sales wants to leave the accompanied with the feeling that he chooses his actions. Having the feeling of choice, he has the benefit of it. The will is impregnated by the repetition of acts that seem to come to him and that actually come, since he believes it, from his own heart. Thus, the inspired, suggested, unimposed decision from abroad by an order of the accompanier, is doubly beneficial.

In conclusion, all the secret paths that lead to the central core of the human heart were known to Francis de Sales. Salesian pedagogy finds the main lines of a method that is absolutely respectful of human dignity. It requires that obedience be intelligent and active, that the accompanied person understands the proposed orientation and, having discovered it in some way, applies it to himself, always taking into account the exact circumstances of life.

SALESIAN ACCOMPANIMENT PROPERLY SO CALLED

The previous section showed us that Francis de Sales was a guide who was careful not to impose his authority by direct coercion. We have seen him seek and recommend indirect ways of persuading his teachings in the hearts meekly. Wisely respectful of freedom, very moderately interventionist, she leaves a vast field for the personal activity of her companion (COSTA, 2015, pp. 6-7). Spiritual authority acts upon people in different ways at different stages of their spiritual development. It does not apply general and abstract formulas by far. It is exercised over individuals, not categories. He strives to grasp the particular quality or gifts of the persons accompanied in order to conform his action to them. In a word, it adapts and follows a progressive path in faith.



The Bishop of Geneva acts on the people he accompanies only to help them become what they should be by nature and vocation from on high. He has no single, unchanging method for bringing them to Christian perfection. On the contrary, he works on a double datum: on the natural temperament of his companion and on his natural being modified by grace and inspirations received from heaven. The Salesian accompanier bases his initiative both on that of God and on that of those accompanied.

Salesian accompaniment is maieutic. It helps to give birth, it helps to grow the desire to love that is the root of Christian perfection, but it never behaves as if it had the intention of creating it. He undertakes nothing in the name of God. Therefore, the spiritual accompanier never forgets that the starting point of Christian perfection is faith, which is of God, the desire for holiness, which is also of God. Francis de Sales, therefore, first listens to this mysterious germination of the Spirit of God that originates in people's hearts. Philothea's inner life, under his gaze, is a continuous creation, a creation that is simply supervised, protected, and assisted.

The first duty of the accompanier is to make a spiritual record of his accompanied, just as the doctor does for his patient. In other words, it is listening to the inner voices that constantly appear in him. More precisely, it is to establish its treatment rigorously taking into account this information from the human heart³. The spiritual theology of the bishop of Geneva on this important subject is, it may be said, summarized and condensed in a beautiful chapter of the "Introduction," the eighteenth of the second part. It is possible to see in these eminently Salesian pages how great was his faith in individual inspirations and how carefully he regulated his personal action on them. Spiritual inspiration, according to Francis de Sales, can be described as follows:

We give the name of inspirations to all the attractions, movements, reproaches and interior remorse, lights and knowledges that God awakens in us, warming our hearts with his blessings and with his care and paternal love, in order to awaken, stimulate, impel and attract us to holy virtues, heavenly love, good resolutions, in a word, to everything that leads us to our eternal good. [...] Resolve, Philothea, to accept willingly all the inspirations that God has pleased to send you; and when they arrive, receive them as ambassadors of the heavenly King, who desires to marry you. Listen with pleasure to their proposals, be attentive to the love with which you are inspired, and kindly cherish the holy inspiration, because in this way God, whom you cannot oblige, will consider himself very grateful and grateful for your affection. But before consenting and embracing the inspirations of important or extraordinary things, in order not to be deceived, ask your advisor for advice, so that he may examine whether the inspiration is true or false, since the enemy, seeing a soul ready to consent to inspirations, often imposes on him some false ones, in order to deceive it, which he never succeeds, if he humbly obeys his advisor (SALES, 1893. pp. 108-111).

In this distribution of attributions, Francis de Sales leaves the primary initiative to God. The accompanied reports his inner state to his spiritual father and the accompanier intervenes, in the third

³ It is the discernment of the spirits, an exercise to be done daily in the spiritual itinerary, and the mission of the spiritual accompanier.



place, to approve or to discredit. In this way, God's actions and human response are thus perfectly guaranteed. The Bishop of Geneva, therefore, assigns a considerable role to interior lights, but gives them the indispensable restraint in spiritual accompaniment.

In this way, Francis de Sales adapts his spiritual accompaniment to the temperament of his accompanied, observing the particularities of the human person. He has the keenest sense of people's diversity and complexity. A person is for him a whole universe⁴. It strives to define it in such a way as to conform to it. Consciences do not, in his view, have an identical initial formation. Each one presents himself with a different capital of inherited or acquired habits, which one needs to know before anything else.

Infinitely different from one another, humans undertake the spiritual search, each with a moral potential, a variable spiritual dynamism of which it is essential that the accompanier take stock. Francis de Sales is careful not to forget this preliminary operation. Speaking of the candidates for the religious life of the Monastery of the Visitation, he states that "some will have been badly educated and are not very civilized, they will be naturally harsh and coarse. There is no doubt that these will have more work and difficulties than those that are of a milder and more tractable nature, and will be more liable to commit faults than others who are better educated" (SALES, 1895, p. 326).

In this way, individuals or communities, all those he accompanies, are invited to flourish according to their nature, their condition and their environment. The bishop of Geneva wrote, in fact, to one of his spiritual daughters: "Do not wish not to be what you are, but wish to be very well what you are." (SALES, 1904, p. 291). However, in order for each one to be fully what he is, he must be careful not to introduce into his spiritual being the elements that are foreign to him, especially the elements that are incompatible with his nature.

It is important, on the contrary, to grow from within, taking it as it is, at the point where it is offering it only what is identical and assimilable to it. Therefore, for Francis de Sales:

We are not used to feeding young children anything other than milk, and when they grow up and start to have teeth, we give them bread and butter. [...] Superiors and those who are raised to the guidance of souls should especially imitate the Angels in this sweetness and support of their neighbor, leading them, elevating them, and treating them with great charity according to the capacity of their spirit. (SALES, 1897, pp. 110-111).

The further he advanced in life, the more the bishop of Geneva supported and emphasized this great theme of adaptation. Thus, this submission of the spiritual accompanier to the temperament of his accompanied, this attention to treating each one "according to the capacity of his spirit", considers that the human being is a being open to the world, to others and to God. Thus, "God, at the

⁴ See Francis de Sales. *Treatise on the Love of God*: "Man is the perfection of the universe, the spirit the perfection of man, love that of the spirit and charity that of love: for this reason the love of God is the end, the perfection, the excellence of the universe" (SALES, 1894b, p. 165).



creation of the world, commanded the plants to bear fruit, each according to its kind; and so he also commands Christians, who are the living plants of his Church, to bear fruits of devotion, each according to his vocation and state" (SALES, 1893, p. 20).

For Francis de Sales, the problem is therefore reduced to forming the Christian over the human. The saint, as he wants him to be, is an extension of the human. Thus, he observes that "[...] Our only purpose was to be good, devout, godly men, godly women, [...]. And if it pleases God to bring us to these angelic perfections, we shall also be good angels. [...] It sometimes happens that those who think they are Angels are not even good men, [...]" (SALES, 1893, 131-132).

AFFECTIVITY AS THE ENGINE OF THE SPIRITUAL ITINERARY

Love, as an impulse to act in accordance with the will of God, is the foundation and end of Christian perfection. But this love is not a talisman that automatically and immediately confers holiness on us. It is, like living beings, subject to growth. It has to be born, grow and strengthen until it becomes a permanent habit, an ability to act "with promptness and complacency" (SALES, 1893, p. 16). Thus, the bishop of Geneva affirms that each human has the natural inclination to love God (SALES, 1894a, p. 77). Grace appears and gives you the power to do so. With these two strengths, each of us can acquire that constant flexibility of will in the search for Christian holiness. Therefore, there is a pedagogy, an education of love that has its own path.

In this education, the essential thing for the Salesian accompanier is not to present to the spirit of his companion the reasons for loving God, the reasons for practicing Christian virtue, but to present these reasons and motives in such a way that the heart is moved and the will moves towards action. Thus, to love is to want and act, that is, it is a decision. It was to provoke this fertile movement of emotion that the vibrant and sensitive bishop of Geneva worked instinctively through a thousand holy industries: "I do not remember that Our Lord commanded us to heal the head of the daughter of Zion, but only her heart. No, of course, he never said: Speak to the head of Jerusalem, but rather: Speak to the heart of Jerusalem (cf. Is 11:2)" (SALES, 1902, p. 81).

In this way, it gives sensitivity to its role, and a very large part, in the formation of oneself. Francis de Sales said, in fact, that we must never forget: "if a man knows that he is loved by anyone, he is forced to love one another" (SALES, 1894b, p. 33). This principle of human psychology he applies to God. He makes it the starting point and the axis of all his affective pedagogy. Francisco de Sales questions that "[...] knowing that Jesus Christ, the true eternal God, omnipotent, loved us to the point of willing to suffer death for us, even death on a cross, [...] this is not to have our hearts under the winepress, and to feel them bound by force [...]" (SALES, 1894b, p. 33). Therefore, convinced that we are infallibly touched by sympathy for those who love us, he tries to make us feel - and not just understand - that we are loved by God.



He attempts to do this in the last chapters of the "Introduction," which are so expressively entitled, "Of the Love That Jesus Christ Has for Us" and "Of God's Eternal Love for Us," and which are like a last-ditch attempt to lead Philothea to holiness:

Look, my Philothea, it is certain that the heart of our dear Jesus saw yours from the tree of the cross, and loved it; and by this love I obtained from him all the goods that you possess and will possess, among them these resolutions; yes, dear Philothea, we can all say like Jeremiah: 'O Lord, before I was, you looked at me, and called me by my name'; for indeed his divine goodness, in his love and mercy, has prepared all the general and particular means of our salvation, and consequently our resolutions. Yes, no doubt, as a pregnant woman prepares the cradle, the swaddling clothes and mantillas, and even a wet nurse for the child she expects to have, although he is not yet in the world; so Our Lord, having you in the bosom of his goodness, intending to give you birth for salvation, and to make you his daughter, prepared on the tree of the cross what you needed: your spiritual cradle, your swaddling clothes, your wet nurse, with all that you needed for your blessedness. [...] My God, how should we engrave this deeply in our memory: is it possible that I was loved and so sweetly loved by my Savior, that he thought in a particular way of me, even of all these little events by which he drew me to himself? And how much then should we love, esteem, and employ all this to our advantage? This is truly consoling: this loving heart of my God thought of Philothea, loved her and sought her a thousand means of salvation, as much as she had no other soul in the world to think of, [...] SALES, 1893, p. 358).

It is observed that the God of whom Francis de Sales speaks with such affection is not the God distant from metaphysics. He is not the God of the pure spirit, he is the God made man, the God of the manger and of Nazareth, Jesus Christ considered in his body of flesh. With the temperament by which we know him, nourished as he was by the Teresian tradition, he was not a man to deprive himself and his companions of the beautiful source of holy emotion that the contemplation of Jesus-Man in his earthly mysteries. Saint Teresa of Jesus, to whom he gladly called himself a "devotee" (SALES, 1904, p. 118)⁵, had taught him to always keep his eyes on the humanity of Jesus⁶. Thus, the Bishop of Geneva spontaneously links himself to the great tradition of the previous two centuries, especially to the Spanish and Italian traditions, and sees God as a preference in the humanized person of Jesus⁷.

Considered from this perspective, Francis de Sales inserts the conception of a God of Love. The desire to love is therefore the starting point. In this way, to desire to love is already to commit oneself to love. The desire to love is the root of Christian holiness and its first condition. Now, this desire, although no one has the power to create it in us except God, a spiritual accompanier helps it to

⁵ According to Bord (1994, p. 53), Francisco de Sales had before him not only the portrait of Teresa, but also, openly, the "Inner Castle", especially to write books VI and VII of the "Treatise on the Love of God".

⁶ See Teresa of Jesus. Book of Life. Chapter XXII. In.: Teresa de Jesus (Santa). **Complete Works**. 2nd ed. Aveiro: Edições "Carmelo", 1978. pp. 171-183.

⁷ According to Galilea, the influence of the bishop of Geneva on Latin American spirituality expresses well: "[...] It would also be necessary to mention currents of spirituality that have had a more or less explicit influence on our continent. The one that originated, for example, with St. Francis de Sales, whose works ('Introduction to the Devout Life', 'Treatise on the Love of God') were widely read by past generations. The humanism that characterizes them has Ignatian influences, and their doctrine on prayer and love has avowedly Teresian roots. The influence of the Saint of Avila is notorious in these works" (GALILEA, 1984, p. 15).



flourish and grow. The good accompanier conditions in his companion movements of attention and sympathy for God and the good that others may recognize in him.

The life of holiness is a fascinating land where the kindest commerce is to be found. It is truly, the Promised Land:

those who discouraged the Israelites from entering the Promised Land told them that it was a country that devoured its inhabitants, [...]. The world, too, defames holy devotion as much as it can, painting devout people with a closed, sad, melancholy countenance, spreading the word that devotion entails hypochondriac and intolerable moods. But as Joshua and Caleb protested that not only was the Promised Land good and beautiful, but that it would even be sweet and pleasant to possess it, so the Holy Spirit through the mouth of all the Saints, and Our Lord through His own, assures us that the devout life is a sweet, happy, and amiable life (SALES, 1893, pp. 16-17).

Thus, to give impetus to desire or to prevent it from perishing as soon as it is awakened, Francis de Sales allies himself with one of the most imperious feelings of the human heart: his appetite for happiness. In this regard, the bishop of Geneva considers it necessary to teach virtue with pleasure, in order to make approaches to the life of holiness "pleasant" and "sweetly flourishing". On the very first page of the "Introduction", to guide the first steps towards holiness, comes Glicera, the amiable florist, who, with flowers in her hand, promises us the most delightful of journeys through the fragrant forests of Christian virtue (cf. SALES, 1893, p. 6). From the beginning, we are far from the austere nakedness imposed by the great ascetic books of the past: Lorenzo Scupoli's "The Spiritual Combat", and even Thomas de Kempis's "Imitation". This is how Francis de Sales expresses it:

The admiration of pleasant things strongly binds and glues the mind to the thing admired, both because of the excellence of the beauty that it discovers in it and because of the novelty of this excellence, and the understanding cannot be sufficiently satisfied with seeing what it has not yet seen and that is so pleasant to see (SALES, 1894b, p. 21-22).

This is the guiding principle. The consequence for the spiritual educator must be that he must strive to satisfy the natural appetite that every human has for novelty. Therefore, the saint of Annecy was not mistaken when he wrote very well in the Preface to the "Introduction":

The gardener Glicera was so skilful and of such refined taste, that, with a single species of flowers, diversely combined and arranged, she was able to make a great variety of branches, [...]. Thus the divine Holy Spirit orders with such variety the lessons of devotion which he gives us by the words and writings of his servants, that, although the doctrine is always the same, yet the discourses are in extreme variance, according to the various forms in which they are composed. To tell the truth, I cannot, nor do I want, nor should I write in this Introduction anything other than what my predecessors have published on the subject. Therefore, the flowers that I present to you, my reader, are the same; but the bouquet I made will be very different from the others, and this is due to the different way in which the flowers are arranged and arranged (SALES, 1893, pp. 5-6).



By intuition of a pedagogue, Francis de Sales, following the example of the gardener Glicera, said that it was necessary to keep his reader in expectation. Thus, in spiritual guidance, the accompanist, who can only be chosen from among a thousand or ten thousand, must adjust his vocabulary and his accent to the legitimate demands of the public's taste and to the prejudices of each age. Therefore, the spiritual accompanier is a relationship of indispensable help for the human and spiritual growth of the contemporary accompanied towards the love of God.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The spiritual accompaniment of Francis de Sales, practiced by Francis de Sales, has proven, as history shows, to be wonderfully effective (COSTA, 2015, p. 8). In Salesian accompaniment, one can acquire, if not the prodigious psychological penetration, at least some of the flexibility and dexterity in the spiritual accompaniment of people.

It is a classic of spirituality, not because it invented some new system, some original form of the pursuit of holiness, but because it sought in the tradition of Christian mystical spirituality. Francis de Sales synthesized the elements of spiritual accompaniment by gathering, filtering and condensing what fifteen centuries of spiritual literature sometimes confused. His role is really what he assigned to himself: he did the work of Glicera, the work of the bees, he transposed, organized and diversified riches that were still poorly coordinated. He did not boast when he wrote to a laywoman to strengthen his determination: "And not only to preserve them, but also to make them grow up happy, he needs no other advice than that which I gave to Philothea" (SALES, 1911, p. 167).

Salesian accompaniment constantly puts sensitivity at the service of action, appealing to the heart only to better educate the will, but in reality the act alone is valuable. In this way, in Salesian accompaniment every act becomes great, even the most humble, as long as it is willed by God. Thus, Francis de Sales wrote to one of his companions that it was necessary to "gird the kidneys tightly" in order to be faithful to this orientation:

You must not, my dear friend, my daughter, allow your spirit to look at itself and return to its own inclinations; you must turn your eyes to the good pleasure of God and to his providence. You shouldn't be distracted by talking when you have to run [...]. Gird the loins with strength and fill the heart with courage, and then say: I will do my best (SALES, 1911, p. 72).

On the other hand, Francis de Sales' spiritual accompaniment is generally condescending and cordial. One principle dominates all his spiritual accompaniment: the Salesian accompanier must adapt to each person and speak to him constantly in the tone that best suits him. In fact, there is no Salesian way. Theoretically, there are as many modes as there are people, or, if we absolutely want there to be one, this mode is called: flexibility, elasticity, conformity to things, circumstances, and times.



Salesian spirituality is a source of living water, because it has made a maximum reconciliation between the highest mysticism and reason. For Francis de Sales, "all virtues are virtues because of the convenience or conformity they have with reason" (SALES, 1894b, p. 258). For this reason, it is necessary to serve God: "in good faith, without subterfuge and subtlety, in the manner of this world where perfection does not reside; in the human way and according to the times, while we wait for a day to do it in the divine and angelic way and according to eternity" (SALES, 1902, p. 165). The Salesian accompanied, formed in a beautiful general eurythmy of soul and body, walks with simplicity on earth and does not inopportunistly surrender to the ridicule of being angelic.

Finally, in Francis de Sales, elements from all the great spiritual traditions of the Christian past are harmoniously combined in a magnificent synthesis. Like a bee, she made all these riches out of her honey and bequeathed us a spiritual accompaniment for the present day (COSTA, 2015, p. 6).



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