

THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY SALESIAN PENTECOST

*THE SALESIAN FAMILY OF DON BOSCO,
THE OBLATES AND OBLATE SISTERS OF
ST. FRANCIS DE SALES, THE DAUGHTERS
OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES, AND
THE FRANSALIANS*

Introduction, Editing, Translations,
and Commentaries by
Joseph Boenzi, SDB,
Joseph F. Chorpenning, OSFS,
Suzanne C. Toczyski, and Wendy M. Wright

Foreword by
John W. O'Malley, SJ



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IV

**MARY DE SALES CHAPPUIS,
LOUIS BRISSON, LÉONIE
FRANCES DE SALES AVIAT,
AND THE OBLATE SISTERS
AND OBLATES OF
ST. FRANCIS DE SALES**

Joseph F. Chorpensing, OSFS¹

The flames of the Salesian Pentecost blazed brilliantly and intensely in nineteenth-century Troyes, the capital and largest city of the department of Aube, located southeast of Paris in the Champagne region. It was there, under the auspices of a triad of remarkable individuals, that two distinctive religious communities emerged to carry forward the spirit of St. Francis de Sales (1567–1622). The Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales were cofounded in 1871 by Louis Brisson (1817–1908) and Léonie Frances de Sales Aviat (1844–1914), and the Oblates (priests and brothers), in 1875 by Brisson.² However, neither religious congregation would have come into existence if it were not for Mother Mary de Sales Chappuis (1793–1875), the Swiss-born superior of the Troyes monastery of the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary, who is often referred to in the Oblate and Visitandine families as the “Good Mother.” It was through her influence that Brisson, the monastery chaplain, and Aviat, a former student-boarder at the Visitation school, were imbued with Salesian spirituality and

inspired to respond with apostolic action to the complex religious and social issues of their era. The "inspiration" for the founding of a religious community ordinarily comes through the founder, but, in the case of the Oblates, it was transmitted through Mother Chappuis, who likewise played a primary role in the foundation of the Oblate Sisters.

Born into a devout Catholic family, Marie-Thérèse Chappuis's early years were spent in the shadow of the French Revolution, during which her native village of Soyhières in the Swiss Jura Mountains was annexed to France. Her most vivid memory of this time was her elderly priest-uncle celebrating clandestine midnight Masses in her parents' home. At twelve years of age, Marie-Thérèse was sent by her parents to the boarding school of the Visitation Monastery in Fribourg to complete her formal education. She eventually entered the monastery, receiving the name Mary Francis de Sales at her clothing with the religious habit. During her novitiate year (1815-16), she received a series of "lights," or revelations, from the Lord about "His designs for her work" as an apostle of the Salesian spirit.³ Sister Mary de Sales totally immersed herself in the writings of Francis de Sales, fully appropriated the Salesian spirit, and came to be regarded as *the* authentic interpreter of the Salesian spirit in her day. Her profound understanding of, and ability to communicate, Salesian spirituality was quickly recognized, and scarcely a year after her profession, she was sent to reestablish the Visitation Monastery in Metz. When she returned to Fribourg, she was appointed novice mistress, her youth notwithstanding. In 1826, she became superior of the Visitation of Troyes, which was in urgent need of effective leadership.⁴ Complicating the situation, "Troyes was a diocese full of problems, not easy to resolve by simple fiat."⁵

The Troyes Visitation had been disbanded during the French Revolution and restored in 1807. Moreover, it had been deeply influenced by Jansenism for nearly a century, with the nuns refusing to go to confession or to receive holy communion.⁶ But it was not an outlier in the Diocese of Troyes, which was a Jansenist stronghold.⁷ The liturgical books used in the diocese were permeated by Jansenist doctrine.⁸ Gallicanism also thrived in nineteenth-century Troyes,⁹ with Gallicans and Ultramontanes bitterly divided over the restoration of the Roman

liturgy.¹⁰ Exacerbating this state of affairs, French Catholicism generally had developed a pathological obsession with damnation, hellfire, and the small number of the saved. This was communicated in the pulpit by a *théologie féroce* (ferocious theology) and *pastorale de la peur* (religion of fear), and in the confessional by moral rigorism, with absolution often being withheld or delayed. The result was an "uncompromising and frightening picture of the Catholic faith, based on fear rather than on divine love."¹¹ According to Ralph Gibson, who pioneered study of this phenomenon, "In some ways this was part of the influence of Jansenist austerity, but Jansenists and bitter anti-Jansenists alike shared a vision of a judicial and even vengeful God, one to be feared, rather than of a loving God, an ever-present help in time of trouble."¹² Preaching about divine punishment and eternal damnation aimed to get Catholics into the confessional, but for many the sacrament had little appeal.¹³

Simply stated, French Catholicism had lost sight of the gospel's core message that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:17 NRSV). This was the ecclesial-pastoral context for the revelation to the young novice Sister Mary de Sales that "God has looked into Himself and He has decided to open up new sources of graces"¹⁴ by completing "the work of sanctification that [St. Francis de Sales] began on earth."¹⁵ As Brisson would later express it, "St. Francis de Sales was a man of his time, but he is even more truly of our time than his own."¹⁶ While not officially declared a doctor of the church until 1877, Francis de Sales had been acclaimed as the Doctor of Divine Love from at least the time of his beatification (1661).¹⁷ The Doctor of Divine Love's teaching that holiness is accessible and adaptable for people in all walks of life, that "God's great mercy...is infinitely greater...than all the sins of the world"¹⁸ and that the Savior "forgets nothing to prove that His mercy reaches out to all that He has made' [Ps 144:9],...and He wishes 'all to be saved' [1 Tim 2:4] and none be lost,"¹⁹ and pastoral method of attracting and winning hearts through gentle persuasion were uniquely suited to addressing the specific challenges confronting nineteenth-century French Catholicism.²⁰

Mother Chappuis's first reforming efforts were directed to her own Visitation community; however, her aspirations extended much more widely. A year after his ordination as a priest of the Diocese of Troyes (1840), Louis Brisson was assigned as confessor and professor at the Visitation monastery's boarding school in Troyes. Like Chappuis, Brisson came from a deeply Catholic family. Among other things, his parents instilled in the young Louis a fervent devotion to the Holy Eucharist. His mother had taught him to read, using St. Alphonsus Liguori's book *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament*. While praying before the altar of the Virgin Mary in his parish church several weeks after his first communion, Brisson had a strong feeling that God was calling him to save a great many souls and "to make the Lord loved with an infinite love, to make the love of God so strong in souls... that this love would consume everything."²¹

From an early age, Brisson had also demonstrated a keen power of observation and an aptitude for the natural sciences, chemistry, physics, and astronomy. At the Visitation's school, his fascination with science, especially astronomical observation, was put to good use as a teacher. But Mother Chappuis saw in him greater potential. Not long thereafter, in 1843, he became the monastery's ordinary confessor and chaplain, serving in this capacity for the next forty-one years. During this time, Brisson was formed and nurtured in the Salesian spirit by the monastery's superior, and together they collaborated on a number of projects aimed at revitalizing French Catholicism.

Chappuis and Brisson worked together to free Troyes from "Gallican separatism and Jansenist rigorism"²² and "to support the return...of the Roman liturgy."²³ They also participated in the European network of the Association of St. Francis de Sales, which had been initiated by the French priest Emmanuel d'Alzon (1810–80),²⁴ and then launched on an international scale by two major ecclesiastical patrons of the Salesian Pentecost: the Parisian archbishop Louis Gaston de Ségur (1820–81),²⁵ and the Swiss bishop (and later cardinal) Gaspard Mermillod (1824–92).²⁶ The association's inspiration, model, and patron was Francis de Sales, Apostle of the Chablais, a "region of Savoy, where, against great odds and much opposition, he [won] thousands of Calvinists back to the Catholic

fold by an irenic and truly pastoral approach that respected and highlighted human freedom and dignity, and that presented the Church as the assembly of love and the visible resurrected body of Christ without compromising its hierarchical and institutional aspects."²⁷ Conceived as a response to Pope Pius IX's concern about the working class's ignorance of the Catholic faith,²⁸ the association's "general purpose was to renew the Catholic faith and restore religious practice"²⁹ within Christian countries—what today is called the "new evangelization." In 1857, the association was established in the Diocese of Troyes, with Brisson as its director and Chappuis as treasurer.³⁰

Chappuis and Brisson's collaboration in responding to the critical social issues of the day grew out of their involvement with the Association of St. Francis de Sales. Under Brisson's leadership, the association's membership doubled, and its fundraising activity was prodigious. However, not content with these accomplishments, Brisson initiated an apostolate (in French, *œuvres ouvrières*) to provide spiritual and social support, as well as catechetical instruction, for young women workers in Troyes.³¹ What is most striking about Troyes today is its stunning Gothic and Renaissance architectural and artistic treasures;³² however, in the nineteenth century it was primarily considered "a *ville ouvrière* (workers' town),"³³ being one of the largest centers of the textile industry in France. Troyes had traditionally specialized in the manufacture of hosiery (*bonneterie*) as a cottage industry. Industrialization brought the building of factories and increased production, but also a host of social, environmental, and moral problems.³⁴

Young women working in the factories were especially vulnerable. Long and exhausting work hours (about twelve hours a day), unhealthy and unsanitary working and living conditions, unsavory conversations and crude behavior, and religious indifference and ignorance were the norm.³⁵ To try to remedy this situation, Brisson initially established a series of clubs and then shelters. The primary purpose of the *œuvres ouvrières* was to preserve and strengthen the young women's faith and its practice, with the shelters providing affordable lodging, safety and security, clothing, food, and childcare, as well as an opportunity for work. The operation of the shelters

required full-time competent and responsible staff, which proved very challenging to find and retain. To meet this critical need, the Oblate Sisters were founded.³⁶

A gifted graduate of the Troyes Visitation boarding school, Léonie Aviat had been profoundly impacted by her formative experience in the Salesian spirit under the tutelage of Brisson and Chappuis. While her non-practicing Catholic parents' plan for her was a marriage that would provide social and financial security, Léonie hoped that one day she would be able to respond to the inner call she felt to give herself to God. When she turned twenty-one and was legally free to make her own decisions, she thought of entering the Visitation. However, during a retreat with Brisson, Léonie discerned that she was possibly called instead to engage in an apostolate that he regarded as critical for the renewal of the faith.³⁷ In his *Life of the Venerable Mother Mary de Sales Chappuis*, chapter 47, Brisson recounts the events leading to the Oblate Sisters coming into existence and their spirit.

LIFE OF THE VENERABLE MOTHER MARY DE SALES CHAPPUIS, CHAPTER 47³⁸

The homes for young working girls were established, and their direction had been entrusted to some devout unmarried women who dedicated themselves generously to this apostolate. However, as invariably happens, enthusiasm cools and courage flags in the face of difficulties. It was thus necessary to entrust the care of these homes to a religious community. But what community would be able to enter fully into the outlook of the Founders [= St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane Frances de Chantal] and into the spirit that they desired to give to this apostolate? Only the Visitation measured up to these requirements, but the Sisters of the Visitation were cloistered, and an external apostolate was impossible for them. Thus, the idea emerged of establishing a congregation that, although different from the Visitation by its exterior

apostolate, would, nevertheless, practice the *Spiritual Directory*, and approximate as much as possible the Visitandine spirit and interior life. This idea seemed all the more reasonable insofar as St. Francis de Sales himself had initiated the Institute as a non-cloistered congregation, which he had given statutes and named the Congregation of the Oblates of the Visitation of Holy Mary. This form particularly appealed to him because, in a letter to Cardinal Bellarmine,³⁹ after having provided the details of the Sisters' external occupations and manner of life, he added that they would practice these works in all simplicity and gentleness, and consequently they should not be considered as religious or monastics, but as Oblates... This name, Oblates, he had engraved on the first stone of the church which he had built for them along the shores of Lake Annecy.

This was St. Francis de Sales's first idea. It was only through acquiescence to the will of Archbishop de Marquemont of Lyon⁴⁰ that he consented to establish cloister in the monasteries of the Visitation. This compromise cost the saintly Founder very dearly. On his first visit to Lyon after the sisters had been cloistered, Archbishop de Marquemont invited him to come to see the nuns. St. Francis de Sales replied: "What nuns?" Archbishop de Marquemont: "Why, the Sisters of Our Lady of the Visitation!" St. Francis de Sales: "Then call them yours, and not mine." Everyone knows how greatly rewarded St. Francis de Sales has been for his sacrifice: by the cloister, the Visitation has easily been able to preserve its spirit and its traditions, becoming—as Father de la Rivière,⁴¹ the first biographer of the holy Founder, said—"the priceless pearl in the diadem of Holy Mother Church."

The Good Mother desired that the spirit of St. Francis de Sales should be communicated to the greatest number of souls possible, and the way to spread it was evidently to place among the faithful a congregation which could reach all levels of society, bringing to it the teachings of the saintly Founder. They, therefore, resolved to begin. Two boarding students at the Visitation, Léonie Aviat and Lucie Canuet, in

obedience to the interior attraction that was inviting them to give themselves to God for the salvation of their neighbor, came to make a retreat in the Monastery of the Visitation in Troyes, with the Good Mother. They desired to study the will of God in prayer and to receive the advice and guidance of her whom they considered a saint and to whom they wished to entrust their future. The result of this retreat was that they felt called to set to work immediately on the project by replacing the good laywomen who had undertaken the guidance of the workers' homes, but who were no longer able to continue. Léonie Aviat and Lucie Canuet went at once to establish themselves at the home where the young girls gathered. The Good Mother took charge of enabling them to make their novitiate. So that they would learn the observance and the exercises of the Rule, she entrusted them to the Assistant Mistress of Novices, who demonstrated the greatest zeal in forming them in the religious life.

Scarcely a few months had elapsed since the retreat made by the two young aspirants, when Bishop Mermillod⁴² (at the time the administrator of Geneva) arrived to find that Bishop Ravinet—for whom he had great esteem and profound affection—was now bishop of Troyes.⁴³ Bishop Mermillod had come to ask the new bishop to begin, in his diocese, a congregation of women living the spirit of St. Francis de Sales and whose apostolate would be the religious instruction and Christian direction of youth. He wished that after a sufficient number of these women religious had been formed, they would be sent to the diocese of Geneva. He explained: "Being the successor of St. Francis de Sales, I ought to establish in my diocese the spirit of that great saint, and for this purpose I need a congregation which professes that spirit. On the other hand, the law of the land prevents me from introducing any religious orders already in existence; however, I am allowed to introduce these new religious as being a society of which I am myself the founder and for which I am personally responsible." Bishop Ravinet told Bishop Mermillod that he should ask Mother Mary de Sales

Chappuis, in whom he had great confidence, for her insights on the subject. They then went to the Visitation and explained their project to the Good Mother, who replied that she believed that it was divinely inspired. They implored her to accept responsibility for instructing and preparing the prospective vocations who would present themselves. She promised to help them and then added: "It is already done; there are here in Troyes, at the Home for Working Girls, two young women who are suitable for what you desire. I have already prepared them. They can begin."

Delighted to see his idea coming to fruition, Bishop Mermillod examined the two aspirants, and, with the concurring favorable opinion of Bishop Ravinet, he clothed them with the religious habit. He wanted them to be called the Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales. He assured them that they were truly the saint's daughters, since on his deathbed St. Francis de Sales had predicted that eventually there would be in his spiritual family an intermediary order between the cloister and the world, responsible for bringing to souls the benefits of the spiritual life; that they were destined to be the auxiliaries of the priesthood in an apostolate of doctrine and of influence. This was the same idea that the Good Mother had: "The Savior wishes me to be an apostle, and what He gives me is for making apostles." Bishop Mermillod gave to Léonie Aviat the name of Frances de Sales, and to Lucie Canuet that of Jeanné-Marie. At the ceremony's conclusion, he went to take his leave of Mother Mary de Sales. He recommended to her the young throng that was going to be formed under her guidance, and he begged her to pray for himself and for Geneva, where he soon hoped to welcome the helpers whom he had just chosen....

The clothing with the habit bestowed a first consecration on the founding of the Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales. The Good Mother believed that it was appropriate to procure for them the means to enter more deeply into the doctrine of St. Francis de Sales and the practice of the interior life, and so she gave them for their directress the Sister Assistant of the

Visitation, Sister Louise David Chérot. The choice could not have been better; Sister Louise David joined to a special gift of supernatural ways: those religious virtues that are most emphasized: mortification and obedience. Bishop Séguin des Hons,⁴⁴ who once had the opportunity to witness an admirable act of obedience by Sister Louise David, told the Good Mother: "You have the mold for making saints." The Oblate Sisters had been founded exteriorly, but the spiritual foundation was still to be established.

One day in December 1868, the Good Mother came to the parlor after Holy Mass and told Father Brisson that she had much to tell him: "This is the life on earth of the Sacred Humanity with God His Father. My Father does nothing that I do not do. He works, I work with Him. I am only one with Him, and My Father is only one with Me' [cf. John 5:17 and 10:30]. I feel that the Savior's charity urges me to achieve these goals. I see Him perfectly in this work. ... I see that He is putting into operation the resources and the industries of His love in order to obtain what He wishes. I see Him wandering through places not yet visited by the divine charity in order to find there the help necessary for the souls who will enter this way, in order to make them strong and invincible. Then those who will be found faithful will completely effect the coming of the Savior on earth." The Good Mother told Father Brisson that these things were meant for the Oblate Sisters.

Brisson left behind a sizeable number of retreat conferences, chapter instructions, and sermons, in addition to his biography of Mother Chappuis and other writings. By contrast, Léonie Aviat left relatively little, and what survives is thanks to the Oblate Sisters writing down her instructions and counsels. The following selections offer a sampling.⁴⁵ Salient in these brief texts and sayings is Aviat's emphasis on the Salesian practices of continual awareness of the presence of God, living in the present moment and between the two wills of God, and the exercise of the little virtues; as well as the distinctively Visitandine prayer of simple *remise*, that is, entrustment into the hands of God.⁴⁶

EXCERPTS FROM TWO INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN BY MOTHER AVIAT IN 1872 OR 1873 TO A GROUP OF NOVICES, SEVERAL OF WHOM RECORDED THEM⁴⁷

One must see shining in you the gentleness, the humility, the simplicity—in a word, the virtues indicated in the rule of St. Francis de Sales.

If, for example, you went to the Carmelites, and you did not find fasting and austerity there, you would think, "But I am not among Carmelites." In the same way, one must find here, not the austerities of Carmel, but the charity and the renunciations prescribed by the rule of St. Francis de Sales. That is why I ask you to bring a great attentiveness to bear on everything that our Father [= Louis Brisson] will tell you. We have him with us for the time being, but we will not always have him. That is why you must presently apply yourselves well to doing everything that he has told you.

You will ask me, our Good Mother [= Léonie Aviat] added, what continual union with God is. I will give you an example of it. If you work with someone whom you love well, and she speaks to you, you answer her. You are entirely there for her. You love her conversation. Well! With the good Lord, it is the same thing. If you love Him, you are happy to converse heart to heart with Him. If you find that you are alone, and that the good Lord is inspiring good thoughts within you, you will receive them well. If you do not allow yourself to be troubled; distracted in your actions; and if you do them without being overly hurried, then the good Lord will make Himself felt to your heart. You know that the good Lord is not found among noise and trouble....

And thus, as I was telling you earlier, if a person that you like very much is near you, and is speaking with you, or is remaining silent, you are, nevertheless, happy, for you feel her near you. Well, then, with the good Lord, it is the same thing: if you are well-united to Him in all of your actions,

either He will speak to you, or He will make you feel His presence.

This week, then, unite yourselves well to God. You will then be in continual meditation. This continual meditation is nothing but a conversation with God, union with Him in all of our actions. If we do not do this, we are not religious....

FROM AN UNPUBLISHED LETTER OF 1907 OF MOTHER AVIAT⁴⁸

Allow the good God to act, and receive from His hand everything, everything without exception, profiting from each exercise so as to carry out the Rule well. In a word, be the little ball of wax in the hand of obedience....

FROM A SMALL BOOK CONTAINING QUOTES FROM MOTHER AVIAT, INTENDED FOR USE WITHIN THE OBLATE SISTERS⁴⁹

[Whether] here or there, an Oblate Sister must be a little ball of wax in the hand of obedience, to have life in the practice of the *Spiritual Directory* and of the observance, being entirely within the present moment.

May the Savior give you, at every moment, the light and strength to act, the peace that is the happiness of an Oblate Sister, even within, overwork, uncertainty, and difficult moments.

Remain very confident and abandoned; it is thus that a little Oblate Sister manages to overcome her personal difficulties and respond well to the desires of the good Lord for her soul.

Everywhere, trials make themselves felt, so that everywhere, through union in prayer and in suffering, we may

become more and more friends with the cross, and true Oblate Sisters, accepting, from moment to moment, the will of the good Lord, as well as what He permits.

FROM A DOCUMENT, ENTITLED OF THE TRUE MEANING OF OUR LIVES AS OBLATE SISTERS, WHICH WAS LIKELY USED TO INSTRUCT SISTERS IN FORMATION⁵⁰

The life of any religious is supernatural, but particularly that of an Oblate Sister. An Oblate is not an extraordinary creature, but she must always act supernaturally. An Oblate who does not act supernaturally in everything is not an Oblate. This supernatural life is desired and willed within the charity of God. It is of an extreme simplicity. It consists in looking at God, following the Savior, and only acting for Him. This life must be as our holy Founder said, very openly frank, very candid.

The foundation of the Oblate Sisters, so dear to Brisson's heart, was not to be the final work of the Troyes Pentecost. After cofounding, with Jane Frances de Chantal (1572-1641), the Visitation Order in 1610, Francis de Sales had wanted to found a comparable congregation of priests animated by the Salesian spirit; however, he was unable to realize this project before his death. Jane and the Visitation Order kept alive this aspiration, which was taken up by Fr. Raymond Bonal (1600-1653), a priest of the Diocese of Rodez, who in 1632 founded the Priests of Holy Mary, a very small congregation that did not survive the French Revolution.⁵¹ While Chappuis and Brisson were well aware of this history,⁵² they also knew that the initiative for their project of founding the Oblates had come not from themselves, but from the Lord, who had revealed to Sister Mary de Sales during her novitiate at Fribourg that the congregation's "foundation was one of the fruits of the inner life of the three Persons of the Blessed

Trinity.⁵³ On her arrival in Troyes to become superior of the Visitation, “she understood that this was the place that God had chosen for the accomplishment of His work.”⁵⁴

Troyes, like other dioceses throughout France, was confronted by many problems: Jansenism and Gallicanism, widespread religious ignorance and indifference, prevalence of a religion of fear (*pastorale de la peur*) and moral rigorism that repelled the laity and depressed practice of the faith and reception of the sacraments, and neglect of the pastoral care of workers. Troyes was thus a microcosm of nineteenth-century French Catholicism. At the root of these problems was the deficient state of seminary education. Poorly educated and subscribing to the “Sulpician ideal” of the priest shut off from the world, the French clergy was unprepared and unequipped—intellectually, spiritually, and pastorally—to engage the contemporary issues facing the church.⁵⁵

A sharply different view of the priesthood was articulated to Brisson—during the process of seeking papal approbation for the Oblate Constitutions (which was granted in 1887)⁵⁶—by Cardinal Włodzimierz Czański (1834–88), who had served as papal nuncio to France (1879–82): “How do we reach the world, and attract it to us, to save it? We must jump in with both feet, even if it means getting splashed with mud! Let’s make it our responsibility to try to sanctify and cleanse it.”⁵⁷ The Oblates were to be a “new breed of priests,” who would “go out into the world in search of the lost sheep and bring them back into the fold.”⁵⁸ Ministering in the spirit of the Doctor of Divine Love and continuing his work of sanctification, they were to be the instrument through which “the treasure of [the Savior’s] charity will be lavished on the earth and given in all its fullness to the world,”⁵⁹ in an era when the gospel of God’s love and mercy had been eclipsed by a religion of fear and moral rigorism.

For more than forty years, Brisson was schooled and steeped in Salesian doctrine and spirituality by Mother Chappuis. Inspired to minister as the Doctor of Divine Love did, he was indefatigable in preaching and teaching—by word and by action—that God is loving, “rich in mercy” (Eph 2:4 NRSV), and desirous that all be saved and none be lost. Following Francis de Sales’s example, Brisson sought to attract and win hearts, which is possible only by love—the *pastorale*

de la peur had no place in his pastoral method and ministry. Likewise, Brisson wanted the Oblates to walk in the Doctor of Divine Love’s footsteps by being “apostles of the love of God”⁶⁰ and, consequently, apostles of the Salesian spirit. He also wished that those to whom he and the Oblates ministered would become in their own state of life “apostles of the love of God,” thereby continuing the evangelizing mission of the apostles and the saving work of the Savior.⁶¹

When, as a recently ordained priest, Brisson was assigned to the Visitation boarding school, Mother Chappuis was not in Troyes, but serving as superior of the Second Visitation Monastery, on the rue de Vaugirard, in Paris (1838–44). In 1842, the young priest from Troyes went to Paris to visit Chappuis, who immediately recognized him as the one chosen by God to realize the project revealed to her by the Lord.⁶² From his mature perspective many years later, Brisson recounts, in a retreat conference to his confreres in 1885, these events and how the Oblates came to be founded.

CONFERENCE, NO. 6, OBLATE RETREAT OF 1885⁶³

Every religious order is linked to a notion distinctly its own. For some orders, it is poverty; for others, zeal for the salvation of souls; others practice painful mortifications; others devote themselves to a special ministry, such as the care of the sick. What, then, is our aim? For we have an aim that is distinctly our own. If we did not, we would have no reason for being (*raison d'être*). We would be no more than a group of individuals doing exactly the same things as others do, and would, as a consequence, have no special reason to exist, nor be in any way successful. It would be better to combine our forces, instead of dispersing them, and to join with others to obtain better results.

Let’s return to our origins, to our creation. Teaching based in history has, above all others, an immense advantage: it specifies with great precision the goal and the means to attain it.

The Good Mother. Why did God choose a woman?⁶⁴ When does the history of our foundation begin? This foundation dates a long way back. In order to find the first thought of it, the first inspiration, we must go to a little Swiss village. With regard to the early years in the life of the Good Mother, I will pass over these in silence, for at that time she did not yet understand what God was asking of her; she had not received any positive revelations. But why was it that God chose a woman to bring about the foundation? And why wasn't a man chosen? I know nothing about that. Let this be the first answer. As long as the foundation was not definitively established, it was possible to have doubts. But now I can say to you what Jesus said to the Jews: "If you do not believe in the words I say, believe at least because of the deeds that I do. [John 10:38]." Yes, you can doubt, our Lord was saying; you can deny the truth, and no doubt your heart is evil enough to deny the truth. In the end, however, the deeds I have done will compel you to believe. *Propter opera ipsa credite*, "Believe Me because of the works themselves" [John 14:11]. I am here to tell you the same thing: Do not look at the person, look at what this person has accomplished.

The Novice at Fribourg and Bishop Yenni. One day, in the novitiate in Fribourg, Sister Mary de Sales Chappuis received some great lights from the good God; she already caught a glimpse of the foundation of the Oblate Fathers. God enabled her to see that this foundation was one of the fruits of the inner life of the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, and especially of the Father in relation to the Word. These were sublime things. She reported everything to her Superior, following what was prescribed by the Rule. Her Superior, a very remarkable and saintly woman in her own right, did not trust her own judgment; she consulted Bishop Yenni,⁶⁵ who had been educated in Rome, the source of doctrine. The saintly and learned bishop gathered around himself a group of the most distinguished priests, who had all been educated at the German College in Rome. These priests spent the greater part of their time not playing cards but

studying, having serious conferences about theological and canonical questions, thus buttressing the learning that they had acquired at such a good school. The Mother Superior at Fribourg thus had recourse to the authority and learning of this bishop, who quickly understood and appreciated the value of the nun being submitted to him for examination. On his advice, the Superior said to Sister Mary de Sales: "You must write down and submit to me everything that God communicates to you."

The Notebook of Fribourg. Under obedience, Sister Mary de Sales began to write. A first piece of writing, now in my possession, gives to the Mother Superior an account of some divine operations, of the part which the Sister is to play in them, and of the ensuing consequences. This first notebook provides us a complete overview of the work to be accomplished. God reveals to this soul that He has, in His charity, a particular view of salvation for the world, [and] that a great number of graces and spiritual favors remain in a state of preparation by His divine charity and are at the disposal of the world. She saw this very clearly, and, with even greater clarity, she put it into words. The bishop, to whose examination the Mother Superior submitted everything, studied this question in depth....

This, then, is the context within which Mother Mary de Sales came onto the scene. This is how judgment was passed on her, on her first communications with God. The notebook containing her manifestation of conscience speaks of the communications that she received from the divine Persons, and particularly what God still intends to give to the world. This notebook states:

Behold, I am being called to be an apostle and to contribute to the work that God will establish in order to communicate His graces and to expand the diffusion of His divine charity. The Savior will bring to the fore merits not yet employed. The treasure of His charity will be

lavished on the earth and given in all its fullness to the world.

This is what God told this novice in Fribourg. This is what the Mother Superior and the bishop accepted. No one said to her: "Good Sister, this is all well and good, but be good enough to let it remain there. Just limit yourself to mental prayer of the usual kind." She was not told: "Take another road, strike a different note."

Thus, she continued. From time to time, the bishop came to visit her, and he would then say to the Mother Superior: "Let her say and do what she wishes." Often he would say: "You have a saint there. The good God is making use of her and will continue to do so in the future. Let her act; help her."

These are, I believe, well-authorized communications, my friends. There is nothing dangerous in them, nothing contrary to the teachings of the Church. These revelations are supported by doctors in the sacred sciences who are in direct contact with the Holy See.

The Good Mother, nonetheless, did not wish to immediately busy herself exteriorly with this work and to make use of "the effects of the effect." You must understand what she meant by this expression. The "effects" refer to what takes place in the godhead and was being communicated to the Good Mother. These are the contacts (*rappports*) with the three divine Persons; that is, the first effect. The second effect—resulting from the first—is the communication that God makes to the faithful called to profit from these things.

At Troyes. The Good Mother came to Troyes.... On her arrival, she understood that this was the place that God had chosen for the accomplishment of His work, that in Troyes God had laid the first stone, and that there the effects of the blessed Trinity were to become manifest. "Here," she said on her arrival, "is the place of my abiding rest." She experienced this feeling very strongly. By this time, she already had, in her

communications with God; something more positive and with greater clarity...

The Announcement of the Work at Paris. I was sent to the Visitation Monastery of Troyes while the Good Mother was in Paris. A year later, in 1842, I went to Paris to visit her. She told me, "You have been chosen by the good God to help me a great deal in the work that I have to do. The time has come when the good God is going to start His work. And when it will begin, when it was about to begin, there will be a sign..."

The Good Mother's Entreaties. The Good Mother returned to Troyes, and there she speaks to me in more explicit terms: "I have begun," she said, "but my mission is accomplished. At the present time, I have nothing more to say to anyone, nothing more to begin. The enterprise will be accomplished soon..."

I can tell you that I hesitated a long time before believing all that she told me. "God will give you an understanding of this during the celebration of Mass," she assured me. During Mass, I had some enlightenment; after Mass, she would ask me: "Have you received anything?" "I do not know," I would answer, "this is not always clear for me." But she would go on, nonetheless, sure as she was of God's promises....

Her Communications. If I had written down everything that she told me, whole books would not have sufficed to record it, but I did not write anything. Perhaps I was wrong, but nothing can be done about it now. To make reparation for my fault, I must in conscience declare today that, through her mediation, God wanted to entrust us with a mission. I repeat, the things that she told me were the most sublime, the purest kind of doctrine, the most precise description of what took place within the godhead. All this, as communicated by the Good Mother de Sales, is to come to fruition today....

The Words of Pope Leo XIII. Three years ago, I recounted these things to our Holy Father the Pope [= Leo XIII]. Then the Pope, in deep meditation, in a recollection that seemed to

make him oblivious to everything, was silent for several moments, during which it seemed that his whole being had been annihilated, or at least withdrawn and totally absorbed in God. Then he said: "All that you do, you, in your apostolates, it is the will of God that you should do it, and all those who have worked with you have personally done what God wanted of them. What you are doing now, God wills it; and God wants it, not only of you, but of all those who work with you. What is left for you to obtain? The approbation of the Holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church? I, the Pope, give it to you, and what is more, I am giving you a mission: Go to France! You will also go elsewhere. Spread your works. I love them!"

"Be men of sacrifice," the Pope said, "you must be religious *usque ad effusionem sanguinis*, 'even to the shedding of blood.' And thus the Pope will be with you!..." You would have to see how the Pope's stature was rising and rising. In truth, I say, it was the good God who was speaking....

Faith in Our Mission.... Our task, then, is all mapped out.... I believe that now there is no longer room for doubt. In the sight of God, I make this declaration: Were I covered with all the sins committed in the world, I would be less ashamed to appear before God at the Last Judgment than if I should fail to put into practice what Mother Mary de Sales told me. I can certainly bring before God the stains of my life, but the failure to believe in these things, that I cannot do. We are not dealing here with an impression that comes and goes; this dominates my entire life. Over fifty years, I have had the time to look at things with a cool head and from a distance sufficiently removed to allow for a correct judgment....

For a long time, Brisson steadfastly resisted Mother Chappuis's entreaties about founding the Oblates, until the Lord appeared to him, revealing that "he was no longer the master in his own house, that he must surrender."⁶⁶ Brisson later described this apparition several times,⁶⁷ but the most complete and detailed account (given in the third person) is found in chapter 32 of his *Life of the Venerable Mother*

Mary de Sales Chappuis. This event took place one day during Lent 1845, in the upstairs parlor of the Troyes Visitation monastery.

LIFE OF THE VENERABLE MOTHER MARY DE SALES CHAPPUIS, CHAPTER 32⁶⁸

The Good Mother had sent for the young chaplain [Brisson] and told him in a kind of authoritative manner that he ought not to resist God any longer, but obey Him. She did so by stressing the motives of God's will and the necessity of submitting to His supreme authority. Her words wounded the young confessor, who looked upon this solemn injunction as a restraint on his freedom. "Reverend Mother," he said to her, "I shall never do what you want from me." "But if God is leading you?" she said. "Well, Mother, since you go that far, I declare to you that nothing will ever lead me to do it, and, even if I were to see a dead man resurrected from the dead, I would never give in." After this remark, the Good Mother left the parlor without saying a word, and the young confessor found himself alone, discontented and irritated by the violence that she wished to do him.

He began to consider what he would have to do to put an end to all these incidents, which were disturbing his peace, and which were making his existence bitter and intolerable. Just as he raised his eyes, he saw through the grill of the parlor, about two meters from the grill and one meter from the door leading to the boarders' quarters (this door is on the right for anyone who is outside and looking into the parlor), Our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord was dressed in a tunic of wool similar in color to the fleece of sheep, and He wore a mantle of whiter wool. He seemed to be between twenty-five and thirty years of age. His beard and hair were chestnut blond, His countenance was open, but His glance toward the young priest was rather severe. He appeared without any rays of glory, as He was at Nazareth. His features were regular and

perfectly harmonious. His height was not above average, and in His bearing there was an expression of simplicity and ineffable dignity. He was God with us, and God who became one of us.

The apparition lasted some time, during which the young priest was able to carefully take in all that he beheld.... Nothing escaped him, and it was after this minute examination that his gaze was arrested anew by the Savior's glance, and he saw in the expression on His face and in His gesture what was His will. Our Lord was commanding him to do what Mother Mary de Sales was telling him. The Savior's visit had found the young priest agitated; it left him calm, without any physical emotion, in a state of deep recollection and in the most perfect consciousness of what he had seen.

The apparition then just disappeared; [the young chaplain] did not wish it to be prolonged any longer: that was how God wanted it. He adored, he loved what the Savior had just done; he wanted only what Christ wanted. After several minutes of this recollected adoration, the door alongside the infirmary opened and the Good Mother returned. She did not say a single word to the young confessor, and he said not a word to her. The Good Mother's demeanor indicated that everything was finished, and she left immediately.

MAJOR THEMES ANIMATING THE OBLATE-SALESIAN TRADITION

1. St. Francis de Sales, Patron and Model

Of all the religious congregations founded as part of the nineteenth-century Salesian Pentecost, the Oblate Sisters and Oblates were most closely linked to the Visitation Order. Indeed, the Troyes Visitation was the cradle and nursery of both Oblate congregations. As Brisson's account of their origin attests, the Oblate Sisters were the realization of Francis's "first idea" of the Visitation as "a non-cloistered congregation."⁶⁹ Thus, the Oblate Sisters were the counterpart of, or

the complement to, the Visitation: "although different from the Visitation by its exterior apostolate, [the Oblate Sisters] would, nevertheless, practice the *Spiritual Directory*, and approximate as much as possible the Visitandine spirit and interior life."⁷⁰

As already stated, the founding of the Oblates fulfilled Francis's unrealized desire, kept alive in the Visitation, to found a congregation of priests to continue his pastoral ministry. The Oblates were not simply "under the patronage of St. Francis de Sales, but also completely under the direction of his thought, his doctrine, his manner of acting and seeing."⁷¹ The Oblate vocation was to "do what [Francis de Sales] did, and... identify as much as possible with his person."⁷² To be an Oblate was thus an experience of lifelong learning from Francis de Sales through constant study of his biography and writings, as well as of interior conformation to the saint through the practice of the *Spiritual Directory*, with a view to replicating Francis's messaging and pastoral method in a world that stood in acute need of these. Brisson elaborates this essential theme in a chapter instruction of January 25, 1893, which was intended to help his confreres prepare for the Feast of St. Francis de Sales.⁷³

Chapter Instruction of January 25, 1893⁷⁴

On Sunday, we will celebrate the Feast of St. Francis de Sales. It is necessary that each of us prepare carefully for this solemnity, which will bring us very special graces. We have more reason than others to prepare well for this feast and these graces, since we can say, without any self-aggrandizement, that we are truly the children of St. Francis de Sales....

There are several religious congregations for which St. Francis de Sales is the patron and which have taken his name. They are more important than we;... the good God blesses them greatly. But St. Francis de Sales is only their patron. They have placed themselves under his protection; they desire to enter his spirit, but their special goal is not ours, namely, to reproduce as completely as possible the interior and exterior life of St. Francis de Sales. Theirs is a patronage rather than the real continuation of his work and of his life. I

cannot recall who it was that asked Father de Mayerhoffen:⁷⁵ "What do you do in order to call yourselves Oblates of St. Francis de Sales? In what way do you seek to imitate him?"... I believe that it was the Vicar General at Annecy... "We practice the [*Spiritual*] *Directory* that St. Francis de Sales practiced," Father de Mayerhoffen replied, "and we try, by means of it, to resemble him in everything." "I understand, then," replied the Vicar General, "that you are achieving something special. You are continuing his work."

We have, therefore, a right to very special protection from St. Francis de Sales insofar as we are his children, his sons. St. Jane de Chantal testified to me of this.⁷⁶ The Good Mother very often gave me assurances of this. We are the true sons of St. Francis de Sales.

We, therefore, more than others must prepare ourselves for his feast, and the best means to do this is by trying to imitate him. In every imitation of an image or a portrait, two things are necessary: the features and the color. The features distinguish and delineate the shape of the face and the body; the color achieves the resemblance because it completes the particular and personal existence—the physiognomy of the subject. It is necessary, my friends, that we reproduce our holy Founder from this double point of view....

St. Francis de Sales tells us that St. Francis of Assisi received the stigmata as a result of contemplating Jesus crucified, and as a result of meditating upon Him lovingly.⁷⁷ Likewise, let us contemplate St. Francis de Sales. Let's imitate him, let's work, and let's faithfully practice, like him, the *Spiritual Directory*, and we shall celebrate a beautiful feast of St. Francis de Sales. Each solemnity of the Church brings us special and distinctive graces. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are of many varied forms, *multiformis Spiritus*. May the Holy Spirit, therefore, communicate to us on this feast day love and zeal for our ministry, fidelity to the *Directory*, taking thoughts, intentions, and affections from it. Note well that we shall desire absolutely nothing else but that.

The Oblate vocation is a specification of the Christian baptismal vocation: the Oblate follows Christ by imitating Francis de Sales, who, in the estimation of his contemporaries, was a "true image [*vraie image*] of the Son of God."⁷⁸ Closing the circle, Mother Chappuis believed that "through [the Oblates], the Savior... will be seen walking again upon the earth."⁷⁹ Chappuis and Brisson maintained that the short text known as the *Spiritual Directory of St. Francis de Sales* (referenced in several texts above) was indispensable to the Oblates fulfilling "their special goal... to reproduce as completely as possible the interior and exterior life of St. Francis de Sales,"⁸⁰ which set them apart from other religious congregations associated with the saint.

Composed for the Visitation Order toward the end of Francis's life, "[the] *Spiritual Directory* represents a distillation into a brief and compact form the fruits of Francis's many years of experience and wisdom in living the Christian life and in guiding and directing others in that same endeavor. It provides a privileged access to the style and method of this great spiritual master."⁸¹ In rebuilding the Troyes Visitation in the aftermath of the French Revolution and persistent Jansenist tendencies, Chappuis had found in the *Spiritual Directory* an extraordinarily effective resource for restoring the authentic Salesian spirit to the community.⁸² Brisson later adopted the *Spiritual Directory* for use by the Oblate Sisters and Oblates, which he considered as essential to their life and identity.

The *Spiritual Directory's* purpose was eminently practical: to maintain a sense of God's presence throughout the day and to infuse ordinary activities with a spirit of prayer and communion with God.⁸³ The core article of the *Spiritual Directory*, the Direction of Intention, exemplifies the wide applicability and appeal of its approach. Not simply one among other articles, the Direction of Intention is the "very essence" of the *Spiritual Directory*, for it "is interwoven with every other article."⁸⁴ It "does not concern any action in particular," but "provides the attitude and approach that one should bring toward every action, even matters which are small and seemingly insignificant."⁸⁵ The text of the Direction of Intention, as practiced by the Oblates, here follows.

*The Direction of Intention*⁸⁶

The Oblates who wish to thrive and advance in the way of Our Lord should, at the beginning of their actions, both exterior and interior, ask for His grace and offer to His divine goodness, all the good they will do. In this way, they will be prepared to bear with peace and serenity all the pain and suffering they will encounter as coming from the fatherly hand of our good God and Savior. His most holy intention is to have them merit by such means in order to reward them afterwards out of the abundance of His love.

They should not neglect this practice in matters which are small and seemingly insignificant, nor even if they are engaged in those things which are agreeable and in complete conformity with their own will and needs, such as drinking, eating, resting, recreating and similar actions. By following the advice of the Apostle, everything they do will be done in God's name to please Him alone [1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17].

2. Pastoral Renewal of the Priesthood

The founding of the Oblates launched a new religious congregation, as well as a pastoral renewal of the priesthood. At a time when God's love and mercy had been supplanted by a religion of fear and moral rigorism, Chappuis and Brisson were inspired to retrieve the spirituality and pastoral style of Francis de Sales, the Doctor of Divine Love. The living image of the Savior, Francis was the standard against which the new congregation and the priesthood were to measure themselves.

In his priestly and episcopal ministry, Francis imaged the Son of God by enfleshing "the two favorite and well-beloved virtues which shone forth in the sacred person of our Lord, and which He singularly recommended to us, . . . Learn of Me: He says, for I am gentle and humble of heart" [Matt 11:29].⁸⁷ Francis's appropriation of the heart of Jesus was a phenomenon known in the Christian spiritual tradition as an "exchange of hearts."⁸⁸

Another description of this process is found in Brisson's biography of Chappuis: self-effacement that made space for the Savior to act. In her mystical experiences, Chappuis learned "what the Savior wished to do for the world, and how He wished to employ the Oblates to effect this new Redemption."⁸⁹ Subsequently, she insisted, "to respond to their vocation," the Oblates "must strive to efface themselves and leave place for the Savior in themselves and in their ministries; they must identify themselves with Him and assume His divine inclinations,"⁹⁰ following the Pauline injunction to have the mind of Jesus Christ (cf. Phil 2:5). Rather than seeking to control or restrict God's mercy, the Oblate priest was called to cooperate with the Savior to bring about a "new Redemption," whereby divine love, mercy, and graces would be profusely poured out on the world. This was a sublime vocation that was to be approached with the most profound humility and sense of unworthiness, which Brisson sought to inculcate in the first Oblates in this chapter instruction.

*Chapter Instruction of December 19, 1894*⁹¹

The priesthood is certainly the first dignity among Christians, in this sense: that the priest is chosen by God, elected to consecrate the body and blood of Jesus Christ, to remit sins, and to bless the people. The bishop tells the priest whom he is going to ordain that he must pay careful attention, that he must fully understand his obligations, that he imitate the Victim of the sacrifice that he will offer to God: *Imitamini quod tractatis*, "Imitate the mystery you celebrate."

This admonition by the bishop contains all the priest's obligations. It is essential that the priest be well instructed in them, and that he be fully aware of what he does when he celebrates Mass, when he baptizes, when he hears confessions, when he instructs. Let him render a strict account of himself, and let him bring perfect dispositions. It is something so important, so great, that the entire life of a man who would consecrate all his thoughts without exception and all his efforts to this preparation would not suffice for it. He would never succeed in being worthy of the holy functions

that the priest has to fulfill. One becomes accustomed to everything, my friends, if one is not careful, to celebrating Mass, to hearing confessions, to preaching: one is less and less impressed with everything.

Two obligations rise up before us that are very great and very important: to know what we are doing, and to do it worthily. It is necessary to know fully, it is necessary to understand, that we are doing something holy, to imbibe it, to speak of it. We must not do as certain preachers do, who, when speaking of the grandeurs of the priesthood to the faithful or to religious (male or female) say things so beautiful, so uplifting, so admirable, that they seem to want to have these things applied personally to themselves. The priest is very great, of course, but in his own eyes, he must be *servus servorum*, the servant of the servants. Yes, indeed, we are well aware of our grandeur and the eminent dignity of our functions, but only to better recognize our personal unworthiness, our incapacity. Let us not identify the priesthood with ourselves. Let us not take for our little person the praise that the priesthood deserves. Let us give an account, with regard to the sublime state to which we are called, of how much we fall short.

Some good priests give beautiful sermons about the above. They tell the truth, of course, but they ought to distinguish a little more clearly between the thing and the man. The thing is a thousand times beyond all human imagination, but the man is much below the degree of virtue and holiness that he ought to have. He should recognize this and not exalt himself too much.

I refer here to a sermon preached last Sunday to some nuns, and in a way that none of us must ever preach about the priesthood. The preacher made of the priest an extraordinary ideal. This ideal has been realized many times, undoubtedly: St. Vincent de Paul,⁹² St. Francis de Sales. That's fine, they were at the summit, but we—are we at the summit? If we truly heed the injunction made by the bishop in the admonition in the Pontifical⁹³ to be fully aware of what we are doing,

and the manner in which we do it, we will only have to lower our head. The grandeur of the priesthood and its lofty dignity shows us at once the immense distance which exists between the thing and the person, between the sublimity of the function and the unworthiness of the minister.

... We are the successors of the seventy-two disciples [cf. Luke 10:1–24]. They aided the Apostles in their ministry; they had received—like the Apostles—the graces and powers of priestly ordination. We also have that grace of the Apostles and of the Disciples; it is the same because it has not diminished, as the Jansenists contend.⁹⁴ No, certainly. The disciples had the same weaknesses as we, the same temptations, the same difficulties and discouragements, the same powerlessness... we must hold fast to this conviction.

Doesn't St. Francis de Sales tell us that in the confessional one must venerate the priest as an angel of God who has received from Him the mandate to come to purify us?⁹⁵ All that is true. But this does not mean, however, that we are really an angel of God, alas, no! When we measure ourselves, and when we then try to measure an angel of God, we see clearly that we do not have the same stature. In the instruction that we give to the faithful, let's really understand the dignity of the priesthood, of course, but let's be very careful not to put ourselves forward and appear to say: "This is what I am, I who speak to you!"

Imitamini quod tractatis, "Imitate the mystery you celebrate." Imitate our Lord Jesus Christ, Whom you touch, Whom you handle—this is the second obligation of the priest, to do worthily what we do, by imitating and reproducing our Lord. We touch and handle the Word of God, at Holy Mass, at Holy Communion. There is a very great distance between Him and us, and, nevertheless, He submits to our orders, He obeys us... We also go to Him. It is only by repeated and constant effort that we will succeed in imitating our Lord. If our Lord came on earth, it was not only to preach doctrine, it was also to give an example. Let us also give an example. It is essential that we priests be filled with that spirit.

When we preach, when we catechize, let us truly recall that we are the providers of the divine Word and that it is He whom we must give to souls. When we are truly imbued with this thought, when we have truly meditated on the instruction in the Pontifical, we shall then understand how far the word that we give the faithful is from being what it ought to be....

Let us carefully consider the distance that exists between us and the things we do, and our ministry—when motivated by humility—will be extremely efficacious. Nothing touches the faithful like the humility of the priest. When one is truly little, when one puts himself in his place, when one really understands the distance that exists between himself and the sublime functions with which he is occupied, one achieves some good for souls, one gains their confidence, one gives them God....

From the outset, the pastoral renewal of the priesthood envisioned by the founding of the Oblates was intended to have an impact beyond the congregation, specifically a third order of priests devoted to living and ministering according to the teachings of St. Francis de Sales.⁹⁶ This independently came about when the Parisian diocesan priest Fr. Henri Chaumont (1838–96), another major figure in the Salesian Pentecost, founded in 1876 the Society of the Priests of St. Francis de Sales, whose purpose was to instill in the diocesan clergy the spirit of Francis de Sales. Within a few years, this group numbered in its ranks the elite of the French clergy. In 2020, it had approximately one thousand members, spread over five continents, who are dedicated to the ministry of spiritual direction or accompaniment.

The Oblates also spread the Salesian spirit among diocesan priests. The *Spiritual Directory of St. Francis de Sales* was useful not only for internal Oblate formation, but also for disseminating and popularizing Francis's practical spirituality to a wider public. *The Spiritual Directory of St. Francis de Sales Adapted to the Use of Priests* was published in French (1896), German (1905), and English (1906) editions, and *The Directory or Spiritual Guide for Persons in the World* was first published in 1899.⁹⁷ Both the Oblate and diocesan priest

editions of the *Directory* included a supplement with, among other things, counsels on the manner of celebrating the sacrament of penance and on preaching that were excerpted from Francis's *Advice to Confessors* and his famous letter on preaching to André Frémyot (1573–1641), the brother of Mother de Chantal and archbishop of Bourges, that is sometimes referred to as the *Treatise on Preaching*.⁹⁸

Chappuis and Brisson also encouraged the Oblates to incorporate the *Spiritual Directory* into their preaching and various ministries. Brisson himself modeled this approach in his catechetical instruction at the *œuvres ouvrières*. His teaching was essentially that of the *Spiritual Directory*, particularly those parts distilling Francis de Sales's instructions in the *Introduction to the Devout Life* (1609). This method is clearly observable in Brisson's "teaching on prayer, especially the preparation of the day, meditation, spiritual recollection and ejaculatory prayer, and the Direction of Intention, which is the very centerpiece and heart of the *Spiritual Directory*."⁹⁹ Brisson adapts, or "contemporizes," these elements of Salesian spirituality in a practical way to fit the everyday needs of the young women workers in the often challenging social and work environments in which they found themselves.¹⁰⁰

3. The Sacredness of Work

French Catholicism's pathological obsession with sin, eternal damnation, and the small number of the saved presented the laity with a grim picture of the afterlife. Its understanding of this life was no less severe. Idleness was a sin, but work was regarded as a penance; the punishment for original sin.¹⁰¹ As a result, most of the French clergy was unsympathetic to the working class and found it difficult to relate to workers. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that most priests came from rural backgrounds and had a marked preference for agrarian society, coupled with a deep suspicion of the urban environment.¹⁰²

Acutely aware of the gulf between the clergy and the working class, Chappuis and Brisson sought to bring about a basic shift in how priestly ministry was exercised by recovering the pastoral style of Francis de Sales, who "received all comers with the same expression of

quiet friendliness, and never turned anyone away, whatever his station in life."¹⁰³ Thus, the new Salesian model of the priest did not shy away from openness to and interaction with all, especially the working class. In Brisson's words, "The thought of the Good Mother was that the Oblates, brought into existence at this time, . . . have a role to play in that great question of work and workers. They are to exercise a healthy influence, . . . and to usefully serve holy Church in these times, we have to be in contact with workers."¹⁰⁴

Complementing their emphasis on the priest's approachability and accessibility to all, Chappuis and Brisson, also following the lead of Francis de Sales, had a sacramental view of the world that was the foundation for their development of a spirituality of work that insists on its sacred nature as a participation in God's creative activity and presence in the world: "We are made in the image of God, who sanctified and glorified work, especially in creating the universe. We most resemble the Creator by our human activity. When the Creator works in, with and through us, then we become collaborators and co-creators with God, thereby reflecting God's presence and continued activity in the world."¹⁰⁵ Brisson develops these themes in this chapter instruction.

Conference no. 7, Retreat of 1888¹⁰⁶

This morning I wish to say a word to you about work. I have no weighty considerations to make to you on work; I am not going to delve into history nor Sacred Scripture for good and excellent thoughts in regard to work. I shall limit myself to a few ideas from the Gospel, St. Francis de Sales, and the Good Mother.

"My Father works until now, and I work," said our Lord Jesus Christ [John 5:17]. "My Father works": He works even until now. . . ; He makes light, He makes worlds, He kneads clay and fashions man out of it. "And I work": I am with you; I speak to you in parables; I teach you. I do, as it seems, nothing else but evangelize the Jewish people, and yet at this moment, I am one with My Father in work—in material as well as supernatural work. It is I who operate the world.

We profess for work, which is specifically attributed to God the Father, an especially religious bent. We have learned that what God does merits our respect, our gratitude. When we work, when we set our hands to these material things that God has created, we return praise and honor to God, and we cause creatures to render this homage to the Creator, in their own secret and wonderful language. We look upon creatures as the property of God, we treat them, with respect as holy and divine. Work makes us sharers in the divine action, and, consequently, in the holiness and grace that emanates from God the Father and that communicates itself not only through the ordinary means of the Redemption, but by the special channel of work—by contact with material things that are for our use. With us, work is a thing of awe, of blessedness. By work, we cooperate with God and with the Word. Now cooperation in the action of God is sanctifying. There is in it, we might say, something analogous to what occurs in the Sacraments or at least in the Sacramentals.¹⁰⁷ Work with our hands is our way of honoring God the Father.

In God, there are three Persons, three co-equal Persons. No one of the three is inferior to the others. God forbid that I should belittle the work of Redemption, without which all men would be eternally miserable and reprobate. In this sense, the work of Redemption infinitely surpasses the work of Creation. If in God there is no differentiation, there is for us an immense difference between these two acts. But in that it comes from God, all work is excellent, and St. Francis de Sales and the Good Mother Mary de Sales desire that all that emanates from God be received with very great respect, with deep gratitude and love. By steeping ourselves in this doctrine, it will come to pass that our work of each day, whatever it may be—whether manual or intellectual—will take on a character so elevated, so complete in its union with God that we will treat all things as holy and sacred and as requiring our attention, our care, and our devotion. And in their turn, these things will bring us grace, the grace of God the Father. Let us make use of these material things for the honor of God

the Father—*cum gratiarum actione*, with thanksgiving [cf. 1 Tim 4:3–4]. Let us use them, and turn them to our service as blessed things....

God's creations carry within them their graces. As a matter of practice, then, preserve a deep respect for the material things that obedience and religious poverty put in your hands. In the use that we make of these things, there is a thanksgiving and praise that leap towards God, and which God hears, although our bodily ears hear them not. May the beating of our hearts, and the prayer that bursts forth from these hearts, be in union with that prayer of all creation that we hear not. We shall offer, then, to God not only the sacrifice of the morning and the evening, but a perpetual sacrifice, the complete holocaust of our entire life, and all our works.

Moreover, work not only brings us closer to God, but also "brings us closer to all of those who work. It makes us appreciate the toil, trials and effort that especially marked the workers in a highly industrialized city like Troyes."¹⁰⁹ These ideas, as well as the initiatives undertaken on behalf of workers by Chappuis and Brisson, were part of developing Catholic social thought about the dignity of labor and of the church's pastoral outreach to the working class during the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁹ This process culminated in Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, On the Condition of Labor (1891), the first of the great encyclicals of modern Catholic social teaching.

4. Reimprinting the Gospel

One of the most daunting problems facing the church in the aftermath of the French Revolution, especially its policy of de-Christianization, was widespread ignorance, even among educated Catholics, of the most basic tenets of faith and particularly of Sacred Scripture.¹¹⁰ The situation among the clergy was no more encouraging. The great majority of seminarians lacked academic aptitude, there was a vast "gap between the standards expected in the secular schools and universities and...in the seminaries," and those ordained priests were deficient even "in the academic subjects in their own

professional sphere, ecclesiastical history, canon law, and biblical criticism."¹¹¹ This state of affairs was the context for the importance and urgency that Chappuis and Brisson gave to their distinctive imperative, "to reimprint the Gospel" (*réimprimer l'Évangile*).

Chappuis and Brisson's description of what it meant to reimprint the gospel was effectively synonymous with *lectio divina*. Akin to this ancient Christian practice, Chappuis and Brisson conceived of reimprinting the gospel as a highly active and dynamic process of slow, thoughtful reading, in-depth knowledge and understanding (aided by resources such as Scripture commentaries), prayerful rumination, interior assimilation and appropriation, and adaptation to the needs of the present-day world and the souls encountered in ministry. The prototype for reimprinting the gospel was Francis de Sales, whose sustained practice of *lectio divina*¹¹² made him, in the eyes of his contemporaries, "the Gospel speaking [*l'Évangile parlant*]," because it was completely integrated into his life.¹¹³ In a retreat conference in 1882, Brisson instructs his Oblate confreres in what reimprinting the gospel specifically entails on their part.

Conference no. 10, Retreat of 1882¹¹⁴

The Good Mother often said that it was necessary "to reimprint the Gospel." By this expression, my friends, she meant that the Gospel must be given a very broad meaning. The Gospel needs to be re-imprinted in our heart and in the world.

In order to re-imprint the Gospel, we must know it. It is impossible to print what we do not know. If we had lost the Gospel according to St. John and you were charged with re-imprinting it, the beginning would go all by itself because you know it by heart. But what about the rest? You must know it, therefore, in order to re-imprint it. In our studies, we learned a few verses each day; in that way we retained something of the Gospel. It is essential that you know the Gospel. Our Rule obliges us to read the New Testament daily. We are supposed to read a chapter per day. Let's be

very faithful to this, and let's read it with attention and care so as to understand and retain it.

Bossuet¹¹⁵ was asked which was the best commentary on the Gospel. He did not reply. "Which is the one you use?" they then asked. "A second reading?" He then answered, "a third, a fourth." You also see how skillfully he worked his knowledge of the Gospel into his sermons.

We must, therefore, in order to re-imprint the Gospel, read it first and read it carefully. This should not be a distracted reading, not one that is simply pious, but a reading made with great attention, great relish, as if you were hearing it from the mouth of Our Lord Himself. You must then strive to carefully penetrate the meaning.

I recommend, nevertheless, that you make use of a few of the more renowned commentators. A good commentator provides the key to how we should understand and interpret the Scriptures. In our courses on Sacred Scripture, we were given the method of interpreting Scripture in its literal, spiritual, and accommodated sense. We must know about these matters....

Nourish yourselves with the Scriptures; read them slowly, three, four or five verses at a time; then pause, allow them to sink in, and ask God for understanding of them. You have read the Scriptures so many times, and it seems that that has produced nothing; pray, and you will be surprised at all that you find in the words of Sacred Scripture. Those who look for silver or gold are obliged to painfully dig through the earth's crust formed by other baser metals; they have to leap over rocks, they have to sift the mud of streams, and it is only in this way that they find the silver-bearing lair, the flakes of gold which are worth a hundred times, a thousand times more than the trouble they cost....

If, until now, the Gospels have said nothing to your heart, this is because you have not yet opened the mine. Make use of prayer, and God will give you the key. Remove the obstacles, and you will find an immense mine full of enlightenment,

consolations, and material for your instructions. You will never say anything to souls without Sacred Scripture.

The Good Mother loved the Gospels.¹¹⁶ During retreats, she used to re-read the Gospel according to St. John. She found in it the good God, the light. She reflected at length on it, and she had some very profound theological intuitions. Fr. Chevalier¹¹⁷ said to me several times: "What she says, we are unable to say; we are unable to plumb these matters, unenlightened as we are."

It is not sufficient to read the Gospels in order to understand them; we must also put them into practice. The Gospel is the express story of the Word of God appearing on earth among humankind. It is the Gospel thus understood that we are supposed to make a new edition of among people, by prayer, by work, by the evangelization of nations, by sacrifice.

Reimprinting the gospel was of a piece with another key attribute of the Salesian model of the priest: dedication to ongoing intellectual growth and lifelong learning. In a sermon of March 4, 1898, for the occasion of the religious profession of two novices, Brisson takes love of learning as his theme, admonishing his confreres that, as spiritual sons of Francis de Sales, they were to resemble him in every way—in charity, gentleness, and learning.

My sons, we are the spiritual children of St. Francis de Sales: Children ought to resemble their father.... St. Francis de Sales is a Doctor of the Church, and in order to become a Doctor of the Church, one must have learning that is beyond the ordinary, that is superior to common learning.... I desire that the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales become learned men.... I desire that we become learned like St. Francis de Sales.... You must be learned, not only in theology, but in all knowledge.... The Fathers of the Church say that learning draws us closer to God, makes us participants in His eternal glory.... Thus, all human knowledge will be a way to heaven.... We will be true Oblates when we employ our knowledge in a spirit of faith, which will show us God through intelligence, learning, and

insight, drawing us to Him through this human awareness. Thus, we will be able to make the good God loved, make Him better known, along with His wondrous powers. Our labor will then... be one with the Savior, who is our sustenance, our aid, our travelling companion, and, finally, our magnificent reward when we will see Him, and when we will love Him on the great day of blessed eternity.¹¹⁸

Brisson's exhortation echoed Francis de Sales's of 1603-5 to the priests of his diocese: "I implore you to apply yourselves seriously to study, because knowledge, to a priest, is the eighth sacrament of the hierarchy of the Church."¹¹⁹ Sacraments are intended to benefit the people of God. Knowledge as the eighth sacrament of the hierarchy of the church was not knowledge for knowledge's sake, but for the sake and benefit of the pastoral ministry. No one modeled this principle more clearly than Francis de Sales himself: one of the best educated and learned men of his age,¹²⁰ he put this education and learning completely in the service of the pastoral ministry to build up and accompany the people of God on their earthly pilgrimage to heaven.

5. The "Way"

As did Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-97), Chappuis also used the term *the Way*, in a manner that bears comparison with the youngest doctor of the church.¹²¹ Unfortunately, this part of Chappuis's legacy was misunderstood in some quarters after her death, and here Brisson aims to explain the meaning of her Way clearly and accessibly, while establishing its unimpeachable orthodoxy.

*Conference no. 9, Retreat of 1900*¹²²

In reading the *Life of the Good Mother*,¹²³ notice, my friends, how very often it speaks of "the Way": "One is in the Way. One must enter the Way. The good God asks us to sustain ourselves in the Way." What are we to understand by this word, "the Way"?

This expression has struck all those who have read the *Life of the Good Mother*. Diverse appraisals and different

judgments have been formulated about this word. Detractors have seen in this a kind of mystery which tended to the annihilation of human action and which led inevitably to quietism. This critique appeared in an article which did cause something of a stir.¹²⁴ It was successfully refuted by Fr. Fragnières, a doctor of theology and a professor at the Major Seminary in Fribourg. A Jesuit father, the Reverend Fr. Hagen, Director of the Observatory of Washington, replied no less successfully to these attacks.¹²⁵ You have recently read, in the *Annales Salésiennes*,¹²⁶ the work of Fr. Hagen, who is very solid and unassailable.

He [= Fr. Hagen] seems to have a good understanding of the Good Mother and the method of "the Way." He is in contact with various Visitation monasteries in America. He has understood, digested, and practiced these things. We ought to have complete confidence in what he says about the doctrine. I shall say the same thing about Fr. Fragnières. But I do not know if each has completely understood everything that is contained in this idea of "the Way." Fr. Fragnières sees in it, above all, the charity, goodness, and mercy of God.¹²⁷ Fr. Tissot, the former superior of the Missionaries [of St. Francis de Sales] of Annecy said the same thing.¹²⁸ He compared "the Way" to devotion to the Sacred Heart. He saw in it a new devotional food, a form of special devotion. All these interpretations are good, of course. However, I am going to say that there is in "the Way" what there is in a reflecting prism, a ray of light. Look at it diametrically before you, it appears blue. Tilt it to the right, there is a nuance of green; tilt it to the left and it appears violet. It changes color depending upon the angle in which you position your eye. "The Way" is a little like that, it seems to me. It is all that these worthy and devout authors have said it is, but it is still something more. This depends on the perspective, the point of view from which one sees it.

We Oblates, how are we supposed to understand and explain—in a practical manner—the Good Mother's "Way"?

We must, of course, see the charity, the infinite mercy of the Savior in it; also new graces, intimate graces. Yes, but I desire that we see in it, above all, the correspondence that God demands by these intimate graces. Let us consider, especially, fidelity to following our Lord. *Ego sum Via*. "I am the Way." He tells us. *Nemo venit ad Patrem nisi per me*. "No one comes to the Father except through Me" [John 14:6]. "The Way" is fidelity to walking with Jesus, to reproducing Him and to imitating Him in everything. "The Way" is loving obedience to all our obligations; it is correspondence to grace; it is fidelity to the *Directory*; to the Direction of Intention. As our Constitutions indicate, those who wish to advance and make progress in the Way of our Lord will find that it is also the most loving and faithful practice possible of our vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. "The Way," for us, is, therefore, the Rule. "The Way" is the ensemble, the totality, of our life conformed to the life of our Savior.

There you have "the Way" as the Good Mother understood it from the first and before all. It is thus something clear, positive, practical. We realize it by devotion and by following the Savior; we profess to be faithful to and love the person of the Savior; we live in union of heart and action with Him. That is "the Way."

POSTSCRIPT

Chappuis died on October 7, 1875, and was buried in the cemetery within the cloister of the Troyes Visitation. On July 27, 1897, she was declared Venerable, and her cause for beatification was introduced at Rome. On May 17, 1901, her tomb was opened in the presence of a delegate from the Vatican Congregation of Rites, a number of bishops, and other ecclesiastical dignitaries, and her body was found to be incorrupt. It was subsequently reinterred in a vault in the Oratory of Jesus the Redeemer inside the Troyes monastery.¹²⁹

Brisson died in his family's home in Plancy (France) on February 2, 1908, and was buried in his parents' tomb. On April 11, 1961, his

remains were entombed in the crypt chapel of St. Gilles in the motherhouse of the Oblate Sisters in Troyes. His cause for beatification was opened on February 11, 1938. On December 19, 2009, Pope Benedict XVI (1927–, r. 2005–13) declared that Brisson practiced the theological, cardinal, and related virtues to a heroic degree and declared him Venerable. Brisson was beatified on September 22, 2012. His feast day is October 12.¹³⁰

Aviat died on January 10, 1914, in Perugia (Italy), where she was buried. Her body was later transferred to Troyes, where, on April 11, 1961, it was entombed in the crypt chapel of St. Gilles in the motherhouse of the Oblate Sisters. On April 9, 1957, Pope Pius XII (1876–1939, r. 1939–58) himself signed the document introducing her cause for beatification. On December 1, 1978, Pope St. John Paul II (1920–2005, r. 1978–2005) confirmed her life of heroic virtue and declared her Venerable. The same pope beatified Aviat on September 27, 1992, and canonized her on November 25, 2001. Her feast day is January 10.¹³¹

4. MARY DE SALES CHAPPUIS, LOUIS BRISSON, LÉONIE FRANCES DE SALES AVIAT, AND THE OBLATE SISTERS AND OBLATES OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all English translations are from the original French texts by the author, who is grateful to Dr. Suzanne Toczyski for her advice and suggestions for improvement.

2. The official date of founding for the Oblate Sisters is October 11, 1871, when Léonie Aviat and Lucy Canuet professed their first vows. That for the Oblates is December 24, 1875, when, in a *Decretum Laudis*, or official papal decree, Bl. Pope Pius IX (1792–1878, r. 1846–78) granted the congregation its first charter and placed it under the direct and immediate jurisdiction of the Holy See. See “A Salesian/Oblate Chronology,” in *The Constitutions, the General Statutes, and the Spiritual Directory of the Oblates of Saint Francis de Sales*, American Centenary Edition (Wilmington, DE: De Sales Publishing, 1991), 266–78, esp. 270–71 (hereafter Salesian/Oblate Chronology).

3. Louis Brisson, *Vie de la vénérée Mère Marie de Sales Chappuis* (Paris: chez M. l'Aumonier de la Visitation, 1891), 9, 35–36, 61–64, 70, 78–79; quotes at 78–79 (hereafter Chappuis Biography). Marie-Thérèse initially entered the Fribourg Visitation in 1811, but only remained a few months, suffering from a severe bout of homesickness. After remaining at home for three painful years, she again entered the monastery, but hesitated at the doorway because she experienced the same repugnance as before. However, her brother and sister,

who had accompanied her, convinced her to try it out for three days and; if she still felt homesick, they would take her home again. Her apprehension immediately dissipated as soon as she heard the monastery door bolted behind her.

4. Chappuis Biography, 86–107. Also see Alexander T. Pocetto, OSFS, “Mary de Sales Chappuis (1793–1875): Apostle of the Salesian Spirit,” *Salesianum* 71 (2009): 321–40, esp. 322–23, 325, 327 (hereafter Pocetto 2009). Chappuis’s life is best understood in the context of the ecclesial tradition of female mystics-apostles, who “mediate glimpses of God’s mysteries intended to expand mankind’s knowledge of his plan for salvation history,” thus “fulfilling a thoroughly prophetic mission, for the benefit of many people” (Wolfgang Riehle, *The Secret Within: Hermits, Recluses, and Spiritual Outsiders in Medieval England*, trans. Charity Scott-Stokes, [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014], 211). This was certainly how Chappuis saw herself: “I am being called to be an apostle and to contribute to the work that God will establish in order to communicate His graces and to expand the diffusion of His divine charity” (Louis Brisson, OSFS, *Chapitres, Retraites, Instructions-et Allocutions*, 7 vols. [Tilburg, The Netherlands: Maison “Ave Maria” 1966–68], 4:126 [hereafter Brisson]). Brisson’s retreat conferences, allocutions, and chapter instructions are also available electronically, in unpaginated format, in the millennium edition (2000) of Brisson’s *Œuvres*, ed. Roger Balducelli, OSFS, assisted by Jean Gayet, OSFS, and the Oblate Sisters of the Motherhouse in Troyes: www.louisbrisson.org. Due to ease of reference by volume and page, here the Tilburg edition is cited throughout. When there is a discrepancy between the Tilburg edition and the millennium edition, priority is given to the latter in translating the French text. Chappuis was absolutely convinced that this mission was “her very *raison d’être*” and the work to which the Lord had called her, and accordingly “she speaks [of it] with all of the confidence and certainty of an Old Testament prophet” (Pocetto 2009, 338–39).

5. Austin Gough, *Paris and Rome: The Gallican Church and the Ultramontane Campaign 1848–1853* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 171 (hereafter Gough). This was the assessment of the papal nuncio in Paris, Archbishop (later Cardinal) Raffaele Fornari (1788–1854; nuncio 1843–50).

6. Pocetto 2009, 327. A radical reform movement within Catholicism that originated in Flanders but whose true home was France; Jansenism espoused positions similar to, and sometimes identical with, those of Calvinism. See Dale K. Van Kley, *Reform Catholicism and the International Suppression of the Jesuits in Enlightenment Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 32 (hereafter Van Kley); Ulrich L. Lehner, *The Catholic Enlightenment: The Forgotten*

History of a Global Movement (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 19–22, 49–53, 170–73 (hereafter Lehner); John W. O'Malley, SJ, *Vatican I: The Council and the Making of the Ultramontane Church* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 32–33.

7. Chappuis Biography, 103; Van Kley, 41.

8. Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet's nephew and namesake, who was bishop of Troyes from 1716 to 1742, was a leading Jansenist, and the liturgical books that he prepared for the diocese were permeated by Jansenist doctrine. See Yvon Beaudoin, OMI, *Father Louis Brisson (1817–1908): A Documented Biography*, trans. several De Sales Oblates and ed. Alexander T. Pocetto, OSFS, and Daniel P. Wisniewski, OSFS (Wilmington, DE: Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, 2008), 21n5, 221 (hereafter Beaudoin); Michael Kwatera, OSB, "Marian Feasts in the Roman, Troyes and Paris Missals and Breviaries and the Critique of Dom Prosper Guéranger" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 1993), 55–66.

9. Beaudoin, 21n5, 25, 221, 268n114. Gallicanism held that the French themselves controlled the church in France, independent of Rome. Gallicans were opposed by Ultramontane Catholics, who looked beyond the Alps to the papacy for guidance. See Lehner, 18–19.

10. Chappuis Biography, 303–12. Also see Beaudoin, 220–21. Bishops Jacques-Louis-David de Séguin des Hons (1826–43) and Pierre-Louis Cœur (1849–60) were well-known Gallicans. A former professor of the Sorbonne and a vigorous defender of Gallican liturgical prerogatives, Cœur was censured by the Holy See for granting a general exemption from the Roman liturgy, which had been restored by his predecessor (Jean-Marie Debelay [1844–48]). See Gough, 169–71; Beaudoin, 21n5.

11. Ralph Gibson, "Hellfire and Damnation in Nineteenth-Century France," *Catholic Historical Review* 74, no. 3 (1988), 383–402, at 385 (hereafter Gibson 1988). Also see his *A Social History of French Catholicism 1789–1914* (New York: Routledge, 1989) (hereafter Gibson 1989); Jean-Louis Quantin, *Le rigorisme chrétien*, Histoire de Christianisme (Paris: Cerf, 2001); and Alexander T. Pocetto, OSFS, "Blessed Louis Brisson (1817–1908), the Laity, and the Social Dimensions of the New Evangelization," *Salesianum* 76 (2014): 121–40, esp. 127–28, 132 (hereafter Pocetto 2014), who examines how Brisson greatly contributed in his ministry to moving away from the religion of fear by consistently focusing on the love of God.

12. Gibson 1988, 385. On the emergence and dominance of rigorism in early modern French Catholicism, see Robin Briggs, *Communities of Belief:*

Cultural and Social Tension in Early Modern France (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

13. Gibson 1989, 247.

14. Chappuis Biography, 254.

15. Louis Brisson, draft of letter of October 14, 1867, to Fr. Claude Perrot, OSB, in the Archives of the Oblate Generalate in Rome, box 30, Einsiedeln Collection (hereafter Perrot letter). I thank Fr. Barry R. Strong, OSFS, Superior General of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, for retrieving and scanning this document.

16. Brisson, 2:152.

17. For example, the aim of the solemn celebration of Francis's beatification that took place in Annecy on April 30, 1662, was "to set ablaze all the hearts of the city's inhabitants in the school of this incomparable Doctor of Divine Love." Barthélémy Magistri, *Cérémonies et résjouissances faites en la ville d'Annessy sur la solennité de la béatification et l'élévation du corps sacré du bienheureux François de Sales, le 30. d'avril. 1662* (Annecy: Pierre Delachinal, 1662), 21, quoted in Agnès Guiderdoni, "Exegetical Immersion: The Festivities on the Occasion of Francis de Sales's Canonisation (1665–1667)," in *Imago Exegetica: Visual Images as Exegetical Instruments, 1400–1700*, ed. Walter S. Melion et al., Intersections: Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Modern Culture 33 (Boston: Brill, 2014), 855–84, at 876. Pope Alexander VII signed the brief of Francis's beatification on December 28, 1661, with the formal ceremony following in St. Peter's Basilica on January 8, 1662. Francis's designation as the Doctor of Divine Love is now commonplace in papal documents: see, e.g., Pope St. Paul VI, *Sabaudiae gemma* (Gem of Savoy): *Apostolic Letter Commemorating the 400th Anniversary of the Birth of St. Francis de Sales, Doctor of the Church*, trans. Neil Kilty, OSFS (Hyattsville, MD: Institute of Salesian Studies, 1967), 4, 8; and Pope St. John Paul II, *Letter on the Fourth Centenary of the Episcopal Ordination of St. Francis de Sales* (Nov. 23, 2002), n. 3 (available at https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/2002/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_20021209_francesco-sales.html). Earlier John Paul referenced Francis as the "Doctor of Love" in a homily given in Annecy, Oct. 7, 1986, during his apostolic pilgrimage to France (available at https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/fr/homilies/1986/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19861007_annecy-francia.html; accessed May 3, 2016).

18. Francis de Sales, *Avertissements aux Confesseurs* (1603 or 1604), in *Oeuvres de saint François de Sales*, Édition complète, 27 vols. (Annecy: J. Niérat et al., 1892–1964), 23:279–97, at 284 (hereafter Annecy edition).

19. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, in Saint François de Sales, *Œuvres*, ed. André Ravier – Roger Devos, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 433 (book 2, ch. 8) (hereafter *Œuvres*). Francis's teaching stood in stark contrast to that of rigorist proto-Jansenist, militant Catholic preachers of the Wars of Religion (1562–1629), as well as later purveyors of a religion of fear. This contrast was salient, e.g., during Francis's 1602 visit to Paris: "His sermons captivated [his listeners] by their direct and simple pronouncements about God's love for man. In elegant French, [He] would exhort his listeners to recall the sufferings of Christ, His compassion for the unfortunate, and the beauty of the love of God for those whom He has created. This seemed like poetry to the Parisians, who for decades had heard nothing but invective and hellfire" (Orest Ranum, *Paris in the Age of Absolutism: An Essay*, rev. and exp. ed. [1968; University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002], 174). For an examination of the contrast between Francis and militant Catholicism, see Thomas A. Donlan, *The Reform of Zeal: François de Sales and Militant French Catholicism*, St. Andrews Studies in French History and Culture (St. Andrews, UK: Centre for French History and Culture of the University of St Andrews, 2018).

20. Only Francis de Sales appeared to be equal to the challenge. The moral theology of St. Alphonsus Liguori (1696–1787), who was influenced by Francis, had aimed to steer a middle course between laxism and Jansenist rigorism by winning back sinners through patience and moderation. However, Liguori's message was inconsistent, as he counseled his Redemptorists "to be lions in the pulpit but lambs in the confessional" (Patrick W. Carey, *Confession: Catholics, Repentance & Forgiveness in America* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2018], 128). This fell well short of the Salesian principle of all through love, nothing through fear: see Francis de Sales, letter of October 14, 1604, to Madame de Chantal, in Ancey edition, 12:352–70, at 359. In fact, the Redemptorists had the reputation of being "the leading specialists in hellfire preaching," sometimes even being described as "Redempt-terrorists" (Gibson 1988, 387). It has recently been noted that after Liguori's death, "the Redemptorists somewhat distorted the heritage of their founder... and they also forgot much of his message" (Lehner, 173). Also see Wendy M. Wright, "The Doctor of Divine Love and Fear of the Lord," in *Saving Fear in Christian Spirituality*, ed. Ann W. Astell (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2020), 182–208. Chappuis and Brisson welcomed introduction of Liguori's moral theology to the seminary of Troyes. See Beaudoin, 25, 252, 334; Wendy M. Wright, *Heart Speaks to Heart: The Salesian Tradition*, Traditions of

Christian Spirituality Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 144 (hereafter Wright 2004); Pocetto 2009, 337–38.

21. Beaudoin, 3–4 (quote at 4).

22. Jean-Émil Fonteneau, archbishop of Albi, letter of January 6, 1887, to Brisson, printed in the 1891 edition of Brisson's *Life of the Venerable Mother Mary de Sales Chappuis*, vi–vii. The text of this letter is also in Beaudoin, 252–53, with quote at 252.

23. Beaudoin, 334.

24. A priest of the diocese of Nîmes, d'Alzon was the founder of the male religious order, the Augustinians of the Assumption (the Assumptionists). He originated the idea of the Association of St. Francis de Sales as a means to assist by prayer and alms those who defended the faith against Protestantism, which was firmly rooted in some regions in southern and western France, though practically nonexistent in the Department of the Aube. The Association received papal approval in 1855, and by 1859 it was established in seventy-two dioceses in France, Belgium, Italy, Spain, and Canada. See Beaudoin, 39–42.

25. De Ségur served as the dynamic president of the Association of St. Francis de Sales from 1857 to 1881, working incessantly for its growth and development. Religiously indifferent in his youth, de Ségur experienced a conversion during a retreat using the meditations in the *Introduction to the Devout Life* as a guide. During his studies for the priesthood at the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice in Paris, he found the warmth and accessibility of Salesian spirituality as a balance to the austere abnegation of the French School. Ordained in 1847, he dedicated himself to the evangelization of the people of Paris, especially children, the poor, and imprisoned soldiers. Five years after ordination, he was appointed as auditor of the Roman Rota, but blindness forced him to resign in 1856 and return to his native Paris, with the honorary rank of archbishop. In his work with the Association of St. Francis de Sales, de Ségur was often in contact with Chappuis and Brisson, whom he regarded as preeminent among the diocesan directors of the Association, singling out "the intelligence and ingenious zeal" with which Brisson carried out this ministry (Beaudoin, 41; Pocetto 2014, 126). See Marthe de Hédouville, *Monseigneur de Ségur: Sa vie - son action 1820–1881* (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 1957); Beaudoin, 39–40; Wright 2004, 129–33.

26. Mermillod served as auxiliary bishop/vicar apostolic (1864–83) and later bishop of Lausanne and Geneva (1883–91). He was elevated to cardinal in 1890. Besides being a major figure in the Salesian Pentecost, Mermillod played an important role in the development of Catholic social teaching that served as

the foundation for Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, On the Condition of Labor (1891).

27. Pocetto 2014, 123.
28. Beaudoin, 39; Pocetto 2014, 124.
29. Pocetto 2014, 124.
30. Beaudoin, 39–44.
31. Pocetto 2014, 124–25.
32. See, e.g., “Troyes,” in *The Grove Encyclopedia of Northern Renaissance Art*, ed. Gordon Campbell; 3 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3:417–18.
33. Colin Heywood, “Learning Democracy in France: Popular Politics in Troyes, c. 1830–1900,” *The Historical Journal* 47, no. 4 (2004): 921–39, at 924.
34. Beaudoin, 44–45.
35. Beaudoin, 45–46; Pocetto 2014, 135.
36. Beaudoin, 40–49; Pocetto 2014, 126–29.
37. Marie-Aimée d’Esmanges, *To Forget Myself Entirely: Mother Frances de Sales, 1844–1914*, trans. Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales (Childs, MD: Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales, 1991), 19–30 (hereafter d’Esmanges).
38. Chappuis Biography, 395–402.
39. St. Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621) was one of the most renowned and prolific Jesuit theologians of the early modern era. After a distinguished career as a teacher and then rector of the Roman College, Bellarmine served as papal theologian and was later elevated to cardinal in 1599, in which capacity he was a member of several key curial congregations. For a brief time, he was also archbishop of Capua (1602–5).
40. Denis-Simon de Marquemont (1572–1626) was archbishop of Lyon (1612–26), being elevated to cardinal in January 1626.
41. Louis de la Rivière (1593–1670) wrote one of the first biographies of St. Francis de Sales: *La vie de l’Illustrissime et Reverendissime François de Sales* (Lyon, 1624), with subsequent editions in 1625, 1626, 1627, and 1631. A Franciscan Minim, de la Rivière had preached the Lenten sermons in Annecy in 1616 and knew Francis well.
42. On Mermillod, see n. 26 above.
43. Emmanuel-Jules Ravinet (1801–81), a priest of the Archdiocese of Paris, was ordained as bishop of Troyes in 1861, serving in that capacity until his retirement in 1875.
44. Séguin des Hons was ordained bishop of Troyes in 1826 and served in that capacity until his death seventeen years later. Also see n. 10 above.

45. All Aviat texts that follow were translated by Sr. Audrey Frances Moran, OSFS, whose generous collaboration is gratefully acknowledged.
46. Wright 2004, 60, 159.
47. *Résumé des Noviciats faits par N.T.H. Mère Françoise de Sales Aviat aux premières novices de l’Institut et rédigés de mémoire par l’une d’elles* (Perugia, 1916; reprint, 1966).
48. Preserved in the archives of the Motherhouse of the Oblate Sisters in Troyes.
49. The booklet is entitled *Collection of Thoughts Drawn from the Letters of Our Venerable Mother Frances de Sales Aviat*.
50. The original, preserved in the archives of the Motherhouse of the Oblate Sisters in Troyes, is carefully formatted, written in clear handwriting, and has a decorative border. The words are Mother Aviat’s.
51. Beaudoin, 93.
52. See Brisson’s “Notes to Show That the Institute of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales Is Not a New Idea,” in the archives of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in Rome (Beaudoin, 123n5).
53. Brisson, 4:124.
54. Brisson, 4:127.
55. Gibson 1989, 80–87, 98–99; Gough, 1–21.
56. Salesian/Oblate Chronology, 272.
57. Brisson, 3:16.
58. Gibson 1989, 98–99; Pocetto 2014, 140.
59. Brisson, 4:126.
60. *Résumé des Retraites Prêchées aux jeunes Ouvrières des Œuvres des Oblates de Saint François de Sales à Troyes de 1870 à 1901 par leur Fondateur Le Vénéré Père Louis Brisson* (Perugia: Imprimerie G. Squartinini, 1927); 118, cited by Pocetto 2014; 132n37. As Pocetto importantly points out, the word *apostle* had special significance for Brisson: it was closely associated with Brisson’s conception of the church, as well as Mother Chappuis, whose mission was to be an apostle of the Salesian spirit (see Pocetto 2009). He believed that the Oblates continued the evangelizing mission of the apostles and of Christ himself and thus extended the Savior’s love to all those whom they were called to evangelize.
61. Pocetto 2014, 130–32, 136. Brisson made this point in his catechism classes for the girls working in the factories in Troyes by explaining “that by our fundamental purpose of being created to know, love, and serve God, we are also called to make him known, loved, and served by others, particularly in one’s own family. Those who do so, he calls ‘apostles of the love of God’” (Pocetto

2014, 132). Likewise, Brisson understood reception of the Eucharist as “not intended merely for one’s own personal devotion but [it] must make us more aware of others and their needs. It makes us ‘become more charitable, generous... makes us see God in others... [Thus,] we must take God wherever we go,’ as ‘apostles of the love of God’” (Pocetto 2014, 136).

62. Brisson, 4:129.

63. Brisson, 4:123–33.

64. “Male anxiety” about the foundational role that women sometimes have in a male religious order or congregation is well documented: see, e.g., Christopher C. Wilson, “Masculinity Restored: The Visual Shaping of St. John of the Cross,” *Archive for Reformation History* 98, no. 1 (2007): 134–66.

65. Pierre-Tobie Yenni (1774–1845) was bishop of the Diocese of Lausanne and Geneva (1815–45), with residence at Fribourg.

66. Chappuis Biography, 260.

67. Beaudoin, 343.

68. Chappuis Biography, 259–61.

69. Chappuis Biography, 396.

70. Chappuis Biography, 395.

71. Brisson, 1:120.

72. Brisson, 1:120.

73. In the pre-Vatican II liturgical calendar, the Feast of St. Francis de Sales was assigned to January 29; in the current calendar, it is celebrated on January 24.

74. Brisson, 3:10–14.

75. Auguste-Marie de Mayerhoffer, OSFS (1856–1918), was chaplain to the Second Monastery of the Visitation in Paris and ministered to Brisson at the hour of his death. See Beaudoin, 301.

76. During a visit to Annecy in April 1869, Brisson had an apparition of St. Jane de Chantal in the chapel of the Visitation Monastery. The saint communicated, among other things, how pleased she was by the founding of the Oblates since that had been the ardent desire of her life. See Beaudoin, 343–44.

77. See *Œuvres*, 657–59 (*Treatise on the Love of God*, book 6, ch. 15).

78. *St. Francis de Sales: A Testimony by St. Chantal*, newly edited in translation with an introduction by Elisabeth Stopp (Hyattsville, MD: Institute of Salesian Studies, 1967), 96 (hereafter *A Testimony by St. Chantal*). For further testimony on this topic, see “Letter of December 1623 from Jane Frances de Chantal to Dom Jean de Saint-François,” in *A Testimony by St. Chantal*, 165–72, esp. 172; and Vincent de Paul, “Deposition at the Process of Beatification of

Francis de Sales (April 17, 1628),” in Saint Vincent de Paul, *Correspondance, Conferances, Documents*, ed. and trans. Marie Poole, DC, et al., 14 vols. (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1985–2014), 13a: 91 (Article 38).

79. Chappuis Biography, 445. Brisson frequently attests to this conviction of Chappuis: see, e.g., Brisson, 1:19, 58, 192, 254; 2:39, 330; 3:96, 220, 352, 421, 490, 531; 4:63.

80. Brisson, 3:10.

81. Anthony R. Ceresko, OSFS, “St. Francis de Sales’s *Spiritual Directory* for a New Century: Re-interpreting the ‘Direction of Intention,’” in his *St. Francis de Sales and the Bible* (Bangalore: SFS Publications, 2005), 110–27, at 111–12 (originally published in *Indian Journal of Spirituality* 14 [2001]: 377–91) (hereafter Ceresko).

82. Wright 2004, 140–41; Pocetto 2009, 328–31.

83. Like the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, the *Spiritual Directory* stood at the head of a substantial body of early-modern French devotional manuals and catechisms that aimed to teach their readers how to organize each hour of the day so as to benefit from the God-given opportunity to gain eternal beatitude. See Mette Birkedal Bruun, “Time Well Spent: Scheduling Private Devotion in Early Modern France,” in *Managing Time: Literature and Devotion in Early Modern France*, ed. Richard Maber and Joanna Barker, *Medieval and Early Modern French Studies* 15 (New York: Peter Lang, 2017), 35–68.

84. Alexander T. Pocetto, OSFS, “The *Spiritual Directory* in the American Oblate Tradition,” 7, unpublished paper, available online at https://www.desales.edu/docs/default-source/salesian-center-docs/salesian--fr.-pocetto/spir-direct.pdf?sfvrsn=2d632761_2.

85. Ceresko, 114.

86. “The *Spiritual Directory*,” in *The Constitutions, the General Statues, and the Spiritual Directory of the Oblates of Saint Francis de Sales*, 191–229, at 192–93.

87. *Œuvres*, 142 (*Introduction to the Devout Life*, part 3, ch. 8).

88. Wright 2004, 33, 41; Joseph F. Chorpenning, OSFS, “*Lectio divina* and Francis de Sales’s Picturing of the Interconnection of Human and Divine Hearts,” in *Imago Exegetica: Visual Images as Exegetical Instruments, 1400–1700*, ed. Walter S. Melion et al., *Intersections: Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Modern Culture* 33 (Boston: Brill, 2014), 449–77, esp. 459, 462.

89. Chappuis Biography, 444.

90. Chappuis Biography, 445.

91. Brisson, 3:140–43.

92. Brisson's linking of Francis de Sales and Vincent de Paul (1581-1660) is not accidental since the Doctor of Divine Love had served as a spiritual and priestly mentor to the Apostle of Charity: see, e.g., José María Román, CM, *St. Vincent de Paul: A Biography*, trans. Sr. Joyce Howard, DC (London: Melisende, 1999), 149-56. During his 1618-19 sojourn in Paris, Francis de Sales was invited to give a series of conferences for priests, which were the inspiration for Vincent de Paul's later "Tuesday Conferences" that played an important role in the renewal of the clergy (See E.-J. Lajeunie, OP, *Saint Francis de Sales: The Man, the Thinker, His Influence*, trans. Rory O'Sullivan, OSFS, 2 vols. (Bangalore: SFS Publications, 1986-87), 2:417-18; André Ravier, SJ, *Francis de Sales: Sage & Saint*, trans. Joseph D. Bowler, OSFS (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 227 (hereafter Ravier). For his part, Vincent sought to create a new type of priest, as would Chappuis and Brisson in their era: "When [Vincent] began to give the much-needed missions to the poor country people he made a discovery... which revealed to him that there was urgent need for a new type of priest. This new type of priest must not be content simply to contemplate Christ the Eternal Priest offering Himself to the Father, but rather one who carries the living Christ into the marketplace of the neglected people, especially the poor and the destitute" (James Cahalan, "St. Vincent and the Priesthood," *Colloquy: Journal of the Irish Province of the Congregation of the Mission* 7 [Spring 1983]: 51-58, at 53).

93. "The Roman Pontifical is the episcopal ritual containing the rites (formularies and rubrics) for sacraments and sacramentals celebrated by a bishop, especially the consecration of the holy oils and the sacraments of confirmation and holy orders.

94. The Jansenists held that the early church was the model of perfection, which was gradually eroded by what they considered the usurping and ever more domineering papacy. See Van Kléy, 26-27.

95. *Ceuvres*, 39 (*Introduction to the Devout Life*, part 1, ch. 4). However, Francis de Sales cautions confessors that they are not angels (Annecy edition, 23:282).

96. Perrot letter.

97. Pocetto, "The *Spiritual Directory* in the American Oblate Tradition," 3-4.

98. St. Francis de Sales, *On the Preacher and Preaching*, trans. with an introduction and notes by John K. Ryan (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964; repr. Stella Niagara, NY: DeSales Resource Center, 2020).

99. Pocetto 2014, 138.

100. Pocetto 2014, 129, 135, 138.

101. Gibson 1989, 23.

102. Gibson 1989, 221.

103. *A Testimony by St. Chantal*, 138 (Article 46).

104. Brisson, 5:268.

105. Pocetto 2009, 333.

106. Brisson, 5:106-7. This text has been translated by Alexander T. Pocetto, OSFS, who suggested it as a particularly apt example of Brisson's theology/spirituality of work, for which the author is deeply grateful.

107. "Holy Mother Church has, moreover, instituted sacramentals. These are sacred signs which bear a resemblance to the sacraments. They signify effects, particularly of a spiritual nature, which are obtained through the intercession of the Church. By them men are disposed to receive the chief effect of the sacraments, and various occasions in life are rendered holy." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., no. 1667).

108. Pocetto 2009, 333.

109. Faced with a changed economic reality, the church's approach to the new circumstances was twofold: direct assistance and the formulation of ethical norms. As Matthew E. Bunson has indicated, "Direct assistance was provided through hospitals and schools, as epitomized in Italy by St. John Bosco and the Salesians and in France by Frédéric Ozanam and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. There were as well the efforts of Christian industrialists, such as Léon Harmel in France, who lived with his own employees. Bishops around the world provided leadership, including Bishop (Cardinal from 1890) Mermillod of Geneva and Lausanne, Cardinal Manning of Westminster, Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore, Bishop Ireland of Minneapolis, and Cardinal Moran of Sydney" ("Pope of the Worker," Dec. 1, 2007, at <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/pope-of-the-worker> [retrieved September 28, 2018]). In tandem with these efforts, an original body of Catholic teaching was developed that sought to understand the new social problems and to formulate solutions based on the gospel. "In France, Villeneuve de Bargemont wrote an 1834 treatise on political and Christian life, while in Germany, Bishop Wilhelm E. von Ketteler of Mainz helped launch a Catholic social movement that expanded swiftly across Europe after 1870. [Pope] Leo [XIII] later called von Ketteler 'our great predecessor from whom I have learned'... Finally, the Fribourg Union, founded in 1884 and headed by Mermillod, brought together various leaders in the nascent Catholic social movement" (Bunson).

110. Gibson 1989, 161; Pocetto 2014, 127.

111. Gough, 1. Also see Gibson 1989, 80–87.
112. Wright 2004, 182n15; Chorpenning, 456–59. In the post-Vatican II era, there has been a burgeoning literature on *lectio divina*, attesting to the growing interest in and popularity of this slow, meditative approach to the sacred text. One of the most influential contemporary promoters and practitioners of *lectio divina*—the Jesuit biblical scholar Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini—looked to Francis de Sales as a guide for this prayerful approach to Scripture. See Carlo Maria Martini, SJ, *The Gospel Way of Mary: A Journey of Trust and Surrender*, trans. Marsha Daigle-Williamson (Frederick, MD: The Word Among Us Press, 2011), 31–35.
113. Terence McGoldrick, “The Living Word: Francis de Sales, A Humanist Biblical Theologian of the Renaissance,” in *Love Is the Perfection of the Mind: Salesian Studies Presented to Alexander T. Pocetto, OSFS, on the Occasion of His 90th Birthday*, ed. Joseph R. Chorpenning, OSFS; Thomas F. Dailey, OSFS; and Daniel P. Wisniewski, OSFS (Center Valley, PA: Salesian Center for Faith and Culture, 2017), 83–101, at 92. The description of Francis as the “the gospel speaking” is found in “Déposition de M. Vincent au procès de béatification de saint François de Sales, version française, 1628,” in John Rybolt, CM, *Saint Vincent de Paul / Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Unpublished Documents, Part 1 (2020), 174–87, at 178 (https://via.library.depaul.edu/coste_en/3, accessed May 14, 2020). The word *parlant* can also be translated as “revealing” (as in, he revealed the gospel), as well as “speaking” or even “eloquent.” I am grateful to Dr. Suzanne Tocyski for this observation.
114. Brisson, 4:209–11.
115. Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704), a French bishop and theologian, is renowned as one of the most brilliant preachers of all time. He was instructed in preaching by St. Vincent de Paul, specifically his “Little Method,” which in turn was influenced by St. Francis de Sales’s theory and practice of preaching. See Edward R. Udovic, CM, “On the Eminent Dignity of the Poor in the Church: A Sermon by Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet,” *Vincentian Heritage Journal* 13/1 (1992): 37–58, esp. 43.
116. Chappuis’s Bible was a two-volume folio edition, illustrated with engravings by Gustave Doré (1832–83), the most popular French designer of wood-engraved book illustration of the mid-nineteenth century. Today this Bible rests on the table beside the Good Mother’s deathbed in her room in the Troyes Visitation Monastery, which has been preserved intact. For a photo of this room, see ICSS (International Commission for Salesian Studies) *Newsletter* 21 (March 2008): 6, fig. 9.

117. Fr. Cyrille Chevalier (1801–61), a priest of the Diocese of Troyes and professor of moral theology at the diocesan seminary, was the teacher and long-time friend of Brisson. Chevalier frequently visited the Troyes Visitation Monastery to confer with Chappuis.
118. Brisson, 7:245–50.
119. Anancy edition, 23:303.
120. On his arrival in Paris in 1618, Francis de Sales was hailed as “the greatest theologian of [his] time” (Ravier, 222). When his masterwork, *Treatise on the Love of God*, was published (1616), the Sorbonne and the Jesuits declared that this work placed Francis de Sales among the ranks of the four great doctors of the Western Church—Augustine (354–430), Jerome (ca. 345–420), Ambrose (ca. 339–97), and Gregory the Great (ca. 540–604). See M. Hamon, *Vie de Saint François de Sales*, 6th ed., 2 vols. (Paris-Lyon: Librairie Jacques-Lecoffre, 1875), 2:180.
121. For an introduction to Thérèse’s Little Way, see Ernest Larkin, O’Carm, “The Little Way of St. Thérèse of Lisieux,” *Review for Religious* 59, no. 5 (2000): 507–17.
122. Brisson, 6:315–16.
123. Brisson’s *Life of the Venerable Mother Mary de Sales Chappuis* was first published in 1886. A second edition appeared in 1891.
124. Here Brisson likely has in mind the article “Une nouvelle école de spiritualité,” by the Jesuit Henri Watrigant, SJ, published in *Études publiées par les Pères de la Compagnie de Jésus* 79 (June 5, 1899): 614–32. Subsequently, Watrigant expanded his article into a book, entitled *Deux méthodes de spiritualité: Étude critique* [Two methods of spirituality: A critical study] (Lille-Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1900).
125. Johann Georg Hagen (1847–1930) was an Austrian Jesuit priest and astronomer. In 1880, he immigrated to the United States, eventually becoming a naturalized citizen. In 1888, Hagen was appointed director of the Georgetown University Observatory, where he published a number of important articles and books in the fields of astronomy and mathematics. In 1906, Pope St. Pius X (1835–1914, r. 1903–14) appointed him as the first Jesuit director of the Vatican Observatory, in which position he served until his death in 1930. Hagen was also the spiritual director of Maria Elizabeth Hesselblad (1870–1957), who was baptized by him in 1902 and canonized a saint by Pope Francis in 2016. The crater Hagen, 55 km in diameter, on the far side of the moon, is named for him.

