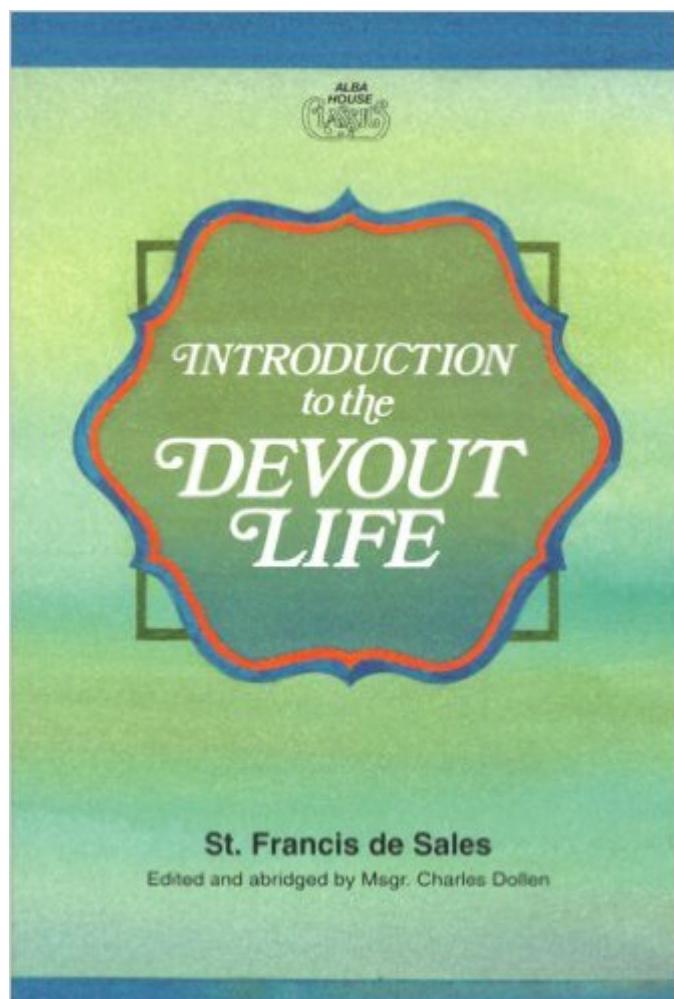


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Introduction To The Devout Life



Synopsis

Francis de Sales's *Introduction to the Devout Life* has remained a uniquely accessible and relevant treasure of devotion for nearly four hundred years. As Bishop of Geneva in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, Francis de Sales saw to the spiritual needs of everyone from the poorest peasants to court ladies. The desire to be closer to God that he found in people from all levels of society led him to compile these instructions on how to live in Christ. Francis's compassionate *Introduction* leads the reader through practical ways of attaining a devout life without renouncing the world and offers prayers and meditations to strengthen devotion in the face of temptation and hardship.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

What more can be said about a work that during the four hundred years since its birth (1609) has never gone out of print, and is still garnering the highest praise from Christians of all denominations? A 'classic,' it truly is--'a masterpiece of mystical and devotional literature' (p. 13). *INTRODUCTION TO THE DEVOUT LIFE* (hereafter, *IDL*) by Francis de Sales (John K. Ryan, ed.) (New York: Doubleday, Image Books, 1972) is the distillation of the written correspondence exchanged between the Roman Catholic bishop, Francis de Sales and his relative by marriage, Mademoiselle de Charmoisy (Marie de Chastel). Published only coincidentally when Marie showed the letters to the Jesuit priest, Père Jean Fourier, who subsequently persuaded Francis to prepare them for publication. It is no wonder that Francis has been honored as the 'patron saint of writers'.

His illustrations--frequently derived from nature--are always rich and informative, but sometimes overly florid. For example, he defines 'devotion' as: 'the delight of delights and queen of the virtues since it is the perfection of charity. If charity is milk, devotion is its cream; if it is a plant, devotion is its blossom; if it is a precious stone, devotion is its luster; if it is a rich ointment, devotion is its odor, yes, the odor of sweetness which comforts men and rejoices angels' (p. 43). Francis has also been deemed a 'Doctor of the Church' for his wisdom. Take for example this comment on the exercise of certain virtues: 'Occasions do not often present themselves for the exercise of fortitude, magnanimity, and great generosity, but meekness, temperance, integrity, and humility are virtues that must mark all our actions. We like sugar better than salt but salt is in more common and frequent use' (p. 121).

Saint Francis de Sales-patron saint of authors and writers and eminent Doctor of the Catholic Church-is quite deserving of his posthumous honors and titles, for with Introduction to the Devout Life (among his numerous other books and pamphlets), he gives to not only Catholics around the world but humanity in general, a religious, informative yet readable work of theology that will aid in answering some of the fundamental questions of human existence. But more importantly, in the Introduction to the Devout Life, "St. Francis de Sales gives one of the clearest statements in religious literature of the theory and practice of the purgative way, the illuminative way, and the unitive way, the three levels of thought and conduct that are required for a completely moral and religious life..." Page 14. That is the gist of this work; for those individuals (which would indeed, unfortunately, be a large number) who are not destined for a religious vocation or a life of monastic contemplation, the lessons contained within the Introduction to the Devout Life (if at least minutely adhered to) can become a moral and religious compass for individuals who are frightfully lost as a result of the freewheeling sexualization of society, unrepentant, insolent amour propre, the rise of unceasing materialism and other debasing wounds that can cause spiritual deadness and thus can become none too quick to heal. Written in a similar style to that of the Dialogue of Saint Catherine of Siena, the book, however, is in the format of St. Francis writing down answers to a female pupil named Philothea and not a one-on-one conversation as in the Dialogue, but Introduction to the Devout Life is similar in idea.

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