

De Sales Discussions

Authentic Devotion: A Modern Interpretative

by Bernard Bangle

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SPIRITUALITY SERVICES

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www.oblates.org/dss

dss@oblates.org

**A Discussion Group on the
Authentic Devotion:
A Modern Interpretative**

**Based upon the
Introduction to the Devout Life
By Francis de Sales**

by Bernard Bangley

Bernard Bangley provides us with a refreshingly new and contemporary presentation of the *Introduction to the Devout Life* that is also strikingly faithful to the spirit and intention of St. Francis de Sales. We hope that Bangley's effort will lead you to read the *Introduction to the Devout Life* in its entirety.

We have provided you with a number of questions for each section. We suggest that you review the questions before reading each chapter in order to glean some of the suggested highlights from each section.

Avoid feeling constrained to address all the questions for each chapter in one session. You (and your group) may choose to consider only a few questions in one session. You could also spread out the questions for each chapter over several sessions.

After you have read each section, ask yourself...

- 1) What touched you in that section?
- 2) What are the most important points, feelings, truths that you want to hold on to, to incorporate in your own life?
- 3) Is he affirming values or teachings that you already believe?
- 4) Is he challenging something that you presently believe?

General Discussion Guidelines and Hints

A discussion is a group of people engaged in conversation. This is a natural human activity: an interesting, exciting and creative experience. Discussion is a shared pursuit of responsive understanding -- of yourself, others and the material under consideration.

The purpose of leaders is to be a catalyst. They are present to help everyone (1) make a thoughtful examination of the meaning of the material to be discussed and the problems it presents, (2) clarify their thinking and feeling about the problems, and (3) decide their individual response. It is not presumed that leaders necessarily know more about the subject under discussion, but that they are trained and prepared to lead this discussion and offer this special kind of assistance to the group.

Don't expect pre-packaged or 'right' answers. Neither the leader nor a member of the group will provide a conclusive answer at the end of the discussion. Each of you will try to find personally satisfying answers; your pursuit of answers may continue long after any particular discussion period ends. The discussion provides information and deepened understanding, but the real answers will be your personal response to life and the world.

What Happens Before the Discussion?

Read over the text selection at least once and preferably twice, first for general comprehension and second for attention to specifics. On the second reading, underline words and phrases you consider important, and make notes in the margins of anything you did not understand; questions you would like to ask your group, and examples or applications that occur to you; What important ideas does it convey? How? Do these ideas conflict with other ideas or feelings you have? Are problem situations presented? How would you behave in such situations? Why?

What can I do to participate well in the discussion?

- Be committed and involved in the group.
- Treat others in the group with support and respect, even if you disagree with their views.
- Express support and agreement with others when appropriate.
- Be mindful of your nonverbal communication and behavior when you are not speaking

- Stick to the point.
- Say it in the group (not before or after to a few friends).
- Respect the confidentiality of others' disclosures.
- Make the meetings. It's difficult to re-create the discussion experience for you, and the group suffers from your absence and input when you're not there.
- Stay on the subject. Speak about the text, your reactions and others' responses.
- Speak to the entire group, not just one person.
- Seek your own understanding. Don't accept another's view as your own unless it makes sense to you.
- Be sure you understand what another is saying. This is especially true when you disagree with him or her.

(Adapted from E. W. Flynn and J. F. La Faso, Group Discussion as Learning Process: a Source book. Paulist Press, 1972)

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Chapter 1

Instructions for Beginning to Fully Living the Devout Life

1. What is my understanding of "true devotion"? How have the thoughts of de Sales affected my understanding?

2. "God commands Christians... to exercise devotion in a manner that is appropriate to occupation and condition." What does this mean for me?

3. How am I engaged in the gradual process of removing anything in my life that stands in the way of my union with God?

4. How might a general confession help me to see who I am and fill me with gratitude?

5. Where have the nine meditations led me in my relationship with God?

6. Can I be completely honest with God? What may still hold me back?

7. Am I ready to make a serious agreement with God about the direction of my life?

4. How can remembering that I am living in God's presence affect my day?

5. Am I attentive to God's inspirations within me? Do I follow them?

6. How are confession and communion a part of my prayer life?

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Chapter 3**

The Challenge of Christian Living

1. What virtues are most in demand in my life right now?
2. What have I read that can help me to be more patient in daily living?
3. What advice on humility can I use best?

4. How can these thoughts on gentleness help me with anger?

5. Can I use de Sales' advice: "Rebuke yourself gently"?

6. Do I care without worrying? How might I need to improve my ability to do this?

7. How do I understand the freedom of spiritual poverty?

8. What are my friendships based on?

9. How might inscribing "Live Jesus" on my heart show itself in my daily living?

10. "The tongue can also be a guide to diagnosing the condition of the soul."
What does my tongue say about me?

11. How do I treat the good name of others in my speech?

12. Why should I take time to relax in my daily life?

13. How can I better handle the inconveniences of life?

14. How well do I exhibit rationality, the distinguishing mark of being human?

15. If I am married, how well do I honor the divine dimension of my marriage?

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Temptations and Setbacks

1. How might the "world" be tempting me back?

2. Do I recognize the difference between temptation and sin? Where is my heart?

3. How do I deal with anxiety and sadness?

4. Is my devotion a constant, determined, prompt, and active will to do what I know pleases God?

5. How dependent am I on God when I feel spiritually "dry"?

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Chapter 5**

Renewing the Spiritual Life

1. Do I take time yearly for a retreat to renew my determination to lead a devout life?

2. Am I grateful for how the Spirit has led me to where I am with God today?

3. Am I willing to do an honest and gentle introspection as outlined by Francis de Sales?

4. Will I meditate on one point each day?

5. How do I understand final three instructions? How do they speak to me?

Evaluation
A Discussion Group on
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1. In broad strokes, my experience of this discussion program was

Poor 2 Good 4 Excellent

2. What I learned during this discussion series was...

Not useful 2 Useful 4 Very Useful

3. During this discussion program, I really liked...

4. I would have enjoyed the discussion program more if...

5. Would you like to see a program like this to continue? If so, what Salesian topics or works would you like to explore?

6. Would you suggest any changes to the time, duration, and frequency of the discussion group?

Your Name _____ Date _____

Name of Parish/School/Ministry _____