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De Sales Discussions

Heart Speaks to Heart: The Salesian Tradition

by Wendy M. Wright

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De Sales

SPIRITUALITY CENTER

1120 Blue Ball Road
Childs, MD 21916
410-398-3027
www.oblates.org/spirituality

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 a leader is to be a catalyst. He/she is 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 a leader necessarily knows more about the subject under discussion, but that the person is 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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After you have read each section,

- 1) What touched you in that section?
- 2) What are the most important points, feelings, truths that you want to live, to incorporate in your own life?
- 3) Is this book affirming some things that you already believe?
- 4) Is this book challenging some things that you already believe?
- 5) Is this book causing you to reflect upon things in a new way?

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Chapter 2: A World of Hearts: Francis de Sales

a) How do I appreciate Francis de Sales as speaking “heart to heart”?

Early years

b) How do I appreciate the world and time in which Francis lived?

c) How was theological thought of his day involved in his crisis in Paris?

d) How did this struggle influence his later spirituality? With optimism?

e) How did his study in Padua contribute to his spiritual growth?

f) How do I appreciate his *Spiritual Exercises* for his student life?

g) How do I understand his daily practice of “sacred sleep”?

Missionary and Spiritual Guide

h) How do I appreciate Francis’ method of conversion and persuasion?

i) How do I understand “devout humanism”?

Bishop of Geneva

- j) How do I understand Francis' idea of "devotion"?
- k) How do I understand the centerpiece of Francis' spiritual vision: Jesus, humble and gentle of heart?
- l) How did Francis weave his ideas of spirituality into a "world of hearts"?
- m) How do I understand Francis' notion of "discipleship"?

Teaching the Love of Others

- n) Why are "all forms of human communion and communication" essential in Salesian spirituality?

o) Why would Francis see love as “the bond of perfection”?

Pastoral Work

p) How do I understand Francis’ treatment of each heart as unique?

The Treatise

q) How do I understand Francis’ teaching on “living between the two wills of God”?

r) How do I understand Francis’ teaching on the “love of conformity”?

s) How do I understand Francis' teaching on the "love of submission"?

Last Years

t) How do I understand Francis' maxim: "Ask for nothing, refuse nothing"?

The Little Virtues

l) How do I understand “doing little things with great love”?

m) How do I understand the Salesian virtue of “gentleness – *douceur*”?

n) How do I understand Jane’s advice to superiors about gentleness?

The Martyrdom of Love

o) How do I understand the “bonds” which linked the Visitation communities?

p) How do I understand Jane’s prayer - life?

q) How would Visitandine prayer lead to a relationship with Jesus on Calvary?

r) How do I understand Jane's handling of difficulties by "abandoning herself to the will of God's good pleasure"?

s) How do I understand Jane's comments on the "martyrdom of love"?

Later Years

t) How do I understand Jane's approach to the deaths of children and friends?

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Chapter 4: 'A Great Light' -- Diffusion of the Salesian Spirit

a) How did the spirituality of Francis and Jane continue?

Portraits of the Founders

b) How does the quote from Camus help me to understand Salesian spirituality?

c) How do I understand Jane's words about Francis living between the two wills of God?

d) How do I understand Chaugy's words about Jane and the night before entering the Visitation?

The Literary Legacy

e) How do I understand the value of Francis' Introduction to the Devout Life?

f) How do I understand Francis' encouragement to form a "spiritual bouquet" at the end of meditation?

g) What do I find appealing about Francis' advice on virtue?

h) How do I understand Francis' advice on friendship?

Continuing Influence

i) How do I understand that the images of the saints often reflect changing times in the Church?

Continuing Influence: The French School

j) How did Francis influence French spirituality?

Continuing Influence: The Vincentian School

k) How do I understand Francis and Jane's influence on Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac?

Continuing Influence: Raymond Bonal

l) How do I understand the influence of Francis and Jane on Raymond Bonal and the Priests of the Visitation of Mary?

Continuing Influence: Theological Controversies

m) How do I understand the controversy involving Fenelon and Francis' writings?

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Chapter 5: Margaret Mary Alacoque and the Sacred Heart

a) How was the Sacred Heart of Jesus pictured on the Visitation coat of arms and profession cross?

b) How was the “Heart of Jesus” seen in Church history and piety?

Early Years

c) How do I understand “the exchange of hearts” in Margaret Mary’s mystical experience?

Expansion of the Devotion

d) How do I understand Margaret Mary’s thoughts in her letter to Jesuit Jean Croiset?

Jesuit Support

e) How do I understand devotion to the Sacred Heart as a fitting devotion to re-evangelize France?

f) How do I understand the Sacred Heart as becoming the emblem of Counter-Revolution in France?

g) How do I understand devotion to the Sacred Heart as Salesian?

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Chapter 6: The Nineteenth Century “Salesian Pentecost”

a) How do I understand Francis’ image of Jacob’s ladder and love?

b) How did Francis’ writings influence Alphonsus Liguori?

Apostles of the Chablais: The Missionaries from Annecy

c) How did Francis’ spirituality influence Fr. Mermier and the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales?

d) How did Mermier’s “parish mission” continue the work of Francis?

Henri Chaumont...and the Daughters of St. Francis De Sales

- j) How do I understand Salesian influence on Henri Chaumont?

- k) How do I understand Salesian influence on Caroline Carre and the Daughters of St. Francis de Sales?

The Spiritual Directory: Oblates and Oblate Sisters

- l) How do I understand the importance of the Spiritual Directory in the life of Marie de Sales Chappuis?

- m) How do I understand “The Way” of Marie de Sales Chappuis?

- n) How do I understand the “serenity” of Marie de Sales Chappuis?

- o) How do I understand “reprinting the Gospel” of Louis Brisson and the Good Mother?

p) How do I understand Salesian spirituality in the life of Leonie Aviat and the Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales?

q) How do I understand the importance of practicing of the Directory to the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales?

r) How do I understand Fr. Brisson's appreciation of the mystery of the Incarnation in the lives of Christians, especially Oblates?

English Admirers and Pious Ladies

s) How do I understand Salesian spirituality influencing England?

Dom Mackey and the Library of St. Francis De Sales

t) How do I understand the contributions of Dom Mackey to Salesian spirituality?

The Salesian Spirit in America

u) How do I understand the Salesian influence on Elizabeth Seton?

v) How do I appreciate the Salesian influence on John Carroll?

The Visitation in America

w) How do I understand the founding of the Visitation at Georgetown?

x) How does the Salesian spirit express itself with the “nunz in the hood”?

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Chapter 7: Holiness, the Second Vatican Council and the Salesian Saints

a) How do I understand the Salesian Influence on the Second Vatican Council?

b) How do I appreciate Francis “world of hearts”?

c) How do I understand “Salesian” holiness?

Evaluation
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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 _____