The great facility with and sensitivity to *le mot juste* that Francis de Sales exhibited in his writings sharpened his awareness of how our words and intentions can easily be misunderstood and/or misinterpreted, especially in delicate matters dealing with spiritual guidance and cultivating the memory of the heart. We note this awareness in the very first sentence of his 14 October 1604 letter to Jane de Chantal where he writes: “May God give me as much power as I have will to make my self understood in this letter.”¹ He had a great gift of reading hearts and attributed this to God inclining “many people to give him the key of their hearts, indeed of unlocking them for him so that he could better see what was inside.”² His persuasive, gentle, supportive and encouraging manner of speaking and writing invited this responsiveness.

As a Latinist³, Francis de Sales was well aware of the etymology of the French word “*sentiment.*” The word “*sentiment*” is formed from the two Latin words “*sensus*” (sense) and “*mens*” (mind). The multiple meanings of *sensus*: ‘perception’, ‘observation’, ‘feeling,’ ‘consciousness,’ ‘a sense,’ ‘emotion,’ ‘manner of thinking,’ ‘signification of a word,’ ‘meaning’ - as well as that of *mens*: ‘the mind,’ ‘opinion,’ ‘way of thinking,’ ‘character,’ ‘understanding,’ ‘reason,’ ‘the mind as the seat of feeling,’ ‘intellect,’ ‘judgment,’ and ‘thoughts’⁴ – are very revealing and enriching. The very word itself embodies both head and heart, body and mind – our cognitive, affective and volitional faculties.

It is the purpose of this study to examine the many meanings of the word “*sentiment*” and the ways that Francis

---

³ “*Latiniste, familier de bonne heure avec la langue latine qui était pour lui comme une seconde langue maternelle, il a rédigé, comme au moyen âge, la plus grande partie de ses sermons ou plans de sermons*” Albert Deplanque, *Saint François de Sales, humanist et écrivain latin* (Lille, Facultés catholique, 1907), 173: [https://archive.org/details/saintfranoisdes00delpgoog](https://archive.org/details/saintfranoisdes00delpgoog).
de Sales uses this word and its qualifiers, particularly in some selected letters, the Spiritual Conferences and The Treatise on the Love God, that may add to our understanding of his approach to spiritual guidance and of the illusive mind-body problem. The frequent and numerous uses that he makes of the word “sentiment” affords us the opportunity to look into his mind and heart as well as of those with whom he corresponded and interacted. Given, as he remarks in the Treatise, that he had the opportunity to interact frequently with women of great sensitivity and sensibilities, especially as revealed in the Spiritual Conferences, it is not surprising to see that this resulted in a rich assortment of meanings for this one word that reflect its Latin origin.\(^5\) This is seen, as we note below, particularly in his Spiritual Conferences and the influence the early Visitandines had on the subject of prayer and love of God in the Treatise.

The word “sentiment” is most frequently translated as “feeling” even in contexts where a more suitable word or phrase conveys, in this author’s view, more accurately the saint’s thoughts and feelings/sentiments. We will point this out when trying to understand the use of this term in mystical prayer or experiences.

**Reader of Hearts**

The centrality of the heart in Salesian spirituality has been amply treated from various perspectives by a number of Salesian Scholars.\(^6\) So I do not intend to rehearse these here but merely to approach the symbol of the heart from the perspective of sentiments or feelings and how profoundly they mark his spirituality. Fr. Tessier points out the difficulty of reading hearts because of how intimately and inextricably so many diverse sentiments are intertwined. “The same act, the same sentiment can have so many shades of egoism, so many lights of virtue.”\(^7\) Since sentiments can be located in the whole range of our consciousness, they are often difficult to recognize, disentangle and sort out. These can have a physiological, psychological, intellectual, spiritual or mystical basis and are, at times, intermingled.

In guiding such people as Madame de Chantal, Rose Bourgeois, and Mme de la Fléchère, he wanted to know what motivated them, what was their intention(s). He did not want to deal in generalities but in specifics. So if there were to state: “I did not have as much fervor as I should when receiving Holy Communion,” Francis had them examine the reasons or the motives/intentions for these actions to get at the heart of the matter. He recommends to Jane: “Search the recesses of your soul, note all the resources of your soul, and consider all that needs to either be improved or corrected.”\(^8\) Of course, what frequently needed to be improved or corrected were the person’s sentiments or feelings. For our saint, sentiments reside in the heart, which is often synonymous with the soul or the whole person. Sentiments not only shape and drive our motives but on occasion are identified with our intentions. For example, when he writes: “Excluding the sick is completely contrary to my purpose (esprit) and intention (sentiment).”\(^9\)

**The Heart’s Memory**

Tessier, echoing the thought of Schopenhauer remarks on the power of sentiments to deeply affect our heart’s memory and hence our whole consciousness or being: “There is . . . a memory of the heart more precise and more tenacious than that of the mind.”\(^10\) Whatever feeling or sentiment is uppermost in our thoughts has a very evocative, organizing, focusing, and staying power to profoundly touch and move us. Schopenhauer notes that even “a weak memory always perfectly retains what is of value to the dominant passion: the beloved never

---

5 “I had to deal many times with the most delicate sentiments of piety going beyond what I said to Philothea.” . OEA, 4:20. All translations are the author’s unless otherwise noted
8 OEA, 12:40. See also Tessier, pp. 72ff.
9 CD. Saint François de Sales, Oeuvres complètes de l’édition d’Annecy: Édition numérisée par Jean Gayet, osfs, avec l’aimable autorisation des Soeurs de la Visitation d’Annecy vol. 6, p. 162. For the Spiritual Conferences, Fr. Gayet digitized a different edition of the Spiritual Conferences than that found in vol. 6 of the Annecy edition. Hereafter Gayet.
10 Tessier, 169.
forgets any favorable occurrence, the ambitious person nothing that serves his plans, the avaricious person never forgets the loss suffered, nor the proud man the insult made to his honor; the vain person each word of praise . . . This could be called the memory of the heart, more intimate than that of the mind.”

Ribot highlights the immediacy of the hearts’ memory: “Affective memory . . . consists in the actual reproduction of a former affective state with all of its characteristics. . . . The memory does not only consist of the representation of the conditions, circumstances, in a word the intellectual states, but a reviviscence of the affective state itself as such, that it is to say we feel it” and do not merely remember it.

The basic truth and its accompanying sentiments that Francis wants to come alive in our consciousness, in our heart’s memory and cultivate in himself and others is the belief and conviction that we are indelibly stamped with the inclination to love God above all things because we are made in the image and likeness of God. This inclination is in our very DNA. Like God, we imagine, we think and we will. These three faculties: imagination, understanding and the will reflect the Trinitarian God and hence interact with one another mysteriously in such wise that, at times, they become inextricable. This might explain the multiple meanings of the word “sentiment.”

First and foremost, our saint desires to vigorously and resolutely cultivate this memory of the heart in himself. He strives to accomplish this by what he calls the desire of self-emptying (ce sentiment de l’aneantissement), the desire to have this love of God “burn and consume all that is not [God] so as to reduce and convert everything in him.” This sentiment, he tells us, greatly affects his will disposing it to whatever it takes to achieve this goal. Elsewhere, he expresses this sentiment more crisply and resolutely: “If I suspected that there would be in my heart a single movement of love that does not tend toward God . . . , this unfaithful and illegitimate sentiment of my heart, I would do everything to pull it out with my very bowels, and I would not tolerate it for a single moment.” This is the way he cultivates the memory of his heart in order to do likewise in the hearts of those who seek his guidance.

Making Sense of ‘Sentiments’

There is one letter written to a novice that gives us in detail an excellent example of his method of cultivating the memory of the heart and of guiding others to what psychologists call affective maturation. In a letter dated 16 January 1603, i.e., before he wrote the Introduction to the Devout Life and not too long after his episcopal ordination, he already exhibits a great gift for reading hearts. Francis sees a contradiction in her letter. She says she is free from anxiety and yet remains anxious in trying to seek perfection rapidly. She asks his advice on how to “accept and deal with sentiments” because they make her uneasy. This is why she feels she should reject them. He gives her four criteria for discerning how to accept and deal with bons sentiments (consolations or good feelings).

First of all, “these sentiments and pleasant feelings (douceurs)” can come from a good or evil source. If we utilize them to give us some spiritual enjoyment or relaxation so that afterward we can perform the work and duties entrusted to us, they are good. God gives us these good sentiments because of our weakness. They are like a little sauce added to the meat not for us to eat only the sauce but to encourage us to eat solid food. So as long as we do not dwell on them for a long time since this is what the evil one desires, they are not harmful. “By only eating the sauce, our spiritual stomach would become weak and waste away little by little by it.”

“In the second place, consolations (les bons sentiments) do not give rise to prideful thoughts. On the contrary, these consolations strengthen us to reject those the evil one sends us. If sentiment or feeling feeds our ego or self-esteem, the superior part of our consciousness makes us recognize our weakness and makes us humble ourselves.”

12 Ribot, 161.
13 See OEA, 4, Bk. 1, ch. 16 & 17.
14 ”OEA, 21:2.
15 OEA, 21:5.
“The good sentiment once experienced does not leave us weak, but strengthened, not afflicted, but consoled. On the contrary, the bad sentiment as we become conscious of it gives us some joy, and when it departs, it leaves us full of anxiety. . . In a word, the good sentiment does not desire to be loved but only that we love the One who gives it, not that he gives it on the condition that we love him, but that is not what he looks for. The evil sentiment desires that we love it above all.”

These four criteria help us to discern the source of our sentiments or feelings. Good sentiments like wine bring joy and animate us. “When God sends us these sentiments, it is for our imperfection, against which we have to struggle, and not the sentiments which work against this struggle.” So if they come from God, even through the intermediary of other creatures, it is wrong to reject these gifts.

He finally tells her very frankly what he said he would tell her. “It seems to me that I see you are being driven by an over eagerness and a great anxiety in the quest for perfection. This is what makes you afraid of these little consolations and sentiments.”

This whole letter clearly demonstrates the saint’s ability to understand the fundamental problem troubling this novice by reading her heart and cultivating the memory of her heart by the wise and practical advice he gives. He wants to engrave in her heart’s memory that we are not to be too eager to achieve holiness and not love the consolations of God but the God of consolations. He uses interchangeably the expression bon sentiments with the term consolations. This letter shows how Francis helps others make sense of their sentiments.

Another good example of cultivating the memory of the heart on a much deeper level is the way he describes practicing spiritual repose by first of all setting aside a convenient time for this sacred repose so that we can “refresh our memory of all the good movements, desires, affections resolutions, projects, sentiments and consolations which the divine Majesty inspires in [us].” He also recommends remembering the illnesses and infirmities we received and how we profited spiritually from them by God’s grace. This exercise of cultivating the memory of the heart creates a wholeness by having our memory bring together the various movements/experiences of our hearts.

The word “sentiment” can also mean “understanding.” In one letter, he writes: “Remain in this peace and tranquility that Our Lord gives you. May the peace of God, St. Paul says, which surpasses all understanding (sentiment) keep your heart and mind in Jesus Christ Our Lord, [Ph 4:7]. Don’t you see, my dear daughter, that he says the peace of God surpasses all understanding (tout sentiment)? This is to teach you that you must not in any way be upset about not having any other feeling (sentiment) than that of the peace of God.”

This passage illuminates the connection between the word sentiment and the Latin word “sensum” which the Vulgate has for “sentiment”, both conveying the meaning of “understanding” or “experience”. Francis plays on the word “sentiment” to signify both “understanding” and also “feeling” because his advisee was struggling with not having sentient consolations, and he wants to appeal to her heart to make her understand that “this satisfaction of the mind, although not satisfying our taste, is worth more than a thousand delicious consolations.”

**Sense of the Word Sentiment**

The great variety of meanings that the word “sentiment” with its qualifiers can help us look more closely into his mind and heart and appreciate the great power for good or evil that sentiments can have, and how these multiple meanings can serve to cultivate the memory of the heart to achieve a certain wholeness of heart or consciousness.

**Sentiment as Sensation and Physical Senses**

---

17 OEA, 12:166.
18 OEA, 22:33.
19 OEA, 15:279. The verse from the Vulgate reads: “et pax Dei quae exsuperat omnem sensum custodiat corda vestra et intelligentias vestras in Christo Jesu.”
In his *Meditations on the Church*, where Francis asserts that natural reason is a criterion for belief, he stresses the importance of our physical senses for arriving at truth and points out that God has given our senses their proper sensations or functions (*sentimens*). If we become hardened by sin, then our sensations or senses or spiritual responsiveness become blunted (*les sentimens s'engourdisissent*).

In explaining Descartes’ thought on the passions, one writer states: “In so far as the passions come through or with sensations, they are sentiments, feelings; in so far as they interrupt and change the course of thought, they are emotions (Art. 28)”.

In this view, sentiments can also change the course of thought and action since they are “ways of feeling pleasures and pains as evaluations,” i.e., “affective intentionalities,” an expression meaning to make sense of them, understanding them in the light of our self-conception and purpose in life. Rorty argues that there was a sea change in the conception of the mind during the period from Descartes to Rousseau. I would argue that this change occurred before this period. This is evidenced by the multiple meanings and uses De Sales makes of passions and affections in his writings and especially in the *Treatise on the Love of God*. For example, passions that proceed from the right kind of love are not “turbulent commotions” but virtuous because of their source and object. This love helps us to make sense of them and redirect our actions accordingly, which is another way of explaining that the word “*sens*” in French also means “direction” in the expression “*sens unique*” – one way. So sentiments as sensations can put us on the right path or another path; they can redirect our actions and our lives because they have great power to influence and shape our affectivity seated in our hearts. “The awareness of our body in so far as it is living and active is known a coenesthesia,” a term referring to the aggregate of impressions arising from organic sensations or what Francis de Sales call “sentiments sensibles” such as a feeling of health, vigor, lethargy. The phenomenologists make the following distinction: “Sensations, perceptions, and feelings are present-ations; images and ideas are re-presentations.” So there is a certain immediacy about sensations that command our attention and focus.

**The Word ‘Sentiment’ in the Spiritual Conferences**

Dom Mackey rightly notes in his introduction to volume six of the Annecy edition of the saint’s *œuvres complètes* that in the Spiritual Conferences, our saint wants the early Visitandines to place less emphasis on *sentiment* as feeling and more on reason. This certainly reoccurs in a number of conferences. It can be helpful to point out the nature of these various feelings since they appear to be merely on the sentient level of our consciousness.

When one sister complains that she does not have any feelings of confidence in God and only says the words, the saint replies: “If the heart does not want it, the mouth would not say a word about it.” The fact that she expresses this confidence without any sentient feeling should not discourage her. An absence of such a feeling does not necessarily mean that we are merely mouthing the words of confidence because if our intention is to honor the Lord, then these words and the sentiment they express come from the heart.

---

21 “Dieu, qui a donné a nos sens leurs propres sentimens et connaissances [knowledge], pour seconder nature ne permet que jamais ilz soient trompés quand ilz sont en une droite application, et nostre expérience prise a part, simple et nue, ne bronche point.” (OEA, I:331).
22 OEA, 26:134. The glossary of OEA in volume 26 notes that *sentiment* has the following meanings: “the impression or sensation that the soul feels or experiences” (impression que l’âme ressent), “a movement of passion” (movement d’humeur), “of sensation” (sensibilité) which disturbs spiritual peace.” It can also be a synonym for the word “sens” and all that the multiple meanings this word can have not only in French, but also in English.
24 “Affective intentionality would be the philosophical explanation of feelings as the ’reasons of the heart.’” Andrew Tallon, *Head and Heart: Afection, Cognition, Volition as Triune Consciousness* (New York : Fordham University Press, 1997), 34.
25 See Bk. 1, ch.4.
26 Ribot, p. 120.
27 Tallon, p. 29
28 OEA, 6:xxxvii-xxxviii.
29 OEA, 6:30.
It seems that some of the sisters had strong feelings of aversion or antipathy, which of course could be exacerbated when living in unavoidable daily contact. This feeling, (sentiment), our saint notes, could also arise when we are obliged to give another a correction. “If while doing so motivated by charity, I nevertheless, in speaking [to her] have a feeling of aversion (un peu de sentiment), it is not sinful.” The word “sentiment” could also mean, a feeling of dislike, of awkwardness, even resentment.30

The word sentiments can refer at times to mere inclinations. Our saint makes a clear distinction between inclinations and attachments (affections): “You have to distinguish inclinations from attachments. When these [feelings] are only inclinations and not affections, you should not be upset because it does not depend on us to avoid evil inclinations. If it happens that when one exchanges a habit with a sister to give her one that is not as good, our lower nature has a slight feeling of resentment, this is not sinful, provided she accepts it in good part out of love for God. The same can be said of all the other inclinations (sentiments) which occur.”31 Sentiment can also mean resentment or feeling of displeasure in the phrase “sentiment ou de la sécheresse du Coeur.” He uses this expression and the word “sentiment” several times in the sense of a passion or reactions to receiving a correction.32

Speaking of how to calm certain feelings that are upsetting, Francis explains, “Your mind (sentiment) does not calm down.” The way to calm it is “not to give into our feeling (de ne point consenter à notre passion).” Here the word sentiment is equivalent to a passion. When we have hurt feelings, we never lack for “a crowd of reasons” to nourish this passion (sentiment).33

The feeling (sentiment) of God’s presence appears to be a major concern among the sisters. The saint remarks: “If I’m not mistaken, when we say we cannot find God and he appears to be far from us, we mean to say that we cannot have the feeling of his presence (le sentiment de sa présence). We can say a good deal about having God’s presence and being in God’s presence or rather to have the feeling of his presence (le sentiment de sa présence). Isn’t that what you mean to say? . . . It is only God that can give this gift for it is not possible for us to acquire this sentiment on our own.”34 The sentiment of God’s presence is not simply a feeling but an awareness, a belief, an affirmation, a conviction that God is there with us.

Sentiment can also mean inspiration or movement of the heart: “Tell me, haven’t you felt the inspiration or movement in your heart to seek such a great good,” i.e., to become a religious. He then speaks of the “strength of this sentiment” and advises that we should not be disturbed when the emotional feeling (ce sentiment sensible) diminishes to pursue a religious vocation. What is important is the resolve of the will. We must not focus too much on the feeling but “only carefully cultivate [the constancy of our will].”35

Other meanings that the word “sentiment” has in the Conferences: ‘Sensitivity’: It would be nice if we could always “adjust our words to the sensitivity (sentiment) of others.”36 ‘Opinion’ and speaking one’s mind: “Although the opinion (sentiment) of others is quite contrary to yours . . . You are afraid to speak your mind (votre sentiment).”37 Passion: “You have a certain strong passion of anger (grand sentiment de colère).38

Sentiment in the Treatise

In the opening chapters of Book 1, Francis de Sales establishes a clear hierarchy among our many sentiments. On the lowest level of our being, there is a sentiment lodged in our sense appetite that accompanies certain temptations and arouse bodily feelings. Over and above these sentiments are those associated with affections

---

31 Ravier, 1033.
32 See Gayet, 57-58; Ravier, 1052-53.
33 See Gayet, 58; Ravier, 1054-55.
34 Gayet, 59-60; Ravier, 1057-58.
35 Gayet, 142.
36 Gayet, 118-19.
37 Gayet, 151.
38 Gayet, 162.
caused by reasoning on the experience of the senses, on that of human sciences and on revealed knowledge. However on the highest level of our consciousness, i.e., in the summit or in the Holy of Holy of our souls, sentiments do not come about through any human reasoning. Given the fact that on this level, Francis no longer calls these mystical experiences affections but *sentimens*, we can reasonably conclude that the word *sentimens* in this context is practically equated with affections since they are movements that result from the will or the rational appetite. The sentiments experienced in the depth of our heart appear to be a very elevated perception or rather disposition, acquiescence or acceptance since they bring about through God’s grace the most elevated movements or affections.39

Our saint explains that the attraction of love is not only based on similarity but also dissimilarity. We see this in the mutual attraction between old people and young children between doctors and their patients. These attractions are based on what he calls “*un sentiment secret*” that is variously translated as “a secret sense,” “feeling,”40 and “instinct.”41

There is one particular passage where translating the word *sentiment* as “feeling” does not, in this author’s view, adequately capture the saint’s meaning. “Those, who are affected by divine and intellectual pleasures let their heart be ravished by these sentiments, are truly out of themselves, that is to say, above the condition of their nature.” Then, he states in the following paragraph: “And so these angelic men who are ravished in God and in heavenly things, completely lose, as long as the ecstasy lasts, the use and the attention of their senses.”42 Now if they lose the use of their senses, then in what sense do they feel the experience since the sensation of feeling for Francis is on the level of the senses, except when he distinguishes between “*sentimens sensibles*” and those on a higher level of our being? So the word “feelings” for “*sentimens*” in this context appears to miss an important distinction he is making. This is the central problem of trying to grasp the meaning of the word “*sentiment*” describing the experience on the summit of the soul in Book 1, ch. 12. More about this below.

For our saint, the inferior level of our discursive faculty “reasons and draws conclusions according to what it learns and experiences from the senses (*les sens*), while the superior level reasons and draws conclusions according to intellectual knowledge. The latter level he says is “commonly called the mind (*esprit*) or mental part of the soul,” while the former “is ordinarily called sense (*le sens*) or feeling (*sentiment*) or human reason.”43 This description creates problems in English, if not, in the French also. The word “sentiment” in this context is aptly translated as “feeling”, sentient feeling since it is on the level of the senses. However, “sentiment” apparently is not put forth as a mere sentient experience but rather a capacity or faculty that reasons according to the knowledge of the senses since it is equated with “human reason”. Is *sentiment* in this context a state of sentient mindfulness or does “*sentiment*” reason? This is somewhat puzzling, to say the least. Perhaps the English expression to feel in the sense of to believe or think captures the Saint’s meaning as, for example, in the expression “I feel I’m right,” where feeling is equated to thinking or believing.

In the very next chapter, there are multiple meanings of the word “*sentiment*” that differ greatly from that of the previous chapter. In this supremely important chapter, (Bk. 1, ch. 12), the word “sentiment” appears four times and presents a real challenge as to its various meanings.: (1) “*une simple veüe de l’entendement et un simple sentiment de la volonté*”. Ryan translates #1 as “a simple movement of the will.”44 The word “movement” in the first example is appropriate because *sentiment* in this context appears to be a faculty in the sense that, along with intuition, it guides the mind or spirit in the summit of the soul or reason; (2) “*la veüe et le sentiment de la beauté*...}

---

39 See OEA, 4:37.
42 OEA, 4:58.
43 OEA, 4:63.
44 Ryan, I:85
et bon playisir de Dieu”: I would opt here either for “experience” as the MSFS translation has, or “awareness” or “enjoyment”. The word “experience” would not connote any sentient sensation. The (3)”le grand, universel et souverain sentiment”: The word conviction for sentiment here is much stronger than feeling and underscores the idea of winning over the mind (esprit), not violently but persuasively. (4) “par une simple veue et un simple sentiment de la volonté”: Citation #4 is almost the same expression as in #1. Ryan translates it as “perception” and not “movement”; and MSFS: “feeling”; Car: “liking” [penchant, inclination] In my view, the word “feeling” in citations (2) and (3) do not adequately reflect the level of intensity or consciousness that the saint is considering or explaining.

The word “inspiration” and “sentiment” seem to be so closely allied in the saint’s mind that, at times, he almost equates the two. “When the inspiration, like a sacred wind, comes to lift us into the air of holy love, it takes hold of our will and by the stirring (sentiment) of some heavenly delight, it moves it.”

Sentiment seems to be a very part of inspiration: “What a consolation to consider the sacred method with which the Holy Spirit shines its first rays and perceptions (sentimens) of its warm and vital light into our hearts.” Sentiment is likened, in some instances, to the warming aspect of inspirations. It is akin to the grace that awakens the soul from spiritual torpor. Speaking of St. Pachomius, Francis says: “God is at the door of his heart, and through the good example of these Christians [who befriended him], like a sweet voice, he calls him, awoke him and gives him the first sensation (sentiment) of the vital warmth of his love.”

In recounting the parable of a newly married young princess who lost consciousness but was revived by her husband, he says the king took the precious liqueur that he had in his mouth forcing it into the mouth of his bride and applying some of this liqueur to her temple and nose, he succeeded in reviving her so as to regain “consciousness” (reprendre sentiment).

Chapter 11 of Book 4, “On How to Recognize This Imperfect Love,” contains the word “sentiment” five times and points out that feelings (sentimens) sometimes are misleading, especially when we have good feelings about our relationship with God but in reality have affections, desires and plans that run counter to his will; they deceive us by having us believe that God’s love is alive in our hearts. We need to examine our current affections. In doing so, we should not be discouraged that at times we do not feel up to meeting the challenges of God’s love because we still can have spiritual courage as long as we desire to place our confidence in God despite the fact that such feelings are lacking. This entire chapter is an excellent example of the way he advises others to cultivate their sentiments and the memory of the heart.

In the prayer of spiritual repose, Francis attempts to understand the multiplicity and nature of the movements of our heart causes us to easily lose our way like a bloodhound who loses the tracks and the scent (sentiment) of his prey. In such a state, we seem to have the feeling of not feeling. “The will does not even perceive the joy and contentment that it receives but enjoys it [imperceptibly]. Our saint calls this experience “the delicate sentiment of the divine presence” (ce delicat sentiment de la presence divine). The whole citation appears to give an explanation of the expression of the sentiment of the will (sentiment de la volonté) in Book 1, chapter 12. Although difficult to explain, this sentiment or experience can indelibly mark the heart’s memory.

---

45 MSFS, 58.
46 Ryan, I: 87.
47 MSFS, 60.
48 Car, 52.
49 OEA, 4:129.
50 OEA, 4: 130.
51 OEA, 4:121.
52 OEA, 4:174-75.
53 Car translates “nous ayons toujours le sentiment et movement du courage”: “It is not always necessary that we have the sense and motion of courage” (p. 263).
54 This is Ryan’s translation of “la volonte n'appercoit point cet ayse et contentement qu'elle reçoit, jouissant insensiblement d'iceluy” (I:290)
Conclusion

The author’s interest in studying the sense of the word “sentiment” was first aroused by the belief that the word “feeling” to describe the most profound experience that we can have of God in prayer did not adequately convey the saint’s meaning. As noted above, this experience is a feeling of non-feeling, a non-sensual feeling in the very depth of our hearts. After doing a computer search of the word “sentiment” in all 26 volumes of the Oeuvres complètes, the author believes there is still much to be learned about the saint’s vocabulary. As Hélène Michon explains, Francis purposefully eschewed the abstract and esoteric terms that were common in his day in works on prayer and had a penchant for using ordinary words to express mystical prayer experiences that were certainly not free from ambiguity and misunderstanding but made his writings more accessible.55 This is certainly evidenced by his use of the word “sentiment.”

From the numerous questions posed to him by the first Visitandines, we gather that the word “sentimens” as feelings must have been uppermost in their minds. The strong desire to experience the feeling (sentiment) of God’s presence was prominent among them to the extent that it became a serious hindrance, in some instances, to their spiritual growth. Some of them expected prayer to make them feel good. The saint, however, wanted them to understand that prayer is not about feeling good but about being good by doing good. The clarifications he gave in these frank, give-and-take informal talks reveal precious insights into his mind and heart and his method of spiritual guidance, viz., of cultivating the memory of the heart. He acknowledges in the Treatise his debt to them. Their sentiments and sensibilities and profound mystical experiences helped to cultivate the memory of his heart as well as the hearts of those who sought his guidance.

There is a wide range of meanings or senses that the word “sentiment” in the writings we have noted56: ‘feeling’, ‘sensation’, ‘awareness’, ‘consciousness’, ‘consolation’, ‘scent’, ‘perception’, ‘opinion’, ‘mind’, ‘conviction’, ‘understanding’, ‘affections’, ‘passion’, ‘aversion’, ‘experience’, ‘intention’, ‘direction’ and ‘inspiration’. Although the etymology of “sentiment” denotes a connection of the heart with the head, the affective with the cognitive, there are instances where Francis associates “sentimens” with purely sensual feelings, notably, in the expression “sentiment sensible,” whose locus is the sense appetite. However, in most cases, the word does connect the mind with the body. His frequent use of the word “sentiment” to connote this inherent connectedness gives additional evidence that he was not a Platonist and that his spirituality, true to the best in the Christian spirituality tradition, gives a remarkable balance to his teaching and method of spiritual guidance. The many meanings of the word “sentiment” should make the reader of his works more conscious of the important nuances of this word and yield a deeper understanding of his teaching.

Both the physiology and symbolism of the heart are receiving great attention in the research of neurophysiological psychologists such as those of the Institute of Heart Math. They view the heart as “a powerful entry point into the communication network that connects body, mind, emotions and spirit.”57 The profound and penetrating understanding that Francis de Sales demonstrates in his writings on the heart and its sentiments can serve as an excellent basis for dialogue and further research in cultivating the memory of the heart.58


55 Hélène Michon, Saint François de Sales: Une nouvelle mystique (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2008), 14
56 There are a number of other meanings that have not been mentioned because they would take us beyond the limited scope of this study