

## Two Friends: Francis de Sales and Antoine Favre<sup>1</sup>

On November 24<sup>th</sup>, 1592, Raymond Pobel, the President of the Senate of Savoy in Chambéry, declared "noble Francis de Sales" an advocate to the sovereign Senate; Senator Antoine Favre was present. The new lawyer, dressed in a toga, proclaimed the prescribed speech, speaking of justice in human society. He went to greet all the Senators, thanking them, as was the custom; just then a call to arms from the Marquis of Treffort, the lieutenant general of Savoy, put an end to the session. Duke Charles Emmanuel, under pressure from Lesdiguières, was forced to concentrate his regular forces in Piedmont. The senators took up this serious matter, the new lawyer had to leave and the two future "brothers" were not able to meet.

Antoine Favre, proclaimed "the greatest magistrate in the world" by the Parliament of Paris, was born at Bourg-en-Bresse on October 5, 1557. His father sent him to Paris in 1571 to study the humanities, rhetoric and philosophy with the Jesuits. He finished his studies brilliantly in 1574, returned home and received his first lessons in law from his father, Philibert Favre, the financial counsel in Bresse. He continued his studies at the University of Turin where he received his doctorate at the beginning of August 1579.

In 1581 he married Benoite Favre, who died in 1605; his second marriage, which took place prior to September 1606, was to Philiberte Marin de la Prouse. He had several children of whom Claude, Lord of Vaugelas, the famous grammarian, and Jacqueline, the second member of the Order of the Visitation.

His career in the Savoyard judiciary was brilliant: judge of la Bresse and Bugey (1584), senator in the sovereign Senate of Savoy (1587), president of the Council of the Genevois (1596), first president of the Senate of Savoy (1610).

Francis de Sales was born at the château of Thorens on August 21, 1567. He attended primary school at la Roche sur Foron then at the Chapuisien College at Annecy. Like Favre he studied humanities with the Jesuits at Clermont College in Paris, and followed the theology courses of Genebrard at the Royal College of the Sorbonne. He continued his studies at the University of Padua, where he graduated as a Doctor *in utroque jure* in 1591—doctor in both civil law and canon law. He had studied law to please his father, and at the same time studied theology to please himself, for he had already decided to be a priest.

It was this young Doctor of Law who was admitted to the bar of the sovereign Senate of Savoy. Later on his friend, Antoine Favre, would try to persuade him to accept the dignity of senator which was offered him by Duke Charles Emmanuel I, citing other instances of churchmen who combined the two roles. But Francis declined; he was firmly decided to serve but one master. He became provost of the chapter of St. Peter of Geneva (1593), priest on December 18, 1593 and bishop in 1602.

The correspondence between the future friends began July 30, 1593. Favre took the initiative of writing the young provost a laudatory letter in Latin. Francis replied, also in Latin, and the number of rough drafts of this letter proves his concern to reciprocate the praises he had received. The correspondence continued and the style became simpler, less affected to the extent that they were

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treating of real matters. Francis often did word plays on Favre's Latin name: *Faber optime—Faber clarissime*. The tone of the letter quickly became affective: Favre's wife became his "sister," and his children became his "nephews."

The two "brothers" first met at Faverges in February 1594: Francis wrote to his friend: "Thus, as we had hoped, my dear brother, we will be together during these free days, if the people of Faverges see Favre within the boundaries of Faverges.<sup>2</sup>" In June they spent vacations together at Chambéry and environs.

Their budding friendship took on more concrete and less literary forms once Francis, at the bidding of his bishop, Claude de Granier, moved to the Chablais on September 14, 1594. This whole region had become Calvinist and there wasn't a single Catholic priest left in it. Although the Treaty of Nyon (1589) had re-established freedom for the Catholic religion, the Bernese considered it a dead letter. Since religion and politics were so linked, the Duke Charles Emmanuel asked Bishop Granier to re-establish the clergy in the parishes of the Chablais.

Francis de Sales and his cousin Louis were chosen for this dangerous mission. As guests of the Baron d'Hermance they resided at the fortress Les Allinges with the soldiers and during the day went down to Thonon. The Calvinists proved to be hostile and contemptuous of the two young priests in the streets.

The missionaries had presented their credentials to the governor of Les Allinges, to the tax collectors and the officials of Thonon—credentials, which proved that they were acting in accord with the Duke of Savoy and the Bishop of Geneva. But no delegate of Charles Emmanuel appeared to announce that they had received from his highness the mission to bring back the people of the Chablais to the Roman church.

Since the Duke had asked Francis de Sales to tell him just how he could contribute to his apostolic mission, he responded succinctly and clearly; among other things he asked for collaborators; that it be made possible for people to consider freely the arguments he advanced. He asked the duke "to have a letter written to the officials and to require one of the senators of Savoy to come here to call together the citizenry. To invite them, on behalf of your Excellency, to listen, ponder and consider closely the reasons that the preachers would propose for the Catholic Church, from whose jurisdiction they had been swept without reason by the sheer force of the Bernese<sup>3</sup> ." Francis suggested that for this persuasive mission the duke choose his "brother," Antoine Favre.

Finally the Duke would send Favre, who had been recently promoted President of the Council of the Genevois, as his delegate to the Chablais in order to give backing to the missionaries. Unfortunately, when he arrived there, his friend was sick. Their temperaments were very different and whereas Francis had suggested that the people be encouraged without offending them, Favre spoke of confiscation of goods and of prison.

In 1597 the young missionary had a meeting with Theodore de Beze in Geneva. In obedience to Pope Clement VIII, he made a second trip to the chief minister's house, and, in order to continue the discussion took along a layman, his friend Antoine Favre.

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<sup>2</sup> *Œuvres de saint François de Sales, évêque et prince de Genève et docteur de l'Eglise*. Annecy, 1892-1964, 27 vol., XI, 47. From here on we will cite this work as E A.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, XI, 168-171.

He knew Geneva well and was esteemed in the city by some for his high rank and his knowledge of law. The conclusion of the meeting and of the controversy remains obscure. In any case de Beze officially belonged to Calvinism when he died in 1605.

In 1598 the provost planned to go to Rome in order to resolve the difficulties surrounding the mission in the Chablais. At the same time, Anne d'Este and her son, the young duke of Nemours, sent the first president to pursue the claims of the princess against Caesar d'Este, duke of Modene who was attempting to succeed Alphonse II, the duke of Ferarre, who had died in 1597. The two friends met in Rome, took up lodgings near the church of the Lateran, and visited the monuments and churches together, while at the same time each pursued his own agenda. Favre met with the judges of the Roman Rota, discussed matters with the lawyers accredited in this jurisdiction, and visited with the friends and clients of the Nemours, of Savoy and of France.

Francis de Sales made the *ad limina* visit on behalf of his bishop and obtained the bulls naming him Bishop of Necopolis *in partibus* and coadjutor to the bishop of Geneva. The latter, through his nephew, François de Chisse, had petitioned the pope for these papers. It seems that Favre did not return with his friend at the end of May 1599. Having left the secretaries of the Duke of Nemours in Rome to see to the good progress of the matter, he went back to Annecy to look after legal matters and his own family business.

Bishop de Granier sent his coadjutor to Paris to discuss with the king of France the situation of the Catholics in the territory of Gex. Antoine Favre had to go there to speak with Anne d'Este in person about the succession of Ferraro, and to prepare the will of the duchess, who wanted to entrust its writing to him. The provost and the president coordinated their trips and left for the capital in January 1602. It was there that the first president learned of the negative decision of the Rota. He was disappointed but rejoiced in the success his friend Bishop de Sales had in the pulpits of Paris. Favre went back to Annecy in the month of May, with the duke of Nemours. The provost remained in Paris to demand the same liberty of conscience for Catholics that had been granted for Protestants by the edict of Nantes (1598). Francis achieved little and wrote to the Pope: "After nine whole months I have been forced to return home having accomplished almost nothing<sup>4</sup> ." It was at Lyons in September that he heard of the death of Bishop de Granier; from then on he was the Prince-Bishop of Geneva.

For a number of years Antoine Favre had been working on a Latin commentary on the local law, covering all possible crimes and hence the errors which a just law could not ignore or endorse. As a Catholic magistrate he thought that a ruler should not allow heresy to have an open field. Of necessity his work would have to begin with a chapter of controversy. He asked his friend, Francis de Sales, to write this first section. The missionary began it in the Chablais, but circumstances did not allow him to finish it then. In 1604 Favre's work was nearing completion and it was urgent that Francis finish the first section. He was not to do the final editing, and asked his friend to look it over. Some bitter words against the Huguenots, and praise of Francis himself reveal that Antoine Favre had added a bit to the work of his "very dear friend."

The two humanists, the bishop and the president, dreamed of establishing in Annecy where they both lived a society of learned and lettered people on the model of Italian academies. There were in Savoy individuals who had licentiates or masters in arts, doctors of law and theology who had returned from Louvain, Paris, Turin, Padua and Rome. The founders had rather similar intellectual tastes; an irresistible affinity had joined them in a beautiful friendship for thirteen years. Already in the fall a name for the society had been chosen: "Because the muses flourish among the mountains of Savoy,

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, XII, 128.

explained Charles-Auguste de Sales, it was deemed very appropriate to call it the Florimontane Academy.<sup>5</sup> " The two friends wrote the statutes that would govern the society. Henri of Savoy, the Duke of Nemours, would be its prince and protector and the two founders would be the advisors. "The goal of the academy will be the exercise of all the virtues, the sovereign glory of God and the service of the royal princes and the public good." The meetings began during the winter of 1606 in Favre's house. His children, including Vaugelas, the future grammarian and member of the French Academy and Jacqueline, a future Visitandine, greeted the guests by name. Among the first academicians whose names are known to us was Honore d'Urfe, a friend of Favre, who that year published the first part of his *Astrée*.

"This first year," Charles Auguste recounts, "a course in mathematics began... the globe and cosmography with its parts: geography, hydrogeography, chorography and topography; followed by the art of navigating and the theory of the planets, and finally music theory..."<sup>6</sup> " Favre wrote to the duke of Nemours on the November 9, 1607: "I hope, my Lord, that as soon as possible our academy will send you the fruits of your garden to fulfill our duty to you and to make itself that much more worthy of the honor you bestow on us by your love"<sup>7</sup> .

When Favre was named president of the sovereign senate in June 1610, he had to move to Chambéry. The bishop did not have the time to continue alone; the departure of the second advisor was the deathblow of the academy Florimontane which went into a rapid decline.

Duke Charles-Emmanuel sent his son, Prince Maurice of Savoy, to the court of Louis XIII to obtain the hand of the king's sister, Christine of France, for his son, Victor-Amadée, Prince of Piedmont. The clever Duke wanted his son Maurice to arrive in Paris with a prestigious entourage: the Bishop of Geneva with his brother Jean-Françis, the illustrious president of the Senate, Antoine Favre, the secretary of State Carron, the Bishop of Saluces, Octave Viale and a numerous following.

The departure was set for September 1618. The young Cardinal Prince decided to go by the Loire River, from Roanne to Orleans. "During the five days on the river, related de Sales, I could enjoy at leisure the company of his eminence the cardinal, and talk with him about many good things.

"Twice a day his highness read French books in order to better learn the language... and sometimes he even rowed and invited me to row with him, thinking at first that I was unskilled in the matter. But he found out on the contrary that I was a past master."<sup>8</sup> " Favre probably took no part in the sport, but could be a competent judge of it, since he had become a bit of a sailor himself by going with Francis on the Lake of Annecy.

From Chartres on, M. de Bonneuil, who introduced the ambassadors, was with the Cardinal-Prince; they traveled in the carriages of the court, because they were to make a solemn entry into Paris. The bishop and the president were in the carriage with his highness; "the crowd that came out to see him was indeed huge."<sup>9</sup> " But many Parisians recognized the two companions at his side. As he was to admit later on Antoine Favre enjoyed an "exhilaration of glory" that afternoon. They heard the same praises: "Here is the illustrious bishop of Geneva, the greatest theologian of our day!... and here

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<sup>5</sup> Sales (C.A. de). *Histoire du bienheureux François de Sales*, Lyon, La Bottier et Juillart 1634 p 367.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 369-370.

<sup>7</sup> Mugnier (F.), *Histoire et correspondance du président Favre*, Paris, Champion, 1902-1903, 3 vol. I, 273.

<sup>8</sup> E.A., XVIII, 307.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

is President Favre who has published so many works and who in friendship has become like a brother to the bishop!"<sup>10</sup> .

The reception of the prince and his entourage was held at the Louvre the next day. King Louis XIII, the Queen, Anne of Austria, "Monsieur," brother of the king, Princess Christine and her younger sister Henriette greeted them. Even though the marriage negotiations risked failure, to the point that Antoine Favre and the Count de Verrua thought about leaving Paris, the bishop told them: "Wait and God will arrange everything."<sup>11</sup> " The marriage was decided and the lawyers went to work; Favre for the prince of Piedmont and the chancellor of France, Nicholas Brulart, marquis of Sillery, the minister of justice, du Vair, and President Jeanin for the king. Favre hoped that his Highness "would find the contract to his liking, at least he had done everything he could to make it happen."<sup>12</sup> "

Once the negotiations had been completed, the prince of Piedmont went to Paris in the company of his brother. Prince Thomas. The marriage was celebrated in the chapel of the Louvre on February 10, 1619, by Cardinal Francis de la Rochefoucauld, first chaplain of France, assisted by the bishop of Geneva.

Once the wedding was over, Favre took care of some unfinished matters and returned to Chambéry in June. Francis de Sales, who had been named Madame's chaplain, accompanied the princely couple in their return trip to Savoy as far as Grenoble and was back in Annecy by October.

Charles Emmanuel, together with his sons, Princes Maurice, Thomas and Victor Amadeus, his daughter-in-law, Princess Christine of France, went to France in order to greet King Louis XIII who was returning victorious from a civil war. "His Highness of Savoy ordered the bishop of Geneva to go to Avignon." The bishop, who was already sick, wrote his last will and testament and went "where God calls us." He joined the princely retinue at Avignon and went back to Lyons at the same time as the king and the duke. Instead of taking care of himself, he took on many exhausting tasks and on December 28, 1622 he died in the gardener's cottage at the Visitation Monastery of Bellecour in Lyons.

The word of his illness spread rapidly; Favre, who was waiting for his return became aware of the seriousness of his "brother's" illness from his son des Charmettes, one of the chaplains of the princess who was in the entourage. He immediately wrote to Jean François de Sales, the bishop's brother and coadjutor a distressful letter: "I could not believe that my Lord Bishop could die during my lifetime; or that I should outlive him... My wife and I and our whole family humbly pay our respects, to the extent that the desolation we experience allows... The courier has arrived confirming the news we had been fearing. May God console us ail! It is not possible for us to write you any further at this time."<sup>13</sup>

The bishop's body was transported to Annecy where it arrived on January 22, 1623. On the 24<sup>th</sup> it was carried to the cathedral and that evening to the chapel of the Visitation.

That same year 1623 was to be Antoine Favre's last.

A beautiful friendship had united this "pair of friends" for thirty years. They had so many things in common: the same faith, the same culture, and the same love of study. Both were excellent men of letters; both humanists, they wrote each other in Latin at the beginning of their friendship. Authors of

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<sup>10</sup> Trochu (F.), *Saint François de Sales*, Lyon, Vitte, 1955-1956, 2 vol., II, 617.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 618.

<sup>12</sup> *Correspondance Favre*, II, 34.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 160-162.

several works they sent each other their manuscripts. They spent vacations together. Favre welcomed the Baronne de Chantal into his house on the Rue Ste. Claire in Annecy when she came to found, with Francis, the Order of the Visitation in 1610; he confided his daughter Jacqueline to his friend to accompany Madame de Chantal in this new spiritual adventure. He left the use of his house to the bishop when he left Annecy for Chambéry. They had shared the great moments of their lives and also the most banal day to day happenings. The letters that they wrote each other reflected their intimate union, the mutual confidence which united them.

Perhaps Jane de Chantal had the best expression for this friendship: "Favre is a gentleman whom as you know our Beloved Father (Francis de Sales) loved and honored like his own eyes; in short he was his dear friend."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Correspondance de Jeanne de Chantal*, Paris, Cerf-CERF, 1986-1996, 6 vol., II, 230.