

Abandonment
to Divine
Providence

**The Classic Text
with a Spiritual
Commentary by
Dennis Billy, C.Ss.R.**

The greatness of *Abandonment to Divine Providence* and the reason it should be ranked among the classics of Christian devotion is its ability—simply and profoundly—to lead us to God. Caussade has read our soul and spoken to our condition. But even more, he has taken us by the hand and led us to the twin paths of trust and obedience that converge onto the highway of godliness.

Richard J. Foster

Author of A Celebration of Discipline

Since its publication in 1861, *Abandonment to Divine Providence* by Jean-Pierre de Caussade, S.J., has proven to be not only a spiritual classic, but also one of the finest expressions of French and Jesuit mystical theology. Fr. Dennis Billy, C.Ss.R., illuminates the depth and meaning of *Abandonment* with a commentary that is scholarly, insightful, and full of sound spiritual wisdom.

Robert L. Fastiggi

Professor of Systematic Theology
Sacred Heart Major Seminary

This book is a marvelous gift. In a time that is practically defined by distractions, we can all find our way to God by reading both Fr. Billy's luminous commentary and the classic text itself. While reading this book, citizens of the frenetic Western world will desire, and perhaps even know, the healing found in receiving God as he comes to us at every moment of our day.

James Keating

Director of Theological Formation
Institute for Priestly Formation
Creighton University

 CLASSICS
with
COMMENTARY

Abandonment
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The Classic Text
with a Spiritual
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Dennis Billy, C.Ss.R.

Jean-Pierre de Caussade

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In memory of
my father
Michael Billy, Sr.,
(1924–2009)
in gratitude
and appreciation
for his deep love
and fatherly care





O bread of angels, heavenly manna,
the pearl of the Gospel, the sacrament of the present moment!

Abandonment to Divine Providence



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*Abandonment to Divine
Providence*

Jean-Pierre de Caussade

Translated by Algar Thorold



Book One

On the Virtue of Abandonment



Book One: An Overview

The first book considers abandonment as an interior disposition of the soul that enables us to give ourselves over to God's action in a constant, habitual manner. As a virtue, abandonment has both active and passive dimensions. It requires both the passive reception of God's grace, as well as an active participation with it. This first book deals with both aspects and is composed of two chapters. The first focuses on the active fidelity to God's plan required by the virtue; the second, on the continual activity of God's grace in our lives and the importance of our being open to receiving it. As we will see later on in the treatise, the virtue of abandonment is a necessary prerequisite for arriving at the state of complete abandonment.

Chapter 1

Holiness Lies in Faithfulness to God’s Established Order and in Abandonment to His Action



Introduction

In this chapter, the author introduces the notion of the “sacrament of the present moment.” In nine sections, he focuses on how God reveals his will for us through the immediate duties presented to us at each moment by our particular state in life. He uses many metaphors and numerous examples from the Old and New Testaments to show that God speaks to us from one moment to the next. Although holiness is not difficult to achieve, it requires us to empty our hearts and to remove whatever obstacles stand in the way of God’s activity. Warning against the dangers of Quietism—a sixteenth-century movement condemned by

the Church for its promotion of complete passivity before God, even to the point of not desiring one's own salvation—he insists that we must do our share in fulfilling the obligations of our state in life. God's will, he maintains, lies hidden in the duties of present moment. To discover it, we must abandon our self-will and embrace whatever is asked of us from one moment to the next. Even such worthy activities as reading and spiritual devotions are useless if they are not what God wants for us in the present moment. Holiness does not require an intricate knowledge of the truths of the faith, but simply a willingness to embrace God's will in the present. When properly understood and dutifully performed, even the most trivial and otherwise unimportant tasks will sanctify us and lead us into communion with the divine.

§1

*The holiness of the saints of old and especially
of our Blessed Mother
consisted of fidelity to the order established by God.*

Introduction

In this section, the author states that God speaks to us today in much the same way as when he spoke to our forebears. It looks back to the time before there were spiritual directors and schools of spirituality, to a time when life was much simpler and when people were guided by the duties of the present moment. The author likens those who are sensitive to the Spirit to the hand of a clock that achieves its appointed task from one minute to the next. Under the constant influence of divine grace, these people faithfully fulfill their duties from one moment to the next with little fuss or forethought. He cites Mary as an example of someone who followed God's will at each moment of her life, doing whatever was asked of

her in a spirit of humble surrender. She saw these tasks as gifts from the Lord and received them with great joy.



Text

God still speaks today as he spoke to our fathers, when there were no spiritual directors or set methods. Then, spirituality consisted in fidelity to the designs of God, for it had not yet been reduced to an art and explained in a lofty and detailed manner with many rules, maxims, and instructions. Surely our present needs demand this, but it was not so in former times when we were more upright and simple. Then it was enough for those who led a spiritual life to see that each moment brought with it a duty to be faithfully fulfilled. On that duty the whole of their attention was fixed at each successive moment, like the hand of the clock which marks each moment of the hour. Under God's unceasing guidance their spirit turned without conscious effort to each new duty as it was presented to them by God each hour of the day.

Such were the hidden springs of Mary's conduct, for she was of all creation the most utterly submissive to God. Her reply to the angel when she said, "Let it be with me according to your word" (Lk 1:38), contained all the mystical theology of our ancestors. Everything was reduced, as it is today, to complete and utter abandonment to God's will under whatever form it was manifested.

This beautiful and lofty disposition of Mary's soul is admirably revealed in those simple words, "Let it be." Note how perfectly they agree with those words which our Lord wishes us to have always on our lips and in our hearts: "Your will be done" (Mt 6:10). It is true that what was asked of Mary at that moment was something glorious for her. But all the splendor of that glory would have had no effect on her had she not seen in it the will of God, which alone was able to move her.

It was this divine will that ruled her every act. Whatever her occupations, commonplace or lofty, they were in her eyes nothing but external signs, sometimes clear, sometimes obscure, under which she

saw the means of glorifying God and acknowledging the action of the Almighty. Her spirit, transported with joy, looked on everything she had to do or suffer at each moment as a gift from him who fills with good things the hearts which hunger for him alone and not for created things.

Living in the Present Moment

- What can we learn from the way the saints of old listened to and responded to God? What qualities did they exhibit in listening to and carrying out God's will in their daily lives?
- Do you believe that God speaks to you in much the same way?

§2

*The duties of each moment are shadows
that conceal the divine action.*

Introduction

In this section, the author uses the angel's words to Mary in the Gospel of Luke to liken the duties, hardships, and trials of the present moment to divine shadows cast by God's power and concealing his will. Just as regular shadows come about when the sun sheds its light on real objects, so our present obligations come as a result of the divine light shining on us. Although Mary lived a very ordinary life, she had the ability to see God's will behind each and every circumstance. Both she and Joseph were nourished by a faith that enabled them to live in the present

and see God's will behind their daily tasks and challenges. By living in the sacrament of the present moment, they were able to see the great things God was accomplishing in their otherwise ordinary lives.



Text

The power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Lk 1:35), said the angel to Mary. This shadow, in which the power of God conceals itself to bring Jesus Christ to us, is whatever duty, temptation, or trial that comes with every moment. These are in fact but shadows similar to those in nature that spread over visible objects and hide them from us. Thus in the moral and supernatural order the duties of each moment conceal under their outward appearances the true reality of the divine will, which alone is worthy of our attention. It was in this light that Mary regarded them. As these shadows spread over her faculties, far from causing her any illusion, they filled her with faith in him who is ever the same. Draw back, archangel, you are only a shadow. Your moment passes and you disappear. Mary moves beyond you. She goes forward unceasingly. From now on you are behind her. The Holy Spirit has entered her under the visible form of this mission and will never leave her.

There are few extraordinary features in the external life of the Blessed Virgin. At least Holy Scripture does not record any. Her life is represented as exteriorly very simple and ordinary. She acts and experiences the same things as others in her state of life. She goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth, as her other relations do. She takes shelter in a stable, a natural consequence of her poverty. She returns to Nazareth after having fled from the persecution of Herod. Jesus and Joseph live there with her, supporting themselves by the work of their hands. This provides their daily bread, but what is the divine food with which this material bread feeds the faith of Mary and Joseph? What is the sacrament of each of their sacred moments? What treasures of grace are contained in each of these moments underneath the ordinary appearance of the events that fill them? On the surface, these events are no different from those that happen to everyone, but the interior,

invisible element discerned by faith reveals God himself performing great works. O bread of angels, heavenly manna, the pearl of the Gospel, the sacrament of the present moment! You present God in such lowly forms as the manger, the hay and straw! But to whom do you give him? “You fill the hungry with good things” (Lk 1:53). God reveals himself to the humble in the humblest things, while the great who never delve beneath the surface do not discover him even in great events.

Living in the Present Moment

- Do you believe that God’s will is hidden in the circumstances of daily life?
- In what way do the duties and obligations of the present moment reveal God’s will to you? Can they obscure it in any way?
- What does the author mean by the “sacrament of the present moment”?

§3

How much easier it would be to become holy if it were understood in terms of fidelity to God’s plan.

Introduction

In this section, the author tells us that holiness is not difficult but easy to attain and that it lies in being completely faithful to God’s will. He draws an important distinction between active and passive fidelity. Active fidelity means following the laws of God and of his Church and fulfilling the duties of our station in life. Passive fidelity has to do with the loving embrace of whatever God sends from one moment to the next. The author

insists that neither active nor passive fidelity is difficult, since God never tests us beyond our limits. The secret to holiness is to view everything that happens to us as a manifestation of God's will and to embrace whatever is required with every fiber of our being. God is our true spiritual director who guides us through the specific tasks and challenges that come to us from one moment to the next.



Text

If the work of our sanctification presents us with difficulties that appear insurmountable, it is because we do not look at it in the right way. In reality, holiness consists in one thing alone, namely, fidelity to God's plan. And this fidelity is equally within everyone's capacity in both its active and passive exercise.

The practice of active fidelity consists in accomplishing the duties imposed on us by the general laws of God and the Church and the particular state of life that we have embraced. Passive fidelity consists in the loving acceptance of all that God sends us at every moment.

Which of these two requirements of holiness is beyond our strength? Not active fidelity, since the duties it imposes cease when they are really beyond our powers. If the state of your health, for example, does not allow you to hear Mass, then you are under no obligation to do so. It is the same with all positive precepts, namely, those which lay down duties to be done. The only precepts to which no exceptions can be permitted are those which forbid the doing of things that are evil in themselves, for it is never permissible to do evil.

Can anything be easier or more reasonable? What excuse can we give? Yet this is all that God demands of us in the work of its sanctification. He demands it from the high and the low, from the strong and the weak; in a word, from all, always and everywhere. It is true then that he asks from us only what is simple and easy, for it is enough to possess this simple fund of goodwill in order to attain to eminent holiness.

If over and above the commandments he puts before us the counsels as a more perfect goal for our endeavor, he is always careful