Examination of Our State of Soul In Relation to God, Ourselves and Our Neighbor According to St Francis de Sales' *Introduction to the Devout Life:* Fifth Part

In Relation to God

1. What is your attitude towards mortal sin? Have you a firm determination never to commit it no matter what may happen? Has this determination lasted from the time of your Firm Resolution until now? The foundation of the spiritual life is in this determination.

2. What is your attitude towards God's commandments? Do you find them good, delightful and pleasant? My daughter, he whose taste is in good order and whose stomach is healthy loves good food and rejects the bad.

3. What is your attitude towards venial sin? We cannot avoid committing venial sins now and then, but have you a particular inclination to any venial sin? And, what is worse, is there any for which you have attachment and love?

4. What is your attitude towards spiritual exercises? Do you love them? Do you value them? Do you find them troublesome? Are you disgusted with them? To which do you feel yourself less inclined and to which more inclined? Do you feel dislike for any of the following: hearing the word of God, going to confession, taking spiritual advice, preparing for and receiving Communion, controlling your inclinations? If you discover something to which your heart is less inclined, examine from where this distaste comes and what is its cause.

5. What is your attitude towards God himself? Do you take pleasure in often recalling God to mind? In doing this, do you feel any pleasant delight? David says: I remember God and was delighted (Ps. 77:5-6). Do you feel within you a certain readiness to love God and a special satisfaction in tasting this love? Do you find joy in thinking of the immensity of God, of his goodness, of his gentleness? If the thought of God comes to you amid worldly activities and its vanities, does it find a ready welcome and does it fill your heart? Does your heart turn towards God and in some way wait for him? There are certainly such persons. A woman's husband returns home from afar. As soon as she sees him returning and hears his voice, though she may be fully engaged in work held back by some urgent preoccupation, her heart is not held back but leaves all other thoughts to think of her husband who has just come back. It is the same with those who love God greatly. However busy they may be when the thought of God comes to them, they find the return so delightful, that they give little attention to anything else. This is a very good sign.

6. What is your attitude towards Jesus Christ, God and man? Do you find pleasure in him? Bees take pleasure in honey, and wasps in garbage. In the same way, the good find happiness in Jesus Christ and have a most tender love for him. But the wicked take pleasure in vanities.

7. What is your attitude towards our Lady, the Saints and your Guardian Angel? Do you love them greatly? Have you special confidence in their kindheartedness? Are their pictures, their life stories, their praises pleasing to you?

8. As to your tongue, how do you speak about God? Do you take pleasure in speaking well of him according to your condition of life and your ability? Do you love to sing sacred songs?

9. As regards works, do you have at heart the external glory of God and doing something in his honour? Those who love God, love to add beauty to his house (Ps. 26:8).

10. Are you aware of having renounced any attachment and given up anything for God? For it is a clear expression of love to deprive oneself of something for the sake of the one who is loved. What have you renounced for the love of God?

## In Relation to Ourselves

1. How do you love yourself? Do you love yourself much for the sake of this world? If so, you will desire to remain here always, and will be very concerned to make yourself secure on this earth. But if you love yourself for the sake of Heaven, you will desire, or at least be willing to leave this world whenever it is pleasing to the Lord.

2. Do you keep a right order in the love of yourself? It is only inordinate love of ourselves which ruins us. A well-ordered love of ourselves demands that we should love the soul more than the body, that we should be more diligent to acquire virtues than anything else, that we should set a greater value on heavenly honour than on that which is low and passing. The well-ordered persons say more often to himself: ³What will the Angels say if I think of a such a thing?" rather than ³What will men say?"

3. What love have you for your own heart? What trouble do you take to care for it in its illness? You owe it this care, in order to help it and to obtain help for it when it is tormented by passions, and to lay all else aside for that.

4. How much do you value yourself before God? Nothing, no doubt. There is not much humility in a fly esteeming itself nothing compared with a mountain, nor in a drop of water esteeming itself nothing compared with the sea, nor in a spark of fire esteeming itself nothing compared with the sun. But humility lies in not esteeming ourselves better than others, and in not wanting to be overestimated by others. What is your stand in this respect?

5. As to the tongue, do you boast yourself in one way or another? Do you flatter yourself in speaking of yourself?

6. As to works, do you indulge in any pleasure harmful to your health? I mean vain and useless pleasures, too many late nights without any good reason, and so on.

## In Relation to Our Neighbor

1. The love for one's husband or wife should be tender and peaceful, firm and continuous. It must hold the first place since this is God's plan and will. I say the same of the love of one's children, close relatives and friends, each in its place.

2. Generally speaking what is your attitude towards your neighbour? Do you love him from your heart and for love of God? In order to discern this well, call to mind certain persons whom you think are troublesome and unpleasant. It is specially in such cases that we practise the love of God towards our neighbour, and still more in loving those who do us harm by their actions or their words. Examine carefully whether you are sincere at heart with regard to them? Or do you have great difficulty in loving them?

Do you readily speak ill of your neighbour, especially of those who dislike you? Do you do anything evil to your neighbour directly or indirectly? Provided you are a little reasonable, you will easily notice it.