



ABANDONMENT TO  
DIVINE PROVIDENCE



Jean-Pierre de Caussade, SJ

# Abandonment to Divine Providence

Jean-Pierre de Caussade, SJ

REVISED TRANSLATION

Edited and with Introduction, Reflections, and Prayers  
by Mary Mark Wickenhiser, FSP



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*Dedicated to the memory of  
Sister Mary Mark Wickenhiser, FSP, editor (1941–2021)  
who was called home by the Lord when this manuscript  
was nearing publication.*

Sister Anne Eileen Heffernan, FSP,  
Associate Editor

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## Foreword

SOME YEARS AGO, aware that I could not read all the spiritual books presented to me, I decided to privilege the classics. I read Saints Thérèse, John of the Cross, Francis de Sales, John Henry Newman, Teresa of Avila, Bonaventure, and others. I read Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* and Brother Lawrence's *The Practice of the Presence of God*. The day came when I took up Jean-Pierre de Caussade's *Abandonment to Divine Providence*—and loved it.

Since then, I return to it often. Some passages I have copied, highlighted, underlined, and learned by heart. Among them, a question and its answer: “What do you desire, you souls seeking perfection?” That is to say, do you desire holiness? To respond fully to Jesus? And do

you hesitate to aim so high? “Give free reign to your aspirations; place no limit on your desires. Expand your hearts to reach the infinite.” Yes, listen to me! Let your heart demand the infinite.

“The divine action,” Caussade writes, “is everywhere and always present, but only visible to the eyes of faith.” He continues, “If we could penetrate the veil that hides it, and if we were vigilant and attentive, God would reveal himself, and we would recognize his action in everything happening to us.” I love this vision of the spiritual life: eyes open in the most “ordinary” activities of the day to see and rejoice in God’s active presence to us.

But this book is cherished above all because it offers a simple path to peace amid the worries and burdens of life: “Allow God to act and abandon yourself to him.” This is the abandonment to God’s loving Providence highlighted in the title. Over the years, I have seen people undergoing great trials find peace through the reading of this book. I warmly recommend it to all, but perhaps above all to those in time of burden, pain, and anxiety: “Allow God to act and abandon yourself to him.”

I am grateful to Pauline Books and Media for this new and enhanced edition of a loved classic. The text draws upon the best of earlier translations, includes the preface

of the original editor, and offers additional reflections and prayers. Whether you are new to *Abandonment to Divine Providence* or wish to return to it, this edition will answer your need. May this book bless you as it has so many others, and may it bring peace to your heart.

TIMOTHY M. GALLAGHER, OMV

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## Introduction

GOD REVEALS HIS will for us through the joys, hardships, pains, and sufferings we encounter as we go about the duties of our ordinary, everyday lives. Extreme penances, countless rote prayers, and complex spiritual practices are of little value in our pursuit of holiness unless we are attentive to the gift of the present moment. God offers us peace of mind and heart in every circumstance of life if we surrender our will to him and place our trust in his plan for us, a plan designed for each of us, personally.

The spiritual doctrine of Jean-Pierre de Caussade, simple and clear, offers those who read and reflect on his words straightforward advice in their search for holiness of life: trustful surrender in every duty and event, for it is in these that God is secretly at work for our good. In other words, God has a reason for allowing things to

happen; we may not understand God's wisdom, but we can always trust his divine will.

The message within these pages, intended to inspire and convince, is similar to a musical score composed of variations of the same theme. While the topic is examined under various aspects, the core melody appears throughout: all will be well if we live in the present moment and give ourselves over into the loving hands of our provident God.



Caussade was not among the famed French spiritual writers of his day and never knew he wrote the work entitled *Abandonment to Divine Providence*. Only the basic facts of his life are known: he was born in 1675, entered the Jesuits in Toulouse when he was eighteen, was ordained a priest in 1704, and made his final vows in 1708. His assignments took him to many towns in southern France, where he taught in the local universities. After returning to Toulouse, where he obtained his doctorate in theology, he was sent as an itinerant preacher and confessor to various cities and towns in southern and central France.

It was in the city of Nancy in 1729, while Caussade was traveling in the province of Lorraine, that he first encountered the nuns of the Visitation Order. He became



the confessor and spiritual director for the community and remained there for about a year before he was sent as spiritual director to the seminary in Albi. Two years later, Caussade was back in Nancy and in charge of the Jesuit Retreat House, where he remained for about six years. During this time he gave frequent conferences to the Visitation nuns, and after he had moved on to other assignments he assumed the role of spiritual director for several of them through letters and correspondence. We owe a debt of gratitude to the nuns of the monastery who preserved the notes of his conferences and his letters of spiritual guidance. Caussade died in 1751.

About 110 years after Caussade's death, the collection of conference and retreat notes along with the letters that had been preserved by the Visitation nuns were given to a Jesuit scholar, writer, and editor, Father Henri Ramière. Ramière studied the material carefully, recognized the importance of Caussade's spiritual insights, and arranged the work into a comprehensive treatise that we know as *Abandonment to Divine Providence*. Today, this work is considered one of the world's great spiritual classics.



This present edition is closely based on translations of the eighth and tenth French editions; it attempts to use an

inclusive style without diminishing the depth of the message. While Caussade's conferences were originally directed to women religious, the substance of his spiritual insights can benefit all Christians who are seeking a path to holiness. The central work comprises six books containing short essays as chapters. Reflections and prayers have been added at the end of each chapter to offer today's reader a life-application for further meditation and deeper prayer. Also noteworthy are the following inclusions from the eighth French edition: the preface by Father Henri Ramière, SJ, and appendices highlighting helpful methods and prayers to guide the reader in the practice of abandonment. These latter have been selected from the works of saints and spiritual writers of the time. The present edition has been further enriched with additional prayers of abandonment by well-known spiritual writers.



May all who are searching for peace of mind and heart, those searching for meaning in a world suffering from spiritual emptiness, find in these pages guidance, comfort, and hope in their quest for inner peace.

MARY MARK WICKENHISER, FSP

*Editor*



Preface from  
the Original French Edition

*On the Foundation and True Nature  
of the Virtue of Abandonment*

EVERY TRUTH, HOWEVER clear, becomes error the moment it is lessened or exaggerated; all food for the soul, however salutary it may be, when wrongly applied, becomes a fatal poison.

The virtue of abandonment does not escape this danger; the holier and more profitable it is in itself, the more serious are the dangers we risk by misunderstanding its just limits.

These dangers, unfortunately, are not mere possibilities. The seventeenth century witnessed the birth of a heresy—that of the Quietists—which, while claiming to

teach its followers perfect abandonment to God, led them into grave disorders. For a time this sect caused confusion in the very capital of Catholicism, putting forth such false teaching that François Fénelon himself, while scorning the practical consequences drawn from the teaching of the Quietists, was temporarily misled by their false appearance of perfection.

To preserve Father Caussade's readers from these dangers, we think it well to add to these writings a concise description of the rules that should guide us in this matter. By the light of the principles furnished by reason and faith, we should have no difficulty in determining the proper limits that should mark our abandonment to Divine Providence; and it will be easy for us afterward to clarify the points in our author's doctrine that might be wrongly interpreted.

## I.

In his letters Father Caussade very clearly explains the two principles that form the basis of the virtue of abandonment.

First principle: In both the material world and the moral world, nothing is done, nothing happens that God has not foreseen from all eternity, and that he has not willed or at least permitted.

Second principle: God can will nothing, can permit nothing, except in view of the end he proposed to himself in creating the world—that is, in view of his glory and the glory of Jesus Christ, his only Son.

To these two principles laid down by our author we add a third, which completes the clarification of this whole subject: As long as humans live on earth, God desires to be glorified through the happiness of these privileged creatures; consequently, in God's designs the interest of humanity's sanctification and happiness is inseparable from the interest of the divine glory.

If we do not lose sight of these principles, which no Christian can question, we shall understand that our confidence in the Providence of our Father in heaven cannot be too great, too absolute, too childlike. If nothing happens but what he permits, and if he can permit nothing except what is for our happiness, then we need fear nothing other than not being adequately submissive to God. As long as we keep ourselves united with him and walk according to his designs, even if all creatures were to turn against us, they could not harm us. Those who rely on God become, through this very reliance, as powerful and as invincible as God, and created powers can no more prevail against them than against God himself.

This confidence in the fatherly Providence of God cannot exempt us from doing everything in our power to accomplish his designs, but after having done all that depends on our own efforts, we should abandon ourselves completely to God for the rest.

However, since not all these things enter into the designs of Divine Providence in the same way, neither should our abandonment in their regard be practiced in the same manner: the rules we should follow in the practice of this virtue should be founded on the nature of the objects that call it forth. We shall indicate the principal ones.

A. Among all the dispositions to which our abandonment can be applied, there are first those regarding events that depend solely on God, where human liberty has no part either in producing or averting them. These include, for example, certain adversities and occurrences as a result of the weather, certain accidents impossible to foresee, or certain natural imperfections of body or soul.

In regard to these realities, whether past, present, or future, it is evident that our abandonment cannot be too absolute.

There is nothing to do here but to lovingly endure all that God sends us, to accept in advance all that he may send us in the future. Resistance would be useless and

only serve to make us unhappy. On the other hand, loving and frequently renewed acceptance would make these unavoidable misfortunes very meritorious. And, oh, the marvels of God's goodness! Our abandonment will not only sanctify and sustain us in real trials; it will enable us to draw great merit from trials to which we shall never be subjected! For if we lovingly accept these trials when they present themselves to our mind as probable, or simply possible, then this willing acceptance, this fiat uttered in the depths of our heart, cannot fail to please God and be very useful to our soul. In this regard, therefore, the practice of abandonment can be very sanctifying, because it changes not only real but even purely imaginary trials into means of sanctification.

B. There are other sufferings that come to us through the sinfulness of creatures: persecution, slander, ill-treatment, neglect, injustice, and offenses of every kind. What are we to do when we find ourselves exposed to these?

1. Certainly we cannot condone the offenses against God that accompany such happenings; on the contrary, we should deplore and despise them, not because they wound our self-love but because they offend God and compromise the salvation of the offending souls.

2. In what concerns ourselves, on the other hand, we should regard as a blessing that which is an evil. To do so, we need only recall the principles previously stated: not to look only at the creature who is the immediate cause of our sufferings, but to raise our eyes higher and behold God, who has permitted them with only our happiness in view. This thought will suffice to dispel the bitterness and distress that would take possession of our hearts if we were to look merely at ourselves as victims of injustice.
3. In regard to the effects of an injustice already executed and irreparable, we have only to resign ourselves as lovingly as possible and carefully gather its precious fruits. It is often not difficult to understand the spiritual fruits God destines for us in exposing us to temporal evils: to detach us from creatures; to deliver us from intemperate affections, from our pride, from our indifference. These are true sicknesses of the soul, frequently all the more dangerous because they are less perceptible. The heavenly Physician wishes to cure us of such ills, using the rancor of another as a sharp instrument. Since we do not hesitate to endure much greater sufferings to be delivered from bodily



infirmities, let us gratefully accept the spiritual health—ininitely more precious—that God offers us, however disagreeable the instrument through which he gives it to us.

4. If it is in our power to avert the consequences of evil and injustice, and if we consider it necessary to take certain measures toward the goal of our true interest and the interest of the divine glory, let us do so without deviating from the practice of the virtue of abandonment. Let us entrust the success of our efforts to God and be ready to accept failure if God judges it more suitable to his designs and more profitable to our souls. We are so blind that we always have reason to fear being deceived, but God cannot be deceived, and we can be certain that what he determines will be best. Therefore, we cannot do better than to abandon the result of our efforts to him with full confidence.

C. But should this abandonment extend equally to our rash behavior, our faults, and every kind of annoyance that might arise as a result?

It is important to differentiate two things, which self-love tends to confuse. In the fault itself we must separate

what is blameworthy from what is humiliating. Likewise in its consequences we must distinguish between what is detrimental to the divine glory and what is inflicted on our self-love. Clearly, we could never despise our fault too much, nor regret too deeply the injury done to the divine glory. But as for our humiliation and the confusion inflicted on our self-love, we should rejoice and accept it with complete abandonment. This kind of sacrifice is undoubtedly best suited to destroy the secret fibers of self-love in us and to help us make rapid progress in virtue. To souls who have achieved a certain degree of constancy and detachment, exterior humiliations are small. When we have learned the vanity of human glory, we can easily endure the sting of contempt. However, we might still interweave such exterior detachment with great attachment to our own self-esteem and approval and a wholly egotistical desire for perfection. In this case, self-love, by changing its object, would only become more subtle and more dangerous. To extinguish it there is no remedy more effective than the humiliation resulting from our faults. Thus, we can never strive too earnestly to apply the practice of abandonment to this humiliation, at the same time laboring to correct our faults themselves.

What we say of past faults applies equally to future faults. Well understood, the practice of abandonment should deliver us from that impatience that makes us

wish to reach the summit of perfection immediately and only serves to turn us from the sole path that leads to perfection. This path is humility, and the impatience we are faulting is only another form of pride. Let us make every effort to correct our faults but let us be resigned to not seeing them all disappear in a day. With the most child-like confidence, let us sincerely ask God to grant us the essential grace that will completely free us from ourselves, to make us live only in him; but with an equally filial abandonment let us leave to him the day and hour in which this grace will be given us.

With still greater reason we should abandon to God the degree of sanctity that we shall attain on earth, the extraordinary graces that will accompany this sanctity here below, and the glory with which it will be crowned in heaven. Insofar as it depends on us, we should leave nothing undone to increase this holiness and glory, so as not to fall short of the degree God has marked for us. But if we are to earnestly devote ourselves to realizing God's designs, we must not desire to have them other than they are. If our love for God is what it should be, we will thank him for having granted other souls favors that he has not given us, and we will praise him no less for our poverty than for our riches.

D. Should our abandonment go even further? Should we, in view of the possibility of our damnation, resign