



Parish of the Nativity of the Lord

Book+Circle – February 2025

Abandonment to Divine Providence by Jean-Pierre de Caussade

About the Book

Divine Providence is a spiritual classic which offers insights into the essence of Christian spirituality, embracing what Caussade calls the “sacrament of the present moment”. The concept that every moment of our lives can be sacramental and God’s divine providence encompasses every single thing that happens to us, “The divine action, although visible to the eye, is everywhere and always present”. The book was written between 1733 and 1740, in French, for the Sisters of the Visitation in Nancy France.

How did the book make us feel?

- The book, which felt dense at times, left some feeling frustrated as they really wanted to get something out of the book.
- The state of perfect Abandonment – giving yourself to God – was a subject the group wanted to explore. Unfortunately, however, most struggled to finish the book reading some of the sentences over and over and again.
- It was felt that perhaps there were issues with the translation or indeed the ‘highbrow’ nature of the book which left most feeling unable to engage with the book.
- The fact that the book served as a teaching tool to the Nuns in the 18th century perhaps contributed to its intensity and sheer lack of connection

What did we think were the book’s main strengths?

- There were a few passages which held on to the simplicity of “Living in the moment”. Not to look back and ruminate on the past and not to worry about what might happen in the future.
 - Pope Francis said similarly “Live in the present”. There is no better time for us: now, here and now, is the one and only time to do good, to make our life a gift. Let us live in the present”
- Caussaude endeavoured to capture “Faith is our light in this life”, albeit without holding on to its simplicity of message.
- The book was set out in easy to ‘pick up’ reads – a chapter to read a day. The concepts being put forward by Caussaude for the Sisters in the convent around 1740 were sound and still relevant to us today

What did we think were the book’s main weaknesses?

- The book required a lot of concentration, and time to read and digest each section before moving on. We could imagine nuns in the convent reading this would have spent a lot of time on each section and ‘digested’ the meaning before moving forward. We agreed we don’t read in this fashion in today’s society.

- It did not engage the reader or attempt to simplify its important and much yearned for message of “Giving ourselves to God” – abandonment a source of Joy. It did not give clear, practical examples for us all to follow
- The lay out of the book, namely the Chapter headings and the sub headings, contributed to the overall sense of the book being a struggle to read. Perhaps these have been translated from Latin or French into English and over the 300+ years since it was written may have lost some meaning in translation.

Would we recommend that this book is read by others?

No – we all agreed that this was a challenging book to read and couldn’t think who might enjoy it.

Next Book+Circle - Small Meeting Room at St Joseph’s

Friday 28 March 10.30 am: Dillexit Nos (2004) – free to read online (Pope Francis’s Oct 24 Encyclical)

<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/20241024-enciclica-dillexit-nos.html>

OR purchase on the St Paul’s website, shop next to Westminster Cathedral

<https://stpauls.org.uk/dillexit-nos.html>

Thursday 22 May 8.00pm The Jesuit Guide to (almost) everything By James Martin.