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The way of Vincent de Paul: contents and preface

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PREFACE

The celebrated French historian, Henri Bremond, in his study of religious movements and personalities of seventeenth century France was captivated by the attractiveness and depth of spirituality that he encountered in the writings of Saint Vincent de Paul. He did not hesitate, however, to chide gently the Community of Saint Vincent for having too carefully guarded the writings of the Saint and for not having made them available to the public at large. He subsequently retracted his complaint when on the eve of the publication of his own magisterial work in the 1920's, he learned that the first volumes of the project of publishing the fourteen volumes of Saint Vincent's correspondence and conferences had begun to appear.

Father Bremond, were he writing today, might be justified in thinking and regretting that the English-speaking world was not yet sufficiently familiar with the writings of Saint Vincent. Language is a formidable barrier and the work of translation is demanding and slow. Recent years, however, have seen an acceleration in the pace of translating Saint Vincent's writings, as well as a growth in the number of studies of the many faceted mind and heart of Saint Vincent.

Among such studies must be placed the present volume—*The Way of Vincent de Paul*—which Father Robert Maloney offers to all who would like to become more acquainted with the spiritual vision of this man whose name immediately conjures up, not only the poor but the challenge of serving them. In a very painstaking and thorough manner Father Maloney presents, with ample references to sources, the outlines of Saint Vincent's "way." A feature of this work are the very practical deductions and consequences which Father Maloney draws out from the vows and virtues which Saint Vincent considered to be so important for a person called to serve Christ in the poor. This practical aspect of the book would, I feel, appeal greatly to Saint Vincent who considered prayer to be largely ineffective if it was not backed up by concrete resolutions bearing on one's daily life.

In welcoming this book—and in thanking Father Maloney—I feel confident that it will draw its readers closer to Saint Vincent whom Pope John Paul II has described as "a man of action and prayer, of administration and imagination, of leadership and humility, a man of yesterday and of today"

(Pope John Paul II to the Members of the General Assembly, 1986; cf. *Vincentiana* 1986, p. 416).

27 September 1991

Richard McCullen, C.M.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Let me express my gratitude right from the start to the many people who helped me put this work together. Actually, most of the chapters originated in oral form in a series of conferences to the Daughters of Charity. Subsequently, using those materials, I published a series of articles in *Vincentiana*, whose immediate audience was the Vincentian community of priests and brothers. The reader will undoubtedly note remnants of both the original “oral tradition” and then the “written sources.” After some hesitation, I decided not to obliterate those remnants, since often their concreteness, though revealing that they were originally directed to a particular group (male or female), gives life to what otherwise might remain merely theoretical. All of the chapters have been revised—some extensively, some less so—in preparing this book. I address it primarily to the extended Vincentian family, which includes the members of the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity, a large number of other communities of sisters, and hundreds of thousands of other lay Vincentians throughout the world, but I hope that it will also be of service to others who seek to give their lives in the service of the poor.

I want to express my sincerest thanks to those who assisted in the nitty-gritty labor of putting the book in its final form: to Julie Keating, Barbara Spigel, and Llewellyn Sasyn, who did much of the typing in its early stages; to Fran Japertas, Colleen Kleintop, and Helen Neveroski, who typed the computerized version; to Jim Claffey and Pat Griffin, who lodged me and offered me generous computer services during the revision stage; and to my sister Marie, for proofreading the text. The simple truth is that without such help books do not get written.