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From The “Regulations” of Chatillon To The “Rules” Of the Daughters of Charity

Sister Blandine Delort, D.C.

*Translated by Sr. Martha Beaudoin, D.C.**

The subject that was suggested to me is particularly vast. It is not a question of giving a detailed analysis of the various regulations but, rather, of a historical overview which I invite you to undertake in several stages.

I. 1617

My Daughters, it can be said in all truth *that it is God who made your Company* (Coste IX 208).

St. Vincent often recalled this truth, but when he wished to convince the Sisters more strongly he evokes Chatillon.

God showed himself there, through the event, and for us Daughters of Charity that is where it all began.

On August 20, the plight of a family was brought to the attention of St. Vincent:

I did not fail to commend them affectionately to the charity of the congregation in the course of the sermon, and God, touching the hearts of those who heard me, moved them with compassion for those poor afflicted people (Coste IX 243).

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On Wednesday, August 23, he assembled some good women who “associated themselves for charitable ends” to help the poor sick of that city and he gave them Regulations.

These Regulations of August 23, 1617 demonstrated a concern of guaranteeing *an effective and continuous* service of the poor sick of the city,

who have often suffered greatly, more because of a lack of organization in their care because of a lack of charitable people (Coste XIII 423).

This is the reality that St. Vincent sensed as he went to the meeting of the Maladières on Sunday afternoon. Fully docile to the idea that God had given him en route, he immediately set to work and *prioritized the tasks according to the needs of the poor sick*.

- the rotation of service was assigned by name,
- details for substitutes were minutely defined (spelled out)
- “Since the Mother of God, has been invoked and chosen as patroness of important matters, then nothing but good could result and redound to the glory of Jesus her Son” (Coste XIV 126).

In this confident assurance the “Service” began the very next day.

The pressing needs of the poor brought about the quick launching of the project but St. Vincent “sees it live,” as he observed,...he reflected on it before God.

Little by little, the *daily* routine of life led him to reflect on the *constitutive elements of the lasting nature of a work* in order to *maintain the momentum of charity and guarantee the permanency of service*. He realized that good will was not enough to accomplish each day with painful exactitude a difficult and *obscure* task for which, in fact,

these good ladies were not prepared.

The spontaneous, generous "Gift of God" for the service of the poor needed to be sustained and nourished by a strong spiritual life accompanied by the bonds of fraternal charity.

Thus appeared progressively to St. Vincent the opportunity to provide to the members of the association a new structure of transforming this "Charitable Association" into a Confraternity.

But since it is to be feared that once having begun this good work, it should fade away in a short time, if in order to maintain it, they (the ladies) do not have some sort of union and spiritual bond among themselves, they are disposed to join themselves into a body which can be erected into a confraternity with the following Regulations.

...The Confraternity will be called the "Confraternity of Charity" and those who will be its members will be known as the "servants of the poor or of the Charity" (Coste XIII 423).

Written in the light of a lived experience, the "Regulation" was presented to the Archbishop of Lyon. It was approved by his Vicar General, Monsignor Mechatin Lafaye, on November 26, 1617.

The following December 8, the Pastor of Chatillon, Vincent de Paul, officially erected the Confraternity in the Chapel of the hospital of the city and called for the election of officers.

Regulations Of The Confraternity

These Regulations found in a handwritten text of twenty-four pages defined the goal of the organization of the Confraternity.

A remarkable article explains the concrete attitude of service which the “Ladies who became servants of the Poor” should have, an exterior attitude which should come from an interior attitude of the heart, humble, loving, respectful and delicate, a Vincentian attitude par excellence, which is directed to the “Master” served in the person of the sick poor, and who nevertheless reveals His presence.

The spiritual structure is brought out in the article concerning:

— the *Common Rules* which all the members should observe,

— the *individual spiritual exercises* which provide the framework of a life of prayer,

— *presence at the assemblies* which brings out the importance of the spiritual and fraternal bonds among the members.

They gather:

— *to pray together*: Mass, exhortation, prayer is common,
 — *for a review of life* on the questions relative to the service of the sick, and to place in common the projects for the following month,

— *for a personal and fraternal reevaluation*:

they will charitably admonish each other of the faults related to the service of the poor; all of this, nevertheless, without noise or confusion and in as few words as possible (Coste XIII 431).

This Regulation of Chatillon has served as a basis for all those that St. Vincent wrote at the time of the Establishment of the Confraternities, which he established in the places where he would preach a Mission.

The fundamental outline remains the same. St. Vincent “*adjusts*” it according to the places and the particular character of each new foundation.

II. 1629

St. Vincent met St. Louise in 1625. In 1629, he asked her to visit the Confraternities of the dioceses surrounding Paris so as to preserve them in the primitive spirit, to rekindle their zeal, and to watch over the observance of their rules.

This stage was very important for the Daughters of Charity because *it was from this period that a close and confident collaboration was established between St. Vincent and St. Louise, with regard to the service of the Poor.*

In both the Confraternities, which St. Louise organized and those she visited, St. Vincent gave her complete latitude to adapt the Regulations to life to the particular nature of the place, while at the same time inciting it to maintain the first inspiration as firmly as possible:

For the sisters of the Charity (Villepreux), I think it would be expedient that you assemble all of them, that you read the Regulations together and strive *to place everything in the practice which conforms to the Regulations* which is different from the others because it is the second establishment. But would you tell them, please, about the practice in other places and try to aid them to resolve to do the same (Coste I 84).

And elsewhere:

I find good all that you relate to me about the charity and I ask you to propose to the sisters *all that you will find appropriate for that end and that you terminate the way you have written or have it continue according to what ideas may come to you for its better functioning* (Coste I 104).

Thus we see that the institution of the Confraternities, as much in the country as in Paris, was the first common

endeavor of St. Vincent and St. Louise. She prepared day by day the foundation of the Daughters of Charity.

In fact, during the visits St. Louise noted various deficiencies in the services of the poor. She indicated them to St. Vincent in very brief and precise accounts. One perceived the necessity to remedy certain abuses, but in order to do that, it is necessary to find a formula that could be adopted toward that end.

III. 1630

The arrival of Marguerite Naseau opened a new perspective on the subject.

A simple girl from the fields, she came with her whole heart and her love of God to give herself for the service of the poor.

She was soon followed by other girls whom "she had helped to develop a spiritual life." Other girls referred by St. Vincent came to join them. If they were judged suitable for the service of the Ladies, servants of the sick poor, they were immediately placed in the Confraternities; most of them in Paris and the others in the country.

A "*Project for the Regulations to unite girls or servants of the poor to the sisters of the Confraternities of Charity in the villages*" attests to this attempt.

The text, written by St. Louise and corrected by St. Vincent (dated between 1629 and 1633), brings out the concern of the Founders to support the girls placed in this new situation.

But in this context the Regulations were not enough. The girls had no bonds among each other. Scattered, from the time of their arrival, it was difficult, if not impossible, to provide a formation to the service of the poor or the spiritual life.

IV. 1633

This observation led St. Vincent, on November 29, 1633, to entrust to St. Louise some of the girls so that they could live in her house and have them live in Community.

Thus it was fraternal life in common, for the service of the poor, which marked the specific nature of this fundamental stage.

A regulation spelled out the details. The text written by St. Louise has no date on it. It was not known if it existed from the first days, but it can be said that it existed from very early times. It does not seem very likely that St. Vincent and St. Louise spelled out the details of this new formula ahead of time.

Indications were given on the manner of living daily life: times for relating to God, for the service of the poor, and for formation were well divided.

- 1) *relationship to God*: each day,
 - prayer and sharing on prayer
 - vocal prayers: morning and evening
 - Mass
 - Particular and general examen
 - Scripture reading
- 2) *service of the poor*: a rotation and a schedule are established
 - for those who work days serving the poor (carrying the soup pot, taking care of the clothing, of the wood, of the preserves etc...),
 - for those who are in charge of the medicines (carrying them to the poor, getting the prescriptions, etc...).
- 3) *formation*
 - they learn to read, to work,
 - they are instructed on how to teach the catechism.

On July 30, 1634, M. Vincent in a Conference gave the

Rules and the instructions to her to practice them to the little congregation of the Daughters of Charity:

My good girls, I said to you, the other day when I was speaking to you, that you have now been living together for some time with one object in view and that, nevertheless, you have not had so far any Regulation for your manner of life. In this the Divine Providence has conducted you as it conducted the people of God who were without a code of laws for more than a thousand years after the creation (Coste IX 1).

Up until that day, in fact, the Daughters referred to the order of day given by Mlle Le Gras. It was a “project” in a way, on a trial basis, that could be modified in the course of the experience of life.

After some months, St. Vincent explained it with some small changes. He advanced the hour of rising, he introduced silence, he decided that Holy Communion would take place on Sundays and feast days; he insisted on the importance of living in great cordiality and charity with each other, on availability, and divestment of everything in order to belong to God alone.

After having attentively listened to the explanations given by St. Vincent:

All the Sisters then declared that they desired to follow the advice that had been given them and to practice the mode of life prescribed. All knelt down, and M. Vincent added: “May the goodness of God be pleased so to imprint on your hearts and mind what I wretched sinner have just said to you on His behalf, *that you may be enabled to remember it well so as to practice it, and that you may be true Daughters of Charity.* In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen (Coste IX 13).

That day, the Daughters “committed” themselves to live

according to the little Rule. For the next six years there exist no documents relative to the conferences of M. Vincent.

Nevertheless, he no doubt continued to see the Sisters and call them together. The correspondence exchanged with Mlle Le Gras during this period attests to this. It also permits us to measure the great activity of Louise de Marillac with the Charities while at the same time continuing the formation of the girls in her home.

I am going to attempt to visit some of the charities, and perhaps, if I continue to feel well, I may go as far as Liancourt and Montmorency to take on work which you can complete afterwards (Coste I 237 L.166).

I approve of what you say about setting up a Confraternity (Beauvais) and accommodating it to the state of those of the diocese and have sent your letter to M. de Beauvais for that purpose (Coste I 240 L.169).

The close collaboration continued in total confidence and continued reference to the designs of God:

O what great treasures are hidden in the Holy Providence and that those who honor our Savior follow Providence and do not try to step over it. *Is it not true that you wish as it is good and reasonable that your Savior would not undertake anything without you and without your order?* (Coste 169).

Being here, we will work on the Regulations of Beauvais. I even think that it would not be expedient at this time to stop the one of Liancourt because of that house and the Daughters; but send them the ordinary letter unsigned, *because the experience may show that it is necessary to add or subtract from it.*

For the time being let us do as Our Savior, Who gave the Law of grace to men without having written it. (Coste I 246 L.174).

Was this continual looking upon the Lord and the way He did things while on earth what led St. Vincent to always postpone the time of writing the Rules for the Daughters of Charity?

Louise de Marillac often worried about this and during this period, 1633-1640, her letters indicated the proposals which she made to St. Vincent on the subject.

Between 1634 and 1638 she wrote to him:

I received your letter and your memorandum about the Regulations of your girls, which I have not had the time to read (Coste I, 277).

I am sending back to you the Rules of the Daughters. It was so well done that I did not want to add anything to it. Read them to the Daughters. If you judge it necessary that I be present, I promise you that it will be one of the first things I shall do on my return, please be good.

It would be well if those of the parish (St. Lawrence) be there at the same time so that they will all be uniform (Coste I 326).

In the Conference of July 19, 1640, M. Vincent noted once again that:

During the ten or twelve years since your Company came into existence, you have honored the way in which the Son of God acted when He established His Church, for He spent thirty years of His life without appearing in public, labored only for three years and left nothing in writing to His Apostles, but with the help of God *for the future you will have your little Rules* (Coste IX 18).

He continued:

Reflect, my Daughters, on the greatness of God's design in your regard, and the grace He bestows on you, by even now enabling you to serve so many poor people in so many different places. To do this entails different sorts of

regulations. The Daughters in Angers have theirs; one sort is needed for those who serve the poor little children, another for those who serve the poor in the Hotel-Dieu, another for those who serve the poor in the parishes, another for those who serve the poor convicts, and still another for those who remain at home, which you should look upon and love as your own family. *And all these Rules should be based upon the general rule of which I now wish to speak* (Coste IX 19).

Following this Conference Louise de Marillac must have set to work immediately and sent her projects to M. Vincent who wrote her "This Wednesday morning" (1640):

I have just read the order of day which you sent me and I find it good.

One thing that I find difficult to understand is that *I could not distinguish in my mind the works of the Daughters.*

And so this is what I think would be well: those of la Chapelle and the Hotel Dieu can observe it as it stands; those of the parishes, those who work with children and prisoners should have in view to observe them as closely as possible. The Rule of the Sisters of the parishes is well spelled out. At the end you could add those lines from the rule for those working with children, if you think it appropriate, and to the rules for the Sisters working with prisoners, *but for this it is well to know what they are doing and include it in the rule.*

Today please add the section on the Sisters who work with children and send it to me. I will look at it this evening (Coste II 114).

Louise de Marillac certainly went to "see" what the Daughters were doing, because the propositions which she made to add to the Rules of the Sisters who work with prisoners and of the orphans are the expression of

observations made based on details lived out before her eyes.

We measure in all these texts how our Rules came directly from *life*.

At the beginning of the Conference of June 14, 1643, Louise de Marillac wrote in her own hand:

M. Vincent did us the charity of giving us a discourse on the rule and the mode of life of Daughters of Charity, as the result of the fact that a parish Sister had asked him to let her have in writing an account of the practices observed in the house.

Our most honored Father had not yet been able to make up his mind to have a written rule and, *from this fact, we have reason to believe that Divine Providence has reserved to itself the guidance of this work, which it advances or retards, according to its pleasure* (Coste IX 13).

M. Vincent explained the subject of the conference which was:

...the necessity of every Company's having a rule or mode of life conformable to the service which God wishes it to render Him. ...It is difficult and even impossible for communities to preserve uniformity without a rule.

And he explained:

...It is easy to observe your rules. They are divided into two parts:

The first tells you, in fifteen articles, how the day should be spent, that is to say, all that you should do every hour.

In the second part, some instructions are given to help you to carry out these directions thoroughly.

I know quite well there is a little diversity in your Rules, on account of the different classes of poor people whom you serve, but, nevertheless, they all can be made to

agree as far as the substance of your exercises is concerned.

And if it proves necessary to alter anything, for the sake of the service of the convicts, the children, the poor in the parishes, and the Sisters who are out in the country, it will be done. I think you can all easily live like those in this house; it is to be wished that your exercises should be similar to those of the Sisters here (Coste IX 115).

This last paragraph is very important because it brings out that adaptation necessitated by the particular needs of the poor does not for all that imply whim or dissipation.

This diversity already mentioned in the Conference of July 19, 1640, inspired by a profound respect of the person served and of the "One" encountered in that person, in Faith, should be, according to St. Vincent, the unifying factor.

The concrete details, spelled out in function to the service rendered, should all be carried out according to the specific "spirit" of the Company, set forth in the Common Rules.

This is what Louise de Marillac, who remained remarkably close to the life of the poor and of the Sisters, persistently tried daily to bring before St. Vincent:

I made these remarks, she said at the conclusion of the observations on the Common Rules, because your Charity asked me to do so (L.a 93 [Thoughts of Louise de Marillac]).

One essential point still remained to be worked out clearly.

Although I recommend you to observe your Rules and way of life exactly, and although you should love to conform yourselves to all that is done in this house, which is the body of the Company, *nevertheless, as your chief obligation is the service of the sick poor*, when the needs of the poor are urgent you must not fear to omit some regula-

tions, provided it is *really necessary* to do so, and that you do not neglect them from idleness or mere natural inclination (Coste IX 126).

At the beginning of the Conference M. Vincent foresaw the possibility that the Sisters would have a copy of the Rules to help them practice them more exactly.

In the last article he recommended reading them in common:

You are supplied with a copy, so that you may read it at least once a month. That is essential. *By reading it, you will know the Will of God, and be incited to put it into practice.*

And he ended by encouraging the Sisters to thanksgiving and fidelity:

Yes, my Daughters, look upon it as a great thing to become good christian women by the faithful observance of your Rules. God will thereby be glorified and your Company will edify the entire Church (Coste IX 126 [June 14, 1643]).

On January 22, 1645, M. Vincent defined the subject of the Conference:

I shall point out to you what has been observed in your Company for a very long time. They are not new Rules, but only your usual practices (Coste IX 203).

Now, my dear Sisters, *as the design of bringing you together came from God Himself, you should also believe that your way of life was translated into a set of Rules by the action of Divine Providence*, and that it is necessary to set down those Rules in writing both to preserve the memory of what God asks of you, and to enable those who will come after you to continue their observance (Coste IX 210).

This reflection introduced a new step.

V. 1645

The Company developed. It grew in number and started to spread to greater distances. St. Vincent felt under pressure to give it a stronger organization. He contemplated obtaining episcopal approbation, then royal sanction, in order to give the Institute a constancy based on the protection of the Church and of the State.

In August or September 1645 (exact date unknown), St. Vincent submitted to St. Louise "the texts of the memorandum for the establishment of the Daughters in view of asking for the approbation of the Company by his excellency Jean Francois Paul de Gondi, Coadjutor to the Archbishop of Paris (Coste II 546). St. Louise answered giving the observations requested (Coste II 547).

This memorandum, having briefly recalled the goal and origin of the work, with its growth, indicates the present situation (organization, services rendered, resources) bringing out the spiritual benefits extended to the poor:

Works can only be called works for the service of God if those who undertake them and devote themselves to them have a spiritual union among themselves (Coste II 551).

(And in this passage we find the same terms used at Chatillon), St. Vincent asked the Archbishop to approve the Rule along with the request and to set up into a confraternity this Company of girls and widows.

This text of the primitive Regulations or Statutes is a very important document (Coste XIII 551 al).

It came from attentive and daily observance of the life style of the Daughters of Charity during twelve years.

It represented the fundamental givens to which St. Vincent would henceforth make reference in writing the Rules properly so called: Common and particular Rules.

VI. 1646

This first petition was reviewed in 1646 (Coste III 50 and XIII 557 and 565) and the episcopal approbation was given on November 20, 1646.

On May 30, 1647 St. Vincent assembled the Sisters to explain the memorandum:

After he had finished reading the Rules, (approved by The Archbishop of Paris) our most honored Father added:

And now, my Daughters, *here are the Rules, approved by the mercy of God, which establish you as a Confraternity of Charity separate from that of the Confraternity of the Ladies of Charity* with which you have been hitherto associated. They do not release you from association with the Ladies, to whom you are subject in all matters concerning the care of the sick, but *they do render you different, as far as your mode of life is concerned.*

...you should consider these Rules as coming to you from the hand of God Himself (Coste IX 327).

Even if the Rules were sent "by God," St. Vincent still did not think it was time to write them, as was seen in a letter from St. Louise of July 15, 1651:

Another need is that the manner of life be put down in writing and distributed to every place where there are Sisters who can read. They should keep it reverently, without giving copies to lay people or showing it to them. To be sure that every member of the Company is well acquainted with it, it could be read in Paris once a month by the Sister Servant. The Sisters of the parishes would assemble for that purpose—half the first two weeks, and the other half the next two weeks.

As for the Sisters living in the country, there are places where it would be better not to distribute it, partly because they can hardly read, and partly because we aren't too sure of them. They could listen to the reading of it when they come here to the House.

Since there will always be literal-minded persons in the Company, *an interpretation of the manner in which each action should be performed must accompany the article* (Letters, English trans. 1972 p. 321).

This last sentence expressed once again the concern of our Founders of maintaining a deep spirituality which was indispensable in order to motivate and sustain charitable activity.

Time passed and St. Vincent continued to wait before giving the Sisters a written text.

One of the reasons for this delay was the incident of the loss of the document of the approbation of the Company by Bishop de Gondi.

Nine years went by without having found the precious original document, and it was necessary to wait until January 18, 1655 to obtain a new approbation from Cardinal de Retz.

Between the document of November 20, 1646 and that of January 18, 1655, there was only one notable difference: the supervision and direction of the said Society was confided to Vincent de Paul, for the remainder of his life, and after him to his successors, Generals of the Congregation of the Mission.

VII. 1655

The approbation of the Company by the Church brought about a new stage of development.

As he had done at Chatillon, St. Vincent proceeded to the

erection of the Company during the first General Assembly of the Sisters on August 8, 1655:

Although the Statutes stipulate that the election of the officers should be carried out with a plurality of votes, nevertheless, since this is the first time it falls to the one who established the said Confraternity to name the Officers, we have named the following...(Coste XIII, 574).

From then on, one can say that the Company was legally constituted, that very day (August 8, 1655). St. Vincent read the Act of Approbation to the Sisters:

I also want to read your Rules to you, which he did. The Sisters were so touched by this that they could not hold back their tears.

You are the Apostles of Charity. You have been chosen to be the foundation of your Company. *You should then give yourselves wholly to God in thanksgiving. You should give yourselves wholly to God to observe your Rules.*

It now remains for us to find out whether you all desire to persevere in this observance.

All the Sisters answered "Yes."

Monsieur Vincent then said, "Do you accept these Regulations?"

"Yes, Father"

Having noted *the consent of all the Sisters*, as of the following September 29, St. Vincent began the explanation of the Common Rules, placing once again the emphasis on *the obligation we have of giving ourselves to God to observe them well* (Coste X 106).

"It was not men who invented them," he continued, "*it was God who inspired them*, after having consulted and tested them through practical experience to see if they were good. This has gone on for twenty-five years that we had the same Rules observed and that *Our Lord allowed to be known little by little what should be done.*"

At last they are received by the Church, *another mark*

that they are of God, since the Church only approves that which comes from God (Coste X 110).

Moreover there are also Common Rules, which all should observe, and other particular Rules which are proper to each office, such as cook, portress, etc... (Coste X 112).

On October 18, 1655 during the Conference on the “end of the Company,” M. Vincent explained articles 1, 2 and 3, starting with the reading of the Rule.

Thus we find, throughout the texts of the Conferences which he gave after this date, the texts of the forty-three articles of the Rules which he wrote, followed by twenty-seven others dealing with the employment of the day.

The Rules for the Sisters in the Parishes were also noted in eighteen articles. They were supplemented by a summary (in seventeen points) of the Common Rules which the Sisters should observe in particular.

Lastly, a very brief succinct order of the day which very much resembled the one proposed to the first Sisters by St. Louise.

Although the exact date of the edited, definitive text is unknown, nevertheless the Sisters were very eager to have it.

On August 24, 1656, Sister Jeanne de la Croix wrote to M. Portail:

...also, M. Alméras gave me the hope of soon having our Rules. Must we die without having the happiness of seeing them! I beg you to ask M. Vincent our most honored father for them for me. I ask him for them in the name of God, and for love of Him, on my knees, hands joined, that it may please his charity to give to the Company this benefit so important to the Company, so that his memory may be more and more eternalized on earth as well as in heaven (L.A. 1083) [Archives of the Daughters of Charity]).

The allusion made by St. Vincent in the Conference of August 11, 1655 led to the presumption that at that moment the manuscript was ready, because he said:

It will be necessary to give you your Rules, and you will have them; we will have them printed or written and we shall give them to you (Coste X 656).

We will not go into the details in this paper of how, afterward, M. Alméras, the first successor of St. Vincent, was led to transmit to the Daughters of Charity the text of their Common and Particular Rules.

Conclusion

To end, I would like simply to make some brief remarks.

God inspired them to the Superiors so that they would give them to you (30 May 1647: Coste IX 312).

You are the ones who have made them, or rather it is God who inspired you with them (June 14, 1643 (Coste 113).

St. Vincent was convinced

...of the necessity for each Company to have a rule or a style of life suitable to the service that God wishes to draw from it. (Coste IX 114).

At Chatillon, the urgent nature of the service of the poor had led him to compose a Regulation which organized the aid immediately.

As to the Daughters of Charity, if, in fact, it was St. Vincent who wrote and institutionalized the Rules, *their elaboration was brought about, as at Chatillon, based on life experience and on the availability to the Spirit* but with one important difference, which was *the participation of St. Louise and that of the first Sisters.*

I would like to bring this out.

As soon as St. Louise was associated in 1629 with the establishment of the Confraternities, St. Vincent entrusted to her the "*adjustment*" of the Rules, when it was necessary.

From the beginning of the common life of the Daughters of Charity, it was St. Louise who wrote the first "employment of the day" (L. a 55). It was adopted by St. Vincent who gave it officially to the Sisters on July 31, 1634.

The writings of St. Louise show what she was able to constantly bring to St. Vincent concrete and constructive elements.

In other respects, it was *the dialogue with the Sisters*, the *review of life* during the course of the Conferences, which enriched with daily experience the reflection of the Founder.

He questioned them on the practice of such or such an article of the Rules.

The *simplicity* with which the Sisters expressed themselves in truth; *the love of the poor* which they demonstrated; *the humility* which led them to accuse themselves publicly of their faults, incited St. Vincent to thanksgiving, but also, they enlightened him on the real difficulties met and led him to determine what *could be maintained* and *what should be modified*.

It was thus that on October 15, 1641 he proposed to the Sisters to change their time of rising to 4 o'clock, so that the Sisters of the parishes, who on the preceding August 16 had said that they could not pray in the morning because of the great numbers of sick, would not miss this *indispensable relationship with God*.

For St. Vincent, the service of the poor could not be brought about "effectively" except if it were first of all preceded by the "totally given to God." By the modification of the horarium, one sees clearly that it was to preserve to

the service of the poor its full priority and all the time it required, that St. Vincent adjusted the rule to the fundamental necessity of the interior life.

When we go back to the source as we have just done, we can only marvel once again at the workings of God on the "little Company."

In a renewed certainty that it was God who did it all, we can reaffirm that it is again "Him" who does "all" today, in the face of the evangelization of the poor, in the measure in which "He" finds "instruments" like St. Vincent and St. Louise, fundamentally open to the Spirit, totally docile to His action, humbly active, placing all their confidence and their confidence only in the action of Divine Providence.



Do not overburden yourself with rules and practices; strengthen yourself to fulfill well those you have, especially as regards your daily actions and employments; in short, let your greatest concern be to do well what you do.

St. Vincent de Paul



Ask of God for the Company that His goodness may impart His Spirit to all, in general and in particular, so we may be faithful to Him.

St. Louise de Marillac