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**The Role of Saint Vincent de Paul
and Saint Louise de Marillac
as Architects and as Moving Spirits
behind the Spiritual
and Missionary Renewal
in Seventeenth-Century France.**

BY
RAYMOND DEVILLE, S.S.



*Reverend
Raymond Deville, S.S.*

First of all, I wish to thank Father John Richardson, C.M., president of DePaul University, for his kind invitation to participate in your symposium.

I feel much honored and a bit nervous, but above all, I am very pleased to spend a few moments with you, in spite of my bad English, especially in spite of my bad pronunciation. But, after all, I think my French accent will go very well with my subject!

As a Sulpician, I am pleased to meet you here at DePaul University because, as you know, Father Jean-Jacques Olier, the founder of the Society of Saint Sulpice, was not only a directee of Saint Vincent, but also

a disciple and a friend. Saint Vincent used to speak of him as "le tout bon Abbé Olier," the very good Father Olier. And when Olier died, the other Sulpicians organized a meeting to elect his successor and they asked Saint Vincent, "Monsieur Vincent," to preside over this first chapter. Moreover, the ties between the Sulpicians in America and the Daughters of Charity are very strong, especially because of Saint Elisabeth Anne Seton, Father Louis William Dubourg, and so many others. So, I can tell you that I feel "at home" with you this evening.

The title of my presentation invites us to "situate" Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise at the heart of the spiritual and missionary

renewal in seventeenth-century France. Other contributions will help us better to situate the Vincentian Communities in the religious and cultural terrain of Counter Reformation France.

Two Introductory Remarks

(1) I would like to emphasize the spiritual aspect of the question and speak of what is often called “the French school of spirituality.” You probably know that the term “French school of spirituality” is very controversial. Some historians do not agree with such a term. Others simply deny the very existence of such a “school” of spirituality. Still others do not think that Saint Vincent and Saint Louise belong to it. It is necessary, before all, to clarify our ideas on that topic.

The words “school” and “spirituality” are not absolutely accurate. Even if Pierre de Bérulle, Charles Condren, Jean-Jacques Olier, John Eudes and, to some extent, Vincent, share in many common approaches of Christian life and mission, they never had any intention of “founding” a school of spirituality. Moreover, the very term “spirituality” is a bit misleading in the context of the renewal of the Church in seventeenth-century France. All the great leaders in the Church of France at that time were involved in missionary work as well as being true mystics. This point deserves much attention today. Saint Vincent, Saint Louise, and the others present us with a model of how to combine our commitment to mission and charity with contemplation of Jesus.

(2) Secondly, we have to emphasize the strong influence of Francis de Sales and Jane Frances de Chantal on all the members of the French school. At the beginning of that seventeenth century, Saint Francis de Sales had a very strong influence. He was not a Frenchman himself nor an Italian. He was born and lived most of the time in Savoy, between France and Italy. Of course, he often came and stayed in Paris, Lyon, and Dijon, and you know how much influence he had on Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac. For instance the emphasis on the will of God that we find in Saint Louise and Saint Vincent seems to me to be rooted in Saint Francis de Sales. In all Saint Louise’s writings—letters and personal writings—we find that theme. She was always preoccupied with knowing God’s design for her. An infinite number of texts could be quoted here. That reality—not just a theme—is rooted in the gospel. “Thy will be done” . . . “my food is to fulfill my Father’s will.”

But in the France of seventeenth-century there was a strong emphasis on that. *The Rule of Perfection*, a famous book written by a Capuchin,

Benedict of Canfeld, was very popular. Both Vincent and Louise read it. And Benedict insisted very much on fulfilling God's will. But I think that the influence of Francis de Sales was still strong in that respect. Both in the *Introduction to the Devout Life* and the *Treatise on the Love of God*, Francis speaks of abandonment to Divine Providence and fulfillment of God's will. I advise you to look at the index at the end of the spiritual writings of Saint Louise under the words "will of God."¹ You may also compare Louise's affirmations with similar affirmations of Francis de Sales, for example, *Treatise on the Love of God*, Book 9, chapter 9, a chapter often quoted by Vincent.

You are familiar with the spiritual and missionary journey of Saint Vincent and also with the evolution of Saint Louise's spiritual life and her charitable undertakings. Many persons, readings, and events influenced them on their journey to conversion and holiness, to missionary and charitable commitment. And each of them had a strong influence on the other. Remember, for example, the exhortation of Saint Vincent to Saint Louise at the beginning of their relationship. "Please, Mademoiselle, honor the joy of Our lord Jesus Christ," a sentence which "sounds" typically berullian: the direct reference to the feelings of Jesus and the use of the verb to honor.

I shall now present you three major points which seem to me prove that Saint Vincent and Saint Louise were at the heart of spiritual and mission renewal in seventeenth-century France. (1) They played a central part in the seventeenth-century French Church. (2) Like all their contemporaries they had a great concern for mission and charity. (3) The place de Jesus and the Holy Spirit in their spiritual lives, commitment, and teaching, was absolutely central.

I. Saint Vincent and Saint Louise Played a Central Part in the Seventeenth-Century French Church

Saint Vincent, as Father André Dodin, C.M., points out, can be identified with all of this period: he was born in 1581 and died in 1660.² The extent of his life corresponds to the great period in the history of the French Church. Vincent was involved in almost all the great events of his time, political as well as religious. He knew or he met most of the

¹*Spiritual Writings of Saint Louise*, ed. and trans. Louise Sullivan, D.C. (New York: 1984), 251.

²André Dodin, C.M., *Saint Vincent de Paul et la charité* (Paris: 1960), 5.

spiritual and apostolic leaders of the seventeenth century in France. We are amazed at the number of people he knew when we look, for example, at the index of Pierre Coste's *Life and Works of Saint Vincent de Paul*, at the end of volume 3, with forty pages consisting mainly of proper names.³ I shall pick only a few.

He knew many of the people who met with Madame Acarie even if he did not frequent her circle: André Duval, a professor at the Sorbonne, who became his confessor and a confessor to the Daughters of Charity (at Saint Lazare, Saint Vincent commissioned two pictures, one of Saint Francis de Sales, another one of André Duval⁴), Michel de Marillac (uncle of Louise), Bérulle, who helped him a lot, maybe Benedict of Canfeld, whose *Rule of Perfection* he read assiduously.

I would add a few words about Madame Acarie, even if Professor Barbara Diefendorf will speak about her role tomorrow. She might be considered as the mother or the grandmother of our spiritual and apostolic renewal. A few months ago, I had the great joy of giving a retreat to the Carmelites of Pontoise, where Madame Acarie lived and died. Beatified in 1791, she is venerated not also by the Carmelite nuns but also by many other people. It is interesting to know that the Carmelite monastery in Pontoise was founded by Bérulle in 1605, and the present Community has been living in the same monastery since 1610. It was very moving for me to spend a week in that monastery and to visit the cell where Madame Acarie died.

Saint Vincent was probably a member of the Company of the Blessed Sacrament which played a prominent role in France in that period, even if that is very controversial.⁵

I shall insist on the relationships that he had with Bérulle and the first Oratorians like Condren and François Bourgoing. Vincent lived a while in their community without joining the Oratory. Bérulle helped him at the beginning and sent him to the Gondi family. A few years later, Bérulle objected to the foundation of the Mission as a congregation. But the influence of Cardinal de Bérulle and Condren cannot be denied: concern for the renewal of the Church, especially by the missions, the

³Pierre Coste, C.M., *The Life and Works of Saint Vincent de Paul*, trans. Joseph Leonard, C.M., 3 vols. (Brooklyn, New York: 1987), 3:523-63.

⁴See Vincent de Paul to François du Coudray, 1631, in *Saint Vincent de Paul: Correspondance, entretiens, documents*, Pierre Coste, C.M., ed., 14 vols. (Paris: 1920-1926), 1:116, n. 1. (Hereinafter cited as CED).

⁵ Coste, *Life and Works*, 3:271-85.

formation of the clergy, and the christocentrism of the teaching. You will be interested to know that Saint Vincent's famous statement "Jesus is the rule of the Mission" most probably came from Condren.⁶

Like Bérulle, he was a close friend of Saint-Cyran until 1642, but he then withdrew from the Jansenism of Saint-Cyran's group. Vincent esteemed also very much Father Adrien Bourdoise and Father Olier. Much has been written in that respect. On another level he had relationships with Cardinal Richelieu, Cardinal Mazarin, Queen Anne of Austria, and Chancellor Séguier.

Through the Gondi's family who gave three bishops to the diocese and archdiocese of Paris, he met many important people in high society and the Church. During the ten years after the death of Louis XIII in 1643, he was a member of the Council of Conscience which was a kind of national ministry for religious and social affairs. He had to deal with many questions, especially about the appointments of bishops.⁷

I have already said a word about his relationship with Francis de Sales and Jane Frances de Chantal, who was under his spiritual direction for many years and who put him in relationship with many Visitandines, even before Saint Francis's death.

⁶Excerpts from a Letter of de Condren to a Missioner of the Oratory (1637?):

I beg Jesus Christ, Our Lord, to live in you in the perfection of his ways, in the fullness of his virtue, and in the holiness of his Spirit. . . . With all my heart I give thanks to Our Lord for the success which he has given to you in your mission. It is an evidence that he has been pleased that you are serving him in this kind of work. Nonetheless the visits, to be really Christian, must not be prolonged. The Son of God often turned to his Father, as on the mountains and in the deserts, even though he did not have the need that we may have to be renewed in the spirit of God and to have healed what time and external concerns may have drained away from the interior resources necessary to have for the sake of speaking and acting with God. In that, he has willed to point out what may be left for us to do. And as he is the origin of the evangelical mission, he has willed to be the law and the rule of its perfection. He has said: "As the Father has sent me, so do I send you". The charity he has left us and that be the life of true missions seeks God more than people, and seeks people by means of the love we draw from him. That is why it is sometimes necessary to attend to God alone—because he is our God, because our love seeks him within all things, because we owe him our principal duties, because he is the beginning and the end of all that we do, because from him we must draw what we have to do for his glory, to refer what we have to do to himself and . . . to give it back to him when it is finished. . . .

I believe that sometimes from day to day, when he will have given you a new spirit and when you will be ready for a second mission, he will be pleased that you have followed the charity that he has given you for the sake of the areas devastated by heresy. . . . While waiting, it would be good for you to study the most popular, the clearest, and the most efficacious ways to deal with controversies. Very deep study is not so necessary as the acquiring of clarity, and preciseness in proposing and resolving things.

Lettres du Père de Condren, Auvray et Jouffrey, eds., (Paris: 1943), 335 -53

⁷On that see Coste, *Life and works*, 3:86-112.

I could go on enumerating many other people. I want to show you now a picture made after Saint Vincent's beatification which represents a meeting of the Tuesday Conference. Although painted probably in 1753, it is very interesting. In the middle there is Saint Vincent pointing to "Charity" with his finger. On one side we may see some bishops. It has been possible to identify some of them: facing us down below is Jacques Bénigne Bossuet and at the right Alain de Solminihac, a very good bishop and friend of Saint Vincent and Father Olier. He was beatified by Pope John Paul II a few years ago. Above Alain de Solminihac, Henri Maupas du Tour, who was a good friend of Saint Vincent. He was bishop of Le Puy, then of Evreux. He preached at Saint Vincent's funeral mass. He wrote a life of Jane Frances de Chantal in



The Tuesday Conferences by J. Fr. de Troy (1735 ?). Saint Vincent in the center. On his left are the bishops: Godeau (bishop of Vence), Maupas du Tour (bishop of Le Puy, then Evreux), Bossuet (bishop of Condom, then Meaux), unknown, Solminihac (bishop of Cahors). On his right are the priests: Louis de Chandenier (a benefactor of the Congregation of the Mission), Bourdoise (with Maltese cross, pastor of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, founder of a seminary), Olier, unknown, Eudes (former Oratorian, founder of Notre Dame de Charité and the Congregation of Jesus and Mary [Eudists]).

1653. To his left is probably Godeau, a famous bishop who was at the court and became—afterwards—a holy man. We do not know who the bishop is who is near to Saint Vincent.

On the other side we can see some priests. Right near to Saint Vincent is Father Olier. And then, with the Maltese cross, Louis de Chandenier, abbot of Tournus who lived at Saint Lazare for some years and joined the Congregation of the Mission, before his death. Saint Vincent held him in great esteem. The man at the left is probably Father Bourdoise, who was bald, and below, perhaps Saint John Eudes. Such a picture illustrates the opinion of Henri Daniel-Rops, who said that Saint Vincent was at the center of this time of Church renewal.

On the original picture the bishops were at the right side of Saint Vincent and the priests at his left. On the engraving and here, the situation is reversed, as in a mirror.

As for Saint Louise, it is enough to remember a few points.

(1) Louise belonged to a typically aristocratic family of seventeenth-century France. Although she had married a man who did not belong to the aristocracy, Antoine Le Gras, and so she was called Mademoiselle, she was quite at ease with the higher class of the society, more at ease than Vincent sometimes. She knew or met many important people of the period in Paris. She received a very good education and read widely.

(2) Louise was perfectly informed of the social and political situation of that period. Two of her uncles, Michel and Louis de Marillac, who had very important responsibilities in the kingdom, had some difficulties with Richelieu, and they were imprisoned, and finally they died in 1630 and 1631. Louise also was aware of the bad situation of the poor people in the countryside and the cities. As Lacordaire said once, "Big hearted persons have the grace of being aware of the difficulties and pains of their contemporaries, and they received the mission of doing much for them." So Louise was immersed in the society of her time, she was immersed in the great movement of the Church in France, and she had eyes and a heart open to share in the sufferings of the poor, for Jesus's sake.

(3) She knew Saint Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal and many other Visitandines very well. She read Francis's books very often.

II. Like All Their Contemporaries, Vincent and Louise Had a Great Concern for Mission and Charity

The French school, Saint Vincent, and the Mission

When speaking of the mission and charity, we identify them with Saint Vincent de Paul. It is true. It is necessary to remember, however, that the seventeenth century in France was a very missionary period. It was not only "the great century of souls", *le grand siècle des âmes*, it was also the great century of missions. A very interesting dissertation was dedicated fifty years ago on the topic "The missionary awakening of France, from Henry IV [end of sixteenth century] to the foundation of Foreign Missions Seminary [1663]."⁸

Our founders and their friends were at the same time spiritual masters and missionaries. Here again I will enumerate a few things

Controversies with Protestants were very strong. Francis de Sales worked strenuously in his diocese for the return of Calvinists to the Church. Bérulle converted quite a few important persons. Many letters of Saint Vincent allude to that problem also.

The preaching of missions in the countryside and in the cities, even at the court, was one of the most important activities of the Oratorians, Jesuits, Capuchins, Eudists, and, of course, Saint Vincent de Paul and his disciples. I will mention here the presence of Father Olier among those missionaries who worked under Saint Vincent. You know that Saint Vincent insisted on missions to the poor people of the countryside.

The renewal of parish life was a great concern for many of them: Bourdoise and Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, and Olier and Saint-Sulpice are good examples. Parish renewal included fine liturgies, catechetical instruction, care of the sick, etc.

Service to the poor and orphans was not just the specialty of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise. Jean Eudes founded the order of Our Lady of Charity (the Good Shepherd nuns issued from that order) for prostitutes. And the word "House of charity" was very common at that time to design centers of welcome for the poor.

The teaching of young people in colleges for rich or middle class youth was ensured by Jesuits and Oratorians. But there were also many foundations for the education of poor girls with Blessed Alix Le Clerc

⁸G. de Vaumas, *L'éveil missionnaire de la France, d' Henri IV à la fondation des Missions étrangères* (Paris: 1942), 7:16-17.

and Saint Peter Fourier and poor boys with Jean Baptiste de la Salle. Louise de Marillac was involved with that apostolate.

The formation of good priests was a condition for the success of the missions, as Father Olier and Saint Vincent often said

The foreign missions were very active at that time: Jesuits, Sulpicians, and Ursulines in Canada, Vincentians in Madagascar, Jesuits in Indochina, Capuchins in the Near East. Finally the Seminary for Foreign Missions, which began in 1663, was at the same time a beginning and the fruit of that renewal.

I should emphasize a phenomenon of vocabulary which seems to me very interesting. While Saint Vincent always speaks of "mission"—mission of Jesus, first missionary of his father etc.—many of his contemporaries used the words "apostolic" and "apostles." Saint Vincent often speaks of apostles and apostolic spirit. Later on Saint Jean Baptiste de La Salle in his wonderful *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* will tell his brothers that they were successors of the apostles in their task of teaching the Gospel to the poor, "God gave you the grace of participating in the ministry of the apostles."⁹ This is very interesting: the brothers were lay people not priests, but they participated in the ministry of the apostles.

Some years before, both Francis de Sales and Alix Le Clerc spoke of women as *apôtresses*, women apostles.

Charles de Condren (1588-1641) wrote to Olier in regard to a missionary, "I recognize in him, it seems to me, and honor in him something of the apostolic grace of which I beg Our Lord to give me some share."¹⁰ Olier, at the moment of leaving for a mission at Montdidier, wrote to a sister who was under his direction, "I entreat you to ask for me, strongly and often, the apostolic spirit. . . . What good would we not be capable of doing with that spirit. . . . It is necessary to use all our powers to obtain that gift."¹¹ Another letter written on the same day to another religious woman speaks of "that adorable spirit of Jesus, the apostolic spirit which he poured forth on the apostles going out to sanctify the world."¹² He speaks elsewhere "of invoking every day the apostolic spirit on self and on the whole Church."¹³

⁹*Méditations pour le temps de la retraite*, 7 méditation, 3 point (ed. de Rome: 1976), 115-16.

¹⁰*Lettres*, 200-201.

¹¹*Lettres*, 52, ed. Levesque (Paris: 1935), 1:113.

¹²*Lettres*, 54.

¹³*Divers écrits*, 1:67 Archives of Saint Sulpice, Paris.

"It has pleased [Our Lord] to say to me, 'I want to form an apostolic society'. By that, I understood the Society of Saint-Sulpice, whose members must have the apostolic spirit in order to establish some churches for God."¹⁴

Marie de l'Incarnation¹⁵ (1599-1672) wrote:

When I was about thirty-four or thirty-five years old, I entered the state which had been pointed out to me and which I was, in a sense, awaiting. It was an emanation of the apostolic spirit which was none other than the spirit of Jesus Christ which seized my spirit so that my spirit no longer had life other than in his and by his; all was surrendered to the interests of that divine and adorable master and to zeal for his glory so that he might be known, loved, and adored by all the nations he has ransomed by his precious blood. My body was in my convent; but my spirit, which was bound to the spirit of Jesus, could not be [so] contained. That spirit carried me in spirit to the Indies, to Japan, to America, to the Far East, to the West, to parts of Canada, to the Hurons, and to all the inhabited earth where there were human beings whom I saw as all belonging to Jesus Christ.¹⁶

It is important to note that their devotion to the Holy Spirit was not only a private, pious one, for prayer only, but also for mission and charity. The feast of Pentecost was very important for them—and not just for Louise.

I want to add a special, Sulpician remark on this point. When Father Olier built his first seminary, he commissioned a famous painter of his time, Charles Le Brun, to do a large picture of Pentecost which was placed behind and above the main altar of the seminary of Saint-Sulpice. This picture became famous and four or five more copies were ordered. One of these copies, which is now in the Louvre, belonged to the first Carmelite monastery in Paris. The Holy Spirit Fathers of Paris have another copy. A third copy has been recently identified in a small parish church near Evreux, in Normandy.

The original painting came back to Saint-Sulpice after the French Revolution. It was restored a few years ago and now hangs in the chapel of our motherhouse in Paris.

¹⁴"Memoires de M. Olier," Archives of Saint Sulpice, Paris, M 5, 107.

¹⁵This Marie de l'Incarnation had the maiden name of Guyart de Tours. She lived in tours and Quebec. Another Marie de l'Incarnation was Barbe Avrillot, known as Madame Acarie, who died as a Carmelite at Pontoise in 1618.

¹⁶*La relation autobiographique de 1654*, with a foreward by Dom Guy-Marc Oury (Ed. Solesmes: 1976), 90.

III. The place of Jesus in French school of spirituality and in Saint Vincent's teaching

Of course, for all Christians, Jesus is the center of their faith, prayer, and life. It is true for the French School, but it might appear that the christology of Saint Vincent is not so profound, even not so theological as that of Saint John Eudes, for example. Of course, we cannot compare what Bérulle wrote on the "states and mysteries" of Jesus with the simpler sentences of Saint Vincent. I do think, however, that Saint Vincent is very near to Bérulle. Maybe in that regard he is nearer to Bérulle, Olier and Eudes than to Saint Francis de Sales, not only because Saint Vincent is not so optimistic as Francis de Sales, but because Vincent is perhaps more Augustinian and realistic. But above all, because he always speaks of Jesus. "Therefore, Monsieur, you must empty yourself in order to clothe yourselves with Jesus Christ."¹⁷ Remember the famous letter to Antoine Portail. "Remember, Monsieur, we live in Jesus Christ through the death of Jesus Christ, and we must die in Jesus Christ through the life of Jesus Christ, and our life must be hidden in Jesus Christ, and filled with Jesus Christ, and in order to die as Jesus Christ, we must live as Jesus Christ."¹⁸ You would think that you were listening to Saint Paul or to John Eudes.

But Saint Vincent is different from the other members of the French school in three ways when he speaks of Jesus. (1) He is much simpler, nearer to the Synoptic Gospels than to Saint John. Father Robert Maloney, C.M., thinks that Saint Vincent is "Lucan."¹⁹ (2) He insists very much on the mission of Jesus which we have to carry on. Jesus is the Father's missionary. (3) He emphasizes very strongly the fact that the poor are the members of Jesus, and that when we serve them we serve Him. Jesus is identified with the poor.

And now, I may pose the question: who was Jesus for Saint Vincent? This is a fundamental question. Father Jean Renouard, C.M., wrote a very good article on that topic.²⁰

¹⁷Vincent de Paul to Antoine Durand, 1656, *CED*, 11:343.

¹⁸*Saint Vincent de Paul: Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, I *Correspondence*, vol. 1 (1607-1639), newly translated, edited, and annotated from the 1920 edition of Pierre Coste, C.M., ed. Jacqueline Kilar, D.C., trans. Helen Marie Law, D.C., John Marie Poole, D.C., James R. King, C.M., Francis Germovnik, C.M., annotated John W. Carven, C.M., (Brooklyn: 1985), 1:276.

¹⁹Robert P. Maloney, C.M., "Listening as the Foundation for Spirituality," *Vincentiana* 36, n. 3 (May-June 1992):170-87.

²⁰Jean-Pierre Renouard, C.M., "Le Christ de Monsieur Vincent," *Vincentiana*, 4-5-6 (1984):565-577.

Of course, Christianity is the religion of Jesus Christ, and each baptized person is situated face to face with Jesus. Such a relationship, however, may be “colored” in diverse ways. There is the Jesus of Matthew, the Jesus of Mark, of Luke, of John, of Saint Paul, of Ignatius, of Teresa, etc.

Bérulle adores the Incarnate Word. Nourished by Saint Paul and Saint John, he contemplates the humility, the *anéantissement* (emptying) of Jesus in his incarnation, he emptied himself in his infancy. Bérulle regards Christian life as an adherence to the states and mysteries of Jesus, which are past in history but still living and active in Jesus and in us. That corresponds to Marmion’s *Christ in his Mysteries*. Eudes considers Christian life as a continuation and accomplishment of Jesus’s life.

For Father Olier the key verse of the New Testament is Galatians 2: 20, “it is no longer I, but Jesus who lives in me.” Saint Vincent also quotes that verse, in his conferences, but his presentation of the relationship to Jesus is simpler and more practical but always very deep.

He insists on the necessity of imitating Jesus who is the model of all the virtues. We find this, for example, in the Common Rules. We have to clothe ourselves with the spirit of Jesus, which essentially is a spirit of charity, compassion and tenderness, we have to conform our actions and intentions to his especially his commitment to the poor. In a special way—and I think that this is his charism—he insists on the carrying out of Jesus’s mission.²¹ For Vincent Jesus has to imprint in us his mark and character. This is the fruit of the spirit of God, of the spirit of Jesus.

Here Vincent agrees with Olier and Bérulle. Olier wrote that the true Christian is the one who has in himself the spirit of Jesus so that he may live according to Jesus’s will, feelings, and inclinations. Bérulle, as Bourgoing wrote, thought that Jesus had three ways of looking: (1) one towards his Father to honor and adore him; (2) one towards men and women to love and save them; (3) one towards himself to sacrifice himself. Saint Vincent agrees with such a presentation, but he insists on the mission of Jesus and the imitation of Jesus’s virtues and attitudes. “Jesus is the only rule of the Mission.”²² You remember that he borrowed this last sentence from Father de Condren.

²¹Common Rules, throughout.

²² See the indices of Common Rules under the word Jesus Christ.

Louise de Marillac and the imitation of Jesus

The personal relationship with Jesus was always very strong in Louise's life. I think that it became stronger after she came under Saint Vincent's spiritual direction. And I think that this comes directly or indirectly from the berullian spirituality. Louise always speaks of the holy humanity of Jesus, which is typically berullian. For her—exactly as for Bérulle and more than for Vincent—the feast of the Annunciation, of the Incarnation, is a great feast, *the* great feast. True devotion to the Eucharist, to the Infancy of Jesus as well as her emphasis on the grace of Baptism, are signs of her belonging to the French school.

An expression which seems to me proper to Saint Louise is this: to have the image of Jesus Christ imprinted on my soul.²³ Here again there are many texts that can be quoted. When we read her writings we have always to ask ourselves: who was Jesus for her, and why did she say that the poor are images of Jesus?

The place of Mary in Louise's life and teaching is very important. She speaks of Mary more than does Saint Vincent. There might be good psychological explanations: she was a mother who suffered with her son Michel, she herself never knew her own mother, etc. That is true, but I think that her devotion to Mary is very theological, rooted in her faith, in the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption. And a part of her testament declared that Mary is the only Mother of the Company.

Her emphasis on the virtues of humility, simplicity, and above all charity, is always connected with a call to imitate Jesus in his mysteries.

So her actions, her attitudes, her teaching, always depended on her contemplation of Jesus. The humility of Jesus calls us to be humble. Our charity towards the poor has to come from our faith in Jesus present in them.

Conclusion

I wish to present you, as a conclusion, two sentences and a prayer of a Vincentian who has been beatified as a martyr, Blessed John Gabriel Perboyre, C.M. The first sentence is the "motto" of the famous Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset: *yo soy yo y mi circunstancia y si no la salvo, no me salvo tampoco*, "I am me and my circumstance [my epoch] and if I do not work to save my contemporaries, I cannot save myself." Saint

²³ Spiritual Writings, A 8, p. 44.

Vincent was a saint in his epoch, and he saved his soul when saving his brothers and sisters.

The second sentence which can apply to us comes from a French priest speaking to a group of sisters after their founder's death at the end of the nineteenth century.

We must lean on our origins, keep a love for our traditions so that the family remains itself, something distinct in the mass of the nation. . . . The continued existence of the family depends on our fidelity to the spirit of the founders. . . . The life of a tree depends on the depths of its roots. You carry within you the future and a considerable responsibility. After God, the future depends on us. we are a little plant, but there is a place for all in the field of the Church and in the garden of the Father, who does not take back his gifts.²⁴

Finally, I shall end with a Vincentian prayer by blessed John Gabriel Perboyre who was a martyr in China. This prayer reflects the main themes of the French school of spirituality.

Vincentian Mission Prayer

BY

BLESSED JOHN GABRIEL PERBOYRE, C.M.

Divine Savior, transform me into Yourself.
 May my hands be Your hands.
 May my tongue be Your tongue.
 Grant that every faculty of my body
 may serve only to glorify You.
 Above all, transform my soul and all its powers,
 that my memory, my will, and my affections,
 may be the memory, the will, and the affections of You.
 I pray You to destroy in me all that is not of You.
 Grant that I may live but in You, and by You, and for You,
 and that I may truly say with Saint Paul,
 "I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me."

²⁴Father E. de Régny, speaking in 1868 to some Sisters of Saint Louis, founded by the Abbé Louis Bautain in 1842 at Juilly, France.