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An Unpublished Letter of St. Vincent: A 1645 Submission

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An unpublished letter of St Vincent

-- a 1645 submission --

by Bernard KOCH cm

A notarised letter, signed by M. Vincent,
of which the original and a facsimile are in private hands

I was staying in Fain-les-Moutiers, giving a retreat, and the Daughters of Charity of that house showed me a photocopy of an unpublished letter of St Vincent. It had been given to the archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters on 3 May 1994 by the owners of the original. The sisters, in turn, made their own photocopy of it, and this is what I worked on that same day and subsequently.

It seemed worth publishing this text, for it throws additional light on Monsieur Vincent's activities in the management of money, as well as on the financial dealings of the French kings. It gives interesting precise details, and gives us a glimpse of a whole network of resources for the missionaries and the sisters, complementing the huge amount of work I had already done on this topic.

Monsieur Vincent, apart from his missionary work, which was always done gratuitously, carried on an ever-growing charitable campaign all the time. This meant constantly finding new resources and means to conserve them at a time when all sources of funding were coveted, challenged and became subjects of lawsuits. And on top of all that, this was a period of unending war which endangered the agricultural enterprises and transport undertakings in which he had invested and led the king to confiscate the revenue from these in order to meet his military expenditure.

Monsieur Vincent had come to rely especially on farms and agricultural estates, of which I have discovered seventeen, as guaranteed sources of revenue for the poor and for the numerous Congregations for which he was responsible (the Congregation of the Mission, the Visitation, the Daughters of Providence, the Daughters of the Cross, the Daughters of Charity, not forgetting some abbeys).

The earliest farms and agricultural estates are those which depended on the priory of St Lazare, which was united with the Congregation of the Mission on 7 January 1632 (SV XIII 234).

The recently discovered letter informs us that these lands were not the property of this priory, but of the Crown, and that only their revenues were available for the care of lepers, or, since the arrival of St Vincent, of the poor and the missionaries, subject to paying a small annual rent to the State.

We already knew, from many letters and notarised documents, that possession of the various estates and revenues did not go uncontested, and that M. Vincent had to fight all the time in order to retain them.

This submission which we are now publishing is one further piece of evidence for this. It informs us that in April 1645, during the war against Lorraine, the Royal Council (i.e. the Queen Regent and Mazarin) wanted to auction these properties to swell the finances of the State, which was normal practice at that time. This could be confiscation of one or two, or even three, quarterly rents, seizure of municipal dues, as in 1647 (cf A. Dodin: *Saint Vincent de Paul et la Charit.*, p. 168), etc. After his coming of age on 7 September 1651 Louis XIV continued these same practices.

Our letter is an official submission that His Majesty intervene and have this judgement overturned.

One can see from it, once again, how closely St Vincent monitored his business affairs, and that he knew how to learn from archives at a time when every right had to be justified by official title-deeds. He was able to base his claim on royal edicts of 1147 and 1181, which brings home to us the very long history of the priory of St Lazare.

(Thomas Davitt CM,)

A PETITION OF SAINT VINCENT
IN FAVOUR OF THE ESTATE
OF THE MILLS OF GONESSE

HVHVH

A NOTARISED LETTER SIGNED BY ST. VINCENT

Facsimile and original preserved at the Chateau d'Époisses, Côte d'Or.
Photocopy in the Archives of the Daughters of Charity, 140 Rue du Bac
and with the Daughters of Charity in Fain-les-Moutiers.

B.KOCH

Transcribed at Fain-les-Moutiers, Monday 17th July 1995. Typed at Paris on Friday 28th. -
<.>means "doubtful reading"; [..]means "addition."

1645
19th June

*To Their Lordships the Commissioners
General deputed by His Majesty for
carrying out the Decision of the Council of the 26th
April 1645.*

A humble submission from Vincent de Paul Superior General of the Congregation of the priests of the Mission established at the Priory of St. Lazare at Paris, to say that the estate of the mills of Gonesse belonging to his Majesty is burdened by mortgage to the said Priory of St. Lazare for two barrelsof corn by way of annual rent and royalty, by Briefs of Louis VII, of the year 1147, as also the Estate of His Majesty in the Provost District of Paris, to the amount of three hundred and sixty five Pounds, similarly due ti the above mentioned Priory, by other Briefs of King Phillipe, <II, Auguste> <number not in text> of the year 1181.

For these reason, My Lords,

and because it has come to the knowledge of the Petitioner that the said estates are being sold under pledge signed in the presence of a notary, on foot of a decree of the Council of 26th April. May it please Your Graces to receive the Petioner, as he opposes the sale and award of the above properties. And while passing judgment on the aforesaid objection <no signature-mark-> to order- that these properties shall be and shall remain moritaged to the said Priory of St. Lazare. And that those inentioned shall continue for the future the payment of the said annual rents of two barrels of corn in the one case and three hundred and sixty five pounds in the order, according to and in keeping with the said Constitutions of rents given in the said Briefs, and [*they will do well*]

Vincent Depaul [F F F] [??? = Ind.Pr.Miss.]

Choux <with elaborate flourish>

<Apostille> Order is given that the present request shall be shown to the procurator of the king in the Commission on... and communicated to the rival claimant in order that the act may be in due form <reasonably>. Decided in the Council room of the Château du Louvre at Paris, on the 19th of June 16 forty five.

Carré <with elaborate flourish>

(Andrew Spelman CM, translator)